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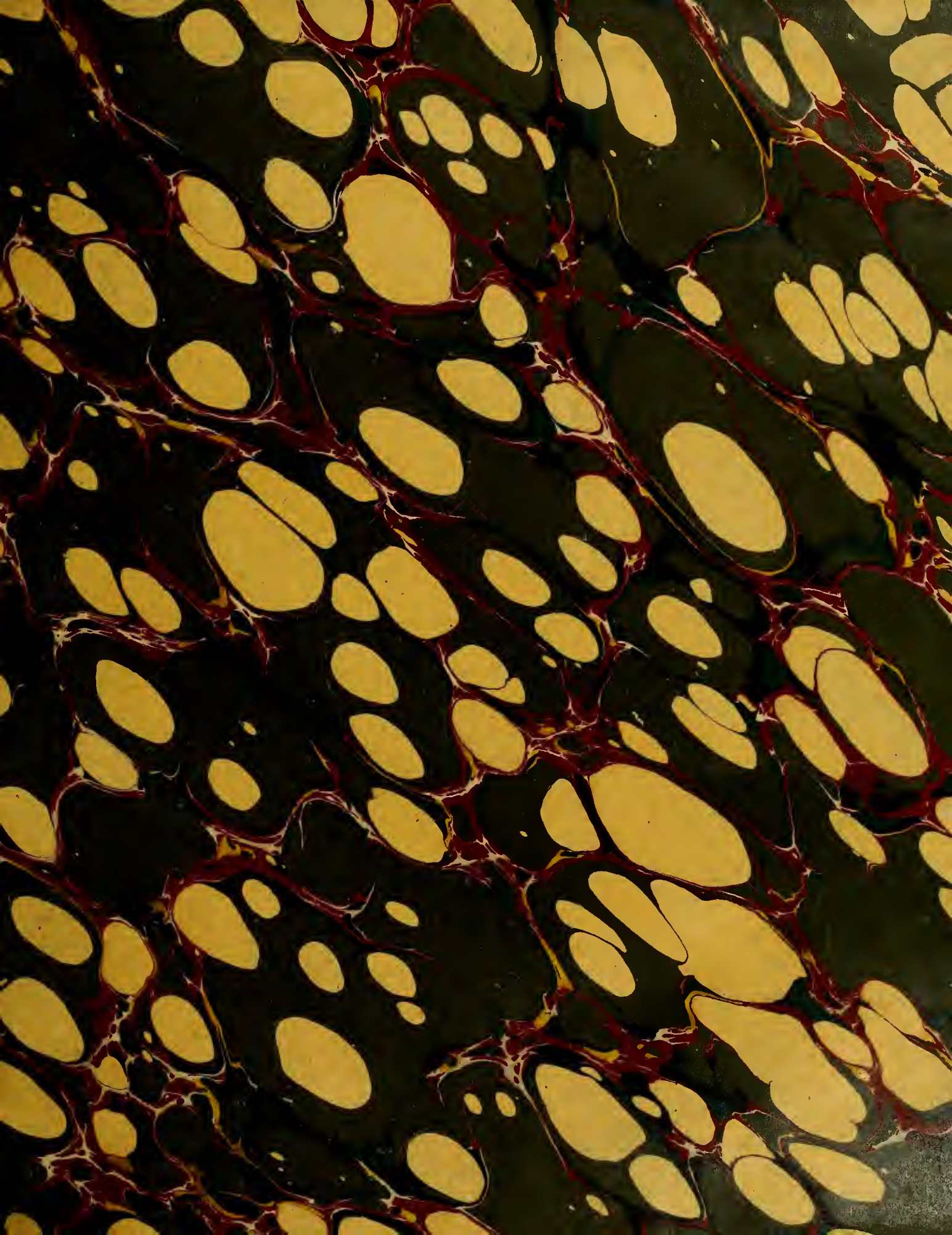


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AN
EXPOSITION
OF THE
OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT:



WHEREIN
EACH CHAPTER IS SUMMED UP IN ITS CONTENTS; THE SACRED TEXT INSERTED AT LARGE
IN DISTINCT PARAGRAPHS; EACH PARAGRAPH REDUCED TO ITS PROPER HEADS;
THE SENSE GIVEN AND LARGELY ILLUSTRATED;

WITH
PRACTICAL REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS,
BY
MATTHEW HENRY, V.D.M.

WITH PREFATORY REMARKS, BY
ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D.D., AND REV. EDWARD BICKERSTETH.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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AN

E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH

Practical Observations,

OF THE FIRST BOOK OF

K I N G S.

Many histories are books of kings and their reigns, to which the affairs of their kingdoms are reduced; it is a piece of honour that has commonly been paid to crowned heads. The holy Scripture is the history of the kingdom of God among men, under the several administrations of it; but there, the King is one, and his Name one. The particular history now before us accounts for the affairs of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, yet with special regard to the kingdom of God among them; for still it is a sacred history, much more illustrative, and not less entertaining, than any of the histories of the kings of the earth, to which (those of them that are of any certainty) it is prior in time; for though there were kings in Edom before there was any king in Israel, Gen. 36. 31. (foreigners, in that point of state, got the precedency,) yet the history of the kings of Israel lives, and will live, in holy writ, to the end of the world, whereas that of the kings of Edom is long since buried in oblivion: for the honour that comes from God is durable, while the honour of the world is like a mushroom, which comes in a night, and perishes in a night.—The Bible began with the story of the Patriarchs, and Prophets, and Judges, men whose converse with Heaven was more immediate, (the record of which strengthens our faith,) but is not so easily accommodated to our case, now that we expect not visions, as the subsequent history of affairs, like our's, under the direction of common providence; and here also we find, though not many types and figures of the Messiah, yet great expectations of him; for not only prophets, but kings, desired to see the great mysteries of the Gospel, Luke, 10. 24. —The two books of Samuel are introductions to the books of the Kings, as they relate the origin of the royal government in Saul, and of the royal family in David. These two books give us an account of David's successor, Solomon, the division of his kingdom, and the succession of the several kings both of Judah and Israel, with an abstract of their history down to the captivity. And as, from the book of Genesis, we may collect excellent rules of economics, for the good governing of families; so, from these books, of politics, for the directing of public affairs. There is in these books special regard had to the house and lineage of David, from which Christ came. Some of his sons trod in his steps, and others did not. The characters of the kings of Judah may be thus briefly given:—David the devout, Solomon the wise, Rehoboam the simple, Abijah the valiant, Asa the upright, Jehoshaphat the religious, Jehoram the wicked, Ahaziah the profane, Joash the backslider, Amaziah the rash, Uzziah the mighty, Jotham the peaceable, Ahaz the idolater, Hezekiah the reformer, Manasseh the penitent, Amon the obscure, Josiah the tender-hearted, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, all wicked, and such as brought ruin quickly on themselves and their kingdom. The number of the good and bad is nearly equal, but the reigns of the good were generally long, and those of the bad short. The consideration of which will make the state of Israel not altogether so bad, in this period, as, at first, it seems. In this first book, we have,

- I. The death of David, *ch.* 1. and 2.
- II. The glorious reign of Solomon, and his building of the temple, *ch.* 3. . 10. but the cloud his sun set under, *ch.* 11.
- III. The division of the kingdoms in the reign of Rehoboam, and his reign and Jeroboam's, *ch.* 12. . 14.
- IV. The reigns of Abijah and Asa over Judah, Baasha and Omri over Israel, *ch.* 15. and 16.
- V. Elijah's miracles, *ch.* 17. . 19.
- VI. Ahab's success against Ben-hadad, his wickedness and fall, *ch.* 20. . 22. And in all this history it appears, that Kings, though gods to us, are men to God, mortal and accountable.

CHAP. I.

This chapter, we have, I. David declining in his health, v. 1..4. II. Adonijah aspiring to the kingdom, and treating his party, in order to it, v. 5..10. III. Nathan and Bath-sheba contriving to secure the succession to Solomon, and prevailing for an order from David for that purpose, v. 11..31. IV. The anointing of Solomon accordingly, and the people's joy therein, v. 32..40. V. The effectual stop this put to Adonijah's usurpation, and the dispersion of his party, thereupon, v. 41..49. VI. Solomon's dismissal of Adonijah upon his good behaviour, v. 50..53.

1. **N**OW king David was old, and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. 2. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin, and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. 3. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. 4. And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not.

David, in the foregoing chapter, had, by the great mercy of God, escaped the sword of the destroying angel; but our deliverances from or through diseases and dangers, are but reprieves; if the candle be not blown out, it will burn out of itself. We have David here sinking under the infirmities of old age, and brought by them to the gates of the grave. He that *cometh up out of the pit, shall fall into the snare*; and, one way or other, *we must needs die*.

1. It would have troubled one to see David so infirm. He was old, and his natural heat so wasted, that no clothes could keep him warm, v. 1. David had been a valiant active man, and a man of business, and very vehement had the flame always been in his breast; and yet now his blood is chilled and stagnated, he is confined to his bed, and there can get no heat. He was now seventy years old. Many, at that age, are as lively and fit for business as ever: but David was now chastised for his former sins, especially that in the matter of Uriah, and felt from his former toils, and the hardships he had gone through in his youth, which then he made nothing of, but was now the worse for. *Let not the strong man glory in his strength*, which may soon be weakened by sickness, or, at last, will be weakened by old age. Let young people remember their Creator in the days of their youth, before these evil days come. What our hand finds to do for God, and our souls, and our generation, let us do with all our might, because the night comes, the night of old age, in which no man can work; and, when our strength is gone, it will be a comfort to remember that we used it well.

2. It would have troubled one to see his physicians so weak and unskilful, that they knew no other way of relieving him than by outward applications. No cordials, no spirits, but, (1.) *They covered him with clothes*, which, where there is any inward heat, will keep it in, and so increase it; but, where it is not, they have none to communicate, no, not royal clothing. Elihu makes it a difficulty to understand *how our garments are warm upon us*, Job, 37. 17. but, if God deny his blessing, men clothe them, and there is none warm, Hag. 1. 6. David here was not. (2.) They foolishly prescribed nuptials to one that should rather have been preparing for his funeral, v. 2..4. but they knew what would gratify their own corruptions, and perhaps were too willing to gratify his, under colour of consulting his health; his prophets should have been consulted as well as his physicians, in an affair of this nature. However, this might be excused, then, when even good men ignorantly allowed themselves to have many wives. We now have not so learned of Christ, but are taught, that one

man must have but one wife, Matth. 19. 5. And further, *that it is good for a man not to touch a woman*, 1 Cor. 7. 1. That Abishag was married to David before she lay with him, and was his secondary wife, appears from its being imputed as a great crime to Adonijah, that he desired to marry her (ch. 2. 22.) after his father's death.

5. Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. 6. And his father had not displeased him at any time, in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom. 7. And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah, helped him. 8. But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei, and the mighty men which belonged to David, were not with Adonijah. 9. And Adonijah slew sheep and oxen, and fat cattle, by the stone of Zoheleth, which is by En-rogel, and called all his brethren the king's sons, and all the men of Judah the king's servants: 10. But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he called not.

David had much affliction in his children; Amnon and Absalom had both been his grief; the one his first-born, the other his third: (2 Sam. 3. 2, 3.) his second, whom he had by Abigail, we will suppose he had comfort in; his fourth was Adonijah, (2 Sam. 3. 4.) he was one of those that were born in Hebron; we have heard nothing of him till now, and here we are told that he was a comely person, and that he was next in age, and (as it proved) next in temper, to Absalom, v. 6. And further, that in his father's eyes he had been a jewel, but was now a thorn.

1. His father had made a fondling of him, v. 6. He had not displeased him at any time. It is not said, He never displeased his father; it is probable that he had done so frequently, and his father was secretly troubled at his misconduct, and lamented it before God: but his father had not displeased him, either by crossing him in his humours, or denying him any thing he had a mind to, or by calling him to an account, as to what he had done, and where he had been, or by keeping him to his book or his business, or reproving him for what he saw or heard of that he did amiss; he never said to him, *Why hast thou done so?* because he saw it was uneasy to him, and he could not bear it without fretting. It was the son's fault, that he was displeased at reproof, and took it for an affront, whereby he lost the benefit of it. And it was the father's fault, that, because he saw it displeased him, he did not reprove him; and now he justly smarted for indulging him. They who honour their sons more than God, as they do who keep them not under good discipline, thereby forfeit the honour they might expect from their sons.

II. He, in return, made a fool of his father: because he was old, and confined to his bed, he thought no notice was to be taken of him, and therefore exalted himself, and said, *I will be king*, v. 5. Children that are indulged learn to be proud and ambitious, and that is the ruin of a great many young people. The way to keep them humble, is, to keep them under. Observe Adonijah's insolence. 1. He looks upon the days of mourning for his father to be at hand, and therefore he prepares to succeed him, though he knew, that, by the designation both of God and David, Solomon was to be the man, for public notice had been given of it by David himself, and the succession settled, as it were, by act of parlia-

ment, in pursuance of God's appointment, 1 Chron. 22. 9.—23. 1. This entail Adonijah attempted by force to cut off, in contempt of God and his father. Thus is the kingdom of Christ opposed, and there are those that say, "We will not have him to reign over us." 2. He looks upon his father as superannuated, and good for nothing, and therefore he enters immediately upon the possession of the throne. He cannot wait till his father's head be laid low, but it must now be said, *Adonijah reigns*, v. 18. and, *God save king Adonijah*, v. 25. His father is not fit to govern, for he is old, and past it; nor Solomon, for he is young, and not come to it; and therefore Adonijah will take it upon him. It argues a very base and wicked mind for children to insult over their parents, because of the infirmities of their age.

In pursuance of this ambitious prospect, (1.) He got a great retinue, v. 5. *chariots and horsemen*, both for state and strength; to wait on him, and to fight for him. (2.) He made great interest, with no less than Joab, the general of the army, and Abiathar the high priest, v. 7. That he should make his court to those who, by their influence in church and camp, were capable of doing him great service, is not strange; but we may well wonder by what arts they could be drawn to follow him, and help him. They were old men, who had been faithful to David, in the most difficult and troublesome of his times; men of sense and experience, who, one would think, would not easily be wheedled. They could not propose any advantage to themselves by it, for they were both at the top of their preferment, and stood fast in it. They could not be ignorant of the entail of the crown upon Solomon, which it was not in their power to cut off, and whom, therefore, it was their interest to oblige. But God, in this matter, left them to themselves, perhaps to correct them, for some former misconduct, with a scourge of their own making. We are told, v. 8. who they were that were of such approved fidelity to David, that Adonijah had not the confidence so much as to propose it to them, Zadok, Benaiah, and Nathan. A man that has given proofs of his resolute adherence to that which is good, shall not be asked to do a bad thing. (3.) He prepared a great entertainment (v. 9.) at En-rogel, not far from Jerusalem; his guests were the king's sons, and the king's servants, whom he feasted and caressed, to bring them over to his party; but Solomon was not invited, either because he despised him, or because he despaired of him, v. 10. Such as serve their own belly, and will be in the interest of those that will feast them, what side soever they are of, are an easy prey to seducers, Rom. 16. 18. Some think that Adonijah slew these sheep and oxen, even fat ones, for sacrifice, and that it was a religious feast he made, beginning his usurpation with a shew of devotion, as Absalom, under the colour of a vow, 2 Sam. 15. 7. which he might do the more plausibly, when he had the high priest himself on his side. It is pity that any occasion should ever be given to say, *In nomine Domini incipit omne malum*—*In the name of the Lord begins all evil*, and that religious exercises should be made to patronize unrighteous practices.

11. Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth *it* not? 12. Now therefore come, let me, I pray thee, give thee counsel, that thou mayest save thine own life, and the life of thy son Solomon. 13. Go, and get thee in unto king David, and say unto him, Didst not thou, my lord, O king, swear unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? why then doth Adonijah reign? 14. Behold, while thou yet talkest there with the king, I will also come in after thee, and confirm thy words. 15. And

Bath-sheba went in unto the king into the chamber: and the king was very old; and Abishag the Shunammite ministered unto the king. 16. And Bath-sheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king. And the king said, What wouldest thou? 17. And she said unto him, My lord, thou swarest by the Lord thy God unto thine handmaid, *saying*, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne. 18. And now, behold, Adonijah reigneth; and now, my lord the king, thou knowest *it* not: 19. And he hath slain oxen, and fat cattle, and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the host: but Solomon thy servant hath he not called. 20. And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21. Otherwise it shall come to pass, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders. 22. And, lo, while she yet talked with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in. 23. And they told the king, saying, Behold Nathan the prophet. And when he was come in before the king, he bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground. 24. And Nathan said, My lord, O king, hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? 25. For he is gone down this day, and hath slain oxen, and fat cattle, and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the king's sons, and the captains of the host, and Abiathar the priest; and, behold, they eat and drink before him, and say, God save king Adonijah. 26. But me, *even* me thy servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and thy servant Solomon, hath he not called. 27. Is this thing done by my lord the king; and thou hast not shewed *it* unto thy servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him? 28. Then king David answered and said, Call me Bath-sheba. And she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. 29. And the king sware, and said, *As* the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, 30. Even as I swear unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day. 31. Then Bath-sheba bowed with *her* face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever.

We have here the effectual endeavours that were used by Nathan and Bath-sheba to obtain from David a ratification of Solomon's succession, for the crushing of Adonijah's usurpation. 1. David himself knew not what was doing. Disobedient children may

that they were well enough off, if they can but keep their good old parents ignorant of their bad courses; but *a bird of the air will carry the voice*. 2. Bath-sheba lived retired, and knew nothing of it, till Nathan informed her. Many get very comfortably through this world, that know little how the world goes. 3. Solomon, it is likely, knew of it, but was as a deaf man that heard not. Though he had years, and wisdom above his years, yet we do not find that he stirred to oppose Adonijah, but quietly composed himself, and left it to God and his friends to order the matter. Hence David, in his psalm for Solomon, observes, that, while men, in pursuit of the world, in vain *rise early and sit up late, God giveth his beloved (his Jeddiahs) sleep*, in giving them to be easy, and gain their point without agitation, Ps. 127. 1, 2. How, then, is the design brought about?

I. Nathan the prophet alarms Bath-sheba, by acquainting her with the case, and puts her in a way to get an order from the king, for the confirming of Solomon's title. He was concerned, because he knew God's mind, and David's and Israel's interest; it was by him that God had named Solomon *Jedidiah*, 2 Sam. 12. 25. and therefore he could not sit still and see the throne usurped, which he knew was Solomon's right, by the will of Him from whom promotion cometh. When crowns were disposed of by immediate direction from heaven, no marvel that prophets were so much interested and employed in that matter; but, now that common providence rules the affairs of the kingdom of men, Dan. 4. 32. the subordinate agency must be left to common persons, and let not prophets intermeddle in them, but keep to the affairs of the kingdom of God among men. Nathan applies himself to Bath-sheba, as one that had the greatest concern for Solomon, and could have the freest access to David. He acquaints her with Adonijah's attempt, v. 11. and that it was not with David's consent or knowledge. He suggests to her, that not only Solomon was in danger of losing the crown, but that he and she too were in danger of losing their lives, if Adonijah prevailed. A humble spirit may be indifferent to a crown, and may be content, notwithstanding the prospect of it, to sit down short of the possession of it; but the law of self-preservation, and the sixth commandment, obliges us to use all possible endeavours to secure our own life and the life of others. Now, says Nathan, let me *give thee counsel how to save thy own life, and the life of thy son*, v. 12. Such as this is the counsel that Christ's ministers give us in his name, to give all diligence, not only that *no man take our crown*, Rev. 3. 11. but that we *save our lives*, even the lives of our souls. He directs her, v. 13. to go to the king, to remind him of his word and oath, that Solomon should be his successor; and to ask him, in the most humble manner, *Why doth Adonijah reign?* He thought David was not so cold but this would warm him. Conscience, as well as a sense of honour, would put life into him, upon such an occasion as this; and he promises, v. 14. that, while she was reasoning with the king upon this matter, he would come in and second her, as if he came accidentally, which perhaps the king might look upon as a special providence, (and he was one that took notice of such evidences, 1 Sam. 25. 32, 33.) or, however, it would help to awaken him so much the more.

II. Bath-sheba, according to his advice and direction, loses no time, but immediately makes her application to the king, on the same errand that Esther came to king Abasnerus, to intercede for her life. She needed not wait for a call, as Esther did; she knew she should be welcome at any time; but, it is remarked, that, when she visited the king, Abishag was ministering to him, v. 15. and Bath-sheba took no displeasure either at him or her for it. Also that she *bowed, and did obeisance to the king*, v. 16. in token of her respect to him, both as her prince and as her husband; such a genuine daughter was she of Sarah, who obeyed Abraham, calling him *lord*. They that would find favour with superiors, must shew them reverence, and be dutiful to those whom they expect to be kind to them. Her address to the king, on this occasion, is very discreet. 1. She reminds him of his promise made to her, and confirmed with a solemn oath, that Solomon should succeed him, v. 17. She knew how fast this would hold such a conscientious

man as David was. 2. She informs him of Adonijah's attempt, which he was ignorant of, v. 18. "Adonijah reigns, in competition with thee for the present, and in contradiction to thy promise for the future. The fault is not thine, for thou knewest it not; but, now that thou knowest it, thou wilt, in pursuance of the promise, take care to suppress it." She tells him who were his guests, and who were in his interest, but *Solomon thy servant has he not called*, which plainly shews he looks upon him as his rival, and aims to undermine him, v. 19. It is not an oversight, but a contempt of the act of settlement, that Solomon is neglected. 3. She pleads that it was very much in his power to obviate this mischief, v. 20. *The eyes of all Israel are upon thee*, not only as a king, for we cannot suppose it to be the prerogative of any prince to bequeath his subjects by will, (as if they were his goods and chattels;) to whom he pleases, but as a prophet; all Israel knew that David was not only himself *the anointed of the God of Jacob*, but that the *Spirit of the Lord spake by him*, 2 Sam. 23. 1, 2. and, therefore, waiting for, and depending upon, a divine designation, in a matter of such importance, David's word would be an oracle and a law to them; this, therefore, (says Bath-sheba,) they expect, and it will end the controversy, and effectually quash all Adonijah's pretensions. *A divine sentence is in the lips of the king*. Note, Whatever power, interest, or influence, men have, they ought to improve it to the utmost, for the preserving and advancing of the kingdom of the Messiah, of which Solomon's kingdom was a type. 4. She suggests the imminent peril which she and her son would be in, if this matter was not settled in David's life-time, v. 21. If Adonijah prevail, as he is likely to do, (having Joab the general, and Abiathar the high priest, on his side,) Solomon and all his friends will be looked upon as traitors, and dealt with accordingly; usurpers are most cruel. If Adonijah had got into the throne, he would not have dealt so fairly with Solomon as Solomon did with him. Those hazard every thing who stand in the way of such as, against right, force their entrance.

III. Nathan the prophet, according to his promise, seasonably stepped in, and seconded her, while she was speaking, before the king had given his answer, lest, if he had heard Bath-sheba's representation only, his answer should have been dilatory, and only that he would consider of it: but, out of the mouth of two witnesses, two such witnesses, the word would be established, and he would immediately give positive order. The king is told that Nathan the prophet is come, and he is sure to be always welcome to the king, especially when either he is not well, or has any great affair upon his thoughts, for, in either case, a prophet will be, in a particular manner, serviceable to him. Nathan knows he must render honour to whom honour is due, and therefore pays the king the same respect, now that he finds him sick in bed, as he would have done if he had found him in his throne; he *bowed himself with his face to the ground*, v. 23. He deals a little more plainly with the king than Bath-sheba had done, in which his character would support him, and the present languor of the king's spirits made it necessary that they should be roused. 1. He makes the same representation of Adonijah's attempt as Bath-sheba had made, v. 25, 26. adding, that his party were already got to that height of assurance, as to shout, *God save king Adonijah*, as if king David were already dead, taking notice also, that they had not invited him to their feast, *Me, thy servant, has he not called*; thereby intimating, that they resolved not to consult either God or David in the matter, for Nathan was a *secretioribus consiliis*—intimately acquainted with the mind of both. He makes David sensible how much he was concerned to clear himself from having a hand in it. *Hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me?* v. 24. And again, v. 27. *Is this thing done by my lord the king?* If it be, he is not so faithful, either to God's word or to his own, as we all took him to be; if it be not, it is high time that we witness against the usurpation, and declare Solomon his successor. If it be, why is not Nathan made acquainted with it, who is not only, in general, the king's confidant, but is particularly concerned in this matter, having been employed to notify to David the mind of God concerning the succession; but, if my lord the king know nothing of

the matter, (as certainly he does not,) what daring insolence are Adonijah and his party guilty of!" Thus he endeavours to incense David against them, that he might act the more vigorously for the support of Solomon's interest. Note, Good men would do their duty, if they were reminded of it, and put upon it, and told what occasion there is for them to appear: and those who thus are their remembrancers do them a real kindness, as Nathan here did to David.

IV. David, hereupon, made a solemn declaration of his firm adherence to his former resolution, that Solomon should be his successor; Bath-sheba is called in, v. 28. and to her, as acting for and on the behalf of her son, the king gives these fresh assurances.

1. He repeats his former promise and oath, owns that he had sworn unto her by the Lord God of Israel, that Solomon should reign after him, v. 30. Though he is old, and his memory begins to fail him, yet he remembers this. Note, An oath is so sacred a thing, that the obligations of it cannot be broken, and so solemn a thing, that the impressions of it, one would think, cannot be forgotten. 2. He ratifies it with another, because the occasion offered for it. *As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, even so will I certainly do this day*, without dispute, without delay. His form of swearing seems to be what he commonly used on solemn occasions, for we find it, 2 Sam. 4. 9. And it carries in it a grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to him, in bringing him safe through the many difficulties and hardships which had lain in his way; and which he now makes mention of, to the glory of God, as Jacob, when he lay a dying, Gen. 48. 16. thus setting to his seal, from his own experience, that that was true which the Lord spake by him, Ps. 34. 22. *The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants*. Dying saints ought to be witnesses for God, and speak of him as they have found. Perhaps, he speaks thus, on this occasion, for the encouragement of his son and successor to trust in God in the distresses he also might meet with.

Bath-sheba receives these assurances, (v. 31.) (1.) With great complaisance to the king's person: she did reverence to him, while Adonijah and his party affronted him. (2.) With hearty good wishes for the king's health, *Let him live*. So far was she from thinking that he lived too long, that she prayed he might live for ever, if it were possible, to adorn the crown he wore, and to be a blessing to his people. We should earnestly desire the prolonging of useful lives, however it may be the postponing of any advantages of our own.

32. And king David said, Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king. 33. The king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: 34. And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel: and blow ye with the trumpet, and say, God save king Solomon. 35. Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead: and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah. 36. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen: the LORD God of my lord the king say so too. 37. As the LORD hath been with my lord the king, even so be he with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David. 38. So Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the

Pelethites, went down, and caused Solomon to ride upon king David's mule, and brought him to Gihon. 39. And Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, God save king Solomon. 40. And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them.

We have here the effectual care David took, both to secure Solomon's right, and to preserve the public peace, by crushing Adonijah's project in the bud. Observe,

I. The express orders he gave for the proclaiming of Solomon. The persons he entrusted with this great affair, were, Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, men of power and interest, whom David had always reposed a confidence in, and found faithful to him, and whom Adonijah had passed by in his invitation, v. 10. David orders them forthwith, with all possible solemnity, to proclaim Solomon; they must take with them *the servants of their lord*, the life-guards, and all the servants of the household; they must set Solomon on the mule the king used to ride, for he kept not such stables of horses as his son afterward did; he appoints them whither to go, v. 33. and, v. 34, 35. what to do. 1. Zadok and Nathan, the two ecclesiastical persons, must, in God's name, anoint him king: for though he was not the first of his family, as Saul and David were, yet he was a younger son, was made king by divine appointment, and his title was contested, which made it necessary that hereby it should be settled. This unction was typical of the designation and qualification of the Messiah, or Christ, the anointed one, on whom the Spirit, that oil of gladness, was poured without measure, Heb. 1. 9. Ps. 89. 20. And all real Christians, being *heirs of the kingdom*, (Jam. 2. 5.) do from him receive the anointing, 1 John, 2. 27. 2. The great officers, civil and military, are ordered to give public notice of this, and to express the public joy upon this occasion, by sound of trumpet, by which the law of Moses directed the gracing of large solemnities; to this must be added the acclamations of the people, "*Let king Solomon live*, let him prosper, let his kingdom be established and perpetuated, and let him long continue in the enjoyment of it;" so it had been promised concerning him, Ps. 72. 15. *He shall live*. 3. They must then bring him in state to the city of David, and he must sit upon the throne of his father, as his substitute now, or viceroy, to dispatch public business during his weakness, and be his successor after his death; *he shall be king in my stead*. It would be a great satisfaction to David himself, and to all parties concerned, to have this done immediately, that, upon the demise of the king, there might be no dispute, or agitation, in the public affairs. David was far from grudging his successor the honour of appearing such in his life-time, and yet perhaps was so taken up with his devotions on his sick bed, that, if he had not been put in mind of it by others, this great good work, which was so necessary to the public repose, had been left undone.

II. The great satisfaction which Benaiah, in the name of the rest, professed in these orders. The king said, "Solomon shall reign for me, and reign after me;" "Amen," (says Benaiah, heartily,) "as the king says, so say we, we are entirely satisfied in the nomination, and concur in the choice; we give our vote for Solomon, *nemine contradicente*—*unanimously*; and, since we can bring nothing to pass, much less establish it, without the concurrence of a propitious providence, *The Lord God of my lord the king say so too!*" v. 36. This is the language of his faith in that promise of God on which Solomon's government was founded. If we say as God says in his word, we may hope that he will say as we say by his providence. To this he adds a prayer for Solomon, v. 37. That God would be with him as he had been with David, and make his throne greater; he knew David was none of those that envy their children's greatness, and therefore that he would

not be disquieted at this prayer, nor take it as an affront, but would heartily say *Amen* to it. The wisest and best man in the world desires his children may be wiser and better than he, for he himself desires to be wiser and better than he is; and wisdom and goodness are true greatness.

III. The immediate execution of these orders, v. 38. 40. No time was lost, but Solomon was brought in state to the place appointed, and there Zadok (who, though he was not as yet high priest, was, we may suppose, the Suffragan, the Jews called him the *Sagan*, or second priest) anointed him by the direction of Nathan the prophet, and David the king, v. 39. In the tabernacle, where the ark was now lodged, was kept, among other sacred things, the holy oil for many religious services; thence Zadok took a *horn of oil*, which denotes both power and plenty, and therewith anointed Solomon. We do not find that Abiathar pretended to anoint Adonijah, he was made king by a feast, not by an unction; whom God calls he will qualify, which was signified by the anointing; usurpers had it not. *Christ signifies anointed*, and he is the King whom God hath set upon his holy hill of Zion, according to the decree, Ps. 2. 6, 7. Christians also are made to our God (and by him) kings, and they have an unction from the Holy One, 1 John, 2. 20.

The people, hereupon, express their great joy and satisfaction in the elevation of Solomon, surround him with their Hosannas, *God save king Solomon*, and attend him with their music and shouts of joy, v. 40. Hereby they declared their concurrence in the choice, and that he was not forced upon them, but cheerfully accepted by them. The power of a prince can be little satisfaction to himself, unless he knows it to be a satisfaction to his people. Every Israelite indeed rejoices in the exaltation of the Son of David.

41. And Adonijah and all the guests that *were* with him heard *it* as they had made an end of eating. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, Wherefore *is* this noise of the city being in an uproar? 42. And while he yet spake, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came, and Adonijah said unto him, Come in; for thou *art* a valiant man, and bringest good tidings. 43. And Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, Verily our lord king David hath made Solomon king. 44. And the king hath sent with him Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and they have caused him to ride upon the king's mule. 45. And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king in Gihon; and they are come up from thence rejoicing, so that the city rang again. This *is* the noise that ye have heard. 46. And also Solomon sitteth on the throne of the kingdom. 47. And moreover the king's servants came to bless our lord king David, saying, God make the name of Solomon better than thy name, and make his throne greater than thy throne. And the king bowed himself upon the bed. 48. And also thus said the king, Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, which hath given *one* to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing *it*. 49. And all the guests that *were* with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way. 50. And Adonijah

feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. 51. And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah feareth king Solomon, for, lo, he hath caught hold on the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to-day that he will not slay his servant with the sword. 52. And Solomon said, If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die. 53. So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon: and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house.

We have here,

1. The tidings of Solomon's inauguration brought to Adonijah and his party in the midst of their jollity. *They had made an end of eating*, and, it should seem, it was a great while before they made an end, for all the affair of Solomon's anointing was ordered, done, and finished, while they were at dinner, glutting themselves. Thus they who *serve not our Lord Christ*, but oppose him, are commonly such as *serve their own belly*, Rom. 16. 18. and make a god of it, Phil. 3. 19. Their long feast intimates likewise that they were very secure, and confident of their interest, else they would not have lost so much time. The old world and Sodom were *eating and drinking*, secure and sensual, when their destruction came, Luke, 17. 26, &c. When *they had made an end of eating*, and were preparing themselves to proclaim their king, and bring him in triumph into the city, they *heard the sound of the trumpet*, v. 41. and a *dreadful sound it was in their ears*, Job, 15. 21. Joab was an old man, and was alarmed at it, apprehending the city to be in an uproar; but Adonijah is very confident that the messenger, being a *worthy man*, brings good tidings, v. 42. Usurpers flatter themselves with the hopes of success, and those are commonly least timorous, whose condition is most dangerous. But how can those who do evil deeds expect to have good tidings? No, the worthiest man will bring them the worst news, as the priest's son did here to Adonijah, v. 43. "Verily, the best tidings I have to bring you, is, that *Solomon is made king*, so that your pretensions are all quashed."

He relates to them very particularly, 1. With what great solemnity *Solomon was made king*, v. 44, 45. and that he was now *sitting on the throne of the kingdom*, v. 46. Adonijah thought to have stept into the throne before him, but Solomon was too quick for him. 2. With what general satisfaction Solomon was made king, so that that which was done was not likely to be undone again. (1.) The *people* were pleased, witness their joyful acclamations, v. 45. (2.) The *courtiers* were pleased; *The king's servants* attended him with an address of congratulation upon this occasion, v. 47. We have here the heads of their address; they *blessed king David*, applauded his prudent care for the public welfare, acknowledged their happiness under his government, and prayed heartily for his recovery. They also prayed for Solomon, that God would make his name better than his father's, which it might well be, when he had his father's foundation to build upon; a child, on a giant's shoulders, is taller than the giant himself. (3.) The *king* himself is pleased; he *bowed himself upon the bed*, not only to signify his acceptance of his servants' address, but to offer up his own address to God, v. 48. *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel*, who, as Israel's God, for Israel's good, has brought this matter to such a happy issue, *mine eyes even seeing it*. Note, It is a great satisfaction to good men, when they are going out of the world, to see the affairs of their families in a good posture, their children rising up in their stead to serve God and their generation, and especially to see peace upon Israel, and the establishment of it.

II. The effectual crush which this gave to Adonijah's attempt; it spoiled their sport, dispersed their company, and obliged every man to shift for his own safety. *The triumphing of the wicked is short.* They were building a castle in the air, which, having no foundation, would soon fall, and crush them; they were afraid of being taken in the fact, while they were together hatching their treason, and therefore each one made the best of his way.

III. The terror Adonijah himself was in, and the course he took to secure himself; he was now as much depressed as he had been elevated, v. 42, 50. he had despised Solomon, as not worthy to be his guest, v. 10. but now he dreads him as his judge; he *feared because of Solomon.* Thus they who oppose Christ and his kingdom, will shortly be made to tremble before him, and call, in vain, to rocks and mountains to shelter them from his wrath. He *took hold on the horns of the altar*, which was always looked upon as a sanctuary, or place of refuge, Exod. 21. 14. intimating thereby, that he durst not stand a trial, but threw himself upon the mercy of his prince, in suing for which, he relied upon no other plea than the mercy of God, which was manifested in the institution and acceptance of the sacrifices that were offered on that altar, and the remission of sin, thereupon. Perhaps Adonijah had formerly slighted the service of the altar, yet now he courts the protection of it. Many who, in the day of their security, neglect the great salvation, under the arrests of the terrors of the Lord, would gladly be beholden to Christ and his merit, and, when it is too late, *will catch hold of the horns of that altar.*

IV. His humble address to Solomon for mercy. By those who brought Solomon tidings where he was, he sent a request for his life, v. 51. *Let king Solomon swear to me that he will not slay his servant.* He owns Solomon for his prince, and himself his servant, dares not justify himself, but *makes supplication to his judge.* It was a great change with him; he that, in the morning, was grasping at a crown, is, before night, begging for his life. Then Adonijah reigns, now Adonijah trembles, and cannot think himself safe unless Solomon promise, with an oath, not to put him to death.

V. The orders Solomon gave concerning him. He discharged him, upon his good behaviour, v. 52, 53. He considers he is his brother; it was the first offence, perhaps, being so soon made sensible of his error, and then not persisting in his rebellion, he might prove, not only a peaceable, but a serviceable, subject, and therefore, if he will conduct himself well for the future, what is past shall be pardoned: but, if he be found disaffected, turbulent, and aspiring, this offence shall be remembered against him, he shall be called up, upon his former conviction, (as our law speaks,) and execution shall be awarded against him. Thus the Son of David receives those to mercy that have been rebellious: if they will return to their allegiance, and be faithful to their Sovereign, their former crimes shall not be mentioned against them; but if still they continue in the interests of the world and the flesh, that will be their ruin. Adonijah is sent for, and told upon what terms he stands, which he signifies his grateful submission to, and then is bid to go to his house, and live retired there. Solomon not only gave him his life, but his estate, thus *establishing his throne by mercy.*

CHAP. II.

In this chapter, we have David setting, and Solomon, at the same time, rising.

I. The conclusion of David's reign with his life. 1. The charges he gives to Solomon upon his death-bed, in general, to serve God, v. 1. 4. in particular, concerning Jonb, Barzillai, and Shimei, v. 5. 9. 2. His death and burial, and the years of his reign, v. 10, 11. II. The beginning of Solomon's reign, v. 12. Though he was to be a prince of peace, he began his reign with some remarkable acts of justice, 1. Upon Adonijah, whom he put to death for his aspiring pretensions, v. 13. 25. 2. Upon Abiathar, whom he deposed from the high priesthood for siding with Adonijah, v. 26, 27. 3. Upon Jonb, whom he put to death for his late treason and former murders, v. 28. 33. 4. Upon Shimei, whom, for cursing David, he confined to Jerusalem, v. 36. 38. and, three years after, for transgressing the rules, put to death, v. 39. 46.

1. **N**OW the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, 2. I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man; 3. And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: 4. That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel. 5. Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that *was* about his loins, and in his shoes that *were* on his feet. 6. Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace. 7. But shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table: for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother. 8. And, behold, *thou hast* with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse, in the day when I went to Mahanaim: but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I sware to him by the LORD, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. 9. Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou *art* a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood. 10. So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David. 11. And the days that David reigned over Israel *were* forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.

David, that great and good man, is here a dying man, v. 1. and a dead man, v. 10. It is well there is another life after this, for death stains all the glory of this, and lays it in the dust. We have here,

I. The charge and instructions which David, when he was dying, gave to Solomon, his son, and declared successor. He feels himself declining, and is not backward to own it, nor afraid to hear or speak of dying: *I go the way of all the earth*, v. 2. Heb. *I am walking in it.* Note, 1. Death is a way; not only a period of this life, but a passage to a better. 2. It is *the way of all the earth*, of all mankind who dwell on earth, and are themselves earth, and therefore must return to their earth. Even the sons and heirs of heaven must *go the way of all the earth*, they must needs die; but they walk with pleasure in this way, *through the valley of the shadow of death*, Ps. 23. 4. Prophets, and even kings, must go this way, to brighter light and honour than prophecy

or sovereignty. David is going this way, and therefore gives Solomon directions what to do.

(1.) He charges him, in general, to keep God's commandments, and to make conscience of his duty, v. 2. .4. He prescribes to him, [1.] A good rule to act by, the divine will; "Govern thyself by that." David's charge to him is, to *keep the charge of the Lord his God*. The authority of a dying father is much, but nothing to that of a living God. There are great trusts which we are charged with by the Lord our God, let us keep them carefully, as those that must give account; and excellent statutes, which we must be ruled by, let us also keep them. The written word is our rule: Solomon must himself do *as was written in the law of Moses*. [2.] A good spirit to act with; *Be strong, and shew thyself a man*, though, in years, but a child. Those that would keep the charge of the Lord their God, must put on resolution. [3.] Good reasons for all this; this would effectually conduce, *First*, To the prosperity of his kingdom; it is the way to *prosper in all thou doest*, and to succeed with honour and satisfaction in every undertaking. *Secondly*, To the perpetuity of it; *that the Lord may continue*, and so confirm, *his word which he spake concerning me*. Those that rightly value the treasure of the promise, that sacred depositum, cannot but be solicitous to preserve the entail of it, and very desirous that those who come after them may do nothing to cut it off. Let each, in his own age, successively, keep God's charge, and then God will be sure to continue his word. We never let fall the promise, till we let fall the precept. God had promised David that the Messiah should come from his loins, and that promise was absolute: but the promise, that there should not fail him *a man on the throne of Israel*, was conditional; if his seed behave themselves as they should. If Solomon, in his day, fulfil the condition, he does his part toward the perpetuating of the promise. The condition is, that he walk before God in all his institutions, in sincerity, with zeal and resolution; and, in order hereunto, that he *take heed to his way*. In order to our constancy in religion, nothing is more necessary than caution and circumspection.

(2.) He gives him directions concerning some particular persons, what to do with them, that he might make up his deficiencies, in justice to some, and kindness to others.

[1.] Concerning Joab, v. 5. David was now conscious to himself that he had not done well to spare him, when he had made himself once and again obnoxious to the law, by the murder of Abner first, and afterward of Amasa, both of them great men, *captains of the host of Israel*: he slew them treacherously, *shed the blood of war in peace*; and injuriously to David; *thou knowest what he did to me* therein. The murder of a subject is a wrong to the prince, it is a loss to him, and is against the peace of our sovereign lord the king. These murders were particularly against David, reflecting upon his reputation, he being, at that time, in treaty with them, and hazarded his interest, which they were very capable of serving. Magistrates are the avengers of the blood of those they have the charge of. It aggravated Joab's crime, that he was neither ashamed of the sin, nor afraid of the punishment, but daringly wore the girdle and shoes that were stained with innocent blood, in defiance of the justice both of God and the king. David refers him to Solomon's wisdom, v. 6. with an intimation that he left him to his justice. Say not, "He has a hoary head, it is pity it should be cut off, for it will shortly fall of itself;" No, let it not *go down to the grave in peace*. Though he has been long reprieved, he shall be reckoned with at last; time does not wear out the guilt of any sin, particularly not of murder.

[2.] Concerning Barzillai's family, whom he orders him to be kind to for Barzillai's sake, who, we may suppose, by this time, was dead, v. 7. When David, upon his death-bed, was remembering the injuries that had been done, he could not forget the kindnesses that had been shewn, but leaves it as a charge upon his son to return them. Note, The kindnesses we have received from our friends must not be buried, either in their graves or our's, but our children must return them to their's. Hence, perhaps, Solomon fetched that rule, Prov. 27. 10. *Thine own*

friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not. Paul prays for the house of Onesiphorus, who had often refreshed him.

[3.] Concerning Shimei, v. 8, 9. *First*, His crime is remembered; *He cursed me with a grievous curse*; the more grievous, because he insulted him when he was in misery, and poured vinegar into his wounds. The Jews say, that one thing which made this a grievous curse, was, that, beside all that was mentioned, 2 Sam. 16. Shimei upbraided him with his descent from Ruth the Moabitess. *Secondly*, His pardon is not forgotten. David owns he had sworn to him, that he would not himself put him to death; because he seasonably submitted, and cried *Pec-cavi—I have sinned*, and he was not willing, especially at that juncture, to use the sword of public justice for the avenging of wrongs done to himself. But, *Thirdly*, His case, as it now stands, is left with Solomon, as one that knew what was fit to be done, and would do as he found occasion. David intimates to him, that his pardon was not designed to be perpetual, but only a reprieve for David's life; *Hold him not guiltless*: do not think him any true friend to thee or thy government, or fit to be trusted; he has no less malice than he had then, though he has more wit to conceal it. He is still a debtor to the public justice, for what he did then; and though I promised him that I would not put him to death, I never promised that my successor should not. His turbulent spirit will soon give thee an occasion, which thou shouldst not fail to take, for bringing of his *hoary head to the grave with blood*." This proceeded not from personal revenge, but a prudent zeal for the honour of the government, and the covenant God had made with his family, the contempt of which ought not to go unpunished. Even a hoary head, if a guilty and forfeited head, ought not to be any man's protection from justice. *The sinner, being an hundred years old, shall be accursed*. Isa. 65. 20.

11. David's death and burial, v. 10. He was buried in the city of David; not in the burying place of his father, as Saul was, but in his own city, which he was the founder of. *There were set the thrones, and there the tombs, of the house of David*. Now, David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell asleep, and was laid to his fathers, and saw corruption. Acts, 13. 36. and see Acts, 2. 39. His epitaph may be taken from 2 Sam. 23. 1. Here lies David the son of Jesse, the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel; adding his own words, Ps. 16. 9. *My flesh also shall rest in hope*. Josephus says, that, beside the usual magnificence with which his son Solomon buried him, he put into his sepulchre a vast deal of money; and that, 1300 years after, (so he reckons,) it was opened by Hircanus the high priest, in the time of Antiochus, and 3000 talents taken out for the public service. The years of his reign are here computed, v. 11. to be forty years; the odd six months which he reigned above seven years in Hebron are not reckoned, but the even sum only.

12. Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was established greatly.

13. And Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon. And she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably.

14. He said moreover, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on. 15. And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign: howbeit, the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the LORD. 16. And now I ask one petition of thee, deny me not. And she said unto him, Say on. 17. And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king, (for he will not say thee nay,) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to

wife. 18. And Bath-sheba said, Well; I will speak for thee unto the king. 19. Bath-sheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand. 20. Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee; *I pray thee*, say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother, for I will not say thee nay. 21. And she said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah thy brother to wife. 22. And king Solomon answered and said unto his mother, And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; for he is mine elder brother, even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah. 23. Then king Solomon swore by the LORD, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life. 24. Now therefore, *as the LORD liveth*, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who hath made me an house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day. 25. And king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he fell upon him that he died.

Here is,

1. Solomon's accession to the throne, *v. 12*. He came to it much more easily and peaceably than David did, and much sooner saw his government established. It is happy for a kingdom, when the end of one good reign is the beginning of another, as it was here.

II. His just and necessary removal of Adonijah his rival, in order to the establishment of his throne. Adonijah had made some bold pretensions to the crown, but was soon obliged to let them fall, and throw himself upon Solomon's mercy, who dismissed him, upon his good behaviour, and, had he been easy, he might have been safe. But here we have him betraying himself into the hands of Solomon's justice, and falling by it; the righteous God leaving him to himself, that he might be punished for his former treason, and that Solomon's throne might be established. Many thus ruin themselves, because they know not when they are well off, nor well done to; and sinners, by presuming on God's patience, treasure up wrath to themselves. Now observe,

1. Adonijah's treasonable project, which was, to marry Abishag, David's concubine; not because he was in love with her, but because, by her, he hoped to renew his claim to the crown, which might stand him in stead, or because it was then looked upon as a branch of the government, to have the *wives of the predecessor*, 2 Sam. 12. 8. Absalom thought his pretensions much supported by lying with his father's concubines. Adonijah flatters himself, that if he may succeed him in his bed, especially with the best of his wives, he may by that means step up to succeed him in his throne. Restless and turbulent spirits reach high. It was but a small game to play at, as it should seem, yet he hopes to make it an after-game for the kingdom, and now to gain that by a wife which he could not gain by force.

2. The means he used to compass this. He durst not make suit to Abishag immediately, (he knew she was at Solomon's disposal, and he would justly resent it, if his consent were not first obtained, as even Ish-bosheth did, in a like case, 2 Sam. 3. 7.) nor durst he apply himself immediately to Solomon, knowing that he lay under his displeasure; but he engaged Bath-sheba to be his

friend in this matter, who would be forward to believe it a matter of love, and not apt to suspect it a matter of policy. Bath-sheba was surprised to see Adonijah in her apartment, and asked him if he did not come with a design to do her a mischief, because she had been instrumental to crush his late attempt. "No," says he, "I come *peaceably*, *v. 13*. and to beg a favour," *v. 14*. that she would use the great interest she had in her son, to gain his consent, that he might marry Abishag, *v. 16, 17*. and if he may but obtain this, he will thankfully accept it, (1.) As a compensation for his loss of the kingdom. He insinuates, *v. 15*. *Thou knowest the kingdom was mine*, as my father's eldest son, living at the time of his death, and *all Israel set their faces on me*. That was false, they were but a few that he had on his side; yet thus he would represent himself as an object of compassion, that had been deprived of a crown, and therefore might well be gratified in a wife: if he may not inherit his father's throne, yet let him have something valuable that was his father's, to keep for his sake, and let it be Abishag. (2.) As his reward for his acquiescence in that loss. He owns Solomon's right to the kingdom, "*It was his from the Lord*, I was foolish in offering to contest it; and, now that it is turned about to him, I am satisfied." Thus he pretends to be well-pleased with Solomon's accession to the throne, when he is doing all he can to give him disturbance. *His words were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart*.

3. Bath-sheba's address to Solomon on his behalf. She promised to speak to the king for him, *v. 18*. and did so, *v. 19*. Solomon received her with all the respect that was owing to a mother, though he himself was a king; he *rose up to meet her*, *bowed himself to her*, and caused her to *sit on his right hand*, according to the law of the fifth commandment. Children, not only when grown up, but when grown great, must give honour to their parents, and behave dutifully and respectfully toward them. *Despise not thy mother when she is old*. As a further instance of the deference he paid to his mother's wisdom and authority, when he understood she had a petition to present to him, he promised not to say her nay. A promise which both he and she understood with this necessary limitation, provided it be just and reasonable, and fit to be granted; but, if it were otherwise, he was sure he should convince her that it was so, and that then she would withdraw it. She tells him her errand, at last, *v. 21*. *Let Abishag be given to Adonijah thy brother*. It was strange that she did not suspect the treason, but more strange that she did not abhor the incest, that was in the proposal: but either she did not take Abishag to be David's wife, because the marriage was not consummated, or she thought it might be dispensed with, to gratify Adonijah, in consideration of his tame submission to Solomon. This was her weakness and folly; it was well that she was not regent. Note, They that have the ear of princes and great men, as it is their wisdom not to be too prodigal of their interest, so it is their duty never to use it for the assistance of sin, or the furtherance of any wicked design. Let not princes be asked that which they ought not to grant. It ill becomes a good man to prefer a bad request, or appear in a bad cause.

4. Solomon's just and judicious rejection of the request. Though his mother herself was the advocate, and called it a *small petition*, and, perhaps, it was the first she had troubled him with since he was king, yet he denied it, without violation of the general promise he had made, *v. 20*. If Herod had not had a mind to cut off John Baptist's head, he would not have thought himself obliged to do it by a general promise, like this, made to Herodias. The best friend we have in the world must not have such an interest in us as to bring us to do a wrong thing, either unjust or unwise. (1.) Solomon convinces his mother of the unreasonableness of the request, and shews her the tendency of it, which, before, she was not aware of. His reply is somewhat sharp, *Ask for him the kingdom also*, *v. 22*. To ask that he may succeed the king in his bed, is, in effect, to ask that he may succeed him in his throne, for that is it he aims at. Probably, he had information, or cause for a strong suspicion, that Adonijah was plotting with Joab and Abiathar to give him disturbance, which warranted him to put this

construction upon Adonijah's request. (2.) He convicts and condemns Adonijah for his pretensions, and both with an oath. He convicts him out of his own mouth, v. 23. His own tongue shall fall upon him; and a heavier load a man needs not fall under. Bath-sheba may be imposed upon, but Solomon cannot; he plainly sees what he aims at, and concludes, "He has *spoken this word, against his own life*; he is snared in the words of his own lips; now he shews what he would be at." He condemns him to die immediately; *He shall be put to death this day*, v. 24. God had interposed himself with an oath, that he would establish David's throne, Ps. 89. 35. and therefore Solomon pledges the same assurance to secure that establishment, by cutting off the enemies of it. "As God liveth, that establisheth the government, Adonijah shall die, that would unsettle it." Thus the ruin of the enemies of Christ's kingdom is as sure as the stability of his kingdom, and both as sure as the being and life of God, the Founder of it. The warrant is immediately signed for his execution, and no less a man than Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, general of the army, is ordered to be the executioner, v. 25. It is strange that Adonijah may not be heard to speak for himself: but Solomon's wisdom did not see it needful to examine the matter any further, it was plain enough that Adonijah aimed at the crown, and Solomon cannot be safe while he lives. Ambitious turbulent spirits commonly prepare for themselves the instruments of death. Many a head has been lost by catching at a crown.

26. And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou *art* worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the LORD God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted. 27. So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD; that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh. 28. Then tidings came to Joab; for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. 29. And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD; and, behold, *he is* by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. 30. And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. 31. And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. 32. And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing *thereof*, to wit, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. 33. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head

of his seed for ever: but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD. 34. So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness.

Abiathar and Joab were both aiding and abetting in Adonijah's rebellious attempt, and, it is probable, were at the bottom of this new motion made by Adonijah for Abishag, and it should seem Solomon knew it, v. 22. This was, in both, an intolerable affront, both to God and to the government; and the worse, because of their high station, and the great influence their examples might have upon many. They therefore come next to be reckoned with: they are both equally guilty of the treason, but, in the judgment passed upon them, a difference is made, and with good reason.

I. Abiathar, in consideration of his old services, is only degraded, v. 26, 27. 1. Solomon convicts him, and by his great wisdom finds him guilty. "Thou *art* worthy of death, for joining with Adonijah, when thou knewest on whose head God intended to set the crown." 2. He calls to mind the respect he had formerly shewed to David his father, and that he had both ministered to him in holy things, *had borne before him the ark of the Lord*, and also had tenderly sympathised with him in his afflictions, and been afflicted in them all, particularly when he was in exile and distress, both by Saul's persecution, and Absalom's rebellion. Note, Those that shew kindness to God's people shall have it remembered to their advantage, one time or other. 3. For this reason, he spares Abiathar's life, but deposes him from his offices, and confines him to his country-seat at Anathoth, forbids him the court, the city, the tabernacle, the altar, and all intermeddling in public business, with an intimation likewise, that he was upon his good behaviour, and that though he did not put him to death, at this time, he might another time, if he did not conduct himself well. But, for the present, he was only thrust out from being priest, as rendered unworthy that high station, by the opposition he had given to that which he knew to be the will of God. Saul, for a supposed crime, had barbarously slain Abiathar's father, and 85 priests, their families, and city; Solomon spares Abiathar himself, though guilty of a real crime. Thus was Saul's government ruined, and Solomon's established. As men are to God's ministers, they will find him to them. 4. The depriving of Abiathar was the fulfilling of the threatening against the house of Eli, 1 Sam. 2. 30. for he was the last high priest of that family. It was now above 80 years since the ruin was threatened; but God's judgments, though not executed speedily, will be executed surely.

II. Joab, in consideration of his old sins, is put to death.

1. His guilty conscience sent him to the horns of the altar. He heard that Adonijah was executed, and Abiathar deposed, and therefore, fearing his turn would be next, he flies for refuge to the altar. Many that, in the day of their security, care not for the service of the altar, in the day of their distress, will be glad of the protection of it. Some think Joab designed thereby to devote himself for the future to a constant attendance upon the altar, hoping thereby to obtain his pardon: as some that have lived a dissolute life, all their days, have thought to atone for it, by retiring into a monastery when they are old, leaving the world when it has left them.

2. Solomon orders him to be put to death there for the murder of Abner and Amasa; for these are the crimes upon which he thought fit to ground the sentence, rather than upon his treasonable adherence to Adonijah. Joab was indeed worthy of death for turning after Adonijah, in contempt of Solomon, and his designation to the throne, *though he had not turned after Absalom*, v. 28. Former fidelity will not serve to excuse for any after treachery; yet, beside that, Joab had merited well of the house of David, to which, and to his country, he had done a great deal of good service in his day, in consideration of which, it is probable, Solomon

would have pardoned him his offence against him, (for clemency gives great reputation and establishment to an infant-government,) and would have only displaced him, as he did Abiathar; but he must die for the murders he had formerly been guilty of, which his father had charged him to call him to an account for. The debt he owed to the innocent blood that was shed, by answering it with the blood of him that shed it, he could not pay himself, but left it to his son to pay it, who, having power wherewithal, failed not to do it. On this he grounds the sentence, aggravating the crime, *v. 32. that he fell upon two men more righteous, and better, than he*, that had done him no wrong, nor meant him any, and, had they lived, might probably have done David better service; if the blood shed be not only innocent, but excellent, the life more valuable than common lives, the crime is the more heinous: that David knew not of it, and yet the case was such, that he would be suspected as privy to it; so that Joab endangered his prince's reputation, in taking away the life of his rivals, which was a further aggravation.

For these crimes, (1.) He must die, and die by the sword of public justice. *By man must his blood be shed*, and it lies upon his own head, *v. 32.* as their's does, whom he had murdered, *v. 33.* Woe to the head that lies under the guilt of blood! Vengeance for murder was long in coming upon Joab; but, when it did come, it remained the longer, being here entailed upon the head of his seed for ever, *v. 33.* who, instead of deriving honour, as otherwise they might have done, from his heroic actions, derived guilt, and shame, and a curse, from his villanous actions. The seed of such evil doers shall never be renowned. (2.) He must die at the altar, rather than escape. Joab resolved not to stir from the altar, *v. 30.* hoping thereby either to secure himself, or else to render Solomon odious to the people, as a profaner of the holy place, if he should put him to death there. Benaiah made a scruple of either killing him there, or dragging him thence; but Solomon knew the law, that the altar of God should give no protection to wilful murderers, *Exod. 21. 14. Thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die*, may die a sacrifice. In case of such sins as the blood of beasts would atone for, the altar was a refuge, but not in Joab's case; he therefore orders him to be executed there, if he would not be got thence, to shew that he feared not the censure of the people in doing his duty, but would rectify their mistake, and let them know, that the administration of justice is better than sacrifice, and that the holiness of any place should never countenance the wickedness of any person. They who, by a lively faith, take hold on Christ and his righteousness, with a resolution, if they perish, to perish there, shall find in him a more powerful protection than Joab found at the horns of the altar. Benaiah slew him, *v. 34.* with the solemnity, no doubt, of a public execution. The law being thus satisfied, he was buried in his own house in the wilderness, privately, like a criminal, not pompously, like a soldier; yet no indignity is done to his dead body: it is not for man to lay the iniquity upon the bones, whatever God does.

Lastly, Solomon pleases himself with this act of justice, not as it gratified any personal revenge, but as it was the fulfilling of his father's orders, and a real kindness to himself and his own government. 1. Guilt was hereby removed, *v. 31.* By returning the innocent blood that had been shed, upon the head of him that shed it, it was taken away from him, and from the house of his father; which implies, that the blood which is not required from the murderer will be required from the magistrate, at least there is danger lest it should. They that would have their houses safe, and built up, must put away iniquity far from them. 2. Peace was hereby secured, *v. 33.* upon David; he does not mean his person, but, as he explains himself in the next words, Upon his seed, his house, and his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the Lord; thus he expresses his desire that it may be so, and his hope that it shall be so. Now that justice is done, and the cry of blood is satisfied, the government will prosper. Thus righteousness and peace kiss each other. Now that such a turbulent man as Joab is removed, there shall be peace. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness, *Prov. 25. 5.* Solomon, in this blessing of peace

upon his house and throne, piously looks upward to God as the Author of it, and forward to eternity as the perfection of it; "It shall be peace from the Lord, and peace for ever from the Lord." The Lord of peace himself give us that peace which is everlasting.

35. And the king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his room over the host: and Zadok the priest did the king put in the room of Abiathar. 36. And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Build thee an house in Jerusalem, and dwell there, and go not forth thence any whither. 37. For it shall be, that on the day thou goest out, and passest over the brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain that thou shalt surely die: thy blood shall be upon thine own head. 38. And Shimei said unto the king, The saying is good: as my lord the king hath said, so will thy servant do. And Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days. 39. And it came to pass at the end of three years, that two of the servants of Shimei ran away unto Achish son of Maachah king of Gath: and they told Shimei, saying, Behold thy servants be in Gath. 40. And Shimei arose, and saddled his ass, and went to Gath to Achish to seek his servants: and Shimei went, and brought his servants from Gath. 41. And it was told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath, and was come again. 42. And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Did I not make thee to swear by the LORD, and protested unto thee, saying, Know for a certain, that on the day thou goest out, and walkest abroad any whither, that thou shalt surely die? And thou saidst unto me, The word that I have heard is good. 43. Why then hast thou not kept the oath of the LORD, and the commandment that I have charged thee with? 44. The king said moreover to Shimei, Thou knowest all the wickedness which thine heart is privy to, that thou didst to David my father: therefore the LORD shall return thy wickedness upon thine own head; 45. And king Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the LORD for ever. 46. So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, which went out, and fell upon him, that he died. And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

Here is,

I. The preferment of Benaiah and Zadok, two faithful friends to Solomon and his government, *v. 35.* Joab being put to death, Benaiah was advanced to be general of the forces in his room, and, Abiathar being deposed, Zadok was made high priest in his room, and therein was fulfilled that word of God, when he threatened to cut off the house of Eli, *1 Sam. 2. 35. I will raise me up a faithful priest, and will build him a sure house.* Though sacred offices may be disgraced, they shall not be destroyed, by the mal-administration of those that are intrusted with them, nor shall God's work ever stand still for want of hands to carry it on. No wonder that a king, so immediately of God's making, was

empowered to make whom he thought fit high priest; and he did it in equity, for the ancient right was in Zadok, he being of the family of Eleazar, whereas Eli and his house were of Ithamar.

II. The course that was taken with Shimei. He is sent for, by a messenger, from his house at Bahurim, expecting, perhaps, no better than Adonijah's doom, being conscious of his enmity to the house of David; but Solomon knows how to make a difference of crimes and criminals. David had promised Shimei his life for his time; Solomon is not bound by that promise, and yet will not go directly contrary to it.

1. He confined him to Jerusalem, and forbade him, upon any pretence whatsoever, to go out of the city any further than the brook Kidron, v. 36, 37. He would not suffer him to continue at his country-seat, lest he should make mischief among his neighbours, but took him to Jerusalem, where he kept him prisoner at large: this might make Shimei's confinement easy to himself, for Jerusalem was beautiful for situation, *the joy of the whole earth*, the royal city, the holy city; he had no reason to complain of being shut up in such a paradise; it would also make it the more safe for Solomon, for there he would have him under his eye, and be able to watch his motions; and he plainly tells him, that, if he ever go out of the rules, he shall certainly die for it. 'This was a fair trial of his obedience, and such a test of his loyalty, as he had no reason to complain of; he has his life upon easy terms, he shall live, if he will but be content to live at Jerusalem.'

2. Shimei submits to the confinement, and thankfully takes his life upon those terms; he enters into recognizance, v. 38. under the penalty of death, not to stir out of Jerusalem, and owns the saying is good. Even they that perish cannot but own the conditions of pardon and life unexceptionable, so that their blood, like Shimei's, must rest upon their own heads. Shimei promised, with an oath, to keep within his bounds, v. 42.

3. Shimei forfeits his recognizance, which was the thing Solomon expected; and God was righteous in suffering him to do it, that he might now suffer for his old sins. Two of his servants (it seems, though he was a prisoner, he lived like himself, well attended) ran from him to the land of the Philistines, v. 39. Thither he pursued them, and thence brought them back to Jerusalem, v. 40. For the keeping of it private, he *saddled his ass* himself, probably went in the night, and came home, he thought, undiscovered. "Seeking his servants," (says Bishop Hall,) "he lost himself; these earthly things either are, or should be, our servants; how commonly do we see men run out of the bounds set by God's law, to hunt after them, till their souls incur a fearful judgment."

4. Solomon takes the forfeiture. Information is given him that Shimei had transgressed, v. 41. The king sends for him, and, (1.) Charges him with the *present* crime, v. 42, 43. that he had put a great contempt upon the authority and wrath both of God and the king; that he had broken *the oath of the Lord*, and disobeyed the commandment of his prince; and by this it appeared what manner of spirit he was of, that he would not be held by the bonds of gratitude or conscience. Had he represented to Solomon the urgency of the occasion, and begged leave to go, perhaps Solomon might have given him leave; but, to presume either upon his ignorance or his connivance, was to affront him in the highest degree. (2.) He condemns him for his *former* crime, cursing David, and throwing stones at him in the day of his affliction: *the wickedness which thy heart is privy to*, v. 44. There was no need to examine witnesses for the proof of the fact, his own conscience was instead of a thousand witnesses; that wickedness which men's *own hearts* alone are *privy to*, is enough, if duly considered, to fill them with confusion, in expectation of its return upon *their own heads*; for, if the heart be privy to it, God is greater than the heart. Others knew of Shimei's cursing David, but Shimei himself knew of the wicked principles of hatred and malice against David, which he displayed in cursing him, and that his submission was but feigned and forced. (3.) He blessed himself and his government, v. 45. *King Solomon shall be blessed*, notwithstanding Shimei's impotent curses, which perhaps, in fury and despair, he now vented freely. *Let them curse, but bless*

Thou. And *the throne of David shall be established*, by taking away those that would undermine it. It is a comfort, in reference to the enmity of the church's enemies, that, how much soever they rage, it is a vain thing they imagine; Christ's throne is established, and they cannot shake it. (4.) He gives orders for the execution of Shimei immediately, v. 46. All judgment is committed to the Lord Jesus, and, though he be King of peace, he will be found a King of righteousness; and this will shortly be his word of command, concerning all his enemies, that will not have him to reign over them, *Bring them forth, and slay them before me*; the reproaches of them that blasphemed him will fall on themselves, to their eternal condemnation.

CHAP. III.

Solomon's reign looked bloody in the foregoing chapter, but the necessary acts of justice must not be called cruelty; in this chapter, it appears with another face: we must not think the worse of God's mercy to his subjects, for his judgments on rebels. We have here, I. Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, v. 1. II. A general view of his religion, v. 2..4. III. A particular account of his prayer to God for wisdom, and the answer to that prayer, v. 5..15. IV. A particular instance of his wisdom, in deciding the controversy between the two harlots, v. 16..28. And very great he looks here, both at the altar and on the bench, and therefore on the bench, because at the altar.

1. **A**ND Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about. 2. Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days. 3. And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. 4. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that *was* the great high place: a thousand burnt-offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

We are here told, concerning Solomon,

I. Something that was unquestionably good, for which he is to be praised, and in which he is to be imitated. 1. He *loved the Lord*, v. 3. Particular notice was taken of God's love to him, 2 Sam. 12. 24. he had his name from it, *Jedidiah, beloved of the Lord*; and here we find he returned that love, as John, the beloved disciple, was most full of love. Solomon was a wise man, a rich man, a great man; yet the brightest encomium of him is that which is the character of all the saints, even the poorest, *He loved the Lord; he loved the worship of the Lord*, so the Chaldee. All that love God, love his worship, love to hear from him, and speak to him, and so to have communion with him. 2. He *walked in the statutes of David his father*, that is, in the statutes that David gave him, ch. 2. 2, 3. 1 Chron. 28. 9, 10. (his dying father's charge was sacred, and as a law to him;) or in God's statutes, which David his father walked in before him; he kept close to God's ordinances, carefully observed them, and diligently attended them. They that *truly love God*, will make conscience of *walking in his statutes*. 3. He was very free and generous in what he did for the honour of God; when he offered sacrifice, he offered like a king, in some proportion to his great wealth, *a thousand burnt-offerings*, v. 4. Where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap accordingly; and those that truly love God, and his worship, will not grudge the expences of their religion. We may be tempted to say, *To what purpose is this waste?* Might not these cattle have been given to the poor? But we must never think that wasted which is laid out in the service of God. It seems strange how so many beasts

should be burnt upon one altar in one feast, though it continued seven days; but the fire on the altar is supposed to be more quick and devouring than common fire, for it represented that fierce and mighty wrath of God, which fell upon the sacrifices, that the offerers might escape: *Our God is a consuming Fire*. Bishop Patrick quotes it as a tradition of the Jews, that the smoke of the sacrifices ascended directly in a straight pillar, and was not scattered, otherwise it would have choked those that attended, when so many sacrifices were offered as were here.

II. Here is something, concerning which it may be doubted whether it were good or no.

1. His marrying of Pharaoh's daughter, *v. 1*. We will suppose she was proselyted, else it had not been lawful; yet, if so, surely it was not advisable; he that *loved the Lord* should, for his sake, have fixed his love upon one of the Lord's people; unequal matches of the sons of God with the daughters of men have often been of pernicious consequence; yet some think that he did this with the advice of his friends, that she was a sincere convert, (for the gods of the Egyptians were not reckoned among the strange gods, which his strange wives drew him in to the worship of, *ch. 11. 5, 6.*) and that the book of Canticles, and the 45th psalm, were penned on this occasion, by which these nuptials were made typical of the mystical espousals of the church to Christ, especially the Gentile church.

2. His worshipping in the high places, and thereby tempting the people to do so too, *v. 2, 3*. Abraham built his altars on mountains, *Gen. 12. 8.*—*22. 2.* and worshipped in a grove, *Gen. 21. 33.* thence the custom was derived, and was proper, till the divine law confined them to one place, *Deut. 12. 5, 6*. David kept to the ark, and did not care for the high places, but Solomon, though in other things he *walked in the statutes of his father*, in this came short of him, he shewed thereby a great zeal for sacrificing, but to obey had been better; this was an irregularity; though there was as yet no house built, there was a tent pitched, to the name of the Lord, and the ark ought to have been the centre of their unity; it was so by divine institution, from it the high places separated, yet while they worshipped God only, and, in other things, according to the rule, he graciously overlooked their weakness, and accepted their services; and it is owned that *Solomon loved the Lord*, though he *burnt incense in the high places*, and let not men be more severe than he is.

5. In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. 6. And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day. 7. And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father, and *I am but* a little child: I know not *how* to go out or come in. 8. And thy servant *is* in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. 9. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? 10. And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. 11. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither

hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; 12. Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. 13. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. 14. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father did walk, then I will lengthen thy days. 15. And Solomon awoke; and, behold, *it was* a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt-offerings, and offered peace-offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.

We have here an account of a gracious visit which God made to Solomon, and the communion he had with God in it, which puts a greater honour upon Solomon than all the wealth and power of his kingdom did.

I. The circumstances of this visit, *v. 5*. 1. The place—it was in Gibeon, that was the great high place, and should have been the only one, because there the tabernacle and the brazen altar were, *2 Chron. 1. 3*. There Solomon offered his great sacrifices, and there God owned him more than in any other of the high places; the nearer we come to the rule in our worship, the more reason we have to expect the tokens of God's presence; where God records his name, there he will meet us, and bless us. 2. The time—it was by night, the night after he had offered that generous sacrifice, *v. 4*. the more we abound in God's work, the more comfort we may expect in him; if the day has been busy for him, the night will be easy in him. Silence and retirement befriended our communion with God: his kindest visits are often in the night, *Ps. 17. 3*. 3. The manner—it was in a dream, when he was asleep, his senses locked up, that God's access to his mind might be the more free and immediate; in this way, God used to speak to the prophets, *Numb. 12. 6.* and to private persons, for their own benefit, *Joh. 33. 15, 16*. These divine dreams, no doubt, distinguished themselves from those in which there are divers vanities, *Eccl. 5. 7*.

II. The gracious offer God made him of the favour he should choose, whatever it were, *v. 5*. He saw the glory of God shine about him, and heard a voice, saying, *Ask what I shall give thee*. Not that God was indebted to him for his sacrifices, but thus he would testify his acceptance of them, and signify to him what great mercy he had in store for him, if he were not wanting to himself. Thus he would try his inclinations, and put an honour upon the prayer of faith. God, in like manner, condescends to us, and puts us in the ready way to be happy, by assuring us that we shall have what we will, for the asking, *John, 16. 23*. *1 John, 5. 15*. What would we more? *Ask, and it shall be given you*.

III. The pious request Solomon, hereupon, made to God. He readily laid hold on this offer; why do we neglect the like offer made to us, like Ahaz, who said, *I will not ask?* *Isa. 7. 12*. Solomon prayed in his sleep, God's grace assisting him; yet it was a lively prayer. What we are most in care about, and which makes the greatest impression upon us when we are awake, commonly affects us when we are asleep; and by our dreams, sometimes, we may know what our hearts are upon, and how our pulse beats. Plutarch makes virtuous dreams one evidence of increase in virtue. Yet this must be attributed to a higher source. Solomon's making of such an intelligent choice as this, when he was asleep, and the powers of reason were least active, shewed that it came purely from

the grace of God, which wrought in him these gracious desires. If *as reins thus instruct him in the night-season*, he must bless the Lord, who gave him counsel, Ps. 16. 7. Now, in this prayer,

1. He acknowledges God's great goodness to his father David, v. 6. He speaks honourably of his father's piety, that he had *walked before God in uprightness of heart*, drawing a veil over his faults. It is to be hoped that those who praise their godly parents will imitate them. But he speaks more honourably of God's goodness to his father, the mercy he had shewed to him while he lived, giving him to be sincerely religious, and then recompensing his sincerity; and the great kindness he had kept for him, to be bestowed on his family when he was gone, in *giving him a son to sit on his throne*. Children should give God thanks for his mercies to their parents, for the sure mercies of David. God's favours are then doubly sweet, when we observe them transmitted to us through the hands of those that have gone before us. The way to get the entail perpetuated, is, to bless God that it has hitherto been preserved.

2. He owns his own insufficiency for the discharge of that great trust to which he was called, v. 7, 8. And here is a double plea to enforce his petition for wisdom. (1.) That his place required it, as he was successor to David: "*Thou hast made me king instead of David*, who was a very wise, good man; Lord, give me wisdom, that I may keep up what he wrought, and carry on what he began;" and, as he was ruler over Israel, "Lord, give me wisdom to rule well, for they are a numerous people, that will not be managed without much care. They are thy people, which thou hast chosen, and therefore to be ruled for thee; and the more wisely they are ruled, the more glory thou wilt have from them." (2.) That he wanted it; as one that had an humble sense of his own deficiency, he pleads, *Lord, I am but a little child*; so he calls himself, a child in understanding, though his father called him a wise man, ch. 2. 9. "*I know not how to go out, or come in*, as I should, nor to do so much as the common daily business of the government, much less what to do in a critical juncture." Note, Those who are employed in public stations, ought to be very sensible of the weight and importance of their work, and their own insufficiency for it; and then they are qualified for receiving divine instruction. St. Paul's question (*Who is sufficient for these things?*) is much like Solomon's here, *Who is able to judge this thy so great a people?* v. 9. Absalom, who was a fool, wished himself a judge; Solomon, who was a wise man, trembles at the undertaking, and suspects his own fitness for it. The more knowing and considerate men are, the better acquainted they are with their own weakness, and the more jealous of themselves.

3. He begs of God to give him wisdom, v. 2. *Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart*. He calls himself God's servant; pleased with that relation to God, Ps. 116. 16. and pleading it with him; "I am devoted to thee, and employed for thee; give me that which is requisite to the services in which I am employed." Thus his good father prayed, and thus he pleaded, Ps. 119. 125. *I am thy servant, give me understanding*. An understanding heart is God's gift, Prov. 2. 6. We must pray for it, James, 1. 5. and pray for it with application to our particular calling, and the various occasions we have for it; as Solomon, *Give me an understanding*, not to please my own curiosity with, or puzzle my neighbours, but to *judge thy people*. That is the best knowledge which will be serviceable to us in doing our duty; and such that knowledge is which enables us to *discern between good and bad*, right and wrong, sin and duty, truth and falsehood, so as not to be imposed upon by false colours, in judging either of other's actions, or of our own.

4. The favourable answer God gave to his request. It was a *pleasing prayer*, v. 10. *The speech pleased the Lord*. God is well-pleased with his own work in his people; the desires of his own kindling, the prayers of his Spirit's inditing. By this choice, Solomon made it appear that he desired to be good more than great, and to serve God's honour more than to advance his own. Those are accepted of God who prefer spiritual blessings to temporal, and are more solicitous to be found in the way of their duty, than

in the way to preferment. But that was not all; it was a *pre-vailling* prayer, and prevailed for more than he asked. (1.) God gave him wisdom, v. 12. He fitted him for all that great work to which he had called him; gave him such a right understanding of the law which he was to judge by, and the cases he was to judge of, that he was unequalled, for a clear head, a solid judgment, and a piercing eye. Such an insight, and such a foresight, never was prince so blessed with. (2.) He gave him riches and honour over and above into the bargain, v. 13. and it was promised that he should as much exceed his predecessors, his successors, and all his neighbours, in these, as in wisdom. These also are God's gift, and are promised to all that *seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof*, as far as is good for them, Matth. 6. 33. Let young people learn to prefer grace to gold, because *godliness has the promise of the life that now is*, but *the life that now is* has not *the promise of godliness*. How completely blessed was Solomon, that had both wisdom and wealth! He that has wealth and power, without wisdom and grace, is in danger of doing hurt with it; he that has wisdom and grace, without wealth and power, is not capable of doing so much good with it, as he that has both. Wisdom is good, is so much the better, with an inheritance, Eccles. 7. 11. But if we make sure of wisdom and grace, those will either bring outward prosperity with them, or sweeten the want of it. God promised Solomon riches and honour, absolutely, but long life, upon condition, v. 14. *If thou wilt walk in my ways, as David did, then I will lengthen thy days*: he failed in the condition; and therefore, though he had riches and honour, he did not live so long to enjoy them, as, in the course of nature, he might have done. Length of days is wisdom's right-hand blessing, typical of eternal life; but it is in her left hand that riches and honour are, Prov. 3. 16. Let us see here, [1.] That the way to obtain spiritual blessings, is, to be importunate for them; to wrestle with God in prayer for them, as Solomon did for wisdom, asking that only, as *the one thing needful*. [2.] That the way to obtain temporal blessings, is, to be indifferent to them, and to refer ourselves to God concerning them. Solomon has wisdom given him, because he did ask it, and wealth because he did not.

5. The grateful return Solomon made for the visit God was pleased to make him, v. 15. He awoke, we may suppose, in a transport of joy; awoke, and *his sleep was sweet to him*, as the prophet speaks, Jer. 31. 26. being satisfied of God's favour, he was satisfied with it, and he began to think, *what he should render to the Lord*. He had made his prayer at the high place at Gibeon, and there God had graciously met him; but he comes to Jerusalem, to give thanks *before the ark of the covenant*, blaming himself, as it were, that he had not prayed there, the ark being the token of God's presence, and wondering that God had met him any where else. God's passing by our mistakes, should persuade us to amend them. There he, (1.) Offered a great sacrifice to God. We must give God praise for his gifts in the promise, though not yet fully performed. David used to *praise God's word*, as well as his works, Ps. 56. 10. and particularly, 2 Sam. 7. 18. and Solomon trod in his steps. (2.) He made a great feast upon the sacrifice, that those about him might rejoice with him in the grace of God.

16. Then came there two women, *that were harlots*, unto the king, and stood before him. 17. And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house, and I was delivered of a child with her in the house. 18. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together, *there was no stranger with us in the house*, save we two in the house. 19. And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it. 20. And she arose at midnight, and took my son from

beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. 21. And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son which I did bear. 22. And the other woman said, Nay; but the living *is* my son, and the dead *is* thy son. And this said, No; but the dead *is* thy son, and the living *is* my son. Thus they spake before the king. 23. Then said the king, The one saith, This *is* my son that liveth, and thy son *is* the dead: and the other saith, Nay; but thy son *is* the dead, and my son *is* the living. 24. And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. 25. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. 26. Then spake the woman whose the living child *was* unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, *but* divide it. 27. Then the king answered, and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she *is* the mother thereof. 28. And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God *was* in him, to do judgment.

An instance is here given of Solomon's wisdom, to shew that the grant lately made him had a real effect upon him: the proof is fetched, not from the mysteries of state, and the policies of the council-board, though there, no doubt, he excelled, but from the trial and determination of a cause between party and party, which princes, though they devolve them upon their judges, must not think it below them to take cognizance of. Observe,

I. The case opened, not by lawyers, but by the parties themselves, though they were women, which made it the easier, to such a piercing eye as Solomon had, to discern between right and wrong by their own shewing. These two women were harlots, kept a public-house, and their children, some think, were born of fornication, because here is no mention of their husbands. It is probable the cause had been heard in the inferior courts, before it was brought before Solomon, and had been found special, the judges being unable to determine it, that Solomon's wisdom in deciding it, at last, might be the more taken notice of. These two women lived in a house together, were each of them delivered of a son within three days of one another, *v. 17, 18*. They were so poor, that they had no servant or nurse to be with them; so slighted, because harlots, that they had no friend or relation to accompany them. One of them overlaid her child, and, in the night, exchanged it with the other, *v. 19, 20*, who was soon aware if the cheat put upon her, and appealed to public justice to be lighted, *v. 21*. See, 1. What anxiety is caused by little children, how uncertain their lives are, and to how many dangers they are continually exposed. The age of infancy is the valley of the shadow of death; and the lamp of life, when first lighted, is easily blown out. It is a wonder of mercy, that so few perish in the perils of nursing. 2. How much better it was, in those times, with

children born in fornication, than, commonly, it is now. Harlots then loved their children, nursed them, and were loath to part with them, whereas now they are often sent to a distance, abandoned, or killed. But thus it is foretold, that *in the last days perilous times should come*, when people should be without natural affection, *2 Tim. 3. 3*.

II. The difficulty of the case. The question was, Who was the mother of this living child, which was brought into court, to be finally adjudged either to the one or to the other? Both mothers were vehement in their claims, and shewed deep concern about it. Both were peremptory in their asseverations; "It is mine," says one; "Nay, it is mine," says the other. Neither will own the dead child, though it would be cheaper to bury that, than to maintain the other: but it is the living one they strive for. The living child is therefore the parents' joy, because it is their hope; and may not the dead children be so? See *Jer. 31. 17*. Now the difficulty of the case was, that there was no evidence on either side. The neighbours, though it is probable that some of them were present at the birth and circumcision of the children, yet had not taken so much notice of them, as to be able to distinguish them*. To put the parties to the rack would have been barbarous: not she who had justice on her side, but she who was most hardy, would have had the judgment in her favour. Little stress is to be laid on extorted evidence. Judges and juries have need of wisdom, to find out truth, when it thus lies hid.

III. The determination of it. Solomon, having patiently heard what both sides had to say, sums up the evidence, *v. 23*. And now the whole court is in expectation what course Solomon's wisdom will take to find out the truth. One knows not what to say to it; another, perhaps, would determine it by lot; Solomon calls for a sword, and gives orders to divide the living child between the two contenders. Now, 1. This seemed a ridiculous decision of the case, and a brutal cutting of the knot which he could not untie. "Is this," think the sages of the law, "the wisdom of Solomon?" They could not conjecture what he aimed at in it. *The hearts of kings, such kings, are unsearchable*, *Prov. 25. 3*. There was a law concerning the dividing of a living ox and a dead one, *Exod. 21. 35*, but that did not reach this case. But, 2. It proved an effectual discovery of the truth. Some think that Solomon did himself discern it, before he made this experiment, by the countenances of the women, and their way of speaking: but by this he gave satisfaction to all the company, and silenced the pretender. To find out the true mother, he could not try which the child loved best, and must therefore try which loved the child best; both pretended to a motherly affection, but the sincerity of it will be tried when the child is in danger. (1.) She that knew the child was not her own, but, in contending for it, stood upon a point of honour, was well content to have it divided. She that had overlaid her own child, cared not what became of this, so that the true mother might not have it. *Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it*. By this it appeared that she knew her own title to be bad, and feared Solomon would find it so, though she little suspected she was betraying herself, but thought Solomon in good earnest. If she had been the true mother, she had forfeited her interest in the child, by agreeing so readily to this bloody decision. But, (2.) She that knew the child was her own, rather than the child should be butchered, gives it up to her adversary. How feelingly does she cry out, *O my lord! give her the living child*, *v. 26*. "Let me see it her's, rather than not see it at all." By this tenderness toward the child, it appeared that she was not the careless mother that had overlaid the dead child, but was the true mother of the living one, that could not endure to see its death, having compassion on the son of her womb. "The case is plain," says Solomon, "what need of witnesses? Give her the living child; for you all see, by this undissembled compassion, *she is the mother of it*." Let parents shew their love to their children,

* The reader will observe an inadvertency here; it being questionable whether the dead child lived to be circumcised, and it being plainly stated that at the birth of the children, the two mothers were alone in the house.—Ed.

by taking care of them, especially by taking care of their souls, and, with a holy violence, snatching them as brands out of the burning. They are most likely to have the comfort of children that do their duty to them. Satan pretends to the heart of man, but by this it appears that he is only a pretender, that he would be content to divide with God, whereas the rightful Sovereign of the heart will have all or none.

Lastly, We are told what a great reputation Solomon got among his people, by this and other instances of his wisdom, which would have a great influence upon the ease of his government; *they feared the king*, v. 28. highly revered him, durst not, in any thing, oppose him, and were afraid of doing an unjust thing; for they knew, if ever it came before him, he would certainly discover it, *for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him*, that is, that wisdom which God had promised to endue him with. *This made his face to shine*, Eccl. 8. 1. *this strengthened him*, Eccl. 7. 19. *this was better to him than weapons of war*, Eccl. 9. 18. for this he was both feared and loved.

CHAP. IV.

An instance of the wisdom of God granted to Solomon, we had in the close of the foregoing chapter. In this, we have an account of his wealth and prosperity, which was the other branch of the promise there made him. We have here, I. The magnificence of his court; his ministers of state, (v. 1. .6.) and the purveyors of his household, (v. 7. .19.) and their office, v. 27, 28. II. The provision for his table, v. 22, 23. III. The extent of his dominion, v. 21. .24. IV. The numbers, ease, and peace, of his subjects, v. 20, 25. V. His stables, v. 26. VI. His great reputation for wisdom and learning, v. 29. .34. Thus great was Solomon, but our Lord Jesus was greater than he, (Matth. 12. 42.) though he took upon him the form of a servant. For, Divinity, in its lowest humiliations, infinitely transcends royalty in its highest elevations.

1. **S**O king Solomon was king over all Israel. 2. And these *were* the princes which he had; Azariah the son of Zadok the priest, 3. Elihoreph and Ahiah, the sons of Shisha, scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, the recorder. 4. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was* over the host: and Zadok and Abiathar *were* the priests: 5. And Azariah the son of Nathan *was* over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan *was* principal officer, *and* the king's friend: 6. And Ahishar *was* over the household: and Adoniram the son of Abda *was* over the tribute. 7. And Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision. 8. And these *are* their names: The son of Hur, in mount Ephraim: 9. The son of Dekar, in Makaz, and in Shaalbim, and Beth-shemesh, and Elon-beth-hanan: 10. The son of Hesed, in Aruboth; to him *pertained* Sochoh, and all the land of Hephher: 11. The son of Abinadab, in all the region of Dor; which had Taphath the daughter of Solomon to wife: 12. Baana the son of Ahilud; to him *pertained* Taanach and Megiddo, and all Beth-shean, which *is* by Zartanah beneath Jezreel, from Beth-shean to Abel-meholah, *even unto the place that is* beyond Jokneam: 13. The son of Geber, in Ramoth-gilead; to him *pertained* the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, which *are* in Gilead; to him *also pertained* the region of Argob, which *is* in Bashan,

threescore great cities with walls and brazen bars: 14. Ahinadab the son of Iddo *had* Mahavaim: 15. Ahimaaz *was* in Naphtali; he also took Basmath the daughter of Solomon to wife: 16. Baanab the son of Hushai *was* in Asher and in Aloth: 17. Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar: 18. Shimei the son of Elah, in Benjamin: 19. Geber the son of Uri *was* in the country of Gilead, *in the country of Sihon king of the Amorites, and of Og king of Bashan: and he was* the only officer which *was* in the land.

Here is,

I. Solomon upon his throne, v. 1. *So king Solomon was king*, that is, he was confirmed and established king *over all Israel*, and not, as his successors, only over two tribes. He was a king, he did the work and duty of a king, with the wisdom God had given him. Those preserve the name and honour of their place that mind the business of it, and make conscience of it.

II. The great officers of his court, in the choice of which, no doubt, his wisdom much appeared. It is observable, 1. That several of them are the same that were in his father's time. Zadok and Abiathar were then priests, 2 Sam. 20. 25. so they were now; only then, Abiathar had the precedence, now, Zadok; Jehoshaphat was then recorder, or keeper of the great seal, so he was now. Benaiah, in his father's time, was a principal man in military affairs, and so he was now. Shisha was his father's scribe, and his sons were his, v. 3. Solomon, though a wise man, would not affect to seem wiser than his father in this matter. When sons come to inherit their fathers' wealth, honour, and power, it is a piece of respect to their memory—*cæteris paribus*—where it can properly be done, to employ those whom they employed, and trust those whom they trusted. Many pride themselves in being the reverse of their good parents. 2. The rest were priests' sons. His prime minister of state was *Azariah the son of Zadok the priest*. Two others of the first rank were the sons of Nathan the prophet, v. 5. In preferring them, he testified the grateful respect he had for their good father, whom he loved *in the name of a prophet*.

III. The purveyors for his household, whose business it was to send in provisions from several parts of the country, for the king's tables and cellars, v. 7. and for his stables, v. 27, 28. That thus, 1. His house might always be well-furnished, at the best hand. Let great men learn hence good house-keeping, and yet good husbandry in their house-keeping; to be generous in spending according to their ability, but prudent in providing. It is the character of the virtuous woman, that she *bringeth her food from afar*, Prov. 31. 14. not far-fetched and dear-bought, but the contrary, every thing bought where it is cheapest. 2. That thus he himself, and those who immediately attended him, might be eased of a great deal of care, and the more closely apply themselves to the business of the state, not troubled about much-serving, provision for that being got ready to their hand. 3. That thus all the parts of the kingdom might be equally benefited, by the taking off of the commodities that were the productions of their country, and the circulating of the coin. Industry would hereby be encouraged, and consequently wealth increased, even in those tribes that lay most remote from the court. The providence of God extends itself to all *places of his dominions*, Ps. 103. 22. so should the prudence and care of princes. 4. The dividing of this trust into so many hands was prudent, that no one man might be continually burthened with the care of it, nor grow exorbitantly rich with the profit of it; but that Solomon might have those, in every district, who, having a dependence upon the court, would be serviceable to him and his interest, as there was occasion.

These commissioners of the victualling-office, not for the army or navy, (Solomon was engaged in no war,) but for the household

are here named. Several of them only by their surnames, as great men commonly call their servants; *Ben-hur, Ben-dekar, &c.* Though several of them have also their proper names prefixed. Two of them married Solomon's daughters, *Ben-Abinadab, v. 11.* and *Ahimaaz, v. 15.* and no disparagement to them to marry men of business. Better match with the officers of their father's court that were Israelites, than with the sons of princes that were strangers to the covenant of promise. The son of Geber was in *Ramoth-gilead, v. 13.* and Geber himself was in the country of *Sihon and Og, which included that and Mahanaim, v. 19.* He is therefore said to be *the only officer in that land,* because the other two, mentioned *v. 13, 14.* depended on him, and were subordinate to him.

20. *Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry.* 21. And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life. 22. And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and three-score measures of meal. 23. Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roe-bucks, and fallow-deer, and fatted fowl. 24. For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphshah even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him. 25. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon. 26. And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. 27. And those officers provided victual for king Solomon, and for all that came unto king Solomon's table, every man in his month: they lacked nothing. 28. Barley also and straw for the horses and dromedaries brought they unto the place where the officers were, every man according to his charge.

Such a kingdom, and such a court, sure never any prince had, as Solomon's is here described to be.

I. Such a kingdom. Never did the crown of Israel shine so bright, as it did when Solomon wore it; never in his father's days, never in the days of any of his successors; nor was that kingdom ever so glorious a type of the kingdom of the Messiah, as it was then. The account here given of it is such as fully answers the prophecies which we have concerning it, *Ps. 72.* which is a psalm for Solomon, but with reference to Christ.

1. The territories of his kingdom were large, and its tributaries many; so it was foretold that he should *have dominion from sea to sea, Ps. 72. 8. . 11.* Solomon reigned not only over all Israel, who were his subjects by choice, but over all the neighbouring kingdoms, who were his subjects by constraint. All the princes from the river Euphrates north-east, to the border of Egypt south-west, not only added to his honour, by doing him homage, and holding their crowns from him, but added to his wealth, by serving him, and bringing him presents, *v. 21.* David, by his successful wars, compelled them to this subjection, and Solomon, by his admirable wisdom, made it easy and reasonable; for it is fit that the fool should be servant to the wise in heart. If they gave him presents, he gave them instructions, and still taught the people knowledge;

not only his own people, but those of other nations; and *wisdom is better than gold.* He had *peace on all sides, v. 24.* None of all the nations that were subject to him offered to shake off his yoke, or give him any disturbance; but, rather, thought themselves happy in their dependence upon him. Herein, his kingdom typified the Messiah's; for to him it is promised that he shall have *the heathen for his inheritance,* and that *princes shall worship him, Isa. 49. 6, 7. — 53. 12.*

2. The subjects of this kingdom, and its inhabitants, were many and cheerful. (1.) They were numerous, and the country exceedingly populous, *v. 20. Judah and Israel were many,* and that good land sufficient to maintain them all. *They were as the sand of the sea in multitude.* Now was fulfilled the promise made to Abraham, concerning the increase of his seed, *Gen. 22. 17.* as well as that concerning the extent of their dominion, *Gen. 15. 18.* This was their strength and beauty, the honour of their prince, the terror of their enemies, and an advancement of the wealth of the nation. If they grew so numerous, that the place was any where too strait for them, they might remove with advantage into the countries that were subject to them. God's spiritual Israel are many, at least, they will be so when they come all together, *Rev. 7. 9.* (2.) They were easy, they dwelt safely, or with confidence and assurance, *v. 25.* not jealous of their king, or of his officers, not disaffected, either to him, or one to another, nor under any apprehension of danger from enemies, foreign or domestic. They were happy, and knew it; safe, and willing to think themselves so. They dwelt every man under *his vine and fig-tree.* Solomon invaded no man's property, took not to himself their vine-yards and olive-yards, as sometimes was the manner of the king, *1 Sam. 8. 19.* but what they had they could call their own: he protected every man in the possession and enjoyment of his property. They that had vines and fig-trees ate the fruit of them themselves; and so great was the peace of the country, that they might, if they pleased, dwell as safely under the shadow of them, as within the walls of a city. Or, because it was usual to have *vines by the sides of their houses, Ps. 128. 3.* they are said to *dwell under their vines.* (3.) They were cheerful in the use of their plenty, *eating and drinking, and making merry, v. 20.* Solomon did not only keep a good table himself, but enabled all his subjects, according to their rank, to do so too, and taught them that God gave them their abundance, that they might use it soberly and pleasantly, not that they might hoard it up. *There is nothing better than for a man to eat the labour of his hands, Eccl. 2. 24.* and that *with a merry heart, Eccl. 9. 7.* His father, in the psalms, had led his people into the comforts of communion with God, and now he led them into the comfortable use of the good things of this life. This pleasant posture of Israel's affairs extended, in place, from Dan to Beer-sheba; no part of the country was exposed, or, upon any account, uneasy; and it continued a long time, *all the days of Solomon,* without any material interruption. Go where you would, you might see all the marks of plenty, peace, and satisfaction. The spiritual peace, and joy, and holy security, of all the faithful subjects of the Lord Jesus, were typified by this. *The kingdom of God is not,* as Solomon's was, *meat and drink,* but, what is infinitely better, *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

II. Such a court Solomon kept, as can scarcely be paralleled. We may guess at the vast number of his attendants, and the great resort that was to him, by the provision that was made daily for his table. Of bread so many measures of flour and meal, as, it is computed, would richly serve 3000 men; Carellus computes above 48,000 men; and the provision of flesh, *v. 23.* is rather more, in proportion. What vast quantities were here of beef, mutton, and venison, and the choicest of all *fatted things,* as some read that which we translate *fatted fowl!* Ahasuerus, once in his reign, made a *great feast, to shew the riches of his kingdom, Esth. 1. 3, 4.* But it was much more the honour of Solomon, that he kept a constant table, and a very noble one; not of dainties, or deceitful meats, (he himself witnessed against them, *Prov. 23. 3.*) but substantial food, for the entertainment of those who came to hear his wisdom. Thus Christ fed those whom he taught, five thousand at a time.

more than ever Solomon's table would entertain at once: all believers have in him a continual feast. Herein, he far out-does Solomon, that he feeds all his subjects, not with the bread that perishes, but *with that which endures to eternal life*.

It added much, both to the strength and glory of Solomon's kingdom, that he had such abundance of horses, 40,000 for chariots, and 12,000 for his troops. A thousand horse, perhaps, in every tribe, for the preserving of the public peace, v. 26. God had commanded that their king should not multiply horses, Dent. 17. 16. nor, according to the account here given, considering the extent and wealth of Solomon's kingdom, did he multiply horses in proportion to his neighbours; for we find even the Philistines bringing into the field 30,000 chariots, 1 Sam. 13. 6. and the Syrians at least 40,000 horse, 2 Sam. 10. 18. The same officers that provided for his house, provided also for his table, v. 27, 28. Every one knew his place, and work, and time; and so this great court was kept without confusion. Solomon, that had vast incomes, lived at a vast expence, and perhaps wrote that, with application to himself, Eccl. 5. 11. *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes, unless withal they have the satisfaction of doing good with them?*

29. And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore. 30. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east-country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about. 32. And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. 33. And he spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. 34. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

Solomon's wisdom was more his glory than his wealth; a general account of that we have here.

I. The fountain of his wisdom. *God gave it him, v. 29.* He owns it himself, Prov. 2. 6. *The Lord giveth wisdom.* He gives the powers of reason, Job, 38. 36. preserves and improves them. The ordinary advances of them are owing to his providence, and sanctification of them, to his grace; and this extraordinary pitch at which they arrived in Solomon, to a special grant of his favour to him, in answer to prayer.

II. The fulness of it. *He had wisdom and understanding, exceeding much:* great knowledge of distant countries, and the histories of former times; a quickness of thought, strength of memory, and clearness of judgment, such as never any man had. It is called *largeness of heart*, for the heart is often put for the intellectual powers. He had a vast compass of knowledge, could take things entire, and had an admirable faculty of laying things together. Some, by his *largeness of heart*, understand his courage and boldness, and that great assurance with which he delivered his dictates and determinations. Or, it may be meant of his disposition to do good with it. He was very free and communicative of his knowledge; had the gift of utterance, as well as wisdom; was as free of his learning as he was of his meat; and grudged neither to any that were about him. Note, It is very desirable that those who have large gifts of any kind, should have large hearts to use them for the good of others; and this is *from the hand of God*, Eccl. 3. 21. He shall *enlarge the heart*, Ps. 119. 32.

The greatness of Solomon's wisdom is illustrated by comparison. Chaldaea and Egypt were nations famous for learning; thence the Greeks borrowed their's: but the greatest scholars of these nations came short of Solomon, v. 30. If nature excels art, much more does grace. The knowledge which God gives by special favour, goes beyond that which man gets by his own labour. Some wise men there were in Solomon's time, who were in great repute; particularly Heman, and others who were Levites, and employed by David in the temple music, 1 Chron. 15. 19. Heman was *hū Scer in the word of God*, 1 Chron. 25. 5. Chalcol and Darda were own brothers, and they also were noted for learning and wisdom, but *Solomon excelled them all, v. 30.* he out-did them, and confounded them; his counsel was much more valuable.

III. The fame of it. It was talked of *in all nations round about*. His great wealth and glory made his wisdom much more illustrious, and gave him those opportunities of shewing it, which they cannot have that live in poverty and obscurity. The jewel of wisdom may receive great advantage by the setting of it.

IV. The fruits of it; by these the tree is known: he did not bury his talent, but shewed his wisdom,

1. In his compositions. Those in divinity, written by divine inspiration, are not mentioned here, for they are extant, and will remain to the world's end, monuments of his wisdom; and are, as other parts of scripture, of use to make us *wise unto salvation*. But, beside these, it appears, by what he spake or dictated to be written from him, (1.) That he was a moralist, and a man of great prudence, for he spake *three thousand proverbs*, wise sayings, apophthegms, of admirable use for the conduct of human life. The world is much governed by proverbs, and was never better furnished with useful ones, than by Solomon. Whether those proverbs of Solomon that we have, were any part of the 3000, is uncertain. (2.) That he was a poet, and a man of great wit. *His songs were a thousand and five, of which one only is extant*, because that only was divinely inspired, which is therefore called his *Song of songs*. His wise instructions were communicated by *proverbs*, that they might be familiar to them *he designed to teach*, and ready on all occasions; by *songs*, that they might be pleasant, and move the affections. (3.) That he was a natural philosopher, and a man of great learning and insight into the mysteries of nature: from his own and others' observations and experience, he wrote both of plants and animals, v. 33. descriptions of their natures and qualities, and (some think) of the medicinal use of them.

2. In his conversation. There came persons from all parts, who were more inquisitive after knowledge than their neighbours, to *hear the wisdom of Solomon, v. 34.* Kings that had heard of it, sent their ambassadors to hear it, and to bring them instructions from it. Solomon's court was the staple of learning, and the rendezvous of philosophers, that is, the lovers of wisdom, who all came to light their candle at his lamp, and to borrow from him. Let those who magnify the modern learning above that of the ancients, produce such a treasure of knowledge, any where in these latter ages, as that was which Solomon was master of; yet this puts an honour upon human learning, that Solomon was praised for it, and recommends it to the great men of the earth as well worthy their diligent search. But, *lastly*, Solomon was herein a type of Christ, *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*; and hid for use, for he is *made of God to us, wisdom*.

CHAP. V.

The great work which Solomon was raised up to do, was the building of the temple; his wealth and wisdom were given him, to qualify him for that. In this, especially, he was to be a type of Christ, for He shall build the temple of the Lord, Zech. 6. 12. In this chapter, we have an account of the preparations he made for that and his other buildings. Gold and silver his good father had prepared in abundance, but timber and stones he must get ready; and about these we have him treating with Hiram king of Tyre. I. Hiram congratulated him on his accession to the throne, v. 1. II. Solomon signified to him his design to build the temple, and desired him to furnish him with workmen, v. 2. 6. III. Hiram agrees to do it, v. 7. 9. IV. Solomon's work is, accordingly, well done, and Hiram's workmen well paid, v. 10. 18.

1. **A**ND Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; (for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father;) for Hiram was ever a lover of David. 2. And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying. 3. Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God, for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. 4. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. 5. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name. 6. Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar-trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants, according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians. 7. And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people. 8. And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for: and I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. 9. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea, and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household.

We have here an account of the amicable correspondence between Solomon and Hiram. Tyre was a famous trading city, that lay close upon the sea, in the border of Israel; its inhabitants, (as should seem,) none of the devoted nations, nor ever at enmity with Israel; and therefore David never offered to destroy them, but lived in friendship with them. It is said here of Hiram their king, that he was ever a lover of David; and we have reason to think he was a worshipper of the true God, and had himself renounced, though he could not reform, the idolatry of his city. David's character will win the affections of those that are without. Here is,

I. Hiram's embassy of compliment to Solomon, v. 1. He sent, as is usual among princes, to condole with him on the death of David, and to renew his alliances with him upon his succession to the government. It is good keeping up friendship and communion with the families in which religion is uppermost.

II. Solomon's embassy of business to Hiram, sent, it is likely, by messengers of his own. In wealth, honour, and power, Hiram was very much inferior to Solomon, yet Solomon has occasion to be beholden to him, and begs his favour. Let us never look with disdain on those below us, because we know not how soon we may need them. Solomon, in his letter to Hiram, acquaints him,

1. With his design to build a temple to the honour of God. Some think that temples among the heathen took their first rise and copy from the tabernacle which Moses erected in the wilderness,

and that there were none before that; however, there were many houses built in honour of the false gods, before this was built in honour of the God of Israel, so little is external splendour a mark of the true church. Solomon tells Hiram, (who was himself no stranger to the affair,) (1.) That David's wars were an obstruction to him, that he could not build this temple, though he designed it, v. 3. They took up much of his time, and thoughts, and cares; were a constant expence to him, and a constant employment of his subjects; so that he could not do it so well as it must be done, and, therefore, it not being essential to religion, he must leave it to be done by his successor. See what need we have to pray that God will give peace in our time, because, in time of war, the building of the gospel-temple commonly goes slowly on. (2.) That peace gave him an opportunity to build it, and therefore he resolved to set about it immediately. God has given me rest both at home and abroad, and there is no adversary, v. 4. no Satan, so the word is; no instrument of Satan to oppose it, or to divert us from it. Satan does all he can to hinder temple-work, 1 Thess. 2. 18. Zech. 3. 1. but when he is bound, (Rev. 20. 2.) we should be busy. When there is no evil occurrent, then let us be vigorous and zealous in that which is good, and get it forward. When the churches have rest, let them be edified, Acts, 9. 31. Days of peace and prosperity present us with a fair gale, which we must account for, if we improve not. As God's providence excited Solomon to think of building the temple, by giving him wealth and leisure, so his promise encouraged him. God had told David, that his son should build him an house, v. 5. he will take it as a pleasure to be thus employed, and will not lose the honour designed him by that promise. It may stir us up much to good undertakings, to be assured of good success in them. Let God's promise quicken our endeavours.

2. With his desire that Hiram would assist him herein. Lebanon was the place whence timber must be had, a noble forest in the north of Canaan, particularly expressed in the grant of that land to Israel, all Lebanon, Josh. 13. 5. So that Solomon was proprietor of all its productions; the cedars of Lebanon are spoken of as, in a special manner, the planting of the Lord, Ps. 104. 16. being designed for Israel's use, and particularly for temple-service. But Solomon owns, that, though the trees were his, the Israelites could not skill to hew timber like the Sidonians, who were Hiram's subjects. Canaan was a land of wheat and barley, Deut. 8. 8. which employed Israel in the affairs of husbandry, so that they were not at all versed in manufactures: in them, the Sidonians excelled. Israel, in the things of God, are a wise and understanding people; and yet, in curious arts, inferior to their neighbours: true piety is a much more valuable gift of Heaven than the highest degree of ingenuity. Better be an Israelite skilful in the law, than a Sidonian skilful to hew timber. But, the case being thus, Solomon courts Hiram to send him workmen, and promises, v. 6. both to assist them, My servants shall be with thy servants, to work under them; and to pay them, Unto thee will I give hire for thy servants; for the laborer, even in church-work, though it be indeed its own wages, is worthy of his hire. The evangelical prophet, foretelling the glory of the church in the days of the Messiah, seems to allude to this story, Isa. 60. where he prophesies, (1.) That the sons of strangers (such were the Tyrians and Sidonians) should build up the wall of the gospel-temple, v. 10. Ministers were raised up among the Gentiles, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (2.) That the glory of Lebanon should be brought to it to beautify it, v. 13. All external endowments and advantages should be made serviceable to the interests of Christ's kingdom.

3. Hiram's reception of, and return to, this message.

(1.) He received it with great satisfaction to himself. He rejoiced greatly, v. 6. that Solomon trod in his father's steps, and carried on his designs, and was likely to be so great a blessing to his kingdom. Hiram's generous spirit rejoiced in this, and not only in the prospect he had of making an advantage to himself by Solomon's employing him. What he had the pleasure of, he gave God the praise of; Blessed be the Lord, which has given to David (who was himself a wise man) a wise son, to rule over this great

people. See here, [1.] With what pleasure Hiram speaks of Solomon's wisdom, and the extent of his dominion; let us learn not to envy others either those secular advantages, or those endowments of the mind, wherein they excel us. What a great comfort is it to those that wish well to the Israel of God, to see religion and wisdom kept up in families from one generation to another, especially in great families, and those that have great influence on others: where it is so, God must have the glory of it. If to godly parents be given a godly seed, Mal. 2. 15. it is a token for good, and a happy indication, that the entail of the blessing shall not be cut off.

(2.) He returned it with great satisfaction to Solomon, granting him what he desired, and shewing himself very forward to assist him in this great and good work to which he was laying his hand. We have here his articles of agreement with Solomon concerning this affair. In which we may observe Hiram's prudence. [1.] He deliberated upon the proposal, before he returned an answer, v. 8. *I have considered the things.* It is common for those that make bargains rashly, afterward to wish them unmade again. The virtuous woman *considers a field*, and then *buys it*, Prov. 31. 16. Those do not lose time who take time to consider. [2.] He descended to particulars in the articles, that there might be no misunderstanding afterward, to occasion a quarrel. Solomon had spoken of hewing the trees, v. 6. and Hiram agrees to what he desired concerning that, v. 8. but nothing had been said concerning carriage; that matter therefore must be settled. Land-carriage would be very troublesome and chargeable, he therefore undertakes to bring all the timber down from Lebanon by sea; a coasting voyage. Conveyance by water is a great convenience to trade, for which God is to have praise, who taught man that discretion. Observe what a punctual bargain Hiram made; Solomon must appoint the place where the timber shall be delivered, and thither Hiram will undertake to bring it, and be responsible for its safety. As the Sidonians excelled the Israelites in timber-work, so they did in sailing, for Tyre and Sidon were *situate at the entry of the sea*, Ezek. 27. 3. they therefore were fittest to take care of the water-carriage, *Tractant fabrilis fabri—Every artist has his trade assigned.* And, lastly, If Hiram undertake for the work, and do all *Solomon's desire concerning the timber*, v. 8. he justly expects that Solomon shall undertake for the wages; *Thou shalt accomplish my desire in giving food for my household*, v. 9. not only for the workmen, but for my own family. If Tyre supplies Israel with craftsmen, Israel will supply Tyre with corn, Ezek. 27. 17. Thus, by the wise disposal of Providence, one country has need of another, and is benefited by another, that there may be mutual correspondence and dependence, to the glory of God our common Parent.

10. So Hiram gave Solomon cedar-trees and fir-trees according to all his desire. 11. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year. 12. And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together. 13. And king Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel, and the levy was thirty thousand men. 14. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home: and Adoniram was over the levy. 15. And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burthens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains; 16. Beside the chief of Solomon's officers which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred, which

ruled over the people that wrought in the work. 17. And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house. 18. And Solomon's builders, and Hiram's builders, did hew them, and the stone-squarers: so they prepared timber and stones to build the house.

Here is,

I. The performance of the agreement between Solomon and Hiram; each of the parties made good its engagement. 1. Hiram delivered Solomon the timber, according to his bargain, v. 10. The trees were Solomon's, but, perhaps—*Materiam superabat opus—The workmanship was of more value than the article.* Hiram is therefore said to deliver the trees. 2. Solomon conveyed to Hiram the corn which he had promised him, v. 11. Thus let justice be followed, as the expression is, Deut. 16. 20. justice on both sides, in every bargain.

II. The confirmation of the friendship that was between them hereby. *God gave Solomon wisdom*, v. 12. that was more and better than anything Hiram did or could give him; but this made Hiram love him, and enabled Solomon to improve his kindness, so that they were both willing to ripen their mutual love into a mutual league, that it might be lasting; it is wisdom to strengthen our friendship with those we find to be honest and fair, lest new friends prove not so firm and kind as old ones.

III. The labourers whom Solomon employed in preparing materials for the temple. 1. Some were Israelites, who were employed in the more easy and honourable parts of the work, felling trees, and helping to square them, in conjunction with Hiram's servants; for this he appointed 30,000, but employed only 10,000 at a time, so that, for one month's work, they had two months' vacation, both for rest, and for the dispatch of their own affairs at home, v. 13, 14. It was temple-service, yet Solomon takes care that they shall not be over-worked; great men ought to consider that their servants must rest as well as they. 2. Others were captives of other nations, who were to bear burthens, and to hew stone, v. 15. and we read not that these had their resting times as the other had, for they were doomed to servitude. 3. There were some employed as directors and overseers, (v. 16.) 3,300 that ruled over the people, and they were as necessary and useful in their place as the labourers in their's; here were many hands and many eyes employed, for preparation was now to be made, not only for the temple, but for all the rest of Solomon's buildings, both at Jerusalem and here in the forest of Lebanon, and in other places of his dominion, of which see ch. 9. 17. . 19. He speaks of the vastness of his undertakings, Eccl. 2. 4. *I made me great works*, which required this vast number of workmen.

IV. The laying of the foundation of the temple; for that is the building his heart is chiefly upon, and therefore he begins with that, v. 17, 18. It should seem, Solomon was himself present, and president, at the founding of the temple, and that the first stone (as has been usual in famous buildings) was laid with some solemnity. *Solomon commanded, and they brought costly stones* for the foundation; he would do every thing like himself, generously, and therefore would have some of the costliest stones laid, or buried rather, in the foundation, though, being out of sight, worse might have served. Christ, who is laid for a Foundation, is an elect and precious stone, Isa. 28. 16. and the foundations of the church are said to be *laid with sapphires*, Isa. 54. 11. compare Rev. 21. 19. That sincerity which is our gospel-perfection, obliges us to lay our foundation firm, and to bestow most pains on that part of our religion which lies out of the sight of men.

CHAP. VI.

Great and long preparation had been making for the building of the temple, and here, at length, comes an account of the building of it; a noble piece of work it was, one of the wonders of the world, and, taken in its

spiritual significance, one of the glories of the church. Here is, I. The time when it was built, v. 1. and how long it was in the building, v. 37, 38. II. The silence with which it was built, v. 7. III. The dimensions of it, v. 2, 3. IV. The message God sent to Solomon, when it was in the building, v. 11, 13. V. The particulars; windows, v. 4. chambers, v. 5, 6, 8, 10. the walls and flooring, v. 14, 18. the oracle, v. 19, 22. the cherubims, v. 23, 30. the doors, v. 31, 35. and the inner court, v. 36. Many learned men have well bestowed their pains in expounding the description here given of the temple according to the rules of architecture, and solving the difficulties, which, upon search, they find in it; but, in that matter having nothing new to offer, we will not be particular or curious; it was then well-understood, and every man's eyes, that saw this glorious structure, furnished him with the best critical exposition of this chapter.

1. **AND** it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD. 2. And the house which king Solomon built for the LORD, the length thereof was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits. 3. And the porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits was the length thereof, according to the breadth of the house; and ten cubits was the breadth thereof, before the house. 4. And for the house he made windows of narrow lights. 5. And against the wall of the house he built chambers round about, against the walls of the house round about, both of the temple, and of the oracle: and he made chambers round about: 6. The nethermost chamber was five cubits broad, and the middle was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad: for without, in the wall of the house, he made narrowed rests round about, that the beams should not be fastened in the walls of the house. 7. And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house, while it was in building. 8. The door for the middle chamber was in the right side of the house: and they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber, and out of the middle into the third. 9. So he built the house, and finished it; and covered the house with beams and boards of cedar. 10. And then he built chambers against all the house, five cubits high: and they rested on the house with timber of cedar.

Here,

1. The temple is called the house of the Lord, v. 1. because it was, 1. Directed and modelled by him. Infinite Wisdom was the Architect, and gave David the plan or pattern by the Spirit, not by word of mouth only, but, for the greater certainty and exactness, in writing, 1 Chron. 28. 11, 12, 19. as he had given to Moses in the mount a draught of the tabernacle. 2. Dedicated and devoted to him and to his honour, to be employed in his service; so his, as never any other house was: for he manifested his glory in it, (so as never in any other,) in a way agreeable to that dispensation; for when there were carnal ordinances, there was a worldly sanctuary, Heb. 9. 1, 10. This gave it its beauty of holiness, that it was the house of the Lord, which far transcended all its other beauties.

II. The time when it began to be built is exactly set down. 1. It was just 480 years after the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt; allowing 40 years to Moses, 17 to Joshua, 299 to the Judges, 40 to Eli, 40 to Samuel and Saul, 40 to David, and 4 to Solomon, before he began the work, we have the just sum of 480. So long it was, after that holy state was founded, before that holy house was built, which, in less than 480 years, was burnt by Nebuchadnezzar; it was thus deferred, because Israel had, by their sins, rendered themselves unworthy of this honour, and because God would shew how little he values external pomp and splendour in his service; he was in no haste for a temple. David's tent, which was clean and convenient, though it was neither stately nor rich, nor, for aught that appears, ever consecrated, is called the house of the Lord, 2 Sam. 12. 20. and served as well as Solomon's temple; yet, when God gave Solomon great wealth, he put it into his heart thus to employ it, and graciously accepted him, chiefly, because it was to be a shadow of good things to come, Heb. 9. 9. 2. It was in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, the three first years being taken up in settling the affairs of his kingdom, that he might not find any embarrassment from them in this work; it is not time lost, which is spent in composing ourselves for the work of God, and disentangling ourselves from every thing which might distract or divert us; during this time, he was adding to the preparations which his father had made, 1 Chron. 22. 14. hewing the stone, squaring the timber, and getting every thing ready, so that he is not to be blamed for slackness in deferring it so long; we are truly serving God, when we are preparing for his service, and furnishing ourselves for it.

III. The materials are brought in, ready for their place, v. 7. so ready, that there was neither hammer nor axe heard in the house, while it was in building. In all this building, Solomon prescribes it as a rule of prudence, to prepare the work in the field, and afterward build, Prov. 24. 27. But here, it seems, the preparation was, more than common, full and exact, to that degree, that, when the several parts came to be put together, there was nothing defective to be added, nothing amiss to be amended; it was to be the temple of the God of peace, and therefore no iron tool must be heard in it; quietness and silence both become and befriend religious exercises; God's work should be done with as much care and as little noise as may be; the temple was thrown down with axes and hammers; and they that did it roared in the midst of the congregation, Ps. 74. 4, 6. but it was built up in silence; clamour and violence often hinder, but never further, the work of God.

IV. The dimensions are laid down, v. 2, 3. according to the rules of proportion. Some observe that the length and breadth were just double to that of the tabernacle. Now that Israel was grown more numerous, the place of their meeting needed to be enlarged, Isa. 54. 1, 2. and now that they were grown richer, they were the better able to enlarge it; where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap so.

V. An account of the windows, v. 4. they were broad within, and narrow without, Marg. Such should the eyes of our mind be, reflecting nearer on ourselves than on other people, looking much within, to judge ourselves, but little without, to censure our brethren. The narrowness of the lights intimated the darkness of that dispensation, in comparison with the gospel-day.

The chambers are described, v. 5, 6. in which the utensils of the tabernacle were carefully laid up, the priests dressed and undressed themselves, and left the clothes in which they ministered; probably, in some of these chambers they feasted upon the holy things, they served as vestries. Solomon was not so intent upon the magnificence of the house, as to neglect the conveniences that were requisite for the offices thereof, that every thing might be done decently and in order; care was taken that the beams should not be fastened in the walls to weaken them, v. 6. Let not the church's strength be impaired, under pretence of adding to its beauty or convenience.

11. And the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying, 12. Concerning this house which thou art

outside toward the great court 10. And the foundation *was of* costly stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits. 11. And above *were* costly stones, after the measures of hewed stones, and cedars. 12. And the great court round about *was* with three rows of hewed stones, and a row of cedar beams, both for the inner court of the house of the LORD, and for the porch of the house.

Never had any man so much of the spirit of building as Solomon had, never man built to better purpose; he began with the temple, built for God first, and then all his other buildings were comfortable: the surest foundations of a lasting prosperity are those which are laid in an early piety, Matth. 6. 33.

1. He built a house for himself, v. 1. *where he dwelt*, v. 8. His father had built a good house; but it was no reflection upon his father for him to build a better, in proportion to the estate wherewith God had blessed him; much of the comfort of *this* life is connected with an agreeable house. He was *thirteen* years building this house, whereas he built the temple in little more than seven years; not that he was more exact, but less eager and intent, in building his own house than in building God's; he was in no haste for his own palace, but impatient till the temple was finished, and fit for use; thus we ought to prefer God's honour before our own ease and satisfaction.

2. He built *the house of the forest at Lebanon*, v. 2. supposed to be a country-seat near Jerusalem, so called from the pleasantness of its situation, and the trees that encompassed it. I rather incline to think that it was a house built in the forest of Lebanon itself, whither (though far distant from Jerusalem) Solomon (having so many chariots and horses, and those dispersed into chariot-cities, which probably were his stages) might frequently retire with ease. It does not appear that his throne, mentioned v. 7. was at the house of the forest of Lebanon, and it was not at all improper to put his shields there, as in a magazine. Express notice is taken of his buildings, not only in Jerusalem, but in Lebanon, ch. 9. 19. and we read of the tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus, Cant. 7. 4. which probably was part of this house. A particular account is given of this house: That, being built in Lebanon, a place famed for cedars, the pillars, and beams, and roof, were all cedar, v. 2, 3. and, being designed for pleasant prospects, there were three tier of windows on each side, *light against light*, v. 4, 5. or, as it may be read, *prospect against prospect*. Those whose lot is east in the country may be well reconciled to a country life by this, that some of the greatest princes have thought those the most pleasant of their days which they have spent in their country retirements.

3. He built piazzas before one of his houses, either that at Jerusalem, or that in Lebanon, which were very famous, a porch of pillars, v. 6. either for an exchange, or a guard-house, or for those to walk in that attended him about business, till they could have audience, or for state and magnificence. He himself speaks of Wisdom's building her house, and *hewing out her seven pillars*, Prov. 9. 1. for the shelter of those that, three verses before, ch. 8. 34. are said to *watch daily at her gates, and to wait at the posts of her door*.

4. At his house, where he dwelt in Jerusalem, he built a great hall, or porch of judgment, where was set the throne, or king's bench, for the trial of causes, in which he himself was appealed to, (*Placita coram ipso rege tenenda—Causes were to be adjusted in the king's presence*;) and this was richly wainscotted with cedar, from the floor to the roof, v. 7. He had there also *another court within the porch*, nearer his house, of smaller work, for his attendants to walk in, v. 8.

5. He built a house for his wife, where she kept her court, v. 8. It is said to be *like the porch*, because built of cedar like it, though not in the same form; this, no doubt, was nearer

adjoining to his own palace; yet perhaps, if it had been as near as it ought to have been, Solomon would not have multiplied wives as he did.

The wonderful magnificence of all these buildings is taken notice of, v. 9, &c. All the materials were the best of their kind; the foundation-stones were costly for their size, four or five yards square, or, at least, so many yards long, v. 10. and the stones of the building costly for the workmanship, hewn and sawn, and in all respects finely wrought, v. 9, 11. The court of his own house was like that of the temple, v. 12. (compare ch. 6. 36.) so well did he like the model of God's courts, that he made his *own* by it.

13. And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. 14. He *was* a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father *was* a man of Tyre, a worker in brass; and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work. 15. For he cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about. 16. And he made two chapiters of molten brass, to set upon the tops of the pillars: the height of the one chapter *was* five cubits, and the height of the other chapter *was* five cubits: 17. And nets of chequer work, and wreathes of chain work, for the chapiters which *were* upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one chapter, and seven for the other chapter. 18. And he made the pillars, and two rows round about upon the one net work, to cover the chapiters that *were* upon the top, with pomegranates: and so did he for the other chapter. 19. And the chapiters that *were* upon the top of the pillars *were* of lily work in the porch, four cubits. 20. And the chapiters upon the two pillars *had pomegranates* also above, over against the belly which *was* by the net work: and the pomegranates *were* two hundred in rows round about upon the other chapter. 21. And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz. 22. And upon the top of the pillars *was* lily work: so was the work of the pillars finished. 23. And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other: *it was* round all about, and his height *was* five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. 24. And under the brim of it round about *there were* knops compassing it, ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about: the knops *were* cast in two rows, when it was cast. 25. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea *was set* above upon them, and all their hinder parts *were* inward. 26. And it *was* an hand-breadth thick, and the brim thereof

was wrought like the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies: it contained two thousand baths. 27. And he made ten bases of brass; four cubits *was* the length of one base, and four cubits the breadth thereof, and three cubits the height of it. 28. And the work of the bases *was* on this *manner*; they had borders, and the borders *were* between the ledges: 29. And on the borders that *were* between the ledges *were* lions, oxen, and cherubims: and upon the ledges *there was* a base above: and beneath the lions and oxen *were* certain additions made of thin work. 30. And every base had four brazen wheels, and plates of brass: and the four corners thereof had undersetters: under the laver *were* undersetters molten, at the side of every addition. 31. And the mouth of it within the chapter and above *was* a cubit: but the mouth thereof *was* round, *after* the work of the base, a cubit and an half: and also upon the mouth of it *were* gravings with their borders, four-square, not round. 32. And under the borders *were* four wheels; and the axle-trees of the wheels *were joined* to the base: and the height of a wheel *was* a cubit and half a cubit. 33. And the work of the wheels *was* like the work of a chariot-wheel; their axle-trees, and their naves, and their felloes, and their spokes, *were* all molten. 34. And *there were* four undersetters to the four corners of one base: *and* the undersetters *were* of the very base itself. 35. And in the top of the base *was there* a round compass of half a cubit high: and on the top of the base, the ledges thereof, and the borders thereof, *were* of the same. 36. For on the plates of the ledges thereof, and on the borders thereof, he graved cherubims, lions, and palm-trees, according to the proportion of every one, and additions round about. 37. After this *manner* he made the ten bases: all of them had one casting, one measure, *and* one size. 38. Then made he ten lavers of brass: one laver contained forty baths: *and* every laver was four cubits: *and* upon every one of the ten bases one laver. 39. And he put five bases on the right side of the house, and five on the left side of the house: and he set the sea on the right side of the house eastward over against the south. 40. And Hiram made the lavers, and the shovels, and the basins. So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he made king Solomon for the house of the LORD: 41. The two pillars, and the *two* bowls of the chapters that *were* on the top of the two pillars; and the two net-works, to cover the two bowls of the chapters which *were* upon the top of the pillars; 42. And four hundred pomegranates for the two net-works, *even* two rows of pomegranates for one net-work, to cover the two bowls of the chapters that *were* upon the pillars; 43. And the

ten bases, and ten lavers on the bases; 44. And one sea, and twelve oxen under the sea; 45. And the pots, and the shovels, and the basins: and all these vessels, which Hiram made to king Solomon for the house of the LORD, *were of* bright brass. 46. In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them; in the clay-ground between Succoth and Zarthan, 47. And Solomon left all the vessels *unweighed*, because they were exceeding many: neither was the weight of the brass found out.

We have here an account of the brass work about the temple; there was no iron about the temple, but we find David preparing for the temple *iron for things of iron*, 1 Chron. 29. 2. What those things were, we are not told, but some of the things of brass are here described, and the rest mentioned.

I. The brazier, whom Solomon employed to preside in this part of the work, was Hiram, or Hiram, 2 Chron. 4. 11. who was by his mother's side an Israelite, of the tribe of Naphtali, by his father's side a man of Tyre, v. 14. If he had the ingenuity of a Tyrian, and the affection of an Israelite to the house of God, (the head of a Tyrian, and the heart of an Israelite,) it was happy that the blood of the two nations mixed in him; thereby he was qualified for the work to which he was designed: as the tabernacle was built with the wealth of Egypt, so the temple with the wit of Tyre. God will serve himself by the common gifts of the children of men.

II. The brass he made use of was the best he could get; *and* the brazen vessels were of *bright brass*, v. 45. *good* brass, so the Chaldee, that which was strongest, and looked finest; God, who is the best, must be served and honoured with the best.

III. The place where all the brazen vessels were cast was the plain of Jordan, because the ground there was stiff and clayey, fit to make moulds of, for the casting of the brass, v. 46. and Solomon would not have this meaner work done in or near Jerusalem.

IV. The quantity was not accounted for, the vessels were *unnumbered*, (so it may be read, v. 47. as well as *unweighed*,) *because they were exceeding many*, and it would have been an endless thing to keep the account of them; *neither was the weight of the brass*, when it was delivered to the workmen, searched or inquired into; so honest were the workmen, and such great plenty of brass they had, that there was no danger of wanting: we must ascribe it to Solomon's care, that he provided so much, not to his carelessness, that he kept no account of it.

V. Some particulars of the brass-work are described.

1. Two brazen pillars, which were set up *in the porch of the temple*, v. 21. whether under the cover of the porch, or in the open air, is not certain; it was between the temple and the court of the priests. These pillars were neither to hang gates upon, nor to rest any building upon, but purely for ornament and significancy. (1.) What an ornament they were, we may gather from the account here given of the curious work that was about them; chequer-work, chain-work, net-work, lily-work, and pomegranates in rows, and all of bright brass; and framed, no doubt, according to the best rules of proportion, to please the eye. (2.) Their significancy is intimated in the names given them, v. 21. *Jachin—He will establish*; and *Boaz—In him is strength*. Some think they were intended for memorials of the pillar and cloud of fire, which led Israel through the wilderness: I rather think them designed for memorandums to the priests, and others that came to worship at God's door, [1.] To depend upon God only, and not upon any sufficiency of their own, for strength and establishment in all their religious exercises; when we come to wait upon God, and find our hearts wandering and unfixed, then, by faith, let us fetch in help from heaven: *Jachin—God will fix this roving mind*; *It is a good thing; that the heart be established with grace*. We find ourselves weak and unable for holy duties, but this is our encouragement. *Boaz—*

In him is our strength, who works in us both to will and to do. *I will go in the strength of the Lord God.* Spiritual strength and stability are to be had at the door of God's temple, where we must wait for the gifts of grace, in the use of the means of grace. [2.] It was a memorandum to them of the strength and establishment of the temple of God among them. Let them keep close to God and duty, and they should never lose their dignities and privileges, but the grant should be confirmed and perpetuated to them. The gospel-church is what God will establish, and what he will strengthen, and what the gates of hell can never prevail against. But with respect to this temple, when it was destroyed, particular notice is taken of the destroying of these pillars, 2 Kings, 25. 13, 17. which had been the tokens of its establishment, and would have been so, if they had not forsaken God.

2. A brazen sea; a very large vessel, above five yards diameter, and which contained above 500 barrels of water for the priests' use, in washing themselves, conducting the sacrifices, and keeping the courts of the temple clean, v. 23, &c. It stood raised upon the figures of twelve oxen in brass, so high, that either they must have stairs to climb up to it, or cocks at the bottom to draw water from it. The Gibeonites, or Nethinim, who were to draw water for the house of God, had the care of filling it. Some think Solomon made the images of oxen to support this great cistern, in contempt of the golden calf, which Israel had worshipped, that (as Bishop Patrick expresses it) the people might see there was nothing worthy of adoration in those figures; they were fitter to make posts of, than to make gods of. Yet this prevailed not to prevent Jeroboam's setting up the calves for deities. In the court of the tabernacle there was only a *laver* of brass provided to wash in, but in the court of the temple a *sea* of brass; intimating, that, by the gospel of Christ, much fuller preparation is made for our cleansing, than was by the law of Moses. That had a *laver*, this a *sea*; a *fountain opened*, Zech. 13. 1.

3. Ten bases, or stands, or settles, of brass, on which were put ten lavers, to be filled with water for the service of the temple, because there would not be room at the molten sea for all that had occasion to wash there. The bases on which the lavers were fixed are very largely described here, v. 27, &c. They were variously adorned, and set upon wheels, that the lavers might be removed as there was occasion; but, ordinarily, they stood in two rows, five on one side of the court, and five on the other, v. 39. Each laver contained forty baths, that is, about ten barrels, v. 38. They must be very *clean that bear the vessels of the Lord*. Spiritual priests and spiritual sacrifices must be washed in the laver of Christ's blood, and of regeneration. We must wash often, for we daily contract pollution; cleanse our hands, and purify our hearts. Plentiful provision is made for our cleansing; so that if we have our lot for ever among the unclean, it will be our own fault.

4. Beside these, there was a vast number of brass pots, made to boil the flesh of the peace-offerings in, which the priests and offerers were to feast upon before the Lord; see 1 Sam. 2. 14. also shovels wherewith they took out the ashes of the altar. Some think the word signifies *flesh-hooks*, with which they took meat out of the pot. The basins also were made of brass, to receive the blood of the sacrifices. These are put for all the utensils of the brazen altar, Exod. 38. 3. While they were about it, they made abundance of them, that they might have a good stock by them, when those that were first in use wore out, and went to decay. Thus Solomon, having wherewithal, provided for posterity.

48. And Solomon made all the vessels the *per-tained* unto the house of the Lord: the altar of gold, and the table of gold, whereupon the shew-bread was, 49. And the candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right *side*, and five on the left, before the oracle, with the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs of gold, 50. And the bowls, and the snuffers, and the basins, and the spoons, and the censers

of pure gold; and the hinges of gold, both for the doors of the inner house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the house, to wit, of the temple. 51. So was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the LORD. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; *even* the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the LORD.

Here is,

1. The making of the gold-work of the temple, which, it seems, was done last, for with it the work of the house of God ended. All within doors was gold, and all made new, except the ark, with its mercy-seat and cherubims, the old ones being either melted down or laid by—the golden altar, table, and candlestick, with all their appertenance. The altar of incense was still *one*, for Christ and his intercession are so; but he made ten golden tables, 2 Chron. 4. 8. (though here mention is made of that one only *on which the shew-bread was*, v. 48. which we may suppose larger than the rest, and to which the rest were as side-boards,) and *ten golden candlesticks*, v. 49. intimating the much greater plenty both of spiritual food and heavenly light, which the gospel blesses us with, than the law of Moses did, or could afford. Even the hinges of the doors were of gold, v. 50. that every thing might be alike magnificent, and bespeaks Solomon's generosity. Some suggest that every thing was made thus splendid in God's temple, to keep the people from idolatry, for none of the idol-temples were so rich and fine as this; but how little the expedient availed, the event shewed.

2. The bringing in of the dedicated things, which his father had devoted to the honour of God, v. 51. What was not expended in the building and furniture, was laid up in the treasury, for repairs, exigencies, and the constant charge of the temple-service. What the parents have dedicated to God, the children ought by no means to alienate or recall; they should cheerfully confirm what was intended for pious and charitable uses, that they may, with their estates, inherit the blessing.

CHAP. VIII.

The building and furniture of the temple were very glorious, but the dedication of it exceeds in glory, as much as prayer and praise, the work of saints, exceed the casting of metal, and the graving of stones, the work of the craftsman. The temple was designed for the keeping up of the correspondence between God and his people; and here we have an account of the solemnity of their first meeting there. I. The representatives of all Israel were called together, v. 1, 2. to keep a feast to the honour of God, for fourteen days, v. 65. II. The priests brought the ark into the most holy place, and fixed it there, v. 3. .9. III. God took possession of it by a cloud, v. 10, 11. IV. Solomon, with thankful acknowledgment to God, informed the people touching the occasion of their meeting, v. 12. .21. V. In a long prayer, he recommended to God's gracious acceptance all the prayers that should be made in or toward this place, v. 22. .53. VI. He dismissed the assembly with a blessing, and an exhortation, v. 54. .61. VII. He offered abundance of sacrifices, on which he and his people feasted, and so parted, with great satisfaction, v. 62. .66. These were Israel's golden days; days of the Son of man in type.

1. **T**HEN Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. 2. And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. 3. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. 4. And

they brought up the ark of the LORD, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that *were* in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up. 5. And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, *were* with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude. 6. And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy *place*, even under the wings of the cherubims. 7. For the cherubims spread forth *their* two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above. 8. And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy *place* before the oracle, and they were not seen without: and there they are unto this day. 9. *There was* nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a *covenant* with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. 10. And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy *place*, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11. So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

The temple, though richly beautified, while without the ark, was like a body without a soul, or a candlestick without a candle, or (to speak more properly) a house without an inhabitant. All the cost and pains bestowed on this stately structure are lost, if God do not accept them; and unless he please to own it, as the place where he will record his name, it is, after all, but a ruinous heap; when therefore *all the work* is ended, *ch. 7. 51.* the *one thing needful* is yet behind, and that is, the bringing in of the ark. This therefore is the end which must crown the work, and which here we have an account of the doing of with great solemnity.

I. Solomon presides in this service, as David did in the bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem; and neither of them thought it below him to follow the ark, or to lead the people in their attendance on it. Solomon glories in the title of the *preacher*, *Ecd. 1. 1.* and the *master of assemblies*,—*12. 11.* This great assembly he summons, *v. 1.* and he is the centre of it, for to him they all assembled, *v. 2. at the feast in the seventh month*, namely, the feast of tabernacles, which was appointed on the fifteenth day of that month, *Lev. 23. 34.* David, like a very *good* man, brings the ark to a *convenient* place, near him; Solomon, like a very *great* man, brings it to a *magnificent* place. As every man has received the gift, so let him minister; and let children proceed in God's service there where their parents left off.

II. All Israel attend the service; their judges, and the chief of their tribes and families; all their officers, civil and military; and (as they speak in the north) the heads of their clans. A convention of these might well be called *an assembly of all Israel*; these came together, on this occasion, 1. To do honour to Solomon, and to return him the thanks of the nation for all the good offices he had done, in kindness to them. 2. To do honour to the ark, to pay respect to it, and testify their universal joy and satisfaction in its settlement. The advancement of the ark in external splendour, though it has often proved too strong a temptation to its hypocritical followers, yet, because it may prove

an advantage to its true interests, is to be rejoiced in (with trembling) by all that wish well to it. Public mercies call for public acknowledgments. They that appeared before the Lord, did not appear empty, for they all sacrificed sheep and oxen innumerable, *v. 5.* The people, in Solomon's time, were very rich, very easy, and very cheerful, and therefore it was fit that, on this occasion, they should consecrate not only their cheerfulness, but a part of their wealth, to God and his honour.

III. The priests do their part of the service. In the wilderness, the Levites were to carry the ark, because then there were not priests enough to do it; but here, (it being the last time that the ark was to be carried,) the priests themselves did it, as they were ordered to do, when it surrounded Jericho. We are here told, 1. What was in the ark; nothing but the two tables of stone, *v. 9.* a treasure far exceeding all the dedicated things both of David and Solomon. The pot of manna, and Aaron's rod, were *by* the ark, but not *in* it. 2. What was brought up with the ark, *v. 4. the tabernacle of the congregation.* It is probable that that which Moses set up in the wilderness, which was in Gibeon, and that which David pitched in Zion, were both brought to the temple, to which they did, as it were, surrender all their holiness, merging it in that of the temple; which must, henceforward, be the place where God must be sought unto. Thus will all the church's holy things on earth, that are so much its joy and glory, be swallowed up in the perfection of holiness above. 3. Where it was fixed in its place, the place appointed for its rest after all its wanderings, *v. 6. in the oracle of the house*, whence they expected God to speak to them, even in the most holy place, which was made so by the presence of the ark, *under the wings of the great cherubim*, which Solomon set up, *ch. 6. 27.* signifying the special protection of angels, which God's ordinances and the assemblies of his people are taken under. The staves of the ark were drawn out, so as to be seen from under the wings of the cherubims, to direct the high priest to the mercy-seat, over the ark, when he went in, once a year, to sprinkle the blood there; so that still they continued of some use, though there was no longer occasion for them to carry it by them.

IV. God graciously owns what is done, and testifies his acceptance of it, *v. 10, 11.* The priests might come into the most holy place, till God manifested his glory there; but, thenceforward, none might, at their peril, approach the ark, except the high priest, on the day of atonement. Therefore it was not till the priests were come out of the oracle, that the *Shechinah* took possession of it, in a cloud, which filled not only the most holy place, but the temple, so that the priests, who burnt incense at the golden altar, could not bear it. By this visible emanation of the divine glory, 1. God put an honour upon the ark, and owned it as a token of his presence. The glory of it had been long diminished and eclipsed by its frequent removes, the meanness of its lodging, and its being exposed too much to common view; but God will now shew that it is as dear to him as ever, and he will have it looked upon with as much veneration as it was when Moses first brought it into his tabernacle. 2. He testified his acceptance of the building and furnishing of the temple, as good service done to his name and his kingdom among men. 3. He struck an awe upon this great assembly; and, by what they saw, confirmed their belief of what they read in the books of Moses, concerning the glory of God's appearances to their fathers, that hereby they might be kept close to the service of the God of Israel, and fortified against temptations to idolatry. 4. He shewed himself ready to hear the prayer Solomon was now about to make; and not only so, but took up his residence in this house, that all his praying people might there be encouraged to make their applications to him. But the glory of God appeared in a cloud, a dark cloud, to signify, (1.) The darkness of that dispensation, in comparison with the light of the gospel, by which, *with open face, we behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord.* (2.) The darkness of our present state, in comparison with the vision of God, which will be the happiness of heaven, where the divine glory is unveiled. Now we can only say what he is not, but then we shall see him as he is.

12. Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. 13. I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever. 14. And the king turned his face about, and blessed all the congregation of Israel: (and all the congregation of Israel stood;) 15. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled it, saying, 16. Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build an house, that my name might be therein; but I chose David to be over my people Israel. 17. And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 18. And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart. 19. Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name. 20. And the LORD hath performed his word that he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 21. And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

Here,

1. Solomon encourages the priests, who came out of the temple from their ministration, much astonished at the dark cloud that overshadowed them. The disciples of Christ feared, when they entered into the cloud, though it was a bright cloud, Luke, 9. 34. so did the priests, when they found themselves wrapt in a thick cloud. To silence their fears, 1. He reminds them of that which they could not but know, that this was a token of God's presence, v. 12. *The Lord said, he would dwell in the thick darkness.* It is so far from being a token of his displeasure, that it is an indication of his favour; for he had said, *I will appear in a cloud,* Lev. 16. 2. Note, Nothing is more effectual to reconcile us to dark dispensations, than to consider what God hath said, and to compare his word and works together; as Lev. 10. 3. *This is that which the Lord hath said.* God is light, 1 John, 1. 5. and he dwells in light, 1 Tim. 6. 16. but he dwells with men in the thick darkness, makes that his pavilion, because they could not bear the dazzling brightness of his glory. *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.* Thus our holy faith is exercised, and our holy fear increased; where God dwells in light, faith is swallowed up in vision, and fear in love. 2. He himself bids it welcome, as worthy of all acceptance; and since God, by this cloud, came down to take possession, he does, in a few words, solemnly give him possession, v. 13. *Surely I come,* says God. "Amen," says Solomon, "Even so, come, Lord. The house is thine own, entirely thine own, I have surely built it for thee, and furnished it for thee; it is for ever thine own, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever; it shall never be alienated or converted to any other use; the ark shall never be removed from it, never unsettled again." It is Solomon's joy, that God has taken possession; and it is his desire, that he would keep possession. Let not the priests therefore dread that in which Solomon so much triumphs.

II. He instructs the people, and gives them a plain account, concerning this house, which they now saw God take possession of. He spoke briefly to the priests, to satisfy them; (a word to the wise;) but turned his face about, v. 14. from them to the congregation that stood in the outer court, and addressed himself to them largely.

1. He blessed them. When they saw the dark cloud enter the temple, they were astonished at it, and afraid lest the thick darkness should be utter darkness to them; the amazing sight, such as they had never seen in their days, we may suppose, drove every man to his prayers, and the vainest minds were made serious by it. Solomon therefore set in with their prayers, and blessed them all; as one having authority, (for *the less is blessed of the better,*) in God's name, he spake peace to them, and a blessing; like that with which the angel blessed Gideon, when he was in a fright, upon a like occasion, Judges, 6. 22, 23. *Peace be unto thee, fear not, thou shalt not die.* Solomon blessed them, that is, he pacified them, and freed them from the consternation they were in. To receive this blessing, they all stood up, in token of reverence, and readiness to hear and accept it. It is a proper posture to be in, when the blessing is pronounced.

2. He informed them concerning this house which he had built, and was now dedicating. He begins his account with a thankful acknowledgment of the good hand of his God upon him hitherto: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,* v. 15. What we have the pleasure of, God must have the praise of. He thus engaged the congregation to lift up their hearts in thanksgivings to God, which would help to still the tumult of spirit which, probably, they were in. "Come," says he, "let God's awful appearances not drive us from him, but draw us to him; *Let us bless the Lord God of Israel.*" Thus Job, under a dark scene, blessed the name of the Lord. Solomon here blessed God, (1.) For his promise which he spake with his mouth to David. (2.) For the performance; that he had now fulfilled it with his hand. We have then the best sense of God's mercies, and most grateful both to ourselves and to our God, when we run up those streams to the fountain of the covenant, and compare what God does with what he has said.

Solomon is now making a solemn surrender or dedication of this house unto God, delivering it to God by his own act and deed. Grants and conveyances commonly begin with recitals of what has been before done, leading to what is now done; accordingly, here is a recital of the special causes and considerations moving Solomon to build this house.

[1.] He recites the want of such a place. It was necessary that this should be premised; for, according to the dispensation they were under, there must be one place, in which they must expect God to record his name. If, therefore, there were any other chosen, this would be a usurpation. But he shews, from what God himself had said, that there was no other, v. 16. *I chose no city to build a house in for my name;* therefore there is occasion for the building of this.

[2.] He recites David's purpose to build such a place. God chose the person first that should rule his people, (*I chose David,* v. 16.) and then put it into his heart to build a house for God's name, v. 17. It was not a project of his own, for the magnifying of himself; but his good father, of blessed memory, laid the first design of it, though he lived not to lay the first stone.

[3.] He recites God's promise concerning himself: God approved his father's purpose, v. 18. *Thou didst well, that it was in thine heart.* Note, Sincere intentions to do good shall be graciously approved and accepted of God, though Providence prevent our putting of them in execution. *The desire of a man is his kindness.* See 2 Cor. 8. 12. God accepted David's good-will, yet would not permit him to do the good work, but reserved the honour of it for his son, v. 19. *He shall build the house to my name;* so that what he had done was not of his own head, nor for his own glory; but the work itself was according to his father's design, and his doing of it was according to God's designation.

[4.] He recites what he himself had done, and with what intention; *I have built an house, not for my own name, but for the*

name of the Lord God of Israel, v. 20. and set there a place for the ark, v. 21. Thus all the right, title, interest, claim, and demand whatsoever, which he or his had, or might have, in or to his house, or any of its appurtenances, he resigns, surrenders, and gives up, to God for ever. It is for his name, and his ark. In this, says he, *the Lord hath performed his word that he spake.* Note, Whatever good we do, we must look upon it as the performance of God's promise to us, rather than the performance of our promises to him. The more we do for God, the more we are indebted to him; for our sufficiency is of him, and not of ourselves.

22. And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: 23. And he said, LORD God of Israel, *there is no* God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart: 24. Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled *it* with thine hand, as *it is* this day. 25. Therefore now, LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me: 26. And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father. 27. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded! 28. Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee to-day: 29. That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, *even* toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place. 30. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place: and when thou hearest, forgive. 31. If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: 32. Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness. 33. When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: 34. Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people

Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers. 35. When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: 36. Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance. 37. If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, *or* if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness, *there be*; 38. What prayer and supplication soever be *made* by any man, *or* by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: 39. Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, *even* thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;) 40. That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. 41. Moreover concerning a stranger, that *is not* of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake; 42. (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house; 43. Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as *do* thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name. 44. If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the LORD toward the city which thou hast chosen, and *toward* the house that I have built for thy name: 45. Then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. 46. If they sin against thee, (for *there is* no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near; 47. *Yet* if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; 48. And *so* return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto

their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name: 49. Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling-place, and maintain their cause, 50. And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them: 51. For they be thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron: 52. That thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee. 53. For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O LORD God.

Solomon having made a general surrender of this house to God, which God had signified his acceptance of by taking possession, next follows Solomon's prayer; in which he makes a more particular declaration of the uses of that surrender, with all humility and reverence, desiring that God would agree thereto. In short, it is his request that this temple might be deemed and taken, not only for a house of sacrifice, (no mention is made of that in all this prayer, that was taken for granted,) but a *house of prayer for all people*; and herein it was a type of the gospel-church. See Isa. 56. 7. compared with Matth. 21. 13. Therefore Solomon opened this house, not only with an extraordinary sacrifice, but with an extraordinary prayer.

I. The person that prayed this prayer was great. Solomon did not appoint one of the priests to do it, or one of the prophets, but did it himself, *in the presence of all the congregation of Israel*, v. 22. 1. It was well that he was able to do it; a sign that he had made a good improvement of the pious education which his parents gave him. With all his learning, it seems, he learnt to pray well, and knew how to express himself to God in a suitable manner, *pro re nata—on the spur of the occasion*, without a prescribed form. In the crowd of his philosophical transactions, his proverbs, and songs, he did not forget his devotions. He was a gainer by prayer, ch. 3. 11, &c. and, we may suppose, gave himself much to it, so that he excelled, as we find here, in praying gifts. 2. It was well that he was willing to do it, and not shy of performing divine service before so great a congregation: he was far from thinking it any disparagement to him to be his own chaplain, and the mouth of the assembly to God; and shall any think themselves too great to do this office for their own families? Solomon, in all his other glory, even on his ivory throne, looked not so great as he did now. Great men should thus support the reputation of religious exercises, and so honour God with their greatness. Solomon was herein a type of Christ, the great Intercessor for all over whom he rules.

II. The posture in which he prayed was very reverent, and expressive of humility, seriousness, and fervency in prayer. He stood before the altar of the Lord; intimating that he expected the success of his prayer in the virtue of that sacrifice which should be offered up in the fulness of time, typified by the sacrifices offered at that altar. But, when he addressed himself to prayer, 1. He kneeled down, as appears, v. 54. where he is said to rise from his knees; compare 2 Chron. 6. 13. Kneeling is the most proper posture for prayer, Eph. 3. 14. The greatest of men must not think it below them to kneel before the Lord their Maker.

Mr. Herbert says, "Kneeling never spoiled silk-stockings." 2. He spread forth his hands toward heaven; and, as it should seem by v. 54. continued so, to the end of the prayer, hereby expressing his desire towards, and expectations from, God, as a *Father in heaven*. He spread forth his hands, as it were to offer up the prayer from an open enlarged heart, and to urge it into heaven; and also to receive the mercy thence, with both arms, which he prayed for. Such outward expressions of the fixedness and fervour of devotion ought not to be despised or ridiculed.

III. The prayer itself was very long, and yet perhaps longer than is here recorded. At the throne of grace, we have liberty of speech, and should use our liberty. It is not making long prayers, but making them for a pretence, that Christ condemns.

In this excellent prayer, Solomon does as we should in every prayer:

1. He gives glory to God. This he begins with, as the most proper act of adoration. He addresses himself to God as the *Lord God of Israel*, a God in covenant with them. And, (1.) He gives him the praise of what he is, in general; the best of beings in himself; "*There is no God like thee*, none of the powers in heaven or earth to be compared with thee;" and the best of masters to his people, "*who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants*; not only as good as thy word, in keeping covenant, but better than thy word, in keeping mercy, doing that for them, which thou hast not given them an express promise of, provided they walk before thee with all their heart, are zealous for thee, with an eye to thee." (2.) He gives him thanks for what he had done in particular for his family, v. 24. *Thou hast kept with thy servant David*, as with thy other servants, *that which thou promisedst him*. The promise was a great favour to him, his support and joy, and now, performance is the crown of it: *Thou hast fulfilled it, as it is this day*. Fresh experiences of the truth of God's promises call for enlarged praises.

2. He sues for grace and favour from God.

(1.) That God would perform to him and his the mercy which he had promised, v. 25, 26. Observe how this comes in: he thankfully acknowledges the performance of the promise, in part, hitherto, God had been faithful to his word, "*Thou hast kept with thy servant David that which thou promisedst him*; so far, that his son fills his throne, and has built the intended temple; therefore now keep with thy servant David that which thou hast further promised him, and which yet remains to be fulfilled in its season." Note, The experiences we have of God's performing his promises, should encourage us to depend upon them, and plead them with God: and those who expect further mercies must be thankful for former mercies. Hitherto, God has helped, 2 Cor. 1. 10. Solomon repeats the promise, v. 25. *There shall not fail thee a man to sit on the throne*, not omitting the condition, *so that thy children take heed to their way*; for we cannot expect God's performance of the promise, but upon our performance of the condition: and then he humbly begs this entail, v. 26. *Now, O God of Israel, let thy word be verified*. God's promises (as we have often observed) must be both the guide of our desires, and the ground of our hopes and expectations, in prayer. David had prayed, 2 Sam. 7. 25. *Lord, do as thou hast said*. Note, Children should learn of their godly parents how to pray, and plead in prayer.

(2.) That God would have respect to this temple which he had now taken possession of, and that his eyes might be continually open towards it, v. 29. That he would graciously own it, and so put an honour upon it. To this purpose, he premises, [1.] An humble admiration of God's gracious condescension, v. 27. "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth?* Can we imagine that a Being, infinitely high, and holy, and happy, should stoop so low, as to let it be said of him, that he dwells upon the earth, and blesses the worms of the earth with his presence? The earth, that is corrupt, and overspread with sin! Cursed, and reserved to fire! Lord, how is it?" [2.] An humble acknowledgment of the incapacity of the house he had built, though very capacious, to contain God. *The heaven of heavens cannot do that, for no place can include him who is present in all places; even this house is too little, too*

mean to be the residence of Him that is infinite in being and glory. Note, When we have done the most we can for God, we must acknowledge the infinite distance and disproportion between us and him, between our services and his perfections.

This premised, he prays, in general, *First*, That God would graciously hear and answer the prayer he was now praying, v. 28. It was an humble prayer, *the prayer of thy servant*; an earnest prayer, such a prayer as is a cry; a prayer made in faith, *before thee*, as the Lord, and my God; Lord, *hearken to it*; have respect to it, not as the prayer of Israel's king, (no man's dignity in the world, or titles of honour, will recommend him to God,) but as the prayer of thy servant. *Secondly*, That God would, in like manner, hear and answer all the prayers that should, at any time hereafter, be made in or toward this house which he had now built, and of which God had said, *My name shall be there*, v. 29. his own prayers, *Hearken to the prayers which thy servant shall make*; and the prayers of all Israel, and of every part of Israelite, v. 30. *Hear it in heaven*, that is indeed thy dwelling-place, of which this is but a figure; and, *when thou hearest*, forgive the sin that separates between them and God, even the iniquity of their holy things. 1. He supposes that God's people would ever be a praying people; he resolves to adhere to that duty himself. 2. He directs them to have an eye, in their prayers, to that place where God was pleased to manifest his glory, so as he did not any where else on earth. None but priests might come into that place; but when they worshipped in the courts of the temple, it must be with an eye towards it, not as the object of their worship, (that were idolatry,) but as an instituted medium of their worship helping the weakness of their faith, and typifying the mediation of Jesus Christ, who is the true Temple, to whom we must have an eye in every thing wherein we have to do with God. They that were at a distance looked towards Jerusalem, for the sake of the temple, even when it was in ruins, Dan. 6. 10. 3. He begs that God would *hear the prayers*, and *forgive the sins*, of all that took this way in their prayers: not as if he thought all the devout prayers offered up to God by those who had no knowledge of this house, or regard to it, were therefore rejected; but he desired that the sensible tokens of the divine presence, with which this house was blessed, might always give sensible encouragement and comfort to believing petitioners.

More particularly, he here puts divers cases in which he supposed application would be made to God by prayer, in or toward this house of prayer.

(1.) If God were appealed to by an oath for the determining of any controverted right between man and man, and the oath were taken before this altar, he prayed that God would, some way or other, discover the truth, and judge between the contending parties, v. 31, 32. He prays, that, in difficult matters, this throne of grace might be a throne of judgment, from which God would right the injured that believingly appealed to it, and punish the injurious that presumptuously appealed to it. It was usual to swear by the temple and altar; (Matth. 23. 16, 18.) which corruption perhaps took its rise from this supposition of an oath taken, not by the temple or altar, but at or near them, for the greater solemnity.

(2.) If the people of Israel were groaning under any national calamity, or any particular Israelite under any personal calamity, he desires that the prayers they should make in or towards this house might be heard and answered.

[1.] In case of *public judgments*; war, v. 33. want of rain, v. 35. famine or pestilence, v. 37. and he ends with any plague or sickness; for no calamity befalls other people which may not befall God's Israel. Now he supposes, *First*, That the cause of the judgment would be sin, and nothing else: if they be *smitten before the enemy*, if there be no rain, it is *because they have sinned against thee*: that is it that makes all the mischief. *Secondly*, That the consequence of the judgment would be, that they would cry to God, and make supplication to him, in or toward that house. Those that slighted him before would solicit him then: *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee: In their affliction they will seek me early and earnestly. Thirdly*, That the condition of the removal

of the judgment was something more than bare praying for it. He could not, he would not, ask that their prayer might be answered, unless they did also *turn from their sin*, v. 35. and *turn again to God*, v. 33. that is, unless they did truly repent and reform. On no other terms may we look for salvation, in this world or the other. But, if they did thus qualify themselves for mercy, he prays, 1. That God would hear from heaven, his holy temple above, to which they must look, through *this temple*. 2. That he would forgive their sin; for judgments are then only removed in mercy, when sin is pardoned. 3. That he would *teach them the good way wherein they should walk*, by his Spirit, with his word and prophets; and thus they might be both profited by their trouble, (for *blessed is the man whom God chastens and teaches*;) and prepared for deliverance; which then comes in love, when it finds us brought back to the good way of God and duty. 4. That he would then remove the judgment, and redress the grievance, whatever it is; not only accept the prayer, but give in the mercy prayed for.

[2.] In case of *personal afflictions*, v. 38. 40. "If any man of Israel as an errand to thee, here let him find thee, here let him find favour with thee." He does not mention particulars; so numerous, so various, are the grievances of the children of men: *First*, He supposes, that the complainants themselves would very sensibly feel from their own burthen, and would open that case to God, which otherwise they kept to themselves, and did not make any man acquainted with. *They shall know every man the plague of his own heart*, what it is that pains him; and shall spread their hands, that is, spread their case, as Hezekiah spread the letter, in prayer, toward this house; whether the trouble be of body or mind, they shall represent it before God. Inward burthens seem especially meant; sin is the plague of our own heart, our indwelling corruptions are our spiritual diseases: every Israelite indeed endeavours to know these, that he may mortify them, and watch against the risings of them. These he complains of, this is the burthen he groans under; *O wretched man that I am!* These drive him to his knees, drive him to the sanctuary: lamenting these, *he spreads forth his hands in prayer. Secondly*, He refers all cases of this kind, that should be brought hither, to God. 1. To his omniscience; "*Thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men*, not only the plagues of their hearts, their several wants and burthens," (these he knows, but he will know them from us,) "but the desire and intent of the heart, the sincerity or hypocrisy of it: Thou knowest which prayer comes from the heart, and which from the lips only." The hearts of kings are not unsearchable to God. 2. To his justice; *Give to every man according to his ways*; and he will not fail to do so, by the rules of grace, not the law, for then we were all undone. 3. To his mercy; Hear, and forgive, and do, v. 39. *that they may fear thee all their days*, v. 40. This use we should make of the mercy of God to us in hearing our prayers, and forgiving our sins, we should thereby be engaged to fear him while we live: *Fear the Lord and his goodness; there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared.*

[3.] The case of the stranger, that is not an Israelite, is next mentioned; a proselyte that comes to the temple to pray to the God of Israel, being convinced of the folly and wickedness of worshipping the gods of his country. *First*, He supposes that there would be many such, v. 41, 42. that the fame of God's great works which he had wrought for Israel, by which he proved himself to be above all gods, nay to be God alone, would reach to distant countries; they that live remote *shall hear of thy strong hand, and thy stretched-out arm*; and this will bring all thinking considerate people to pray toward this house, that they may obtain the favour of a God that is able to do them a real kindness. *Secondly*, He begs that God would accept and answer the proselyte's prayer, v. 43. *Do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for*. Thus early, thus ancient, were the indications of favour toward the sinners of the Gentiles; as there was then *one law for the native and for the stranger*, Exod. 12. 49. so there was one gospel for both. *Thirdly*, Herein he aims at the glory of God, and the propagating of the knowledge of him.—"O let the stranger, in a special manner, speed well in his address, that he may carry away with him to his

own country a good report of the God of Israel, *that all people may know thee and fear thee*, (and, if they know thee aright, they will fear thee,) *as do thy people Israel.*" So far is Solomon from monopolizing the knowledge and service of God, and wishing to have them confined to Israel only, (which was the envious desire of the Jews in the days of Christ and his apostles,) that he prays that *all people might fear God as Israel did.* Would to God, that all the children of men might receive the adoption, and be made God's children. *Father, thus glorify thy name.*

[4.] The case of an army going forth to battle is next recommended by Solomon to the divine favour. It is supposed that the army is encamped at a distance, somewhere a great way off, sent by divine order *against the enemy*, v.44. "When they are ready to engage, and consider the perils and doubtful issues of battle, and put up a prayer to God for protection and success, with their eye *toward this city and temple*, then *hear their prayer*, encourage their hearts, strengthen their hands, cover their heads, and so maintain their cause, and give them victory." Soldiers in the field must not think it enough that they who tarry at home pray for them, but must pray for themselves, and they are here encouraged to hope for a gracious answer. Praying should always go along with fighting.

[5.] The case of poor captives is the last that is here mentioned, as a proper object of divine compassion. *First*, He supposes that Israel would sin. He knew them, and himself, and the nature of man, too well to think this a foreign supposition; *for there is no man that sinneth not*, that does not enough to justify God in the severest rebukes of his providence; no man but what is in danger of falling into gross sin, and will, if God leave him to himself. *Secondly*, He supposes, what may well be expected, if Israel revolt from God, that God will be *angry with them*, and *deliver them into the hand of their enemies*, to be carried captive into a strange country, v.46. *Thirdly*, He then supposes that they will bethink themselves, will consider their ways; for afflictions put men upon consideration; and when once they are brought to consider, they will repent and pray, will confess their sins, and humble themselves saying, *We have sinned and have done perversely*, v.47. and *will return to God in the land of their enemies*, whom they had forsaken in their own land. *Fourthly*, He supposes that in their prayers they will look toward their own land, the holy land, Jerusalem the holy city, and the temple the holy house, and directs them so to do, v.48. for his sake who gave them that land, chose that city, and to whose honour that house was built. *Fifthly*, He prays that then God would *hear their prayers, forgive their sins, plead their cause*, and incline their enemies to *have compassion on them*, v.49, 50. God has all hearts in his hand, and can, when he pleases, turn the strongest stream the contrary way, and make those to pity his people who have been their most cruel persecutors. See this prayer answered, Ps. 106. 46. *He made them to be pitied of those that carried them captive*, which, if it did not enlarge them, yet eased their captivity. *Sixthly*, He pleads their relation to God, and his interest in them; "They are thy people, whom thou hast taken into thy covenant, and under thy care and conduct, thine inheritance, from which, more than from any other nation, thy rent and tribute of glory issue and arise, v.51. *separated from among all people to be so*, and by distinguishing favours appropriated to thee," v.53.

Lastly, After all these particulars, he concludes with this general request, that God would hearken to all his praying people *in all that they call unto him for*, v.52. No place now, under the gospel, can be imagined to add any acceptableness to the prayers made in or towards it, as the temple then did; that was a shadow, the substance is Christ; whatever we ask in his name, it shall be given us.

54. And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands

spread up to heaven. 55. And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, 56. Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. 57. The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: 58. That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers. 59. And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: 60. That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else. 61. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.

Solomon, after his sermon in Ecclesiastes, gives us the conclusion of the whole matter; so he does here, after this long prayer: it is called his *blessing of the people*, v.55. He pronounced it standing, that he might be the better heard, and because he blessed as one having authority; never were words more fully spoken, or more pertinently; never was congregation dismissed with that which was more likely to affect them and abide with them.

I. He gives God the glory of the great and kind things he had done for Israel, v.56. He stood up to *bless the congregation*, v.55. but begins with blessing God, for we must in *every thing give thanks*. Do we expect God should do well for us and our's? Let us take all occasions to speak well of him and his. He blesses God who has given, he does not say wealth, and honour, and power, and victory, to Israel, but *rest*, as if that were a blessing more valuable than any of those: let not those who have rest undervalue that blessing, then, though they want some other. He compares the blessings God had bestowed upon them, with the promises he had given them, that God might have the honour of his faithfulness, and the truth of that word of his, which he has *magnified above all his name*. 1. He refers to the *promises given by the hand of Moses*, as he did, v.15, 24. to those which were made to David; there were *promises* given by Moses, as well as *precepts*; it was long ere God gave Israel the promised rest, but they had it at last, after many trials; the day will come when God's spiritual Israel will *rest from all their labours*. 2. He does, as it were, write a receipt in full on the back of these bonds, *There has not failed one word of all his good promises*; this discharge he gives in the name of all Israel, to the everlasting honour of the divine faithfulness, and the everlasting encouragement of all those that build upon the divine promises.

II. He blesses himself and the congregation, expressing his earnest desire and hope of these four things. 1. The presence of God with them, that is all in all to the happiness of a church and nation, and of every particular person. This great congregation was now shortly to scatter, and it was not likely that they would ever be all together again in this world; Solomon therefore dismisses them with this blessing, "*The Lord be present with us*, and that will be comfort enough, when we are absent from each other; *The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers*, v.57. *let him not leave us*, let him be to us to-day, and to our's for ever what he was to those that went before us." 2. The power of his

grace upon them, "*Let him be with us, and continue with us, not that he may enlarge our coasts, and increase our wealth, but that he may incline our hearts to himself, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, v. 58.*" Spiritual blessings are the best blessings, which we should covet earnestly to be blessed with; our hearts are naturally averse to our duty, and apt to decline from God, it is his grace that inclines them, grace that must be obtained by prayer. 3. An answer to the prayer he had now made, "*Let these my words be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, v. 59.*" Let a gracious return be made to every prayer that shall be made here, and that will be a continual answer to this prayer.—What Solomon here asks for his prayer, is still granted in the intercession of Christ, which his supplication was a type of; that powerful prevailing intercession *is before the Lord our God day and night*, for our great Advocate attends continually to this very thing, and we may depend upon him to maintain our cause, (against the adversary that accuses us *day and night*, Rev. 12. 10.) *and the common cause of his people Israel, at all times*, upon all occasions, as the matter shall require, so as to speak for us *the word of the day in its day*, as the original here reads it, from which we shall receive grace sufficient, suitable, and seasonable, *in every time of need.* 4. The glorifying of God in the enlargement of his kingdom among men. Let Israel be thus blessed, thus favoured; not that all people may become tributaries to us, (Solomon sees his kingdom as great as he desires,) but *that all people may know that the Lord is God*, and he only, and may come and worship him, v. 60. With this, Solomon's prayers, like *the prayers of his father, David the son of Jesse, are ended, Ps. 72. 19, 20. Let the whole earth be filled with his glory*; we cannot close our prayers with a better summary than this, *Father, glorify thy name.*

III. He solemnly charges his people to continue and persevere in their duty to God; having spoken to God for them, he here speaks from God to them, and those only would fare the better for his prayers that were made better by his preaching; his admonition, at parting, is, "*Let your heart be perfect with the Lord our God, v. 61.*" let your obedience be universal without dividing, upright without dissembling, and constant without declining;" this is evangelical perfection.

62. And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the LORD. 63. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace-offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD. 64. The same day did the king hallow the middle of the court that *was* before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt-offerings, and meat-offerings, and the fat of the peace-offerings: because the brazen altar that *was* before the LORD *was* too little to receive the burnt-offerings, and meat-offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings. 65. And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven days, *even* fourteen days. 66. On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people.

We read before, that Judah and Israel were eating and drinking and very cheerful, under their own vines and fig-trees; here we

have them so in God's courts; now they found Solomon's words true concerning Wisdom's ways, that they are ways of pleasantness.

1. They had abundant joy and satisfaction, while they attended at God's house, for there, (1.) Solomon offered a great sacrifice, 22,000 oxen, and 120,000 sheep, enough to have drained the country of cattle, if it had not been a very fruitful land. The heathen thought themselves very generous when they offered sacrifices by *hundreds*, (*herotombs* they called them,) but Solomon out-did them, he offered them by *thousands*. When Moses dedicated his altar, the peace-offerings were twenty-four *bullocks; rams, goats, and lambs*, 180, Numb. 7. 88. then the people were poor, but now that they were increased in wealth, more was expected from them; where God sows plentifully, he must reap accordingly. All these sacrifices could not be offered in one day, but in the several days of the feast; thirty oxen a day served Solomon's table, but thousands shall go to God's altar; few are thus minded, to spend more on their souls than on their bodies. The flesh of the peace-offerings, which belonged to the offerer, it is likely, Solomon treated the people with; Christ fed those who attended him. The brazen altar was not large enough to receive all these sacrifices, so that, to serve the present occasion, they were forced to offer many of them *in the middle of the court, v. 64.* Some think, on altars, altars of earth or stone, erected for the purpose, and taken down when the solemnity was over; others think, on the bare ground: they that will be generous in serving God, need not stint themselves for want of room and occasion to be so. (2.) He kept a feast, the feast of tabernacles, as it should seem, after the feast of dedication, and both together lasted fourteen days, v. 65. yet they said not, *Behold, what a weariness is it!*

2. They carried this joy and satisfaction with them to their own houses. When they were dismissed, they blessed the king, v. 66. applauded him, admired him, and returned him the thanks of the congregation, and then *went to their tents, joyful and glad of heart*, all easy and pleased; God's goodness was the matter of their joy, so it should be of ours at all times; they rejoiced in God's blessing, both on the royal family and on the kingdom; thus should we go home, rejoicing, from holy ordinances, and go on our way, rejoicing for God's goodness to our Lord Jesus, (of whom David his servant was a type, in the advancement and establishment of his throne, pursuant to the covenant of redemption,) and to all believers, his spiritual Israel, in their sanctification and consolation, pursuant to the covenant of grace; if we rejoice not herein always, it is our own fault.

CHAP. IX.

In this chapter, we have, I. The answer which God, in a vision, gave to Solomon's prayer, and the terms he settled with him, v. 1..9. II. The interchanging of grateful kindnesses between Solomon and Hiram, v. 10..14. III. His workmen and buildings, v. 15..24. IV. His devotion, v. 25. V. His trading navy, v. 26..28.

1. **A**ND it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he was pleased to do, 2. That the LORD appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon. 3. And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. 4. And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, *and* wilt keep my statutes and my judgments:

5. Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. 6. *But* if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments *and* my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: 7. Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a by-word among all people: 8. And at this house, *which* is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house? 9. And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil.

God had given a real answer to Solomon's prayer, and tokens of his acceptance of it immediately, by the *fire from heaven* which consumed the sacrifices, as we find, 2 Chron. 7. 1. but here we have a more express and distinct answer to it. Observe,

I. In what way God gave him this answer; he appeared to him, as he had done at Gibeon, in the beginning of his reign, in a dream or vision, v. 2. The comparing of it with that, intimates that it was the very night after he had finished the solemnities of his festival, for so that was, 2 Chron. 1. 6, 7. And then, v. 1. speaking of Solomon's finishing all his buildings, which was not till many years after the dedication of the temple, must be read thus, *Solomon finished*, as it is 2 Chron. 7. 11. and v. 2. must be read, *and the Lord had appeared*.

II. The purport of this prayer.

1. He assures him of his special presence in the temple he had built, in answer to the prayer he had made, v. 3. *I have hallowed this house*. Solomon had dedicated it, but it was God's prerogative to hallow it, to sanctify or consecrate it; men cannot make a place holy, yet what we, in sincerity, devote to God, we may hope he will graciously accept of, as his; and *his eyes and his heart shall be upon it*. Apply it to persons, the living temples; those whom God hallows or sanctifies, whom he sets apart for himself, have his eye, his heart, his love, and care, and this perpetually.

2. He shews him that he and his people were, for the future, *upon their good behaviour*; let them not be secure now, as if they might live as they please, now that they have the *temple of the Lord* among them, Jer. 7. 4. No, this house was designed to protect them in their allegiance to God, but not in their rebellion or disobedience: God deals plainly with us, sets before us good and evil, the blessing and the curse, and lets us know what we must trust to. God here tells Solomon,

(1.) That the establishment of his kingdom depended upon the constancy of his obedience, v. 4, 5. "*If thou wilt walk before me as David did*, who left thee a good example, and encouragement enough to follow it, (an advantage thou wilt be accountable for, if thou do not improve it,) *if thou wilt walk as he did, in integrity of heart and uprightness*," (for that is the main matter, no religion but sincerity,) "*then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom*, and not otherwise," for on that condition the promise was made, Ps. 132. 12. If we perform our part of the covenant, God will not fail to perform his; if we improve the grace God has given us, he will confirm us to the end. Let not the children

of godly parents expect the entail of the blessing, unless they tread in the steps of those that are gone before them to heaven, and keep up the virtue and piety of their ancestors.

(2.) That the ruin of his kingdom would be the certain consequence of his or his children's apostacy from God, v. 6. "But know thou, and let thy family and kingdom know it, and be admonished by it, that *if you shall altogether turn from following me*," (so it is thought it should be read,) "if you forsake my service, desert mine altar, and go and serve other gods," (for that was the covenant-breaking sin,) "if you or your children break off from me, this house will not save you." But, [1.] Israel, though a holy nation, will be cut off, v. 7. by one judgment after another, till they become a proverb and a by-word, and the most despicable people under the sun, though now the most honourable: this supposes the destruction of the royal family, though it is not particularly threatened; the king is, of course, undone, if the kingdom be. [2.] The temple, though a holy house, which God himself had *hallowed for his name*, should be abandoned and laid desolate, v. 8, 9. *This house which is high*; they prided themselves in the stateliness and magnificence of the structure, but let them know that it is not so high as to be out of the reach of God's judgments, if they vilify it so as to exchange it for groves and idol-temples, and yet, at the same time, magnify it so as to think it secures the favour of God to them, though they ever so much corrupt themselves. *This house which is high*; they that *now pass by it are astonished* at the bulk and beauty of it; the richness, contrivance, and workmanship, are admired by all spectators, and it is called a stupendous fabric; but, if you forsake God, its height will make its fall the more amazing, and they that pass by will be as much astonished at its ruins, while the guilty, self-convicted, self-condemned, Israelites, will be forced to acknowledge, with shame, that they themselves were the ruin of it; for, when it shall be asked, *Why hath the Lord done thus to this house?* they cannot but answer, *It was because they forsook the Lord their God*. See Deut. 29. 24, 25. Their sin will be read in their punishment, they deserted the temple, and therefore God deserted it; they profaned it with their sins, and laid it common, and therefore God profaned it with his judgments, and laid it waste: God gave Solomon fair warning of this, now that he had newly built and dedicated it, that he and his people might not be high-minded, but fear.

10. And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD and the king's house, 11. (*Now* Hiram the king of Tyre had furnished Solomon with cedar-trees and fir-trees, and with gold, according to all his desire,) that then king Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. 12. And Hiram came out from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him; and they pleased him not. 13. And he said, What cities *are* these which thou hast given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Cabul unto this day. 14. And Hiram sent to the king sixscore talents of gold.

What agreement was made between Solomon and Hiram, when the building-work was to be begun, we read before, ch. 5. Here we have an account of their fair and friendly parting, when the work was done.

1. Hiram made good his bargain to the utmost; he had furnished Solomon with materials for his buildings, according to all his desire, v. 11. and with gold, v. 14. So far was he from envying Solomon's growing greatness and reputation, and being jealous of him, that he helped to magnify him; Solomon's power, with Solomon's wisdom, needs not to be dreaded by any of his neighbours; God honours him, therefore Hiram will.

2. Solomon, no doubt, made good his bargain, and gave Hiram *food for his household*, as was agreed, *ch. 5. 9.* But here we are told that, over and above that, he gave him twenty cities, (small ones we may suppose, like those mentioned here, *v. 19.*) *in the land of Galilee, v. 11.* It should seem these were not allotted to any of the tribes of Israel, (for the border of Asher came up to them, *Josh. 19. 27.* which intimates that it did not include them,) but continued in the hands of the natives, till Solomon made himself master of them, and then made a present of them to Hiram; it becomes those that are great and good, to be generous. Hiram came to see these cities, and did not like them, *v. 12.* *They pleased him not.* He called the country the land of *Cabul*, a Phenician word, (says Josephus,) which signifies *displeasing, v. 13.* He therefore returned them back to Solomon, as we find, *2 Chron. 8. 2.* who repaired them, and then *caused the children of Israel to inhabit them*; which intimates that, before, they did not; but when Solomon received back what he had given, no doubt, he honourably gave Hiram an equivalent in something else. But what shall we think of this? Did Solomon act meanly, in giving Hiram what was not worth his acceptance? Or, was Hiram humourous, and hard to please? I am willing to believe otherwise: the country was truly valuable, and the cities in it, but not agreeable to Hiram's genius; the Tyrians were merchants, trading men, that lived in fine houses, and became rich by navigation, but knew not how to value a country that was fit for corn and pasture, that was business that lay out of their way; and therefore Hiram desired Solomon to take them again, he knew not what to do with them, and if he would please to gratify him, let it be in his own element, by becoming his partner in trade, as we find he did, *v. 27.* Hiram, that was used to the clean streets of Tyre, could by no means agree with the miry lanes in the land of Cabul, whereas the best lands have commonly the worst roads through them: see how the providence of God suits both the accommodation of this earth to the various dispositions of men, and the dispositions of men to the various accommodations of the earth, and all for the good of mankind in general: some take delight in husbandry, and wonder what pleasure sailors can take on a rough sea; others take as much delight in navigation, and wonder what pleasure husbandmen can take in a dirty country, like the land of Cabul; it is so in many other instances, in which we may observe the wisdom of Him whose all souls are, and all lands.

15. And this *is* the reason of the levy which king Solomon raised, for to build the house of the LORD, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer. 16. For Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up, and taken Gezer, and burnt it with fire, and slain the Canaanites that dwelt in the city, and given it for a present unto his daughter, Solomon's wife. 17. And Solomon built Gezer, and Beth-horon the nether, 18. And Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land, 19. And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion. 20. And all the people *that were* left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which *were* not of the children of Israel, 21. Their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bond-service unto this day. 22. But of the children of Israel

did Solomon make no bond-men: but they *were* men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots, and his horsemen. 23. These *were* the chief of the officers that *were* over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty, which bare rule over the people that wrought in the work. 24. But Pharaoh's daughter came up out of the city of David unto her house which Solomon had built for her: then did he build Millo. 25. And three times in a year did Solomon offer burnt-offerings and peace-offerings upon the altar which he built unto the LORD, and he burnt incense upon the altar that *was* before the LORD. So he finished the house. 26. And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-geber, which *is* beside Elath, on the shore of the Red sea, in the land of Edom. 27. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, ship-men that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. 28. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought *it* to king Solomon.

We have here a further account of Solomon's greatness:

I. His buildings. He raised a great levy both of men and money, because he projected a great deal of building, which would both employ many hands, and put him to a vast expence, *v. 15.* And he was a wise builder, who sat down first and counted the cost, and would not begin to build, till he found himself able to finish. Perhaps there was some complaint of the heaviness of the taxes, which the historian excuses from the greatness of his undertakings; he raised it not for war, (as other princes,) which would spend the blood of his subjects, but for **building**, which would require only their labour and purses. Perhaps David observed Solomon's genius to lie toward building, and foresaw he would have his head and hands full of it, when he penned that song of degrees for Solomon, which begins, *Except the Lord build the house, thy labour in vain that build it, Ps. 127. 1.* directing him to acknowledge God in all his ways, and, by prayer and faith in his providence, to take him along with him in all his designs of this kind. And Solomon verily began his work at the right end, for he built God's house first, and finished that before he began his own; and then God blessed him, and he prospered in all his other buildings: if we begin with God, he will go on with us; let the first-fruits be his, and the after-fruits will the more comfortably be our's, *Matth. 6. 33.* Solomon built a church first, and then he was enabled to build houses, and cities, and walls. Those consult not their own interest, that defer to the last what they design for pious uses.

The further order in Solomon's buildings is observable; God's house first for religion, then his own for his own convenience, then a house for his wife, to which she removed as soon as it was ready for her, *v. 24.* then Millo, the Town-house, or Guild-hall, then the wall of Jerusalem, the royal city, then some cities of note and strength in the country, which were decayed and unfortified, Hazor, Megiddo, &c. As he rebuilt these at his own charge, the inhabitants would be not only his subjects, but his tenants, which would increase the revenues of the crown for the benefit of his successors; among the rest, he built Gezer, which Pharaoh took out of the hands of the Canaanites, and made a present of to his daughter, Solomon's wife, *v. 16.* See how God *maketh the earth to help the woman*; Solomon was not himself a yarlake prince, but the king of Egypt, that was, took cities for him to build; then he built cities for convenience, for store, for his chariots, and for his horsemen, *v. 19.* And, *lastly*, he built for pleasure in Lebanon,

for his hunting perhaps, or other diversions there; let piety begin, and profit proceed, and leave pleasure to the last.

II. His workmen and servants. In doing such great works, he must needs employ abundance of workmen. The honour of great men is borrowed from their inferiors, who do that which they have the credit of.

1. Solomon employed those which remained of the conquered and devoted nations, in all the slavish work, v. 20, 21. We may suppose that they renounced their idolatry, and submitted to Solomon's government, so that he could not, in honour, utterly destroy them, and they were so poor that he could not levy money on them, therefore he served himself of their labour. Herein, he observed God's law, Lev. 25. 44. *Thy bondmen shall be of the heathen; and fulfilled Noah's curse upon Canaan, A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren, Gen. 9. 25.*

2. He employed Israelites in the more creditable services, v. 22, 23. *Of them he made no bondmen*, for they were God's freemen; but he made them soldiers and courtiers, and gave them offices, as he saw them qualified, among his chariots and horsemen, appointing some to support the service of the inferior labourers. Thus he preserved the dignity and liberty of Israel, and honoured their relation to God as a kingdom of priests.

III. His piety and devotion, v. 25. *Three times in a year*, he offered burnt-offerings extraordinary, namely, at the three yearly feasts, the passover, pentecost, and feast of tabernacles, in honour of the divine institution; beside what he offered at other times, both stately, and upon special occasions. With his sacrifices he burnt incense, not himself, (that was king Uzziah's crime,) but the priest for him, at his charge, and for his particular use. It is said, *He offered on the altar which he himself built.* He took care to build it, and then, 1. He himself made use of it. Many will assist the devotions of others that neglect their own. Solomon did not think his building an altar would excuse him from sacrificing, but rather engage him the more to it. 2. He himself had the benefit and comfort of it. Whatever pains we take, for the support of religion, to the glory of God, and the edification of others, we ourselves are likely to have the advantage of it.

IV. His merchandise. He built a fleet of trading ships, at Ezion-geber, v. 26. a port on the coast of the Red sea, the furthest stage of the Israelites, when they wandered in the wilderness, Numb. 33. 35. That wilderness, probably, now began to be peopled by the Edomites, which it was not then. To them this port had belonged, but, David having subdued the Edomites, it now pertained to the crown of Judah. The fleet traded to Ophir in the East Indies; supposed to be that which is now called *Ceylon*. Gold was the commodity traded for; substantial wealth. It should seem, Solomon had before been Hiram's partner, or put a venture into his ships, which made him a rich return of 120 talents, v. 14. that encouraged him to build a fleet of his own. The success of others, in any employment, should quicken our industry; for *in all labour there is profit.* Solomon sent his own servants for factors, and merchants, and super-cargoes, but hired Tyrians for sailors, for they had *knowledge of the sea*, v. 27. Thus one nation needs another; Providence so ordering it, that there may be mutual commerce and assistance; for not only as Christians, but as men, we are members one of another. The fleet brought home to Solomon 420 talents of gold, v. 28. Canaan, the holy land, the glory of all lands, had no gold in it: which teaches us, that that part of the wealth of this world which is for hoarding and trading is not the best part of it, but that which is more immediately for the present support and comfort of life, our own and others; such were the productions of Canaan. Solomon got much by his merchandise, but, it should seem, David got much more by his conquests; what was Solomon's *four hundred and twenty talents*, to David's *hundred thousand talents of gold*? 1 Chron. 22. 14.—29. 4. Solomon got much by his merchandise, and yet has directed us to a better trade, within reach of the poorest, having assured us, from his own experience of both, that *the merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold*, Prov. 3. 14.

CHAP. X.

Still Solomon looks great, and every thing in this chapter adds to his magnificence. We read nothing indeed of his charity, of no hospitals he built, or alms-houses; he made his kingdom so rich, that it did not need them; yet, no question, many poor were relieved from the abundance of his table. A church he had built, never to be equalled; schools or colleges he need not build any, his own palace is an academy, and his court a rendezvous of wise and learned men, as well as the centre of all the circulating riches of that part of the world. 1. What abundance of wisdom there was there, appears from the application the queen of Sheba made to him, and the great satisfaction she had in her entertainment there, c. 1. . 13. and others likewise, v. 24. 11. What abundance of wealth there was there, appears here by the gold imported, with other things, yearly, v. 14, 15. and in a triennial return, v. 22. Gold presented, v. 25. and gold used in targets and shields, v. 16, 17. and vessels, v. 21. A stately throne made, v. 18. . 20. His chariots and horsemen, v. 26. His trade with Egypt, v. 28, 29. And the great plenty of silver and cedars among his people, v. 27. So that, putting all together, it must be owned, as it is here said, v. 23. that king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches, and for wisdom. Yet what was he to the King of kings? Where Christ is, by his word and Spirit, Behold, a greater than Solomon is there?

1. **A**ND when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions. 2. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. 3. And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not *any* thing hid from the king, which he told her not. 4. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, 5. And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cup-bearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her. 6. And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. 7. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. 8. Happy *are* thy men, happy *are* these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. 9. Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice. 10. And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. 11. And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug-trees, and precious stones. 12. And the king made of the almug-trees pillars for the house of the LORD, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers: there came no such almug-

trees, nor were seen unto this day. 13. And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside *that* which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.

We have here an account of the visit which the queen of Sheba made to Solomon, no doubt, when he was in the height of his piety and prosperity. Our Saviour calls her *the queen of the south*, for Sheba lay south from Canaan. The common opinion is, that it was in Africa; and the Christians in Ethiopia, to this day, are confident that she came from their country, and that Candace was her successor, who is mentioned Acts, 8. 27. But it is more probable that she came from the south part of Arabia the Happy. It should seem, she was a queen-regent, sovereign of her country. Many a kingdom had been prevented of its greatest blessings, if a Salique law had been admitted into its constitution. Observe,

I. On what errand the queen of Sheba came; not to treat of trade or commerce, to adjust the limits of their dominions, to court his alliance for their mutual strength, or his assistance against some common enemy, which are the common occasions of the congress of crowned heads, and their interviews: but she came, 1. To satisfy her curiosity; for she had heard of his fame, especially for wisdom, and she came to prove him, whether he was so great a man as he was reported to be, v. 1. Solomon's fleet sailed near the coast of her country, and, probably, might put in there for fresh water: perhaps it was thus that *she heard of the fame of Solomon*, that he excelled in wisdom all the children of the east, and nothing would serve her, but she would go herself, and know the truth of it. 2. To receive instruction from him; she came to *hear his wisdom*, and thereby to improve her own, Matth. 12. 42. that she might be the better able to govern her own kingdom by his maxims of policy. Those whom God has called to any public employment, particularly in the magistracy and ministry, should, by all means possible, be still improving themselves in that knowledge which will more and more qualify them for it, and enable them to discharge their trust well. But, it should seem, that which she chiefly aimed at, was, to be instructed in the things of God; she was religiously inclined, and had heard not only of the fame of Solomon, but *concerning the name of the Lord*, v. 1. the great name of that God whom Solomon worshipped, and from whom he received his wisdom, and with this God she desired to be better acquainted. Therefore does our Saviour mention her inquiries after God, by Solomon, as an aggravation of the stupidity of those who inquire not after God, by our Lord Jesus Christ, though He, having lain in his bosom, was much better able to instruct them.

II. With what equipage she came; with a very great retinue, agreeable to her rank, intending to try Solomon's wealth and generosity, as well as his wisdom, what entertainment he could, and would, give to a royal visitant, v. 2. Yet she came not as one begging, but brought enough to bear her charges, and abundantly to recompense Solomon for his attention to her; nothing mean or common, but gold, and precious stones, and spices, because she came to trade for wisdom, which she would purchase at any rate.

III. What entertainment Solomon gave her; he despised not the weakness of her sex, blamed her not for leaving her own business at home, to come so long a journey, and put herself and him to so much trouble and expence, merely to satisfy her curiosity; but bid her welcome, and all her train, gave her liberty to put all her questions, though some perhaps were frivolous, some captious, and some over-curious; he allowed her to *commune with him of all that was in her heart*, v. 2. and gave her a satisfactory answer to *all her questions*, v. 3. whether natural, moral, political, or divine. Were they designed to try him? He gave them such turns as abundantly satisfied her of his uncommon knowledge. Were they designed for her own instruction? (as we suppose most of them were,) She received abundant instruction from him, and he made things surprisingly easy, which she apprehended insuperably difficult,

and satisfied her that there was *a divine sentence in the lips of this king*. But he informed her, no doubt, with particular care, concerning God, and his law and instituted worship. He had taken it for granted, *ch. 8. 42.* that *strangers would hear of his great name*, and would come thither to inquire after him; and now that so great a stranger came, we may be sure he was not wanting to assist and encourage her inquiries, and give her a description of the temple, and the officers and services of it, that she might be persuaded to serve the Lord whom she now sought.

IV. How she was affected with what she saw and heard in Solomon's court. Divers things are here mentioned which she admired; the buildings and furniture of his palace; the provision that was made every day for his table. When she saw that, perhaps she wondered where were mouths for all that meat; but when she saw the multitude of his attendants and guests, she was as ready to wonder where was the meat for all those mouths. The orderly sitting of his servants, every one in his place, and the ready attendance of his ministers, without any confusion, their rich liveries, and the propriety with which his cup-bearers waited at his table, these things she admired, as adding much to his magnificence. But, above all these, the first thing mentioned is his wisdom, v. 4. of the transcendency of which she now had incontestable proofs: and the last thing mentioned, which crowned all, is, his piety, the *ascent by which he went up to the house of the Lord*, with what gravity and seriousness, and an air of devotion in his countenance, he appeared, when he went to the temple, to worship God; with as much humility then, as majesty at other times. Many of the ancient versions read it, *The burnt-offerings which he offered in the house of the Lord*; she observed with what a generous bounty he brought his sacrifices, and with what a pious fervour he attended the offering of them; never did she see so much goodness with so much greatness. Every thing was so surprising, that there was no more spirit in her, but she stood amazed; she had never seen the like.

V. How she expressed herself upon this occasion.

1. She owned her expectation far out-done, though it was highly raised by the report she heard, v. 6, 7. She is far from repenting her journey, or calling herself a *fool* for undertaking it, but acknowledges it was well worth her while to come so far, for the sight of that which she could not believe the report of. Usually, things are represented to us, both by common fame and by our own imagination, much greater than we find them when we come to examine them; but here the truth exceeded both fame and fancy. Those who, through grace, are brought to experience the delights of communion with God, will say that the one half was not told them of the pleasures of Wisdom's ways, and the advantages of her gates. Glorified saints, much more, will say that it was a true report which they heard of the happiness of heaven, but that the thousandth part was not told them, 1 Cor. 2. 9.

2. She pronounced them happy that constantly attended him, and waited on him at table, "*Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants*," v. 8. they may improve their own wisdom by hearing thine." She was tempted to envy them, and wish herself one of them. Note, It is a great advantage to be in good families, and to have opportunity of frequent converse with those that are wise, and good, and communicative. Many have this happiness, who know not how to value it. With much more reason may we say this of Christ's servants, *Blessed are they that dwell in his house, they will be still praising him*.

3. She blessed God, the Giver of Solomon's wisdom and wealth, and the Author of his advancement, who had made him king, (1.) In kindness to him, that he might have the larger opportunity of doing good with his wisdom. He *delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel*, v. 9. Solomon's preferment began in the prophet's calling him *Jedidiah*, because the Lord loved him, 2 Sam. 12. 25. It more than doubles our comforts, if we have reason to hope they come from God's delight in us. *It was his pleasure concerning thee*, (so it may be read,) *to set thee on the throne*; not for thy merit's sake, but because it so seemed good unto him. (2.) In kindness to the people, because the Lord loved Israel for ever, designed them a lasting bliss, long to survive him:

that laid the foundations of it. "He has made thee king, not that thou mayest live in pomp and pleasure, and do what thou wilt, but *to do judgment and justice.*" This she kindly reminded Solomon of, and, no doubt, he took it kindly. Both magistrates and ministers must be more solicitous to do the duty of their places, than to secure the honours and profits of them. To this she attributes his prosperity, not to his wisdom, for bread is not always *to the wise*, Eccl. 9. 11. but *whoso doeth judgment and justice*, it shall be *well with him*, Jer. 22. 15. Thus *giving of thanks* must be *made for kings*, for good kings, for such kings; they are what God makes them to be.

VI. How they parted. 1. She made a noble present to Solomon, of *gold and spices*, v. 10. David had foretold concerning Solomon, that *to him should be given of the gold of Sheba*, Ps. 72. 15. The present of gold and spices which the wise men of the east brought to Christ, was signified by this, Matth. 2. 11. Thus she paid for the wisdom she had learned, and did not think she bought it dear. Let those that are taught of God, give him their hearts, and the present will be more acceptable than this of gold and spices. Mention is made of the great abundance Solomon had of his own, notwithstanding she presented, and he accepted, this gold. What we present to Christ he needs not, but will have us so to express our gratitude. The *almug-trees* are here spoken of, v. 11, 12. as extraordinary, because, perhaps, much admired by the queen of Sheba. 2. Solomon was not behind-hand with her. *He gave her whatsoever she asked*, patterns, we may suppose, of those things that were curious, by which she might make the like; or, perhaps, he gave her his precepts of wisdom and piety in writing, *beside that which he gave her of his royal bounty*, v. 13. Thus they who apply themselves to our Lord Jesus, will find him not only greater than Solomon, and wiser, but more kind; whatsoever we ask, it shall be done for us; nay, he will, out of his divine bounty, which infinitely exceeds royal bounty, even Solomon's, do for us *more than we are able to ask or think*.

14. Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold, 15. *Beside that he had* of the merchantmen, and of the traffic of the spice-merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country. 16. And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred *shekels* of gold went to one target. 17. And *he made* three hundred shields of beaten gold; three pound of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. 18. Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold. 19. The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne *was* round behind: and *there were* slays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays. 20. And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom. 21. And all king Solomon's drinking-vessels *were* of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon *were* of pure gold; none *were* of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon. 22. For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. 23. So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the

earth for riches and for wisdom. 24. And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. 25. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. 26. And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem. 27. And the king made silver *to be* in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he *to be* as the sycamore-trees that *are* in the vale, for abundance. 28. And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price. 29. And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred *shekels* of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring *them* out by their means.

We have here a further account of Solomon's prosperity:

1. How he increased his wealth. Though he had much, he still coveted to have more, being willing to try the utmost the things of this world could do to make men happy. 1. *Beside the gold that came from Ophir*, ch. 9. 28. he brought so much into his country from other places, that the whole amounted, every year, to *six hundred and sixty-six talents*, v. 14. an ominous number; compare Rev. 13. 18. and Ezra, 2. 13. 2. He received a great deal, in customs, from the merchants, and, in land-taxes, from the countries his father had conquered, and made tributaries to Israel, v. 15. 3. He was Hiram's partner in a Tharshish fleet, of and for Tyre, which imported, once in three years, not only gold, and silver, and ivory, substantial goods, and serviceable, but apes to play with, and peacocks to please the eye with their feathers, v. 22. I wish this may not be an evidence that Solomon and his people, being overcharged with prosperity, by this time grew childish and wanton. 4. He had presents made him every year, from the neighbouring princes and great men, to engage the continuance of his friendship, not so much because they feared him, or were jealous of him, as because they loved him, and admired his wisdom, had often occasion to consult him as an oracle, and sent him these presents by way of recompence for his advice in politics, and (whether it became his grandeur or generosity or no, we will not inquire) he took all that came, even garments and spices, horses and mules, v. 24, 25. 5. He traded to Egypt for horses, and linen-yarn, (or, as some read it, *linen-cloth*), the staple commodities of that country, and had his own merchants or factors whom he employed in this traffic, and who were accountable to him, v. 28, 29. The custom to be paid to the king of Egypt, for exported chariots and horses out of Egypt, was very high, but (as Bishop Patrick understands it) Solomon, having married his daughter, got him to compound for the customs, so that he could bring them up cheaper than his neighbours, which obliged them to buy them of him, which he was wise enough, no doubt, to make his advantage of. This puts an honour upon the trading part of a nation, and sets a tradesman not so much below a gentleman as some place him, that Solomon, one of the greatest men that ever was, thought it no disparagement to him to deal in trade. In all labour there is profit.

II. What use he made of his wealth. He did not hoard it up in his coffers, that he might have it to look upon, and leave behind him. He has, in his Ecclesiastes, so much exposed the folly of hoarding, that we cannot suppose he should himself be guilty of it. No; God, that had given him riches, and wealth, and honour,

gave him also power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, Eccl. 5. 19.

1. He laid out his gold in fine things for himself, which he might the better be allowed to do, when he had, before, laid out so much in fine things for the house of God. (1.) He made 200 targets, and 300 shields of beaten gold, v. 16, 17. not for service, but for state, to be carried before him, when he appeared in pomp; with us, magistrates have *swords* and *maces* carried before them, as the Romans their *rods* and *axes*, in token of their power to correct and punish the bad, to whom they are to be a terror. But Solomon had *shields* and *targets* carried before him, to signify that he took more pleasure in using his power for the defence and protection of the good, to whom he would be a praise. Magistrates are *shields of the earth*. (2.) He made a stately throne, on which he sat, to give laws to his subjects, audience to ambassadors, and judgment upon appeals, v. 18. 20. It was made of ivory, or elephants' teeth, which was very rich; and yet, as if he had so much gold that he knew not what to do with it, he *overlaid that with gold*, the best gold. Yet, some think, he did not cover the ivory all over, but here and there. He rolled it, flowered it, or inlaid it, with gold. The stays, or arms, of this stately chair were supported by the images of lions in gold, so were the steps and paces by which he went up to it, to be a memorandum to him of that courage and resolution wherewith he ought to execute judgment, not fearing the face of man. *The righteous*, in that post, *is bold as a lion*. (3.) He made all his drinking-vessels, and all the furniture of his table, even at his country-seat, of pure gold, v. 21. He did not grudge himself what he had, but took the credit and comfort of it, such as it was. That is good that does us good.

2. He made it circulate among his subjects, so that the kingdom was as rich as the king; for he had no separate interests of his own to consult, but sought the welfare of his people. Those princes are not governed by Solomon's maxims, who think it policy to keep their subjects poor. Solomon was herein a type of Christ, who is not only rich himself, but enriches all that are his. Solomon was instrumental to bring so much gold into the country, and disperse it, that *silver was nothing accounted of*, v. 21. There was such plenty of it in Jerusalem, that it was as the stones; and cedars, that used to be great rarities, as common as *sycamore trees*, v. 27. Such is the nature of worldly wealth, plenty of it makes it the less valuable; much more should the enjoyment of spiritual riches lessen our esteem of all earthly possessions. If *gold in abundance* would make silver to seem so despicable, shall not wisdom, and grace, and the foretastes of heaven, which are far better than gold, make it seem much more so?

Well; thus rich, thus great, was Solomon, and thus did he exceed all the kings of the earth, v. 23. Now let us remember, (1.) That this was he who, when he was *setting out in the world*, did not ask for the wealth and honour of it, but asked for a *wise and understanding heart*. The more moderate our desires are towards earthly things, the better qualified we are for the enjoyment of them, and the more likely to have them. See, in Solomon's greatness, the performance of God's promise, ch. 3. 13. and let it encourage us to seek first the righteousness of God's kingdom. (2.) That this was he who, having tasted all these enjoyments, wrote a whole book, to shew the vanity of all worldly things, and the vexation of spirit that attends them, their insufficiency to make us happy, and the folly of setting our hearts upon them; and to recommend to us the practice of serious godliness, as that which is the whole of man, and will do infinitely more toward the making of us easy and happy, than all the wealth and power that he was master of; and which, through the grace of God, is within our reach, when the thousandth part of Solomon's greatness is a thousand times more than we can ever be so vain as to promise ourselves in this world.

CHAP. XI.

This chapter begins with as melancholy a but as almost any we find in all the Bible. Hitherto, we have read nothing of Solomon but what was great and

good; but the lustre both of his goodness, and of his greatness, is here sullied and eclipsed, and his sun sets under a cloud. 1. The glory of his piety is stained by his departure from God, and his duty, in his latter days, marrying strange wives, and worshipping strange gods, v. 1. 8. 11. The glory of his prosperity is stained by God's displeasure against him, and the fruits of that displeasure. 1. He sent him an angry message, v. 9. 13. 2. He stirred up enemies, who gave him disturbance; Hadad, v. 14. 22. Rezon, v. 23. 25. 3. He gave away ten tribes of his twelve, from his posterity after him, to Jeroboam, whom therefore he sought in vain to slay, v. 26. 40. And this is all that remains here to be told concerning Solomon, except his death and burial, v. 41. 43. for there is nothing perfect under the sun, but all is so above the sun.

1. **B**UT king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; 2. Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. 3. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. 4. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. 5. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. 7. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 8. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.

This is a sad story, and very surprising, of Solomon's defection and degeneracy.

1. Let us inquire into the occasions and particulars of it. Shall Solomon fall, that was the beauty of Israel, and so great a blessing of his generation? Yes, it is too true, and the scripture is faithful in relating it, and repeating it, and referring to it, long after, Neh. 13. 26. *There was no king like Solomon, who was beloved of his God, yet even him did outlandish women cause to sin: there is the summary of his apostasy; it was the woman that deceived him, and was first in the transgression.*

1. He doted on strange women, many strange women. Here his revolt began. (1.) He gave himself to women, which his mother had particularly cautioned him against, Prov. 31. 3. *Give not thy strength unto women*, (perhaps alluding to Samson, who lost his strength by giving information of it to a woman,) for it is that which, as much as any thing, destroys kings. His father David's fall began with the lusts of the flesh, which he should have taken warning by. The love of women has cast down many wounded, Prov. 7. 26. and many (says Bishop Hall) have had their head broken by their own rib. (2.) He took many women, so many, that at last, they amounted to 700 wives, and 300 concubines; 1000 in all, and not one good one among them, as he himself owns in his penitential sermon, Eccl. 7. 28. for no woman of established virtue would be one of such a set. God had, by his law, particularly forbidden the kings to multiply either horses or wives. Deut. 17. 16, 17. How he broke the former law, in

multiplying horses, and having them *out of Egypt too*, (which was expressly prohibited in that law,) we read, *ch. 10. 29.* and here how he broke the latter, (which proved of more fatal consequence,) in multiplying wives. Note, Lesser sins, made bold with, open the door to greater. David had multiplied wives too much, and, perhaps, that made Solomon presume it lawful. Note, If those that are in reputation for religion, in any thing, set a bad example, they know not what a deal of mischief they may do by it, particularly to their own children. One bad act of a good man may be of more pernicious consequence to others, than twenty of a wicked man. Probably Solomon, when he began to multiply wives, intended not to exceed his father's number; but the way of sin is down-hill, they that are got into it, cannot easily stop themselves. Divine wisdom has appointed one woman for one man, did so at first; and they who do not think one enough, will not think two or three enough; unbridled lust will be unbounded, and the loosened hind will wander endlessly. But this was not all; (3.) They were strange women, Moabites, Ammonites, &c. of the nations which God had particularly forbidden them to intermarry with, *v. 2.* Some think it was in policy that he married these foreigners, by them to get intelligence of the state of those countries. I rather fear it was because the daughters of Israel were too grave and modest for him, and those foreigners pleased him with the looseness and wantonness of their dress, and air, and conversation. Or, perhaps, it was looked upon as a piece of state to have his seraglio, as his other treasures, replenished with that which was far-fetched; as if that were too great an honour for the best of his subjects, which would really have been a disgrace to the meanest of them—to be his mistresses. And, (4.) To complete the mischief, *Solomon clave unto these in love, v. 2.* He not only kept them, but was extravagantly fond of them, set his heart upon them, spent his time among them, thought every thing well they said and did, and despised Pharaoh's daughter, his rightful wife, who had been dear to him, and all the ladies of Israel, in comparison of them. Solomon was master of a great deal of knowledge, but, to what purpose, when he had no better a government of his appetites?

2. He was drawn by them to the worship of strange gods; as Israel to Baal-peor, by the daughters of Moab. This was the bad consequence of his multiplying wives. We have reason to think it impaired his health, and hastened upon him the decays of age; it exhausted his treasure, which, though vast indeed, would be found little enough to maintain the pride and vanity of all these women; perhaps it occasioned him, in his latter end, to neglect his business, by which he lost his supplies from abroad, and was forced, for the keeping up of his grandeur, to burthen his subjects with those taxes which they complained of, *ch. 12. 4.* But none of these consequences were so bad as this, *His wives turned away his heart after other gods, v. 3, 4.*

(1.) He grew cool and indifferent in his own religion, and remiss in the service of the God of Israel. *His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, v. 4.* nor did he follow him fully, *v. 6.* like David. We cannot suppose that he quite cast off the worship of God, much less that he restrained or hindered it; (the temple-service went on as usual;) but he grew less frequent, and less serious, in his ascent to the house of the Lord, and his attendance on his altar; he left his first love, lost his zeal for God, and did not persevere to the end as he had begun; therefore it is said, *he was not perfect*, because he was not constant; and he followed not God fully, because he turned from following him, and did not continue to the end. His father David had many faults, but he never neglected the worship of God, nor grew remiss in that, as Solomon did, his wives using all their arts to divert him from it, and there began his apostacy.

(2.) He tolerated and maintained his wives in their idolatry, and made no scruple of joining with them in it. Pharaoh's daughter was proselyted (as is supposed) to the Jews' religion, but when he began to grow careless in the worship of God himself, he used no means to convert his other wives to it; in complaisance to them, he built chapels for their gods, *v. 7, 8.* maintained their priests,

and occasionally did himself attend their altars; making a jest of it, as if there were no harm in it, but all religions were alike; which (says Bishop Patrick) has been the disease of some great wits; when he humoured one thus, the rest would take it ill, if he did not, in like manner, gratify them, so that he did it for all his wives, *v. 8.* and, at last, came to that degree of impiety, that he set up a high place for Chemosh, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, the mount of Olives, as if to confront the temple which he himself had built; these high places continued here, not utterly demolished, till Josiah did it, *2 Kings, 23. 13.* This is the account here given of Solomon's apostacy.

II. Let us now pause a while, and lament Solomon's fall; and we may justly stand and wonder at it. *How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid,* as the prophet exclaims in a like case, *Jer. 2. 12.* Strange! 1. That Solomon, in his old age, should be ensnared with fleshly lusts; youthful lusts; as we must never presume upon the strength of our resolutions, so neither upon the weakness of our corruptions, so as to be secure and off our guard. 2. That so wise a man as Solomon was, so famed for a quick understanding and sound judgment, should suffer himself to be made such a fool of by these foolish women. 3. That one who had so often and so plainly warned others of the danger of the love of women, should himself be so wretchedly bewitched with it; it is easier to see a mischief, and to shew it others, than to shun it ourselves. 4. That so good a man, so zealous for the worship of God, who had been conversant with divine things, and who prayed that excellent prayer at the dedication of the temple, should do these sinful things—Is this Solomon? Are all his wisdom and devotion come to this, at last? Never was gallant ship so wrecked; never was crown so profaned.

What shall we say to this? (1.) Why God permitted it, it is not for us to inquire; his way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters; he knew how to bring glory to himself out of it. God foresaw it, when he said concerning him that should build the temple, *If he commit iniquity, &c. 2 Sam. 7. 14.* (2.) But it concerns us to inquire what good use we may make of it. [1.] Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall; we see how weak we are of ourselves, without the grace of God; let us therefore live in a constant dependence on that grace. [2.] See the danger of a prosperous condition, and how hard it is to overcome the temptations of it; Solomon, like Jeshurun, waxed fat, and then kicked; the food convenient, which Agur prayed for, is safer and better than the food abundant, which Solomon was even surfeited with. [3.] See what need those have to stand upon their guard, who have made a great profession of religion, and shewed themselves forward and zealous in devotion, because the Devil will set upon them most violently, and if they misbehave, the reproach is the greater: it is the evening that commends the day; let us therefore fear, lest, having run well, we seem to come short.

9. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, 10. And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. 11. Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. 12. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it, for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. 13. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David

my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, which I have chosen.

Here is,

I. God's anger against Solomon for his sin; the thing he did *displeased the Lord*: time was when the Lord *loved Solomon*, 2 Sam. 12. 24. and delighted in him, ch. 10. 9. but now *the Lord was angry with Solomon*, v. 9. for there was in his sin, 1. The most base ingratitude that could be; he turned from the Lord, which had appeared unto him twice, once before he began to build the temple, ch. 3. 5. and once after he had dedicated it, ch. 9. 2. God keeps account of the gracious visits he makes us, whether we do or no; knows how often he has appeared to us, and for us, and will remember it against us, if we *turn from him*. God's appearing to Solomon was such a sensible confirmation of his faith, as should have for ever prevented his worshipping of any other god; it was also such a distinguishing favour, and put such an honour upon him, as he ought never to have forgotten, especially considering what God said to him in both these appearances. 2. The most wilful disobedience: this was the very thing concerning which God had commanded him—that he should not go after other gods, yet he was not kept right by such an express admonition, v. 10. Those who have dominion over men are apt to forget God's dominion over them; and, while they demand obedience from their inferiors, to deny it to Him who is the Supreme.

II. The message he sent him hereupon v. 11. *The Lord said unto Solomon*, (it is likely by a prophet,) that he must expect to smart for his apostacy. And here, 1. The sentence is just, that, since he had revolted from God, part of his kingdom should revolt from his family: he had given God's glory to the creature, and therefore God would give his crown to his servant, "*I will rend the kingdom from thee*, in thy posterity, and will give it to thy servant, who shall bear rule over much of that for which thou hast laboured." This was a great mortification to Solomon, who pleased himself, no doubt, with the prospect of the entail of his rich kingdom upon his heirs for ever; sin brings ruin upon families, cuts off entails, alienates estates, and lays men's honour in the dust. 2. Yet the mitigations of it are very kind, for David's sake, v. 12, 13. that is, for the sake of the promise made to David; thus, all the favour God shews to man is for *Christ's sake*, and for the sake of the covenant made with him; the kingdom shall be rent from Solomon's house, but, (1.) *Not immediately*; Solomon shall not live to see it done, but it shall be rent out of the hand of his son, a son that was born to him by one of his strange wives, for his mother was an Ammonitess, (1 Kings, 14. 31.) and probably had been a promoter of idolatry. What comfort can a man take in leaving children and an estate behind him, if he do not leave a blessing behind him? Yet, if judgments be coming, it is a favour to us if they come not in our days, as 2 Kings, 20. 19. (2.) *Not wholly*; one tribe, that of Judah, the strongest and most numerous, shall remain to the house of David, v. 13. for Jerusalem's sake, which David built, and for the sake of the temple there, which Solomon built, these shall not go into other hands; Solomon did not quickly nor wholly turn away from God, therefore God did not quickly nor wholly take the kingdom from him.

Upon this message, which God graciously sent to Solomon, to awaken his conscience, and bring him to repentance, we have reason to hope that he humbled himself before God, confessed his sin, begged pardon, and returned to his duty; that he then published his repentance in the book of Ecclesiastes, where he bitterly laments his own folly and madness, ch. 7. 25, 26. and warns others to take heed of the like evil courses, and to *fear God*, and keep his commandments, in consideration of the judgment to come, which, it is likely, had made him tremble, as it did Felix; that penitential sermon was as true an indication of a heart broken for sin, and turned from it, as David's penitential psalms, though of another nature; God's grace in his people works variously; thus, though Solomon fell, *he was not utterly cast down*; what God had said to David concerning him was

fulfilled, *I will chasten him with the rod of men, but my mercy shall not depart from him*, 2 Sam. 7. 14, 15. Though God may suffer those whom he loves to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it. Solomon's defection, though it was much his reproach, and a great blemish to his personal character, yet did not so far break in upon the character of his reign, but that it was afterward made the pattern of a good reign, 2 Chron. 11. 17. where they are said to do well, while *they walked in the way of David and Solomon*. But, though we have all this reason to hope he repented, and found mercy, yet the Holy Ghost did not think fit expressly to record it, but left it doubtful, for warning to others, not to sin upon presumption of repenting, for it is but a peradventure whether *God will give them repentance*, or, if he do, whether he will give the evidence of it to themselves or others; great sinners may recover themselves, and have the benefit of their repentance, and yet be denied both the comfort and credit of it; the guilt may be taken away, and yet not the reproach.

14. And the LORD stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he *was* of the king's seed in Edom. 15. For it came to pass, when David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the host was gone up to bury the slain, after he had smitten every male in Edom; 16. (For six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom;) 17. That Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him, to go into Egypt; Hadad being yet a little child. 18. And they arose out of Midian, and came to Paran: and they took men with them out of Paran, and they came to Egypt, unto Pharaoh king of Egypt; which gave him an house, and appointed him victuals, and gave him land. 19. And Hadad found great favour in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him to wife the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen. 20. And the sister of Tahpenes bare him Gennbath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house: and Gennubath was in Pharaoh's household among the sons of Pharaoh. 21. And when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the host was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to mine own country. 22. Then Pharaoh said unto him, But what hast thou lacked with me, that, behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country! And he answered, Nothing: howbeit let me go in any wise. 23. And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah, which fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah: 24. And he gathered men unto him, and became captain over a band, when David slew them of Zobah, and they went to Damascus, and dwelt therein, and reigned in Damascus. 25. And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad did; and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.

While Solomon kept close to God, and to his duty, there was no adversary nor evil occurrent, ch. 5. 4. nothing to create him any

disturbance or uneasiness in the least, but here we have an account of two adversaries that appeared against him, inconsiderable, and that could not have done any thing worth taking notice of, if Solomon had not first made God his Enemy. What hurt could Hadad or Rezon have done to so great and powerful a king as Solomon was, if he had not, by sin, made himself mean and weak? And then those little people menace and insult him. If God be on our side, we need not fear the greatest adversary; but, if he be against us, he can make us fear the least, and the very grasshopper shall be a burthen.

Both these adversaries God stirred up, v. 14, 23. Though they themselves were moved by principles of ambition or revenge, God made use of them to serve his design of correcting Solomon. The principal judgment threatened was deferred, namely, the rending of the kingdom from him; but he himself was made to feel the smart of the rod, for his greater humiliation. Note, Whoever are, any way, adversaries to us, we must take notice of the hand of God stirring them up to be so, as he made Shimei curse David; we must look through the instruments of our trouble to the Author of it, and hear the Lord's controversy in it.

Both these adversaries had the original of their enmity to Solomon and Israel laid in David's time, and in his conquests of their respective countries, v. 15, 24. Solomon had the benefit and advantage of his father's successes, both in the enlargement of his dominion and the increase of his treasure, and would never have known any thing but the benefit of them, if he had kept close to God; but now he finds evils to balance the advantages, and that David had made himself enemies, which were thorns in his sides. They that are too free in giving provocation, ought to consider, that perhaps it may be remembered in time to come, and returned with interest to their's after them; having so few friends in this world, it is our wisdom not to make ourselves more enemies than we needs must.

1. Hadad, an Edomite, was an adversary to Solomon; we are not told what he did against him, nor which way he gave him disturbance, only, in general, that he was an adversary to him; but we are told, (1.) What induced him to bear Solomon a grudge. David had conquered Edom, 2 Sam. 8. 14. Joab put all the males to the sword, v. 15, 16. a terrible execution he made, avenging on Edom their old enmity to Israel, yet perhaps with too great a severity. While Joab was burying the slain, (for he left not any alive of their own people to bury them, and buried they must be, or they would be an annoyance to the country, Ezek. 39. 12.) Hadad, a branch of the royal family, then a little child, was taken and preserved by some of the king's servants, and brought to Egypt, v. 17. They halted by the way, in Midian first, and then in Paran, where they furnished themselves with men, not to fight for them, or force their passage, but to attend them, that their young master might come into Egypt with an equipage agreeable to his quality; there he was kindly sheltered and entertained by Pharaoh, as a distressed prince, was well provided for, and so recommended himself, that, in process of time, he married the queen's sister, v. 9. and by her had a child, which the queen herself conceived such a kindness for, that she brought him up in Pharaoh's house, among the king's children. (2.) What enabled him to do Solomon a mischief. He returned to his own country again, upon the death of David and Joab, in which, it should seem, he settled, and remained quiet, while Solomon continued wise and watchful for the public good, but from which he had opportunity of making inroads upon Israel, when Solomon, having sinned away his wisdom, as Samson did his strength, (and in the same way,) grew careless of public affairs, was off his guard himself, and had forfeited the divine protection. What vexation he gave to Solomon, we are not here told, but only how loath Pharaoh was to part with him, and how earnestly he solicited his stay, v. 22. *What hast thou lacked with me?* "Nothing," says Hadad; "but, however, let me go to my own country, my native air, my native soil." Peter Martyr has a pious reflection upon this: "That heaven is our home, and we ought to keep up a holy affection to that, and desire towards it, even then when our world, the place of our banishment, smiles most upon us."

Does it ask, *What have you lacked, that you are so willing to be gone?* We may answer, "Nothing that the world can do for us, but, however, let us go thither, where our hope, and honour, and treasure, are."

2. Rezon, a Syrian, was another adversary to Solomon; when David conquered the Syrians, he headed the remains, lived at large by spoil and rapine, till Solomon grew careless, and then he got possession of Damascus, reigned there, v. 24. and over the country about, v. 25. and he created troubles to Israel, probably in conjunction with Hadad, all the days of Solomon, namely, after his apostacy; or, he was an enemy to Israel during all Solomon's reign, and upon all occasions vented his then impotent malice against them; but, till Solomon's revolt, when his defence was departed from him, he could not do them any mischief; it is said of him, that *he abhorred Israel*; other princes loved and admired Israel and Solomon, and courted their friendship, but here was one that abhorred them. The greatest and best of princes and people, that are ever so much respected by the most, yet perhaps will be hated and abhorred by some.

26. And Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up *his* hand against the king. 27. And this *was* the cause that he lifted up *his* hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, *and* repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. 28. And the man Jeroboam *was* a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. 29. And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two *were* alone in the field. 30. And Ahijah caught the new garment that *was* on him, and rent it *in* twelve pieces: 31. And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: 32. (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) 33. Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do *that which is* right in mine eyes, and to *keep* my statutes and my judgments, as *did* David his father. 34. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: 35. But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, *even* ten tribes. 36. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusa-

lem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. 37. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. 38. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do *that is* right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. 39. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever. 40. Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

We have, here, the first mention of that infamous name, *Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that made Israel to sin*; he is here brought upon the stage as an adversary to Solomon, whom God had expressly told, v. 11. that he would give the greatest part of his kingdom to his servant, and Jeroboam was the man. We have here an account,

I. Of his extraction, v. 26. he was of the tribe of Ephraim, the next in honour to Judah; his mother was a widow, to whom Providence had made up the loss of a husband in a son that was active and ingenious, and (we may suppose) a great support and comfort to her.

II. Of his elevation. It was Solomon's wisdom, when he had work to do, to employ proper persons in it; he observed Jeroboam to be a very industrious young man, one that minded his business, took a pleasure in it, and did it with all his might, and therefore he gradually advanced him, till, at length, he made him receiver-general for the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, or perhaps put him into an office equivalent to that of lord-lieutenant of those two counties, for he was ruler of the burthen, or tribute, that is, either of the taxes, or of the militia, of the house of Joseph. Note, Industry is the way to preferment; *Seest thou a man diligent in his business*, that will take care and pains, and go through with it? He shall *stand before kings*, and not always be on the level with mean men. Observe a difference between David, and both his predecessor, and his successor; when Saul saw a *valiant man*, he took him to himself, 1 Sam. 14. 52. when Solomon saw an *industrious man*, he preferred him; but David's eyes were upon the *faithful in the land*, that they might dwell with him: if he saw a godly man, he preferred him, for he was a man after God's own heart, whose countenance beholds the upright.

III. Of his designation to the government of the ten tribes, after the death of Solomon. Some think he was himself plotting against Solomon, and contriving to rise to the throne, that he was turbulent and aspiring. The Jews say, that, when he was employed by Solomon in building Millo, he took opportunities of reflecting upon Solomon as oppressive to his people, and suggesting that which would alienate them from his government; it is not indeed probable that he should say much to that purport, for Solomon would have got notice of it, and it would have hindered his preferment; but it is plainly intimated that he had it in his thoughts, for the prophet tells him, v. 37. *Thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth*: but this was the cause, or, rather, this was the story, of his lifting up of his hand against the king; he made him ruler over the tribes of Joseph, and, as he was going to take possession of his government, he was told by a prophet, in God's name, that he should be king, which inboldened him to aim high, and, in some instances, to oppose the king, and give him vexation.

1. The prophet, by whom this message was sent, was, *Ahijah of Shiloh*; we shall read of him again, ch. 14. 2. It seems, Shiloh was not so perfectly forsaken and forgotten of God, but that, in

remembrance of the former days, it was blessed with a prophet; he delivered himself to Jeroboam in the way, his servants being, probably, ordered to retire, as in a like case, 1 Sam. 9. 27. when Samuel delivered his message to Saul; God's word was not the less sacred and sure, for being delivered to him thus obscurely, under a hedge, it may be.

2. The sign by which it was represented to him, was, the rending of a garment into twelve pieces, and giving him ten, v. 30. It is not certain whether the garment was Jeroboam's, as it is commonly taken for granted, or Ahijah's, which is more probable; *he* (that is, the prophet) *clad himself with a new garment*, on purpose that he might with it give him a sign. The rending of the kingdom from Saul was signified by the rending of Samuel's mantle, not Saul's, 1 Sam. 15. 27, 28. And it was more significant, to give him ten pieces of that which was not his own before, than of that which was; the prophets, both true and false, used such signs, even in the New Testament, as Agabus, Acts, 21. 11.

3. The message itself, which is very particular.

(1.) He assures him that he should be king over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, v. 31. The meanness of his extraction and employment should be no hinderance to his advancement, when the God of Israel says, (by whom kings reign,) *I will give ten tribes unto thee*.

(2.) He tells him the reason; not for his good character or deserts, but for the chastising of Solomon's apostacy, because he, and his family, and many of his people with him, *have forsaken me, and worshipped other gods*, v. 33. It was because they had done ill, not because he was likely to do much better; thus Israel must know that it is not *for their righteousness*, that they are made masters of Canaan, but for the wickedness of the Canaanites, Dent. 9. 4. Jeroboam did not deserve so good a post, but Israel deserved so bad a prince. In telling him that the reason why he rent the kingdom from the house of Solomon, was, because they had forsaken God, he warns him to take heed of sinning away his preferment, in like manner.

(3.) He limits his expectations to the ten tribes only, and to them, in reversion, after the death of Solomon; lest he should aim at the whole, and give immediate disturbance to Solomon's government. He is here told, [1.] That two tribes (called here *one tribe*, because little Benjamin was, in a manner, lost in the thousands of Judah) should remain sure to the house of David, and he must never make any attempt upon them; *He shall have one tribe*, v. 32. and again, v. 36. *that David may have a lamp*, that is, a shining name and memory, Ps. 132. 17. and his family, as a royal family, may not be extinct. He must not think that David was rejected, as Saul was; no, God would not take his loving-kindness from him, as he did from Saul. The house of David must be supported and kept in reputation, for all this, because out of it the Messiah must arise. *Destroy it not, for that Blessing is in it*. [2.] That Solomon must keep possession during his life, v. 34, 35. Jeroboam, therefore, must not offer to dethrone him, but wait with patience till his day shall come to fall. Solomon shall be *prince, all the days of his life*, not for his own sake, (he had forfeited his crown to the justice of God,) but for *David my servant's sake, because he kept my commandments*. Children that do not tread in their parents' steps, yet often fare the better in this world for their good parents' piety.

(4.) He is given to understand that he will be upon his good behaviour. The grant of the crown must run *quandiu se bene gesserit—during good behaviour*. If thou wilt do what is right in my sight, *I will build thee a sure house*, and not otherwise, v. 38. intimating, that, if he forsook God, even his advancement to the throne would, in time, lay his family in the dust; whereas, the seed of David, though afflicted, should not be afflicted for ever, v. 39. but should flourish again, as it did in many of the illustrious kings of Judah, who reigned in glory, when Jeroboam's family was extirpated.

IV. Jeroboam's flight into Egypt, hereupon, v. 40. Some way or other, Solomon came to know of all this; probably, from Jeroboam's own talk of it: he could not conceal it, as Saul did,

nor keep his own counsel; if he had, he might have staid in his own country, and been preparing there for his future advancement; but letting it be known, 1. Solomon foolishly sought to kill his successor. Had not he taught others, that, whatever devices are in men's hearts, *the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand?* And yet does he himself think to defeat that counsel? 2. Jeroboam prudently withdrew into Egypt; though God's promise would have secured him any where, yet he would use means for his own preservation, and was content to live in exile and obscurity for a while, being sure of a kingdom at last. And shall not *we* be so, who have a better kingdom in reserve?

41. And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, *are* they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? 42. And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. 43. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.

We have here the conclusion of Solomon's story, and, in it, 1. Reference is had to another history then extant, but (not being divinely inspired) since lost, *the book of the acts of Solomon*, v. 41. Probably, this book was written by a chronologer or historiographer, whom he employed to write his annals, out of which the sacred writer extracted what God saw fit to transmit to the church. 2. A summary of the years of his reign, v. 42. *He reigned in Jerusalem*, (not, as his father, part of his time in Hebron, and part in Jerusalem,) *over all Israel*, (not, as his son, and his father in the beginning of his time, over Judah only,) *forty years*. His reign was as long as his father's, but not his life. Sin shortened his days. 3. His death and burial, and successor, v. 43. (1.) He followed his fathers to the grave; slept with them, and was buried in David's burying-place, with honour, no doubt. (2.) His son followed him in the throne. Thus the graves are filling with the generations that go off, and houses are filling with those that are growing up. As the grave cries, "Give, give;" so *land* is never lost for want of an heir.

CHAP. XII.

The glory of the kingdom of Israel was in its height and perfection, in Solomon; it was long in coming to it, but it soon declined, and began to sink and wither in the very next reign, as we find in this chapter, where we have the kingdom divided, and thereby weakened, and made little, in comparison with what it had been. Here is, I. Rehoboam's accession to the throne, and Jeroboam's return out of Egypt, v. 1, 2. II. The people's petition to Rehoboam for the redress of grievances, and the rough answer he gave, by the advice of his young counsellors, to that petition, v. 3..15. III. The revolt of the ten tribes, thereupon, and their setting up of Jeroboam, v. 16..20. IV. Rehoboam's attempt to reduce them, and the prohibition God gave to that attempt, v. 21. 21. V. Jeroboam's establishment of his government upon idolatry, v. 25..33. Thus did Judah become weak, being deserted by their brethren: and Israel, by deserting the house of the Lord.

1. **A**ND Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. 2. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;) 3. That they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, 4. Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. 5. And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then

come again to me. And the people departed. 6. And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? 7. And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever. 8. But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: 9. And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? 10. And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little *finger* shall be thicker than my father's loins. 11. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. 12. So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. 13. And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; 14. And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father *also* chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. 15. Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Solomon had 1000 wives and concubines, yet we read but of one son he had to bear up his name, and he a fool. It is said, Hos. 4. 10. *They shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase.* Sin is a bad way of building up a family. Rehoboam was the son of the wisest of men, yet did not inherit his father's wisdom, and then it stood him in little stead to inherit his father's throne. Neither wisdom nor grace runs in the blood. Solomon came to the crown very young, yet he was then a wise man: Rehoboam at forty years old, when men will be wise, if ever they will, yet he was then foolish. Wisdom does not go by age, nor is it the multitude of years, or the advantage of education, that reaches it. Solomon's court was a mart of wisdom, and the rendezvous of learned men, and Rehoboam the darling of the court; and yet all was not sufficient to make him a wise man: *The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.* No dispute is made of Rehoboam's succession; upon the death of his father, he was immediately proclaimed. But,

I. The people desire a treaty with him at Shechem, and he condescends to meet them there. 1. Their pretence was, to make him king, but the design was, to unmake him. They would give him a public inauguration, in another place than the city of David,

that he might not seem to be king of Judah only. They have ten parts in him, and will have him among themselves, for once, that they might recognize his title. 2. The place was ominous; at *Shechem*, where Abimelech set up himself, Judg. 9. Yet it had been famous for the convention of the states there, Josh. 24. 1. Rehoboam, we may suppose, knew of the threatening, that the kingdom should be rent from him, and hoped, by going to Shechem, and treating there with the ten tribes, to prevent it; yet it proves the most impolitic thing he could do, and hastens the rupture.

II. The representatives of the tribes address him, praying to be eased of the taxes they were burthened with. The meeting being appointed, they sent for Jeroboam out of Egypt to come and be their speaker; which they needed not to have done, he knew what God had designed him for, and would have come, though he had not been sent for, for now was his time to expect the possession of the promised crown. In their address, 1. They complain of the last reign; *Thy father made our yoke grievous*, v. 4. They complain not of his father's idolatry, and revolt from God; that which was the greatest grievance of all, was none to them: so careless and indifferent were they in the matters of religion, as if God or Moloch were all one, so they might but live at ease, and pay no taxes. Yet the complaint was groundless and unjust. Never did people live more at ease than they did, or in greater plenty. Did they pay taxes? It was to advance the strength and magnificence of their kingdom. If Solomon's buildings cost them money, they cost them no blood, as war would do. Were many servile hands employed about them? They were not the hands of the Israelites. Were the taxes a burthen? How could that be, when Solomon imported bullion in such plenty, that silver was, in a manner, as common as the stones? So that they did but render to Solomon the things that were Solomon's. Nay, suppose there was some hardship put upon them, were they not told before, that this would be the manner of the king, and yet they would have one. The best government cannot secure itself from reproach and censure, no not Solomon's. Factioned spirits will never want something to complain of. I know nothing in Solomon's administration that could make the people's yoke grievous, unless, perhaps, the women, whom in his latter days he doted on, were connived at in oppressing them. 2. They demanded relief from him, and, on that condition, will continue in their allegiance to the house of David. They asked not to be wholly free from paying taxes, but to have the burthen made lighter; that was all their care, to save their money, whether their religion was supported, and the government protected, or no. All seek their own.

III. Rehoboam consulted with those about him, concerning the answer he should give to this address. It was prudent to take advice, especially having so weak a head of his own; yet, upon this occasion, it was impolitic to take time himself to consider, for thereby he gave time to the disaffected people to ripen things for a revolt; and his deliberating, in so plain a case, would be improved as an indication of the little concern he had for the people's ease. They saw what they must expect, and prepared accordingly. Now,

1. The grave experienced men of his council advised him, by all means, to give the petitioners a kind answer, to promise them fair, and, this day, this critical day, to serve them, that is, to tell them that he was their servant, and that he would redress all their grievances, and make it his business to please them, and make them easy. "Deny thyself" (say they) "so far as to do this, for this once, and they will be *thy servants for ever*." When the present heat is allayed with a soft answer, and the assembly dismissed, their cooler thoughts will reconcile and fix them to Solomon's family still." Note, The way to rule, is to serve; to do good, and stoop to do it; to become all things to all men, and so win their hearts. Those in power, really sit highest, and easiest, and safest, to do so.

2. The young men of his council were hot and haughty, and they advised him to return a severe and threatening answer to the people's demands. It was an instance of Rehoboam's weakness,

(1.) That he did not prefer aged counsellors, but had a better opinion of the young men that had grown up with him, and with whom he was familiar, v. 8. Days should speak. It was a folly for him to think, that, because they had been his agreeable companions in the sports and pleasures of his youth, they were therefore fit to have the management of the affairs of his kingdom. Great wits have not always the most wisdom; nor are those to be relied on as our best friends, that know how to make us merry, for that will not make us happy. It is of great consequence to young people, that are setting out in the world, to have suitable persons to associate with, accommodate themselves to, and depend upon for advice. If they reckon those that feed their pride, gratify their vanity, and further them in their pleasures, their best friends, they are already marked for ruin. (2.) That he did not affect moderate counsels, but was pleased with those that put him upon harsh and rigorous methods, and advised him to double the taxes, whether there was occasion for it or no, and to tell them, in plain terms, that he would do so, v. 10, 11. They thought the old men expressed themselves but dully, v. 7. They affect to be witty in their advice, and value themselves on that. The old men did not undertake to put words into Rehoboam's mouth, only counselled him to speak good words; but the young men will furnish him with very pointed and pert similitudes; *My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins*, &c. That is not always the best sense, that is best-worded.

IV. He answered the people according to the counsel of the young men, v. 14, 15. He affected to be haughty and imperious, and fancied he could carry all before him with a high hand, and therefore would rather run the risk of losing them, than deny himself so far as to give them good words. Note, Many ruin themselves by consulting their humour more than their interest.

See, 1. How Rehoboam was infatuated in his counsels. He could not have acted more foolishly and impolitely. (1.) He owned their reflections upon his father's government to be true, *My father made your yoke heavy*; and therein was unjust to his father's memory, which he might easily have vindicated from the imputation. (2.) He fancied himself better able to manage them, and impose upon them, than his father was; not considering that he was vastly inferior to him in capacity. Could he think to support the blemishes of his father's reign, who could never pretend to come near the glories of it? (3.) He threatened not only to squeeze them by taxes, but to chastise them by cruel laws, and severe executions of them; which should not be as whips only, but as scorpions, whips with rowels in them, that will fetch blood at every lash. In short, he would use them as brute-beasts, load them, and beat them, at his pleasure; not caring whether they loved him or no, he would make them fear him. (4.) He gave this provocation to a people that by long ease and prosperity were made wealthy, and strong, and proud, and would not be trampled upon, as a poor cowed dispirited people may; that were now disposed to revolt, and had one ready to head them. Never surely, was man so blinded by pride, and affectation of arbitrary power, than which nothing is more fatal.

2. How God's counsels were hereby fulfilled. It was *from the Lord*, v. 15. He left Rehoboam to his own folly, and *hid from his eyes the things which belonged to his peace*, that the kingdom might be rent from him. Note, God serves his own wise and righteous purposes by the imprudences and iniquities of men, and snares sinners in the work of their own hands. They that lose the kingdom of heaven, throw it away, as Rehoboam did his, by their own wilfulness and folly.

16. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither *have we inheritance in the son of Jesse*: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. 17. But *as for the children of Israel which*

dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. 18. Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who *was* over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. 19. So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. 20. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. 21. And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. 22. But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 23. Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, 24. Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house: for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD.

We have here the rending of the kingdom of the ten tribes from the house of David; to effect which,

1. The people were bold and resolute in their revolt. They highly resented the provocation that Rehoboam had given them, were incensed at his menaces, concluded that that government would, in the progress of it, be intolerably grievous, which, in the beginning of it, was very haughty; and therefore immediately came to this resolve, one and all, *What portion have we in David?* v. 16. They speak here very unbecomingly of David, that great benefactor of their nation, calling him *the son of Jesse*, no greater a man than his neighbours. How soon are good men, and their good services to the public, forgotten! The rashness of their resolution was also much to be blamed; in time, and with prudent management, they might have settled the original contract with Rehoboam, to mutual satisfaction. Had they inquired *who* gave Rehoboam this advice, and taken a course to remove those evil counsellors from about him, the rupture might have been prevented: otherwise, their jealousy for their liberty and property well became that free people. *Israel is not a servant, is not a home-born slave; why should he be spoiled?* Jer. 2. 14. They are willing to be ruled, but not to be ridden; protection draws allegiance, but destruction cannot. No marvel that *Israel falls away from the house of David*, v. 19. if the house of David fall away from the great ends of their advancement, which was to be *ministers of God to them for good*. But thus to rebel against the seed of David, whom God had advanced to the kingdom, (entailing it on his seed,) and to set up another king, in opposition to that family, was a great sin; see 2 Chron. 13. 5. 8. To this God refers, Hos. 8. 4. *They have set up kings, but not by me*. And it is here mentioned, to the praise of the tribe of Judah, that they *followed the house of David*, v. 17, 20. and, for aught that appears, they found Rehoboam better than his word, nor did he rule with the rigour which, at first, he threatened.

II. Rehoboam was imprudent in the further management of this

affair, and more and more infatuated. Having foolishly thrown himself into a quicksand, he sunk the further in, with plunging to get out. 1. He was very unadvised, in sending Adoram, who was *over the tribute*, to treat with them, v. 18. The tribute was the thing, and, for the sake of that, Adoram was the person, they most complained of; the very sight of him, whose name was odious among them, exasperated them, and made them outrageous. He was one whom they could not so much as give a patient hearing to, but *stoned him to death* in a popular tumult. Rehoboam was now as unhappy in the choice of his ambassador, as before of his counsellors. 2. Some think he was also unadvised, in quitting his ground, and making so much haste to Jerusalem, for thereby he deserted his friends, and gave advantage to his enemies, who had gone to their tents indeed, v. 16. in disgust, but did not offer to make Jeroboam king, till Rehoboam was gone, v. 20. See how soon this foolish prince went from one extreme to the other. He hectorated, and talked big, when he thought all was his own, but sunk, and looked very mean, when he saw himself in danger. It is common for those that are most haughty in their prosperity, to be most abject in adversity.

III. God forbade his attempt to recover what he had lost by the sword. What was done was of God, who would not suffer, 1. That it should be undone again, as it would be, if Rehoboam got the better, and reduced the ten tribes. Nor, 2. That more should be done to the prejudice of the house David, as would be, if Jeroboam should get the better, and conquer the two tribes. The thing must rest as it is, and therefore God forbids the battle.

(1.) It was brave in Rehoboam to design the reducing of the revolted by force. His courage came to him, when he was come to Jerusalem, v. 21. There he thought himself among his fast friends, who generously adhered to him, and appeared for him. Judah and Benjamin (who feared the Lord and the king, and meddled not with them that were given to change) presently raised an army of 180,000 men, for the recovery of their king's right to the ten tribes, and were resolved to stand by him (as we say) with their lives and fortunes; having either not such cause, or rather not such a disposition, to complain, as the rest had.

(2.) It was more brave in Rehoboam to resist, when God, by a prophet, ordered him to lay down his arms. He would not lose a kingdom tamely, for then he had been unworthy the title of a prince; and yet he would not contend for it, in opposition to God, for then he had been unworthy the title of an Israelite. To proceed in this war, would be not only *to fight against their brethren*, v. 24. whom they ought to love, but to fight against their God, whom they ought to submit to; *This thing is from me*. These two considerations should reconcile us to our losses and troubles, that God is the Author of them, and our brethren are the instruments of them; let us not therefore meditate revenge. Rehoboam, and his people, *hearkened to the word of the Lord*, disbanded the army, and acquiesced. Though, in human probability, they had a fair prospect of success; for their army was numerous and resolute, Jeroboam's party weak and unsettled; though it would turn to their reproach among their neighbours, to lose so much of their strength, and never have one push for it, to make a flourish, and do nothing; yet, [1.] They regarded the command of God, though sent by a poor prophet. When we know God's mind, we must submit to it, how much soever it crosses our own mind. [2.] They consulted their own interest; concluding that, though they had all the advantages, even that of right, on their side, yet they could not prosper, if they fought in disobedience to God: it was better to sit still, than to rise up and fall. In the next reign, God allowed them to fight, and gave them victory, 2 Chron. 13. but not now.

25. Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. 26. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: 27. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem,

then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. 28. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 29. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan. 30. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to *worship* before the one, *even* unto Dan. 31. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. 32. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Beth-el, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Beth-el the priests of the high places which he had made. 33. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Beth-el, the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even* in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

We have here the beginning of the reign of Jeroboam. He built Shechem first, and then Penuel—beautified and fortified them, and, probably, had a palace in each of them for himself, c. 25. the former in Ephraim, the latter in Gad, on the other side Jordan. This might be proper; but he formed another project for the establishing of his kingdom, which was fatal to the interests of religion in it.

1. That which he designed, was, by some effectual means, to secure those to himself who had now chosen him their king, and to prevent their return to the house of David, v. 26, 27. It seems, 1. He was jealous of the people, afraid that, some time or other, they would kill him, and go again to Rehoboam. Many that have been advanced in one tumult, have been hurled down in another. Jeroboam could not put any confidence in the affections of his people, though now they seemed extremely fond of him: for what is got by wrong and usurpation, cannot be enjoyed or kept with any security or satisfaction. 2. He was distrustful of the promise of God; could not take his word, that, if he would keep close to his duty, *God would build him a sure house*, ch. 11. 38. but he would contrive ways and means, and sinful ones too, for his own safety. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency is at the bottom of all our treacherous departures from him.

II. The way he took to do this, was, by keeping the people from going up to Jerusalem to worship. That was the place God had chosen to put his name there; Solomon's temple was there, which God had, in the sight of all Israel, and in the memory of many now living, taken solemn possession of, in a cloud of glory. At the altar there, the priests of the Lord attended, there all Israel were to keep the feasts, and thither they were to bring their sacrifices.

Now, 1. Jeroboam apprehended, that, if the people continued to do this, they would, in time, return to the house of David, allured by the magnificence both of the court, and of the temple. If they cleave to their old religion, they will go back to their old king. We may suppose, if he had treated with Rehoboam for the safe conduct of himself and his people to and from Jerusalem, at the times appointed for their solemn feasts, it would not have been

denied him; therefore he fears not their being driven back by force, but their going back to Rehoboam.

2. He therefore dissuaded them from going up to Jerusalem, pretending to consult their ease, "*It is too much for you to go so far to worship God*, v. 23. it is a heavy yoke, and it is time to shake it off, *you have gone long enough to Jerusalem*." So some read it; "The temple, now that you are used to it, does not appear so glorious and sacred as it did at first:" (sensible glories wither, by degrees, in men's estimation:) "you have freed yourselves from other burthens, free yourselves from this; why should we now be tied to one place any more than in Samuel's time?"

3. He provided for the assistance of their devotion at home. Upon consultation had with some of his politicians, he came to this resolve, To set up two golden calves, as tokens or signs of the divine presence; and persuade the people they might as well stay at home, and offer sacrifice to those, as go to Jerusalem to worship before the ark; and some are so charitable as to think they were made to represent the mercy-seat, and the cherubims over the ark. But, more probably, he learnt it of the Egyptians, in whose land he had sojourned for some time, and who worshipped their god Apis, under the similitude of a bull or calf. (1.) He would not be at the charge of building a golden temple, as Solomon had done; two golden calves are the most that he can afford. (2.) He intended, no doubt, by these to represent, or rather make present, not any false god, as Moloch or Chemosh, but the true God only, the God of Israel, the God that brought them up out of the land of Egypt, as he declares, v. 28. So that it was no violation of the first commandment, but the second. And he chose thus to engage the people's devotion, because he knew there were many among them, so in love with images, that, for the sake of the calves, they would willingly quit God's temple, where all images were forbidden. (3.) He set up two, by degrees to break people off from the belief of the unity of the godhead, which would pave the way to the polytheism of the Pagans. He set up these two at Dan, and Beth-el, one the utmost border of his country northward, the other southward, as if they were the guardians and protectors of the kingdom. Beth-el lay close to Judah: he set up one there, to tempt those of Rehoboam's subjects over to him, who were inclined to image-worship, in lieu of those or his subjects, that would continue to go to Jerusalem. He up the other at Dan, for the convenience of those that lay most remote, and because Micah's images had been set up there, and great veneration paid to them for many ages, Judg. 18. 30. *Beth-el* signifies *the house of God*, which gave some colour to the superstition; but the prophet called it *Beth-aven*, *the house of vanity*, or iniquity.

4. The people complied with him herein, and were fond enough of the novelty; they *went to worship before the one, even unto Dan*, v. 30. to that at Dan first, because it was first set up; or *even* to that at Dan, though it lay such a great way off. They that thought it much to go to Jerusalem, to worship God according to his institution, made no difficulty of going twice as far, to Dan, to worship him according to their own inventions. Or, they are said to go to one of the calves at Dan, because Abijah king of Judah, within twenty years, recovered Beth-el, 2 Chron. 13. 19. and, it is likely, removed the golden calf, or forbade the use of it, and then they had only that at Dan to go to. *This became a sin*; and a great sin it was, against the express letter of the second commandment. God had sometimes dispensed with the law concerning worshipping in one place, but never allowed the worship of him by images. Hereby they justified their fathers in making the calf at Horeb, though God had so fully shewn his displeasure against them for it, and threatened to visit for it in the day of visitation, Exod. 32. 24. So that it was as great a contempt of God's wrath as it was of his law; and thus they added sin to sin. Bishop Patrick quotes a saying of the Jews, That till Jeroboam's time the Israelites sucked but one calf, but from that time they sucked two.

5. Having set up the gods, he fitted up accommodations for them; wherein he varied from the divine appointment, we are here told; which intimates that, in other things, he imitated what

was done in Judah, v. 32. as well as he could. See how one error multiplied into many.

(1.) He made a house of high places, or of altars; one temple at Dan, we may suppose, and another at Beth-el, v. 31. and in each many altars, probably, complaining of it as an inconvenience, that in the temple of Jerusalem there was but one. The multiplying of altars passed with some for a piece of devotion, but God, by the prophet, puts another construction upon it, Hos. 8. 11. *Ephraim has made many altars to sin.*

(2.) He made priests of the lowest of the people; and the lowest of the people were good enough to be priests to his calves, and too good. He made priests *from the extremest parts of the people*, that is, some out of every corner of the country, whom he ordered to reside among their neighbours, to instruct them in his appointments, and reconcile them to them. Thus were they dispersed as the Levites, but *were not of the sons of Levi*. But the priests of the high places, or altars, he ordered to reside in Beth-el, as the priests at Jerusalem, v. 32. to attend the public service.

(3.) The feast of tabernacles, which God had appointed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, he adjourned to the fifteenth day of the eighth month, v. 32. *the month which he devised of his own heart*, to shew his power in ecclesiastical matters, v. 33. The passover and pentecost he observed in their proper season, or did not observe them at all, or with little solemnity in comparison with this.

(4.) He himself assuming a power to make priests, so marvel if he undertook to do the priests' work with his own hands: *He offered upon the altar twice*, it is mentioned, v. 32, 33, as also that he burnt incense. This was connived at in him, because it was of a piece with the rest of his irregularities; but in king Uzziah it was immediately punished with the plague of leprosy. He did it himself, to make him look great among the people, and to get the reputation of a devout man; also to grace the solemnity of his new festival, with which it is likely, at this time, he joined the feast of the dedication of his altar.

And thus, [1.] Jeroboam sinned himself; yet perhaps excused himself to the world, and his own conscience, with this, that he did not do so ill as Solomon did, who worshipped other gods. [2.] *He made Israel to sin*, drew them off from the worship of God, and entailed idolatry upon their seed. And thereby they were punished for deserting the thrones of the house of David.

The learned Mr. Whiston, in his chronology for the adjusting of the annals of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, supposes that Jeroboam changed the calculation of the year, and made it to contain but eleven months, and that by those years the reigns of the kings of Israel are measured, till Jehu's revolution, and no longer; in which interval, eleven years of the annals of Judah answer to twelve in those of Israel.

CHAP. XIII.

In the close of the foregoing chapter, we left Jeroboam attending his altar at Beth-el, and there we find him in the beginning of this, when he received a testimony from God against his idolatry and apostacy. This was sent him by a prophet, a man of God that lived in Judah, who is the principal subject of the story of this chapter, where we are told, I. What passed between him and the new king. 1. The prophet threatened Jeroboam's altar, (v. 1, 2.) and gave him a sign, (v. 3.) which immediately came to pass, v. 5. 2. The king threatened the prophet, and was himself made another sign, by the withering of his hand, (v. 4.) and the restoring of it, upon his submission, and the prophet's intercession, v. 6. 3. The prophet refused the kindness offered him thereupon, v. 7, 10. II. What passed between him and the old prophet. 1. The old prophet fetched him back by a lie, and gave him entertainment, v. 11, 19. 2. He, for accepting it, in disobedience to the divine command, is threatened with death, v. 20, 22. And, 3. The threatening is executed, for he is slain by a lion, (v. 23, 24.) and buried at Beth-el, v. 25, 32. 4. Jeroboam is hardened in his idolatry, v. 33, 31. Thy judgments, Lord, are a great deep.

1. **AND**, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Beth-el: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn

incense. 2. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. 4. And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Beth-el, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. 5. The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. 6. And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Entreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before. 7. And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward. 8. And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: 9. For so it was charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. 10. So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Beth-el.

Here is,

I. A messenger sent to Jeroboam, to signify to him God's displeasure against his idolatry, v. 1. The army of Judah, that aimed to ruin him, was countermanded, and might not draw a sword against him, ch. 12. 24. but a prophet of Judah is, instead thereof, sent to reclaim him from his evil way, and is sent in time, while he is but dedicating his altar, before his heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of his sin; for God delights not in the death of sinners, but would rather they would turn, and live. How bold was the messenger, that durst attack the king in his pride, and interrupt the solemnity he was proud of! They that go on God's errand must not fear the face of man: they know who will hear them out. How kind was He that sent him to warn Jeroboam of the wrath of God revealed from heaven, against his *ungodliness and unrighteousness!*

II. The message delivered in God's name, not whispered, but cried with a loud voice, denoting both the prophet's courage, that he was neither afraid nor ashamed to own it, and his earnestness, that he desired to be heard and heeded by all that were present, who were not a few, on this great occasion. It is directed, not to Jeroboam, or to the people, but to the altar, the stones of which will sooner hear and yield, than they who were mad upon their idols, and deaf to divine calls. Yet, in threatening the altar, he threatens the founder and worshippers, to whom it is as dear as their own souls, and who might conclude, "If God's wrath fasten

upon the lifeless guiltless altar, how shall we escape?" That which is foretold concerning the altar, (v. 2.) is, that, in process of time, a prince of the house of David, Josiah by name, should pollute this altar by sacrificing the idolatrous priests themselves upon it, and burning the bones of dead men. Let Jeroboam know, and be sure, 1. That the altar he now consecrated, should be desecrated. Idolatrous worship will not continue, but the word of the Lord will endure for ever. 2. That the *priests of the high places* he now made should themselves be made sacrifices to the justice of God, and the first and only sacrifices upon this altar that would be pleasing to him. If the offering be such as is an abomination to God, it would follow, of course, that the offerers must themselves fall under his wrath, which will abide upon them, since it is not otherwise transmitted. 3. That this should be done by a branch of the house of David. That family which he and his kingdom had despised, and treacherously deserted, should recover so much power as to demolish that altar which he thought to establish; so that right and truth should, at length, prevail both in civil and sacred matters, notwithstanding the present triumphs of those that were given to change the fear both of God and the king. It was about 356 years ere this prediction was fulfilled, yet it was spoken of as sure and nigh at hand, for a thousand years with God are but as one day. Nothing more contingent and arbitrary than the giving of names to persons, yet Josiah is here named above 300 years before he was born. Nothing future is hidden from God, There are names in the book of the divine prescience, Phil. 4. 3. names written in heaven.

III. A sign is given for the confirming of the truth of this prediction, that the altar should be shaken to pieces by an invisible power, and the ashes of the sacrifice scattered, v. 3. which came to pass immediately, v. 5. This was, 1. A proof that the prophet was sent of God, *who confirmed the word with this sign following*, Mark, 16. 20. 2. A present indication of God's displeasure against these idolatrous sacrifices. How could the gift be acceptable, when the altar that should sanctify it was an abomination? 3. It was a reproach to the people, whose hearts were harder than these stones, and rent not under the word of the Lord. 4. It was a specimen of what should be done to it in the accomplishment of this prophecy by Josiah; it was now rent, in token of its being then ruined.

IV. Jeroboam's hand withered, which he stretched out to seize or smite the man of God, v. 4. Instead of trembling at the message, as he might well have done, he assaulted him that brought it, in defiance of the wrath of which he was warned, and contempt of that grace which sent him the warning. *Rebuke a sinner*, and *he will hate thee*, and do thee a mischief, if he can; yet God's prophets must rather expose themselves than betray their trust: he that employs them will protect them, and restrain the wrath of man, as he did Jeroboam's here, by withering his hand, so that he could neither hurt the prophet, nor draw it in to help himself. When his hand was stretched out to burn incense to his calves, it was not withered; but when it was stretched out against a prophet, he shall have no use of it, till he humble himself. Of all the wickedness of the wicked, there is none more provoking to God than their malicious attempts against his prophets, of whom he has said, *Touch them not, do them no harm*. As this was a punishment of Jeroboam, and answering to the sin, so it was the deliverance of the prophet. God has many ways of disabling the enemies of his church to execute their mischievous purposes. Jeroboam's inability to pull in his hand, made him a spectacle to all about him, that they might see and fear. If God, in justice, harden the hearts of sinners, so that the hand they have stretched out in sin, they cannot pull in again by repentance, that is a spiritual judgment, represented by this, and much more dreadful.

V. The sudden healing of the hand that was suddenly dried up, upon his submission, v. 6. That word of God which should have touched his conscience, humbled him not, but, this which touched his bone and his flesh, brings down his proud spirit. He looks for help now, 1. Not from his calves, but from God only, from his power, and his favour. He wounded, and his hand but his can

make whole. 2. Not by his own sacrifice or incense, but by the prayer and intercession of the prophet, whom he had just now threatened, and aimed to destroy. The time may come, when those that hate the preaching, would be glad of the prayers, of faithful ministers. "Pray to the Lord thy God," says Jeroboam; "thou hast an interest in him, improve it for me." But observe, He does not desire him to pray that his sin might be pardoned, and his heart changed, only that *his hand might be restored*; thus Pharaoh would have Moses to pray that God would *take away this death* only, Exod. 10. 17. not this *sin*. The prophet, as became a man of God, renders good for evil, upbraids not Jeroboam with his impotent malice, nor triumphs in his submission, but immediately addresses himself to God for him. Those only are entitled to the blessing Christ pronounced on the persecuted, that learn of him to pray for their persecutors, Matth. 5. 10, 44. When the prophet thus honoured God, by shewing himself of a forgiving spirit, God put this further honour upon him, that, at his word, he recalled the judgment, and, by another miracle, healed the withered hand; that, by the goodness of God, Jeroboam might be led to repentance, and if he were not broken by the judgment, yet might be melted by the mercy. With both he seemed affected for the present, but the impressions wore off.

VI. The prophet's refusal of Jeroboam's kind invitation: in which observe, 1. That God forbade his messenger to eat or drink in Beth-el; v. 9. to shew his detestation of their execrable idolatry, and apostacy from God, and to teach us not to have fellowship with the works of darkness, lest we have infection from them, or give encouragement to them. He must not *turn back the same way*, but deliver his message as it were *in transitu*—as he passes along. He shall not seem to be sent on purpose, (they were unworthy such a favour,) but as if he only called by the way, his spirit being stirred, like Paul's at Athens, as he passed, and saw their devotions. God would, by this command, try his prophet, as he did Ezekiel, whether he would not be rebellious, like that rebellious house, Ezek. 2. 8. 2. That Jeroboam was so affected with the cure of his hand, that though we read not of his thanksgivings to God for the mercy, or of his sending an offering to the altar at Jerusalem, in acknowledgment of it, yet he was willing to express his gratitude to the prophet, and pay him for his prayers, v. 7. Favours to the body will make even graceless men seem grateful to good ministers. 3. That the prophet, though hungry and weary, and, perhaps, poor, in obedience to the divine command, refused both the entertainment, and the reward, proffered him. He might have supposed his acceptance of it would give him an opportunity of discoursing further with the king, in order to his effectual reformation, now that he was convinced; yet he will not think himself wiser than God, but, like a faithful careful messenger, hastens home when he has done his errand. They have little learned the lesson of self-denial, that cannot forbear one forbidden meal.

11. Now there dwelt an old prophet in Beth-el; and his sons came, and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Beth-el; the words which he had spoken unto the king, them they told also to their father. 12. And their father said unto them, What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from Judah. 13. And he said unto his sons, Saddle me the ass. So they saddled him the ass: and he rode thereon, 14. And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak: and he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, I am. 15. Then he said unto him, Come home with me, and eat bread. 16. And he said, I may not return with

thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place: 17. For it was said to me by the word of the LORD, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest. 18. He said unto him, *I am a prophet also as thou art*; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. *But he lied unto him.* 19. So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water. 20. And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back: 21. And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, 22. But camest back, and hast eaten bread, and drunk water, in the place of the which *the LORD* did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.

The man of God had honestly and bravely refused the king's invitation, though he promised him a reward; yet was overpersuaded by an old prophet, to come back with him, and dine in Beth-el, contrary to the command given him. Here we find how dear this dinner cost him. Observe, with wonder,

I. The old prophet's wickedness. I cannot but call him a false prophet and a bad man; it being much easier to believe that from one of such a bad character, should be extorted a confirmation of what the man of God said, as we find, v. 32. than that a true prophet, and a good man, should tell such a deliberate lie as he did, and father it upon God. *A good tree could never bring forth such corrupt fruit.* Perhaps he was trained up among the sons of the prophets, in one of Samuel's colleges not far off, whence he retained the name of a prophet, but, growing worldly and profane, the spirit of prophecy was departed from him. If he had been a good prophet, he would have reprov'd Jeroboam's idolatry, and not have suffered his sons to attend his altars, as, it should seem, they did.

Now, 1. Whether he had any good design in fetching back the man of God, is not certain. One may hope that he did it in compassion to him, concluding he wanted refreshment, and out of a desire to be better acquainted with him, and more fully to understand his errand than he could from the report of his sons; yet, his sons having told him all that passed, and particularly that the prophet was forbidden to eat or drink there, which he had openly told Jeroboam, it is supposed to have been done with a bad design, to draw him into a snare, and so to expose him; for false prophets have ever been the worst enemies to the true prophets, usually aiming to destroy them, but sometimes, as here, to debauch them, and draw them from their duty. Thus they *gave the Nazarites wine to drink*, Amos, 2. 12. that they might glory in their fall.

But, 2. It is certain that he took a very bad method to bring him back. When the man of God had told him, "I may not, and therefore I will not, return to eat bread with thee," (his resolutions concurring with the divine command, v. 16, 17.) he wickedly pretended that he had an order from heaven to fetch him back; he imposed upon him his former character as a prophet, *I am a prophet also as thou art*; he pretended he had a vision of an angel that sent him on this errand; but it was all a lie, it was a banter upon prophecy, and profane in the highest degree. When this

old prophet is spoken of, 2 Kings, 23. 18. he is called *the prophet that came out of Samaria*, whereas there was no such place as Samaria till long after, ch. 16. 24. therefore, I take it, he is so called there, though he was of Beth-el, because he was like those who were afterward *the prophets of Samaria*, who caused God's people Israel to err, Jer. 23. 13.

II. The good prophet's weakness, in suffering himself to be thus imposed upon; *He went back with him*, v. 19. He that had resolution enough to refuse the invitation of the king, who promised him a reward, could not resist the insinuations of one that pretended to be a prophet; good people are more in danger of being drawn from their duty by the plausible pretences of divinity and sanctity than by external inducements; we have therefore need to *beware of false prophets*, and not *believe every spirit*.

III. The proceedings of divine justice hereupon; and here we may well wonder that the wicked prophet, who told the lie, and did the mischief, went unpunished, while the holy man of God, that was drawn by him into sin, was suddenly and severely punished for it. What shall we make of this! The judgments of God are unfathomable; *the deceived and the deceiver are his*, and he *giveth not account of any of his matters*; certainly there must be a judgment to come, when these things will be called over again, and when those that sinned most, and suffered least, in this world, will receive according to their works. 1. The message delivered to the man of God was strange; his crime is recited, v. 21, 22. it was, in one word, disobedience to an express command; judgment is given upon it, *Thy carcase shall not come to the sepulchre of thy fathers*, that is, "Thou shalt never reach thy own house, but shalt be a carcase quickly, nor shall thy dead body be brought to the place of thy fathers' sepulchres, to be interred." 2. Yet it was more strange that the old prophet himself should be the messenger; of this we can give no account, but that God would have it so, as he spake to Balaam by his ass, and read Saul his doom by the devil in Samuel's likeness; we may think God designed hereby, (1.) To startle the lying prophet, and make him sensible of his sin; the message could not but affect him the more, when he himself had the delivering of it, and had so strong an impression made upon his spirit by it, that he cried out, as one in an agony, v. 21. He had reason to think, if he must die for his disobedience in a small matter, who sinned by surprise, of how much sorer punishment he should be thought worthy, who had belied an angel of God, and cheated a man of God, by a deliberate forgery. *If this were done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?* Perhaps, it had a good effect upon him; those who preach God's wrath to others, have hard hearts indeed; if they fear it not themselves. (2.) To put the greater mortification upon the prophet that was deceived, and to shew what they must expect who hearken to the great deceiver; they that yield to him as a tempter, will be terrified by him as a tormentor; whom he now fawns upon, he will afterward fly upon, and whom he draws into sin, he will do what he can to drive to despair.

23. And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, *to wit*, for the prophet whom he had brought back. 24. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase. 25. And, behold, men passed by, and saw the carcase cast in the way, and the lion standing by the carcase: and they came and told *it* in the city where the old prophet dwelt. 26. And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard *thereof*, he said, *It is the man of God*, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD

hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him. 27. And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled him. 28. And he went, and found his carcase cast in the way, and the ass and the lion standing by the carcase: the lion had not eaten the carcase, nor torn the ass. 29. And the prophet took up the carcase of the man of God, and laid it upon the ass, and brought it back: and the old prophet came to the city, to mourn, and to bury him. 30. And he laid his carcase in his own grave; and they mourned over him, saying, Alas, my brother! 31. And it came to pass, after he had buried him, that he spake to his sons, saying, When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones: 32. For the saying which he cried by the word of the LORD against the altar in Beth-el, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass. 33. After this thing, Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. 34. And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth.

Here is,

I. The death of the deceived disobedient prophet. The old prophet that had deluded him, as if he would make him some amends for the wrong he had done him, or help to prevent the mischief threatened him, furnished him with an ass to ride home on; but, by the way, a lion set upon him, and killed him, v. 23, 24. He did but turn back to refresh himself when he was hungry, and, behold, he must die for it; see 1 Sam. 14. 43. But we must consider, 1. That his offence was great, and it would, by no means, justify him, that he was drawn into it by a lie; he could not be so certain of the countermand sent by another, as he was of the command given to himself; nor had he any ground to think that the command would be recalled, when the reason of it remained in force, which was, that he might testify his detestation of the wickedness of that place. He had great reason to suspect the honesty of this old prophet, who did not himself bear his testimony, nor did God think fit to make use of him as a witness against the idolatry of the city he lived in: however, he should have taken time to beg direction from God, and not have complied so soon. Did he think this old prophet's house safer to eat in than other houses at Beth-el, when God had forbidden him to eat in any? That was to refine upon the command, and make himself wiser than God. Did he think to excuse himself, that he was hungry? Had he never read, that *man lives not by bread alone*? 2. That his death was for the glory of God; for by this it appeared, (1.) That nothing is more provoking to him than disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, which makes his proceedings against our first parents, for eating forbidden fruit, the easier to be accounted for. (2.) That God is displeased at the sins of his own people, and no man shall be protected in disobedience by the sanctity of his profession, the dignity of his office, his nearness to God, or any good services he has done for him. Perhaps God, by this, intended, in a way of righteous judgment, to harden

Jeroboam's heart, since he was not reformed by the withering of his hand; for he would be apt to make a bad use of it, and to say that the prophet was well enough served for meddling with his altar, he had better have stayed at home; nay, he would say that Providence had punished him for his insolence, and the lion had done that which his withered hand might not do; however, by this he intended to warn all those whom he employs, strictly to observe their orders, at their peril.

II. The wonderful preservation of his dead body, which was a token of God's mercy remembered in the midst of wrath; the lion that gently strangled him, or tore him, did not devour his dead body, nor so much as tear the ass, v. 24, 25, 28. Nay, what was more, he did not set upon the travellers that passed by, and saw it, nor upon the old prophet, (who had reason enough to fear it,) when he came to take up the corpse; his commission was, to kill the prophet, hitherto he should go, but no farther: thus God shewed, that, though he was angry with him, his anger was turned away, and the punishment went no further than death.

III. The care which the old prophet took of his burial; when he heard of the unusual accident, he concluded it was *the man of God, who was disobedient* to his Master, (and whose fault was that?) *therefore the Lord has delivered him to the lion*, v. 26. It had well become him to have asked why the lion was not sent against him and his house, rather than against the good man whom he had cheated. He took up the corpse, v. 29. If there were any truth in the vulgar opinion, surely the corpse bled afresh, when he touched it, for he was, in effect, the murderer, and it was but a poor reparation for the injury, to inter the dead body: perhaps, when he cheated him into his ruin, he intended to laugh at him; yet now his conscience so far relents, that he weeps over him, and, like Joab at Abner's funeral, is compelled to be a mourner for him whom he had been the death of; they said, *Alas, my brother!* v. 30. The case was indeed very lamentable, that so good a man, a prophet so faithful, and so bold in God's cause, should, for one offence, die as a criminal, while an old lying prophet lives at ease, and an idolatrous prince in pomp and power. *Thy way, O God, is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters.* We cannot judge of men by their sufferings, nor of sins by their present punishments; with some, the flesh is destroyed, that the spirit may be saved, while with others the flesh is pampered, that the soul may ripen for hell.

IV. The charge which the old prophet gave his sons concerning his own burial, that they should be sure to bury him in the same grave where the man of God was buried, v. 31. "*Lay my bones beside his bones*, close by them as near as may be, so that my dust may mingle with his;" though he was a lying prophet, yet he desired to die the death of a true prophet; "*Gather not my soul with the sinners of Beth-el, but with the man of God.*" The reason he gives, is, because *what he cried against the altar of Beth-el*, that men's bones should be burnt upon it, *shall surely come to pass*, v. 32. Thus, 1. He ratifies the prediction, that *out of the mouth of two witnesses*, (and one of them such a one as St. Paul quotes, Tit. 1. 12. *one of themselves, even a prophet of their own*,) the word might be established, if possible, to convince and reclaim Jeroboam. 2. He does honour to the deceased prophet, as one whose word would not fall to the ground, though he did; ministers die, die prematurely it may be; but the word of the Lord endures for ever, and does not die with them. 3. He consults his own interest; it was foretold that men's bones should be burnt upon Jeroboam's altar; "*Lay mine*" (says he) "*close to his*, and then they will not be disturbed;" and it was, accordingly, their security, as we find, 2 Kings, 23. 18. Sleeping and waking, living and dying, it is safe being in good company. No mention is made here of the inscription on the prophet's tomb; but it is spoken of 2 Kings, 23. 17. where Josiah asks, *What title is that?* And is told, *It is the sepulchre of the man of God, that came from Judah, who proclaimed these things which thou hast done*; so that the epitaph upon the prophet's grave preserved the remembrance of his prophecy, and was a standing testimony against the idolatries of Beth-el, which it would not have been so remarkably, if he had

died, and been buried elsewhere. The cities of Israel are here called *cities of Samaria*, though that name was not yet known; for, however the old prophet spake, the inspired historian wrote in the language of his own time.

V. The obstinacy of Jeroboam in his idolatry, v. 33. *He returned not from his evil way*; some hand was found, that durst repair the altar God had rent, and then Jeroboam offered sacrifice on it again, and the more boldly, because the prophet who disturbed him before was in his grave, (Rev. 11. 10.) and because the prophecy was for a great while to come. Various methods had been used to reclaim him, but neither threats nor signs, neither judgments nor mercies, wrought upon him, so strangely was he wedded to his calves; he did not reform, no not his priesthood, but whoever would, he filled his hand, and made him priest, though ever so illiterate or immoral, and of what tribe soever; and *this became sin*, that is, a snare first, and then a ruin, to Jeroboam's house, to cut it off, v. 34. Note, The diminution, disquiet, and desolation, of families, are the fruit of sin; he promised himself that the calves would secure the crown to his family, but it proved they lost it, and sunk his family. Those betray themselves, that think by any sin to support themselves.

CHAP. XIV.

The kingdom being divided into that of Judah and that of Israel, we must, henceforward, in these books of Kings, expect and attend their separate history, the succession of their kings, and the affairs of their kingdoms, accounted for distinctly. In this chapter, we have, 1. The prophecy of the destruction of Jeroboam's house, v. 7. 16. The sickness of his child was the occasion of it, v. 1. 6. and the death of his child the earnest of it, v. 17, 18. together with the conclusion of his reign, v. 19, 20. 11. The history of the declension and diminution of Rehoboam's house and his kingdom, v. 21. 28. and the conclusion of his reign, v. 29. 31. In both which, we may read the mischievous consequences of sin, and the calamities it brings on kingdoms and families.

1. **A**T that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. 2. And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there *is* Abijah the prophet, which told me that *I should be king* over this people. 3. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child. 4. And Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose, and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Abijah. But Abijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age. 5. And the LORD said unto Abijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son; for he is sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her: for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself to be another woman. 6. And it was so, when Abijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee *with heavy tidings*.

How Jeroboam persisted in his contempt of God and religion, we read in the close of the foregoing chapter: here we are told how God proceeded in his controversy with him; for when God judges, he will overcome, and sinners shall either bend, or break, before him.

1. His child fell sick, v. 1. It is probable that he was his eldest son, and heir-apparent to the crown; for, at his death, all the kingdom went into mourning for him, v. 13. Neither his dignity as a *prince*, nor his age as a *young prince*, nor his interest in heaven as a *pious prince*, could exempt him from sickness, dangerous sickness; let none be secure of the continuance of their health, but improve it, while it continues, for the best purposes; Lord, *behold, he whom thou lovest*, thy favourite, he whom Israel loves, their darling, *is sick*. At that time, when Jeroboam prostituted and profaned the priesthood, ch. 13. 33. his child sickened; when sickness comes into our families, we should inquire whether there be not some particular sin harboured in our houses, which the affliction is sent to convince us of, and reclaim us from.

11. He sent his wife in disguise, to inquire of Abijah the prophet, *what should become of the child*, v. 2, 3. The sickness of his child touched him in a tender part; the withering of this branch of the family would, perhaps, be as sore an affliction to him as the withering of that branch of his body, ch. 13. 4. such is the force of natural affection; our children are ourselves but once removed.

Now, 1. Jeroboam's great desire, under this affliction, is, to know *what shall become of the child*, whether he will live or die. (1.) It had been more prudent, if he had desired to know what means they should use for the recovery of the child, what they should give him, and what they should do to him; but, by this instance, and that of Ahaziah, 2 Kings, 1. 2. and Ben-hadad, 2 Kings, 8. 8, it should seem, they had then such a foolish notion of fatality, as took them off from all use of means; for if they were sure the patient would live, they thought means needless; if he would die, they thought them useless; not considering that duty is our's, events are God's, and that he that ordained the end, ordained the means. Why should a prophet be desired to shew that which a little time will shew? (2.) It had been more pious, if he had desired to know wherefore God contended with him, had begged the prophet's prayers, and cast away his idols from him; then the child might have been restored to him, as his hand was; but most people would rather be told their fortune, than their faults or their duty.

2. That he might know the child's doom, he sent to Abijah the prophet, who lived obscure and neglected in Shiloh, blind through age, yet still blest with the visions of the Almighty, which need not bodily eyes, but are rather favoured by the want of them, the eyes of the mind being then most intent, and least diverted. Jeroboam sent not to him for advice about the setting up of his calves, or the consecrating of his priests, but has recourse to him in his distress, when the gods he served could give him no relief; Lord, *in trouble have they visited thee*, who before slighted thee; some have by sickness been reminded of their forgotten ministers, and praying friends; he sends to Abijah, because he had *told him he should be king*, v. 2. He was once the messenger of good tidings, surely he will be so again; those that by sin disqualify themselves for comfort, and yet expect their ministers, because they are good men, should speak peace and comfort to them, greatly wrong both themselves and their ministers.

3. He sent his wife to inquire of the prophet, because she could best put the question without naming names, or making any other description than this, "Sir, I have a son ill; will he recover, or not?" The heart of her husband safely trusted in her, that she would be faithful both in delivering the message, and bringing him the answer; and it seems there were none of all his counsellors in whom he could repose such a confidence; otherwise, the sick child could very ill have spared her, for mothers are the best nurses, and it had been much fitter for her to have stayed at home to tend him, than go to Shiloh to inquire what would become of him. If she go, she must go *incognito*—*must disguise herself*, change her dress, cover her face, and go by another name; not only to conceal herself from her own court, and the country through which she past, (as if it were below her quality to go upon such an errand, and what she had reason to be ashamed of, as Nicodemus that came to Jesus by night, whereas it is no disparagement to the greatest to attend God's prophets.)

but also to conceal herself from the prophet himself, that he might only answer her question concerning her son, and not enter upon the displeasing subject of her husband's defection; thus some people love to prescribe to their ministers, limit them to smooth things, and care not for having the *whole counsel of God declared* to them, lest it prove to prophesy *no good concerning them, but evil*. But what a strange notion had Jeroboam of God's prophet, that he believed he could and would certainly tell what *would become of the child*, and yet either could not, or would not, discover who was the mother; could he see into the thick darkness of futurity, and yet not see through the thin veil of this disguise? Did he think the God of Israel like his calves, just what he pleased? *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*.

III. God gave Ahijah notice of the approach of Jeroboam's wife, and that she came in disguise, and full instructions what to say to her, v. 5. which enabled him as she came in at the door, to call her by her name, to her great surprise, and so to discover to all about him, who she was, v. 6. *Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam, why feignest thou thyself to be another?* He had no regard either, 1. To her rank; she was a queen, but what was that to him, who had a message to deliver her immediately from God, before whom all the children of men stand upon the same level? Nor, 2. To her present; it was usual for those who consulted prophets, to bring them tokens of respect, which they accepted, and yet were no hirelings; she brought him a handsome country present, v. 3. but he did not think himself obliged by that to give her any finer language than the nature of her message required. Nor, 3. To her industrious concealment of herself; it is a piece of civility, not to take notice of those who desire not to be taken notice of; but the prophet was no courtier, nor gave flattering titles; plain dealing is best, and she shall know at the first word what she has to trust to; *I am sent to thee with heavy tidings*. Note, Those who think by their disguises to hide themselves from God, will be wretchedly confounded, when they find themselves disappointed in the day of discovery: sinners now appear in the garb of saints, and are taken to be such; but how will they blush and tremble, when they find themselves stripped of their false colours, and are called by their own name! "Go out, thou treacherous false-hearted hypocrite, *I never knew thee, why feignest thou thyself to be another?*" Tidings of a portion with hypocrites will be heavy tidings; God will judge men according to what they are, not according to what they seem.

7. Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, 8. And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; 9. But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back. 10. Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone. 11. Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken it. 12. Arise thou

therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. 13. And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. 14. Moreover the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: But what? Even now. 15. For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger. 16. And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin. 17. And Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: and when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died; 18. And they buried him; and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by the hand of his servant Ahijah the prophet. 19. And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 20. And the days which Jeroboam reigned were two and twenty years: and he slept with his fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead.

When those that set up idols, and keep them up, go to inquire of the Lord, he determines to answer them, not according to the pretensions of their inquiry, but according to the multitude of their idols, Ezek. 14. 3. so Jeroboam is answered here. He prevented her inquiry concerning the child, and foretells the ruin of Jeroboam's house for the wickedness of it; no one else durst have carried such a message, a servant would have smothered it, but his own wife cannot be suspected of ill-will to him.

I. God calls himself the Lord God of Israel; though Israel had forsaken God, God had not cast them off, nor given them a bill of divorce for their whoredoms; he is Israel's God, and therefore will take vengeance on him who did them the greatest mischief he could do them, and drew them away from him.

II. He upbraids Jeroboam with the great favour he had bestowed upon him, in making him king, exalting him from among the people, the common people, to be prince over God's chosen Israel, and taking the kingdom from the house of David, to bestow it upon him. Whether we keep an account of God's mercies to us or no, he does, and will set even them in order before us, if we be ungrateful, to our greater confusion; otherwise, he gives, and upbraids not.

III. He charges him with his impiety and apostacy, and his idolatry particularly; *Thou hast done evil above all that were before thee, v. 9.* Saul, that was rejected, never worshipped idols; Solomon did it but occasionally, in his dotage, and never made Israel to sin; Jeroboam's calves, though pretended to be set up in honour of the God of Israel, that brought them up out of Egypt, yet are here called other gods, or strange gods, because in them he worshipped God as the heathen worshipped their strange gods; because by them he changed the truth of God into a lie, and represented him as altogether different from what he is; and because many of the ignorant worshippers terminated their

devotion in the image, and did not at all regard the God of Israel. Though they were calves of gold, the richness of the metal was so far from making them acceptable to God, that they *provoked him to anger*, designedly affronted him, under colour of pleasing him. In doing this, 1. He had not set David before him, v. 8. *Thou hast not been as my servant David*; who, though he had his faults, and some bad ones, yet he never forsook the worship of God, nor grew loose or cold to that; his faithful adherence to that gained him this honourable character, that he *followed God with all his heart*, and herein he was proposed for an example to all his successors; those did not do well, that did not like David. 2. He had not set God before him, but, v. 9. *Thou hast cast me behind thy back*, my law, my fear; neglected me, forgotten me, and preferred thy policies before my precepts."

IV. He foretells the utter ruin of Jeroboam's house, v. 10, 11. He thought, by his idolatry, to establish his government, and, by that, he not only lost it, but brought destruction upon his family; the universal destruction of all the males, whether shut up or left, married or unmarried. 1. *Shameful destruction*; they shall be taken away as dung, which is loathsome, and which men are glad to be rid of. He worshipped dunghill-deities, and God removed his family as a great dunghill; noble royal families, if wicked, are no better, in God's account. 2. *Unusual destruction*; their very dead bodies should be meat for the dogs in the street, or the birds of prey in the field, v. 11. Thus evil pursues sinners. See this fulfilled, *ch. 15. 29.*

V. He foretells the immediate death of the child, that was now sick, v. 12, 13. 1. In mercy to him; lest, if he live, he be infected with the sin, and so involved in the ruin, of his father's house. Observe the character given of him, *In him was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam*. He only had an affection for the true worship of God, and disliked the worship of the calves. Note, (1.) Those are good, *in whom are good things toward the Lord God of Israel*; good inclinations, good intentions, good desires, toward him. (2.) Where there is but *some good thing* of that kind, it will be found: God that seeks it, sees it, be it ever so little, and is pleased with it. (3.) A little grace goes a great way with great people. It is so rare to find princes well-affected to religion, that, when they are so, they are worthy of double honour. (4.) Pious dispositions are, in a peculiar manner, amiable and acceptable, when they are found in those that are young. The divine image, in miniature, has a peculiar beauty and lustre in it. (5.) Those that are good in bad times and places, shine very bright in the eyes of God. A good child *in the house of Jeroboam* is a miracle of divine grace: to be there, untainted, is like being in the fiery furnace, unhurt, unscathed. Observe the care taken of him: he only, of all Jeroboam's family, shall die in honour; shall be buried, and shall be lamented, as one that lived desired. Note, Those that are distinguished by divine grace, shall be distinguished by divine providence. This hopeful child dies first of all the family, for God often *takes them soonest whom he loves best*; heaven is the fittest place for them, this earth is not worthy of them. 2. In wrath to the family; it was a sign the family would be ruined, when he was taken, by whom it might have been reformed. The righteous are removed from the evil to come in this world, to the good to come in a better world. It is a bad omen to a family, when the best in it are buried out of it; when what was valuable is picked out, the rest is for the fire. It is likewise a present affliction to the family and kingdom, by which both ought to have been bettered. It aggravated it to the poor mother, that she should not reach home time enough to see her son alive. *When thy feet enter into the city, just then the child shall die*. This was to be a sign to her of the accomplishment of the rest of the threatenings, as 1 Sam. 2. 34.

VI. He foretells the setting up of another family, to rule over Israel, v. 14. This was fulfilled in Baasha of Issachar, who conspired against Nadab the son of Jeroboam, in the second year of his reign, murdered him, and all his family. *"But what? Even now. Why do I speak of it as a thing at a distance? It is at the door, it shall be done, even now."* Sometimes God makes

quick work with sinners, he did so with the house of Jeroboam. It was not twenty-four years from his first elevation to the final extirpation of his family.

VII. He foretells the judgments which should come upon the people of Israel, for conforming to the worship which Jeroboam had established. *If the blind lead the blind, both the blind leaders and the blind followers shall fall into the ditch*. It is here foretold, v. 15. 1. That they should never be easy, nor rightly settled in their land, but continually *shaken like a reed in the water*. After they left the house of David, the government never continued long in one family, but one undermined and destroyed another, which must needs occasion great disorders and disturbances among the people. 2. That they should, ere long, be totally expelled out of their land, that good land, and given up to ruin, v. 16. This was fulfilled in the captivity of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria. Families and kingdoms are ruined by sin, ruined by the wickedness of the heads of them. *Jeroboam did sin, and made Israel to sin*. If great men do wickedly, they involve many others both in the guilt and in the snare; multitudes follow their *pernicious ways*. They go to hell with a long train, and their condemnation will be more intolerable, who must answer, not only for their own sins, but for the sins which others have been drawn into, and kept in, by their influence.

Jeroboam's wife has nothing to say against the word of the Lord, but she goes home with a heavy heart to their house in *Tirzah, a sweet delightful place*, so the name signifies, famed for its beauty, Cant. 6. 4. But death cannot be shut out from it, which will stain its beauty, and imbitter all its delights. Hither she came, and here we leave her attending the funeral of her son, and expecting the fate of her family.

(1.) *The child died*, v. 17. and justly did all Israel mourn, not only for the loss of so hopeful a prince, whom they were not worthy of, but because his death plucked up the flood-gates, and made a breach, at which an inundation of judgments broke in.

(2.) Jeroboam himself died soon after, v. 20. It is said, (2 Chron. 13. 20.) *The Lord struck him* with some sore disease, so that he died miserably, when he had reigned twenty-two years; and left his crown to a son, who lost it, and his life too, and all the lives of his family, within two years after. For a further account of him, the reader is referred to the annals of his reign, drawn up by his own secretaries, or to the public records, like those in the Tower, called here, *The book*, or register, *of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel*, to which recourse might be had; but, not being divinely inspired, they are long since lost.

21. And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. 22. And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. 23. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. 24. And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 25. And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: 26. And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house:

he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. 27. And king Rehoboam made in their stead brazen shields, and committed *them* unto the hands of the chief of the guard, which kept the door of the king's house. 28. And it was *so*, when the king went into the house of the LORD, that the guard bare them, and brought them back into the guard-chamber. 29. Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 30. And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all *their* days. 31. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And his mother's name *was* Naamah, an Ammonitess. And Abijam his son reigned in his stead.

Judah's story and Israel's are intermixed in this book. Jeroboam out-lived Rehoboam four or five years, yet his history is dispatched first, that the account of Rehoboam's reign may be laid together; and a sad account it is.

I. Here is no good said of the king. All the account we have of him here, is, 1. That he was 41 years old when he began to reign, by which reckoning, he was born in the last year of David, and had his education, and the forming of his mind, in the best days of Solomon; yet he lived not up to it. Solomon's defection, at last, did more to corrupt him, than his wisdom and devotion had done to give him good principles. 2. That he reigned 17 years in Jerusalem, *the city where God put his name*, where he had opportunity enough to know his duty, if he had had but a heart to do it. 3. That his mother was Naamah, an Ammonitess; this is twice mentioned, v. 21, 31. It was strange that David would marry his son Solomon to an Ammonitess, (for it was done while he lived,) but, it is probable, Solomon was in love with her, because she was *Naamah, a beauty*, so it signifies, and his father was loath to cross him, but it proved to have a very bad influence upon posterity. Probably, she was daughter to Shobi the Ammonite, who was kind to David, 2 Sam. 17. 27. and David was too willing to requite him by matching his son into his family. None can imagine how lasting and how fatal the consequences may be, of being unequally yoked with unbelievers. 4. That he had continual war with Jeroboam, v. 30. which could not but be a perpetual uneasiness to him. 5. That when he had reigned but 17 years, he died, and left his throne to his son. His father, and grandfather, and grandson, that reigned well, reigned long, 40 years apiece; but sin often shortens men's lives and comforts.

II. Here is much said to the disadvantage of the subjects, both as to their character and their condition.

1. See here how wicked and profane they were. It is a most sad account that is here given of their apostacy from God, v. 22. . 24. Judah, the only professing people God had in the world, *did evil in his sight*, in contempt and defiance of him, and the tokens of his special presence with them; *they provoked him to jealousy*, as the adulterous wife provokes her husband, by breaking the marriage-covenant. Their fathers had been bad enough, especially in the times of the judges, but they did abominable things, *above all that their fathers had done*. The magnificence of their temple, the pomp of their priesthood, and all the secular advantages with which their religion was attended, could not prevail to keep them close to it; nothing less than the *pouring out of the Spirit from on high* will keep God's Israel in their allegiance to him. The account here given of the wickedness of the Jews, agrees with that which the apostle gives of the wickedness of the Gentile world, Rom. 1. 21, 24. so that both *Jew and Gentile are all alike under sin*, Rom. 3. 9. (1.) They became

vain in their imaginations concerning God, and *changed his glory into an image*, for they built them *high places, images, and groves*, v. 23. profaning God's name, by affixing to it their images, and God's ordinances, by serving their idols with them. They foolishly fancied that they exalted God, when they worshipped him on high hills, and pleased him, when they worshipped him under the pleasant shadow of green trees. (2.) They were given up to vile affections, as those idolaters, Rom. 1. 26, 27. for there were *Sodomites in the land*, v. 24. *Men with men working that which is unseemly*, and not to be thought of, much less mentioned, without abhorrence and indignation. They dishonoured God by one sin, and then God left them to dishonour themselves by another. They profaned the privileges of a holy nation, therefore God gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, to imitate the abominations of the accursed Canaanites; and herein the Lord was righteous. And when they did *like them that were cast out*, how could they expect any other than to be cast out like them?

2. See here how weak and poor they were; and this was the consequence of the former. Sin exposes, impoverishes, and weakens, any people. Shishak, king of Egypt, came against them, and so far, either by force or surrender, made himself master of Jerusalem itself, that he took away the treasures both of the temple and of the exchequer, of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, which David and Solomon had amassed, v. 25, 26. These, it is likely, tempted him to make this descent; and, to save the rest, Rehoboam perhaps tamely surrendered them, as Ahab, ch. 20. 24. He also took away the golden shields, that were made but in his father's time, v. 26. these the king of Egypt carried off as trophies of his victory; and, instead of them, Rehoboam made brazen shields, which the life-guard carried before him, when he went to church in state, v. 27, 28. This was an emblem of the diminution of his glory. Sin makes the gold become dim, changes the most fine gold, and turns it into brass. We commend Rehoboam for going to *the house of the Lord*, perhaps the oftener for the rebuke he had been under, and do not condemn him for going in pomp. Great men should honour God with their honour, and then they are themselves most honoured by it.

CHAP. XV.

In this chapter, we have an abstract of the history, I. Of two of the kings of Judah, Abijam, the days of whose reign were few and evil, (v. 1. . 8.) and Asa, who reigned well and long, v. 9. . 24. II. Of two of the kings of Israel, Nadab the son of Jeroboam, and Baasha the destroyer of Jeroboam's house, v. 25. . 34.

1. **N**OW in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nebat reigned Abijam over Judah. 2. Three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. 3. And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father. 4. Nevertheless for David's sake did the LORD his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem: 5. Because David did *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. 6. And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. 7. Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of

Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. 8. And Abijam slept with his fathers; and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a short account of the short reign of Abijam the son of Rehoboam king of Judah. He makes a better figure, 2 Chron. 13. where we have an account of his war with Jeroboam, the speech he made before the armies engaged, and the wonderful victory he obtained by the help of God. There he is called *Abijah*, *My father is the Lord*, because no wickedness is there laid to his charge. But here, where we are told of his faults, *Jah*, the name of God, is, in disgrace to him, taken away from his name, and he is called *Abijam*, Jer. 22. 24. Few particulars are related concerning him.

1. He began his reign in the beginning of Jeroboam's 18th year; for Rehoboam reigned but 17, *ch.* 14. 21. Jeroboam indeed survived Rehoboam, but Rehoboam's Abijah lived to succeed him, and to be a terror to Jeroboam, while Jeroboam's Abijah, whom we read of *ch.* 14. 1. died before him. 2. He reigned scarcely 3 years, for he died before the end of Jeroboam's 20th year, *v.* 9. Being made proud and secure by his great victory over Jeroboam, (2 Chron. 13. 21.) God cut him off, to make way for his son Asa, who would be a better man. 3. *His mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom*, namely, Absalom, David's son, as I am the rather inclined to think, because two other of Rehoboam's wives were his near relations, (2 Chron. 11. 18.) one the daughter of Jerimoth, David's son; and another the daughter of Eliah, David's brother. He took warning by his father, not to marry strangers; yet thought it below him to marry his subjects, except they were of the royal family. 4. He carried on his father's wars with Jeroboam. As there was continual war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, not set battles, (they were forbidden, *ch.* 12. 24.) but frequent encounters, especially upon the borders; one making incursions and reprisals on the other: so there was between Abijam and Jeroboam, *v.* 7. till Jeroboam, with a great army, invaded him, and then Abijam, not being forbidden to act in his own defence, routed him, and weakened him, that he compelled him to be quiet the rest of his reign, 2 Chron. 13. 20.

But, in general, we are told, (1.) That he was not like David, had no hearty affection for the ordinances of God; though, to serve his purpose against Jeroboam, he pleaded his possession of the temple and priesthood, as that which he valued himself upon, 2 Chron. 13. 10. . 12. Many boast of their profession of godliness, who are strangers to the power of it; and plead the truth of their religion, who yet are not true to it. *His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God*; he seemed to have zeal, but he wanted sincerity; he began well, but he fell off, and *walked in all the sins of his father*, followed his bad example, though he had seen the bad consequences of it. He that was, all his days, in war, ought to have been so wise as to make and keep his peace with God, and not to make him his Enemy, especially having found him so good a Friend in his war with Jeroboam, 2 Chron. 13. 18. *Let favour be shewed the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness*, Isa. 26. 10. (2.) That yet it was for David's sake that he was advanced, and continued, upon the throne; it was *for his sake*, *v.* 4, 5. that God thus *set up his son after him*; not for his own sake, or for the sake of his father, whose steps he trod in, *but for the sake of David*, whose example he would not follow. Note, It aggravates the sin of a degenerate seed, that they fare the better for the piety of their ancestors, and owe their blessings to it, and yet will not imitate it. They stand upon that ground, and yet despise it, and trample upon it, and unreasonably ridicule and oppose that which they enjoy the benefit of. The kingdom of Judah was supported, [1.] That David might have a lamp, pursuant to the divine ordination of *a lamp for his anointed*, Ps. 132. 17. [2.] That Jerusalem might be established; not only that the honours put upon it, in David's and Solomon's time, might be preserved to it, but that it might be reserved to the honours

designed for it in after-times. The character here given of David is very great, *that he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*, but the exception very remarkable, *save only in the matter of Uriah*, including both his murder and the debauching of his wife. That was a bad matter; it was a remaining blot upon his name, a bar in his escutcheon, and the reproach of it was not wiped away, though the guilt was. David was guilty of other faults, but they were nothing in comparison of that; yet even that, being repented of, though it be mentioned for warning to others, did not prevail to throw him out of the covenant, nor to cut off the entail of the promise upon his seed.

9. And in the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel reigned Asa over Judah. 10. And forty and one years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. 11. And Asa did *that which was right in the eyes of the LORD*, as *did* David his father. 12. And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. 13. And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from *being* queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt *it* by the brook Kidron. 14. But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days. 15. And he brought in the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which himself had dedicated, into the house of the LORD, silver, and gold, and vessels. 16. And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 17. And Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. 18. Then Asa took all the silver and the gold *that were* left in the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants: and king Asa sent them to Ben-hadad, the son of Tabrimon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, 19. *There is a league between me and thee, and between my father and thy father*: behold, I have sent unto thee a present of silver and gold; come and break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. 20. So Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of the hosts which he had against the cities of Israel, and smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-beth-maachab, and all Cinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. 21. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard *thereof*, that he left off building of Ramah, and dwelt in Tirzah. 22. Then king Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah; none *was* exempted; and they took away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha had builded; and king Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah. 23. The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did,

and the cities which he built, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?* Nevertheless in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. 24. And Asa slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a short account of the reign of Asa; we shall find a more copious history of it, 2 Chron. 14, 15, and 16.

Here is,

I. The length of it; *He reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem*, v. 10. In the account we have of the kings of Judah, we find the number of the good kings and the bad ones nearly equal; but then we may observe, to our comfort, that the reign of the good kings was generally long, but that of the bad kings short, the considerations of which will make the state of God's church not altogether so bad, within that period, as it appears at first sight. Length of days is in Wisdom's right hand. *Honour thy father*, much more thy heavenly Father, *that thy days may be long*.

II. The general good character of it, v. 11. *And did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*. That is right indeed, which is so in God's eyes. Those are approved whom he commends. He did *as did David his father*, kept close to God, and to his instituted worship, was hearty and zealous for that, which gave him this honourable character, that he was like David, though he was not a prophet, or psalmist, as David was. If we come up to the *graces* of those that are gone before us, it will be our praise with God, though we come short of their *gifts*. Asa was like David, though he was neither such a conqueror, nor such an author; for *his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days*, (v. 14.) that is, he was both cordial and constant in his religion. What he did for God, he was sincere in, steady and uniform, and did it from a good principle, with a single eye to the glory of God.

III. The particular instances of Asa's piety. His times were times of reformation. For, 1. He removed that which was evil. There reformation begins; and a great deal of work of that kind his hand found to do. For though it was but twenty years after the death of Solomon that he began to reign, yet very gross corruption had spread far, and taken deep root. Immorality he first struck at; *he took away the Sodomites out of the land*, suppressed the brothels; for how can either prince or people prosper while those eagles of unclean and filthy birds, more dangerous than pest-houses, are suffered to remain? Then he proceeded against idolatry; *he removed all the idols*, even those *that his father had made*, v. 12. His father having made them, he was the more concerned to remove them, that he might cut off the entail of the curse, and prevent the visiting of that iniquity upon him and his. Nay, (which redounds much to his honour, and shews his heart was perfect with God,) when he found idolatry in the court, he rooted it out thence, v. 13. When it appeared that Maachah his mother, or rather his grandmother, (but called his *mother*, because she had the education of him in his childhood,) had an idol in a grove, though she was his mother, his grandmother, though, it is likely, she had a particular fondness for it, though, being old, she could not live long to patronise it, though she kept it for her own use only, yet he would by no means connive at it. Reformation must begin at home. Bad practices will never be suppressed in the country, while they are supported in the court. Asa, in every thing else, will honour and respect his mother; he loves her well, but he loves God better, and, like the Levite, Deut. 33. 9. bravely forgets the relation, when it comes in competition with his duty. If she be an idolater, (1.) Her idol shall be destroyed, publicly exposed to contempt, defaced, and burnt to ashes, *by the brook Kidron*, on which, it is probable, he strewed the ashes, in imitation of Moses, Exod. 32. 20. and in token of his detestation of idolatry, and his indignation at it, wherever he found it. Let no remains of a court-idol appear.

(2.) She shall be deposed; he removed her from being queen, or from the queen, that is, from conversing with his wife; he banished her the court, and confined her to an obscure and private life. They that have power are happy, when thus they have hearts to use it well. 2. He re-established that which was good, v. 15. *He brought into the house of God the dedicated things* which he himself had vowed out of the spoils of the Ethiopians he had conquered, and which his father had vowed, but lived not to bring in, pursuant to his vow. We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well; not only cast away the idols of our iniquity, but dedicate ourselves and our all to God's honour and glory. When those who, in their infancy, were by baptism devoted to God, make it their own act and deed to join themselves to him, and vigorously employ themselves in his service, that is, bringing in the dedicated things which they and their fathers have dedicated: it is necessary justice, rendering to God the things that are his.

IV. His political conduct. He built cities himself, to encourage the increase of his people, v. 23. and to invite others to him by the conveniences of habitation. And he was very zealous to hinder Baasha from building Ramah, because he designed it for the cutting off of communication between his people and Jerusalem, and to hinder those who, in obedience to God, would come to worship there. An enemy must by no means be suffered to fortify a frontier town.

V. The faults of his reign. In both the things for which he was praised, he was found defective; the fairest characters are not without some *but* or other in them. 1. Did he take away the idols? That was well; *but the high places were not removed*, v. 14. therein his reformation fell short. He removed all images which were rivals with the true God, or false representations of him; but the altars which were set up in high places, and to which those sacrifices were brought which should have been offered on the altar in the temple, those he suffered to stand, thinking there was no great harm in them, they having been used by good men before the temple was built, and being loath to disoblige the people who had a kindness to them, and were wedded to them both by custom and convenience; whereas in Judah and Benjamin, the only tribes under Asa's government, which lay so near Jerusalem and the altars there, there was less pretence for them than in those tribes which lay more remote. They were against the law, which obliged them to worship *at one place*, Deut. 12. 11. They lessened men's esteem of the temple and the altars there, and were an open gap for idolatry to enter in at, while the people were so much addicted to it. It was not well that Asa, when his hand was in, did not remove these; *nevertheless his heart was perfect with the Lord*. This affords us a comfortable note, that those may be found honest and upright with God, and be accepted of him, who yet, in some instances, come short of doing the good they might and should do. The perfection which is made the indispensable condition of the new covenant, is not to be understood of sinlessness (then we were all undone,) but sincerity. 2. Did he bring in the dedicated things? That was well: but he afterward alienated the dedicated things, when he took the gold and silver out of the house of God, and sent them as a bribe to Ben-hadad, to hire him to break his league with Baasha, and, by making an inroad upon his country, to give him a diversion from the building of Ramah, v. 18, 19. Here he sinned, (1.) In tempting *Ben-hadad to break his league*, and so to violate the public faith. If he did wrong in doing it, as certainly he did, Asa did wrong in persuading him to do it. (2.) In that he could not trust God, who had done so much for him, to free him out of this strait, without his using such indirect means to help himself. (3.) In taking the gold out of the treasury of the temple, which was not to be made use of, but on extraordinary occasions. The project succeeded; Ben-hadad made a descent upon the land of Israel, which obliged Baasha to retire with his whole force from Ramah, v. 20, 21. which gave Asa a fair opportunity to demolish his works there, and the timber and stones served him for the building of some cities of his own, v. 22. But, though the design prospered, we find it was displeasing to God; and though Asa valued himself upon the policy of it, and promised

himself that it would effectually secure his peace, he is told by a prophet that he had done foolishly, and that *from henceforth he should have wars*; see 2 Chron. 16. 7. 9.

VI. The troubles of his reign. For the most part, he prospered: But, 1. Baasha king of Israel was a very troublesome neighbour to him. He reigned twenty-four years, and, all his days, had war, more or less, with Asa, v. 16. This was the effect of the division of the kingdoms, that they were continually vexing one another, which made them both an easier prey to the common enemy. 2. In his old age, he was himself afflicted with the gout; he was *diseased in his feet*, which made him less fit for business, and peevish toward those about him.

VII. The conclusion of his reign. The acts of it were more largely recorded in the common history (to which reference is here had, v. 23.) than in this sacred one. He reigned long, but finished, at last, with honour, and left his throne to a successor no way inferior to him.

25. And Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. 26. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin. 27. And Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon, which *belongeth* to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. 28. Even in the third year of Asa king of Judah did Baasha slay him, and reigned in his stead. 29. And it came to pass, when he reigned, *that* he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite: 30. Because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger. 31. Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 32. And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 33. In the third year of Asa king of Judah began Baasha the son of Ahijah to reign over all Israel in Tirzah, twenty and four years. 34. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.

We are now to take a view of the miserable state of Israel, while the kingdom of Judah was happy under Asa's good government. It was threatened that they should be as a *reed shaken in the water*, ch. 14. 15. and so they were, when, during the single reign of Asa, the government of their kingdom was in six or seven different hands, as we find in this and the following chapter. Jeroboam was upon the throne, in the beginning of his reign, and Ahab at the end of it; between whom were Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, and Omri, undermining and destroying one another. This they got by deserting the house both of God and of David.

Here is, 1. The ruin and extirpation of the family of Jeroboam, according to the word of the Lord by Ahijah. His son Nadab succeeded him. If the death of his brother Ahijah had had a due influence upon him, to make him religious, and the honour done

him at his death had engaged him to follow his good example, his reign might have been long and glorious; but he *walked in the way of his father*, v. 26. kept up the worship of his calves, and forbade his subjects to go up to Jerusalem to worship; *sinned and made Israel to sin*; and therefore God brought ruin upon him quickly, in the second year of his reign. He was besieging Gibbethon, a city which the Philistines had taken from the Danites, and was endeavouring to retake it; and there, in the midst of his army, did Baasha, with others, conspire against him, and kill him, v. 27. and so little interest had he in the affection of his people, that his army did not only not avenge his death, but chose his murderer for his successor. Whether Baasha did it upon a personal pique against Nadab, or to be avenged on the house of Jeroboam, for some affront received from them; or whether, under pretence of freeing his country from the tyranny of a bad prince; or whether, merely from a principle of ambition, or to make way for himself to the throne, does not appear; but he *slew him*, and *reigned in his stead*, v. 28. And the first thing he did, when he came to the crown, was to *cut off all the house of Jeroboam*, that he might the better secure himself, and his own usurped government. He thought it not enough to imprison or banish them, but he destroyed them, left not only no males, as was foretold, ch. 14. 10. but none that breathed. Herein he was barbarous, but God was righteous. Jeroboam's sin was punished, v. 30. for they that provoke God, do it to *their own confusion*; see Jer. 7. 19. Ahijah's prophecy was accomplished, v. 29. for no word of God shall fall to the ground. Divine threatenings are not designed merely to terrify.

2. The elevation of Baasha. He shall be tried a while, as Jeroboam was; twenty-four years he reigned, v. 33. but shewed that it was not from any dislike to Jeroboam's sin that he destroyed his family, but from malice and ambition; for, when he had rooted out the sinner, he himself clave to the sin, and *walked in the way of Jeroboam*, v. 34. though he had seen the end of that way: so strangely was his heart hardened with the deceitfulness of sin.

CHAP. XVI.

This chapter relates wholly to the kingdom of Israel, and the revolutions of that kingdom—many in a little time. The utter ruin of Jeroboam's family, after it had been, twenty-four years, a royal family, we read of in the chapter before. In this chapter we have, I. The ruin of Baasha's family, after it had been but twenty-six years a royal family, foretold by a prophet, v. 1. 7. and executed by Zimri, one of his captains, v. 8. 14. II. The seven days' reign of Zimri, and his sudden fall, v. 15. 20. III. The struggle between Omri and Tibni, and Omri's prevalence, and his reign, v. 21. 28. IV. The beginning of the reign of Ahab, whom we shall afterwards read much of, v. 29. 33. V. The rebuilding of Jericho, v. 34. All this while, in Judah, things went well.

1. **T**HEN the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, 2. Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; Behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 4. Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat. 5. Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 6. So Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah: and Elah his son reigned in his stead. 7. And also by the hand of the prophet Jehu the son

of Hanani came the word of the LORD against Baasha, and against his house, even for all the evil that he did in the sight of the LORD, in provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam; and because he killed him. 8. In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in Tirzah, two years. 9. And his servant Zimri, captain of half *his* chariots, conspired against him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza steward of *his* house in Tirzah. 10. And Zimri went in and smote him, and killed him, in the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his stead. 11. And it came to pass, when he began to reign, as soon as he sat on his throne, *that* he slew all the house of Baasha: he left him not one that pisseth against a wall, neither of his kinsfolks, nor of his friends. 12. Thus did Zimri destroy all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake against Baasha by Jehu the prophet. 13. For all the sins of Baasha, and the sins of Elah his son, by which they sinned, and by which they made Israel to sin, in provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities. 14. Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Here is,

I. The ruin of the family of Baasha foretold: he was a man likely enough to have raised and established his family, active, politic, and daring; but he was an idolater, and that brought destruction upon his family. God sent him warning of it before, 1. That, if he were thereby wrought upon to repent, and reform, the ruin might be prevented; for God threatens, that he may not strike, as one that desires not the death of sinners. 2. That, if not, it might appear that the destruction, when it did come, whoever might be instruments of it, was the act of God's justice, and the punishment of sin. The warning was sent by *Jehu, the son of Hanani*. The father was a seer, or prophet, at the same time, 2 Chron. 16. 7. He was sent to Asa king of Judah; but the son, who was young, and more active, was sent on this longer and more dangerous expedition to Baasha king of Israel. *Juniore ad labores—Toil and adventure are for the young*. This Jehu was a prophet, and the son of a prophet. Prophecy, thus happily entailed, was worthy of so much the more honour. This Jehu continued long in his usefulness, for we find him repraving Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 19. 2. above forty years after, and writing the annals of that prince, 2 Chron. 20. 34. The message which this prophet brought to Baasha is much the same with that which Ahijah sent to Jeroboam by his wife. (1.) He reminds him of the great things God *had* done for him, v. 2. *I exalted thee out of the dust, to the throne of glory*, a great instance of the divine sovereignty and power, 1 Sam. 2. 8. Baasha seemed to have raised himself by his own treachery and cruelty, yet there was the hand of Providence in it, to bring about God's counsel concerning Jeroboam's house; and God's owning his advancement as his act and deed, does by no means amount to the patronising of his ambition and treachery. It is God that puts power into bad men's hands, which he makes to serve his good purposes, notwithstanding the bad use they make of it. *I made thee prince over my people*. God calls Israel his people still, though

wretchedly corrupted, because they retained the covenant of circumcision, and there were many good people among them; it was not till long after that they were called *Lo-ammi, not a people*, Hos. 1. 9. (2.) He charges him with high crimes and misdemeanours. [1.] That he had *made Israel to sin*, had seduced God's subjects from their allegiance, and had brought them to pay the homage, due to him only, to dunghill-deities, and herein he had *walked in the way of Jeroboam*, v. 2. and been like *his* house, v. 7. [2.] That he had himself *provoked God to anger with the work of his hands*, that is, by worshipping images, the *work of men's hands*; though others made them, perhaps he served them, and thereby avowed the making of them, and they are therefore called the *work of his hands*. [3.] That he had *destroyed the house of Jeroboam*, v. 7. *because he killed him*, namely, Jeroboam's son, and all his; if he had done that, with an eye to God, and to his will and glory, and from a holy indignation against the sins of Jeroboam and his house, he had been accepted and applauded as a minister of God's justice; but, as he did it, he was only the tool of God's justice, but a servant to his own lusts, and is justly punished for the malice and ambition which governed him in all he did. They who are any way employed in denouncing or executing the justice of God, (magistrates or ministers,) are concerned to do it from a good principle, and in a holy manner, lest it turn into sin to them, and they make themselves obnoxious by it. (3.) He foretells the same destruction to come upon his family which he himself had been employed to bring upon the family of Jeroboam, v. 3, 4. They who resemble others in their sins may expect to resemble them in their plagues, especially those who seem zealous against such sins in others as they allow themselves in; the house of Jehu was reckoned with for the blood of the house of Ahab, Hos. 1. 4.

II. A reprieve granted for some time, so long, that Baasha himself dies in peace, and is buried with honour in his own royal city, v. 6. so far is he from being a prey either to the dogs or to the fowls, which yet was threatened to his house, v. 4. He lives not either to see or feel the punishment threatened, yet he was himself the greatest delinquent; certainly there must be a future state, in which impenitent sinners will suffer in their own persons, and not escape, as often they do in this world. Baasha died under no visible stroke of divine vengeance, for aught that appears, but *God laid up his iniquity for his children*, as Job speaks, ch. 21. 19. thus he often visits sins. Observe, Baasha is punished, by the destruction of his children, after his death; and his children are punished, by the abuse of their bodies, after their death; that is the only thing which the threatening specifies, v. 4. that the dogs and the fowls of the air should eat them, as if herein were designed a tacit intimation, That there are punishments after death, when death has done its worst, which will be the sorest punishments, and are most to be dreaded; these judgments, on the body and posterity, signified judgments on the soul when separated from the body, by Him who, *after he has killed, has power to cast into hell*.

III. Execution done at last. Baasha's son Elah, like Jeroboam's son Nadab, reigned two years, and then was slain by Zimri, one of his own soldiers, as he was by Baasha: so like was his house made to that of Jeroboam, as was threatened, v. 3. Because his idolatry was like his, and one of the sins for which God contended with him, being the destruction of Jeroboam's family, the more like the destruction of his own was to that, the nearer did the punishment resemble the sin, as face answers to face in a glass.

1. As then, so now, the king himself was first slain, but Elah fell more ingloriously than Nadab; Nadab was slain in the field of action and honour, he and his army then besieging Giblethon, ch. 15. 27. but, the siege being then raised, upon that disaster, and the city remaining still in the Philistines' hands, the army of Israel was now renewing the attempt, v. 15. and Elah should have been with them, to command in chief, but he loved his own ease and safety better than his honour or duty, or the public good, and therefore staid behind to take his pleasure; and, when he was *drinking himself drunk in his servant's house*, Zimri killed him, v. 9, 10. Let it be a warning to drunkards, especially to those who designedly drink themselves drunk, that they knew not but

death may surprise them in that condition. (1.) Death comes *easily* upon men when they are drunk; beside the chronical diseases which men frequently bring themselves into by hard drinking, and which cut them off in the midst of their days, men, in that condition, are more easily overcome by an enemy, as Amnon by Absalom, and are liable to more bad accidents, being unable to help themselves. (2.) Death comes *terribly* upon men in that condition, finding them in the act of sin, and incapacitated for any act of devotion; that day comes upon them at unawares, Luke, 21. 34. like a thief.

2. As then, so now, the whole family was cut off, and rooted out; the traitor was the successor, to whom the unthinking people tamely submitted, as if it were all one to them what king they had, so that they had one; the first thing Zimri did, was, to *slay all the house of Baasha*; thus he held by cruelly what he got by treason; his cruelty seems to have extended further than Baasha's did against the house of Jeroboam, for he left to Elah *none of his kinsfolk or friends, v. 11. none of his avengers*, so the word is, none that were likely to avenge his death; yet divine justice soon avenged it so remarkably, that it was used as a proverb long after, *Had Zimri peace, that slew his master?* 2 Kings, 9. 31. In this, (1.) The word of God was fulfilled, v. 12. (2.) The sins of Baasha and Elah were reckoned for, with which they *provoked God by their vanities*, v. 13. Their idols are called their *vanities*, for they cannot profit nor help; miserable are those whose deities are vanities.

15. In the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah did Zimri reign seven days in Tirzah. And the people *were* encamped against Gibbethon, which *belonged* to the Philistines. 16. And the people *that were* encamped heard say, Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king: wherefore all Israel made Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel that day in the camp. 17. And Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. 18. And it came to pass, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died. 19. For his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of the LORD, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel sin. 20. Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and his treason that he wrought, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?* 21. Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri. 22. But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath; so Tibni died, and Omri reigned. 23. In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. 24. And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria. 25. But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that *were* before him. 26. For he walked in all the way

of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities. 27. Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he shewed, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?* 28. So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria: and Ahab his son reigned in his stead.

Solomon observes, Prov. 28. 2. that, *for the transgression of a land, many were the princes thereof*, (so it was here in Israel,) *but by a man of understanding the state thereof shall be prolonged*. So it was with Judah, at the same time, under Asa; when men forsake God, they are out of the way of rest and establishment; Zimri, and Tibni, and Omri, are here striving for the crown. Proud aspiring men ruin one another, and involve others in the ruin; these confusions end in the settlement of Omri; we must therefore take him along with us through this part of the story.

I. How he was chosen, as the Roman emperors often were, by the army in the field, now encamped before Gibbethon; notice was soon brought thither that Zimri had slain their king, v. 16. and set up himself in Tirzah, the royal city, whereupon they chose Omri king in the camp, that they might, without delay, avenge the death of Elah upon Zimri; though he was idle and intemperate, yet he was their king, and they would not tamely submit to his murderer, nor let the treason go unpunished; they did not attempt to avenge the death of Nadab upon Baasha, perhaps because the house of Baasha had ruled with more gentleness than the house of Jeroboam; but Zimri shall feel the resentments of the provoked army; the siege of Gibbethon is quitted, (Philistines are sure to gain when Israelites quarrel,) and Zimri is prosecuted.

II. How he conquered Zimri: he is said to have reigned seven days, v. 15. so long before Omri was proclaimed king, and himself proclaimed traitor; but we may suppose it a longer time before he died, for he continued long enough to shew his inclination to the way of Jeroboam, and to make himself obnoxious to the justice of God, by supporting his idolatry, v. 19. Tirzah was a beautiful city, but not fortified, so that Omri soon made himself master of it, v. 17. forced Zimri into the palace, which being unable to defend, and yet unwilling to surrender, he burnt, and himself in it, v. 18. Unwilling that his rival should ever enjoy that sumptuous palace, he burnt it; and fearing, that, if he fell into the hands of the army, either alive or dead, he should be ignominiously treated, he burnt himself in it. See what desperate practices men's wickedness sometimes brings them to, and how it hurries them into their own ruin; see the disposition of incendiaries, who set palaces and kingdoms on fire, though they are themselves in danger of perishing in the flame.

III. How he struggled with Tibni, and, at length, got clear of him; *half of the people followed this Tibni*, v. 21. probably those who were in Zimri's interest, with whom others joined, who would not have a king chosen in the camp, (lest he should rule by the sword, and a standing army,) but in a convention of the states; the contest between these two lasted some years, and, it is likely, cost a great deal of blood on both sides, for it was in the twenty-seventh year of Asa that Omri was first elected, v. 15. and thence the twelve years of his reign are to be dated; but it was not till the thirty-first year of Asa that he began to reign without a rival; then Tibni died, it is likely, in battle, and Omri reigned, v. 22. Sir Walter Raleigh, in his History of the World, l. 2. c. 19. § 6. inquires here, why it was, that, in all these confusions and revolutions of the kingdom of Israel, they never thought of returning to the house of David, and uniting themselves again to Judah, *for then was it better for them than now*; and he thinks the reason was, because the kings of Judah assumed a more absolute arbitrary, and despotic, power, than the kings of Israel; it was

the heaviness of the yoke that they complained of, when they first revolted from the house of David, and the dread of that made them ever after averse to it, and attached to kings of their own, who ruled more by law, and the rules of a limited monarchy.

IV. How he reigned, when he was, at length, settled on the throne. 1. He made himself famous by building Samaria, (which ever after was the royal city of the kings of Israel,) the palace at Tirzah being burnt,) and, in process of time, grew so considerable, that it gave name to the middle part of Canaan, which lay between Galilee on the north and Judea on the south,) and to the inhabitants of that country, who were called *Samaritans*. He bought the ground for *two talents of silver*, somewhat more than 700 pounds of our money, for a talent was 35*l.* 1*l.* 10½*d.* Perhaps, Shemer, who sold him the ground, let him have it considerably the cheaper, upon condition that the city should be called after his name, which, otherwise, would have borne the name of the purchaser; it was called *Samaria*, or *Shemeren*, as it is in the Hebrew, from Shemer, the former owner, *v.* 24. The kings of Israel changed their royal seats; Shechem first, then Tirzah, now Samaria; but the kings of Judah were constant to Jerusalem, the city of God: they that cleave to the Lord, fix; they that leave him, ever wander. 2. He made himself infamous by his wickedness, for *he did worse than all that were before him*, *v.* 25. Though he was brought to the throne with much difficulty, and Providence had remarkably favoured him in his advancement, yet he was more profane, or more superstitious, and a greater persecutor, than either of the houses of Jeroboam or Baasha; he went further than they had done, in *establishing iniquity by a law*, and forcing his subjects to comply with him in it; for we read of the statutes of Omri, the keeping of which made *Israel a desolation*, *Mic.* 6. 16. Jeroboam made Israel to sin, by temptation, example, and allurements; but Omri did it by compulsion.

V. How he ended his reign, *v.* 27, 28. He was in some repute for the might which he shewed; many a bad man has been a stout man. He died in his bed, as Jeroboam and Baasha did themselves; but, like them, left it to his posterity to fill up the measure, and then pay off the scores, of his iniquity.

29. And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. 30. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that *were* before him. 31. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. 32. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. 34. In his days did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun.

We have here the beginning of the reign of Ahab, of whom we have more particulars recorded, than of any of the kings of Israel; we have here only a general idea given us of him, as the worst of all the kings, that we may expect what the particulars will be; he reigned twenty-two years, long enough to do a deal of mischief.

I. He exceeded all his predecessors in wickedness, *did evil above all that were before him*, *v.* 30. and, as if it were done with a particular enmity both to God and Israel, to affront him, and ruin them; it is said, *He did more, purposely to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger*, and, consequently, to send judgments on his land, *than all the kings of Israel that went before him*, *v.* 33. It was bad with the people, when their kings were each worse than other; what would they come to at last? He had seen the ruin of other wicked kings and their families; yet, instead of taking warning, his heart was hardened and enraged against God by it. He thought it a *light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam*, *v.* 31. It was nothing to break the second commandment by image-worship, he would set aside the first also, by introducing other gods; his little finger should fall heavier upon God's ordinances than Jeroboam's loins; making light of lesser sins makes way for greater, and they that endeavour to extenuate other people's sins, will but aggravate their own.

II. He married a wicked woman, who, he knew, would bring in the worship of Baal, and seemed to marry her with that design. *As if it had been a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, he took to wife Jezebel*, *v.* 31. a zealous idolater, extremely imperious and malicious in her natural temper, addicted to witchcrafts and whoredoms, *2 Kings*, 9. 22. and every way vicious. The false prophetess spoken of, *Rev.* 2. 20. is there called *Jezebel*, for a wicked woman could not be called by a worse name than her's; what mischiefs she did, and what mischief, at last, befell her, (*2 Kings*, 9. 33.) we shall find in the following story; this one strange wife debauched Israel more than all Solomon's.

III. He set up the worship of Baal, forsook the God of Israel, and served the god of the Zidonians, Jupiter instead of Jehovah; the sun, so some think; a deified hero of the Phenicians, so others: he was weary of the golden calves, and thought they had worshipped them long enough; such vanities were they, that those who had been fondest of them, at length, grew disgusted with them, and, like adulterers, must have variety. In honour of this mock deity, whom they called *Baal, lord*, and for the convenience of his worship, 1. Ahab built a temple in Samaria, the royal city, because the temple of God was in Jerusalem, the royal city of the other kingdom; he would have Baal's temple near him, that he might the better frequent it, protect it, and put honour upon it. 2. He reared an altar in that temple, on which to offer sacrifice to Baal, by which they acknowledged their dependence upon him, and sought his favour. Oh the stupidity of idolaters, who are at a great expence to make one their friend, whom they might have chosen whether they would have made a god or no! 3. He made a grove about his temple; either a natural one, by planting shady trees there, or, if those would be too long in growing, an artificial one in imitation of it; for it is not said, *He planted*, but, *He made a grove*, something that answered the intention, which was to conceal, and so, countenance, the abominable impurities that were committed in the filthy worship of Baal. He that doeth evil, hateth the light.

IV. One of his subjects, in imitation of his presumption, ventured to build Jericho, in defiance of the curse Joshua had long since pronounced on him that should attempt it, *v.* 34. It comes in as an instance of the height of impiety men were then arrived at, especially at Bethel, where one of the calves was, for of that city this daring sinner was. Observe, 1. How ill he did; like Achan, he meddled with the accursed thing, turned that to his own use which was devoted to God's honour: he began to build, in defiance of the curse well known in Israel, jesting with it, perhaps, as a bugbear, or fancying it was worn out by length of time, for it was above 500 years since it was pronounced, *Josh.* 6. 26. He went on to build, in defiance of the execution of the curse in part; for, though his eldest son died when he began, yet he would proceed, in contempt of God and his wrath, revealed from heaven, against his ungodliness. 2. How ill he sped; he built for his children, but God wrote him childless; his eldest son died when he began, the youngest when he finished, and all the rest, (it is supposed,) between. Note, Those whom God curses, are cursed

indeed; none ever hardened his heart against God, and prospered. God keep us back from presumptuous sins, those great transgressions!

CHAP. XVII.

So sad was the character of both the princes and people of Israel in the foregoing chapter, that one would expect God should cast off a people that had so cast him off; but, as an evidence to the contrary, never was Israel so blessed with a good prophet, as when it was so plagued with a bad king; never was king so bold to sin as Ahab, never was prophet so bold to reprove and threaten as Elijah, whose story begins in this chapter, and is full of wonders. Scarcely any part of the Old-Testament history shines brighter than the history of the spirit and power of Elias; he only, of all the prophets, had the honour of Enoch, the first prophet, to be translated, that he should not see death, and the honour of Moses, the great prophet, to attend our Saviour in his transfiguration: other prophets prophesied and wrote, he prophesied and acted, but wrote nothing; but his actings cast more lustre on his name than their writings on their's. In this chapter, we have, I. His prediction of a famine in Israel, through the want of rain, v. 1. II. The provision made for him in that famine, 1. By the ravens at the brook Cherith, v. 2.. 7. 2. When that failed, by a widow at Zarephath, who received him in the name of a prophet, and had a prophet's reward; for, (1.) He multiplied her meal and her oil, v. 8.. 16. (2.) He raised her dead son to life, v. 17. 24. Thus his story begins with judgments and miracles, designed to awaken that stupid generation that had so deeply corrupted themselves.

1. **A**ND Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, *As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.* 2. And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 3. Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, *that is* before Jordan. 4. And it shall be, *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. 5. So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, *that is* before Jordan. 6. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. 7. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

The history of Elijah begins somewhat abruptly: usually, when a prophet enters, we have some account of his parentage, are told whose son he was, and of what tribe; but Elijah drops (so to speak) out of the clouds, as if, like Melchisedek, he were without father, without mother, and without descent, which made some of the Jews fancy that he was an angel sent from heaven; but the apostle has assured us that *he was a man subject to like passions as we are*, (James, 5. 17.) which perhaps intimates, not only that he was liable to the common infirmities of the human nature, but that, by his natural temper, he was a man of strong passions, more hot and eager than most other men, and therefore the more fit to deal with the daring sinners of the age he lived in. So wonderfully does God suit men to the work he designs them for; rough spirits are called to rough services; the reformation needed such a man as Luther to break the ice.

Observe, 1. His name; *Elijahu*, "*My God Jehovah is he*," (so it signifies,) "*as he who sends me, and will own me, and bear me out, is he to whom I would bring Israel back, and who alone can effect that great work.*" 2. His country; he was *of the inhabitants of Gilead*, on the other side Jordan; either of the tribe of Gad, or that half of Manasseh, for Gilead was divided between them; but whether a native of either of those tribes, is uncertain; the

obscurity of his parentage was no prejudice to his eminency afterward; we need not inquire *whence* men are, but *what* they are; if it be a good thing, no matter though it come out of Nazareth. Israel was sore wounded, when God sent them this balm from Gilead, and this physician thence. He is called a *Tishbite* from Tishbe, a town in that country.

Two things we have an account of here in the beginning of his story.

I. How he foretold a famine, a long and grievous famine, with which Israel should be punished for their sins; that fruitful land, for want of rain, should be turned into barrenness, for the iniquity of them that dwelt therein; he went and told Ahab this; did not whisper it to the people, to make them disaffected to the government, but proclaimed it to the king, in whose power it was to reform the land, and so, to prevent the judgment. It is probable that he reprov'd Ahab for his idolatry and other wickedness, and told him, that, unless he repented and reformed, this judgment would be brought upon his land. There should be *neither dew nor rain for some years, none but according to my word*; that is, "Expect none, till you hear from me again." The apostle teaches us to understand this, not only of the word of prophecy, but the word of prayer, which turned the key of the clouds, Jam. 5. 17, 18. He prayed earnestly, (in a holy indignation at Israel's apostacy, and a holy zeal for the glory of God, whose judgments were defied,) *that it might not rain*, and, according to his prayers, the heavens became brass, till he *prayed again that it might rain*. In allusion to this story, it is said of God's witnesses, Rev. 11. 6. *These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy.*

Elijah lets Ahab know, 1. That *the Lord Jehovah is the God of Israel*, whom he had forsaken. 2. That he is a *living God*, and not like the gods he worshipped, which were dead dumb idols. 3. That *he was his servant in office*, and a messenger sent from him; "*It is he before whom I stand, to minister to him*," or "*whom I now represent, in whose stead I stand, and in whose name I speak, in defiance of the prophets of Baal and the groves.*" 4. That, notwithstanding the present peace and prosperity of their kingdom, God was displeased with them for their idolatry, and would chastise them for it by the want of rain, which, when he withheld it, it was not in the power of the gods they served to bestow; for, *Are there any of the vanities of the heathen that can give rain?* Jer. 14. 22. which would effectually prove their impotency, and the folly of those who left the living God, to make their court to such as could do neither good nor evil; and this he confirms with a solemn oath, *As the Lord God of Israel liveth*; that Ahab might stand the more in awe of the threatening, the divine life being engaged for the accomplishment of it. 5. He lets him know what interest he had in heaven; *It shall be according to my word*. With what dignity does he speak, when he speaks in God name, as one who well understood that commission of a prophet, Jer. 1. 10. *I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms*. See the power of prayer, and the truth of God's word; for he performeth the counsel of his messengers.

II. How he was himself taken care of in that famine.

1. How he was hidden; God bade him *go and hide himself by the brook Cherith*, v. 3. This was intended, not so much for his preservation, for it does not appear that Ahab immediately sought his life, but as a judgment to the people, to whom, if he had publicly appeared, he might have been a blessing, both by his instructions and his intercession, and so have shortened the days of their calamity; but God had determined it should last three years and a half, and therefore, so long, appointed Elijah to abscond, that he might not be solicited to revoke the sentence, the execution whereof he had said should be *according to his word*. When God *speaks concerning a nation to pluck up and destroy*, he finds some way or other to remove those that would stand in the gap, to turn away his wrath; it bodes ill to a people, when good men and good ministers are ordered to hide themselves; when God intended to *send rain upon the earth*, then he bade Elijah *go slay himself to Ahab*, ch. 18. 1. For the present, in obedience to the divine command.

he went, and dwelt all alone in some obscure unfrequented place, where he was not discovered; probably, among the reeds of the brook. If Providence calls us to solitude and retirement, it becomes us to acquiesce; when we cannot be useful, we must be patient, and when we cannot work for God, we must sit still quietly for him.

2. How he was fed; though he could not work there, having nothing to do but to meditate and pray, (which would help to prepare him for his usefulness afterward,) yet he shall eat, for he is in the way of his duty, and *verily he shall be fed, in the day of famine he shall be satisfied.* When the woman, the church, is driven into the wilderness, care is taken that she be fed and nourished there, time, times, and half a time, that is, three years and a half, which was just the time of Elijah's concealment. See Rev. 12. 6, 14. Elijah must drink of the brook, and the ravens were appointed to *bring him meat*, v. 4. and did so, v. 6. Here,

(1.) The provision was plentiful, and good, and constant; bread and flesh, twice a day, daily bread, and food convenient. We may suppose that he fared not so sumptuously as the prophets of the groves, who *did eat at Jezebel's table*, ch. 18. 19. and yet better than the rest of the Lord's prophets, whom Obadiah fed *with bread and water*, ch. 18. 4. It ill becomes God's servants, especially his servants the prophets, to be nice and curious about their food, and to affect dainties and varieties; if nature be sustained, no matter though the palate be not pleased; instead of envying those who have daintier fare, we should think how many there are, better than we, who live comfortably upon coarser fare, and would be glad of our leavings. Elijah had but one meal brought him at a time, every morning and every evening, to teach him not to take thought for the morrow; let those who have but from hand to mouth, learn to live upon Providence, and trust it for *the bread of the day in the day*; thank God for bread this day, and let to-morrow bring bread with it.

(2.) The caterers were very unlikely; the ravens brought it him. Obadiah and others in Israel, that had not bowed the knee to Baal, would gladly have entertained Elijah; but he was a man by himself, and shall be fed in an extraordinary way, he was a figure of John the Baptist, whose meat was locusts and wild honey. God could have sent angels to minister to him, as he did afterward, ch. 19. 5. and as he did to our Saviour, Matth. 4. 11. but he chose to send by winged messengers of another nature, to shew, that, when he pleases, he can serve his own purposes by the meanest creatures as effectually as by the mightiest. If it be asked, whence the ravens had this provision, how and where it was cooked, and whether they came honestly by it, we must answer, as Jacob did, Gen. 27. 20. *The Lord our God brought it to them*, whose the earth is, and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein. But why ravens? [1.] They are birds of prey, greedy devouring creatures, more likely to have taken his meat from him, or to have picked out his eyes, (Prov. 30. 17.) but thus Samson's riddle is again unriddled, *Out of the eater comes forth meat.* [2.] They are unclean creatures; every raven after his kind was, by the law, forbidden to be eaten, Lev. 11. 15. yet Elijah did not think the meat they brought over the worse for that, but ate and gave thanks, asking no question for conscience-sake. Noah's dove was to him a more faithful messenger than his raven; yet here the ravens are faithful and constant to Elijah. [3.] Ravens feed on insects and carrion themselves, yet they brought the prophet man's meat, and wholesome food; it is pity that those who bring the bread of life to others, should themselves take up with *that which is not bread.* [4.] Ravens could bring but a little, and broken meat, yet Elijah was content with such things as he had, and thankful that he was fed, though not feasted. [5.] Ravens neglect their own young ones, and do not feed them; yet, when God pleases, they shall feed his prophet; young lions and young ravens may lack, and suffer hunger, but not they that fear the Lord, Ps. 34. 10. [6.] Ravens are themselves fed by special providence, Job, 38. 41. Ps. 147. 9. and now they feed the prophet. Have we experienced God's special goodness to us and our's? Let us reckon ourselves obliged, thereby, to be kind to those that

are his, for his sake. Let us learn from hence, *First*, To acknowledge the sovereignty and power of God over all the creatures; he can make what use he pleases of them, either for judgment or mercy. *Secondly*, To encourage ourselves in God in the greatest straits, and never to distrust him; he that could furnish a table in the wilderness, and make ravens purveyors, cooks, and servitors to his prophet, is able to supply all our need according to his riches in glory.

Thus does Elijah, for a great while, *eat his morsels alone*, and his provision of water, which he has in an ordinary way from the brook, fails him before that which he had by miracle. The powers of nature are limited, but not the powers of the God of nature. Elijah's brook dried up, v. 7. *because there was no rain*; if the heavens fail, earth fails of course; such are all our creature-comforts; we lose them, when we most need them, like the brooks in summer, Job, 6. 15. But there is a river which makes glad the city of God; that never runs dry, Ps. 46. 4. *a well of water that springs up to eternal life*; Lord, give us that living water!

8. And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 9. Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which *belongeth* to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. 13. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman *was* there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. 11. And as she was going to fetch *it*, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. 12. And she said, *As* the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I *am* gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. 13. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go *and* do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring *it* unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. 14. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. 15. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat *many* days. 16. *And* the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

We have here an account of the further protection Elijah was taken under, and the further provision made for him, in his retirement; *at destruction and famine he shall laugh*, that has God for his Friend, to guard and maintain him; the brook Cherith is dried up, but God's care of his people, and kindness to them, never slacken, never fail, but are still the same, are still *continued and drawn out to them that know him*, Ps. 36. 10. When the brook was dried up, Jordan was not; why did not God send him thither? Surely, because he would shew that he has a variety of ways to provide for his people, and is not tied to any one. God will now provide for him there where he shall have some company and opportunity of usefulness, and not be, as he had been, buried alive. Observe,

1. The place he is sent to; to Zarephath, or Sarepta, a city of Sidon, out of the borders of the land of Israel, v. 9. Our Saviour

takes notice of this as an early and ancient indication of the favour of God, designed for the poor Gentiles, in the fulness of time, Luke, 4. 25, 26. *Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias*, and some, it is likely, that would have bidden him welcome to their houses; yet he is sent to honour and bless with his presence a city of Sidon, a Gentile city, and so becomes (says Dr. Lightfoot) *the first prophet of the Gentiles*. Israel had corrupted themselves with the idolatries of the nations, and were become worse than they; justly therefore is *the casting off of them the riches of the world*. Elijah was hated and driven out by his countrymen, therefore, *Lo, he turns to the Gentiles*, as the apostles were afterward ordered to do, Acts, 18. 6. But why to a city of Sidon? Perhaps, because the worship of Baal, which was now the crying sin of Israel, came lately from thence, with Jezebel, who was a Sidonian, *ch. 16. 31*. therefore thither he shall go, that thence may be fetched the destroyer of that idolatry; *Even out of Sidon have I called my prophet, my reformer*. Jezebel was Elijah's greatest enemy; yet, to shew her the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding-place for him even in her country; Christ never went among the Gentiles, except once *into the coast of Sidon*, Matth. 15. 21.

II. The person that is appointed to entertain him; not one of the rich merchants, or great men, of Sidon, not such a one as Obadiah, that was governor of Ahab's house, and fed the prophets, but a poor widow-woman, destitute and desolate, is commanded (that is, made both able and willing) to sustain him. It is God's way, and it is his glory, to make use of, and put honour upon, the *weak and foolish things of the world*. He is, in a special manner, the widows' God, and feeds them, and therefore they must study what they shall render to him.

III. The provision made for him there; Providence brought the widow-woman to meet him very opportunely at the gate of the city, *v. 10*. and, by what is here related of what passed between Elijah and her, we find,

1. Her case and character; and it appears,

(1.) That she was very poor and necessitous; she had nothing to live upon, but a handful of meal and a little oil, needy at the best, and now, by the general scarcity, reduced to the last extremity; when she has eaten the little she has, for aught she yet sees, she must die for want, she and her son, *v. 12*. She had no fuel, but the sticks she gathered in the streets, and, having no servant, she must gather them herself, *v. 10*. more likely to receive alms than give entertainment; to her Elijah is sent, that he might still live upon Providence, as much as he did when the ravens fed him; it was in compassion to the low estate of his handmaiden, that God sent the prophet to her, not to beg of her, but to board with her, and he would pay well for his table.

(2.) That she was very humble and industrious; he found her gathering sticks, and preparing to bake her own bread, *v. 10, 12*. Her mind was brought to her condition, and she complains not of the hardship she was brought to, nor quarrels with the Divine Providence for withholding rain, but accommodates herself to it as well as she can; such as are of this temper, in a day of trouble, are best prepared for honour and relief from God.

(3.) That she was very charitable and generous; when this stranger desired her to go fetch him some water to drink, she readily went, at the first word, *v. 10, 11*. She objected not the present scarcity of it, nor asked him what he would give her for a draught of water, for now it was worth money, nor hinted that he was a stranger, an Israelite, with whom, perhaps, the Sidonians cared not for having any dealings, any more than the Samaritans, John, 4. 9. She did not excuse herself on account of her weakness through famine, or the urgency of her own affairs; did not tell him she had something else to do than to go on his errands, but left her gathering of the sticks for herself, to fetch water for him, which perhaps she did the more willingly, being moved with the gravity of his aspect. We should be ready to do any office of kindness, even to strangers; if we have not wherewith to give to the distressed, we must be the more ready to work for them; a cup of cold water, though it cost us no more than the labour of fetching, shall, in no wise, lose its reward.

(4.) That she had a great confidence in the word of God; it was a great trial of her faith and obedience, when, having told the prophet how low her stock of meal and oil was, and that she had but just enough for herself and her son, he bade her *make a cake for him*, and make *his* first, and, *after, prepare for herself and her son*; if we consider, it will appear as great a trial as could be, in so small a matter; "Let the children first be served;" (might she have said;) "charity begins at home; I cannot be expected to give, having but little, and not knowing, when that is gone, where to obtain more." She had much more reason than Nabal to ask, "Shall I take my meat and my oil, and give it to one that I know not whence he is?" Elijah, it is true, made mention of *the God of Israel*, *v. 14*. but what was that to a Sidonian? Or, if she had a veneration for the name *Jehovah*, and valued the God of Israel, as the true God, yet what assurance had she that this stranger was his prophet, or had any warrant to speak in his name? It was easy for a hungry vagrant to impose upon her. But she gets over all these objections, and obeys the precept, in dependence upon the promise; she *went and did according to the saying of Elijah*, *v. 15*. *O woman, great was thy faith*; one has not found the like, *no not in Israel*: all things considered, it exceeded that of the widow, who, when she had but two mites, cast them into the treasury; she took the prophet's word, that she should not lose by it, but it should be repayed with interest. Those that can venture upon the promise of God, will make no difficulty of exposing and emptying themselves in his service, by giving him his dues out of a little, and giving him his part first. They that deal with God, must deal upon trust; seek first his kingdom, and then other things shall be added: by the law, the first-fruits were God's, the tithe was taken out first, and the heave-offering of their dough was first offered, Numb. 15. 20, 21. But surely the increase of this widow's faith, to such a degree as to enable her thus to deny herself, and to depend upon the divine promise, was as great a miracle in the kingdom of grace, as the increase of her oil was in the kingdom of Providence. Happy are they who can thus, against hope, believe and obey in hope.

2. The care God took of her and her guest; the *barrel of meal wasted not, nor did the cruse of oil fail*, but still, as they took from them, more was added to them by the divine power, *v. 16*. Never did corn or olive so increase in the growing (says Bishop Hall) as these did in the using; but the *multiplying of the seed sown*, 2 Cor. 9. 10. in the common course of Providence, is an instance of the power and goodness of God, not to be overlooked because common. The meal and the oil multiplied, not in the hoarding, but in the spending; for *there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth*; when God blesses a little, it will go a great way, even beyond expectation; as, on the contrary, though there be abundance, if he blow upon it, it comes to little, Hag. 1. 9.—2. 16.

(1.) This was a maintenance for the prophet: still miracles shall be his daily bread; hitherto, he was fed with bread and flesh, now, with bread and oil, which they used as we do butter; manna was both, for the *taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil*, Numb. 11. 8. This Elijah was thankful for, though he had been used to flesh twice a day, and now had none at all: those that cannot live without flesh once a day, at least, because they have been used to it, could not have boarded contentedly with Elijah, no not to live upon a miracle.

(2.) It was a maintenance for *the poor widow and her son*, and a recompence to her for entertaining the prophet: there is nothing lost by being kind to God's people and ministers; she that received a prophet had a prophet's reward; she gave him house-room, and he repayed her with food for the household. Christ has promised to those who open their doors to him, that he will come in to them, and *sup with them, and they with him*, Rev. 3. 20. Like Elijah here, he brings to those who bid him welcome, not only his own entertainment, but their's too. See how the reward answered the service; she generously made one cake for the prophet, and was repayed with many for herself and her son. When Abraham offers his only son to God, he is told he shall be the father of multitudes; what is laid out in piety, or charity, is let out to the best interest,

upon the best securities. One poor meal's meat this poor widow gave the prophet, and, in recompence of it, *she and her son did eat many days*, v. 15. above two years, in a time of general scarcity; and to have their food from God's special favour, and to eat it in such good company as Elijah's, made it more than doubly sweet. It is promised to them that trust in God, that they *shall not be ashamed in the evil time, but in the days of famine they shall be satisfied*, Ps. 37. 19.

17. And it came to pass after these things, *that* the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick: and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. 18. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? 19. And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. 20. And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? 21. And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. 22. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth. 24. And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou *art* a man of God, *and* that the word of the LORD in thy mouth *is* truth.

We have here a further recompence made to the widow for her kindness to the prophet; as if it were a small thing to be kept alive, her son, when dead, is restored to life, and so restored to her. Observe,

I. The sickness and death of the child; for aught that appears, he was her only son, the comfort of her widowed estate. He was fed miraculously, and yet that did not secure him from sickness and death; *Your fathers did eat manna, and are dead, but there is bread, of which a man may eat, and not die*, which was given for the life of the world, John, 6. 49, 50. This affliction was to this widow as a thorn in the flesh, lest she should be lifted up above measure with the favours that were done her, and the honours that were put upon her. 1. She was nurse to a great prophet, was employed to sustain him, and had strong reason to think the Lord would do her good; yet now, she loses her child. Note, We must not think it strange, if we meet with very sharp afflictions, even then when we are in the way of duty, and of eminent service to God. 2. She was herself nursed by miracle, and kept a good house without charge or care, by a distinguishing blessing from heaven; and, in the midst of all this satisfaction, she is thus afflicted. Note, When we have the clearest manifestations of God's favour and good-will towards us, even then we must prepare for the rebukes of Providence; our mountain never stands so strong, but it may be moved, and therefore, in this world, we must always rejoice with trembling.

II. Her pathetic complaint to the prophet of this affliction; it should seem the child died suddenly, else she would have applied to Elijah, while he was sick, for the cure of him; but being dead, dead in her bosom, she expostulates with the

prophet upon it, rather to give vent to her sorrow, than in any hope of relief, v. 18.

1. She expresses herself *passionately*. *What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?* How calmly had she spoken of her own and her child's death, when she expected to die for want, v. 12. *that we may eat and die!* Yet now that her child dies, and *not* so miserably as by famine, she is extremely disturbed at it: we may speak lightly of an affliction at a distance, but when it *toucheth us, we are troubled*, Job, 4. 5. Then she spake deliberately, now in haste; the death of the child was now a surprise to her, and it is hard to keep our spirits composed, when troubles come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly, and in the midst of our peace and prosperity. She calls him *a man of God*, and yet quarrels with him, as if he had occasioned the death of her child, and is ready to wish she had never seen him, forgetting past mercies and miracles; "What have I done against thee?" So some understand it; "Wherein have I offended thee, or been wanting in my duty? *Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.*"

2. Yet she expresses herself *penitently*; "*Art thou come to call my sin to thy remembrance*, as the cause of the affliction, and so to call it to *my* remembrance, as the effect of the affliction?" Perhaps she knew of Elijah's intercession against Israel, and, being conscious to herself of sin, perhaps her former worshipping of Baal, the god of the Sidonians, she apprehends he had made intercession against her. Note, (1.) When God removes our comforts from us, he remembers our sins against us, perhaps the iniquities of our youth, though long since past, Job, 13. 26. Our sins are the death of our children. (2.) When God thus remembers our sins against us, he designs, thereby, to make us remember them against ourselves, and repent of them.

III. The prophet's address to God, upon this occasion; he gave no answer to her expostulation, but brought it to God, and laid the case before him, not knowing what to say to it himself: he took the dead child from his mother's bosom to his own bed, v. 19. Probably, he had taken a particular kindness to the child, and found the affliction his own, more than by sympathy; he retired to his chamber, and, 1. He humbly reasons with God concerning the death of the child, v. 20. He sees death striking by commission from God; *Thou hast brought this evil*; for is there any evil of this kind in the city, in the family, and the Lord has not done it? He pleads the greatness of the affliction to the poor mother; "*It is evil upon the widow*; thou art the widow's God, and dost not usually bring evil upon widows; it is affliction added to the afflicted." He pleads his own concern; "*It is the widow with whom I sojourn*; wilt thou, that art my God, bring evil upon one of the best of my benefactors? I shall be reflected upon, and others will be afraid of entertaining me, if I bring death into the house where I come." 2. He earnestly begs of God to restore the child to life again, v. 21. We do not read, before this, of any that were raised to life: yet Elijah, by a divine impulse, prays for the resurrection of this child, which yet will not warrant us to do the like: David expected not, by fasting and prayer, to bring his child back to life, 2 Sam. 12. 23. but Elijah had a power to work miracles, which David had not; he *stretched himself upon the child*, to affect himself with the case; and to shew how much he was affected with it, and how desirous he was of the restoration of the child, he would, if he could, put life into him by his own breath and warmth: also to give a sign of what God would do by his power, and what he does by his grace, in raising of dead souls to a spiritual life; the Holy Ghost comes upon them, overshadows them, and puts life into them: he is very particular in his prayer, *I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again*; which plainly supposes the existence of the soul in a state of separation from the body, and, consequently, its immortality; which, Grotius thinks, God designed by this miracle to give intimation and evidence of, for the encouragement of his suffering people.

IV. The resurrection of the child, and the great satisfaction it gave to the mother; the child revived, v. 22. See the power of prayer, and the power of him who hears prayer, who *kills and makes alive*. Elijah brought him to his mother, who, we may

suppose, could scarcely believe her own eyes, and therefore Elijah assures her it is her own; "It is *thy son that liveth*, see it is thy own, and not another," v. 23. The good woman hereupon cries out, *Now I know that thou art a man of God*; though she knew before, by the increase of her meal, yet the death of her child she took so unkindly, that she began to question it; (a good man surely would not serve her so;) but now she was abundantly satisfied that he had both the power and goodness of a man of God, and will never doubt of it again, but give up herself to the direction of his word, and the worshipping of the God of Israel. Thus the death of the child, like that of Lazarus, John, 11. 4. was for the glory of God, and the honour of his prophet.

CHAP XVIII.

We left the prophet Elijah wrapt up in obscurity; it does not appear that either the increase of the provision, or the raising of the child, had made him taken notice of at Zarephath, for then Ahab would have discovered him; he would rather do good, than be known to do it; but in this chapter his appearance was as public, as, before, his retirement was close; the days appointed for his concealment, (which was part of the judgment upon Israel,) being finished, he is now commanded to shew himself to Ahab, and expect rain upon the earth, v. 1. Pursuant to this order, we have here, I. His interview with Obadiah, one of Ahab's servants, by whom he sends notice to Ahab of his coming, v. 2..16. II. His interview with Ahab himself, v. 17..19. III. His interview with all Israel upon mount Carmel, in order to a public trial of titles, between the Lord and Baal; a most distinguished solemnity it was, in which, 1. Baal and his prophets were confounded. 2. God and Elijah were honoured, v. 21..39. IV. The execution he did upon the prophets of Baal, v. 40. V. The return of the mercy of rain, at the word of Elijah, v. 41..46. It is a chapter in which are many things very observable.

1. **A**ND it came to pass *after* many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. 2. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And *there was* a sore famine in Samaria. 3. And Ahab called Obadiah, which *was* the governor of *his* house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly: 4. For it was *so*, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) 5. And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. 6. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. 7. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, *Art* thou that my lord Elijah? 8. And he answered him, *I am*: go, tell thy lord, Behold, *Elijah is here*. 9. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver my servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? 10. *As* the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, *He is not there*; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. 11. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, *Elijah is here*. 12. And it shall come to pass, *as soon as* I am gone from thee, that the

Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not: and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth. 13. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? 14. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, *Elijah is here*. and he shall slay me. 15. And Elijah said, *As* the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to-day. 16. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

In these verses, we find,

I. The sad state of Israel at this time, upon two accounts:

1. *Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, v. 4. slew them, v. 13.* Being an idolater, she was a persecutor, and made Ahab one. Even in those bad times, when the calves were worshipped, and the temple at Jerusalem deserted, yet there were some good people that feared God and served him, and some good prophets that instructed them in the knowledge of him, and assisted them in their devotions. The priests and the Levites were all gone to Judah and Jerusalem, 2 Chron. 11. 13, 14. but, instead of them, God raised up these prophets, who read and expounded the law in private meetings, or in the families that retained their integrity, for we read not of any synagogues at this time; they had not the spirit of prophecy as Elijah, nor did they offer sacrifice, or burn incense, but taught people to live well, and keep close to the God of Israel. These Jezebel aimed to extirpate, and put many of them to death; which was as much a public calamity as a public iniquity, and threatened the utter ruin of religion's poor remains in Israel. Those few that escaped the sword were forced to abscond, and hide themselves in caves, where they were buried alive, and cut off, though not from life, yet from usefulness, which is the end and comfort of life; and, when the prophets were persecuted and driven into corners, no doubt, their friends, those few good people that were in the land, were treated in like manner.

Yet, bad as things were, (1.) There was one very good man, who was a great man at court, *Obadiah*, who answers his name, *a servant of the Lord*, one who feared God, and was faithful to him, and yet was a steward of the household to Ahab. Observe his character; he *feared the Lord greatly, v. 3.* was not only a good man, but zealously and eminently good; his great place put a lustre upon his goodness, and gave him great opportunities of doing good, and he *feared the Lord from his youth, v. 12.* he began betimes to be religious, and had continued long. Note, Early piety, it is to be hoped, will be eminent piety; those that are good betimes are likely to be very good; he that feared God from his youth came to fear him greatly. He that will thrive, must rise betimes. But it is strange to find such an eminent good man governor of Ahab's house, an office of great honour, power, and trust. [1.] It was strange that so wicked a man as Ahab would prefer him to it, and continue him in it; certainly it was because he was a man of celebrated honesty, industry, and ingenuity, and one whom he could repose a confidence in, whose eyes he could trust as much as his own, as appears here, v. 5. Joseph and Daniel were preferred, because there were none so fit as they for the places they were preferred to. Note, Those who profess religion should study to recommend themselves to the esteem even of those that are without, by their integrity, fidelity, and application to business. [2.] It was strange that so good a man as Obadiah would accept of preferment in a court so addicted to idolatry, and all manner of wickedness. We may be sure, it was not made necessary, to qualify him for preferment, that he should be of the king's religion, that he should

conform to the *statutes of Omri, or the law of the house of Ahab*. Obadiah would not have accepted the place, if he could not have had it without bowing the knee to Baal, nor was Ahab so impolitic as to exclude those from offices, that were fit to serve him, merely because they would not join with him in his devotions; that man that is true to his God will be faithful to his prince. Obadiah therefore could, with a good conscience, enjoy the place, and therefore would not decline it, or give it up, though he foresaw he could not do the good he desired to do in it; they that fear God need not go out of the world, bad as it is. [3.] It was strange that either he did not reform Ahab, or Ahab corrupt him; but, it seems, they were both fixed; he that was filthy would be filthy still, and he that was holy would be holy still. Those that fear God greatly will keep up the fear of him in bad times and places; thus Obadiah did. God has his remnant among all sorts, high and low; there were saints in Nero's household, and in Ahab's. (2.) This great good man used his power for the protection of God's prophets; he hid 100 of them in two caves, when the persecution was hot, and *fed them with bread and water, v. 4.* He did not think it enough to fear God himself, but, having wealth and power wherewithal to do it, he thought himself obliged to assist and countenance others that feared God; nor did he think his being kind to them would excuse him from being good himself, but he did both, he both feared God greatly himself, and patronised those that feared him likewise. See how wonderfully God raises up friends for his ministers and people, for their shelter in difficult times, there where one should least expect them; bread and water were now scarce commodities, yet Obadiah will find a competency of both for God's prophets, to keep them alive for service hereafter, though now they were laid aside.

2. When Jezebel cut off God's prophets, God cut off their necessary provisions by the extremity of the drought. Perhaps Jezebel persecuted God's prophets, under pretence that they were the cause of the judgment, because Elijah had foretold it; *Christi-
anos ad leones—Away with Christians to the lions.* But God made them know the contrary, for the famine continued till Baal's prophets were sacrificed, and so great a scarcity of water there was, that the king himself and Obadiah went in person throughout the land, to seek for grass for the cattle, *v. 5, 6.* Providence ordered it so, that Ahab might, with his own eyes, see how bad the consequences of this judgment were, that so he might be the better inclined to hearken to Elijah, who would direct him into the only way to put an end to it. Ahab's care was not to *lose all the beasts*, many being already lost; but he took no care about his soul, not to lose that; took a deal of pains to seek grass, but none to seek the favour of God; fencing against the effect, but not inquiring how to remove the cause. The land of Judah lay close to the land of Israel, yet we find no complaint there of the want of rain; for *Judah yet ruled with God, and was faithful with the saints and prophets, Hos. 11. 12.* By which distinction Israel might plainly have seen the ground of God's controversy, when God caused it to rain upon one city, and not upon another, *Amos, 4. 7, 8.* but they blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, and would not see.

II. The steps taken toward redressing the grievance, by Elijah's appearing again upon the stage, to act as a *Tishbite, a converter or reformer of Israel*, for so (some think) that title of his signifies. Turn them again to the Lord God of hosts, from whom they have revolted, and all will be well quickly; this must be Elijah's doings. See *Luke, 1. 16, 17.*

1. Ahab had made diligent search for him, *v. 10.* had offered rewards to any one that would discover him, sent spies into every tribe and lordship of his own dominions, as some understand it, or, as others, into all the neighbouring nations and kingdoms that were in alliance with him; and when they denied that they knew any thing of him, he would not believe them, unless they swore it, and, as should seem, promised likewise, upon oath, that, if ever they found him among them, they would discover him, and deliver him up. It should seem he made this diligent search for him, not so much that he might punish him for what he had done in

denouncing the judgment, as that he might oblige him to undo it again, by recalling the sentence, because he had said it should be according to his word; having such an opinion of him as men foolishly conceive of witches, that, if they can but compel them to bless that which they have bewitched, it will be well again, or such as the king of Moab had of Balaam; I incline to this, because we find, when they came together, Elijah, knowing what Ahab wanted him for, appointed him to meet him on mount Carmel, and Ahab complied with the appointment, though Elijah took such a way to revoke the sentence, and bless the land, as perhaps he little thought of.

2. God, at length, ordered Elijah to present himself to Ahab, because the time was now come when he would send rain upon the earth, *v. 1.* or, rather, upon the land; above two years, he had lain hid with the widow at Zarephath, after he had been concealed one year by the brook Cherith; so that the third year of his sojourning there, here spoken of, *v. 1.* was the fourth of the famine, which lasted, in all, three years and six months, as we find, *Luke, 4. 25.* *James, 5. 17.* Such was Elijah's zeal, no doubt, against the idolatry of Baal, and such his compassion to his people, that he thought it long to be thus confined to a corner; yet he appeared not, till God bade him, "*Go, shew thyself to Ahab, for now thine hour is come, even the time to favour Israel.*" Note, It bodes well to any people, when God calls his ministers out of their corners, and bids them shew themselves; a sign that he will give rain on the earth; however, we may the better dispense with the bread of affliction, while our eyes see our teachers, *Isa. 30. 20, 21.*

3. Elijah first surrendered, or, rather, discovered, himself to Obadiah. He knew, by the Spirit, where to meet him, and we are here told what passed between them.

(1.) Obadiah saluted him with great respect, fell on his face, and humbly asked, *Art thou that my Lord Elijah? v. 7.* As he had shewed the tenderness of a father to the sons of the prophets, so he shewed the reverence of a son to this father of the prophets; and by this made it appear that he did indeed fear God greatly that he did honour to one that was his extraordinary ambassador, and had a great interest in heaven.

(2.) Elijah, in answer to him, [1.] Transfers the title of honour he gave him, to Ahab; "Call him thy lord, not me;" that is a fitter title for a prince than for a prophet, *who seeks not honour from men.* Prophets should be called *seers, and shepherds, and watchmen, and ministers*, rather than *lords*; as those that mind duty more than dominion. [2.] He bids Obadiah go tell the king that he was there to speak with him. *Tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is forth-coming, v. 8.* He would have the king know before, that it might not be a surprise to him, and that he might be sure it was the prophet's own act, to present himself to him.

(3.) Obadiah begs to be excused from carrying this message to Ahab, for it might prove as much as his life was worth. [1.] He tells Elijah what great search Ahab had made for him, and how much his heart was upon it to find him out, *v. 10.* [2.] He takes it for granted, that Elijah would again withdraw, *v. 12.* *The Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee,* (as it is likely he had done sometimes, when Ahab thought he had been sure of him,) *whither I know not.* See *2 Kings, 2. 16.* He thought Elijah was not in good earnest, when he bade him tell Ahab where he was, but intended only to expose the impotency of his malice; for he knew Ahab was not worthy to receive any kindness from the prophet, and it was not fit that the prophet should receive any mischief from him. [3.] He is sure Ahab would be so enraged at the disappointment, that he would put him to death for making a fool of him, or for not laying hands on Elijah himself, when he had him in his reach, *v. 12.* Tyrants and persecutors, in their passion, are often unreasonably outrageous, even toward their friends and confidants. [4.] He pleads that he did not deserve to be thus exposed, and put in peril of his life, *What have I sinned? v. 9.* *Nay, v. 13.* *Was it not told my lord, how I hid the prophets?* He mentions this, not in pride or ostentation, but to convince Elijah, that, though he was Ahab's servant, he was not in his interest, and therefore deserved not to be bantered as one of the tools of his

persecution. He that had protected so many prophets, he hoped, should not have his own life hazarded by so great a prophet.

(4.) Elijah satisfies him that he might, with safety, deliver this message to Ahab, by assuring him, with an oath, that he would, this very day, present himself to Ahab, v.15. Let but Obadiah know that he spake seriously, and really intended it, and he will make no scruple to carry the message to Ahab. Elijah swears by the *Lord of hosts*, who has all power in his hands, and was therefore able to protect his servant against all the powers of hell and earth.

(5.) Notice is hereby soon brought to Ahab, that Elijah had sent him a challenge to meet him immediately at such a place, and Ahab accepts the challenge, *he went to meet Elijah*, v.16. We may suppose it a great surprise to Ahab, to hear that Elijah, whom he had so long sought, and not found, was now found without seeking. He went in quest of grass, and finds him, from whose word, at God's mouth, he must expect rain. Yet his guilty conscience gives him little reason to hope for it, but, rather, to fear some other more dreadful judgment. Had he, by his spies, surprised Elijah, he would have triumphed over him, but, now that he was thus surprised by him, we may suppose he even trembled to look him in the face; hated him, and yet feared him, as Herod did John.

17. And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* 18. And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim. 19. Now therefore send, *and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel*, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. 20. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.

We have here the meeting between Ahab and Elijah; as bad a king as ever the world was plagued with, and as good a prophet as ever the church was blessed with.

1. Ahab, like himself, basely accuses Elijah; he dares not strike him, remembering that Jeroboam's hand was withered when it was stretched out against a prophet, but gives him bad language, which was no less an affront to him that sent him. It is a very coarse compliment with which he accosts him, at the first word, *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* v.17. How unlike was this to that with which his servant Obadiah saluted him, v.7. *Art thou that my lord Elijah?* Obadiah feared God greatly, Ahab had sold himself to work wickedness; and both discovered their character by the manner of their address to the prophet. One may guess how people stand affected to God, by observing how they stand affected to his people and ministers. Elijah now came to bring blessings to Israel, tidings of the return of the rain; yet he is thus affronted. Had it been true that he was the *troubler of Israel*, Ahab, as king, had been obliged to animadvert upon him. There are those who trouble Israel by their wickedness, whom the conservators of the public peace are concerned to inquire after. But it was utterly false concerning Elijah; so far was he from being an enemy to Israel's welfare, that he was the stay of it, the *chariots and horsemen of Israel*. Note, It has been the lot of the best and most useful men, to be called and counted the *troublers of the land*, and to be run down as public grievances. Even Christ and his apostles were thus misrepresented, Acts, 17.6.

2. Elijah, like himself, boldly returned the charge upon the king, and proved it upon him, that he was the *troubler of Israel*, v.18. Elijah is not the Achan; "*I have not troubled Israel*, have neither done them any wrong, nor designed them any hurt."

They that procure God's judgments do the mischief, not he that foretells them only, and gives warning of them, that the nation may repent, and prevent them. *I would have healed Israel, but they would not be healed.* Ahab is the Achan, the troubler, who follows Baalim, those accursed things. Nothing creates more trouble to a land than the impiety and profaneness of princes and their families.

3. As one having authority immediately from the King of kings, he orders a convention of the states to be forthwith summoned to meet at mount Carmel, where there had been an altar built to God, v.30. Probably, on that mountain they had had an eminent high place, where, formerly, the pure worship of God had been kept up as well as it could be any where but at Jerusalem. Thither all Israel must come, to give Elijah the meeting, and the prophets of Baal, who were dispersed all the country over, with those of the groves, who were Jezebel's domestic chaplains, must there make their personal appearance.

4. Ahab issues out writs accordingly, for the convening of this great assembly, v.20. either because he feared Elijah, and durst not oppose him; (Saul stood in awe of Samuel more than of God;) or because he hoped Elijah would bless the land, and speak the word that they might have rain, and, upon those terms, they would be all at his beck. Those that slighted and hated his counsels, would gladly be beholden to him for his prayers. Now God made those who said they were Jews and were not, but were of the synagogue of Satan, to come, and, in effect, to worship at his feet, and to know that God had loved him, Rev. 3.9.

21. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. 22. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. 23. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: 24. And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. 25. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. 26. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. 27. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud; for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. 28. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. 29. And it came to pass, when mid-day was past, and they prophesied until

the *time* of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that *there was* neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. 30. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD *that was* broken down. 31. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: 32. And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. 33. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid *him* on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour *it* on the burnt-sacrifice, and on the wood. 34. And he said, Do *it* the second time. And they did *it* the second time. And he said, Do *it* the third time. And they did *it* the third time. 35. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. 36. And it came to pass at the *time* of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou *art* God in Israel, and *that I am* thy servant, and *that I have* done all these things at thy word. 37. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou *art* the LORD God, and *that* thou hast turned their heart back again. 38. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench. 39. And when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he *is* the God; the LORD, he *is* the God. 40. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

Ahab and the people expected that Elijah should, in this solemn assembly, *bless the land*, and pray for rain; but he has other work to do first. The people must be brought to repent and reform, and then they may look for the removal of the judgment, but not till then. This is the right method; God will first *prepare our heart*, and then *cause his ear to hear*; will first *turn us to him*, and then *turn to us*, Ps. 10. 17.—70. 3. Deserters must not look for God's favour, till they return to their allegiance. Elijah might have looked for rain 70 times 7 times, and not have seen it, if he had not thus begun his work at the right end.

Three years and a half's famine would not bring them back to God; Elijah will endeavour to convince their judgments, and, no doubt, by special warrant and direction from heaven, he put the controversy between God and Baal upon a public trial. It was great condescension in God, that he would suffer so plain a case to be disputed, and would permit Baal to be a competitor with him; but thus God would have every mouth to be stopped, and all flesh to become silent before him. God's cause is so incon-

testably just, that it needs not fear to have the evidences of its equity searched into, and weighed.

1. Elijah reproves the people for mixing the worship of God and the worship of Baal together. Not only some Israelites worshipped God, and others Baal, but the same Israelites sometimes worshipped one, and sometimes the other. This he calls, *v. 21. Halting between two opinions, or thoughts*. They worshipped God, to please the prophets, but worshipped Baal, to please Jezebel, and curry favour at court. They thought to trim the matter, and play on both sides, as the Samaritans, 2 Kings, 17. 33. Now Elijah shews them the absurdity of this; he does not insist upon their relation to Jehovah. "Is he not your's, and the God of your fathers, while Baal is the God of the Sidonians? And *will a nation change their God?* Jer. 2. 11. No, he waves the prescription, and enters upon the merits of the cause." There can be but one God, but one infinite and but one supreme: there needs but one God, one omnipotent, one all-sufficient: what occasion for addition to that which is perfect? Now, if, upon trial, it appears that Baal is that one infinite omnipotent Being, that one supreme Lord and all-sufficient Benefactor, you ought to renounce Jehovah, and cleave to Baal only: but, if Jehovah be that one God, Baal is a cheat, and you must have no more to do with him. Note, 1. It is very wrong to *halt between God and Baal*. "In reconcileable differences (says Bishop Hall) nothing more safe than indifference both of practice and opinion; but in cases of so necessary hostility, as betwixt God and Baal, *he that is not with God, is against him.*" Compare Mark, 9. 38, 39. with Matth. 12. 30. The service of God, and the service of sin, the dominion of Christ, and the dominion of our lusts, these are the two thoughts which it is dangerous halting between. Those do so that are unresolved under their convictions; unstable and unsteady in their purposes; promise fair, but do not perform; begin well, but do not hold on; that are inconsistent with themselves, indifferent and lukewarm in that which is good. *Their heart is divided*, (Hos. 10. 2.) whereas God will have all or none. 2. We are fairly put to our choice *whom we will serve*, Josh. 24. 15. If we can find one that has more right to us, or will be a better master to us, than God, we may take him at our peril. God demands no more from us than he can make out a title to.

This fair proposal of the case, which Elijah here makes, the people knew not what to say to, they *answered him not a word*. They could say nothing to justify themselves, and they would say nothing to condemn themselves, but, as people confounded, let him say what he would.

II. He proposes to bring the matter to a fair trial; and it was so much the fairer, because Baal had all the external advantages on his side. The king and court were all for Baal; so was the body of the people. The managers of Baal's cause were 450 men, fat, and well-fed, *v. 22.* beside 400 more, their supporters or seconds, *v. 19.* The manager of God's cause was but one man, lately a poor exile, hardly kept from starving; so that God's cause has nothing to support it but its own right. However, it is put to this experiment; "Let each side prepare a sacrifice, and pray to its God, and *the God that answereth by fire, let him be God*; if neither do, let them turn atheists; if both, let them continue to *halt between two.*" Elijah, doubtless, had a special commission from God to put it to this test, else he had tempted God and affronted religion; but the case was extraordinary, and the judgment upon it would be of use, not only then, but in all ages. It is an instance of the courage of Elijah, that he durst stand alone in the cause of God against such powers and numbers; and the issue encourages all God's witnesses and advocates never to fear the face of man. Elijah does not say, "The God that answers by *water*," (though that was the thing the country needed,) but "that *answers by fire, let him be God*;" because the atonement was to be made by sacrifice, before the judgment could be removed in mercy. The God therefore that has power to pardon sin, and to signify it by consuming the sin-offering, must needs be the God that can relieve us against the calamity. He that can give fire, can give rain; see Matth. 9. 2, 6.

III. The people join issue with him: *It is well spoken*, v. 24. They allow the proposal to be fair and unexceptionable. "God had often answered by fire; if Baal cannot do so, let him be cast off for an usurper." They were very desirous to see the experiment tried, and seemed resolved to abide by the issue, whatever it should be. They that were firm for God, doubted not but it would end to his honour; they that were indifferent, were willing to be determined. Ahab and the prophets of Baal durst not oppose, for fear of the people, and hoped that either *they* could obtain fire from heaven, (though they never had yet,) and the rather, because, as some think, they worshipped the sun in Baal; or, that *Elijah* could not, because not at the temple, where God was wont thus to manifest his glory. If, in this trial, they could but bring it to a drawn battle, their other advantages would give them the victory. Let it go on therefore to a trial.

IV. The prophets of Baal try first, but in vain, with their god. They covet the precedency, not only for the honour of it, but that, if they could but in the least seem to gain their point, Elijah might not be admitted to make the trial. Elijah allows it them, v. 25. gives them the leading for their greater confusion; only, knowing that the working of Satan is with lying wonders, he takes care to prevent a fraud, *Be sure to put no fire under*. Now, in their experiment, observe,

1. How importunate and noisy the prophets of Baal were in their applications to him. They got their sacrifices ready; and we may well imagine what a noise 450 men made, when they cried as one man, and with all their might, *O Baal, hear us; O Baal, answer us*; as it is in the margin: and this, for some hours together, longer than Diana's worshippers made their cry, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians*, Acts, 19. 34. How senseless, how brutish, were they in their addresses to Baal! (1.) Like fools, *they leaped upon the altar*, as if they would themselves become sacrifices with their bullock: or, thus they expressed their great earnestness of mind. *They leaped up and down*, or danced about the altar: they hoped, by their dancing, to please their deity, as Herodias did Herod, and so to obtain their request. (2.) Like madmen, *they cut themselves in pieces with knives and lancets*, v. 28. for vexation that they were not answered, or in a sort of prophetic fury, hoping to obtain the favour of their god, by offering to him their own blood, when they could not do it with the blood of their bullock. God never required his worshippers thus to honour him; but the service of the devil, though, in some instances, it pleases and pampers the body, yet, in other things, it is really cruel to it, as in envy and drunkenness. It seems, this was the manner of the worshippers of Baal: God expressly forbade his worshippers to cut themselves, Deut. 14. 1. He insists upon it, that we mortify our lusts and corruptions; but corporeal penances and severities, such as the papists use, which have no tendency to that, are no pleasure to him: *Who has required these things at your hands?*

2. How sharp Elijah was upon them, v. 27. He stood by them, and patiently heard them for many hours, praying to an idol, yet with secret indignation and disdain; and at noon, when the sun was at the hottest, and they too expecting fire, then, if ever, he upbraided them with their folly; and notwithstanding the gravity of his office, and the seriousness of the work he had before him, banters them, "*Cry aloud, for he is a god; a goodly god, that cannot be made to hear without all this clamour! Surely you think he is talking, or meditating,*" (as the word is,) "*or he is pursuing some deep thoughts, thinking of somewhat else, and not minding his own matter, when not your credit only, but all his honour, lies at stake, and his interest in Israel. His new conquest will be lost, if he do not look about him quickly.*" Note, The worship of idols is a most ridiculous thing, and it is but justice to represent it so, and expose it to scorn. This will, by no means, justify those who ridicule the worshippers of God in Christ, because the worship is not performed just in their way. Baal's prophets were so far from being convinced and put to shame by the just reproach Elijah cast upon them, that it made them the more violent, and act more ridiculously. *A deceived heart having turned them aside, they could not deliver their souls*, by saying, *Is there not a lie in our right hand?*

3. How deaf Baal was to them. Elijah did not interrupt them, but let them go on, till they were tired, and quite despaired of success, which was not *till the time of the evening sacrifice*, v. 29. During all that time, some of them prayed, while others of them prophesied, sang hymns, perhaps, to the praise of Baal, or, rather, encouraged those that were praying to proceed, telling them, Baal would answer them at last; but there was *no answer, nor any that regarded*. Idols could do neither good nor evil. The prince of the power of the air, if God had permitted him, could have caused *fire to come down from heaven* on this occasion, and gladly would have done it for the support of his Baal. We find that the beast which deceives the world, does it, Rev. 13. 13. *He maketh fire come down from heaven in the sight of men*, and so deceiveth them, v. 14. But God would not suffer the devil to do it now, because the trial of his title was put on that issue by consent of parties.

V. Elijah soon obtains from his God an answer by fire. The Baalites are forced to give up their cause, and now it is Elijah's turn to produce his. Let us see if he speed better.

1. He fitted up an altar. He would not make use of their's, which had been polluted with their prayers to Baal, but, finding the ruins of an altar there, which had formerly been used in the service of the Lord, he chose to repair that, v. 30. to intimate to them that he was not about to introduce any new religion, but to revive the faith and worship of their father's God, and reduce them to their first love, their first works. He could not bring them to the altar at Jerusalem, unless he could have united the two kingdoms again, (which, for correction to both, God designed should not now be done,) therefore, by his prophetic authority, he builds an altar on mount Carmel, and so owns that which had formerly been built there. When we cannot carry a reformation so far as we would, we must do what we can, and rather comply with some corruptions than not do our utmost toward the extirpation of Baal. He repaired this altar with *twelve stones*, according to the number of the twelve tribes, v. 31. Though ten of the tribes were revolted to Baal, he will look upon them as belonging to God still, by virtue of the ancient covenant with their fathers: and though those ten were unhappily divided from the other two in civil interest, yet in the worship of the God of Israel they had communion with each other, and they twelve were one. Mention is made of God's calling their father Jacob by the name of *Israel*, a prince with God, v. 31. to shame his degenerate seed, who worshipped a god which, they saw, could not hear or answer them, and to encourage the prophet, who was now to wrestle with God as Jacob did; he also shall be a prince with God, Ps. 24. 6. *Thy face, O Jacob*. Hos. 12. 4. *There he spake with us*.

2. Having built his altar in the name of the Lord, v. 32. by direction from him, and with an eye to him, and not for his own honour, he prepared his sacrifice, v. 33. *Behold the bullock and the wood; but where is the fire?* Gen. 22. 7, 8. *God will provide himself fire*. If we, in sincerity, offer our hearts to God, he will, by his grace, kindle a holy fire in them. Elijah was no priest, nor his attendants Levites; Carmel had neither tabernacle nor temple, it was a great way distant from the ark of the testimony, and the place God had chosen; this was not the altar that sanctified the gift; yet never was any sacrifice more acceptable to God than this. The particular Levitical institutions were so often dispensed with, (as in the time of the Judges, Samuel's time, and now,) that one would be tempted to think they were more designed for types to be fulfilled in the evangelical anti-types than for laws to be fulfilled in the strict observance of them. Their perishing thus in the using, as the apostle speaks of them, Col. 2. 22. was to intimate the utter abolishing of them, after a while, Heb. 8. 13.

3. He ordered abundance of water to be poured upon his altar which he had prepared a trench for the reception of, v. 32. and, some think, made the altar hollow. Twelve barrels of water, (probably, sea-water, for the sea was near, and so much fresh water, in the time of drought, was too precious for him to be so prodigal of it,) thrice four, he poured upon his sacrifice, to prevent

the suspicion of any fire under; for if there had been any, this would have put it out; and to make the expected miracle the more illustrious.

4. He then solemnly addressed himself to God by prayer, before his altar, humbly beseeching him to *turn to ashes his burnt-offering*, as the phrase is, Ps. 20. 3. and to testify his acceptance of it. His prayer is not long, for he used no vain repetitions, nor thought he should be *heard for his much speaking*; but it is very grave and composed, and shews his mind to be calm and sedate, and far from the heats and disorders that Baal's prophets were in, v. 36, 37. Though he was not at the *place* appointed, he chose the appointed *time of the offering of the evening sacrifice*, thereby to testify his communion with the altar at Jerusalem. Though he expected an answer by fire, yet he came near to the altar with boldness, and feared not that fire. He addressed himself to God, as the *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel*, acting faith on God's ancient covenant, and reminding the people too (for prayer may prevail) of their relation both to God, and to the patriarchs. Two things he pleads here, (1.) The glory of God; "Lord, hear me, and answer me, *that it may be known* (for it is now by the most denied or forgotten) *that thou art God in Israel*, to whom alone the homage and devotion of Israel are due, and *that I am thy servant*, and do all I have done, am doing, and shall do, as thine agent, *at thy word*, and not to gratify any humour or passion of my own. Thou employest me; Lord, make it appear that thou dost so;" see Numb. 16. 28, 29. Elijah sought not his own glory, but in subserviency to God's, and for his own necessary vindication. (2.) The edification of the people; *that they may know that thou art the Lord*, and may experience thy grace, *turning their heart*, by this miracle, as a means, *back again to thee*, in order to thy return in a way of mercy to them."

5. God immediately answered by fire, v. 38. Elijah's God was neither talking nor pursuing, needed not to be either awakened or quickened; while he was yet speaking, *the fire of the Lord fell*, and not only, as at other times, (Lev. 9. 24. 1 Chron. 21. 6. 2 Chron. 7. 1.) *consumed the sacrifice and the wood*, in token of God's acceptance of the offering, but *licked up all the water in the trench*, exhaling that, and drawing it up as a vapour, in order to the intended rain, which was to be the fruit of this sacrifice and prayer, more than of natural causes. Compare Ps. 135. 7. *He causeth vapours to ascend, and maketh lightnings for the rain*; for this rain, he did both. Those who fall as victims to the fire of God's wrath, no water can shelter from it, any more than briars or thorns, Isa. 27. 4, 5. But this was not all; to complete the miracle, the fire consumed the *stones of the altar*, and the very *dust*, to shew that it was no ordinary fire, and perhaps to intimate that though God accepted this occasional sacrifice from this altar, yet, for the future, they ought to demolish all the altars on their high places, and, for their constant sacrifices, make use of that at Jerusalem only. Moses's altar and Solomon's were consecrated by the fire from heaven; but this was destroyed, because no more to be used. We may well imagine what a terror the fire struck on guilty Ahab, and all the worshippers of Baal, and how they fled from it as far and as fast as they could, saying, *Lest it consume us also*, alluding to Numb. 16. 34.

Lastly, What was the result of this fair trial. The prophets of Baal had failed in their proof, and could give no evidence at all, to make out their pretensions on the behalf of their god, but were perfectly non-suited; Elijah had, by the most convincing and undeniable evidence, proved his claims on behalf of the God of Israel.

And now, 1. The people, as the jury, give in their verdict upon the trial, and they are all agreed in it; the case is so plain, they need not go from the bar to consider of their verdict, or consult about it, *they fell on their faces*, and all, as one man, said, "*Jehovah, he is the God*, and not Baal; we are convinced and satisfied of it, *Jehovah, he is the God*," v. 39. Whence, one would think, they should have inferred, "If he be the God, he shall be our God, and we will serve him only," as Josh. 24. 24. Some, we hope, had their hearts thus turned back, but the generality of them were convinced only, not converted; yielded to the truth of

God, that he is the God, but consented not to his covenant, that he should be their's. Blessed are they that have not seen what *they saw*, and yet have believed, and been wrought upon by it, more than they that saw it. Let it for ever be looked upon as a point adjudged against all pretenders, (for it was carried, upon a full hearing, against one of the most daring and threatening competitors that ever the God of Israel was affronted by,) that *Jehovah, he is God*, God alone.

2. The prophets of Baal, as criminals, are seized, condemned, and executed, according to law, v. 40. If Jehovah be the true God, Baal is a false god, to whom these Israelites had revolted, and seduced others to the worship of him; and therefore, by the express law of God, they were to be put to death, Deut. 13. 1, 11. There needed no proof of the fact, all Israel were witnesses of it, and therefore Elijah (acting still by an extraordinary commission, which is not to be drawn into a precedent) orders them all to be slain immediately, as the troublers of the land, and Ahab himself is so terrified, for the present, with the fire from heaven, that he dares not oppose it. These were the 450 prophets of Baal; the 400 prophets of the groves, (who, some think, were Sidonians,) though summoned v. 19. yet, as it should seem, did not attend, and so escaped this execution, which fair escape perhaps Ahab and Jezebel thought themselves happy in; but it proved they were reserved to be the instruments of Ahab's destruction, some time after, by encouraging him to go up to Ramoth-gilead, ch. 22. 6.

41. And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for *there is* a sound of abundance of rain. 42. So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees. 43. And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, *There is* nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. 44. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare *thy chariot*, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. 45. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. 46. And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Israel being thus far reformed, that they had acknowledged the Lord to be God, and had consented to the execution of Baal's prophets, that they might not seduce them any more, though it was far short of a thorough reformation, yet was so far accepted, that God thereupon opened the bottles of heaven, and poured out blessings upon his land that very evening (as it should seem) on which they did this good work, which should have confirmed them in their reformation; see Hag. 2. 18, 19.

1. Elijah sends Ahab to *eat and drink*, for joy that God *had now accepted his works*, and that rain was coming; see Eccl. 9. 7. Ahab had continued fasting all day, either religiously, it being a day of prayer, or, for want of leisure, it being a day of great expectation; but now let him *eat and drink*, for, though others perceive no sign of it, Elijah, by faith, hears the *sound of abundance of rain*, v. 41. God reveals his secrets to his servants the prophets; and yet, without a revelation, we may foresee, that, when man's judgments run down like a river, God's mercy will. *Rain is the river of God*, Ps. 65. 9.

2. He himself retires to pray, (for though God has promised rain, he must ask it, Zech. 10. 1.) and to give thanks for God's

answer by fire, now hoping for an answer by water. What he said, we are not told: but, (1.) He withdrew himself to the *top of Carmel*, which was very high and very private. Hence we read of those that *hide themselves in the top of Carmel*, Amos, 9. 3. There he would be alone. Those who are called to appear, and act in public, for God, must yet find time to be private with him, and keep up their converse with him in solitude. There he set himself, as it were, *upon his watch-tower*, like the prophet, Hab. 2. 1. (2.) He cast himself down on his knees upon the earth, in token of humility, reverence, and importunity; and *put his face between his knees*, that is, bowed his head so low that it touched his knees, thus abasing himself in the sense of his own meanness, now that God had thus honoured him.

3. He orders his servant to bring him notice, as soon as he discerned a cloud arising out of the sea, the Mediterranean sea, which he had a large prospect of from the top of Carmel. The sailors at this day call it *Cape Carmel*. Six times his servant goes to the point of the hill, and sees nothing, brings no good news to his master; yet Elijah continues praying, will not be diverted so far as to go and see with his own eyes, but still sends his servant to see if he could discover any hopeful cloud, while he keeps his mind close and intent in prayer, and abides by it, as one that had taken up his father Jacob's resolution, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*. Note, Though the answer of our fervent and believing supplications does not come quickly, yet we must continue instant in prayer, and not faint or give over; for, *at the end, it shall speak and not lie*.

4. A little cloud, at length, appears, no bigger than a man's hand, which presently overspreads the heavens, and waters the earth, v. 44, 45. Great blessings often arise from small beginnings, and showers of plenty from a cloud of a span long. Let us therefore never *despise the day of small things*, but hope and wait for great things from it. This was not as a morning-cloud, which passes away, (though Israel's goodness was so,) but one that produced a plentiful rain, Ps. 68. 9. and an earnest of more.

5. Elijah, hereupon, hastens Ahab home, and attends him himself. Ahab rode in his chariot, at ease and in state, v. 45. Elijah ran on foot before him. If Ahab had paid the respect to Elijah that he deserved, he would have taken him into his chariot, as the eunuch did Philip, that he might honour him before the elders of Israel, and confer with him further about the reformation of the kingdom: but his corruptions got the better of his convictions, and he was glad to get clear of him, as Felix of Paul, when he dismissed him, and adjourned his conference with him to a more convenient season. But, since Ahab invites him not to ride with him, he will *run before him*, v. 46. as one of his footmen, that he might not seem to be lifted up with the great honour God had put upon him, or to abate in his civil respect to this prince, though he reproved him faithfully. God's ministers should make it appear, that, how great soever they look when they deliver God's messages, yet they are far from affecting worldly grandeur: let them leave that to the kings of the earth.

CHAP. XIX.

We left Elijah at the entrance of Jezreel, still appearing publicly, and all the people's eyes upon him. In this chapter, we have him again absconding, and driven into obscurity, at a time when he could ill have been spared; but we are to look upon it as a punishment to Israel for the insincerity and inconsistency of their reformation. When people will not learn, it is just with God to remove their teachers into corners. Now observe, I. How he was driven into banishment by the malice of Jezebel, his sworn enemy, v. 1. 3. II. How he was met, in his banishment, by the favour of God, his covenant-Friend. 1. How he fed him, v. 4. 8. 2. How he conversed with him, and manifested himself to him, v. 9. 11. 13. heard his complaint, v. 10. 14. directed him what to do, v. 15. 17. and encouraged him, v. 18. III. How his hands were strengthened, at his return out of banishment, by the joining of Elisha with him, v. 19. 21.

I. **AND** Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the

prophets with the sword. 2. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time. 3. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which *belongeth to Judah*, and left his servant there. 4. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper-tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers. 5. And as he lay and slept under a juniper-tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, *Arise and eat*. 6. And he looked, and, behold, *there was a cake baken on the coals*, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. 7. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, *Arise and eat*; because the journey is too great for thee. 8. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

One would have expected, after such a public and sensible manifestation of the glory of God, and such a clear decision of the controversy depending between him and Baal, to the honour of Elijah, the confusion of Baal's prophets, and the universal satisfaction of the people; after they had seen both fire and water come from heaven, at the prayer of Elijah, and both, in mercy to them; the one, as it signified the acceptance of their offering, the other, as it *refreshed their inheritance, which was weary*; that now they should all, as one man, have returned to the worship of the God of Israel, and taken Elijah for their guide and oracle, that he should from henceforward have been prime minister of state, and his directions laws both to king and kingdom. But it is quite otherwise; he is neglected, whom God honoured; no respect is paid him, no care taken of him, nor any use made of him, but, on the contrary, in the land of Israel, to which he had been, and might have been, so great a blessing, he finds it impossible to dwell.

1. Ahab incensed Jezebel against him. That queen-consort, it seems, was, in effect, queen-regent, as she was afterward, when she was queen-dowager; an imperious woman, that managed king and kingdom, and did what she would. Ahab's conscience would not let him persecute Elijah, (some remains he had in him of the blood and spirit of an Israelite, which tied his hands,) but he told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, v. 1. not to convince, but to exasperate, her. It is not said, he told her what *God* had done, but what *Elijah* had done; as if he, by some spell or charm, had brought fire from heaven, and the hand of the Lord had not been in it. Especially, he represented to her, as that which would make her outrageous against him, that he had slain the prophets; the prophets of Baal he calls *the prophets*, as if none but they were worthy of the name. They were the gods his heart was upon, and he aggravates the slaying of them as Elijah's crime, without taking notice that it was a just reprisal upon her for killing God's prophets, ch. 18. 4. Those who, when they cannot, for shame or fear, do mischief themselves, yet stir up others to do it, will have it laid to their charge, as if they had themselves done it.

III. Jezebel sent him a threatening message, v. 2. that she had vowed and sworn to be the death of him within 24 hours. Something prevented her from doing it just now, but she resolves it

shall not be long undone. Note, Carnal hearts are hardened and enraged against God by that which should convince and conquer them, and bring them into subjection to him. She swears by her gods, and, raging like one distracted, cursed herself, if she slay not him, without any proviso of a divine permission. Cruelty and confidence often meet in persecutors: *I will pursue, I will overtake*, Exod. 15. 9. But, how came she to send him word of her design, and so to give him an opportunity of making his escape? Did she think him so daring, that he would not flee? or, did she think herself able to prevent it? or, was there a special providence in it, that she should be thus infatuated, by her own fury? I am apt to think, that, though she desired nothing more than his blood, yet, at this time, she durst not meddle with him, *for fear of the people, all counting him a prophet*, a great prophet, and therefore sent this message to him, merely to frighten him, and get him out of the way, for the present, that he might not carry on what he had begun. The backing of her threats with an oath and imprecation does not at all prove that she really intended it, but only intended to make him believe it. The gods she swore by could do her no harm.

III. Elijah, hereupon, in a great fright, fled for his life, it is likely by night, and came to Beer-sheba, v. 3. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not. Where was the courage with which he had lately confronted Ahab, and all the prophets of Baal? nay, which kept him by his sacrifice, when the fire of God fell upon it? He that stood undaunted in the midst of the terrors both of heaven and earth, trembles at the impotent menaces of a proud passionate woman. *Lord, what is man?* Great faith is not always alike strong. He could not but know that he might be very serviceable to Israel at this juncture, and had all the reason in the world to depend upon God's protection, while he was doing God's work; yet he flies. In his former danger, God had bidden him hide himself, *ch. 17. 3.* therefore he supposed he might do it now.

IV. From Beer-sheba he went forward into the wilderness, that vast howling wilderness, in which the Israelites wandered. Beer-sheba was so far distant from Jezreel, and within the dominion of so good a king as Jehoshaphat, that he could not but be safe there; yet, as if his fears haunted him, even then when he was out of the reach of danger, he cannot rest there, but went a day's journey into the desert. Yet, perhaps, he retired thither, not so much for his safety, as that he might be wholly retired from the world, in order to a more free and intimate communion with God. *He left his servant at Beer-sheba*, that he might be private in the wilderness, as Abraham left his servants at the bottom of a hill, when he went up into the mount to worship God, and as Christ, in the garden, was *withdrawn from his disciples*: or, perhaps, it was because he would not expose his servant, who was young and tender, to the hardships of the wilderness; that would be putting new wine into old bottles. We ought thus to consider the frame of those who are under our charge, for God considers our's.

V. Being wearied with his journey, he grew cross, (like children when they are sleepy,) and *wished he might die*, v. 4. He *requested for his life*, (so it is in the margin,) *that he might die*; for death is life to a good man; the death of the body is the life of the soul. Yet that was not the reason why he wished to die; it was not the deliberate desire of grace, as Paul's, to *depart, and be with Christ*, but the passionate wish of his corruption, as Job's. Those that are, in this manner, forward to die, are not in the fittest frame for it. Jezebel has sworn his death, and therefore he, in a fret, prays for it, runs from death to death, yet with this difference, he wishes to die by the hand of the Lord, whose tender mercies are great, and not to fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel. He would rather die in the wilderness than as Baal's prophets died, according to Jezebel's threatening, v. 2. lest the worshippers of Baal triumph, and blaspheme the God of Israel, whom they will think themselves too hard for, if they can run down his advocate. He pleads, "It is enough, I have done enough, and suffered enough, I am weary of living." Those that have secured such a happiness in the other world, will soon have

enough of this world. He pleads, "*I am not better than my fathers*, nor better able to bear those fatigues, and therefore why should I be longer burthened with them than they were?" But is this *that my lord Elijah*? Can that great and gallant spirit shrink thus? God thus left him to himself, to shew, that, when he was bold and strong, it was *in the Lord*, and *the power of his might*, but, of himself, he was *no better than his fathers*, or brethren.

VI. God, by an angel, fed him in that wilderness, into the wants and perils of which he had wilfully thrown himself, and in which, if God had not graciously succoured him, he had perished. How much better does God deal with his froward children than they deserve! Elijah, in a fit of despondency, wished to die; God needed him not, yet designed further to honour him, and therefore sent an angel to *keep him alive*. Our case would be bad sometimes, if God should take us at our word, and grant us our foolish passionate requests. Having prayed that he might die, he *laid down and slept*, v. 5. wishing, it may be, to die in his sleep, and not to wake again; but he is awakened out of his sleep, and finds himself, not only well provided for with bread and water, v. 6. but, which was more, attended by an angel, who guarded him when he slept, and twice called him to his food when it was ready for him, v. 5, 7. He needed not complain of the unkindnesses of men, when it was thus made up by the ministration of angels. Thus provided for, he had reason to think he fared better than the *prophets of the groves*, that *did eat at Jezebel's table*. Wherever God's children are, as they are still upon their Father's ground, so they are still under their Father's eye and care. They may lose themselves in a wilderness, but God has not left them; there they may *look at him that lives, and sees them, as Hagar*, Gen. 16. 13.

Lastly, He is carried, in the strength of this meat, to Horeb, *the mount of God*, v. 8. Thither the Spirit of the Lord led him, probably beyond his own intention, that he might have communion with God in the same place where Moses had, the law that was given by Moses being revived by him. The angel bade him eat the second time, because of the greatness of *the journey* that was *before him*, v. 7. Note, God knows what he designs us for, though we do not, what services, what trials, and will take care for us, when we, for want of foresight, cannot for ourselves, that we be furnished for them with *grace sufficient*. He that appoints what the voyage shall be, will victual the ship accordingly. See how many different ways God took to keep Elijah alive; fed him by ravens, with multiplied meals—then by an angel—and now, to shew that *man lives not by bread alone*, he kept him alive forty days without meat, not resting and sleeping, which might make him the less to crave sustenance, but continually traversing the mazes of the desert, a day for a year of Israel's wanderings; yet he neither needs food, nor desires it. The place, no doubt, reminds him of the manna, and encourages him to hope that God would sustain him here, and, in due time, bring him hence, as he did Israel, though, like him, fretful and distrustful.

9. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? 10. And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even I only*, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. 11. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but the LORD*

was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; *but* the LORD was not in the earthquake: 12. And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. 13. And it was *so*, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, *there came* a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? 14. And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. 15. And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael *to be* king over Syria: 16. And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint *to be* king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint *to be* prophet in thy room. 17. And it shall come to pass, *that* him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. 18. Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

Here is,

I. Elijah housed in a cave at mount Horeb, which is called *the mount of God*, because on it God had formerly manifested his glory; and perhaps this was the same cave, or cleft of a rock, in which Moses was hidden, when the Lord *passed by before him*, and *proclaimed his name*, Exod. 34. 6. What Elijah proposed to himself, in coming to lodge here, I cannot conceive, unless it were, either to indulge his melancholy, or to satisfy his curiosity, and assist his faith and devotion, with the sight of that famous place where the law was given, and so many great things were done, and hoping to meet with God himself there, where Moses met with him; or, in token of his abandoning his people Israel, who hated to be reformed; and so it agrees with Jeremiah's wish, Jer. 9. 2. *Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them, for they be all adulterous*; and so it was a bad omen of God's forsaking them: or, it was because he thought he could not be safe any where else; and to this instance of the hardships this good man was reduced to, the apostle refers, Heb. 11. 38. *They wandered in deserts and in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth*.

II. The visit God made him there, and the inquiry he made concerning him; *The word of the Lord came to him*. We cannot go any whither, to be out of the reach of God's eye, his arm, and his word. *Whither can I flee from thy Spirit?* Ps. 139. 7, &c. God will take care of his outcasts; and those who, for his sake, are driven out from among men, he will find, and own, and gather, with everlasting loving-kindnesses. St. John saw the visions of the Almighty, when he was in banishment in the isle of Patmos, Rev. 1. 9.

The question God puts to him, is, *What doest thou here, Elijah?* v. 9. and again, v. 13. This is a reproof, 1. For his fleeing thither. "What brings thee so far from home? Dost thou flee from Jezebel? Couldst thou not depend upon almighty power for thy protection?" (Lay the emphasis upon *thou*.) What, *thou*! So great a man, so great a prophet, so famed for resolution—dost thou run thy

country, run thy colours, thus?" This cowardice had been more excusable in another, and not so bad an example. *Should such a man as I am flee?* Neh. 6. 11. *Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be thus shaken*. 2. For his fixing here. "What doest thou here in this cave? Is this a place for a prophet of the Lord to lodge in? Is this a time for such men to retreat, when the public has such need of them?" In the retirement to which God sent Elijah, *ch. 17*. he was a blessing to a poor widow at Sarepta, but here he had no opportunity of doing good. Note, It concerns us often to inquire, whether we be in our place, and in the way of our duty. "Am I where I should be, whither God calls me, where my business lies, and where I may be useful?"

III. The account he gives of himself, in answer to the question put to him, v. 10. and repeated, in answer to the same question, v. 14. In which, 1. He excuses his retreat, and desires it may not be imputed to his want of zeal for reformation, but to his despair of success. For God knew, and his own conscience witnessed for him, that, as long as there was any hope of doing good, he had been *very jealous for the Lord God of hosts*; but now, that he had *laboured in vain*, and all his endeavours were to no purpose, he thought it was time to give up the cause, and mourn for what he could not mend. *Abi in cellam, et dic, Miserere mei—Away to thy cell, and cry, Have compassion on me*. 2. He complains of the people, their obstinacy in sin, and the height of impiety they were got to; "*The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, and that is the reason I have forsaken them; who can stay among them, to see every thing that is sacred ruined and run down?*" This the apostle calls his *making intercession against Israel*, Rom. 11. 2, 3. He had often been, of choice, their advocate, but now is necessitated to be their accuser, before God. Thus, John, 5. 45. *There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust*. Those are truly miserable that have the testimony and prayers of God's prophets against them. 3. He charges them with having forsaken God's covenant; though they retained circumcision, the sign and seal of it, yet they had quitted his worship and service, which was the intention of it. Those who neglect God's ordinances, and let fall their communion with him, do really forsake his covenant, and break their league with him. He charges them with having *thrown down his altars*; they not only deserted them, and suffered them to go to decay, but, in their zeal for the worship of Baal, had wilfully demolished them. He alludes to private altars, which the prophets of the Lord had, and which good people attended, who could not go up to Jerusalem, and would not worship the calves, nor Baal; these separate altars, though breaking in upon the unity of the church, yet, being erected and attended by those that sincerely aimed at the glory of God, and served him faithfully, were excused from the charge of schism; God owned them for his altars, as well as that at Jerusalem, and the putting of them down is charged upon Israel as a crying sin. But this was not all; *They have slain thy prophets with the sword*, who, it is probable, ministered at those altars. Jezebel, a foreigner, did it, *ch. 18. 4*. but it is charged upon the body of the people, because the generality of them were *consenting to their death*, and pleased with it. 4. He gives the reason why he retired into this desert, and took up his residence in this cave. (1.) It was because he could not appear to any purpose: "*I only am left, and have none to second or support me in any good design*. They all said, *The Lord he is God*, but none of them would stand by me, or offer to shelter me. That point then gained, was presently lost again, and Jezebel can do more to debauch them than I can to reform them. What can one do against thousands?" Despair of success hinders many a good enterprise. None are willing to venture alone, forgetting that those are not alone who have God with them. (2.) It was because he could not appear with any safety; "*They seek my life to take it away*; and I had better spend my life in a useless solitude, than lose my life in a fruitless endeavour to reform those that hate to be reformed."

IV. God's manifestation of himself to him. Did he come hither to meet with God? He shall find that God will not fail to

give him the meeting. Moses was put into the cave, when God's glory passed before him; but Elijah was called out of it, to *stand upon the mount before the Lord*, v. 11. He saw no manner of multitude, any more than Israel did, when God talked to them in *Horeb*. But, 1. He heard a strong wind, and saw the terrible effects of it, for it rent the mountains, and tore the rocks. Thus was the trumpet sounded before the Judge of heaven and earth, by his angels, whom he makes *spirits*, or *winds*, Ps. 104. 4. sounded so loud, that the earth not only rang, but rent again. 2. He felt the shock of an earthquake. 3. He saw an eruption of fire, v. 12. These were to usher in the designed manifestations of the divine glory, angels being employed in them, whom he maketh a flame of fire, and who, as his ministers, march before him, to *prepare in this desert a high way for our God*. But, 4. At last, he perceived a still small voice, in which the Lord was, that is, by which he spake to him, and not out of the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. Those struck an awe upon him, awakened his attention, and inspired humility and reverence; but God chose to make known his mind to him in soft whispers, not in those dreadful sounds; which when he perceived, (1.) He wrapped his face in his mantle, as one afraid to look upon the glory of God, and apprehensive that it would dazzle his eyes, and overcome him. The angels cover their faces before God, in token of reverence, Isa. 6. 2. Elijah hid his face, ashamed that he should have been such a coward as to shrink from his duty, when he had such a God of power to stand by him in it. The wind, and earthquake, and fire, did not make him cover his face, but the still voice did. Gracious souls are more affected by the tender mercies of the Lord, than by his terrors. (2.) He stood at the entrance of the cave, ready to hear what God had to say to him. This method of God's manifesting himself here at mount Horeb, seems to refer to the discoveries God formerly made of himself at this place to Moses. [1.] Then there was a tempest, and earthquake, and fire, Heb. 12. 18. but, when God would shew Moses his glory, he proclaimed his goodness; and so here, He was the word, was in the still small voice. [2.] Then the law was thus given to Israel, with the appearances of terror first, and then with a voice of words; and Elijah, being now called to revive that law, especially the two first commandments of it, is here taught how to manage it; he must not only awaken and terrify the people with amazing signs, like the earthquake and fire, but he must endeavour, with a still small voice, to convince and persuade them, and not forsake them, when he should do that. Faith comes by hearing the word of God; miracles do but make way for it. [3.] Then God spake to his people with terror; but in the gospel of Christ, which was to be introduced by the spirit and power of Elias, he would speak by a still small voice, the dread of which should not make us afraid; see Heb. 12. 18, &c.

V. The orders God gives him to execute. He repeated the question he had put to him before, "What doest thou here? This is not a place for thee now." Elijah gives the same answer, v. 14. complains of Israel's apostacy from God, and the ruin of religion among them. To this, God gives him a reply. When he wished he might die, v. 4. God answered him not according to his folly, but was so far from letting him die, that he not only kept him alive then, but provided that he should never die, but be translated. But when he complained of his discouragement, (and whither should God's prophets go with their complaints, of that kind, but to their Master?) God gave him an answer. He sends him back with directions to appoint Hazael king of Syria, v. 15. Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha his successor in the eminency of the prophetic office, v. 16. which is intended as a prediction, that by these God would chastise the degenerate Israelites, plead his own cause among them, and *avenge the quarrel of his covenant*, v. 17. Elijah complained that the wickedness of Israel was unpunished; the judgment of famine was too gentle, and had not reclaimed them, it was removed before they were reformed. "I have been jealous," says he, "for God's name, but he himself has not appeared jealous for it." "Well," says God, "be content, it is all in good time; judgments are prepared for those scorers, though they are not yet inflicted; the persons are pitched upon, and shall now be

nominated, for they are now in being who shall do the business."

1. "When Hazael comes to be king of Syria, he shall make bloody work among the people, 2 Kings, 8. 12. and so correct them for their idolatry." 2. "When Jehu comes to be king of Israel, he shall make bloody work with the royal family, and shall utterly destroy the house of Ahab, that set up and maintained idolatry." 3. "Elisha, while thou art on earth, shall strengthen thy hands; and, when thou art gone, shall carry on thy work, and be a remaining witness against the apostacy of Israel, and even he shall slay the children of Bethel, that idolatrous city." Note, The wicked are reserved to judgment. *Evil pursues sinners*, and there is no escaping it; to attempt an escape, is but to run from one sword's point upon another. See Jer. 48. 44. *He that flees from the fear, shall fall into the pit; and he that gets up out of the pit, shall be taken in the snare*. Elisha, with the sword of the Spirit, shall terrify and wound the consciences of those who escape Hazael's sword of war, and Jehu's sword of justice; *With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked*, Isa. 11. 4. 2 Thess. 2. 8. Hos. 6. 5. It is a great comfort to good men, and good ministers, to think that God will never want instruments to do his work, in his time, but, when they are gone, others shall be raised up to carry it on.

VI. The comfortable information God gives him of the number of Israelites who retained their integrity, though he thought he was left alone, v. 18. *I have left me seven thousand in Israel*, (besides Judah,) *which have not bowed the knee to Baal*. Note, 1. In times of the greatest degeneracy and apostacy, God has always had, and will have, a remnant faithful to him, some that keep their integrity, and do not go down the stream. The apostle mentions this answer of God to Elijah, Rom. 11. 4. and applies it to his own day, when the Jews generally rejected the gospel; *Yet, says he, at this time also there is a remnant*, v. 5. 2. It is God's work to preserve that remnant, and distinguish them from the rest, for without his grace they could not have distinguished themselves: *I have left me*; it is therefore said to be a remnant, *according to the election of grace*. 3. It is but a little remnant, in comparison with the degenerate race; what is 7,000 to the thousands of Israel? Yet, when those of every age come together, they will be found many more, 12,000 sealed out of each tribe, Rev. 7. 4. 4. God's faithful ones are often his hidden ones, Ps. 83. 3. and the visible church scarcely visible; the wheat lost in the chaff, and the gold in the dross, till the sifting, refining, separating, day comes. 5. *The Lord knows them that are his*, though we do not; he sees in secret. 6. There are more good people in the world, than some wise and holy men think there are. Their jealousy of themselves, and for God, makes them think the corruption is universal; but God sees not as they do. When we come to heaven, as we shall miss a great many whom we thought to have met there, so we shall meet a great many whom we little thought to have met there. God's love often proves larger than man's charity, and more extensive.

19. So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. 20. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again; for what have I done to thee? 21. And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

Elisha was named last in the orders God gave to Elijah, but is first called, for by him the other two were to be called. He must

come in Elijah's room; yet Elijah is forward to raise him, and is far from being jealous of his successor, but rejoices to think that he shall leave the work of God in such good hands.

Concerning the call of Elisha, observe,

1. That it was a surprising call: Elijah found him by divine direction, or, perhaps, he was, before, acquainted with him, and knew where to find him. He found him, not in the schools of the prophets, but *in the field*; not reading, or praying, or sacrificing, but *ploughing*, v. 19. Though a great man, (as appears by his feast, v. 21.) master of the ground, and oxen, and servants, yet he did not think it any disparagement to him to follow his business himself, and not only to inspect his servants, but himself to lay his hand to the plough. Idleness is no man's honour, nor is husbandry any man's disgrace. An honest calling in the world does not at all put us out of the way of our heavenly calling; any more than it did Elisha, who was taken from following the plough, to feed Israel, and to sow the *seed of the word*; as the apostles from fishing, to catch men. Elisha inquired not after Elijah, but was anticipated with this call. We love God, and choose him, because he chose us, and loved us, first.

2. That it was a powerful call: Elijah did but *cast his mantle upon him*, v. 19. in token of friendship, that he would take him under his care and tuition, as he did under his mantle, and to be one with him in the same clothes, or, in token of his being clothed with the spirit of Elijah; now he put some of his honour upon him, as Moses on Joshua, Numb. 27. 20. but when Elijah went to heaven, he had the mantle entire, 2 Kings, 2. 13. And immediately he *left the oxen* to go as they would, and *ran after Elijah*, and assured him that he would follow him presently, v. 20. An invisible hand touched his heart, and unaccountably inclined him, by a secret power, without any external persuasions, to quit his husbandry, and give himself to the ministry. It is in a day of power that Christ's subjects are made willing, Ps. 110. 3. nor would any come to Christ, unless they were thus drawn. Elisha came to a resolution presently, but begged a little time, not to *ask leave*, but only to *take leave*, of his parents. This was not an excuse for delay, like his, Luke, 9. 61. that desired he might *bid them farewell that were at home*; but only a reservation of the respect and duty he owed to his father and mother. Elijah bade him go back, and do it, he would not hinder him; nay, if he would, he might go back, and not return, for any thing he had done to him. He will not force him, nor take him against his will; let him sit down and count the cost, and make it his own act. The efficacy of God's grace preserves the native liberty of man's will, so that they who are good are good of choice, and not by constraint; not pressed men, but volunteers.

3. That it was a pleasant and acceptable call to him, which appears by the farewell feast he made for his family, v. 21. Yet he not only quitted all the comforts of his father's house, but exposed himself to the malignity of Jezebel, and her party; it was a discouraging time for prophets to set out in. A man that had consulted with flesh and blood would not be fond of Elijah's mantle, nor willing to wear his coat; yet Elisha, cheerfully, and with a great deal of satisfaction, leaves all, to accompany him. Thus Matthew made a great feast, when he left the receipt of custom to follow Christ.

4. That it was an effectual call: Elijah did not stay for him, lest he should seem to compel him, but left him to his own choice, and he soon arose, went after him, and not only associated with him, but *ministered to him*, as his servitor, *poured water on his hands*, 2 Kings, 3. 11. It is of great advantage to young ministers, to spend some time under the direction of those that are aged and experienced, whose years teach wisdom; and not to think much, if occasion be, to minister to them. Those that would be fit to teach, must have time to learn: and those that hope, hereafter, to rise and rule, must be willing, at first, to stoop and serve.

CHAP. XX.

This chapter is the history of a war, between Ben-hadad king of Syria, and Ahab king of Israel, in which Ahab was, once and again, victorious. We read nothing of Elijah or Elisha in all this story; Jezebel's rage, it is probable, was

abated, and the persecution of the prophets began to cool; which gleam of peace Elijah improves; he appears not at court, but, being told how many thousands of good people there were in Israel, more than he thought of, employs himself, as we may suppose, in founding religious houses, schools, or colleges, of prophets, in several parts of the country, to be nurseries of religion, that they may help to reform the nation, when the throne and court would not be reformed: while they were thus busied, God favoured the nation with the successes we here read of, which were the more remarkable, because obtained against Ben-hadad king of Syria, whose successor, Hazael, was ordained to be a scourge to Israel; they must shortly suffer by the Syrians, and yet now triumph over them, that, if possible, they might be led to repentance by the goodness of God. Here is, I. Ben-hadad's descent upon Israel, and his insolent demand, v. 1. .12. II. The defeat Ahab gave him, encouraged and directed by a prophet, v. 13. .21. III. The Syrians rallying again, and the second defeat Ahab gave them, v. 22. .30. IV. The covenant of peace Ahab made with Ben-hadad, when he had him at his mercy, v. 31. .34. for which he is reproved and threatened by a prophet, v. 35. .43.

1. **A**ND Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together; and *there were* thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. 2. And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad, 3. Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, *even* the goodliest, *are* mine. 4. And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I *am* thine, and all that I have. 5. And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Ben-hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; 6. Yet I will send my servants unto thee to-morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, *that* whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put *it* in their hand, and take *it* away. 7. Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this *man* seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not. 8. And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Harken not *unto him*, nor consent. 9. Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-hadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again. 10. And Ben-hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me. 11. And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell *him*, Let not him that girdeth on *his harness* boast himself as he that putteth it off.

Here is,

I. Ben-hadad's threat to make a descent upon Ahab's kingdom, and the siege he laid to Samaria, his royal city, v. 1. What the ground of the quarrel was, we are not told; covetousness and ambition were the principal, which would never want some pretence or other. David, in his time, had quite subdued the Syrians, and made them tributaries to Israel, but Israel's apostacy from God makes them formidable again. Asa had tempted the Syrians to in-

vade Israel once, *ch.* 15. 18. 20. and now they did it of their own accord; it is dangerous bringing in a foreign force into a country, posterity may pay dear for it. Ben-hadad had with him thirty-two kings, who were either tributaries to him, and bound in duty to attend him, or confederates with him, and bound in interest to assist him; how little did the title of king look, when all these poor petty governors pretended to it!

II. The treaty between these two kings; surely Israel's Defence was departed from them, or else the Syrians could not have marched so readily, and with so little opposition, to Samaria, the head and heart of the country, a city lately built, and therefore, we may suppose, not well fortified, but like to fall quickly into the hands of the invaders; both sides are aware of this, and therefore,

1. Ben-hadad's proud spirit sends Ahab a very insolent demand, *v.* 2, 3. A parley is sounded, and a trumpeter (we may suppose) is sent into the city, to let Ahab know that upon these terms he will raise the siege—That Ahab become his vassal, nay, his *villain*,* and not only pay him a tribute out of what he has, but make over his title to Ben-hadad, and hold all at his will, even his wives and children, the goodliest of them: the manner of expression is designed to gail them; "All shall be mine, without exception."

2. Ahab's poor spirit sends Ben-hadad a very disgraceful submission; it is general indeed, he cannot mention particulars in his surrender, with so much pleasure as Ben-hadad did in his demand, but it is effectual, *I am thine, and all that I have*, *v.* 4. See the effect of sin: (1.) If he had not, by sin, provoked God to depart from him, Ben-hadad could not have made such a demand; sin brings men into such straits, by putting them out of divine protection; if God do not rule us, our enemies shall; a rebel to God is a slave to all besides. Ahab had prepared his silver and gold for Baal, *Hos.* 2. 8. justly therefore it is taken from him; such an alienation amounts to a forfeiture. (2.) If he had not, by sin, wronged his own conscience, and set that against him, he could not have made such a mean surrender; guilt dispirits men, and makes them cowards; he knew Baal could not help, and had no reason to think that God would, and therefore is content to buy his life upon any terms; skin for skin, and all that is dear to him, he will give for it; he will rather live a beggar, than not die a prince.

4. Ben-hadad's proud spirit rises, upon his submission, and becomes yet more insolent and imperious, *v.* 5, 6. Ahab had laid his all at his feet, at his mercy, expecting that one king would use another generously, that this acknowledgment of Ben-hadad's sovereignty would have contented him, the honour was sufficient for the present, and he might, hereafter, make use of it, if he saw cause; *Satis est prostrasse leoni—It suffices the lion to have laid his antagonist prostrate*; but this will not serve: (1.) Ben-hadad is as covetous as he is proud, and cannot go away, unless he have the possession as well as the dominion; he thinks it not enough to call it his, unless he have it in his hands; he will not so much as lend Ahab the use of his own goods above a day longer. (2.) He is as spiteful as he is haughty; had he come himself to select what he had a mind for, it had been some respect to a crowned head, but he will send his servants to insult the prince, and hector over him, to rifle the palace, and strip it of all its ornaments; nay, to give Ahab the more vexation, they shall be ordered, not only to take what they please, but, if they can learn which are the persons or things that Ahab is, in a particular manner, fond of, to take those; *Whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall take that away*. We are often crossed in that which we most dote upon; and that proves least safe which is most dear. (3.) He is as unreasonable as he is unjust, and will construe the surrender Ahab made for himself, as made for all his subjects too, and will have them also to lie at his mercy; "They shall search, not only thy house, but the houses of thy servants too, and plunder them at discretion." Blessed be God for peace and property, and that what we have we can call our own.

4. Ahab's poor spirit begins to rise too, upon his growing insolence; and if it becomes not bold, yet it becomes desperate, and he will rather hazard his life than give up all thus. (1.) Now he takes advice of his privy-council, who encourage him to stand it out. He speaks but poorly, *v.* 7. appeals to them whether Ben-hadad were not an unreasonable enemy, and did not seek mischief. What other could he expect from one who, without any provocation given him, had invaded his country, and besieged his capital city? He owns to them how he had truckled to him before, and would have them advise him what he should do in this strait; they speak bravely, *v.* 8. *Hearken not to him, nor consent*; promising, no doubt, to stand by him in the refusal. (2.) Yet he expresses himself very modestly in his denial, *v.* 9. he owns Ben-hadad's dominion over him, "*Tell my lord the king, I have no design to affront him, nor to recede from the surrender I have already made; what I offered at first, I will stand to, but this thing I may not do; I must not give what is none of my own.*" It was a mortification to Ben-hadad, that even such an abject spirit as Ahab's was dares deny him; yet it should seem, by his manner of expressing himself, that he durst not have done it, if his people had not animated him.

5. Ben-hadad proudly swears the ruin of Samaria; the threatening waves of his wrath, meeting with this check, rage and foam, and make a noise; in his fury he imprecates the impotent revenge of his gods, if *the dust of Samaria serve for handfuls for his army*, *v.* 10. So numerous, so resolute, an army will he bring into the field against Samaria, and so confident is he of their success, it will be done as easily as the taking up of a handful of dust; all shall be carried away, even the ground on which the city stands. Thus confident is his pride, thus cruel is his malice; this prepares him to be ruined, though such a prince and such a people are unworthy of the satisfaction of seeing him ruined.

6. Ahab sends him a decent rebuke to his assurance; dares not defy his menaces, only reminds him of the uncertain turns of war, *v.* 11. "Let not him that begins a war, and his girding on his sword, his armour, his harness, boast of victory, or think himself sure of it, *as if he had put it off*, and were come home a conqueror." This was one of the wisest words that ever Ahab spake, and is a good item or memento to us all; it is folly to boast, before, of any day, since we know not what it may bring forth, *Prov.* 27. 1. but especially to boast of a day of battle, which may prove as much against us, as we promise ourselves it will be for us. It is impolitic to despise an enemy, and to be too sure of victory is the way to be beaten. Apply it to our spiritual conflicts: Peter fell by his confidence; while we are here, we are but girding on the harness, and therefore must never boast as though we had put it off. *Happy is the man that feareth always*, and is never off his watch.

12. And it came to pass, when *Ben-hadad* heard this message, as he *was* drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, *Set yourselves in array*. And they set themselves in array against the city. 13. And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that *I am* the LORD. 14. And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, *Even* by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou. 15. Then he numbered the young men of the

* That is, a person appropriated and enslaved.—ED.

princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty-two: and after them he numbered all the people, *even* all the children of Israel, *being* seven thousand. 16. And they went out at noon. But Ben-hadad *was* drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. 17. And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. 18. And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive. 19. So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. 20. And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Ben-hadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen. 21. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.

The treaty between the besiegers and the besieged being broken off abruptly, we have here an account of the battle that ensued immediately.

I. The Syrians, the besiegers, had their directions from a drunken king, who gave orders over his cups, as he was *drinking*, v. 12. *drinking himself drunk*, v. 16, *with the kings in the pavilions*, and this, at noon. Drunkenness is a sin, which armies and their officers have, of old, been addicted to. Say not thou then that the former days were, in this respect, better than these, though these are bad enough; had he not been very secure, he would not have sat to drink; and had he not been intoxicated, he would not have been so very secure: security and sensuality went together in the old world, and Sodom, Luke, 17. 26, &c. Ben-hadad's drunkenness was the forerunner of his fall, as Belshazzar's was, Dan. 5. How could he prosper, that preferred his pleasure before his business, and kept his kings to drink with him, when they should have been at their respective posts to fight for him? In his drink, 1. He orders the town to be invested, the engines fixed, and every thing got ready for the making of a general attack, v. 12. but stirs not from his drunken club to see it done; *Woe unto thee, O land, when thy king is such a child.* 2. When the besiegers made a sally, (and, by that time, he was far gone,) he gave orders to take them alive, v. 18. not to kill them, which might have been done more easily and safely, but to seize them, which gave them an opportunity of killing the aggressors; so imprudent was he in the orders he gave, as well as unjust, in ordering them to be taken prisoners, though they came for peace, and to renew the treaty; thus, as is usual, he drinks, and forgets the law, both the policies and the justice of war.

II. The Israelites, the besieged, had their directions from an inspired prophet, one of the prophets of the Lord, whom Ahab had hated and persecuted: *And behold, a prophet, even one, drew near to the king of Israel*; so it may be read, v. 13. Behold, and wonder, that God should send a prophet with a kind and gracious message to so wicked a prince as Ahab was; but he did it, 1. For his people Israel's sake, who, though wickedly degenerated, were the seed of Abraham his friend, and Jacob his chosen, the children of the covenant, and not yet cast off. 2. That he might magnify his mercy, in doing good to one so evil and unthankful, might either bring him to repentance, or leave him the more inexcusable. 3. That he might mortify the pride of Ben-hadad, and check his insolence: Ahab's idolatry shall be punished hereafter, but Ben-hadad's haughtiness shall be chastised

now; for God resists the proud, and is pleased to say that *he fears the wrath of the enemy*, Deut. 32. 26, 27. There was but one prophet, perhaps, to be had in Samaria, and he drew near with this message, intimating that he had been forced to keep at a distance; Ahab, in his prosperity, would not have borne the sight of him, but now he bids him welcome, when none of the prophets of the groves could give him any assistance; he inquired not for a prophet of the Lord, but God sent one to him, unasked, for he waits to be gracious.

Now, (1.) This prophet animates him with an assurance of victory, which was more than all the elders of Israel could give him, v. 8. though they promised to stand by him. This prophet, who is not named, (for he *spoke in God's name*,) tells him, from God, that this very day the siege should be raised, and the army of the Syrians routed, v. 13. When the prophet said, *Thus saith the Lord*, we may suppose Ahab began to tremble, expecting a message of wrath: but he is revived, when it proves a gracious one. He is reminded of the use he must make of this blessed turn of affairs; "*Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah*, the sovereign Lord of all:" God's foretelling a thing that was so very unlikely, proved that it was his own doing. (2.) He instructs him what to do for the gaining of this victory. [1.] He must not stay till the enemy had attacked him, but must sally out upon them, and surprise them in their trenches. [2.] The persons employed must be the *young men of the princes of the provinces*, the pages, the footmen, who were few in number, but 232, utterly unacquainted with war, and the unlikelyest men that could be thought of, for such a bold attempt; yet these must do it, those weak and foolish things must be instruments of confounding the wise and strong, that, while Ben-hadad's boasting is punished, Ahab's might be prevented and precluded, and the *excellency of the power might be of God*. [3.] Ahab must himself so far testify his confidence in the word of God, as to command in person, though, in the eye of reason, he exposed himself to the utmost danger by it; but it is fit that those who have the benefit of God's promises, should enter upon them. Yet, [4.] He is allowed to make use of what forces he had at hand, to follow the blow, when these young men had broken the ice. All he had in Samaria, or within call, were but 7000 men, v. 15. It is observable that it is the same number with their's that had not *bowed the knee to Baal*, ch. 19. 18. though, it is likely, not the same men.

III. The issue was accordingly; the proud Syrians were beaten, and the poor despised Israelites were more than conquerors; the young men gave an alarm to the Syrians, just at noon, at high dinner time, supported by what little force they had, v. 16. Ben-hadad despised them, at first, v. 18. but, when they had, with unparalleled bravery and dexterity, *slain every one his man*, and so put the army into disorder, that proud man durst not face them, but mounted immediately, drunk as he was, and made the best of his way, v. 20. See how God *slips off the spirit of princes*, and makes himself *terrible to the kings of the earth*. Now where are the silver and gold he demanded of Ahab? Where the handfuls of Samaria's dust? Those that are most secure are commonly least courageous. Ahab failed not to improve this advantage, but *slew the Syrians with a great slaughter*, v. 21. Note, God oftentimes makes one wicked man a scourge to another.

22. And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee. 23. And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods *are* gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. 24. And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms: 25. And num-

ber thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, *and* surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so. 26. And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel. 27. And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country. 28. And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the vallies, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD. 29. And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day. 30. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and *there* a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men *that were* left. And Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber.

We have here an account of another successful campaign which Ahab, by divine aid, made against the Syrians, in which he gave them a greater defeat than in the former. Strange! Ahab idolatrous, and yet victorious; a persecutor, and yet a conqueror! God has wise and holy ends in suffering wicked men to prosper, and in it glorifies his own name.

I. Ahab is admonished by a prophet to prepare for another war, v. 22. It should seem, he was now secure, and looked but a little way before him; those that are careless of their souls are often as careless of their outward affairs; but the prophet (to whom God made known the following counsels of the Syrians) told him, they would renew the attempt, at the return of the year, hoping to retrieve the honour they had lost, and be avenged for the blow they had received. He therefore bade him strengthen himself, put himself into a posture of defence, and be ready to give them a warm reception. God had decreed the end, but Ahab must use the means, else he tempts God: "Help thyself, strengthen thyself, and God will help and strengthen thee." The enemies of God's Israel are restless in their malice, and though they may take some breathing time for themselves, yet are still *breathing out threatenings and slaughter* against the church. It concerns us always to expect assaults from our spiritual enemies, and therefore to mark and see what we do.

II. Ben-hadad is advised by those about him concerning the operations of the next campaign.

1. They advised him to *change his ground*, v. 23. They take it for granted that it was not Israel, but Israel's gods, that beat them; (so great a regard was then universally had to invisible powers;) but they speak very ignorantly of Jehovah—that he was *many*, whereas he is One, and his name One—that he was *their* God only, a local deity, peculiar to that nation, whereas he is the Creator and Ruler of all the world—and that he was a God *of the hills* only, because David, their great prophet, had said, *I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help*, Ps. 121. 1. and that *his foundation was in the holy mountain*, Ps. 87. 1.—78. 54. and thus was said of his *holy hill*, Ps. 15. 1.—24. 3. supposing

him altogether such a one as their imaginary deities; they fancied he was confined to his hills, and could not, or would not, come down from them, and therefore an army in the valley would be below his cognizance, and from under his protection: thus vain were the *Gentiles in their imaginations* concerning God, so wretchedly were *their foolish hearts darkened*, and, *professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*. 2. They advise him to change his officers, v. 24, 25. not to employ the kings, who were commanders by birth, but captains rather, who were commanders by merit, who were inured to war, would not affect to make a shew like the kings, but would go through with business; let every man be employed in that which he is brought up to, and used to, and preferred to that which he is fit for. Syria, it seems, was rich and populous, when it could furnish recruits sufficient, after so great a defeat, *horse for horse, chariot for chariot*.

III. Both armies take the field; Ben-hadad, with his Syrians, encamps near Aphek, in the tribe of Asher, a city, it is likely, in his own possession, one of those which his father had won, v. 34. and the country about, flat and level, and fit for his purpose, v. 26. Ahab, with his forces, posted himself at some distance over against them, v. 27. The disproportion of numbers was very remarkable, v. 27. *the children of Israel*, who were cantoned in two battalions, looked like *two little flocks of kids*, their numbers small, their equipage mean, and the figure they made contemptible; *but the Syrians filled the country* with their numbers, their noise, their chariots, their carriages, and their baggage.

IV. Ahab is encouraged to fight the Syrians, notwithstanding their advantages and confidence. A man of God is sent to him, to tell him that this numerous army should *all be delivered into his hand*, v. 28. but not for his sake; he it known to him, he was utterly unworthy, for whom God should do this: God would not do it, because Ahab had praised God, or prayed to him, (we do not read that he did either,) but because the Syrians had blasphemed God, and had said, He is *the God of the hills, and not of the vallies*; therefore God will do it in his own vindication, and to preserve the honour of his own name: if the Syrians had said, "Ahab and his people have forsaken their God, and so put themselves out of his protection, and therefore we may venture to attack them;" God would, probably, have delivered Israel into their hands; but when they go upon a presumption so very injurious to the divine omnipotence, and the honour of him who is Lord of all hosts, not only in hills and vallies, but in heaven and earth, which they are willingly ignorant of, they shall be undeceived, at the expence of that vast army which is so much their pride and confidence.

V. After the armies had faced one another seven days, (the Syrians, it is likely, boasting, and the Israelites trembling,) they engaged, and the Syrians were totally routed, 100,000 men slain by the sword of Israel, in the field of battle, v. 29. and 27,000 men, that thought themselves safe *under the walls of Aphek*, a fortified city, (from the walls of which the shooters might annoy the enemy, if they pursued them, 2 Sam. 11. 24.) found their bane where they hoped for protection, the wall fell upon them, probably, overthrown by an earthquake, and, the cities of Canaan being walled up to heaven, it reached a great way, and they were all either killed, or hurt, or overwhelmed with dismay. Ben-hadad, who thought his city Aphek should have held out against the conquerors, finding it thus unwallled, and the remnant of his forces dispirited and dispersed, had nothing but secrecy to rely upon for safety, and therefore hid himself in *a chamber within a chamber*, lest the pursuers should seize him. See how the greatest confidence often ends in the greatest cowardice; "Now, is the God of Israel the *God of the vallies*, or no?" He shall know, now that he is forced *into an inner chamber to hide himself*, see ch. 22. 25.

31. And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will

save thy life. 32. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and *put* ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, *Is he yet alive? he is my brother.* 33. Now the men did diligently observe whether *any thing would come* from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. 34. And *Ben-hadad* said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then *said Ahab*, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away. 35. And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. 36. Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him. 37. Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him. 38. So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face. 39. And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. 40. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So *shall thy judgment be*; thyself hast decided it. 41. And he hastened, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he *was* of the prophets. 42. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of *thy* hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. 43. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.

Here is an account of what followed the victory which Israel obtained over the Syrians.

I. Ben-hadad's tame and mean submission; even in his inner chamber he fears, and would, if he could, flee further, though none pursues; his servants, seeing him and themselves reduced to the last extremity, advise that they surrender at discretion, and make themselves prisoners and petitioners to Ahab for their lives, v. 31. The servants will put their lives in their hands, and venture first, and their master shall act according as they speed. Their inducement to take this course, is, the great reputation the

kings of Israel had for clemency above any of their neighbours; "We have heard that they are merciful kings, not oppressive to their subjects that are under their power," (as governments then went, that of Israel was one of the most easy and gentle,) "and therefore not cruel to their enemies, when they lie at their mercy." Perhaps they had this notion of the kings of Israel, because they had heard that the God of Israel proclaimed his name *gracious and merciful*, and they concluded their kings would make their God their pattern; it was an honour to the kings of Israel to be thus represented, as indeed every Israelite is then dressed as becomes him, when he *puts on bowels of mercies*. "They are merciful kings, therefore we may hope to find mercy, upon our submission;" this encouragement poor sinners have to repent and humble themselves before God; "Have we not heard that the God of Israel is a merciful God? Have we not found him so? Let us therefore rend our hearts, and return to him." Joel, 2. 13. That is evangelical repentance, which flows from an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ; there is forgiveness with him.

Two things they undertake to represent to Ahab;

1. Their master a penitent; for they *girded sackcloth on their loins*, as mourners, and *put ropes on their heads*, as condemned criminals going to execution, pretending to be sorry that they had invaded his country, and disturbed his repose, and to own that they deserved to be hanged for it; here they are ready to do penance for it, and throw themselves at the feet of him whom they had injured; many take upon them to repent of their wrongdoing, when it does not succeed, who, if they had prospered in it, would have justified it, and gloried in it.

2. Their master a beggar, a beggar for his life; *Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, "I pray thee, let me live, v. 32.* Though I live a perpetual exile from my own country, and captive in this, yet, upon any terms, *let me live.*" What a great change is here, (1.) In his condition! how is he fallen from the height of power and prosperity, to the depths of disgrace and distress, and all the miseries of poverty and slavery! See the uncertainty of human affairs; such turns are they subject to, that the spoke which was uppermost may soon come to be undermost. (2.) In his temper; in the beginning of the chapter, hectoring, swearing, and threatening, and none more high in his demands; but here, humbling and bemoaning himself, and none more low in his requests: how poorly does he beg his life at the hand of him whom he had there been trampling upon! The most haughty in prosperity are commonly most abject in adversity; an evil spirit will thus affect a man in these conditions; see how God glorifies himself, when he *looks upon proud men, and abases them, and hides them in the dust together*, Job, 40. 11. . 13.

II. Ahab's foolish acceptance of his submission, and the league he suddenly made with him, upon it; he was proud to be thus courted by him whom he feared, inquires for him with great tenderness, *Is he yet alive? He is my brother*, brother-king, though not brother-Israelite; and Ahab valued himself more on his royalty than on his religion, and others accordingly. "*Is he thy brother, Ahab?* Did he use thee like a brother, when he sent thee that barbarous message? v. 5, 6. Would he have called thee *brother*, if he had been the conqueror? Would he now have called himself *thy servant*, if he had not been reduced to the utmost strait? Canst thou suffer thyself to be thus imposed upon by a forced and counterfeit submission?" This word *brother* they catch at, v. 33. and were encouraged by that to go and fetch him to the king; he that calls him *brother*, will *let him live*; let poor penitents hear God, in his word, calling them *children*, Jer. 31. 20. catch at it, echo to it, and call him *Father*. Ben-hadad, upon his submission, shall not only be honourably conveyed, (he *took him up into the chariot*;) but treated with as an ally, v. 34. he *made a covenant with him*, not consulting either God's prophets, or the elders of the land, or himself, concerning what was fit to be insisted on, but, as Ben-hadad had been conqueror, he shall make his own terms; he might now have demanded some of Ben-hadad's cities, when all of them lay at the mercy of his victorious army, but is content with the restitution of his own; he

might now have demanded the stores, and treasures, and magazines, of Damascus, to augment the wealth and strength of his own kingdom, but is content with a poor liberty, at his own expence, to build streets there, a point of honour, and no advantage, or no more than what the kings of Syria had had in Samaria, though they never had had so much power as he had now, to support the demand of it. With this covenant he sent him away, without so much as reproving him for his blasphemous reflections upon the God of Israel, whose honour Ahab had no concern for. Note, There are those on whom success is ill-bestowed; they know not how to serve either God or their generation, or even their own true interests, with their prosperity. *Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness.*

III. The reproof given to Ahab for his clemency to Ben-hadad, and his covenant with him; it was given him by a prophet, in the name of the Lord; the Jews say it was Micaiah, and not unlikely, for Ahab complains of him, *ch. 22. 8.* that he used to *prophecy evil concerning him*; this prophet designed to reprove Ahab by a parable, that he might oblige him to condemn himself, as Nathan and the woman of Tekoa did David; to make his parable the more plausible, he finds it necessary to put himself into the posture of a wounded soldier.

1. With some difficulty, he gets himself wounded, for he would not do it with his own hands; he commanded one of his brother prophets, his *neighbour or companion*, (for so the word signifies,) to smite him, and this in God's name, *v. 35.* but finds him not so willing to give the blow as he is to receive it; he refused to smite him, others were forward enough to smite prophets, they need not smite one another; we cannot but think it was from a good principle he declined it, "If it must be done, let another do it, not I; I cannot find in my heart to strike my friend." Good men can much more easily receive a wrongful blow than give one; yet, because he disobeyed an express command of God, (which was so much the worse if he were himself a prophet,) like that other disobedient prophet, *ch. 13. 24.* he was presently *slain by a lion, v. 36.* This was intended, not only to shew, in general, how provoking disobedience is, *Col. 3. 6.* but to intimate to Ahab, who, no doubt, was told the story, that, if a good prophet were thus punished for sparing his friend and God's, when God said, *Smite*, of much sorer punishment should a wicked king be thought worthy, who spared his enemy and God's, when God said, *Smite*. *Shall mortal man pretend to be more just than God, more pure or more compassionate than his Maker?* We must be merciful as he is merciful, and not otherwise. The next he met with, made no difficulty of smiting him, (*Volenti non fit injuria—He that asks for an injury is not wronged by it.*) and did it so that he *wounded him, v. 37.* he fetched blood with the blow, it is likely, in his face.

2. Wounded as he was, and disguised with ashes, that he might not be known to be a prophet, he made his application to the king in a story, whereby he charged himself with such a crime as the king was now guilty of in sparing Ben-hadad, and waits for the king's judgment upon it; the case, in short, is this;—A prisoner taken in the battle was committed to his custody, by a man, (we may suppose one that had authority over him as his superior officer,) with this charge, *If he be missing, thy life shall be for his life, v. 39.* The prisoner has made his escape through his carelessness. Can the chancery in the king's breast relieve him against his captain, who demands his life in lieu of the prisoner's? "By no means," says the king, "thou shouldst either not have undertaken the trust, or been more careful and faithful to it, there is no remedy, (*Curat lex—Let the law take its course,*) thou hast forfeited thy bond, and execution must go out upon it; *so shall thy doom be, thyself hast decided it.*" Now the prophet has what he would have, puts off his disguise, and is known by Ahab himself to be a prophet, *v. 41.* and plainly tells him, "*Thou art the man: Is it my doom? No, it is thine; thyself hast decided it;* out of thine own mouth art thou judged; God, thy Superior and Commander in chief, delivered into thy hands one plainly marked for destruction, both by his own pride, and God's providence, and

thou hast not carelessly lost him, but wittingly and willingly dismissed him, and so hast been false to thy trust, and lost the end of thy victory; expect therefore no other than that *thy life shall go for his life*, which thou hast spared," (and so it did, *ch. 22. 35.*) "and thy people for his people, whom likewise thou hast spared;" and so they did afterward, *2 Kings, 10. 32, 33.* When their other sins brought them low, this came into the account. There is a time when *keeping back the sword from blood is doing the work of the Lord deceitfully*, *Jer. 48. 10.* Foolish pity spoils the city.

3. We are told how Ahab took this reproof; he *went to his house heavy and displeased, v. 43.* not truly penitent, or seeking to undo what he had done amiss, but enraged at the prophet, exasperated against God, (as if he had been too severe in the sentence passed upon him,) and yet vexed at himself, every way out of humour, notwithstanding his victory; he who, by his providence, had mortified the pride of one king, by his word, cast a damp upon the triumphs of another: *Be wise therefore, O ye kings, and be instructed to serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling*, *Ps. 2. 10, 11.*

CHAP. XXI.

Ahab is still the unhappy subject of the sacred history; from the great affairs of his camp and kingdom, this chapter leads us into his garden, and gives us an account of some ill things, (and ill indeed they proved to him,) relating to his domestic affairs. I. Ahab is sick for Naboth's vineyard, v. 1..4. II. Naboth dies by Jezebel's plot, that the vineyard may escheat to Ahab, v. 5..14. III. Ahab goes to take possession, v. 15, 16. IV. Elijah meets him, and denounces the judgments of God against him for his injustice, v. 17..24. V. Upon his humiliation, a reprieve is granted, v. 25..29.

1. **A**ND it came to pass after these things, *that* Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which *was* in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it *is* near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; *or*, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. 3. And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. 4. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.

Here is,

I. Ahab's coveting his neighbour's vineyard, which, unhappily, lay near his palace, and was convenient for a kitchen-garden; perhaps, Naboth had been pleased that he had a vineyard which lay so advantageously for a prospect of the royal gardens, or the vending of its productions to the royal family—but the situation of it proved fatal to him; if he had had no vineyard, or it had lain obscure in some remote place, he had preserved his life: but many a man's possessions have been his snare, and his neighbourhood to greatness, of pernicious consequence. Ahab sets his eye and heart on this vineyard, *v. 2.* it will be a pretty addition to his demesne, a convenient out-let to his palace; and nothing will serve him but it must be his own. He is welcome to the fruits of it, welcome to walk in it; Naboth perhaps would have made him a lease of it, for his life, to please him, but nothing will please him, unless he have an absolute property in it, he and his heirs for ever: yet he is not such a tyrant as to take it by force, but fairly proposes, *either to give him the full value of it in money, or a better vineyard in exchange*; he had tamely quitted the great advantages God had

given him, of enlarging his dominion for the honour of his kingdom, by his victory over the Syrians, and now is eager to enlarge his garden, only for the convenience of his house, as if to be penny-wise would atone for being pound-foolish. To desire a convenience to his estate, was not evil; (there would be no buying, if there were no desire of what is bought; the virtuous woman *considers a field and buys it*;) but to desire any thing inordinately, though we would compass it by lawful means, is a fruit of selfishness, as if we must engross all the conveniences, and none must live, or live comfortably, by us; contrary to the law of contentment, and the letter of the tenth commandment, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house*.

II. The repulse he met with in this desire; Naboth would by no means part with it, v. 3. *The Lord forbid it me*; and the Lord did forbid it, else he would not have been so rude and uncivil to his prince, as not to gratify him in so small a matter. Canaan was, in a peculiar manner, God's land; the Israelites were his tenants; and this was one of the conditions of their leases, that they should not alienate, (no not to one another,) any part of that which fell to their lot, unless in case of extreme necessity, and then only till the year of jubilee, Lev. 25. 28. Now Naboth foresaw, that, if his vineyard were sold to the crown, it would never return to his heirs, no not in the jubilee; he would gladly oblige the king, but he must obey God rather than men, and therefore in this matter desires to be excused. Ahab knew the law, or should have known it, and therefore did ill to ask that which his subject could not grant without sin. Some conceive that Naboth looked upon his earthly inheritance as an earnest of his lot in the heavenly Canaan, and therefore would not part with the former, lest it should amount to a forfeiture of the latter: he seems to have been a conscientious man, who would rather hazard the king's displeasure than offend God; and, probably, was one of the 7000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal, for which, ² may be, Ahab owed him a grudge.

III. Ahab's great discontent and uneasiness, hereupon; he was, as before, ch. 20. 43. *heavy and displeased*, v. 4. grew melancholy upon it, threw himself upon his bed, would not eat, nor admit company to come to him; he could by no means digest the affront, his proud spirit aggravated the indignity Naboth did him in denying him, as a thing not to be suffered; he cursed the squeamishness of his conscience, which he pretended to consult the peace of, and secretly meditated revenge; nor could he bear the disappointment, it cut him to the heart to be crossed in his desires, and he was perfectly sick for vexation. Note, (1.) Discontent is a sin that is its own punishment, and makes men torment themselves; it makes the spirit sad, the body sick, and all the enjoyments sour; it is the heaviness of the heart, and the rottenness of the bones. (2.) It is a sin that is its own parent; it arises not from the condition, but from the mind; as we find Paul contented in a prison, so Ahab discontent in a palace; he had all the delights of Canaan, that pleasant land, at command, the wealth of a kingdom, the pleasures of a court, and the honours and powers of a throne; and yet *all this avails him nothing* without Naboth's vineyard. Inordinate desires expose men to continual vexations, and they that are disposed to fret, be they never so happy, will always find something or other to fret at.

5. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? 6. And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee *another* vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. 7. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, *and* eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the

Jezreelite. 8. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed *them* with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that *were* in his city, dwelling with Naboth. 9. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: 10. And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And *then* carry him out, and stone him, that he may die. 11. And the men of his city, *even* the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, *and* as it *was* written in the letters which she had sent unto them. 12. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. 13. And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, *even* against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died. 14. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. 15. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. 16. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Nothing but mischief is to be expected when Jezebel enters into the story—that *cursed woman*, 2 Kings, 9. 34.

I. Under pretence of comforting her afflicted husband, she feeds his pride and passion, and blows the coals of his corruptions. It became her to take notice of his grief, and to inquire into the cause of it, v. 5. Those have forgotten both the duty and affection of the conjugal relation, that interest not themselves in each other's troubles. He tells her what troubled him, v. 6. yet invidiously conceals Naboth's reason for his refusal, representing it as peevish, when it was conscientious; *I will not give it thee*, whereas he said, *I may not*. What? (says Jezebel, v. 7.) *Dost thou govern Israel? Arise, and eat bread*. She does well to persuade him to shake off his melancholy, and not to sink under his burthen, to be easy and cheerful; whatever was his grief, grieving would not redress it, but pleasantness would alleviate it; her plea is, *Dost thou now govern Israel?* This is capable of a good sense, "Does it become so great a prince as thou art, to cast thyself down for so small a matter? Thou shamest thyself, and profanest thy crown; it is below thee to take notice of so inconsiderable a thing. Art thou fit to govern Israel, who hast no better a government of thine own passions? or, hast thou so rich a kingdom at command, and canst not thou be without this one vineyard?" We should learn to quiet ourselves, under our crosses, with the thoughts of the mercies we enjoy, especially our hopes of the kingdom. But she meant it in a bad sense, "*Dost thou govern Israel, and shall any subject thou hast deny thee any thing thou hast a mind to? Art thou a king? It is below thee to buy and pay, much more to beg and pray; use thy prerogative, and take by force what thou canst not compass by fair means; instead of resenting the affront thus,*

revenge it. If thou knowest not how to support the dignity of a king, let me alone to do it; give me but leave to make use of thy name, and I will soon *give thee the vineyard of Naboth*; right or wrong, it shall be thy own shortly, and cost thee nothing." Unhappy princes those are, and hurried apace toward their ruin, who have those about them that stir them up to acts of tyranny, and teach them how to abuse their power.

II. In order to the gratifying of him, she projects and compasses the death of Naboth; no less than his blood will serve to atone for the affront he had given to Ahab, which she thirsts after the more greedily, because of his adherence to the law of the God of Israel. Had she aimed only at his land, her false witnesses might have sworn him out of that by a forged deed; (she could not have set up so weak a title, but the elders of Jezreel would have adjudged it good;) but *the adulteress will hunt for the precious life*, Prov. 6. 26. Revenge is sweet, Naboth must die, and die as a malefactor, to gratify it.

1. Never were more wicked orders given by any prince, than these which Jezebel sent to the magistrates of Jezreel, v. 8, 9, 10. She borrows the privy-seal, but the king shall not know what she will do with it: it is probable this was not the first time he had lent it her, but that with it she had signed warrants for the slaying of the prophets. She makes use of the king's name, knowing the thing would please him when it was done, yet fearing he might scruple the manner of doing it; in short, she commands them, upon their allegiance, to put Naboth to death, without giving them any reason. Had she sent witnesses to inform against him, the judges (who must go *secundum allegata et probata*—according to *allegations and proofs*) might have been imposed upon, and their sentence had been rather their unhappiness than their crime; but to oblige them to find the witnesses, sons of Belial, to suborn them themselves, and then to give judgment upon a testimony which they knew to be false, was such an impudent defiance to every thing that is just and sacred, as we hope cannot be paralleled in any story; she must look upon the elders of Jezreel as men perfectly lost to every thing that is honest and honourable, when she expected these orders should be obeyed; but she will put them in a way how to do it, having as much of the serpent's subtilty as she had of his poison.

(1.) It must be done *under colour of religion*.—"Proclaim a fast, signify to your city that you are apprehensive of some dreadful judgment coming upon you, which you must endeavour to avert, not only by prayer, but by finding out and by putting away the accursed thing, take on you to be afraid that there is some great offender among you undiscovered, for whose sake God is angry with your city; charge the people, if they know of any such, on that solemn occasion to inform against him, as they tender the welfare of the city, and at last let Naboth be fastened upon as the suspected person, probably, because he does not join with his neighbours in their worship: That may serve for a pretence to *set him on high among the people*, to call him to the bar; let proclamation be made, if any one can inform the court against the prisoner, and prove him to be the Achan, they shall be heard; and then let the witnesses appear to give evidence against him." Note, There is no wickedness so vile, so horrid, but religion has sometimes been made a cloke and cover for it. We must not think at all the worse of fasting and praying for their having been sometimes thus abused, but much the worse of those wicked designs that have at any time been carried on under the umbrage of them.

(2.) It must be done *under colour of justice* too, and with the formalities of a legal process. Had she sent to them to hire some of their banditti, some desperate ruffians, to assassinate him, to stab him as he went along the streets in the night, it had been bad enough; but to do it by a course of law, to use that power for the murdering of the innocent, which ought to be their protection, was such a *violent perverting of justice and judgment* as yet we are bid *not to marvel at*, Eccl. 5. 8. The crime they must lay to his charge, was, *blaspheming God and the king*; a complicated blasphemy. Sure she could not think to put a blasphemous sense

upon the answer he had given to Ahab, as if denying him his vineyard were blaspheming the king, and giving the divine law for the reason, were blaspheming God. No, she pretends not any ground at all for the charge; though there was no colour of truth in it, though witnesses must swear it, and Naboth must not be permitted to speak for himself, or cross-examine the witnesses, but immediately, under pretence of a universal detestation of the crime, they must *carry him out and stone him*. His blaspheming God would be the forfeiture of his life, but not of his estate, and therefore he is also charged with treason, in *blaspheming the king*, for which his estate was to be confiscated, that so Ahab might have his vineyard.

Never were wicked orders more wickedly obeyed, than these were by the magistrates of Jezreel. They do not so much as dispute the command, or make any objections against it, though so palpably unjust; but punctually observed all the particulars of it, either because they feared Jezebel's cruelty, or because they hated Naboth's piety, or both: They did *as it was written in the letters*, v. 11, 12. neither made any difficulty of it, nor met with any difficulty in it, but cleverly carried on the villany, they stoned Naboth to death, v. 13. and, as it should seem, his sons with him, or after him: for, when God came to make inquisition for blood, we find that article in the account, 2 Kings, 9. 26. *I have seen the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons*. Perhaps they were secretly murdered, that they might not claim their father's estate, or complain of the wrong done him. Let us take occasion, from this sad story, (1.) To stand amazed at the wickedness of the wicked, and the power of Satan in the children of disobedience. What a holy indignation may we be filled with, to see *wickedness in the place of judgment*, Eccl. 3. 16. (2.) To lament the hard case of oppressed innocency, and to mingle our tears with *the tears of the oppressed that have no comforter*, while *on the side of the oppressors there is power*, Eccl. 4. 1. (3.) To commit the keeping of our lives and comforts to God, for innocency itself will not always be our security. (4.) To rejoice in the belief of a judgment to come, in which such wrong judgments as these will be called over. Now we see that *there be just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked*, Eccl. 8. 14. but all will be set to rights in the great day.

III. Naboth being taken off, Ahab takes possession of his vineyard. 1. The elders of Jezreel sent notice to Jezebel very unconcernedly; sent it her as a piece of agreeable news, *Naboth is stoned, and is dead*, v. 14. Here let us observe, that as obsequious as the elders of Jezreel were to Jezebel's orders which she sent from Samaria for the murder of Naboth, so obsequious were the elders of Samaria afterwards to Jehu's orders which he sent from Jezreel for the murder of Ahab's seventy sons, only that was not done by course of law, 2 Kings, 10. 6, 7. Those tyrants that, by their wicked orders, debauch the consciences of their inferior magistrates, may, perhaps, find at last the wheel return upon them; and that those who will not stick to do one cruel thing for them, will be as ready to do another cruel thing against them. 2. Jezebel, jocund enough that her plot succeeded so well, brings notice to Ahab, that *Naboth is not alive, but dead*, therefore *Arise, take possession of his vineyard*, v. 15. He might have taken possession by one of his officers, but so pleased is he with this accession to his estate, that he will make a journey to Jezreel himself to enter upon it; and it should seem he went in state too, as if he had got some mighty victory, for Jehu remembers, long after, that he and Bidkar attended him at this time, 2 Kings, 9. 25. If Naboth's sons were all put to death, Ahab thought himself entitled to the estate, *ob defectum sanguinis* (as our law expresses it.) If not, yet, Naboth dying as a criminal, he claimed it *ob delictum criminis*. Or, if neither would make him a good title, the absolute power of Jezebel will give it him, and who dares oppose it? Might often prevails against right, and wonderful is the divine patience, that suffers it to do so. God is certainly of *purser eyes than to behold iniquity*, and yet for a time *keeps silence when the wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he*, Hab. 1. 13.

17. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18. Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, *he is* in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. 19. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. 20. And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. 21. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel; 22. And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. 23. And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. 24. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. 25. But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. 26. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 27. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. 28. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29. Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: *but* in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

In these verses, we may observe,

1. The very bad character that is given of Ahab, *v. 25, 26*, which comes in here, to justify God in the heavy sentence passed upon him, and to shew, that, though it was passed upon occasion of his sin in the matter of Naboth, (which David's sin in the matter of Uriah did too much resemble,) yet God would not have punished him so severely, if he had not been guilty of many other sins, especially idolatry; whereas David, except in that one matter, *did that which was right*. But for Ahab, there was *none like him*; so ingenious and industrious in sin, and that made a trade of it. He *sold himself to work wickedness*, that is, he made himself a perfect slave to his lusts, and was as much at their beck and command, as ever any servant was at his master's. He was wholly given up to sin, and, upon condition he might have the pleasures of it, he would take the wages of it, which is death, *Rom. 6. 23*. Blessed Paul complains that he was *sold under sin*, *Rom. 7. 14*. as a poor captive against his will; but Ahab was voluntary, he *sold himself to sin*; of choice, and as his own act and deed, he submitted to the dominion of sin. This did not excuse him, that *Jezebel*

his wife stirred him up to do wickedly, and made him, in many respects, worse than otherwise he would have been. To what a pitch of impiety did he arrive, who had such tinder of corruption in his heart, and such a temper in his bosom to strike fire into it. In many things, he did ill, but he did *most abominably in following idols*, like the Canaanites; his immoralities were very provoking to God, but his idolatries were especially so. Israel's case was sad, when a prince of such a character as this reigned over them.

II. The message which Elijah was sent with to him, when he went to take possession of Naboth's vineyard, *v. 17. 19*. Hitherto, God kept silence, did not intercept Jezebel's letters, nor stay the process of the elders of Jezreel; but now Ahab is reproved, and his *sin set in order before his eyes*. 1. The person sent is Elijah. A prophet of lower rank was sent with messages of kindness to him, *ch. 20. 13*. But the father of the prophets is sent to try him, and condemn him, for his murder. 2. The place is Naboth's vineyard; the time just when he was taking possession of it; then, and there, must his doom be read him. By taking possession, he avowed all that was done, and made himself guilty, *ex post facto—as an accessory after the fact*. There he was taken in the commission of the errors, and therefore the conviction would come upon him with so much the more force. "What hast thou to do in this vineyard? What good canst thou expect from it, when it is *purchased with blood*, *Hab. 2. 12*. and thou hast *caused the owner thereof to lose his life*?" *Job, 31. 39*. Now that he was pleasing himself with his ill-gotten wealth, and giving direction for the turning of this vineyard into a flower-garden, *his meat in his bowels is turned. He shall not feel quietness. When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him*, *Job, 20. 14, 20, 23*. Let us see what passed between them.

(1.) Ahab vents his wrath against Elijah, falls into a passion at the sight of him, and, instead of humbling himself before the prophet, as he ought to have done, *2 Chron. 36. 12*. is ready to fly in his face, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? v. 20*. This shews, [1.] That he hated him; the last time we found them together, they parted very good friends, *ch. 18. 46*. then Ahab had countenanced the reformation, and therefore then all was well between him and the prophet; but now he was relapsed, and worse than ever; his conscience told him he had made God his enemy, and therefore he could not expect Elijah should be his friend. Note, That man's condition is very miserable, that has made the word of God his enemy, and very desperate, that reckons the ministers of that word his enemies, because they *tell him the truth*, *Gal. 4. 16*. Ahab, having sold himself to sin, was resolved to stand to his bargain, and could not endure him that would have helped to recover himself. [2.] That he feared him. *Hast thou found me?* intimating that he shunned him all he could, and it was now a terror to him to see him. The sight of him was like that of the hand-writing upon the wall, to Belshazzar, it made his *countenance change, the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another*. Never was poor debtor or criminal so confounded at the sight of the officer that came to arrest him. Men may thank themselves, if they make God and his word a terror to them.

(2.) Elijah denounces God's wrath against Ahab; *I have found thee*: (says he, *v. 20*.) *because thou hast sold thyself to work evil*. Note, Those that give up themselves to sin, will certainly be found out, sooner or later, to their unspeakable horror and amazement. Ahab is now set to the bar, as Naboth was, and trembles more than he did.

[1.] Elijah finds the indictment against him, and convicts him, upon the notorious evidence of the fact, *v. 19*. *Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?* He is here charged with the murder of Naboth; and it would not serve him to say the law killed him; (perverted justice is the highest injustice;) or, that if he were unjustly prosecuted, it was not his doing, he knew nothing of it: for it was to please him that it was done, and he had shewed himself pleased with it, and so had made himself guilty of all that was done in the unjust prosecution of Naboth. He killed, for he took possession.

If he takes the garden, he takes the guilt with it. *Terra transit cum onere*—The land with the incumbrance.

[2.] He passes judgment upon him, That his family should be *ruined and rooted out*, v. 21. and all his posterity cut off. That his house should be made like the houses of his wicked predecessors, Jeroboam and Baasha, v. 22. particularly, that they who died in the city, should be meat for dogs, and they who died in the field, meat for birds, v. 24. which had been foretold of Jeroboam's house, *ch.* 14. 11. and of Baasha's, *ch.* 16. 4. That Jezebel, particularly, should be devoured by dogs, v. 23. which was fulfilled, 2 Kings, 9. 36. and as for Ahab himself, that the dogs should *lick his blood* in the very same place where they licked Naboth's, v. 19. "*Thy blood, even thine*, though it be royal blood, though it swell thy veins with pride, and boil in thy heart with anger, ere long it shall be an entertainment for the dogs;" which was fulfilled, *ch.* 22. 38. This intimates that he should die a violent death, should come to his grave with blood, and that disgrace should attend him, the foresight of which must needs be a great mortification to a proud man. Punishments after death are here most insisted on, which, though such as affected the body only, perhaps were designed as figures of the soul's misery after death.

III. Ahab's humiliation under the sentence passed upon him, and the favourable message sent him thereupon.

1. Ahab was a kind of penitent. The message Elijah delivered him, in God's name, put him into a fright for the present, so that he *rent his clothes*, and *put on sackcloth*, v. 27. He was still a proud hardened sinner, and yet thus reduced. Note, God can make the stoutest heart to tremble, and the proudest to humble itself. His word is quick and powerful, and is, when he pleases to make it so, like a *fire*, and a *hammer*, Jer. 23. 29. It made Felix tremble. Ahab put on the garb and guise of a penitent, and yet his heart was *unhumbled* and unchanged. After this, we find, he hated a faithful prophet, *ch.* 22. 8. Note, it is no new thing to find the shew and profession of repentance, where yet there the truth and substance of it are wanting. Ahab's repentance was only what might be seen of men: *Seest thou* (says God to Elijah) *how Ahab humbles himself?* it was external only; the garments rent, but not the heart. An hypocrite may go very far in the outward performances of holy duties, and yet come short.

2. He obtained, hereby, a reprieve, which I may call a kind of pardon. Though it was but an outside repentance, (lamenting the judgment only, and not the sin,) though he did not leave his idols, nor restore the vineyard to Naboth's heirs, yet, because he did hereby give some glory to God, God took notice of it, and bade Elijah take notice of it; *Seest thou how Ahab humbles himself?* v. 29. In consideration of this, the threatened ruin of his house, which had not been fixed to any time, should be *adjourned to his son's days*. The sentence should not be revoked, but the execution suspended. Now, (1.) This discovers the great goodness of God, and his readiness to shew mercy, which here *rejoices against judgment*. Favour is shewed to this wicked man, that God might magnify his goodness, (says Bishop Sanderson,) even to the hazard of his other divine perfections; as if (says he) God would be thought unholy, or untrue, or unjust, (though he be none of these,) or any thing, rather than unmerciful. (2.) This teaches us to take notice of that which is good, even in those who are not so good as they should be: let it be commended as far as it goes. (3.) This gives a reason why wicked people sometimes prosper long: God is rewarding their external services with external mercies. (4.) This encourages all those that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe the holy gospel. If a pretending partial penitent shall go to his house reprieved, doubtless, a sincere penitent shall *go to his house justified*.

CHAP. XXII.

This chapter finishes the history of Ahab's reign. It was promised, in the close of the foregoing chapter, that the ruin of his house should not come in his days, but his days were soon at an end. His war with the Syrians, at Ramoth-gilead, is that which we have an account of in this chapter. 1. His preparations for that war. He consulted, 1. His privy-council, v. 1. 3. 2. Jehoshaphat, v. 4.

3. His prophets. (1.) His own, who encouraged him to go on this expedition, v. 5, 6. Zedekiah particularly, v. 11, 12. (2.) A prophet of the Lord, Micaiah, who was desired to come by Jehoshaphat, v. 7, 8. sent for, v. 9, 10, 13, 11. upbraided Ahab with his confidence in the false prophets, v. 15. but foretold his fall in this expedition, v. 16. 18. and gave him an account how he came to be thus imposed upon by his prophets, v. 19. 23. He is abused by Zedekiah, v. 21, 25. and imprisoned by Ahab, v. 26. 28. 11. The battle itself: in which, 1. Jehoshaphat is exposed. But, 2. Ahab is slain, v. 29. 40. In the close of the chapter, we have a short account (1.) Of the good reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, v. 41. 50. (2.) Of the wicked reign of Ahaziah king of Israel, v. 51. 53.

1. **A**ND they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel. 2. And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. 3. And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is our's, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? 4. And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. 5. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day. 6. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. 7. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him? 8. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. 9. Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah. 10. And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. 11. And Zedekiah the son of Cheneanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. 12. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand. 13. And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. 14. And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.

Though Ahab continued under guilt and wrath, and the dominion of the lusts to which he had sold himself, yet, as a reward

or his professions of repentance and humiliation, though the time drew near when he should descend into battle and perish, yet we have him blessed with a three years' peace, v. 1. and an honourable visit made him by Jehoshaphat king of Judah, v. 2. The Jews have a fabulous conceit, that, when Ahab humbled himself for his sin, and lay in sackcloth, he sent for Jehoshaphat to come to him, to chastise him; and that he staid with him for some time, and gave him so many stripes every day. That is a groundless tradition. He came now, it is probable, to consult with him about the affairs of their kingdoms. It is strange that so great a man as Jehoshaphat would pay so much respect to a kingdom revolted from the house of David; and that so good a man would shew so much kindness to a king revolted from the worship of God. But, though he was a godly man, his temper was too easy, which betrayed him into snares and inconveniences.

The Syrians durst not give Ahab any disturbance. But,

I. Ahab here meditates a war against the Syrians, and advises concerning it with those about him, v. 3. The king of Syria gave him the provocation; when he lay at his mercy, he promised to restore him his cities, *ch. 20. 34.* and Ahab foolishly took his word, when he ought not to have dismissed him, till the cities had been put into his possession. But now, he knows by experience, what he ought to have considered, that as the kisses, so the promises, *of an enemy are deceitful*; and there is no confidence to be put in leagues extorted by distress. Ben-hadad is one of those princes that think themselves bound by their word no further and no longer than it is for their interest. Whether any other cities were restored, we do not find, but Ramoth-gilead was not; a considerable city in the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan, a Levites' city, and one of the cities of refuge. Ahab blames himself, and his people, that they did not bestir themselves to recover it out of the hands of the Syrians, and to chastise Ben-hadad's violation of his league; and resolves to let that ungrateful perfidious prince know, that, as he had given him peace, he could give him trouble. Ahab has a good cause, yet succeeds not. Equity is not to be judged of by prosperity.

II. He engages Jehoshaphat, and draws him in, to join with him in this expedition, for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead, v. 4. And here, I do not wonder that Ahab should desire the assistance of so pious and prosperous a neighbour. Even bad men have often coveted the friendship of the good. It is desirable to have an interest in those that have an interest in heaven; and to have those with us that have God with them. But it is strange that Jehoshaphat will go so entirely into Ahab's interests, as to say, *I am as thou art, and my people as thy people.* I hope not; Jehoshaphat, and his people, are not so wicked and corrupt as Ahab and his people. Too great a complaisance to evil-doers, has brought many good people, through unweariness, into a dangerous fellowship with the *unfruitful works of darkness.* Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dear for his compliment, when, in the battle, he was taken for Ahab. Yet some observe, that, in joining with Israel against Syria, he atoned for his father's fault, in joining with Syria against Israel, *ch. 15. 19, 20.*

III. At the special instance and request of Jehoshaphat, he asks counsel of the prophets concerning this expedition. Ahab thought it enough to consult with his statesmen, but Jehoshaphat moves that they should *inquire of the word of the Lord*, v. 5. Note, 1. Whithersoever a good man goes, he desires to take God along with him, and will acknowledge him in all his ways, ask leave of him, and look up to him for success. 2. Whithersoever a good man goes, he ought to take his religion along with him, and not be ashamed to own it, no not when he is with those who have no kindness for it. Jehoshaphat has not left behind him, at Jerusalem, his affection and veneration for the *word of the Lord*, but both avows it, and endeavours to introduce it into Ahab's court. If Ahab drew him into his wars, he will draw Ahab into his devotions.

IV. Ahab's four hundred prophets, the standing regiment he had of them, (*prophets of the groves* they called them,) agreed to encourage him in this expedition, and to assure him of success, v. 6. He put the question to them with a seeming fairness, *Shall I go, or shall I forbear?* But they knew which way his inclination was, and designed only to humour the two kings. To please

Jehoshaphat, they made use of the name *Jehovah*, He shall deliver it into the hand of the king; they stole the word from the true prophets, Jer. 23. 30. and spake their language. To please Ahab, they said, *Go up.* They had, indeed, probabilities on their side; Ahab had, not long since, beaten the Syrians twice; he had now a good cause, and was much strengthened by his alliance with Jehoshaphat; but they pretended to speak by prophecy, not by rational conjecture; by divine, not human, foresight: "Thou shalt certainly recover Ramoth-gilead." Zedekiah, a leading man among these prophets, in imitation of the true prophets, illustrated his false prophecy with a sign, v. 11. He made him a pair of iron horns, representing the two kings, and their honour and power, (both which were signified by horns, exaltation, and force,) and with these the Syrians must be pushed. All the prophets agreed, as one man, that Ahab should return from this expedition a conqueror, v. 12. Unity is not always the mark of a true church, and true ministry. Here were four hundred men that prophesied with one mind and one mouth, and yet all in an error.

V. Jehoshaphat cannot relish this sort of preaching; it is not like what he was used to; the false prophets cannot so mimic the true, but that he who had spiritual senses exercised could discern the fallacy, and therefore he inquires for a *prophet of the Lord besides*, v. 7. He is too much a courtier to say any thing by way of reflection on the king's chaplains, but he waits to see a *prophet of the Lord*; intimating that he could not look upon these to be so. They seemed to be somewhat, (whatever they were it made no matter to him,) but, in conference, they added nothing to him, they gave him no satisfaction, Gal. 2. 6. One faithful prophet of the Lord was worth them all.

VI. Ahab has another, but one he hates, Micaiah by name, and, to please Jehoshaphat, he is willing to have him sent for, v. 8. 10. Ahab owned they might *inquire of the Lord by him*, that he was a true prophet, and one that knew God's mind. And yet, 1. He hated him, and was not ashamed to own to the king of Judah that he did so, and to give this for his reason, *He doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.* And whose fault was that? If Ahab had done well, he had heard accordingly from heaven; if he do ill, he may thank himself for all the uneasiness which the reproofs and threats of God's word gave him. Note, Those are wretchedly hardened in sin, and are ripening apace for ruin, who hate God's ministers, because they deal plainly with them, and faithfully warn them of their misery and danger by reason of sin, and reckon those their enemies that *tell them the truth.* 2. He had (it should seem) imprisoned him; for, when he committed him, v. 26. he bade the officer carry him back; namely, to the place whence he came. We may suppose that this was he that reproved him for his clemency to Ben-hadad, *ch. 20. 38, &c.* and for that was cast into prison, where he had lain these three years. And hence Ahab knew where to find him so readily, v. 9. But his imprisonment had not excluded him from divine visits, the spirit of prophecy continued with him there; he was bound, but the *word of the Lord was not.* Nor did it in the least abate his courage, or make him less confident or faithful in delivering his message. Jehoshaphat gave too gentle a reproof to Ahab, for expressing his indignation against a faithful prophet, *Let not the king say so*, v. 8. He should have said, "Thou art unjust to the prophet, unkind to thyself, and puttest an affront upon his Lord and thine, in saying so." Such sinners as Ahab must be rebuked sharply. However, he so far yielded to the reproof, that, for fear of provoking Jehoshaphat to break off from his alliance with him, he orders Micaiah to be sent for with all speed, v. 9. The two kings sat each in their robes and chairs of state, in the gate of Samaria, ready to receive this poor prophet, and to hear what he has to say; for many will give God's word the hearing, that will not lend it an obedient ear. They were attended with a crowd of flattering prophets, that could not think of prophesying any thing but what was very sweet, and very smooth, to two such glorious princes now in confederacy. They that love to be flattered shall not want flatterers.

Lastly, Micaiah is pressed by the officer that fetched him to follow the cry, v. 13. That officer was unworthy the name of an Israelite, who pretended to prescribe to a prophet, but he thought:

him altogether such a one as the rest, who studied to please men, and not God. He tells him how unanimous the other prophets were in foretelling the king's good success; how agreeable it was to the king; that it was his interest to say as they said, he might gain not only enlargement, but preferment, by it. They that dote upon worldly things themselves, think every body else should do so too, and, true or false, right or wrong, speak and act for their secular interest only. He intimates likewise, that it would be to no purpose to contradict such a numerous and unanimous vote; he would be ridiculed, as affecting a foolish singularity, if he should. But Micaiah knows better things, protests it, and backs his protestation with an oath, that he will deliver his message from God with all faithfulness, whether it be pleasing or displeasing to his prince, v. 14. *What the Lord saith to me, that will I speak*, without addition, diminution, or alteration. Bravely resolved! and as became one who had his eye to a greater King than either of these, arrayed with brighter robes, and sitting on a higher throne.

15. So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver *it* into the hand of the king. 16. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but *that which is true* in the name of the LORD? 17. And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace. 18. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I did not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? 19. And he said, Here thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. 20. And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. 21. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. 22. And the LORD said unto him, Where-with? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade *him*, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. 23. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee. 24. But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee? 25. And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. 26. And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; 27. And say, Thus saith the king, Put this *fellow* in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.

28. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

Here Micaiah does well, but, as is common, suffers ill for so doing.

1. We are here told how faithfully he delivered his message, as one that was more solicitous to please God than to humour either the great or the many. Three ways he delivers the message, and all displeasing to Ahab.

1. He speaks as the rest of the prophets did, but ironically, *Go, and prosper*, v. 15. Ahab put the same question to him, that he had put to his own prophets, *Shall we go, or shall we forbear?* Seeming desirous to know God's mind, when, like Balaam, he was strongly bent to do his own; which Micaiah plainly took notice of, when he bade him go, but with such an air of pronunciation, as plainly shewed he spake it by way of derision; as if he had said, "I know you are determined to go, and I hear your own prophets are unanimous in assuring you of success; go then, and take what follows. They say, *The Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king*; but I do not tell thee that *thus saith the Lord*; no, he saith otherwise." Note, Those deserve to be bantered that love to be flattered; and it is just with God to give up those to their own counsels that give up themselves to their own lusts, Eccl. 11. 9. In answer to this, Ahab adjures him to tell him the truth, and not to jest with him, v. 16. as if he sincerely desired to know both what God would have him do, and what he would do with him; yet intending to represent the prophet as a perverse ill-humoured man, that would not tell him the truth, till he was thus put to his oath, or adjured to do it.

2. Being thus pressed, he plainly foretold that the king would be cut off in this expedition, and his army scattered, v. 17. He saw them in a vision, or dream, dispersed upon the mountains, as sheep that have no one to guide them: *Smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*, Zech. 13. 7. This intimates, (1.) That Israel should be deprived of their king, who was their shepherd; God took notice of it, *These have no master*. (2.) That they would be obliged to retire *re infecta*—without accomplishing what they went for. He does not foresee any great slaughter in the army, but that they should make a dishonourable retreat; *Let them return every man to his house in peace*: put into disorder indeed for the present, but no great losers, by the death of their king: he shall fall in war, but they shall go home in peace. Thus Micaiah, in his prophecy, testified what he had seen and heard, (let them take it how they pleased,) while the others prophesied merely *out of their own hearts*; see Jer. 23. 28. The prophet that has a dream, let him tell that, and so quote his authority; *and he that has my word, let him speak my word faithfully*, and not his own; for *what is the chaff to the wheat?* Now Ahab finds himself aggrieved, turns to Jehoshaphat, and appeals to him, whether Micaiah had not manifestly a spite against him, v. 18. They that bear malice to others are generally willing to believe that they bear malice to them, though they have no cause for it, and therefore to put the worst constructions upon all they say. What evil did Micaiah prophesy to Ahab, in telling him, if he proceeded in this expedition, it would be fatal to him, while he might choose whether he would proceed in it or no? The greatest kindness we can do to one that is going in a dangerous way, is, to tell him of his danger.

3. He informed the king how it was, that all his prophets encouraged him to proceed; God permitted Satan, by them, to deceive him into his ruin, and he, by vision, knew of it; it was represented to him, and he represented it to Ahab, that the God of heaven had determined he should fall at Ramoth-gilead, v. 19, 20. that the favour he had wickedly shewn to Ben-hadad might be punished by him and his Syrians, and that he being in some doubt whether he should go to Ramoth-gilead or no, and resolving to be advised by his prophets, they should persuade him to it, and prevail, v. 21, 22. and hence it was, that they encouraged him with so much assurance, v. 23. it was a lie from the father of lies, but by the divine permission. The matter is here

represented after the manner of men; we are not to imagine that God is ever put upon new counsels, or is ever at a loss for means whereby to effect his purposes, or that he needs to consult with angels, or any creature, about the methods he should take, or that he is the Author of sin, or the cause of any man's either telling or believing a lie; but, beside what was intended by this, with reference to Ahab himself, it is to teach us, (1.) That God is a great King above all kings, and has a throne above all the thrones of earthly princes; "You have your thrones," (said Micaiah to these two kings,) "and you think you may do what you will, and we must all say as you would have us; but *I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne*, and every man's judgment proceeding from him, and therefore I must say as he says; he is not a man, as you are." (2.) That he is continually attended and served by an innumerable company of angels, those heavenly hosts, who stand by him, ready to go where he sends them, and to do what he bids them, messengers of mercy *on his right hand*, of wrath *on his left hand*. (3.) That he not only takes cognizance of, but presides over, all the affairs of this lower world, and overrules them *according to the counsel of his own will*; the rise and fall of princes, the issues of war, and all the great affairs of state, which are the subject of the consultations of wise and great men, are no more above God's direction, than the meanest concerns of the poorest cottages are below his notice. (4.) God has many ways of bringing about his own counsels, particularly concerning the fall of sinners when they are ripe for ruin; he can do it either in this manner or in that manner. (5.) That there are malicious and lying spirits, which go about continually seeking to devour, and, in order to that, seeking to deceive, and especially to put lies into the mouths of prophets, by them to entice many to their destruction. (6.) It is not without the divine permission that the Devil deceives men. Thereby God serves his own purposes. *With him is strength and wisdom, the deceived and the deceiver are his*, Job, 12. 16. When he pleases, for the punishment of those who receive not the truth in the love of it, he not only lets *Satan loose to deceive them*, Rev. 20. 7, 8. but *gives up men to strong delusions to believe him*, 2 Thess. 2. 11, 12. (7.) Those are manifestly marked for ruin that are thus given up; God has certainly *spoken evil concerning those whom he has given up* to be imposed upon by lying prophets; thus Micaiah gave Ahab fair warning, not only of the danger of proceeding in this war, but of the danger of believing those that encouraged him to proceed; thus we are warned to *beware of false prophets*, and to try the spirits; the lying spirit never deceives so fatally, as *in the mouth of prophets*.

II. We are here told how he was abused for delivering his message thus faithfully, thus plainly, in a way so very proper both to convince and to affect.

1. Zedekiah, a wicked prophet, impudently insulted him in the face of the court, *smote him on the cheek*, to reproach him, to silence him and stop his mouth, and to express his indignation at him; (thus was our blessed Saviour abused, Matt. 26. 67. that Judge of Israel, Mic. 5. 1.) and, as if he not only had the Spirit of the Lord, but the monopoly of this Spirit, that he might not go without his leave, he asks, *Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak to thee?* v. 24. The false prophets were always the worst enemies the true prophets had, and not only stirred up the government against them, but were themselves abusive to them, as Zedekiah here. To strike within the verge of the court, especially in the king's presence, is looked upon by our law as a high misdemeanor, yet this wicked prophet gives this abuse to a prophet of the Lord, and is not reprimanded or bound to his good behaviour for it; Ahab was pleased with it, and Jehoshaphat had not courage to appear for the injured prophet, pretending it was out of his jurisdiction; but Micaiah, though he returns not his blow, (God's prophets are no strikers nor persecutors, dare not avenge themselves, render blow for blow, or be, any way, accessory to the breach of the peace,) yet, since he boasted so much of the Spirit, as those commonly do, that know least of his operations, he leaves him to be convinced of his error by the event, *Thou shalt*

know when thou hidest thyself in an inner chamber, v. 25. It is likely, Zedekiah went with Ahab to the battle, and took his horns of iron with him, to encourage the soldiers, to see with pleasure the accomplishment of his prophecy, and return in triumph with the king; but, the army being routed, he fled among the rest from the sword of the enemy, sheltered himself, as Ben-hadad had done, *in a chamber within a chamber*, ch. 20. 30. lest he should perish, as he knew he deserved to do, with those whom he had deluded, as Balaam did, Numb. 31. 8. and lest the blind prophet should *fall into the ditch*, with the blinded prince whom he had misled. Note, Those that will not have their mistakes rectified in time by the word of God, will be undeceived, when it is too late, by the judgments of God.

2. Ahab, that wicked king, committed him to prison, v. 27. not only ordered him to be taken into custody, or remitted to the prison whence he came, but to be fed with bread and water, coarse bread and puddle-water, till he should return; not doubting but he should return a conqueror, and then he would put him to death for a false prophet, v. 27. Hard usage for one that would have prevented his ruin! But by this it appeared that God had *determined to destroy him*, as 2 Chron. 25. 16. How confident is Ahab of success! He doubts not but he shall return in peace, forgetting what he himself had reminded Ben-hadad of, *Let not him that girdeth on the harness, boast*; but there was little likelihood of his coming home in peace, when he left one of God's prophets behind him in prison. Micaiah puts it upon the issue, and calls all the people to be witnesses that he did so, *"If thou return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me"*, v. 28. Let me incur the reproach and punishment of a false prophet, if the king come home alive." He ran no hazard by this appeal, for he knew whom he had believed; he that is terrible to the kings of the earth, and treads upon princes as mortar, will rather let thousands of them fall to the ground, than one jot or tittle of his own word; he will not fail to *confirm the word of his servants*, Isa. 44. 26.

29. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. 30. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle. 31. But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel. 32. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out. 33. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. 34. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. 35. And the battle increased that day; and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. 36. And there went a proclamation throughout the host, about the going down of the sun, saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his own country

37. So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria. 38. And *one* washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake. 39. Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 40. So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.

The matter in contest between God's prophet and Ahab's prophets is here soon determined, and it is made to appear which was in the right. Here,

I. The two kings march, with their forces, to Ramoth-gilead, v. 29. That the king of Israel, who hated God's prophets, should so far disbelieve his admonition, as to persist in his resolution, notwithstanding, is not strange; but, that Jehoshaphat, that pious prince, who had desired to inquire by a *prophet of the Lord*, as disrelishing and discrediting Ahab's prophets, should yet proceed, after so fair a warning, is matter of astonishment; but, by the easiness of his temper, he was carried away with the delusion (as Barnabas was with the dissimulation, Gal. 2. 13.) of his friends; he gave too much heed to Ahab's prophets, because they pretended to speak from God too, and in his country he had never been imposed upon by such cheats; he was ready to give his opinion with the majority, and to conclude that it was four hundred to one but they should succeed; Micaiah, and not forbidden them to go; nay, at first, he said, *Go, and prosper*; if it came to the worst, it was only Ahab's fall that was foretold, and therefore he hoped he might venture.

II. Ahab contrives to secure himself, and expose his friend, v. 30. "*I will disguise myself, and go in the habit of a common soldier, but let Jehoshaphat put on his robes, to appear in the dress of a general.*" He pretended hereby to do honour to Jehoshaphat, and to compliment him with the sole command of the army in this action; he shall direct, and give orders, and Ahab will serve as a soldier under him; but he intended, 1. To make a liar of a good prophet; thus he hoped to elude the danger, and so to defeat the threatening, as if, by disguising himself, he could escape the divine cognizance, and the judgments that pursued him. 2. To make a fool of a good king, whom he did not cordially love, because he was one that adhered to God, and so condemned his apostacy; he knew, that, if any perished, it must be the shepherd, so Micaiah had foretold; and perhaps he had intimation of the charge the enemy had, to fight chiefly *against the king of Israel*, and therefore basely intended to betray Jehoshaphat to the danger, that he might secure himself; Ahab was marked for ruin, one would not have been in his attire for a great sum, yet he will over-persuade this godly king to muster for him. See what they get that join in affinity with vicious men, whose consciences are debauched, and who are lost to every thing that is honourable. How can it be expected that he should be true to his friend that has been false to his God?

III. Jehoshaphat, having more piety than policy, put himself into the post of honour, though it was the post of danger, and was thereby brought into peril of his life, but God graciously delivered him; the king of Syria charged his captains to level their force, not against the king of Judah, for with him he had no quarrel, but with the king of Israel only, v. 31. to aim at his person, as if against him he had a particular enmity; now Ahab was justly repaid for sparing Ben-hadad, who, as the seed of the serpent commonly do, stung the bosom in which he was fostered, and saved from perishing. Some think that he designed only to have him taken prisoner, that he might now give him as honourable a

treatment as he had formerly received from him. Whatever was the reason, this charge the officers received, and endeavoured to oblige their prince in this matter; for, seeing Jehoshaphat in his royal habit, they took him for the king of Israel, and surrounded him. Now, 1. By his danger, God let him know that he was displeased with him, for joining in confederacy with Ahab; he had said, in compliment to Ahab, v. 4. *I am as thou art*, and now he was indeed taken for him: they that associate with evil doers are in danger of sharing in their plagues. 2. By his deliverance, God let him know, that, though he was displeased with him, yet he had not deserted him; some of the captains that knew him perceived their mistake, and so retired from the pursuit of him; but it is said, 2 Chron. 18. 31. *God moved them* (for he has all hearts in his hand) *to depart from him*; to him he cried out, not in cowardice, but devotion, and from him his relief came; Ahab was in no care to succour him; God is a Friend that will not fail us, when other friends do.

IV. Ahab received his mortal wound in the battle, notwithstanding his endeavours to secure himself in the habit of a private sentinel. Let no man think to hide himself from God's judgment, no not in masquerade; *Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies*, whatever disguise they are in, v. 34. The Syrian that shot him little thought of doing such a piece of service to God and his king, for he drew a bow at a venture, not aiming particularly at any man, yet God so directed the arrow, that, 1. He hit the right person, the man that was marked for destruction, whom, if they had taken alive, as was designed, perhaps Ben-hadad would have spared: those cannot escape with life whom God hath doomed to death. 2. He hit him in the right place, *between the joints of the harness*, the only place about him where this arrow of death could find entrance. No armour is of proof against the darts of divine vengeance; ease the criminal in steel, and it is all one, *he that made him can make his sword to approach to him*. That which to us seems altogether casual, is done by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God.

V. The army was dispersed by the enemy, and sent home by the king; either Jehoshaphat or Ahab ordered the retreat of the sheep, when the shepherd was smitten. *Every man to his city*, for it is to no purpose to attempt any thing more, v. 36. Ahab himself lived long enough to see that part of Micaiah's prophecy accomplished, that all Israel should be scattered upon the *mountains of Gilead*, v. 17. and perhaps with his dying lips did himself give orders for it; for, though he would be carried out of the army, to have his wounds dressed, v. 34. yet he would be *stayed up in his chariot*, to see if his army were victorious; but, when he saw the battle increase against them, his spirits sunk, and he died, but his death was so lingering, that he had time to feel himself die; and we may well imagine with what horror he now reflected upon the wickedness he had committed, the warnings he had slighted, Baal's altars, Naboth's vineyard, Micaiah's imprisonment; now he sees himself flattered into his own ruin, and Zedekiah's horns of iron pushing, not the Syrians, but himself, into destruction; thus is he brought to the king of terrors, without hope in his death.

VI. The royal corpse was brought to Samaria, and buried there, v. 37. and thither were brought the bloody chariot and bloody armour in which he died, v. 38. One particular circumstance is taken notice of, because there was in it the accomplishment of a prophecy, That, when they brought the chariot to the pool of Samaria, to be washed, the dogs (and swine, says the Septuagint) gathered about it, and, as is usual, *licked the blood*, or, as some think, the water in which it was washed, with which the blood was mingled; the dogs made no difference between royal blood and other blood. Now Naboth's blood was avenged, ch. 21. 19. and that word of David, as well as Elijah's word, was fulfilled, Ps. 68. 23. *That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same*; the dogs licking the guilty blood, was perhaps designed to represent the terrors that prey upon the guilty soul after death.

Lastly, The story of Ahab is here concluded, in the usual form, v. 39, 40. Among his works, mention is made of an ivory house

which he built, so called, because many parts of it were inlaid with ivory; perhaps it was intended to vie with the stately palace of the kings of Judah, which Solomon built.

41. And Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. 42. Jehoshaphat *was* thirty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 43. And he walked in all the way of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; *for* the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places. 44. And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. 45. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he shewed, and how he warred, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 46. And the remnant of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he took out of the land. 47. *There was* then no king in Edom: a deputy *was* king. 48. Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish, to go to Ophir for gold; but they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber. 49. Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not. 50. And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. 51. Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. 52. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin: 53. For he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the LORD God of Israel, according to all that his father had done.

Here is,

I. A short account of the reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, which we shall have a much fuller narrative of in the book of Chronicles, and of the greatness and goodness of that prince, neither of which was lessened or sullied by any thing but his intimacy with the house of Ahab, which, upon several accounts, was a diminution to him; his confederacy with Ahab, in war, we have already found dangerous to him, and his confederacy with Ahaziah his son, in trade, sped no better; he offered to go partner with him in a fleet of merchant-ships, that should fetch gold from Ophir, as Solomon's navy did, v. 48. See 2 Chron. 20. 35, 36.

But, while they were preparing to set sail, they were exceedingly damaged and disabled by a storm, *broken at Ezion-geber*, which a prophet gave Jehoshaphat to understand was a rebuke to him, for his league with wicked Ahaziah, 2 Chron. 20. 37. And therefore, as we are told here, v. 49. when Ahaziah desired, a second time, to be a partner with him, or, if that could not be obtained, that he might but send his servants, with some effects, on board Jehoshaphat's ships, he refused; *Jehoshaphat would not*; the rod of God, expounded by the word of God, had effectually broken him off from his confederacy with that ungodly unhappy prince. Better buy wisdom dear than be without it; but experience is therefore said to be the mistress of fools, because they are fools that will not learn till they are taught by experience, and particularly till they are taught the danger of associating with wicked people.

Now, Jehoshaphat's reign appears here to have been none of the longest, but one of the best. 1. It was none of the longest, for he reigned but 25 years, v. 42. but then it was in the prime of his time, between 35 and 60, and these 25, added to his father's happy 41, give us a grateful idea of the flourishing condition of the kingdom of Judah, and of religion in it, for a great while, even when things were very bad, upon all accounts, in the kingdom of Israel. If Jehoshaphat reigned not so long as his father, to balance that, he had not those blemishes on the latter end of his reign that his father had, 2 Chron. 16. 9, 10, 12. and it is better for a man, that has been in reputation for wisdom and honour, to die in the midst of it, than to outlive it. 2. Yet it was one of the best, both in respect of piety and prosperity. (1.) He did well, he *did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*, v. 43. observed the commands of his God, and trod in the steps of his good father, and persevered therein, he *turned not aside from it*; yet every man's character has some *but* or other, so had his; the *high places were not taken away*, no not out of Judah and Benjamin, though those tribes lay so near Jerusalem, that they might easily bring their offerings and incense to the altar there, and could not pretend, as some other of the tribes, the incon- veniency of lying remote; but old corruptions are with difficulty rooted out, especially when they have formerly had the patronage of those that were good, as the high places had of Samuel, Solomon, and some others. (2.) His affairs did well; he prevented the mischiefs which had attended their wars with the kingdom of Israel, establishing a lasting peace, v. 44. which had been a greater blessing, if he had contented himself with a peace, and not carried it on to an affinity with Israel; he put a deputy, or viceroy, in Edom, so that that kingdom was tributary to him, v. 47. and therein the prophecy concerning Esau and Jacob was fulfilled, that *the elder should serve the younger*; and, in general, mention is made of his might and his wars, v. 45. He pleased God, and God blessed him with strength and success; his death is spoken of, v. 50. to shut up his story, yet, in the history of the kings of Israel, we find mention of him afterward, 2 Kings, 3. 7.

II. The beginning of the story of Ahaziah the son of Ahab, v. 51. . . 53. his reign was *very short*, not two years; some sinners God makes quick work with; it is a very bad character that is here given him; he not only kept up Jeroboam's idolatry, but the worship of Baal likewise; though he had heard of the ruin of Jeroboam's family, and had seen his own father drawn into destruction by the prophets of Baal, who had often been proved false prophets, yet he received no instruction, took no warning, but followed the example of his wicked father, and the counsel of his more wicked mother Jezebel, who was still living. Miserable are the children that not only derive a stock of corruption from their parents, but are thus taught by them to trade with it; and unhappy, most unhappy, parents, they that help to damn their children's souls.

AN
E X P O S I T I O N,
WITH
Practical Observations,
OF THE SECOND BOOK OF
K I N G S.

This second book of the Kings (which the Septuagint, numbering from Samuel, calls the *fourth*,) is a continuation of the former book; and, some think, might better have been made to begin with the 51st *verse* of the foregoing chapter, where the reign of Ahaziah begins. The former book had an illustrious beginning, in the glories of the kingdom of Israel, when it was entire; this has a melancholy conclusion, in the desolations of the kingdoms of Israel first, and then of Judah, after they had been long broken into two; for a kingdom divided against itself cometh to destruction. But, as Elijah's mighty works were very much the glory of the former book, toward the latter end of it; so were Elisha's the glory of this, toward the beginning of it. These prophets out-shone their princes; and therefore, as far as they go, the history shall be accounted for in them. Here is,

- I. Elijah fetching fire from heaven, and ascending in fire to heaven, *ch. 1, and 2.*
- II. Elisha working many miracles, both for prince and people, Israelites and foreigners, *ch. 3..7.*
- III. Hazael and Jehu anointed, the former for the correction of Israel, the latter for the destruction of the house of Ahab, and the worship of Baal, *ch. 8..10.*
- IV. The reigns of several of the kings, both of Judah and Israel, *ch. 11..16.*
- V. The captivity of the ten tribes, *ch. 17.*
- VI. The good and glorious reign of Hezekiah, *ch. 18..20.*
- VII. Manasseh's wicked reign, and Josiah's good one, *ch. 21..23.*
- VIII. The destruction of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon, *ch. 24, 25.* This history, in the several passages of it, confirms that observation of Solomon, *That righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people.*

Before Christ 896.

II KINGS, I.

Ahaziah's Sickness.

CHAP. I.

We here find Ahaziah, the genuine son and successor of Ahab, on the throne of Israel. His reign continued not two years; he died by a fall in his own house; which, after the mention of the revolt of Moab, v. 1. we have here an account of. I. The message which, on that occasion, he sent to the god of Ekron, v. 2. II. The message he received from the God of Israel, v. 3..8. III. The destruction of the messengers he sent to seize the prophet, once and again, v. 9..12. IV. His compassion to, and compliance with, the third messenger, upon his submission, and the delivery of the message to the king himself, v. 13..16. V. The death of Ahaziah, v. 17, 18. In the story we may observe how great the prophet looks, and how little the prince.

1. **T**HEN Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab. 2. And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that *was* in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease. 3. But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and

say unto them, *Is it* not because *there is* not a God in Israel, *that* ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? 4. Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed. 5. And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back? 6. And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, *Is it* not because *there is* not a God in Israel, *that* thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. 7. And he said unto them, What manner of man *was he* which came up to meet you, and told you these words? 8. And they answered him, *He was* an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, *It is* Elijah the Tishbite.

We have here, Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel, under God's rebukes, both by his providence and by his prophet, by his rod and by his word.

I. He is crossed in his affairs. How can those expect to prosper, that *do evil in the sight of the Lord*, and *provoke him to anger*? When he rebelled against God, and revolted from his allegiance to him, Moab rebelled against Israel, and revolted from the subjection they had long paid to the kings of Israel, v. 1. The Edomites that bordered on Judah, and were tributaries to the kings of Judah, still continued so, as we find in the chapter before, v. 47. till, in the wicked reign of Joram, they broke that yoke, ch. 8. 22. as the Moabites did now. If men break their covenants with us, and withdraw their duty, we must reflect upon our breach of covenant with God, and the neglect of our duty to him. Sin weakens and impoverishes us. We shall hear of the Moabites, ch. 3. 5.

II. He is seized with sickness in body, not from any inward cause, but by a severe accident; *He fell down through a lattice*, and was much bruised with the fall: perhaps it threw him into a fever, v. 2. Wherever we go, there is but a step between us and death. A man's house is his castle, but not to secure him against the judgments of God. The cracked lattice is as fatal to the son, when God pleases to make it so, as the bow drawn at a venture was to the father. Ahaziah would not attempt to reduce the Moabites, lest he should perish in the field of battle; but he is not safe, though he tarry at home. Royal palaces do not always yield firm footing. The snare is laid for the sinner in the ground where he thinks least of it, Job, 18. 9, 10. The whole creation, which groans under the burthen of man's sin, will, at length, sink and break under the weight, like this lattice. He is never safe that has God for his enemy.

III. In his distress, he sends messengers to inquire of the god of Ekron, whether he should recover or no, v. 2. And here, 1. His inquiry was very foolish: *Shall I recover?* Even nature itself would rather have asked, "What means may I use, that I may recover?" But, as one solicitous only to know his fortune, not to know his duty, his question is only this, *Shall I recover?* which a little time would give answer to. We should be more thoughtful what will become of us after death, than how, or when, or where, we shall die; and more desirous to be told how we may conduct ourselves well in our sickness, and get good to our souls by it, than whether we shall recover from it. 2. His sending to Baal-zebub was very wicked; to make a dead and dumb idol, perhaps newly-erected, (for idolaters were fond of new gods,) his oracle, was no

less a reproach to his reason than to his religion. Baal-zebub signifies *the lord of a fly*; one of their Baals, that, perhaps, gave his answers either by the power of the dæmons, or the craft of the priests, with a humming noise, like that of a great fly; or that had (as they fancied) rid their country of the swarms of flies wherewith it was infested, or of some pestilential disease brought among them by flies. Perhaps this dunhill deity was as famous then, as the oracle of Delphos was, long after, in Greece. In the New Testament, *the prince of the devils* is called *Beel-zebub*, Matth. 12. 24. for the gods of the Gentiles were devils, and this, perhaps, grew to be one of the most famous.

IV. Elijah, by direction from God, meets the messengers, and turns them back with an answer that shall save them the labour of going to Ekron. Had Ahaziah sent for Elijah, humbled himself, and begged his prayers, he might have had an answer of peace; but if he send to the god of Ekron, instead of the God of Israel, that, like Saul's consulting the witch, shall fill the measure of his iniquity, and bring upon him a sentence of death. They that will not inquire of the word of God for their comfort, shall be made to hear it, whether they will or no, to their amazement.

1. He faithfully reproves his sin, v. 3. *Is it not because there is not* (that is, because you think there is not) a God in Israel, (*because there is no God, none in Israel*, so it may be read,) *that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron*, a despicable town of the Philistines, Zech. 9. 7. long since vanquished by Israel? Here, (1.) The sin was bad enough, giving that honour to the Devil which is due to God alone, which was done as much by their inquiries as by their sacrifices. Note, It is a very wicked thing, upon any occasion or pretence whatsoever, to consult with the Devil. This wickedness reigned in the heathen world, Isa. 47. 12, 13. and remains too much even in the Christian world, and the Devil's kingdom is supported by it. (2.) The construction which Elijah, in God's name, puts upon it, makes it much worse: "It is because you think not only that the God of Israel is not able to tell you, but that there is no God at all in Israel; else you would not send so far for a divine answer." Note, A practical and constructive atheism is the cause and malignity of our departures from God. Surely we think there is *no in God in Israel*, when we live at large, make flesh our arm, and seek a portion in the things of this world.

2. He plainly reads his doom: "Go, tell him, *he shall surely die*, v. 4. Since he is so anxious to know his fate, this is it; let him make the best of it." The certain fearful looking for of judgment and indignation, which this message must needs cause, cannot but cut him to the heart.

V. The message being delivered to him by his servants, he inquires of them by whom it was sent him, and concludes, by their description of him, that it must be Elijah, v. 7, 8. For, 1. His dress was the same that he had seen him in, in his father's court. He was clad in a hairy garment, and had a leathern girdle about him, plain, and homely in his garb. John Baptist, the Elias of the New Testament, herein resembled him, for his clothes were made of hair-cloth, and he was girt with a leathern girdle, Matth. 3. 4. He that was clothed with the Spirit, despised all rich and gay clothing. 2. His message was such as he used to deliver to his father, to whom he never prophesied good, but evil. Elijah is one of those witnesses that still torment the inhabitants of the earth, Rev. 11. 10. He that was a thorn in Ahab's eyes, will be so in the eyes of his son, while he treads in the steps of his wickedness; and he is ready to cry out, as his father did, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* Let sinners consider that the word which *took hold of their fathers* is still as quick and powerful as ever. See Zech. 1. 6. Heb. 4. 12.

9. Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said,

Come down. 10. And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I *be* a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. 11. Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. 12. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I *be* a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. 13. And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight. 14. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight. 15. And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king. 16. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to inquire of Baalzebub the god Ekron, *is it* not because *there is* no God in Israel to inquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. 17. So he died, according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead, in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son. 18. Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Here,

I. The king issues out a warrant for the apprehending of Elijah. If the God of Ekron had told him he should die, it is probable he would have taken it quietly; but now that a prophet of the Lord tells him so, reproving him for his sin, and reminding him of the God of Israel, he cannot bear it: so far is he from making any good improvement of the warning given him, that he is enraged against the prophet; neither his sickness, nor the thoughts of death, made any good impressions upon him, nor possessed him with any fear of God: no external alarms will startle and soften secure sinners, but rather exasperate them. Did the king think Elijah a prophet, a true prophet? Why then durst he persecute him? Did he think him a common person? What occasion was there to send such a force, in order to seize him? Thus a band of men must take our Lord Jesus.

II. The captain, that was sent with his fifty soldiers, found Elijah on the top of a hill, (some think Carmel,) and commanded him, in the king's name, to surrender himself, v. 9. Elijah was now so far from absconding, as formerly, in the close recesses of a cave, that he makes a bold appearance on the top of a hill; experience of God's protection makes him more bold. The captain calls him

a man of God, not that he believed him to be so, or revered him as such a one, but because he was commonly called so; had he really looked upon him as a prophet, he would not have attempted to make him his prisoner; and had he thought him intrusted with the word of God, he would not have pretended to command him with the word of a king.

III. Elijah calls for fire from heaven, to consume this haughty daring sinner; not to secure himself, he could have done that some other way, nor to avenge himself, for it was not his own cause that he appeared and acted in; but to prove his mission, and to reveal the wrath of God from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. This captain had, in scorn, called him *a man of God*: "If I *be* so," says Elijah, "thou shalt pay dear for making a jest of it." He valued himself upon his commission, (the king has said, *Come down*,) but Elijah will let him know that the God of Israel is superior to the king of Israel, and has a greater power to enforce his commands. It was not long since Elijah had fetched fire from heaven, to consume the sacrifice, 1 Kings, 18. 38. in token of God's acceptance of that sacrifice as an atonement for the sins of the people; but they having slighted that, now the fire falls, not on the sacrifice, but on the sinners themselves, v. 10. See here, 1. What an interest the prophets had in heaven; what the Spirit of God in them demanded, the power of God effected; Elijah did but speak, and it was done; he that formerly had fetched water from heaven, now fetches fire; Oh the power of prayer! *Concerning the work of my hands, command ye me*, Isa. 45. 11. 2. What an interest heaven had in the prophets! God was always ready to plead their cause, and avenge the injuries done to them; kings shall still be *rebuked for their sakes*, and charged to do *his prophets no harm*; one Elijah is more to God than 10,000 captains and their fifties; doubtless, Elijah did this by a divine impulse, and yet our Saviour would not allow the disciples to draw it into a precedent, Luke, 9. 54. They were now not far from the place where Elias did this act of justice upon provoking Israelites, and would needs, in like manner, call for fire upon those provoking Samaritans; "No," says Christ, "by no means, *you know not what manner of spirit you are of*," that is, (1.) "You do not consider *what manner of spirit*, as disciples, you are called to, and how different from that of the Old-Testament dispensation; it was agreeable enough to that dispensation of terror, and of the letter, for Elias to call for fire; but the dispensation of the Spirit and of grace will by no means allow of it." (2.) "You are not aware what manner of spirit you are, upon this occasion, acted by, and how different from that of Elias: he did it in holy zeal, you in passion; he was concerned for God's glory, you for your own reputation only. God judges men's practices by their principles, and his judgment is according to truth."

IV. This is repeated a second time; would one think it? 1. Ahaziah sends, a second time, to apprehend Elijah, v. 11. as if he were resolved not to be baffled by Omnipotence itself: obstinate sinners must be convinced and conquered, at last, by the fire of hell, for fire from heaven, it seems, will not do it. 2. Another captain is ready with his fifty, who, in his blind rage against the prophet, and his blind obedience to the king, dares engage in that service which had been fatal to the last undertakers; this is as impudent and imperious as the last, and more in haste; not only, "*Come down quietly*, and do not struggle," but, without taking any notice of what had been done, he says, "*Come down quickly*, and do not trifle, the king's business requires haste; come down, or I will fetch thee down." 3. Elijah relents not, but calls for another flash of lightning, which instantly lays this captain, and his fifty, dead upon the spot; they that will sin like others, must expect to suffer like them; God is inflexibly just.

V. The third captain humbled himself, and cast himself upon the mercy of God and Elijah. It does not appear that Ahaziah ordered him to do so, (his stubborn heart is as hard as ever; so regardless is he of the terrors of the Lord, so little affected with the manifestations of his wrath, and withal so prodigal of the lives of his subjects, that he sent a third with the same provoking message to Elijah,) but he took warning by the fate of his predecessors,

who, perhaps, lay dead before his eyes; and, instead of summoning the prophet down, fell down before him, and begged for his life and the lives of his soldiers, acknowledging their own evil deserts, and the prophet's power, v. 13, 14. *Let my life be precious in thy sight.* Note, There is nothing to be got by contending with God: if we would prevail with him, it must be by supplication; if we would not fall before God, we must bow before him; and those are wise for themselves who learn submission, from the fatal consequences which others entail by their obstinacy.

VI. Elijah does more than grant the request of this third captain. God is not severer with those that stand it out against him, than he is ready to shew mercy to those that repent, and submit to him; never any found it in vain to cast themselves upon the mercy of God. This captain not only has his life spared, but is permitted to carry his point; Elijah, being so commanded by the angel, *goes down with him to the king, v. 15.* Thus he shews that he, before, refused to come, not because he feared the king or court, but because he would not be imperiously summoned, and would not lessen the honour of his Master; he *magnifies his office.* He comes boldly to the king, and tells him to his face, (let him take it as he may,) what he had before sent to him, v. 16. that he should surely and shortly die; he mitigates not the sentence, either for fear of the king's displeasure, or in pity to his misery: the God of Israel has condemned him, let him send to see whether the god of Ekron can deliver him. So thunder-struck is Ahaziah with this message, when it comes from the prophet's own mouth, that neither he, nor any of those about him, durst offer him any violence, nor so much as give him an affront; but out of that den of lions he comes unhurt, like Daniel. Who can harm those whom God will shelter?

Lastly, The prediction is accomplished in a few days; Ahaziah died, v. 17. and, dying childless, left his kingdom to his brother Jehoram; his father reigned wickedly twenty-two years, he not two; sometimes the *wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power*; but they who therefore promise themselves prosperity in impiety, may, perhaps, find themselves deceived; for, (as Bishop Hall observes here,) "Some sinners live long, to aggravate their judgment, others die soon, to hasten it;" but it is certain that *evil pursues sinners*, and, sooner or later, it will overtake them; nor will any thing fill the measure sooner than that complicated iniquity of Ahaziah—honouring the Devil's oracles, and hating God's oracles.

CHAP. II.

In this chapter, we have, I. That extraordinary event, the translation of Elijah.

In the close of the foregoing chapter, we had a wicked king leaving the world in disgrace, here we have a holy prophet leaving it in honour; the departure of the former was his greatest misery, of the latter, his greatest bliss: men are as their end is. Here is, 1. Elijah's taking leave of his friends, the sons of the prophets, and especially Elisha, who kept close to him, and walked with him through Jordan, v. 1. .10. 2. His rapture into heaven by the ministry of angels, v. 11. and Elisha's lamentation of the loss this earth had of him, v. 12. II. The manifestation of Elisha, as a prophet in his room. 1. By the dividing of Jordan, v. 13, 14. 2. By the respect which the sons of the prophets paid him, v. 15. .18. 3. By the healing of the unwholesome waters of Jericho, v. 19. .22. 4. By the destruction of the children of Bethel that mocked him, v. 23. .25. This revolution in prophecy makes a greater figure than the revolution of a kingdom.

I. **AND** it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, *As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.* So they went down to Beth-el. 3. And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said unto

him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to-day? And he said, Yea, I know *it*; hold ye your peace. 4. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, *As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.* So they came to Jericho. 5. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to-day? And he answered, Yea, I know *it*; hold ye your peace. 6. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, *As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.* And they two went on. 7. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. 8. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped *it* together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

Elijah's times, and the events concerning him, are as little dated as those of any great man in scripture; we are not told of his age, nor in what year of Ahab's reign he first appeared, nor in what year of Joram's he disappeared, and therefore cannot conjecture how long he flourished; it is supposed about twenty years in all.

Here we are told,

I. That God had determined to take him up into heaven by a whirlwind, v. 1. He would do it, and, it is probable, let him know of his purpose, some time before, that he would shortly take him from the world, not by death, but translate him body and soul to heaven, as Enoch was, only causing him to undergo such a change as would be necessary to the qualifying of him to be an inhabitant in that world of spirits; and such as they shall undergo who will be found alive at Christ's coming. It is not for us to say why God would put such a peculiar honour upon Elijah above any other of the prophets; he was a man *subject to like passions as we are*, knew sin, and yet never tasted death. Wherefore is he thus dignified, thus distinguished, as a man whom the King of kings did delight to honour? We may suppose, that, herein, 1. God looked back upon his past services, which were eminent and extraordinary, and intended him a recompence for those, and an encouragement to the sons of the prophets to tread in the steps of his zeal and faithfulness, and, whatever it cost them, to witness against the corruptions of the age they lived in. 2. He looked down upon the present dark and degenerate state of the church, and would thus give a very sensible proof of another life after this, and draw the hearts of the faithful few upward toward himself, and that other life. 3. He looked forward to the evangelical dispensation, and, in the translation of Elijah, gave a type and figure of the ascension of Christ, and the *opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers.* Elijah had, by faith and prayer, conversed much with heaven, and now he is taken thither, to assure us, that, if we have our conversation in heaven while we are here on earth, we shall be there shortly, the soul shall, (and that is the man,) be happy there, there for ever.

II. That Elisha had determined, as long as he continued on earth, to cleave to him, and not to leave him: Elijah seemed desirous to shake him off, would have had him stay behind at Gilgal, at Bethel, at Jericho, v. 2, 4, 6. Some think out of humility; he knew what glory God designed for him, but would not seem to glory in it, nor desired it should be seen of men; (God's favourites covet

not to have it proclaimed before them, that they are so, as the favourites of earthly princes do;) or, rather, it was to try him, and make his constant adherence to him the more commendable, like Naomi's persuading Ruth to go back: in vain does Elijah intreat him to tarry here, and tarry there; he resolves to tarry no where behind his master, till he goes to heaven, and leaves him behind on this earth; whatever comes of it, *I will not leave thee*; and why so? Not only because he loved him, but, 1. Because he desired to be edified, by his holy heavenly converse, as long as he staid on earth; it had always been profitable, but, we may suppose, now more so than ever. We should therefore do all the spiritual good we can, one to another, and get all we can, one by another, while we are together, because we are to be *together but a while*. 2. Because he desired to be satisfied concerning his departure, and to see him when he was taken up, that his faith might be confirmed, and his acquaintance with the invisible world increased. He had long followed Elijah, and he would not leave him now, when he hoped for the parting blessing; let not those that follow Christ, come short by tiring at last.

III. That Elijah, before his departure, visited the schools of the prophets, and took leave of them; it seems that there were such schools in many of the cities of Israel, probably even in Samaria itself; here we find *sons of the prophets*, and considerable numbers of them, even at Bethel, where one of the calves was set up, and at Jericho, which was lately built in defiance of a divine curse. At Jerusalem, and in the kingdom of Judah, they had priests and Levites, and the temple service, the want of which, in the kingdom of Israel, God graciously made up by those colleges, where men were trained up and employed in the exercises of religion and devotion, and whither good people resorted to solemnize the appointed feasts with praying and hearing, when they had not conveniences for sacrifice or incense, and thus religion was kept up at a time of general apostacy. Much of God was among these prophets, and *more were the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife*; none of all the high priests were comparable to those two great men, Elijah and Elisha, who, for aught we know, never attended in the temple at Jerusalem. These seminaries of religion and virtue, which Elijah, it is probable, had been instrumental to found, he now visits, before his departure, to instruct, encourage, and bless them. Note, Those that are going to heaven themselves, ought to be concerned for those they leave behind them on earth, and to leave with them their experiences, testimonies, counsels, and prayers, 2 Pet. 1. 15. When Christ said, with triumph, *Now I am no more in the world*, he added, with tenderness, *But these are; Father, keep them*.

IV. That the sons of the prophets had intelligence, (either from Elijah himself, or by the spirit of prophecy in some of their own society,) or suspected, by the solemnity of Elijah's farewell, that he was now shortly to be removed; and, 1. They told Elisha of it, both at Bethel, v. 3. and at Jericho, v. 5. *Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?* This they said, not as upbraiding him with his loss, or expecting, that, when his master was gone, he would be upon the level with them, but to shew how full they were of the thoughts of this matter, and big with expectation of the event, and to admonish Elisha to prepare for the loss; know we not that our nearest relations, and dearest friends, must shortly be taken from us? *The Lord will take them, we lose them not till he calls for them, whose they are, and who taketh away, and none can hinder him*. He takes away superiors from our head, inferiors from our feet, equals from our arms; let us therefore carefully do the duty of every relation, that we may reflect upon it with comfort, when it comes to be dissolved. Elisha knew it too well, and sorrow had filled his heart upon this account, (as it did the disciples in a like case, John, 16. 6.) and therefore he did not need to be told of it, did not care for hearing of it, and would not be interrupted in his contemplations on this great concern, or, in the least, diverted from his attendance upon his Master; *I know it, hold ye your peace*: he speaks not this peevishly, or in contempt of the sons of the prophets, but as one that was himself, and would have them, composed and sedate, and with an

awful silence expecting the event, *I know it, be silent*, Zech. 2. 13. 2. They went themselves to be witnesses of it at a distance, though they might not closely attend, v. 7. *Fifty of them stood to view afar off*, intending to satisfy their own curiosity, but God so ordered it that they might be eye-witnesses of the honour heaven did to that prophet, who was *despised and rejected of men*. God's works are well worthy our notice; when a *door is opened in heaven*, the call is, *Come up hither, come and see*.

V. That the miraculous dividing of the river Jordan was the preface to Elijah's translation into the heavenly Canaan, as it had been to the entrance of Israel into the earthly Canaan, v. 8. He must go on the other side Jordan, to be translated, because it was his native country, and that he might be near the place where Moses died, and that thus honour might be put on that part of the country, which was most despised. He and Elisha might have gone over Jordan by a ferry, as other passengers did, but God would magnify Elijah in his exit, as he did Joshua in his entrance, by the dividing of this river, Josh. 3. 7. *As Moses with his rod divided the sea, so Elijah with his mantle divided Jordan*, both the *insignia*—the *badges* of their office; these waters, of old, yielded to the ark, now, to the prophet's mantle, which, to those that wanted the ark, was an equivalent token of God's presence. When God will take up his faithful ones to heaven, death is the Jordan which, immediately before their translation, they must pass through, and they find a way through it, a safe and comfortable way; the death of Christ has divided those waters, that the ransomed of the Lord may pass over; *O death, where is thy sting? thy hurt, thy terror?*

9. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. 10. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. 11. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 12. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces,

Here,

1. Elijah makes his will, and leaves Elisha his heir, now anointing him to be a prophet in his room, more than when he cast his mantle upon him, 1 Kings, 19. 19.

1. Elijah, being greatly pleased with the constancy or Elisha's affection and attendance, bade him ask what he should do for him, what blessing he should leave him at parting; he does not say, (as Bishop Hall well observes,) "*Ash of me when I am gone*, in heaven I shall be better able to befriend thee," but, "*Ask before I go*." Our friends on earth may be spoken to, and can give us an answer, but we know not that we can have access to any friend in heaven but Christ, and God in him; *Abraham is ignorant of us*. 2. Elisha, having this fair opportunity to enrich himself with the best riches, prays for a *double portion of his spirit*; he asks not for wealth, or honour, or exemption from trouble, but to be qualified for the service of God and his generation; he asks, (1.) For the spirit, not that the gifts and graces of the Spirit were in Elijah's power to give, therefore he says not, "*Give me the Spirit*," (he knew very well it was God's gift,) but, "*Let it be upon me*, intercede with God for this, for me." Christ bade his disciples ask what they would, not one, but all, and promised to send the

Spirit, with much more authority and assurance than Elijah could. (2.) For *his spirit*; because he was to be a prophet in his room, to carry on his work, to father the sons of the prophets, and face their enemies: because he had the same difficulties to encounter, and the same perverse generation to deal with, that he had, so that, if he have not his spirit, he has not *strength according to the day*. (3.) For a *double portion of his spirit*; he does not mean double to what *he* had, but double to what the rest of the prophets had, from whom so much would not be expected as from Elisha, who had been brought up under Elijah. It is a holy ambition to *covet earnestly the best gifts*, and those which will render us most serviceable to God and our brethren. Note, We all ought, both ministers and people, to set before us the examples of our predecessors, to labour after their spirit, and to be earnest with God for that grace which carried them through their work, and enabled them to finish well. 3. Elijah promises him that which he asked, but under two provisos, v. 10. (1.) Provided he put a due value upon it, and esteem it highly: this he teaches him to do, by calling it a *hard thing*; not too hard for God to do, but too great for him to expect. Those are best prepared for spiritual blessings that are most sensible of their worth, and their own unworthiness to receive them. (2.) Provided he kept close to his master, even to the last, and was observant of him: *If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so*, otherwise not. A diligent attendance upon his master's instructions, and a careful observance of his example, particularly now in his last scene, were the condition, and would be a proper means, of obtaining much of his spirit: taking strict notice of the manner of his ascension would likewise be of great use to him. The comforts of departing saints, and their experiences, will mightily help, both to gild our comforts, and to steel our resolutions. Or, perhaps, this was intended only as a sign; "If God favour thee so far as to give thee a sight of me when I ascend, take that for a token that he will do this for thee, and depend upon it." Christ's disciples saw him ascend, and were, thereupon, assured that they should, in a little time, be filled with his Spirit, Acts, 1. 8. Elisha, we may suppose, hereupon, prayed earnestly, *Lord, shew me this token for good*.

II. Elijah is carried up to heaven in a fiery chariot, v. 11. Like Enoch, he was translated, *that he should not see death*; and was (as Mr. Cowley expresses it) *the second man that leaped the ditch, where all the rest of mankind fell, and went not downward to the sky*. Many curious questions might be asked about this matter, which could not be answered. Let it suffice that we are here told,

1. What his Lord, when he came, found him doing. He was talking with Elisha, instructing and encouraging him, directing him in his work, and quickening him to it, for the good of those whom he left behind. He was not meditating or praying, as one wholly taken up with the world he was going to, but engaged in edifying discourse, as one concerned about the kingdom of God among men. We mistake, if we think our preparation for heaven is carried on only by contemplation, and the acts of devotion. Usefulness to others will pass as well in our account as anything. Thinking of divine things is good, but talking of them (if it come from the heart) is better, because for edification, 1 Cor. 14. 4. Christ ascended as he was blessing his disciples.

2. What convoy his Lord sent for him; *a chariot of fire, and horses of fire*, which appeared either descending upon them from the clouds, or (as Bishop Patrick thinks) running toward them upon the ground: in this form the angels appeared. The souls of all the faithful are carried by an invisible guard of angels into the bosom of Abraham; but Elijah being to carry his body with him, this heavenly guard was visible, not in a human shape, as usual, though they might so have borne him up in their arms, or carried him as on eagles' wings, but that had been to carry him like a child, like a lamb, (Isa. 40. 11, 31.) they appear in the form of a chariot and horses, that he may ride in state, may ride in triumph like a prince, like a conqueror, yea, *more than a conqueror*; the angels are called in scripture, *Cherubim and Seraphim*, and their appearance here, though it may seem below their dignity, answers to both these names; for (1.) *Seraphim* signifies *fiery*, and God is

said to make them a *flame of fire*, Ps. 104. 2. (2.) *Cherubim* (as many think) signifies *chariots*, and they are called *the chariots of God*, Ps. 68. 17. And he is said to *ride upon a cherub*, Ps. 18. 10, to which perhaps there is an allusion in Ezekiel's vision of four living creatures, and wheels, like horses and chariots; in Zechariah's vision they are so represented, Zech. 1. 8.—6. 1. Compare Rev. 6. 2, &c. See the readiness of the angels to do the will of God, even in the meanest services, for the good of them that shall be heirs of salvation. Elijah must remove to the world of angels, and therefore, to shew how desirous they were of his company, some of them would come to fetch him; the chariot and horses appeared like fire, not for burning, but brightness, not to torture or consume him, but to render his ascension conspicuous and illustrious in the eyes of those that stood afar off to view it. Elijah had burned with holy zeal for God and his honour, and now, with a heavenly fire, he was refined and translated.

3. How he was separated from Elisha; this chariot parted them both asunder. Note, The dearest friends must part; Elisha had protested he would not leave him, yet now is left behind by him.

4. Whither he was carried; he *went up by a whirlwind, into heaven*; the fire tends upward, the whirlwind helped to carry him through the atmosphere, out of the reach of the magnetic virtue of this earth, and then how swiftly he ascended through the pure æther to the world of holy and blessed spirits we cannot conceive.

"But where he stopt will ne'er be known

"Till phoenix-nature, aged grown,

"To a better being shalt aspire,

"Mounting herself, like him, to eternity, in fire."—COWLEY.

Elijah had once, in a passion, wished he might die; yet God was so gracious to him, as not only not to take him at his word then, but to honour him with this singular privilege, that he should never see death; and by this instance, and that of Enoch, (1.) God shewed how men should have left the world, if they had not sinned, not by death, but by a translation. (2.) He gave a glimpse of that life and immortality which are brought to light by the gospel, of the glory reserved for the bodies of the saints, and the *opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers*, as then to Elijah; it was also a figure of Christ's ascension.

III. Elisha pathetically laments the loss of that great prophet, but attends him with an encomium, v. 12. 1. He saw it; thus he received the sign by which he was assured of the grant of his request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit; he looked steadfastly toward heaven, whence he was to expect that gift, as the disciples did, Acts, 1. 10. He saw it a while, but the vision was presently out of his sight; and *he saw him no more*. 2. He rent his own clothes, in token of the sense he had of his own and the public loss; though Elijah was gone triumphantly to heaven, yet this world could ill spare him, and therefore his removal ought to be much regretted by the survivors. Surely their hearts are hard, whose eyes are dry, when God, by taking away faithful useful men, calls for weeping and mourning. Though Elijah's departure made way for Elisha's eminency, especially since he was now sure of a double portion of his spirit, yet he lamented the loss of him, for he loved him, and could have served him for ever. 3. He gave him a very honourable character, as the reason why he thus lamented the loss of him. (1.) He himself had lost the guide of his youth; *My father, my father*; he saw his own condition like that of a fatherless child thrown upon the world, and laments it accordingly. Christ, when he left his disciples, did not leave them orphans, John, 14. 15. but Elijah must. (2.) The public had lost its best guard; he was *the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof*. He would have brought them all to heaven, as in this chariot, if it had not been their own fault; they used not chariots and horses in their wars, but Elijah was to them, by his counsels, reproofs, and prayers, better than the strongest force of chariot and horse, and kept off the judgments of God; his departure was like the routing of an army, an irreparable loss. Better have lost all our men of war than this man of God.

13. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that

fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; 14. And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. 15. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho, saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him: 16. And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men: let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. 17. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. 18. And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?

We have here an account of what followed immediately after the capture of Elijah.

1. The tokens of God's presence with Elisha, and the marks of his elevation into Elijah's room, to be, as he had been, a father to the sons of the prophets, and the chariot and horsemen of Israel.

1. He was possessed of Elijah's mantle, the badge of his office, which, we may suppose, he put on, and wore, for his master's sake, v. 13. When Elijah went to heaven, though he did not let fall his body as others do, he let fall his mantle instead of it; for he was unclothed, that he might be clothed upon with immortality: he was going to a world where he needed not the mantle, either to adorn him, or to shelter him from weather, or to wrap his face in, as 1 Kings 19. 13. He left his mantle as a legacy to Elisha, and though in itself it was of small value, yet as it was a token of the descent of the Spirit upon him, it was more than if he had bequeathed to him thousands of gold and silver. Elisha took it up, not a sacred relic to be worshipped, but as a significant garment to be worn, and a recompense to him for his own garments which he had rent; he loved this cloak ever since it was first cast over him, 1 Kings 19. 19. He that then so cheerfully obeyed the summons of it, and became Elijah's servant, is now dignified with it, and becomes his successor. There are remains of great and good men, which, like this mantle, ought to be gathered up and preserved by the survivors, their sayings, their writings, their examples, that as their works follow them in the reward of them, they may stay behind in the benefit of them.

2. He was possessed of Elijah's power to divide Jordan, v. 14. Having parted with his father, he returns to his sons in the schools of the prophets; Jordan was between him and them, it had been divided to make way for Elijah to his glory, he will try whether it will divide to make way for him to his business, and by that he will know that God is with him, and that he has the double portion of Elijah's spirit; Elijah's last miracle shall be Elisha's first; thus he begins where he left off, and there is no vacancy. In dividing the waters, (1.) He made use of Elijah's mantle, as Elijah himself had done, (v. 8.) to signify that he designed to keep to his master's methods, and would not introduce any thing new, as those affect to do, that think themselves wiser than their predecessors. (2.) He applied himself to Elijah's God, *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* He does not ask, "Where is Elijah?" either as poring upon the loss of him, as if he could not be easy now that

he was gone, or as doubting of his happy state, as if, like the sons of the prophets here, he knew not what was become of him, or as curiously inquiring concerning him, and the particulars of that state he was removed to; no, that is a hidden life, it does not yet appear what we shall be: nor as expecting help from him; no, Elijah is happy, but is neither omniscient nor omnipotent; but he asks, *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* Now that Elijah was taken to heaven, God had abundantly proved himself the God of Elijah; if he had not prepared for him that city, and done better for him there than ever he did for him in this world, he would have been ashamed to be called his God, Heb. 11. 16. Matth. 27. 31, 32. Now that Elijah was taken to heaven, Elisha inquired, [1.] After God; when our creature-comforts are removed, we have a God to go to, that lives for ever. [2.] After the God of Elijah, the God that Elijah served, and honoured, and pleaded for, and adhered to, when all Israel had deserted him. This honour is done to those who cleave to God in times of general apostasy, that God will be, in a peculiar manner, their God. "The God that owned, and protected, and provided for, Elijah, and, many ways, honoured him, especially now at last; where is he? Lord, am not I promised Elijah's spirit? Make good that promise." The words which next follow in the original, *Aph-his—even he*, which we join in the following clause, *when he also had smitten the waters*, some make an answer to this question, *Where is Elijah's God? Etiam ille adhuc superest—"He is in being still*, and nigh at hand; we have lost Elijah, but we have not lost Elijah's God: he has not forsaken the earth, it is even he that is still with me." Note, First, It is the duty and interest of the saints on earth to inquire after God, and apply themselves to him as the Lord God of the saints that are gone before to heaven, *the God of our fathers*. Secondly, It is very comfortable to those who inquire after God, that they know where to find him; it is even he that is in his holy temple, (Ps. 11. 4.) and nigh to all who call upon him, Ps. 145. 18. Thirdly, Those that walk in the spirit and steps of their godly, faithful predecessors, shall certainly experience the same grace that they experienced; Elijah's God will be Elisha's too; the Lord God of the holy prophets is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and what will it avail us to have the mantles of those that are gone, their places, their books, if we have not their spirit, their God?

3. He was possessed of Elijah's interest in the sons of the prophets, v. 15. Some of the fellows of the college at Jericho, who had placed themselves conveniently near Jordan, to see what passed, were surprised to see Jordan divided before Elisha in his return, and took that as a convincing evidence that *the spirit of Elijah did rest upon him*, and that therefore they ought to pay the same respect and deference to him, that they had done to Elijah. Accordingly, they went to meet him, to congratulate him on his safe passage through fire and water, and the honour God had put upon him; and they bowed themselves to the ground before him: they were trained up in the schools, Elisha was taken from the plough, yet, when they perceive that God is with him, and that this is the man whom he delights to honour, they readily submit to him, as their head and father, as the people to Joshua, when Moses was dead, Josh. 1. 17. Those that appear to have God's Spirit and presence with them, ought to have our esteem and best affections, notwithstanding the meanness of their extraction and education. Whomsoever God honours, we must. This ready submission of the sons of the prophets, no doubt, was a great encouragement to Elisha, and helped to clear his call.

II. The needless search which the sons of the prophets made for Elijah. 1. They suggested it possible that he was dropt, either alive or dead, upon some mountain, or in some valley; and it would be a satisfaction to them, if they sent some strong men, whom they had at command, in quest of him, v. 16. Some of them perhaps started this as a demurrer to the choice of Elisha; "Let us first be sure that Elijah is quite gone. Can we think Elijah thus neglected by heaven, that chosen vessel thus cast away as a vessel in which was no pleasure?" 2. Elisha consented not to their motion, till they overcame him with importunity, v. 17. They urged him till he was ashamed to oppose it any further, lest

he should be thought wanting in his respect to his old master, or loath to resign the mantle again. Wise men may yield to that, for the sake of peace, and the good opinion of others, which yet their judgment is against, as needless and fruitless. 3. The issue made them as much ashamed of their proposal, as they, by their importunity, had made Elisha ashamed of his opposing it. Their messengers, after they had tired themselves with fruitless search, returned with a *non est inventus—he is not to be found*, and gave Elisha an opportunity of upbraiding his friends with their folly; *Did I not say unto you, Go not?* v. 18. This would make them the more willing to acquiesce in his judgment another time. Traversing hills and vallies will never bring us to Elijah, but the imitation of his holy faith and zeal will, in due time.

19. And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren. 20. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. 21. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more dearth or barren land. 22. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake. 23. And he went up from thence unto Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald-head; go up, thou bald-head. 24. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. 25. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

Elisha had, in this respect, a double portion of Elijah's spirit, that he wrought more miracles than he did. Some reckon them in number just double. Two are recorded in these verses. A miracle of mercy to Jericho; and a miracle of judgment to Bethel, Ps. 101. 1.

I. Here is a blessing upon the waters of Jericho, which was effectual to heal them. Jericho was built in disobedience to a command, in defiance to a threatening, and at the expence of the lives of all the builders' children; yet, when it was built, it was not ordered to be demolished again, nor were God's prophets or people forbidden to dwell in it, but, even within those walls that were built by iniquity, we find a nursery of piety. Fools, they say, build houses for wise men to dwell in. Here the wealth of the sinner provided a habitation for the just. We find Christ at Jericho, Luke, 19. 1. Hither Elisha came, to confirm the souls of the disciples with a more particular account of Elijah's translation than their spies could give them, who saw it at a distance. Here he staid while the fifty men were searching for him.

And, 1. The men of Jericho represented to him their grievance, v. 19. God's faithful prophets love to be employed; it is wisdom to make use of them, the little while that their light is with us. They had not applied themselves to Elijah concerning the matter, perhaps because he was not so easy of access as Elisha was; but now, we may hope, by the influence of the divinity-school in their city, they were reformed. The situation was pleasant, and afforded a good prospect; but they had neither wholesome water to drink, nor fruitful soil to yield them food; and what pleasure

could they take then in their prospect? Water is a common mercy, which we should estimate by the greatness of the calamity which the want or unwholesomeness of it would be. Some think that it was not all the ground about Jericho that was barren, and had bad water, but some one part only, and that where the sons of the prophets had their lodgings, who are here called *the men of the city*.

2. He soon redressed their grievance. Prophets should endeavour to make every place they come to, some way or other, the better for them, endeavouring to sweeten bitter spirits, and to make barren souls fruitful, by the due application of the word of God. Elisha will heal their waters; but, (1.) They must furnish him with salt in a new cruse, v. 20. If salt had been proper to season the water, yet what could so small a quantity do towards it, and what the better for being in a new cruse? But thus they that would be helped must be employed, and their faith and obedience tried. God's works of grace are wrought, not by any operations of our's, but in our observance of his institutions. (2.) He cast the salt into the spring of the waters, and so healed the streams, and the ground they watered. Thus the way to reform men's lives, is, to renew their hearts; let those be seasoned with the salt of grace, for out of them are the issues of life. *Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good*. Purify the heart, and that will cleanse the hands. (3.) He did not pretend to do this by his own power, but in God's name; *Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters*. He is but the instrument, the channel through which God is pleased to convey this healing virtue. By doing them this kindness with a *Thus saith the Lord*, they would be made the more willing, hereafter, to receive from him a reproof, admonition, or command, with the same preface. If, in God's name, he can help them, in God's name, let him teach and rule them. *Thus saith the Lord*, out of Elisha's mouth, must, ever after, be of mighty force with them. (4.) The cure was lasting, and not for the present only, *The waters were healed unto this day*, v. 22. What God doeth, it shall be for ever, Eccl. 3. 14. When he, by his Spirit, heals a soul, there shall be no more death nor barrenness; the property is altered; what was useless and offensive, becomes grateful and serviceable.

II. Here is a curse upon the children of Bethel, which was effectual to destroy them; for it was not a curse causeless. At Bethel there was another school of prophets, thither Elisha goes next, in this his primary visitation; the scholars there, no doubt, welcomed him with all possible respect, but the townsmen were abusive to him. One of Jeroboam's calves was at Bethel; this they were proud of, and fond of, and hated them that reprov'd them. The law did not empower them to suppress this pious academy, but we may suppose it was their usual practice to jeer the prophets as they went along the streets, to call them by some nick-name or other, that they might expose them to contempt, prejudice their youth against them, and, if possible, drive them out of their town. Had the abuse done to Elisha been the first offence of that kind, it is probable that it would not have been so severely punished. But *mocking the messengers of the Lord*, and *mis-using the prophets*, was one of the crying sins of Israel, as we find, 2 Chron. 36. 16. Now here we have,

1. An instance of that sin. The little children of Bethel (the boys and girls that were playing in the streets, notice, it is likely, being come to the town of his approach) went out to meet him, not with their hosannas, as they ought to have done, but with their scoffs; they gathered about him, and mocked him, as if he had been a fool, or one fit to make sport with: among other things that they used to jeer the prophets with, they had this particular taunt for him, *Go up, thou bald-head, Go up, thou bald-head*. It is a wicked thing to reproach any for their natural infirmities or deformities; it is adding affliction to the afflicted; and, if they are as God made them, the reproach reflects upon him. But this was such a thing as scarcely deserved to be called a blemish, and would never have been turned to his reproach, if they had had any thing else to reproach him with. It was his character, as a prophet, that they designed to abuse. The honour God had

crowned him with, should have been sufficient to cover his bald head, and protect him from their scoffs. They bade him *go up*, perhaps reflecting on the assumption of Elijah: "Thy master," they say, "is gone up; why dost not thou go up after him? Where is the fiery chariot? When shall we be rid of thee too?" These children said as they were taught; they had learned of their idolatrous parents to call foul names, and give bad language, especially to prophets. Perhaps their parents did, at the same time, send them out, and set them on, that, if possible, they might keep the prophet out of their town.

2. A specimen of that ruin which came upon Israel, at last, for mis-using God's prophets, and of which this was intended to give them fair warning. Elisha heard their taunts, a good while, with patience; but, at length, the fire of holy zeal for God was kindled in his breast by the continued provocation, and he *turned and looked upon them*, to try if a grave and severe look would put them out of countenance, and oblige them to retire; to see if he could discern in their faces any marks of ingenuousness: but they were *not ashamed, neither could they blush*; and therefore he *cursed them in the name of the Lord*, both imprecated and denounced the following judgment, not in personal revenge for the indignity done to himself, but as the mouth of divine justice to punish the dishonour done to God. His summons was immediately obeyed; two she-bears (bears perhaps robbed of their whelps) came out of an adjacent wood, and presently killed forty-two children, v. 24. Now in this, (1.) The prophet must be justified, for he did it by divine impulse. Had the curse come from any bad principle, God would not have said, *Amen*, to it. We may think it had been better to have called for two rods for the correction of these children, than two bears for the destruction of them. But Elisha knew, by the Spirit, the bad character of these children, what a generation of vipers they were, and what mischievous enemies they would be to God's prophets, if they should live to be men, who began so early to be abusive to them. He intended hereby to punish the parents, and to make them afraid of God's judgments. (2.) God must be glorified, as a righteous God that hates sin, and will reckon for it, even in little children. Let the hideous shrieks and groans of this wicked wretched brood make our flesh *tremble for fear of God*. Let little children be afraid of speaking wicked words, for God notices what they say. Let them not mock at any for their defects in mind or body, but pity them rather; especially let them know that it is at their peril, if they jeer God's people or ministers, and scoff at any for well-doing. Let parents, that would have comfort in their children, train them up well, and do their utmost betimes to drive out the foolishness that is bound up in their hearts; for, (as Bishop Hall says,) "In vain do we look for good of those children whose education we have neglected; and in vain do we grieve for those miscarriages which our care might have prevented."

Elisha comes to Bethel, and fears not the revenges of the bereaved parents; God, who bade him do what he did, he knew would bear him out. Thence he goes to mount Carmel, v. 25. where, it is probable, there was a religious house fit for retirement and contemplation. Thence he returned to Samaria, where, being a public place, this father of the prophets might be most serviceable. Bishop Hall observes here, "That he can never be a profitable seer, who is either always, or never, alone."

CHAP. III.

We are now called to attend the public affairs of Israel, in which we shall find Elisha concerned. Here is, I. The general character of Jehoram king of Israel, v. 1. 3. II. A war with Moab, in which Jehoram and his allies were engaged, v. 4. 8. III. The straits which the confederate army was reduced to in their expedition against Moab, and their consulting of Elisha in that distress, with the answer of peace he gave them, v. 9. 19. IV. The glorious issue of this campaign, v. 20. 25. and the barbarous method the king of Moab took to oblige the confederate army to retire, v. 26, 27. The house of Ahab is doomed to destruction; and though in this chapter we have both its character and its condition better than before, yet the threatened ruin is not far off.

1. **N**OW Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. 2. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. 3. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom. 4. And Mesha king of Moab was a sheep-master, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. 5. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

Jehoram, the son of Ahab, and brother of Ahaziah, is here upon the throne of Israel; and though he was but a bad man, yet two good things are here recorded of him.

1. That he removed his father's idols. He did evil in many things, but not like his father Ahab, or his mother Jezebel, v. 2. Bad he was, but not so bad, so *overmuch wicked*, as Solomon speaks, Eccl. 7. 17. Perhaps Jehoshaphat, though by his alliance with the house of Ahab he made his own family worse, did something toward making Ahab's better. Jehoram saw his father and brother cut off for worshipping Baal, and wisely took warning by God's judgments on them, and *put away the image of Baal*, resolving to worship the God of Israel only, and consult none but his prophets. So far was well, yet it did not prevent the destruction of Ahab's family, nay, that destruction came *in his days*, and fell immediately *upon him*, ch. 9. 24. though he was one of the best of the family, for then the measure of its iniquity was full. Jehoram's reformation was next to none: for, (1.) He only put away the image of Baal *which his father had made*, and this, probably, in compliment to Jehoshaphat, who otherwise would not have come into confederacy with him, any more than with his brother, 1 Kings, 22. 49. But he did not destroy the worship of Baal among the people, for Jehu found it prevalent, ch. 10. 19. It was well to reform his family, but it was not enough; he ought to have used his power for the reforming of his kingdom. (2.) When he put away the image of Baal, he maintained the worship of the calves, that politic sin of Jeroboam, v. 3. *He departed not therefrom*, because that was the state-engine by which the division between the two tribes was supported. Those do not truly, nor acceptably, repent or reform, who only part with the sins that they lose by, but continue their affection to the sins that they get by. (3.) He only *put away* the image of Baal, he did not break it in pieces, as he ought to have done. He laid it aside for the present, yet not knowing but he might have occasion for it another time; and Jezebel, for reasons of state, was content to worship her Baal in private.

2. That he did what he could to recover his brother's losses. As he had something more of the religion of an Israelite than his father, so he had something more of the spirit of a king than his brother. Moab rebelled against Israel immediately upon the death of his father, ch. 1. 1. And we do not find that Ahaziah made any attempt to chastise or reduce them, but tamely let go his interest in them, rather than entertain the cares, undergo the fatigues, and run the hazards, of a war with them. His folly and pusillanimity herein, and his indifference to the public good, were the more aggravated, because the tribute which the king of Moab paid was a very considerable branch of the revenue of the crown of Israel. *An hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand weathers*, v. 4. The riches of kings then lay more in cattle than coin, and they thought it not below them to *know the state of their flocks and herds* themselves, because as Solomon observes, *the crown doth*

not endure to every generation, Prov. 27. 23, 24. Taxes were then paid, not so much in money, as in the commodities of the country, which was an ease to the subject, whether it were an advantage to the prince or no. The revolt of Moab was a great loss to Israel, yet Ahaziah sat still in sloth and ease. But an upper chamber in his house proved as fatal to him as the high places of the field could have been, ch. 1. 2. and the breaking of his lattice let into his throne a man of a more active genius, that will not lose the dominion of Moab without making, at least, one push for its preservation.

6. And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel. 7. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: *I am as thou art*, my people as thy people, *and* my horses as thy horses. 8. And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom. 9. So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey, and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. 10. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab! 11. But Jehoshaphat said, *Is there* not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. 12. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom, went down to him. 13. And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. 14. And Elisha said, *As* the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee. 15. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him. 16. And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches. 17. For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. 18. And this is *but* a light thing in the sight of the Lord: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand. 19. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.

Jehoram has no sooner got the sceptre into his hand, than he takes the sword into his hand, to reduce Moab. Crowns bring such cares and perils to the heads that wear them; no sooner in honour than in war. Now here we have,

I. The concerting of this expedition between Jehoram king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah. Jehoram levied an army, v. 6. and such an opinion he had of the godly king of Judah, that, 1. He courted him to be his confederate: *Wilt thou go with me against Moab?* And he gained him. Jehoshaphat said, *I will go up, I am as thou art*, v. 7. Judah and Israel, though unhappily divided from each other, yet can unite against Moab, a common enemy. Jehoshaphat upbraids them not with their revolt from the house of David, nor makes it an article of their alliance, that they should return to their allegiance, though he had good reason to insist upon it, but treats with Israel as a sister-kingdom. Those are no friends to their own peace and strength, who can never find in their hearts to forgive and forget an old injury, and unite with those that have formerly broken in upon their rights. *Quod initio non valuit, tractu temporis invalescit—That which was originally destitute of authority, in the progress of time acquires it.* 2. He consulted him as his confidant, v. 8. He took advice of Jehoshaphat, who had more wisdom and experience than himself, which way they should make their descent upon the country of Moab; and he advised that they should not march against them the nearest way, over Jordan, but go round *through the wilderness of Edom*, that they might take the king of Edom (who was tributary to him) and his forces along with them: if two be better than one, much more will not a *threefold cord* be easily broken. Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dear for his joining with Ahab, yet he joins with his son, and this expedition also had like to have been fatal to him. There is nothing got by being yoked with unbelievers.

II. The great straits that the army of the confederates was reduced to in this expedition. Before they saw the face of an enemy, they were all in danger of perishing for want of water, v. 9. This ought to have been considered before they ventured a march through the wilderness, the same wilderness (or very near it) where their ancestors wanted water, Numb. 20. 2. God suffers his people, by their own providence, to bring themselves into distress, that the wisdom, power, and goodness, of his providence may be glorified in their relief. What is more cheap and common than water? It is *drink to every beast of the field*, Ps. 104. 11. yet the want of it will soon humble and ruin kings and armies. The king of Israel sadly laments the present distress, and the imminent danger it put them in, of falling into the hands of their enemies the Moabites, to whom, when weakened by thirst, they would be an easy prey, v. 10. It was he that had *called these kings together*, yet he charges it upon Providence, and reflects upon that as unkind; The Lord has *called them together*. Thus the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord, Prov. 19. 3.

III. Jehoshaphat's good motion to ask counsel of God in this exigence, v. 11. The place they were now in could not but remind them of the wonders which their fathers told them of, the waters fetched out of the rock for Israel's seasonable supply. The thought of this, we may suppose, encouraged Jehoshaphat to ask, *Is there not here a prophet of the Lord*, like unto Moses? He was the more concerned, because it was by his advice that they fetched this compass through the wilderness, v. 8. It was well that Jehoshaphat inquired of the Lord now, but it had been much better if he had done it sooner, before he engaged in this war, or steered this course; so the distress might have been prevented. Good men are sometimes remiss and forgetful, and neglect their duty, till necessity and affliction drive them to it.

IV. Elisha recommended as a proper person for them to consult with, v. 11. And here we may wonder, 1. That Elisha should follow the camp, especially in such a tedious march as this, as a volunteer, unasked, unobserved, and in no post of honour at all; not in the office of *priest of the war*, Dent. 20. 2. or president of the council of war, but in such obscurity, that none of the king's knew they had such a jewel in the treasures of their camp, nor:

good a friend in their retinue. We may suppose it was by special direction from heaven, that Elisha attended the war, as *the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof*. Thus does God go before his people with the blessing of his goodness, and provide his oracles for those that provide them not for themselves. It would often be bad with us, if God did not take more care of us, both for soul and body, than we for ourselves. 2. That a servant of the king of Israel knew of his being there, when the king himself did not. Probably it was such a servant as Obadiah was to his father Ahab, one that *feared the Lord*; to such a one Elisha made himself known, not to the kings. The account he gives of him, is, that it was he that *poured water on the hands of Elijah*, that is, he was his servant, and, particularly, attended him when he washed his hands. He that will be great, let him learn to minister: he that will rise high, let him begin low.

V. The application which the kings made to Elisha. They went down to him to his quarters, v. 12. Jehoshaphat had such an esteem for a prophet with whom the word of the Lord was, that he would condescend to visit him in his own person, and not send for him up to him. The other two were moved, by the straits they were in, to make their court to the prophet. He that humbled himself was thus exalted, and looked great, when three kings came to knock at his door, and beg his assistance; see Rev. 3. 9.

VI. The entertainment which Elisha gave them.

1. He was very plain with the wicked king of Israel, v. 13. "*What have I to do with thee? How canst thou expect an answer of peace from me? Get thee to the prophets of thy father and mother, whom thou hast countenanced and maintained in thy prosperity, and let them help thee now in thy distress.*" Elisha was not imposed upon, as Jehoshaphat was, by his partial and hypocritical reformation; he knew, that, though he had put away the image of Baal, Baal's prophets were still dear to him, and perhaps some of them were now in his camp. *Go, said he, go to them. Get you to the gods whom ye have served*, Judg. 10. 14. The world and the flesh have ruled you, let them help you; why should God be *inquired of by you*? Ezek. 14. 3. Elisha tells him to his face, in a holy indignation at his wickedness, that he could scarcely find in his heart to *look toward him, or to see him*, v. 14. Jehoram is to be respected as a prince, but, as a wicked man, he is a vile person, and is to be contemned, Ps. 15. 4. Elisha, as a subject, will honour him, but, as a prophet, he will make him to know his iniquity. For them that had such an extraordinary commission, it was fit (though not for a common person) to say to a king, *Thou art wicked*, Job. 34. 18. Jehoram has so much self-command as to take it patiently; he cares not now for hearing of the prophets of Baal, but is a humble suitor to the God of Israel and his prophet, representing the present case as very deplorable, and humbly recommends it to the prophet's compassionate consideration. In effect he owns himself unworthy, but let not the other kings be ruined for his sake.

2. He shewed a great respect to the godly king of Judah, *regarded his presence*, and, for his sake, would *inquire of the Lord* for them all. It is good being with those that have God's favour, and his prophets' love. Wicked people often fare the better for the friendship and society of those that are godly.

3. He composed himself to receive instructions from God; his mind was somewhat ruffled and disturbed at the sight of Jehoram; though he was not put into a sinful heat or passion, nor had spoken unadvisedly, yet his zeal, for the present, indisposed him for prayer and the operations of the Spirit, which require a mind very calm and sedate. He therefore called for a musician, v. 15. a devout musician, one accustomed to play upon his harp, and sing psalms to it. To hear God's praises sweetly sung, as David had appointed, would cheer his spirits, and settle his mind, and help to put him into a right frame, both to speak to him, and to hear from him. We find a company of prophets prophesying with *a psaltery and a tabret before them*, 1 Sam. 10. 5. Those that desire communion with God must keep their spirits quiet and serene. Elisha being refreshed, and having the tumult of his spirits laid by this divine music, *the hand of the Lord came upon him*, and his visit did him more honour than that of three kings.

4. God, by him, gave them assurance that the issue of the present distress would be comfortable and glorious.

(1.) They should speedily be supplied with water, v. 16, 17. To try their faith and obedience, he bids them *make the valley full of ditches*, to receive the water. They that expect God's blessings must prepare room for them, *dig the pools* for the rain to fill, as they did in the valley of Baca, and so made even that a well, Ps. 84. 6. To raise their wonder, he tells them they should have water enough, and yet there should be *neither wind nor rain*. Elijah, by prayer, obtained water out of the clouds, but Elisha fetches it no body knows whence. The spring of these waters shall be as secret as the head of the Nile. God is not tied to second causes. Ordinarily, it is by a *plentiful rain* that God confirms his inheritance, Ps. 68. 9. but here it is done without rain, at least, without rain in that place. Some of the *fountains of the great deep*, it is likely, were broken up on this occasion; and, to increase the miracle, *that valley only* (as it should seem) *was filled with water*, and no other place had any share of it.

(2.) That supply should be an earnest of victory, v. 18. "*This is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord*; you shall not only be saved from perishing, but shall return in triumph." As God gives freely to the unworthy, so he gives *richly*, like himself, more than we are able to ask or think. His grants out-do our requests and expectations. They that sincerely seek for the dew of God's grace shall have it, and by it be made *more than conquerors*. It is promised that they should be masters of the rebellious country, and they are permitted to lay it waste and ruin it, v. 19. The law forbade them to sell fruit-trees, to be employed in their sieges, Dent. 20. 19. but not when it was intended, in justice, for the starving of a country that had forfeited its fruits, by denying tribute to whom tribute is due.

20. And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat-offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water. 21. And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border. 22. And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood: 23. And they said, This is blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil. 24. And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in *their* country. 25. And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kir-haraseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about it, and smote it. 26. And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through *even* unto the king of Edom: but they could not. 27. Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him *for* a burnt-offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to *their own* land.

We have here the divine gift of both those things which God had promised by Elisha; water and victory; and the former not only a pledge of the latter, but a means of it. God, who created, and commands, all the waters, both above and beneath the firmament, sent them an abundance of water on a sudden, which did them double service.

I. It relieved their armies which were ready to perish, v. 20. And, which was very observable, this relief came just at the time of the offering of the morning sacrifice, upon the altar at Jerusalem, a certain time, and universally known; that time Elisha chose for his hour of prayer, (it is likely looking toward the temple, for so they were to do in their prayers, when they were going out to battle, and encamped at a distance, 1 Kings, 8. 44.) in token of his communion with the temple service, and his expectation of success, by virtue of the great sacrifice. We now cannot pitch upon any hour more acceptable than another, because our High Priest is always appearing for us, to present and plead his sacrifice. That time God chose for the hour of mercy, to put an honour upon the daily sacrifice which had been despised. God answered Daniel's prayer just at the time of the evening sacrifice, Dan. 9. 21. for he will glorify his own institutions.

II. It deceived their enemies, who were ready to triumph, into their destruction. Notice is brought to the Moabites of the advances of the confederate army; to oppose which, all that were able to put on armour were raised, and posted upon the frontiers, where they are ready to give them a warm reception, v. 21. promising themselves, that it would be easy dealing with an army fatigued by so long a march through the wilderness of Edom. But see here, -

1. How easily they were drawn into their own delusions; observe the steps of their self-deceit. (1.) They saw the water in the valley where the army of Israel encamped, and conceived it was blood, v. 22. because they knew it was a dry valley, and (there having been no rain) could not imagine it should be water. The sun shone upon it, and, probably, the sky was red and lowering, a presage of foul weather that day, Matth. 16. 3. and so it proved to them. But this making the water look red, their own fancies, which made them willing to believe what made for them, suggested, *This is blood*; God permitting them thus to impose upon themselves. (2.) If their camp was thus full of blood, they conclude, "Certainly the kings have fallen out, (as confederates of different interests are apt to do,) and they have slain one another, v. 23. for what else should slay them?" And, (3.) If the armies have slain one another, we have nothing to do but to divide the prey, Now therefore, *Moab, to the spoil*. These were the gradual suggestions of some sanguine spirits among them, that thought themselves wiser and happier in their conjectures than their neighbours; and the rest, being desirous it should be so, were forward to believe it was so. *Quod volumus facile credimus—What we wish we readily believe*. Thus they that are to be destroyed are first deceived, Rev. 20. 8. and none are so effectually deceived as those that deceive themselves.

2. How fatally they thereby ran upon their own destruction. They rushed carelessly into the camp of Israel, to plunder it, but were undeceived, when it was too late. The Israelites, animated by the assurances Elisha had given them of victory, fell upon them with the utmost fury, routed them, and pursued them into their own country, v. 24. which they laid waste, v. 25. destroyed the cities, marred the ground, stopped up the wells, felled the timber, and left only the royal city standing; in the walls of which they made great breaches with their battering engines. This they got by rebelling against Israel. Who ever hardened his heart against God, and prospered?

In the close of this chapter, we are told what the king of Moab did, when he found himself reduced to the last extremity by the besiegers, and that his capital city was likely to fall into their hands.

(1.) He attempted that which was bold and brave. He got together 700 choice men, and with them sallied out upon the intrenchments of the king of Edom, who, being but a mercenary

in this expedition, would not, he hoped, make any great resistance if he were vigorously attacked, and so he might make his escape that way. But it would not do; even the king of Edom proved too hard for him, and obliged him to retire, v. 26.

(2.) This failing, he did that which was brutish and barbarous; he took his own son, his eldest son, that was to succeed him, than whom nothing could be more dear to himself and his people, and offered him for a burnt-offering upon the wall, v. 27. He designed by this, [1.] To obtain the favour of Chemosh his god, which, being a devil, delighted in blood and murder, and the destruction of mankind. The dearer any thing was to them, the more acceptable those idolators thought it must needs be, if offered in sacrifice to their gods, and therefore burnt their children in the fire to their honour. [2.] To terrify the besiegers, and oblige them to retire. Therefore he did it upon the wall, in their sight, that they might see what desperate courses he resolved to take rather than surrender, and how dear he would sell his city and life. He intended hereby to render them odious, and to exasperate and enrage his own subjects against them. This effect it had; there was great indignation against Israel for driving him to this extremity. Whereupon, they raised the siege, and returned. Tender and generous spirits would not do that, though just, which will drive any man distracted, or make him desperate.

CHAP. IV.

Great service Elisha had done, in the foregoing chapter, for the three kings; to his prayers and prophecies they owed their lives and triumphs. One would have expected that the next chapter should have told us what honours and what dignities were conferred on Elisha for this: that he should immediately have been preferred at court, and made prime minister of state; that Jehoshaphat should have taken him home with him, and advanced him in his kingdom. No, the wise man delivered the army, but no man remembered the wise man, Eccl. 9. 15. Or, if he had preferment offered him, he declined it; he preferred the honour of doing good in the schools of the prophets, before that of being great in the courts of princes. God magnified him, and that sufficed him; magnified him indeed, for we have him here employed in working no less than five miracles. I. He multiplied the poor widow's oil, v. 1. 7. II. He obtained for the good Shunammite the blessing of a son in her old age, v. 8. 17. III. He raised that child to life when it was dead, v. 18. 37. IV. He healed the deadly postage, v. 38. 41. V. He fed a hundred men with twenty small loaves, v. 42. 44.

1. NOW there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen. 2. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil. 3. Then he said, Go borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. 4. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. 5. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. 6. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. 7. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

Elisha's miracles were for use, *not for shew*; this here was so; an act of real charity; Christ's were so; not only great wonders, but great favours, to them for whom they were wrought. God magnifies his goodness with his power.

1. Elisha readily receives a poor widow's complaint. She was a prophet's widow; to whom therefore should she apply herself, but to him that was a father to the sons of the prophets, and concerned himself in the welfare of their families? It seems, the prophets had wives, as well as the priests, though prophecy went not by entail, as the priesthood did. Marriage is honourable in all, and not inconsistent with the most sacred professions. Now, by the complaint of this poor woman, *v. 1.* we are given to understand, 1. That her husband, being *one of the sons of the prophets*, was well known to Elisha. Ministers of eminent gifts and stations should make themselves familiar with those that are, every way, their inferiors, and know their character and state. 2. That he had the reputation of a godly man. Elisha knew him to be one that feared the Lord, else he had been unworthy of the honour, and unfit for the work, of a prophet. He was one that kept his integrity in a time of general apostacy; one of the 7,000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal. 3. That he was dead, though a good man, a good minister. The prophets—do they live for ever? They that were clothed with the Spirit of prophecy, were not thereby armed against the stroke of death. 4. That he died poor, and in debt more than he was worth. He did not contract his debts by prodigality, and luxury, and riotous living, for he was one that feared the Lord, and therefore durst not allow himself in such courses: nay, religion obliges men not to live above what they have, nor to spend more than what God gives them, no not in expences otherwise lawful; for thereby, of necessity, they must disable themselves, at last, to give every one his own, and so prove guilty of a continued act of injustice all along: yet it may be the lot of those that fear God, to be in debt, and insolvent, through afflictive providences, losses by sea, or bad debts, or their own imprudence, for the *children of light* are not always *wise for this world*. Perhaps this prophet was impoverished by persecution: when Jezebel ruled, prophets had much ado to live, and especially if they had families. 5. That the creditors were very severe to her. Two sons she had, to be the support of her widowed state, and their labour is reckoned *assets* in her hand, that must go therefore, and they must be bondmen for seven years, *Exod. 21. 2.* to work out this debt. Those that leave their families under a load of debt disproportionate to their estates, know not what trouble they entail. In this distress, the poor widow goes to Elisha, in dependence upon the promise, that the seed of the righteous shall not be forsaken. The generation of the upright may expect help from God's providence, and countenance from his prophets.

II. He effectually relieves this poor widow's distress, and puts her in a way both to pay her debt, and to maintain herself and her family. He did not say, *Be warmed, be filled*; but gave her real help. He did not give her some small matter for her present provision, but set her up in the world to sell oil, and put a stock into her hand to begin with. This was done by miracle, but it is an indication to us what is the best method of charity, and the greatest kindness one can do to poor people, which is, if possible, to help them into a way of improving what little they have, by their own industry and ingenuity.

1. He directed her what to do; considered her case; *What shall I do for thee?* The sons of the prophets were poor, and it would signify little to make a collection for her among them: but the God of the holy prophets is able to supply all her need; and if she has a little committed to her management, her need must be supplied by his blessing and increasing that little. Elisha therefore inquires what she had to make money of, and finds she had nothing to sell but one pot of oil, *v. 2.* If she had had any plate or furniture, he would have bidden her part with it, to enable her to be just to her creditors. We cannot reckon that really, nor comfortably, our own, which is not so when all our debts are paid. If she had not had this pot of oil, the divine power could have supplied her; but having this, it will work upon this, and so teach us to make the best

of what we have. The prophet, knowing her to have credit among her neighbours, bids her borrow of them *empty vessels*, *v. 3.* for, it seems, she had sold her own, toward the satisfying of her creditors. He directs her to shut the door upon her and her sons, while she filled all those vessels out of that one. She must shut the door, to prevent interruptions from the creditors and others while it was in the doing, that they might not seem proudly to boast of this miraculous supply, and that they might have opportunity for prayer and praise to God upon this extraordinary occasion. Observe, (1.) The oil was to be multiplied in the pouring, as the other widow's meal in the spending. The way to increase what we have, is, to use it; to him that so hath, shall be given. It is not hoarding the talents, but trading with them, that doubles them. (2.) It must be poured out by herself, not by Elisha, or some of the sons of the prophets, to intimate, that it is after our careful and diligent endeavours that we may expect the blessing of God to enrich us, both for this world and the other. What we have, will increase best in our own hand.

2. She did it accordingly. She did not tell the prophet he designed to make a fool of her, but, firmly believing the divine power and goodness, and in pure obedience to the prophet, she borrowed vessels large and many of her neighbours, and poured out her oil into them; one of her sons was employed to bring her empty vessels, and the other carefully to set aside those that were full, while they were all amazed to find their pot, like a fountain of living water, always flowing, and yet always full; they see not the spring that supplies it, but believe it to be in Him *in whom all our springs are*. Job's metaphor is now verified in the letter, *Job, 29. 6.* *The rock poured me out rivers of oil.* Perhaps this was in the tribe of Asher, part of whose blessing it was, that he should *dip his foot in oil*, *Deut. 33. 24.*

3. The oil continued flowing as long as she had any empty vessels to receive it; when every vessel was full, the oil stayed, *v. 6.* for it was not fit that this precious liquor should run over, and be as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Note, We are never straitened in God, and in his power and bounty, and the riches of his grace; all our straitness is in ourselves. It is our faith that fails, not his promise. He gives above what we ask: were there more vessels, there is enough in God to fill them; enough for all, enough for each. Was this pot of oil exhausted, as long as there were any vessels to be filled from it? And shall we fear lest the golden oil, which flows from the very root and fatness of the good olive, should fail, as long as there are any lamps to be supplied from it? *Zech. 4. 12.*

4. The prophet directed her what to do with the oil she had, *v. 7.* She must not keep it for her own use, to *make her face to shine*. Those whom Providence has made poor, must be content with poor accommodations for themselves—that is *knowing how to want*; and must not think, when they get a little of that which is better than ordinary, to feed their own luxury: no; (1.) She must sell the oil to those that were rich, and could afford to bestow it on themselves. We may suppose, being produced by miracle, it was the best of its kind, like the wine, *John, 2. 10.* so that she might have both a good price and a quick market for it. Probably, the merchants bought it to export, for oil was one of the commodities that Israel traded in, *Ezek. 27. 17.* (2.) She must pay her debt with the money she received for her oil. Though her creditors were too rigorous with her, yet they must not therefore lose their debt. Her first care, now that she has wherewithal, must be to discharge that, even before she makes any provision for her children. It is one of the fundamental laws of our religion, that we render to all their due, pay every just debt, give every one his own, though we leave ever so little for ourselves; and this, not of constraint, but willingly and without grudging; not only for wrath, to avoid being sued, but also for conscience-sake. They that bear an honest mind, cannot with pleasure eat their daily bread, unless it be their own bread. (3.) The rest must not be laid up, but she and her children must live upon it, not upon the oil, but upon the money received from it, with which they must put themselves into a capacity of getting an honest livelihood. No doubt, she did as the man of God directed; and hence, [1.] Let those that are poor and in distress, be

not acquainting him with her errand, lest he should not have faith enough to let her go, v. 22. He objected, *It is neither new moon nor sabbath*, v. 23. which intimates, that, on those feasts of the Lord, she used to go to the assembly in which he presided, with other good people, to hear the word, and to join with him in prayers and praises; she did not think it enough to have his help sometimes in her own family, but, though a great woman, attended on public worship, for which this was none of the times appointed; *Wherefore*, said the husband, "Why wilt thou go to-day? What is the matter?" "No harm," said she, "*It shall be well*, so you will say yourself hereafter." See how this husband and wife vied with each other, in shewing mutual regard; she was so dutiful to him, that she would not go till she had acquainted him with her journey, and he so kind to her, that he would not oppose it, though she did not think fit to acquaint him with her business.

2. She made all the haste she could to the prophet, v. 24. and he, seeing her at a distance, sent his servant to inquire whether any thing was amiss, v. 25, 26. The questions were particular, *Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?* Note, It will become the men of God, with tenderness and concern, to inquire about the welfare of their friends, and their families; the answer was general, *It is well*. Gehazi was not the man that she came to complain to, and therefore she puts him off with this; she said little, and little said is soon amended, Ps. 39. 1, 2. but what she did say was very patient; "It is well with me, with my husband, with the child"—all well, and yet the child dead in the house. Note, When God calls away our dearest relations by death, it becomes us quietly to say, "It is well both with us and them;" it is well, for all is well that God does; all is well with them that are gone, if they are gone to heaven, and all well with us that stay behind, if by the affliction we are furthered in our way thither.

3. When she came to the prophet, she humbly reasoned with him concerning her present affliction; she threw herself at his feet, as one troubled and in grief, which she never shewed till she came to him, who, she believed, could help her, v. 27. When her passion would do her service, she knew how to discover it, as well as how to conceal it; when it would do her disservice. Gehazi knew his master would not be pleased to see her lie at his feet, and therefore would have raised her up; but Elisha waited to hear from her, since he might not know immediately from God, what was the cause of her trouble. God discovered things to his prophets, as he saw fit, not always as they desired; God did not shew this to the prophet, because he might know it from the good woman herself. What she said was very pathetic; she appeals to the prophet, (1.) Concerning her indifference to this mercy which was now taken from her; "*Did I desire a son of my lord?*" No, thou knowest I did not; it was thine own proposal, not mine; I did not fret for the want of a son, as Hannah, nor beg, as Rachel, *Give me children, or else I die*." Note, When any creature-comfort is taken from us, it is well, if we can say, through grace, that we did not set our hearts inordinately upon it; for, if we did, we have reason to fear it was given in anger, and taken away in wrath. (2.) Concerning her entire dependence upon the prophet's word, *Did I not say, Do not deceive me?* Yes, she did say so, v. 16. and this reflection upon it may be considered, either, [1.] As quarrelling with the prophet for deceiving her; she was ready to think herself mocked with the mercy, when it was soon removed, and that it had been better she had never had this child, than to be deprived of him, when she began to have comfort in him. Note, The loss of a mercy should not make us undervalue the gift of it; or, [2.] As pleading with the prophet for the raising of the child to life again; *I said, Do not deceive me*, and I know thou wilt not. Note, However the providence of God may disappoint us, we may be sure the promise of God never did, nor ever will, deceive us: hope in that will not make us ashamed.

III. The raising of the child to life again; we may suppose that the woman gave Elisha a more express account of the child's death, and he gave her a more express promise of his resurrection, than is here related, where we are briefly told,

1. That Elisha sent Gehazi to go, in all haste, to the dead child, gave him his staff, and bade him lay that on the face of the child, v. 29. I know not what to make of this; Elisha knew that Elijah raised the dead child with a very close application, stretching himself upon the child, and praying again and again; and could he think to raise this child by so slight a ceremony as this, especially when nothing hindered him from coming himself? Shall such a power as this be delegated, and to no better a man than Gehazi? Bishop Hall suggests that it was done out of human conceit, and not by divine instinct, and therefore it failed of the effect; God will not have such great favours made too cheap, nor shall they be too easily come by, lest they be undervalued.

2. The woman resolves not to go back without the prophet himself, v. 30. *I will not leave thee*. She had no great expectation from the staff, she will have the hand, and she was in the right of it; perhaps it was intended hereby to teach us not to put that confidence in creatures that are servants, which the power of the Creator, their Master and our's, will alone bear the weight of. Gehazi returns *re infecta*—without success, without the tidings of any sign of life in the child, v. 31. *The child is not awaked*, intimating, to the comfort of the mother, that its death was but a sleep, and that he expected it would shortly be awaked. In the raising of dead souls to spiritual life, ministers can do no more by their own power than Gehazi here could; they lay the word, like the prophet's staff, before their faces, but there is neither voice nor hearing, till Christ, by his Spirit, comes himself; the letter alone kills, it is the Spirit that gives life; it is not prophesying upon dry bones, that will put life into them, breath must come from heaven, and breathe upon those slain.

3. The prophet, by earnest prayer, obtains from God the restoring of this dead child to life again; he found the child dead upon his own bed, v. 32. *and shut the door upon them twain*, v. 33. Even the dead child is spoken of as a person, one of the *twain*, for it was still in being, and not lost; he shut out all company, that he might not seem to glory in the power God had given him, or to use it for ostentation, and to be seen of men.

Observe, (1.) How closely the prophet applied himself to this great operation; perhaps being sensible that he had tempted God too much, in thinking to effect it by the staff in Gehazi's hand, for which he thought himself rebuked by the disappointment, he now finds it a harder task than he then thought, and therefore addresses himself to it with great solemnity. [1.] *He prayed unto the Lord*, v. 33. probably as Elijah had done, *Let this child's soul come into him again*. Christ raised the dead to life, as one having authority, *Damsel, arise; Young man, I say unto thee, Arise; Tazarus, come forth*: for he was powerful and faithful as a Son, the Lord of life, but Elijah and Elisha did it by petition as servants. [2.] *He lay upon the child*, v. 34. as if he would communicate to him some of his vital heat or spirits; thus he expressed the earnestness of his desire, and gave a sign of that divine power which he depended upon for the accomplishment of this great work. He first *put his mouth to the child's mouth*, as if, in God's name, he would breathe into him the breath of life, then *his eyes to the child's eyes*, to open them again to the light of life, then *his hands to the child's hands*, to put strength into them. He then *returned, and walked in the house*, as one full of care and concern, and wholly intent upon what he was about; then he went up stairs again, and, the second time, *stretched himself upon the child*, v. 35. Those that would be instrumental in conveying spiritual life to dead souls, must thus affect themselves with their case, and accommodate themselves to it, and labour fervently in prayer for them.

(2.) How gradually the operation was performed; at the first application, *the flesh of the child waxed warm*, v. 34. which gave the prophet encouragement to continue instant in prayer; after a while, *the child sneezed seven times*, which was an indication, not only of life, but liveliness. Some have reported it as an ancient tradition, That when God breathed into Adam the breath of life, the first evidence of his being alive, was, sneezing, which gave rise to the usage of paying respect to those that sneeze. Some

observe here, that sneezing clears the head, and there lay the child's distemper.

(3.) How joyfully the child was returned alive to his mother, *v. 36, 37.* and all parties concerned *were not a little comforted*, *Acts, 20. 12.* See the power of God, who kills and makes alive again: see the power of prayer; as it has the key of the clouds, so it has the key of death: see the power of faith; that fixed law of nature (that death is a way whence there is no returning) shall rather be dispensed with, than this believing Shunammite shall be disappointed.

38. And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and *there was* a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets *were* sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. 39. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred *them* into the pot of pottage: for they knew *them* not. 40. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, *there is death in the pot.* And they could not eat *thereof.* 41. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast *it* into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot. 32. And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. 43. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave *thereof.* 44. So he set *it* before them, and they did eat, and left *thereof*, according to the word of the LORD.

We have here Elisha, in this place, in his element, among the sons of the prophets, teaching them, and, as a father, providing for them; and happy it was for them that they had one over them who naturally cared for their state, under whom they were well fed, and well taught. There was a dearth in the land, for the wickedness of them that dwelt therein, the same that we read of, *ch. 8. 1.* It continued seven years, just as long again as that in Elijah's time; a famine of bread there was, but not of hearing the word of God, for Elisha had the sons of the prophets sitting before him, to hear his wisdom, who were taught, that they might teach others. Two instances we have here of the care he took about their meat. Christ twice fed those whom he preached to; Elisha was in the more care about it now, because of the dearth, that the sons of the prophets might not be ashamed in this evil time, but, even in *the days of famine, might be satisfied*, *Ps. 37. 19.*

I. He made hurtful food to become safe and wholesome.

1. On the lecture-day, the sons of the prophets being all to attend, he ordered his servant to provide food for their bodies, while he was breaking to them the bread of life for their souls; whether there was any flesh-meat for them, does not appear; he orders only that pottage should be seethed for them of herbs, *v. 38.* The sons of the prophets should be examples of temperance and mortification, not desirous of dainties, but content with

plain food: if they have neither savoury meats, nor sweet meats, nay, if a mess of pottage be all the dinner, let them remember that this great prophet entertained himself and his guests no better.

2. One of the servitors, that was sent to gather herbs, (which, it should seem, must serve instead of flesh for the pottage,) by mistake, brought in that which was noxious, or, at least, very nauseous, and shred it into the pottage, *wild gourds* they are called, *v. 39.* Some think it was *coloquintida*, an herb strongly cathartic, and, if not qualified, dangerous. The sons of the prophets, it seems, were better skilled in divinity than in natural philosophy, and read their Bibles more than their Herbals. If any of the fruits of the earth be hurtful, we must look upon it as an effect of the curse, (*Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee*,) for the original blessing made all good.

3. The guests complained to Elisha of the unwholesomeness of their food. Nature has given man the sense of tasting, not only that wholesome food may be pleasant, but that that which is unwholesome may be discovered before it comes to the stomach; the mouth tries meat by tasting it, *Job, 12. 11.* This pottage was soon found, by the taste of it, to be dangerous, so that they cried out, *There is death in the pot, v. 40.* The table often becomes a snare, and that which should be for our welfare proves a trap, which is a good reason why we should not feed ourselves without fear; when we are receiving the supports and comforts of life, we must keep up an expectation of death, and a fear of sin.

4. Elisha immediately cured the bad taste, and prevented the bad consequences, of this unwholesome pottage; as, before, he had healed the bitter waters with salt, so, now, the bitter broth with meal, *v. 41.* It is probable that there was meal in it before, but that was put in by a common hand, only to thicken the pottage; this was the same thing, but cast in by Elisha's hand, and with intent to heal the pottage; by which it appears that the change was not owing to the meal, (that was the sign only, not the means,) but to the divine power. Now all was well, not only no death, but no harm, in the pot; we must acknowledge God's goodness in making our food wholesome and nourishing; *I am the Lord that healeth thee.*

II. He made a little food to go a great way.

1. Elisha had a present brought him of twenty barley-loaves and some ears of corn, *v. 42.* a present which, in those ages, would not be despicable at any time, but now in a special manner valuable, when there was a dearth in the land. It is said to be of *the first-fruits*, which was God's due out of their increase; and when the priests and Levites were all at Jerusalem, out of their reach, the religious people among them, with good reason, looked upon the prophets as God's receivers, and brought their first-fruits to them, which helped to maintain their schools.

2. Having freely received, he freely gave, ordering it all to be set before the sons of the prophets, reserving none for himself, none for hereafter, *Let the morrow take thought for the things of itself*, give it all to the people that they may eat; it well becomes the men of God to be generous and open-handed, and the fathers of the prophets to be liberal to the sons of the prophets.

3. Though the loaves were little, it is likely, no more than what one man would ordinarily eat at a meal, yet with twenty of them he satisfied 100 men, *v. 43, 44.* His servant thought that to set so little meat before so many men was but to tantalize them, and shame his master for making so great an invitation to such short commons; but he, in God's name, pronounced it a full meal for them, and so it proved; they did eat, and left thereof, not because their stomachs failed them, but because the bread increased in the eating; God has promised his church, *Ps. 132. 15. that he will abundantly bless her provision, and satisfy her poor with bread*; for, whom he feeds he fills, and what he blesses comes to much, as what he blows upon comes to little. *Hagg. 1. 9.* Christ's feeding his hearers was a miracle far beyond this, but both teach us, that those who wait upon God in the way of duty may hope to be both protected and supplied by a particular care of Divine Providence.

CHAP. V.

Two more of Elisha's miracles are recorded in this chapter. I. The cleansing of Naaman, a Syrian, a stranger, from his leprosy, and there, 1. The badness of his case, v. 1. 2. The providence that brought him to Elisha, the intelligence given him by a captive-maid, v. 2. 3. A letter from the king of Syria to the king of Israel, to introduce him, v. 5. 4. And the invitation Elisha sent him, v. 8. 5. The method prescribed for his cure; his submission, after objecting to that method, and his cure thereby, v. 9. 6. 14. 4. The grateful acknowledgments he made to Elisha, hereupon, v. 15. 7. 11. The smiting of Gehazi, his own servant, with that leprosy. 1. Gehazi's sins, which were, belying his master to Naaman, v. 20. 2. 24. and lying to his master when he examined him, v. 25. 2. His punishment for this sin, Naaman's leprosy was entailed on his family, v. 26. 27. And, if Naaman's cure was typical of the calling of the Gentiles, as our Saviour seems to make it, Luke, 4. 27. Gehazi's stroke may be looked upon as typical of the blinding and rejecting of the Jews, who envied God's grace to the Gentiles, as Gehazi envied Elisha's favour to Naaman.

1. **N**OW Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, *but he was a leper*. 2. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid: and she waited on Naaman's wife. 3. And she said unto her mistress, Would God, my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. 4. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. 5. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand *pieces* of gold, and ten changes of raiment. 6. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have *therewith* sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. 7. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, *Am I God*, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore, consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh to quarrel against me. 8. And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

Our Saviour's miracles were intended for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet one, like a crumb, fell from the table to a woman of Canaan; so, this one miracle Elisha wrought for Naaman, a Syrian; for God does good to all, and will have all men to be saved. Here is,

I. The great affliction Naaman was under, in the midst of all his honours, v. 1. He was a great man, in a great place; not only rich and raised, but particularly happy for two things: 1. That he had been very serviceable to his country, God made him so: *by him the Lord had often given deliverance to Syria,*

success in their wars even with Israel. The preservation and prosperity even of those that do not know God and serve him, must be ascribed to him, for *he is the Saviour of all men*, but especially of them that believe. Let Israel know, that, when the Syrians prevailed, it was from the Lord. 2. That he was very acceptable to his prince, was his favourite, and prime-minister of state; so great was he, so high, so honourable, and a mighty man of valour; but he was a leper, was under that loathsome disease, which made him a burthen to himself. Note, (1.) No man's greatness, or honour, or interest, or valour, or victory, can set him out of the reach of the sorest calamities of human life; there is many a sickly crazy body under rich and gay clothing. (2.) Every man has some *but* or other in his character, something that blemishes and diminishes him, some allay to his grandeur, some damp to his joy; he may be very happy, very good, yet, in something or other, not so good as he should be, nor so happy as he would be. Naaman was as great as the world could make him, and yet (as Bishop Hall expresses it) the basest slave in Syria would not change skins with him.

II. The notice that was given him of Elisha's power, by a little maid that waited on his lady, v. 2, 3. This maid was, by birth, an Israelite, providentially carried captive into Syria, and there preferred into Naaman's family, where she publishes Elisha's fame, to the honour of Israel, and Israel's God. The unhappy dispersing of the people of God has sometimes proved the happy occasion of the diffusion of the knowledge of God, Acts, 8. 4. This little maid, 1. As became a true-born Israelite, consulted the honour of her country, could give an account, though but a girl, of the famous prophet they had among them; children should betimes acquaint themselves with the wondrous works of God, that, wherever they go, they may have them to talk of. See Ps. 8. 2. 2. As became a good servant, she desired the health and welfare of her master, though she was a captive, a servant by force; much more should servants of choice seek their masters' good; the Jews in Babylon were to seek the peace of the land of their captivity, Jer. 29. 7. *Elisha had not cleansed any lepers in Israel*, (Luke, 4. 27.) yet this little maid, from the other miracles he had wrought, infers that he *could* cure her master, and, from his common beneficence, infers that he *would* do it, though he was a Syrian. Servants may be blessings to the families where they are, by telling what they know of the glory of God, and the honour of his prophets.

III. The application which the king of Syria, hereupon, made to the king of Israel on Naaman's behalf. Naaman took notice of the intelligence, though given by a simple maid, and did not despise it for the sake of her meanness, when it tended to his bodily health; he did not say, "The girl talks like a fool; how can any prophet of Israel do that for me, which all the physicians of Syria have attempted in vain?" Though he neither loved nor honoured the Jewish nation, yet, if one of that nation can but cure him of his leprosy, he will thankfully acknowledge the obligation. Oh that they who are spiritually diseased would hearken thus readily to the tidings brought them of the great Physician!

See what Naaman did, upon this little hint, 1. He would not send for the prophet to come to him, but such honour would he pay to one who had so much of a divine power with him as to be able to cure diseases, that he would go to him himself, though he himself was sickly, unfit for society, the journey long, and the country an enemy's; princes, he thinks, must stoop to prophets, when they need them. 2. He would not go in disguise, though his errand proclaimed his loathsome disease, but went in state, and with a great retinue, to do the more honour to the prophet. 3. He would not go empty-handed, but took with him gold, silver, and raiment, to present to his physician; those that have wealth, and want health, shew which they reckon the more valuable blessing; what will they not give for ease, and strength, and soundness of body! 4. He would not go without a letter to the king of Israel from the king his master, who did himself earnestly desire his recovery; he knows not where in Samaria to find this wonder-working prophet, but takes it for granted the king knows

where to find him; and, to engage the prophet to do his utmost for Naaman, he will go to him, supported with the interest of two kings. If the king of Syria must *intreat* his help, he hopes the king of Israel, being his liege lord, may *command* it: the gifts of the subject must all be (he thinks) for the service and honour of the prince, and therefore he desires the king that he would *recover the leper*, v.6. taking it for granted that there was a greater intimacy between the king and the prophet than really there was.

IV. The alarm this gave to the king of Israel, v.7. He apprehended there was in this letter, 1. A great affront upon God, and therefore he rent his clothes, according to the custom of the Jews, when they heard or read that which they thought blasphemous; and what less could it be, than to attribute to him a divine power? "*Am I a God, to kill whom I will, and make alive whom I will?*" No, I pretend not to such an authority;" (Nebuchadnezzar did, as we find, Dan.5.19.) "*Am I a God, to kill with a word, and make alive with a word?*" No, I pretend not to such a power." Thus this great man, this bad man, is made to own that he is but a man. Why did he not, with this consideration, correct himself for his idolatry, and reason thus: "Shall I worship those as gods that can neither kill nor make alive; can *do neither good nor evil*?" 2. A bad design upon himself; he appeals to those about him for this, "*See how he seeketh a quarrel against me;*" he requires me to recover the leper, and if I do not, though I cannot, he will make that a pretence to wage war with me," which he suspects the rather, because Naaman was his general. Had he rightly understood the meaning of the letter, that, when the king wrote to him to recover the leper, he meant, that he would take care he might be recovered, he had not been in this fright. Note, We often create a great deal of uneasiness to ourselves, by misinterpreting the words and actions of others that are well intended; it is charity to ourselves, to think no evil. If he had bethought himself of Elisha, and his power, he would easily have understood the letter, and have known what he had to do, but he is put into this confusion, by making himself a stranger to the prophet; the captive maid had him more in her thoughts than the king had.

V. The proffer which Elisha made of his service; he was willing to do anything to make his prince easy, though he was neglected, and his former good services forgotten, by him: hearing on what occasion the king had rent his clothes, he sent to him, to let him know, that, if his patient would come to him, he should not lose his labour, v.8. *he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel;* (and it were sad with Israel if there were not;) that there is a prophet in Israel, who can do that which the king of Israel dares not attempt, which the prophets of Syria cannot pretend to; it was not for his own honour, but for the honour of God, that he coveted to make them all know *that there was a prophet in Israel*, though obscure and overlooked.

9. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. 10. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean. 11. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. 12. *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?* may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. 13. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee *do some great thing*, wouldest thou

not have done *it*? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? 14. Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

We have here the cure of Naaman's leprosy.

I. The short and plain direction which the prophet gave him, with assurance of success. Naaman designed to do honour to Elisha, when he came in his chariot, and with all his retinue, to Elisha's door, v.9. They that shewed little respect to prophets at other times, when they needed them, were very complaisant to them; he attended at Elisha's door as a beggar for an alms. They that would be cleansed from their spiritual leprosy, must wait at *Wisdom's gate, and watch at the posts of her doors*. Naaman expected to have his compliment returned, but Elisha gave him his answer without any formality, would not go to the door to him, lest he should seem too much pleased with the honour done him, but sent a messenger to him, saying, *Go, wash in Jordan seven times*, and promising him, that, if he did so, his disease should be cured. The promise was express, *Thou shalt be clean*; the method prescribed was plain, *Go, wash in Jordan*; this was not intended as any means of the cure; though cold bathing is recommended by many as a very wholesome thing; yet some think that in the case of a leprosy it was rather hurtful; but it was intended as a sign of the cure, and a trial of his obedience; they that will be helped of God, must do as they are bidden. But why did Elisha send a messenger to him with these directions? 1. Because he was retired, at this time, for devotion, was intent upon his prayers for the cure, and would not be diverted; or, 2. Because he knew Naaman to be a proud man, and he would let him know, that, before the great God, all men stand upon the same level.

II. Naaman's disgust at the method prescribed, because it was not what he expected; two things disgusted him. 1. That Elisha, as he thought, put a slight upon his person, in sending him orders by a servant, and not coming to him himself, v.11. Being big with the expectations of a cure, he had been fancying how this cure would be wrought, and the scheme he had laid was this, "*He will surely come out to me*, that is the least he can do to me, a peer of Syria, to me that am come to him in all this state, to me that have so often been victorious over Israel; *he will stand*, and *call on the name of his God*, and name me in his prayer, and then he will *wave his hand over the place*, and so effect the cure;" and, because the thing is not done just thus, he falls into a passion, forgetting, (1.) That he was a leper, and the law of Moses, which Elisha would religiously observe, shut those out from society; a leper, and therefore he ought not to insist upon the punctilios of honour. Note, Many have hearts unhumbléd under humbling providences; see Numb.12.14. (2.) That he was a petitioner, suing for a favour which he could not demand; and beggars must not be choosers, patients must not prescribe to their physician. See in Naaman the folly of pride; a cure will not content him, unless he be cured with ceremony, with a great deal of pomp and parade; he scorns to be healed, unless he be humoured. 2. That Elisha, as he thought, put a slight upon his country; he took it hard that he must be sent to wash in Jordan, a river of Israel, when he thought *Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel*. How magnificently does he speak of these two rivers that watered Damascus, which soon after fell into one, called by geographers *Chrysoroas—the golden stream*. How scornfully does he speak of all the waters of Israel, though God had called the land of Israel *the glory of all lands*, and particularly for its *brooks of waters*, Deut.8.7. So common it is for God and man to differ in their judgments. How slightly does he speak of the prophet's directions! *May I not wash in them, and be clean?* He might wash in them, and be clean from dirt, but not wash in them, and be clean from leprosy. He was angry

that the prophet bade him wash, and be clean; he thought that the prophet must do all, and is not pleased that he is bidden to do any thing; or he thinks this too cheap, too plain, too common, a thing for so great a man to be cured by; or he did not believe it would at all effect the cure, or, if it would, what medicinal virtue was there in Jordan more than in the rivers of Damascus? But he did not consider, (1.) That Jordan belonged to Israel's God, from whom he was to expect the cure, and not from the gods of Damascus; it watered the Lord's land, the holy land, and, in a miraculous cure, relation to God was much more considerable than the depth of the channel, or the beauty of the stream. (2.) That Jordan had more than once, before this, obeyed the commands of Omnipotence; it had, of old, yielded a passage to Israel, and, of late, to Elijah and Elisha, and therefore was fitter for such a purpose than those rivers which had only observed the common law of their creation, and had never been thus distinguished; but, above all, Jordan was the river appointed, and, if he expected a cure from the divine power, he ought to acquiesce in the divine will, without asking why or wherefore. Note, It is common for those that are wise in their own conceits, to look with contempt on the dictates and prescriptions of divine wisdom, and to prefer their own fancies before them; they that are for *establishing their own righteousness*, will not submit to the righteousness of God, Rom. 10. 3.

Naaman talked himself into such a heat, (as passionate men usually do,) that he turned away from the prophet's door in a rage, ready to swear he would never have any thing more to say to Elisha; and who then would be the loser? Note, *They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercies*, Jonah, 2. 8. Proud men are the worst enemies to themselves, and forego their own redemption.

III. The modest advice which his servants gave him, to observe the prophet's prescriptions, with an implied reproof of his resentments, v. 13. Though, at other times, they kept their distance, and now *saw him in a passion*, yet, knowing him to be a *man* that would hear reason, at any time, and from any body, (a good character of great men, and a very rare one,) they drew near, and made bold to argue the matter a little with him. They had conceived a great opinion of the prophet, (having, perhaps, heard more of him from the common people, whom they had conversed with, than Naaman had heard from the king and courtiers, whom he had conversed with,) and therefore begged of him to consider; *If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing*, had ordered thee into a tedious course of physic, or to submit to some painful operation, blistering, or cupping, or salivating, *Wouldst thou not have done it?* No doubt, thou wouldst. And wilt thou not submit to so easy a method as this, *Wash, and be clean?*

Observe, 1. His own servants gave him this reproof and counsel, which was no more disparagement to him, than that he had intelligence of one that could cure him, from his wife's maid, v. 2. Note, It is a great mercy to have those about us, that will be free with us, and faithfully tell us of our faults and follies, though they be our inferiors. Masters must be willing to hear reason from their servants. Job, 31. 13, 14. As we should be deaf to the counsel of the ungodly, though given by the greatest and most venerable names, so we should have our ear open to good advice, though brought us by those who are much below us: no matter who speaks, if it be well said.

2. The reproof was very modest and respectful; they call him *Father*; for servants must honour and obey their masters with a kind of filial affection. In giving reproof and counsel, we must make it appear that it comes from love and true honour, and that we intend, not reproach, but reformation.

3. It was very rational and considerate. If the rude and unthinking servants had stirred up their master's angry resentment, and offered to avenge his quarrel upon the prophet, who (he thought) affronted him, how mischievous had the consequences been! Fire from heaven, probably, upon them all! But they, to our great surprise, took the prophet's part. Elisha, though, it is likely, he perceived that what he had said had put Naaman out

of humour, did not care to pacify him: it was at his peril, if he persisted in his wrath: but his servants are made use of by Providence to reduce him to temper. They reason with him, (1.) From his earnest desire of a cure; *Wouldst thou not do any thing?* Note, When diseased sinners are come to this, that they are content to do any thing, to submit to any thing, to part with any thing, for a cure, then, and not till then, we begin to indulge some hopes of them. Then they will take Christ on his own terms, when they are made willing to have Christ upon any terms. (2.) From the easiness of the method prescribed; it is but, *Wash, and be clean*. It is but trying; the experiment is cheap and easy, it can do no hurt, but may do good. Note, The methods prescribed for the healing of the leprosy of sin are so plain, that we are utterly inexcusable if we do not observe them. It is but, "Believe, and be saved," "Repent, and be pardoned," "Wash, and be clean."

4. The cure effected, in the use of the means prescribed, v. 14. Naaman, upon second thoughts, yielded to make the experiment, yet, it should seem, with no great faith or resolution; for whereas the prophet bade him wash in Jordan seven times, he did but dip himself so many times, as lightly as he could. However, God is pleased so far to honour himself and his word, as to make that effectual. *His flesh came again like the flesh of a child*, to his great surprise and joy. This, men get by yielding to the will of God, by attending to his institutions. His being cleansed by washing, put an honour on the law for cleansing lepers: God will magnify his word above all his name.

15. And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that *there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel*: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. he said, *As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none*. And he urged him to take it; but he refused. 17. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burthen of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. 18. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, *that* when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing. 19. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way.

Of the ten lepers that our Saviour cleansed, the only one that returned to give thanks was a Samaritan, Luke, 17. 16. This Syrian did so, who here bespeaks himself,

I. Convinced of the power of the God of Israel, not only that he is God, but that he is God alone, and that indeed *there is no God in all the earth but in Israel*, v. 15. A noble confession! but such as bespeaks the misery of the Gentile world; for the nations that had many gods really had no God, but were without God in the world. He had formerly thought the gods of Syria gods indeed, but now experience had rectified his mistake, and he knew Israel's God was God alone, the sovereign Lord of all. Had he seen other lepers cleansed, perhaps it had not convinced him, but the mercy of the cure affected him more than the miracle of it. Those are best able to speak of the power of divine grace, who have themselves experienced it.

II. Grateful to Elisha the prophet: "Therefore, for his sake

whose servant thou art, I have a present for thee, silver, and gold, and raiment, whatever thou wilt please to accept." He valued the cure, not by the easiness of it to the prophet, but the acceptableness of it to himself, and would gladly pay for it accordingly. But Elisha generously refused the fee, though urged to accept it; and, to prevent further importunity, backed his refusal with an oath, *As the Lord liveth, I will receive none*, v. 16. not because he did not need it, for he was poor enough, and knew what to do with it, and how to bestow it among the sons of the prophets; nor because he thought it unlawful, for he received presents from others; but he would not be beholden to this Syrian, nor should he say, *I have made Elisha rich*, Gen. 14. 23. It would be much for the honour of God, to shew this new convert, that the servants of the God of Israel were taught to look upon the wealth of this world with a holy contempt, which would confirm him in his belief, that *there is no God but in Israel*. See 1 Cor. 9. 18. 2 Cor. 11. 9.

III. Proselyted to the worship of the God of Israel. He will not only offer a sacrifice to the Lord, in thanks for his present cure, but he resolves he will never offer sacrifice to any other gods, v. 17. It was a happy cure of his leprosy which cured him of his idolatry, a more dangerous disease. But here are two instances of his weakness and infirmity, in his conversion.

1. In one instance, he over-did it, that he would not only worship the God of Israel, but he would have clods of earth out of the prophet's garden, or, at least, of the prophet's ordering, to *make an altar of*, v. 17. He that, a while ago, had spoken very slightly of the *waters of Israel*, v. 12. now is in another extreme, and overvalues the *earth of Israel*, supposing (since God appointed *altars of earth*, Exod. 20. 24.) an altar of that earth would be most acceptable to him; not considering that all *the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*. Or, perhaps, the transport of his affection and veneration for the prophet, not only upon the account of his power, but of his virtue and generosity, made him, as we say, love the very ground he went upon, and desire to have some of it home with him. The modern compliment, equivalent to this, would be, "Pray, sir, let me have your picture."

2. In another instance, he under-did it, that he reserved to himself a liberty to bow in the house of Rimmon, in complaisance to the king his master, and according to the duty of his place at court, v. 18. *in this thing* he must be excused. He owns he ought not to do it, but that he cannot otherwise keep his place: protests his bowing is not, nor ever shall be, as it had been, in honour to the idol, but only in honour to the king; and therefore he hopes God will forgive him. Perhaps, all things considered, this might admit of some apology, though it was not altogether justifiable. But, as to us, I am sure, (1.) If, in covenanting with God, we make a reservation for any known sin, which we will continue to indulge ourselves in, that reservation is a defeasance of his covenant. We must cast away all our transgressions, and not except any house of Rimmon. (2.) Though we are encouraged to pray for the remission of the sins we have committed, yet, if we ask for a dispensation to go on in any sin for the future, we mock God, and deceive ourselves. (3.) Those that know not how to quit a place at court, when they cannot keep it without sinning against God, and wronging their consciences, do not rightly value the divine favour. (4.) Those that truly hate evil will make conscience of abstaining from all appearances of evil. Though Naaman's dissembling of his religion cannot be approved, yet, because his promise to offer no sacrifice to any god, but the God of Israel only, was a great point gained with a Syrian, and because, by asking pardon in this matter, he shewed such a degree of conviction and ingenuousness, as gave hopes of improvement, the prophet took fair leave of him, and bid him *Go in peace*, v. 19. Young converts must be tenderly dealt with.

20. But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which

he brought: but, *as the Lord liveth*, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. 21. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw *him* running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, *Is all well?* 22. And he said, *All is well*. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. 23. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid *them* upon two of his servants; and they bare *them* before him. 24. And when he came to the tower, he took *them* from their hand, and bestowed *them* in the house; and he let the men go, and they departed. 24. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. 26. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart *with thee*, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? *Is it* a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vine-yards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants? 27. The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper *as white as snow*.

Naaman, a Syrian, a courtier, a soldier, had many servants, and we read how wise and good they were, v. 13. Elisha, a holy prophet, a man of God, has but one servant, and he proves a base liar. They that heard of Elisha at a distance, honoured him, and got good by what they heard; but he that stood continually before him, to hear his wisdom, had no good impressions made upon him, either by his doctrine or miracles. One would expect that Elisha's servant should be a saint, (even Ahab's servant, Obadiah, was,) but even Christ himself had a Judas among his followers. The means of grace cannot give grace. The best men, the best ministers, have often had those about them that have been their grief and shame. The nearer the church, the further from God. *Many come from the east and west, to sit down with Abraham, when the children of the kingdom shall be cast out*. Here is,

1. Gehazi's sin. It was a complicated sin.

1. The love of money, that root of all evil, was at the bottom of it. His master contemned Naaman's treasures, but he coveted them, v. 20. His heart (says Bishop Hall) was packed up in Naaman's chests, and he must run after him to fetch it. Multitudes, by coveting worldly wealth, have *erred from the faith*, and *pierced themselves with many sorrows*.

2. He blamed his master for refusing Naaman's present, condemned him as foolish, in not taking gold when he might have it, envied and grudged at his kindness and generosity to this stranger, though it was for the good of his soul. In short, he thinks himself wiser than his master.

3. When Naaman, like a person of accomplished manners, alighted from his chariot, to meet him, v. 21. he told him a deliberate lie, that his master sent him to him, and so he received that courtesy to himself which Naaman intended to his master.

4. He abused his master, and basely misrepresented him to Naaman, as one that had soon repented of his generosity, that was fickle, and did not know his own mind, that would say and *unsay*, swear and unswear, that would not do an honourable thing.

but he must presently undo it again. His story of the two sons of the prophets was as silly as it was false; if he would have begged a token for two young scholars, surely less than a talent of silver might serve them.

5. There was danger of his alienating Naaman from that holy religion which he had espoused, and lessening his good opinion of it. He would be ready to say, as Paul's enemies suggested concerning him, 2 Cor. 12. 16, 17. that, though Elisha himself did not burthen him, yet, being crafty, he caught him with guile, sending those that made a gain of him. We hope that he understood afterward that Elisha's hand was not in it, and that Gehazi was forced to restore what he had unjustly got, else it might have driven him to his idols again.

6. His seeking to conceal what he had unjustly got, added much to his sin. (1.) He hid it, as Achan did his gain, by sacrilege, in the tower, a secret place, a strong place, till he had an opportunity of laying it out, v. 24. Now he thought himself sure of it, and applauded his own management of a fraud, by which he had imposed, not only upon the prudence of Naaman, but upon Elisha's spirit of discerning, as Ananias and Sapphira upon the apostles. (2.) He denied it: he *went in, and stood before his master*, ready to receive his orders; none looked more observant of his master, though really none more injurious to him; he thought, as Ephraim, *I am become rich, but they shall find no iniquity in me*, Hos. 12. 8. His master asked him where he had been. "No where, sir," (said he,) "out of the house." Note, One lie commonly begets another: the way of that sin is down-hill, therefore dare to be true.

II. The punishment of this sin. Elisha immediately called him to account for it; and observe,

1. How he was convicted. He thought to impose upon the prophet, but was soon given to understand that the Spirit of prophecy could not be deceived, and that it was in vain to lie to the Holy Ghost. Elisha could tell him, (1.) What he had done, though he had denied it. "Thou sayest thou wentest no whither; but *went not my heart with thee?*" v. 26. Was Gehazi yet to learn that prophets had spiritual eyes? or, could he think to hide any thing from a seer, from him with whom the secret of the Lord was? Note, It is folly to presume upon sin, in hopes of secrecy. When thou goest aside into any by-path, does not thy own conscience go with thee? Does not the eye of God go with thee? *He that covers his sin shall not prosper*; particularly, *a lying tongue is but for a moment*, Prov. 12. 19. Truth will transpire, and often comes to light strangely, to the confusion of those that make lies their refuge. (2.) What he designed, though he kept that in his own breast. He could tell him the very thoughts and intents of his heart, that he was projecting, now that he had got these two talents, to purchase ground and cattle, to leave Elisha's service, and to set up for himself. Note, All the foolish hopes and contrivances of carnal worldlings are open before God. And he tells him also the evil of it, "*Is it a time to receive money?*" Is this an opportunity of enriching thyself? Couldst thou find no better a way of getting money, than by belying thy master, and laying a stumbling-block before a young convert? Note, Those that are for getting wealth at any time, and by any ways and means whatsoever, right or wrong, lay themselves open to a great deal of temptation. They that will be rich, (*per fas, per nefas*; *rem, rem, quocunque modo rem*—*by fair means, by foul means*; *careless of principle, intent only on money*;) *drown themselves in destruction and perdition*, 1 Tim. 6. 9. War, and fire, and plague, and shipwreck, are not, as many make them, times to get money by. It is not a time to increase our wealth when we cannot do it but in such ways as are dishonourable to God and religion, or injurious to our brethren or the public.

2. How he was punished for it. *The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to thee*, v. 27. If he will have his money, he shall take his disease with it, *Transit cum onere*—*It passes with this encumbrance*. He was contriving to entail lands upon his posterity; but, instead of them, entails a loathsome disease on the heirs of his body, from generation to generation. The sentence was immediately executed on himself; no sooner said than done, he *went out from his pre-*

sence a leper as white as snow. Thus he is stigmatized, and made infamous, and carries the mark of his shame wherever he goes: thus he loads himself and family with a curse, which shall not only for the present proclaim his villany, but for ever perpetuate the remembrance of it. Note, *The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death*, Prov. 21. 6. Those who get wealth by fraud and injustice cannot expect either the comfort or the continuance of it. What was Gehazi profited, though he gained his two talents, when thereby he lost his health, his honour, his peace, his service, and, if repentance prevented not, his soul for ever? See Job, 20. 12, &c.

CHAP. VI.

In this chapter, we have, I. A further account of the wondrous works of Elisha. 1. His making iron to swim, v. 1. 7. 2. His disclosing to the king of Israel the secret counsels of the king of Syria, v. 8. 12. 3. His saving himself out of the hands of those who were sent to apprehend him, v. 13. 23. II. The besieging of Samaria by the Syrians, and the great distress the city was reduced to, v. 24. 33. The relief of it is another of the wonders wrought by Elisha's word, which we shall have the story of in the next chapter. Elisha is still a great blessing, both to church and state, both to the sons of the prophets and to his prince.

1. **A**ND the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. 2. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. 3. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. 4. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. 5. But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. 6. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. 7. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.

Several things may be observed here,

1. Concerning the sons of the prophets, and their condition and character. The college here spoken of seems to be that at Gilgal, for there Elisha was, ch. 4. 38. and it was near Jordan; and, probably, wherever Elisha resided, as many as could of the sons of the prophets flocked to him, for the advantage of his instructions, counsels, and prayers. Every one would covet to dwell with him, and be near him. Those that would be teachers should lay out themselves to get the best advantages for learning. Now observe,

1. Their number increased, so that they wanted room. *The place is too strait for us*, v. 1. A good hearing! for it is a sign many are added to them. Elisha's miracles, doubtless, drew in many; perhaps they increased the more, now that Gehazi was cashiered, and, it is likely, an honest man put in his room, to take care of their provisions, for, it should seem, by that instance, ch. 4. 43. that Naaman's case was not the only one in which he grudged his master's generosity.

2. They were humble men, and did not affect that which was gay or great. When they wanted room, they did not speak of sending for cedars, and marble-stones, and curious artificers, but only of getting every man a beam, to run up a plain hut or cottage with. It becomes the sons of the prophets, who profess to look for great things in the other world, to be content with mean things in this.

3. They were poor men, and men that had no interest in great

ones. It was a sign that Joram was king, and Jezebel ruled too, else the sons of the prophets, when they wanted room, would have needed only to apply to the government, not to consult among themselves, about the enlargement of their buildings. God's prophets have seldom been the world's favourites. Nay, so poor were they, that they had not wherewithal to hire workmen, (but must leave their studies, and work for themselves,) no, nor to buy tools, but must borrow of their neighbours. Poverty, then, is no bar to prophecy.

4. They were industrious men, and willing to take pains; they desired not to live like idle drones, (idle *monks*, I might have said,) upon the labours of others, but only desired leave of their president to work for themselves. As the sons of the prophets must not be so taken up with contemplation, as to render themselves unfit for action; so much less must they so indulge themselves in their ease, as to be averse to labour. He that must eat or die, must work or starve, 2 Thess. 3. 8, 10. Let no man think an honest employment either a burthen or a disparagement.

5. They were men that had a great value and veneration for Elisha; though they were themselves prophets, they paid much deference to him. (1.) They would not go about to build at all, without his leave, v. 2. It is good for us all to be suspicious of our own judgment, even when we think we have most reason for it, and to be desirous of the advice of those who are wiser and more experienced; and it is especially commendable in the sons of the prophets, to take their fathers along with them, and to act in all things of moment under their conduct, *permissu superiorum—by permission of their superiors*. (2.) They would not willingly go to fell timber without his company: "*Go with thy servants*, v. 3. not only to advise us in any exigence, but to keep good order among us, that, being under thine eye, we may behave as becomes us." Good disciples desire to be always under good discipline.

6. They were honest men, and men that were in care to give all men their own. When one of them, accidentally fetching too fierce a stroke, (as those that work seldom are apt to be violent,) threw off his axe-head into the water, he did not say, "*It was a mischance, and who can help it? It was the fault of the helve, and the owner deserves to stand to the loss.*" No, he cries out with deep concern, *Alas, master! For it was borrowed*, v. 5. Had the axe been his own, it would only have troubled him, that he could not be further serviceable to his brethren; but now, beside that, it troubles him that he cannot be just to the owner, to whom he ought to be not only just but grateful. Note, We ought to be as careful of that which is borrowed, as of that which is our own, that it receive no damage, because we must love our neighbour as ourselves, and do as we would be done by. It is likely this prophet was poor, and had not wherewithal to pay for the axe, which made the loss of it so much the greater trouble. To those that have an honest mind, the sorest grievance of poverty is, not so much their own want and disgrace, as their being by it rendered unable to pay their just debts.

II. Concerning the father of the prophet Elisha.

1. That he was a man of great condescension and compassion; he went with the sons of the prophets to the woods, when they desired his company, v. 3. Let no man, especially no minister, think himself too great to stoop to do good, but be tender to all.

2. That he was a man of great power; he could make iron to swim, contrary to its nature, v. 6. for the God of nature is not tied up to its laws. He did not throw the helve after the hatchet, but cut down a new stick, and cast it into the river; we need not double the miracle, by supposing that the stick sunk to fetch up the iron, it was enough that it was a signal of the divine summons to the iron to rise. God's grace can thus raise the stony iron heart, which is sunk into the mud of this world, and raise up affections, naturally earthly, to things above.

8. Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place *shall be my camp*. 9. And the

man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. 10. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. 11. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us *is* for the king of Israel? 12. And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that *is* in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber.

Here we have Elisha, with his spirit of prophecy, serving the king, as, before, helping the sons of the prophets; for that, as other gifts, is given to every man to profit withal; and whatever abilities any man has of doing good, he is by them made a debtor both to the wise and unwise. Observe here,

1. How the king of Israel was informed by Elisha of all the designs and motions of his enemy, the king of Syria, more effectually than he could have been by the most vigilant and faithful spies. If the king of Syria, in a secret council of war, determined in what place to make an inroad upon the coasts of Israel, where he thought it would be the greatest surprise, and they would be least able to make resistance, before his forces could receive his orders, the king of Israel had notice of them from Elisha, and so had opportunity of preventing the mischief; and this, many a time, v. 8. . 10. See here, (1.) That the enemies of God's Israel are politic in their devices, and restless in their attempts, against him. *They shall not know, nor see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them*, Neh. 4. 11. (2.) All those devices are known to God, even those that are deepest laid. He knows not only what men do, but what they design, and has many ways of countermining them. (3.) It is a great advantage to us, to be warned of our danger, that we may stand upon our guard against it. The work of God's prophets, is, to give us warning; if, being warned, we do not save ourselves, it is our own fault, and our blood will be upon our own head. The king of Israel would regard the warnings Elisha gave him of his danger by the Syrians, but not the warnings he gave him of his danger by his sins. Such warnings are little heeded by the most; they will save themselves from death, but not from hell.

2. How the king of Syria resented this. He suspected treachery among his senators, and that his counsels were betrayed, v. 11. But one of his servants, that had heard, by Naaman and others, of Elisha's wondrous works, concludes it must needs be he that gave this intelligence to the king of Israel, v. 12. What could not he discover, who could tell Gehazi his thought? Here, a confession of the boundless knowledge, as, before, of the boundless power of Israel's God, is extorted from Syrians. Nothing done, said, thought, by any person, in any place, at any time, is out of the reach of God's cognizance.

13. And he said, Go and spy where he *is*, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, *he is* in Dothan. 14. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. 15. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? 16. And he answered,

Fear not: for they that *be* with us *are* more than they that *be* with them. 17. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. 18. And when they came down to him Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. 19. And Elisha said unto them, This *is* not the way, neither *is* this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. 20. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, *they were* in the midst of Samaria. 21. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite *them*? shall I smite *them*? 22. And he answered, Thou shalt not smite *them*: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. 23. And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

Here is,

I. The great force which the king of Syria sent to seize Elisha. He found out where he was, at Dothan, v.13. which was not far from Samaria; thither he sent a great host, who were to come upon him by night, and to bring him dead or alive, v.14. Perhaps he had heard that when only one captain and his fifty men were sent to take Elijah, they were baffled in the attempt, and therefore he sent an *army* against Elisha, as if the fire from heaven, that consumed fifty men, could not as easily consume 50,000. Naaman could tell him that Elisha dwelt not in any strong-hold, nor was attended with any guards, nor had any such great interest in the people, that he needed to fear a tumult among them; what occasion then was there for this great force? But thus he hoped to make him sure, especially coming upon him by surprise. Foolish man! Did he believe that Elisha had informed the king of Israel of his secret counsels, or not? If not, what quarrel had he with him? If he did, could he be so weak as to imagine that he would not discover the designs laid against himself, and that, having interest enough in heaven to discover them, he would not have interest enough to defeat them? Those that fight against God, his people, and prophets, know not what they do.

II. The grievous fright which the prophet's servant was in, when he perceived the city surrounded by the Syrians, and the effectual course which the prophet took to pacify him, and free him from his fears. It seems Elisha used his servant to rise early, that is the way to bring something to pass, and to do the work of a day in its day. Being up, we may suppose he heard the noise of soldiers, and thereupon looked out, and was aware of an army compassing the city, v.15. with great assurance, no doubt, of success; and that they should have this troublesome prophet in their hands presently. Now observe, 1. What a consternation he was in; he runs straight to Elisha, to bring him an account of it,

"Alas, master," (said he) "*what shall we do?* We are undone; it is to no purpose to think either of fighting or flying, but we must unavoidably fall into their hands." Had he but studied David's psalms, which were then extant, he might have learnt *not to be afraid of ten thousands of people*, Ps. 3. 6. no not of *an host encamped against him*, Ps. 27. 3. Had he considered, that he was embarked with his master, by whom God had done great things, and whom he would not now leave to *fall into the hands of the uncircumcised*, and who, having saved others, no doubt, would save himself, he had not been thus at a loss. If he had only said, *What shall I do?* it had been the more excusable, and like that of the disciples, *Lord, save us, we perish*; but he needed not to put his master in, as in distress, nor to say, *What shall we do?* 2. How his master quieted him, (1.) By word: what he said to him, v. 16. is spoken to all the faithful servants of God, when *without are fightings and within are fears*; "*Fear not*, with that fear which has torment and amazement, *for they that be with us*, to protect us, *are more than they that be against us*, to destroy us; angels, unspeakably more numerous; God, infinitely more powerful." When we are magnifying the causes of our fear, we ought to possess ourselves with clear, and great, and high, thoughts of God, and the invisible world. *If God be for us*, we know what follows, Rom. 8. 31. (2.) By vision, v. 17. [1.] It seems Elisha was much concerned for the satisfaction of his servant. Good men desire, not only to be easy themselves, but to have those about them easy. Elisha had lately parted with his old man, and this, being newly come into his service, had not the advantage of experience; his master was therefore desirous to give him other convincing evidence of that Omnipotence which employed him, and was therefore employed for him. Note, They whose faith is strong, ought tenderly to consider and compassionate those who are weak, and of a timorous spirit, and to do what they can to strengthen their hands. [2.] He saw himself safe, and wished no more than that his servant might see what he saw, a guard of angels round about him; such as were his master's convoy to the gates of heaven were his protectors against the gates of hell; *chariots of fire, and horses of fire*. Fire is both dreadful and devouring; that power which was engaged for Elisha's protection could both terrify and consume the assailants. As angels are God's messengers, so they are his soldiers, his hosts, Gen. 32. 2. his legions, or regiments, Matth. 26. 53. for the good of his people. [3.] For the satisfaction of his servant, there needed no more than the opening of his eyes; *that* therefore he prayed for, and obtained for him, *Lord, open his eyes, that he may see*. The eyes of his body were open, and with them he saw the danger, "Lord, open the eyes of his faith, that with them he may see the protection we are under." Note, *First*, The greatest kindness we can do for those that are fearful and faint-hearted, is, to pray for them, and so to recommend them to the mighty grace of God. *Secondly*, The opening of our eyes will be the silencing of our fears; in the dark we are most apt to be frightened; the clearer sight we have of the sovereignty and power of heaven, the less we shall fear the calamities of this earth.

III. The shameful defeat which Elisha gave to the host of Syrians who came to seize him; they thought to make a prey of him, but he made fools of them, perfectly played with them, so far was he from fearing them, or any damage by them.

1. He prayed to God to smite them with blindness, and they were all struck blind immediately, not stone-blind, nor so as to be themselves aware that they were blind, for they could see the light, but their sight was so altered, that they could not know the persons and places they were before acquainted with, v. 18. They were so confounded, that those among them whom they depended upon for information, did not know this place to be Dothan, nor this person to be Elisha, but *groped at noon-day as in the night*, Isa. 59. 10. Job, 12. 24, 25. their memory failed them, and their distinguishing faculty. See the power of God over the minds and understanding of men, both ways; he enlightened the eyes of Elisha's friend, and darkened the eyes of his foes, that they might see, indeed, but not perceive, Isa. 6. 9. *For this twofold judgment*

Christ came into this world, *that they which see not, might see, and that they which see, might be made blind*, John, 9. 39. a savour of life to some, of death to others.

2. When they were thus bewildered and confounded, he led them to Samaria, v. 19. promising that he would shew them the man whom they sought, and he did so. He did not lie to them, when he told them, *This is not the way, nor is this the city* where Elisha is; for he was now come out of the city; and, if they would see him, they must go to another city, which he would direct them to: they that fight against God and his prophets deceive themselves, and are justly given up to delusions.

3. When he had brought them to Samaria, he prayed to God so to open their eyes, and restore them their memories, that they might see where they were, v. 20. *and, behold*, to their great terror, *they were in the midst of Samaria*, where, it is probable, there was a standing force sufficient to cut them all off, or make them prisoners of war. Satan, the god of this world, blinds mens' eyes, and so deludes them into their own ruin; but, when God enlightens their eyes, they then see themselves in the midst of their enemies, captives to Satan, and in danger of hell, though, before, they thought their condition good. The enemies of God and his church, when they fancy themselves ready to triumph, will find themselves conquered and triumphed over.

4. When he had them at his mercy, he made it appear that he was influenced by a divine goodness as well as a divine power.

(1.) He took care to protect them from the danger into which he had brought them, and was content to shew them what he could have done; he needed not the sword of an angel to *avenge his cause*, the sword of the king of Israel is at his service, if he pleases, v. 21. *My father*, (so respectfully does he now speak to him, though, soon after, he swore his death,) *shall I smite them?* And again, as if he longed for the assault, *Shall I smite them?* Perhaps, he remembered how God was displeased at his father, for *letting go out of his hands* those whom he had put it into his power to destroy, and he would not offend in like manner; yet such a reverence has he for the prophet, that he will not strike a stroke without his commission; but the prophet would by no means suffer him to meddle with them, they were brought hither, to be convinced and ashamed, not to be killed, v. 22. Had they been his prisoners, taken captive by his sword and bow, when they had asked quarter, it had been barbarous to deny, and when he had given it them, it had been perfidious to do them any hurt, and against the law of arms to kill men in cool blood; but they were not his prisoners, they were God's prisoners, and the prophet's, and therefore he must do them no harm; they that humble themselves under God's hand, take the best course to secure themselves.

(2.) He took care to provide for them; he ordered the king to treat them handsomely, and then dismiss them fairly, which he did, v. 23. [1.] It was the king's praise, that he was so obsequious to the prophet, contrary to his inclination, and, as it seemed, to his interest, 1 Sam. 24. 19. Nay, so willing was he to oblige Elisha, that whereas he was ordered only to set *bread and water* before them, (and that is good fare for captives,) he *prepared great provision* for them, for the credit of his court and country, and of Elisha. [2.] It was the prophet's praise, that he was so generous to his enemies, who, though they came to take him, could not but go away admiring him, as both the mightiest and the kindest man they ever met with. The great duty of loving enemies, and doing good to those that hate us, was both commanded in the Old Testament, (Prov. 25. 21, 22. *If thine enemy hunger, feed him*, Exod. 23. 4, 5.) and practised, as here, by Elisha; his predecessor had given a specimen of divine justice, when he called for flames of fire on the heads of his persecutors to consume them, but he gave a specimen of divine mercy, in heaping coals of fire on the heads of his persecutors to melt them; let not us then be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Lastly, The good effect this had, for the present, upon the Syrians; they come no more into the land of Israel, v. 23. namely, upon this errand, to take Elisha; they saw it was to no purpose to attempt that, nor would any of their bands be persuaded to make

an assault on so great and good a man. The most glorious victory over an enemy is to turn him into a friend.

24. And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. 25. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. 26. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. 27. And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barn-floor, or out of the wine-press? 28. And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will eat my son to-morrow. 29. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. 30. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, *he had sackcloth* within upon his flesh. 31. Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day. 32. But Elisha sat in his house; and the elders sat with him; and *the king* sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: *is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?* 33. And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil *is* of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?

This last paragraph of this chapter should, of right, have been the first of the next chapter, for it begins a new story, which is there continued and concluded.

Here is,

I. The siege which the king of Syria laid to Samaria, and the great distress which the city was reduced to thereby; the Syrians had soon forgotten the kindnesses they had lately received in Samaria, and very ungratefully, for aught that appears, without any provocation, seek the destruction of it, v. 24. Those are base spirits that shew no lasting gratitude. The country, we may suppose, was plundered and laid waste, when this capital city was brought to the last extremity, v. 25. The dearth which had of late been in the land, was, probably, the occasion of the emptiness of their stores, or the siege was so sudden, that they had not time to lay in provisions; so that while the sword devoured without, the famine within was more grievous, Lam. 4. 9. for, it should seem, the Syrians designed not to storm the city, but to starve it; so great was the scarcity, that an ass's head, that has but little flesh on it, and that unsavoury, unwholesome, and ceremonially unclean, was sold for five pounds, and a small quantity of fitches, or lentiles, or some such coarse corn, then called *dove's dung*, no more of it than

to go over to the enemy, and throw themselves upon their mercy; if they killed them, better die by the sword than by famine, one death than a thousand: but perhaps they would save them alive, as objects of compassion: common prudence will put us upon that method which may mend our condition, but cannot make it worse. The prodigal son resolves to return to his father, whose displeasure he had reason to fear, rather than perish with hunger in the far country. These lepers conclude, "If they kill us, we shall but die;" and happy they who, in another sense, can thus speak of dying; "We shall but die, that is the worst of it, not die and be damned, not be hurt of the second death." According to this resolution, they went, in the beginning of the night, to the ramp of the Syrians, and, to their great surprise, found it wholly deserted, not a man to be seen or heard in it, v. 5. Providence ordered it, that these lepers came as soon as ever the Syrians were fled, for they fled in the twilight, (the evening twilight,) v. 7. and in the twilight the lepers came, v. 5. and so no time was lost.

2. How they reasoned themselves into a resolution to bring tidings of this to the city; they feasted in the first tent they came to, v. 8. and then began to think of enriching themselves with the plunder; but they correct themselves, v. 9. "*We do not do well,*" to conceal those good tidings from the community we are members of, under colour of being avenged upon them, for excluding us their society; it was the law that did it, not they, and therefore let us bring them the news; though it awake them from sleep, it will be *life from the dead* to them." Their own consciences told them that some mischief would befall them, if they acted separately, and sought themselves only; selfish narrow-spirited people cannot expect to prosper, the most comfortable prosperity is that which our brethren share with us in. According to this resolution, they returned to the gate, and acquainted the sentinel with what they had discovered, v. 10. who straightway brought the intelligence to court, v. 11. and it was never the less acceptable for being first brought by lepers.

12. And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city. 13. And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed;) and let us send and see. 14. They took therefore two chariot-horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see. 15. And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king. 16. And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD. 17. And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him. 18. And it came to pass as the

man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to-morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria: 19. And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof. 20. And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.

Here is,

I. The king's jealousy of a stratagem in the Syrians' retreat, v. 12. he feared they withdrew into an ambush, to draw out the besieged, that they might fall on them with more advantage; he knew he had no reason to expect that God should appear thus wonderfully for him, having forfeited his favour by his unbelief and impatience; he knew no reason the Syrians had to fly, for it does not appear that he or any of his attendants heard the noise of the chariots which the Syrians were frightened at. Let not those who, like him, are *unstable in all their ways, think to receive any thing from God*; nay, a guilty conscience fears the worst, and makes men suspicious.

II. The course they took for their satisfaction, and to prevent their falling into a snare; they sent out spies to see what was become of the Syrians, and found they were all fled indeed, commanders as well as common soldiers; they could track them by the garments which they threw off, and left by the way, for their greater expedition, v. 15. He that gave this advice seems very sensible of the deplorable condition the people were in, v. 13. for, speaking of the horses, many of which were dead, and the rest ready to perish for hunger, he says, and repeats it, *They are as all the multitude of Israel*. Israel used to glory in their multitude, but now they are diminished and brought low; he advised to send five horsemen, but, it should seem, there were only two fit to be sent, and those chariot-horses, v. 14. Now the Lord repented himself concerning his servants, when he saw that their strength was gone, Deut. 32. 36.

III. The plenty that was in Samaria, from the plunder of the camp of the Syrians, v. 16. Had the Syrians been governed by the modern policies of war, when they could not take their baggage and their tents with them, they would rather have burnt them, (as it is common to do with the forage of a country,) than let them fall into their enemies' hands; but God intended that the besieging of Samaria, which was intended for its ruin, should turn to its advantage, and that Israel should now be enriched with the spoil of the Syrians, as of old with those of the Egyptians. Here see, 1. The *wealth of the sinner laid up for the just*, Job, 27. 16, 17. and the spoilers spoiled, Isa. 33. 1. 2. The wants of Israel supplied in a way that they little thought of, which should encourage us to depend upon the power and goodness of God in our greatest straits. 3. The word of Elisha fulfilled, to a tittle, *a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel*; they that spoiled the camp had not only enough to supply themselves with, but an overplus to sell at an easy rate for the benefit of others; and so even *they that tarried at home did divide the spoil*, Ps. 61. 12. Isa. 33. 23. God's promise may be safely relied on, for no word of his shall fall to the ground.

IV. The death of the unbelieving courtier, that questioned the truth of Elisha's word; divine threatenings will as surely be accomplished as divine promises; *He that believeth not shall be damned*, stands as firm as, *He that believeth shall be saved*. This lord, 1. Was preferred by the king to the charge of the gate, v. 17. to keep the peace, and to see that there was no tumult or disorder in dividing and disposing of the spoil; so much trust did the king repose in him, and in his prudence and gravity, and so much did he delight to honour him; he that will be great, let him serve the public. 2. Was trodden to death by the people in the gate, either

by accident, the crowd being exceedingly great, and he in the thickest of it, or perhaps designedly, because he abused his power, and was imperious, in restraining the people from satisfying their hunger: however it was, God's justice was glorified, and the word of Elisha was fulfilled; he saw the plenty, for the silencing and shaming of his unbelief, corn cheap, without *opening windows in heaven*; and therein saw his own folly in prescribing to God: but he did not eat of the plenty he saw; *when he was about to fill his belly, God cast the fury of his wrath upon him*, Job, 20. 23. and it came between the cup and the lip. Justly are those thus tantalized with the world's promises that think themselves tantalized with the promises of God; if believing shall not be seeing, seeing shall not be enjoying.

This matter is repeated, and the event very particularly compared with the prediction, v. 18. 20. that we might take special notice of it, and might learn, (1.) How deeply God resents our distrust of him, and of his power, providence, and promise: when Israel said, *Can God furnish a table? the Lord heard it, and was wroth*. Infinite wisdom will not be limited by our folly: God never promises the end, without knowing where to provide the means. (2.) How uncertain life is, and the enjoyments of it: honour and power cannot secure men from sudden and inglorious deaths; he whom the king leaned upon the people trod upon; he who fancied himself the stay and support of the government is trampled under foot, as the mire in the streets: thus hath the pride of men's glory been often stained. (3.) How certain God's threatenings are, and how sure to alight on the guilty and obnoxious heads; let all men fear before the great God, *who treads upon princes as mortar, and is terrible to the kings of the earth*.

CHAP. VIII.

The passages of story recorded in this chapter oblige us to look back. I. We read, before, of a Shunammite woman that was a kind benefactor to Elisha; now here we are told how she fared the better for it, afterward, in the advice Elisha gave her, and the favour the king shewed her, for his sake, v. 1. 6. II. We read, before, of the designation of Hazael to be king of Syria, (1 Kings, 19. 15.) and here we have an account of his elevation to that throne, and the way he forced for himself to it, by killing his master, v. 7. 15. III. We read, before, of Jehoram's reigning over Judah, in the room of his father Jehoshaphat, (1 Kings, 22. 50.) now here we have a short and sad history of his short and wicked reign, (v. 16. 21.) and the beginning of the history of the reign of his son Ahaziah, v. 25. 29.

I. THEN spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years. 2. And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. 3. And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land. 4. And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. 5. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life. 6. And when the

king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that *was* her's, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now.

Here we have,

I. The wickedness of Israel punished with a long famine, one of God's sore judgments, often threatened in the law; *Canaan, that fruitful land, is turned into barrenness, for the iniquity of them that dwell therein*. The famine in Samaria was soon relieved, by the raising of the siege; but neither that judgment, nor that mercy, had a due influence upon them, and therefore *the Lord calls for another famine*; for, when he judgeth, he will overcome; if lesser judgments do not prevail to bring men to repentance, he will send greater and longer; they are at his beck, and will come when he calls for them. He does, by his ministers, call for reformation and obedience; and, if those calls be not regarded, we may expect he will call for some plague or other, for he will be heard: this famine continued seven years, as long again as that in Elijah's time; for, if men will walk contrary to him, he will heat the furnace yet hotter.

II. The kindness of the good Shunammite to the prophet rewarded, by the care that was taken of her in that famine; she was not, indeed, fed by miracle, as the widow of Sarepta was; but, 1. She had notice given her of this famine before it came, that she might provide accordingly, and was directed to remove to some other country; any where but in Israel she would find plenty. It was a great advantage to Egypt, in Joseph's time, that they had notice of the famine before it came, so it was to this Shunammite; others would be forced to remove at last, after they had long borne the grievances of the famine, and had wasted their substance, and could not settle elsewhere upon such good terms as she might, that went early, before the crowd, and took her stock with her unbroken. It is our happiness to foresee an evil, and our wisdom, when we foresee it, to hide ourselves. 2. Providence gave her a comfortable settlement in the land of the Philistines, who, though subdued by David, yet were not wholly rooted out. It seems the famine was peculiar to the land of Israel; and other countries, that joined close to them, had plenty at the same time; which plainly shewed the immediate hand of

in it, as in the plagues of Egypt, when they distinguished between the Israelites and the Egyptians, and that the sins of Israel, against whom this judgment was directly levelled, were more provoking to God than the sins of their neighbours, because of their profession of relation to God; *You only have I known, therefore will I punish you*, Amos, 3. 2. Other countries had rain when they had none, were free from locusts and caterpillars when they were eaten up with the .; for some think this was the famine spoken of, Joel, 1. 3, 4. It is strange, that, when there was plenty in the neighbouring countries, there were not those that made it their business to import corn into the land of Israel, which might have prevented the inhabitants removing; but, as they were befooled with their idolatries, so they were infatuated, even in the matters of their civil interest.

III. Her petition to the king, at her return, favoured by the seasonableness of her application to him.

1. When the famine was over, she *returned out of the land of the Philistines*; that was no proper place for an Israelite, any longer than there was necessity for it, for there she could not keep her new-moons and her sabbaths, as she used to do in her own country, among the schools of the prophets, ch. 4. 23.

2. At her return, she found herself kept out of the possession of her own estate, it being either confiscated to the exchequer, seized by the lord, or usurped, in her absence, by some of the neighbours; or perhaps the person she had intrusted with the management of it proved false, and would neither resign it to her, nor come to an account with her for the profits: so hard is it to find a person that one can put a confidence in in a time of trouble, Prov. 25. 19. Mic. 7. 5.

in the choice of those whom they would recommend themselves to, and take their measures from, and whose good opinion they value themselves by; Jehoram chose the house of Ahab for his pattern rather than his father's house, and it was his ruin. We have a particular account of his wickedness, 2 Chron. 21. murder, idolatry, persecution, every thing that was bad.

II. The occasions of his badness; his father was a very good man, and, no doubt, took care to have him taught the good knowledge of the Lord; but, 1. It is certain he did ill, to marry him to the daughter of Ahab; no good could come of an alliance with an idolatrous family, but all mischief with such a daughter of such a mother, as Athaliah the daughter of Jezebel: the degeneracy of the old world took rise from the unequal yoking of professors with profane; those that are ill-matched, are already half-ruined. 2. I doubt he did not do well, to make him king in his own life-time: it is said here, (v. 16.) *he began to reign, Jehoshaphat being then king*; hereby he gratified his pride, (than which nothing is more pernicious to young people,) indulged him in his ambition, in hopes to reform him by humouring him, and so brought a curse upon his family, as Eli did, *whose sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*. Jehoshaphat had made this wicked son of his viceroy, once when he went with Ahab to Ramoth-gilead, from which Jehoshaphat's 17th year (1 Kings 22. 51.) is made Jehoram's second; (ch. 1. 17.) but afterward in his 22d year, he made him partner in his government, and from thence Joram's eight years are to be dated, three years before his father's death. It has been hurtful to many young men, to come too soon to their estates; Samuel got nothing by *making his sons judges*.

III. The rebukes of Providence which he was under for his badness. 1. The Edomites revolted, who had been under the government of the kings of Judah ever since David's time, about 150 years, v. 20. He attempted to reduce them, and gave them a defeat, (v. 21.) but he could not improve the advantage he had got, so as to recover his dominion over them; *yet Edom revolted*; (v. 22.) and the Edomites were, after this, bitter enemies to the Jews, as appears by the prophecy of Obadiah, and Ps. 137. 7. Now Isaac's prophecy was fulfilled, that this Esau the elder should serve Jacob the younger; yet, in process of time, he should *break that yoke from off his neck*, Gen. 27. 40. 2. Libnah revolted, that was a city in Judah, in the heart of his country, a priests' city, the inhabitants of that city shook off his government, *because he had forsaken God*, and would have compelled them to do so too, 2 Chron. 21. 10, 11. In order that they might preserve their religion, they set up for a free state; perhaps other cities did the same. 3. His reign was short, God cut him off in the midst of his days, when he was but 40 years old, and had reigned but eight years; *bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days*.

IV. The gracious care of Providence for the keeping up of the kingdom of Judah, and the house of David, notwithstanding the apostasies and calamities of Jehoram's reign; (v. 19.) *Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah*; he could easily have done it, he might justly have done it, it would have been no loss to him to have done it; yet he would not do it, for David's sake, not for the sake of any merit of his which could challenge this favour to his family as a debt, but for the sake of a promise made to him, that he should always have a lamp, that is, a succession of kings from one generation to another; by which his name should be kept bright and illustrious, as a lamp is kept burning by a constant fresh supply of oil: thus his family was not to be extinct, till it terminated in the Messiah, that Son of David, on whom was to be *hung all the glory of his Father's house*, and in whose everlasting kingdom that promise to David is fulfilled, (Ps. 132. 17.) *I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed*.

V. The conclusion of this impious and inglorious reign, v. 23, 24. Nothing peculiar is here said of him; but we are told, 2 Chron. 21. 19, 20. that he *died of sore diseases, and died without being desired*.

25. In the twelfth year of Joram the son of

Ahab king of Israel, did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah begin to reign. 26. Two and twenty years old *was* Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Athaliah, the daughter of Omri king of Israel. 27. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the LORD, as *did* the house of Ahab: for he *was* the son-in-law of the house of Ahab. 28. And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to the war with Hazael king of Syria in Ramoth-gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram. 29. And king Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramoth, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.

As among common persons, there are some that we call *little men*, who make no figure, are little regarded, and less valued; so among kings, there are some whom, in comparison with others, we may call *little kings*. This Ahaziah was one of these: he looks mean in the history, and, because wicked, in God's account, vile. It is too plain an evidence of the affinity between Jehoshaphat and Ahab, that they had the same names in their families, at the same time, in which, we may suppose, they designed to compliment one another. Ahab had two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram, who reigned successively; Jehoshaphat had a son and grandson named Jehoram and Ahaziah, who, in like manner reigned successively. Names indeed do not make natures, but it was a bad omen to Jehoshaphat's family, to borrow names from Ahab's; or if he lent the names to that wretched family, he could not communicate with them the devotion of their significations *Ahaziah, Taking hold of the Lord*; and *Jehoram, The Lord exalted*.

Ahaziah king of Israel had reigned but two years, Ahaziah king of Judah reigned but one. We are here told that his relation to Ahab's family was the occasion,

1. Of his wickedness; (v. 27.) *He walked in the way of the house of Ahab*, that idolatrous, bloody house; for his mother was Ahab's daughter, v. 26. So that he sucked in wickedness with his milk. *Partus sequitur ventrem—The child may be expected to resemble the mother*. When men choose wives for themselves, they must remember they are choosing mothers for their children, and are concerned to choose accordingly.

2. Of his fall; Joram, his mother's brother, courted him to join with him for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead, an attempt fatal to Ahab; so it was to Joram his son, for in that expedition he was wounded, (v. 28.) and returned to Jezreel to be cured, leaving his army there in possession of the place. Ahaziah was likewise returned, but went to Jezreel, to see how Jehoram did, v. 29. Providence so ordered it, that he who had been debauched by the house of Ahab, might be cut off with them, when the measure of their iniquity was full, as we shall find in the next chapter. They who partake with sinners in their sin, must expect to partake with them in their plagues.

CHAP. IX.

Hazael and Jehu were the men that were designed to be the instruments of God's justice in punishing and destroying the house of Ahab. Elijah was bidden to appoint them to this service; but, upon Ahab's humiliation, a reprieve was granted, and so it was left to Elisha to appoint them. Hazael's elevation to the throne of Syria we read of in the foregoing chapter; and we must now attend Jehu to the throne of Israel; for him that escapeth the

sword of Hazael, as Joram and Ahaziah did, Jehu must slay, of which this chapter gives us an account. 1. A commission is sent to Jehu by the hand of one of the prophets, to take upon him the government, and destroy the house of Ahab, v. 1..10. 11. Here is his speedy execution of this commission. 1. He communicates it to his captains, v. 11..15. 2. He marches directly to Jezreel, v. 16..20, and there dispatches, (1.) Joram king of Israel, v. 20..26. (2.) Ahaziah king of Judah, v. 27..29. (3.) Jezebel, v. 30..37.

AND Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead: 2. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber; 3. Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not. 4. So the young man, *even* the young man the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. 5. And when he came, behold, the captains of the host *were* sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain. 6. And he arose, and went into the house; and he poured the oil on his head, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the LORD, *even* over Israel. 7. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel. 8. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish: and I will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel: 9. And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah: 10. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and *there shall be none to bury her*. And he opened the door, and fled.

We have here the anointing of Jehu to be king, who was, at this time, a commander (probably commander-in-chief) of the forces employed at Ramoth-gilead, v. 14. There he was fighting for the king his master, but received orders from a higher King to fight against him. It does not appear that Jehu aimed at the government, or that he ever thought of it, but the commission given him was a perfect surprise to him. Some think that he had been anointed before by Elijah, whom God ordered to do it, but privately, and with an intimation that he must not act till further orders; as Samuel anointed David long before he was to come to the throne: but that is not at all probable, for then we must suppose Elijah had anointed Hazael too. No, when God bade him do these things, he bade him anoint Elisha to be prophet in his room, to do them when he was gone, as God should direct him.

Here is,

I. The commission sent. Elisha did not go himself to anoint Jehu, because he was old, and unfit for such a journey, and so well known that he could not do it privately, could not go and come without.

therefore he sends one of the sons of

the prophets to do it, v. 1. They not only revered him as their father, ch. 2. 15. but *observed* and *obeyed* him as their father. This service of anointing Jehu, 1. Had danger in it, (1 Sam. 16. 2.) and therefore it was not fit that Elisha should expose himself, but one of the sons of the prophets, whose life was of less value, and who could do it with less danger. 2. It required labour, and therefore fitter for a young man in his full strength. Let youth work, and age direct. 3. Yet it was an honourable piece of service, to anoint a king, and he that did it might hope to be preferred for it afterward, and therefore, for the encouragement of the young prophets, Elisha employed one of them: he would not engross all the honours to himself, nor grudge the young prophets a share in them.

When he sent him, (1.) He put the oil into his hand, with which he must anoint Jehu. *Take this box of oil*. Solomon was anointed with oil out of the tabernacle, 1 Kings, 1. 39. That could not now be had, but oil from a prophet's hand was equivalent to oil out of God's house. It was not the constant practice to anoint kings, but upon the disturbance of the succession, as in the case of Solomon; or the interruption of it, as in the case of Joash, ch. 11. 12. or the translation of the government to a new family, as here, and in the case of David; yet it might be used generally, though the scripture does not mention it. (2.) He put the words into his mouth, which he must say, v. 3. *I have anointed thee king*, and, no doubt, told him all the rest that he said, v. 7..10. Those whom God sends on his errand, shall not go without full instructions.

He also ordered him, [1.] To do it privately; to single out Jehu from the rest of the captains, and anoint him in an inner chamber, v. 2. that Jehu's confidence in his commission might be tried, when he had no witness to attest it; his being, of a sudden, animated for the service, would be proof sufficient of his being anointed to it, there needed no other proof. The thing signified was the best evidence of the sign. [2.] To do it expeditiously; when he went about it, he must gird up his loins; when he had done it, he must flee and not tarry for a fee, or a treat, or to see what Jehu would do. It becomes the sons of the prophets to be quick and lively at their work, to go about it, and go through it, as men that hate sauntering and trifling. They should be as angels that fly swiftly.

II. The commission delivered. The young prophet did his business with dispatch; was at Ramoth-gilead presently, v. 4. There he found the general officers sitting together, either at dinner, or in a council of war, v. 5. With the assurance that became a messenger from God, notwithstanding the meanness of his appearance, he called Jehu out from the rest, not waiting his leisure, or begging his pardon for disturbing him, but as one having authority, *I have an errand to thee, O captain*. Perhaps Jehu had some intimation of his business; and therefore, that he might not seem too forward to catch at the honour, he asked, *To which of all us?* That it might not be said afterward, he got it byspeaking first, but they might all be satisfied he was indeed the person designed.

When the prophet had him alone, he anointed him, v. 6. The anointing of the Spirit is a hidden thing, that new name, which none knows but they that have it. Herewith,

1. He invests him with the royal dignity; *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel*, whose messenger I am, in his name *I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord*. He gives him an uncontested title, but reminds him that he was made king, (1.) *By the God of Israel*; from him he must see his power derived, for by him kings reign, for him he must use it, and to him he must be accountable. Magistrates are the ministers of God, and must therefore act in dependence upon him, and with an entire devotedness to him and to his glory. (2.) *Over the Israel of God*; though the people of Israel were wretchedly corrupted and had forfeited all the honour of relation to God, yet they are here called the *people of the Lord*, for he had a right to them, a had not yet given them a bill of divorce. Jehu must look upon people he was made king of, as the *people of the Lord*, not as *vassals*, but God's freemen, his sons, his first-born, not to

abused or tyrannized over; *God's people*, and therefore to be ruled for him, and according to his laws.

2. He instructs him in his present service, which was to destroy all the house of Ahab; (v. 7.) not that he might clear his own way to the throne, and secure to himself the possession of it, but that he might execute the judgments of God upon that guilty and obnoxious family. He calls Ahab his *master*, that the relation might be no objection. "He was thy master; and to lift up thy hand against his son and successor, would be not only base ingratitude, but treason, rebellion, and all that is bad, if thou hadst not an immediate command from God to do it: but thou art under higher obligations to thy Master in heaven, than to thy master Ahab; He has determined that *the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and by thy hand*; fear not, has not he commanded thee? Fear not sin; his command will justify thee and bear thee out: fear not danger; his command will secure and prosper thee."

That he might, intelligently, and in a right manner, do this great execution on the house of Ahab, he tells them,

(1.) What was their crime, what the ground of the controversy, and wherefore God had this quarrel with them, that he might have an eye to that which God had an eye to, and that was *the blood of God's servants the prophets*, and his other faithful worshippers, which they had shed, and which must now be required at the hand of Jezebel. That they were idolaters, was bad enough, and merited all that was brought upon them; yet that is not mentioned here, but the controversy God has with them, is, for their being persecutors; not so much their *throwing down God's altars*, as their *slaying his prophets with the sword*. Nothing fills the measure of the iniquity of any prince or people so as this does, or brings a surer and sorer ruin. This was the sin that brought on Jerusalem its first destruction, (2 Chron. 36. 16.) and its final one, Matth. 23. 37, 38. Jezebel's whoredoms and witchcrafts were not so provoking as her persecuting the prophets, killing some, and driving the rest into corners and caves, 1 Kings 18. 4.

(2.) What was their doom; they were sentenced to utter destruction; not to be corrected, but to be cut off, and rooted out. This Jehu must know, that his eye might not spare for pity, favour, or affection. All that belonged to Ahab, must be slain, v. 8. A pattern is given him of the destruction intended, in the destruction of the families of Jeroboam and Baasha; (v. 9.) and he is particularly directed to throw Jezebel to the dogs, v. 10. The whole stock of royal blood was little enough, and too little, to atone for the blood of the prophets, the saints, and martyrs, which, in God's account, is of great price.

The prophet, having done this errand, made the best of his way home again, and left Jehu alone to consider what he had to do, and to beg direction from God.

11. Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord; and *one* said unto him, *Is all well?* Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee? And he said unto them, Ye know the man, and his communication. 12. And they said, *It is false*; tell us now. And he said, Thus and thus spake he to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. 13. Then they hasted, and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs, and blew the trumpets, saying, Jehu is king. 14. So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. (Now Joram had kept Ramoth-gilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael king of Syria. 15. But king Joram was returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria.)

And Jehu said, If it be your minds, *then* let none go forth *nor* escape out of the city to go to tell it in Jezreel.

Jehu, after some pause, returned to his place at the board, taking no notice of what had passed, but, as it should seem, designing, for the present, to keep it to himself, if they had not urged him to discover it. Let us therefore see what passed between him and the captains.

1. With what contempt the captains speak of the young prophet; (v. 11.) "*Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?* What business has he with thee? And why wouldst thou humour him so far as to retire for conversation with him? Are prophets company for captains?" They call him a *mad fellow*, because he was one of those that would not *run with them to an excess of riot*, (1 Pet. 4. 4.) but that lived a life of self-denial, mortification, and contempt of the world, and spent their time in devotion; for these things they thought the prophets were fools, and the *spiritual men were mad*, Hos. 9. 7. Note, Those that have no religion, commonly speak with disdain of those that are religious, and look upon them as mad. They said to our Saviour, *He is beside himself*; of John Baptist, *He has a devil*, is a poor melancholy man; of St. Paul, *Much learning has made him mad*. The highest wisdom is thus represented as folly, and those that best understand themselves, are looked upon as beside themselves. Perhaps Jehu intended it for a rebuke to his friends, when he said, "*Ye know the man to be a prophet, why then do ye call him a mad fellow?* Ye know the way of his communication to be not from madness, but inspiration." Or, "Being a prophet, you may guess what his business is, to tell me of my faults, and to teach me my duty; I need not inform you concerning it." Thus he thought to have put them off, but they urged him to tell them. "It is false," say they, "we cannot conjecture what was his errand, and therefore tell us." Being thus pressed to it, he told them that the prophet had *anointed him king*, and, it is probable, showed them the oil upon his head, v. 12. He knew not but some of them, either out of loyalty to Joram, or envy of him, might oppose him, and go near to crush his interest in its infancy; but he relied on the divine appointment, and was not afraid to own it, knowing whom he had trusted: he that raised him, would stand by him.

2. With what respect they compliment the new king, upon the first notice of his advancement, v. 13. How meanly soever they thought of the prophet that anointed him, and of his office, they expressed a great veneration for the royal dignity of him that was anointed, and were very forward to proclaim him with sound of trumpet. In token of their subjection and allegiance to him, their affection to his person and government, and their desire to see him high and easy in it, they put their garments under him, that he might stand or sit upon them *on the top of the stairs*, in sight of the soldiers, who, upon the first intimation, came together to grace the solemnity. God put it into their hearts thus readily to own him, for he turns the hearts of people as well as kings, like the rivers of water, into what channel he pleases. Perhaps they were disquieted at Joram's government, or had a particular affection for Jehu; however, it seems, things were ripe for the revolution, and they all came into Jehu's interest, and conspired against Joram, v. 14.

3. With what caution Jehu proceeded. He had advantages against Joram, and he knew how to improve them. He had the army with him; Joram had left it, and was gone home badly wounded. Jehu's good conduct appears in two things; (1.) That he complimented the captains, and would do nothing without their advice and consent; ("If it be your minds, we will do so and so, else not;") thereby intimating the deference he paid to their judgment, and the confidence he had in their fidelity, both which tended to please and fix them. It is the wisdom of those that would rise fast, and stand firm, to take their friends along with them. (2.) Thus he contrived to surprise Joram; and, in order thereto, to come upon him with speed, and to prevent his having notice of

what was now done: "*Let none go forth to tell it in Jezreel, that, as a snare, the ruin may come on him and his house.*" The suddenness of an attack sometimes turns to as good an account as the force of it.

16. So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Joram lay there. And Ahaziah king of Judah was come down to see Joram. 17. And there stood a watchman on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. And Joram said, Take an horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, *Is it peace?* 18. So there went one on horseback to meet him, and said, Thus saith the king, *Is it peace?* And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me. And the watchman told, saying, The messenger came to them, but he cometh not again. 19. Then he sent out a second on horseback, which came to them, and said, Thus saith the king, *Is it peace?* And Jehu answered, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me. 20. And the watchman told, saying, He came even unto them, and cometh not again; and the driving *is* like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously. 21. And Joram said, Make ready. And his chariot was made ready. And Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite. 22. And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, *Is it peace, Jehu?* And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts *are* so many? 23. And Joram turned his hands, and fled, and said to Ahaziah, *There is treachery, O Ahaziah.* 24. And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot. 25. Then said Jehu to Bidkar his captain, Take up, *and* cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite: for remember how that, when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the LORD laid this burthen upon him; 26. Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the LORD; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the LORD. Now therefore take *and* cast him into the plat of ground, according to the word of the LORD. 27. But when Ahaziah the king of Judah saw *this*, he fled by the way of the garden-house. And Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot. *And they did so* at the going up to Gur, which *is* by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there. 28. And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his sepulchre with his fathers in the city of David. 29. And in the eleventh year

of Joram the son of Ahab, began Ahaziah to reign over Judah.

From Ramoth-gilead to Jezreel was more than one day's march; about the mid-way between them, the river Jordan must be crossed. We may suppose Jehu to have marched with all possible expedition, and to have taken the utmost precaution to prevent the tidings from getting to Jezreel before him; and, at length, we have him within sight first, and then within reach, of the devoted king.

I. Joram's watchman discovers him first at a distance, him and his retinue, and gives notice to the king of the approach of a company, whether of friends or foes he cannot tell. But the king (impatient to know what is the matter, and perhaps jealous that the Syrians, who had wounded him, had traced him by the blood to his own palace, and were coming to seize him) sent first one messenger, and then another, to bring him intelligence, v. 17, 19. He had scarcely recovered the fright he was put into in the battle, and his guilty conscience put him into a continual terror. Each messenger asked the same question, "*Is it peace?* Are you for us, or for our adversaries? Do you bring good tidings, or bad?" Each had the same answer, *What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me*, v. 18, 19. as if he had said, "It is not to thee, but to him that sent thee, that I will give answer; for thy part, thou consult thy own safety, *turn thee behind me*, and insist thyself among my followers." The watchman gives notice that the messengers were taken prisoners; and, at length, observes that the leader of this troop drove like Jehu, who, it seems, was noted for driving furiously, thereby discovering himself to be a man of a hot eager spirit, intent upon his business, and pushing forward with all his might. A man of such a violent temper was fittest for the service to which Jehu was designated. The wisdom of God is seen in the choice of proper instruments to be employed in his work. But it is not much for any man's reputation to be known by his fury. He that has rule over his own spirit is better than the mighty. The Chaldee paraphrase gives this a contrary sense: *The leading is like that of Jehu, for he leads quietly.* And, it should seem, he did not come up very fast, for then there had not been time for all this that passed. And some think he chose to march slowly, that he might give Joram time to come out to him, and so dispatch him before he entered the city.

II. Joram himself goes out to meet him, and takes Ahaziah king of Judah along with him; neither of them equipt for war, as not expecting an enemy, but in haste to have their curiosity satisfied. How strangely has Providence sometimes ordered it, that men have been in haste to meet their ruin, when their day has come to fall!

1. The place where Joram met Jehu was ominous, *in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite*, v. 21. The very sight of that ground was enough to make Joram tremble, and Jehu triumph; for Joram had the guilt Naboth's blood fighting against him, and Jehu had the force of Elijah's curse fighting for him. The circumstances of events are sometimes so ordered by Divine Providence, as to make the punishment answer to the sin, as face answers to face in a glass.

2. Joram's demand was still the same, "*Is it peace, Jehu?* Is all well? Dost thou come home thus, flying from the Syrians? or more than a conqueror over them?" It seems he looked for peace, and could not entertain any other thought. Note, It is very common for great sinners, even when they are upon the brink of ruin, to flatter themselves with an opinion that all is well with them, and to cry peace to themselves.

3. Jehu's reply was very startling; he answered him with a question, *What peace canst thou expect, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, (who, though queen-dowager, was, in effect, queen-regent,) and her witchcrafts, are so many?* See how plainly Jehu deals with him. Formerly he durst not do so, but now he had another spirit. Note, Sinners will not always be flattered; one time or other they will have their own given them,

Ps. 36. 2. Observe, (1.) He charges upon him his mother's wickedness, because he had at first learned it, and then with his kingly power protected it. She stands impeached for whoredom, corporal and spiritual, serving idols, and serving them with the very acts of lewdness; for witchcraft likewise, enchantments and divinations, used in honour of her idols; and these multiplied, the whoredoms and the witchcrafts many; for those that abandon themselves to wicked courses know not where they will stop. One sin begets another. (2.) Upon that account, he throws him off from all pretensions to peace; "What peace can come to that house in which there is so much wickedness unrepented of?" Note, The way of sin can never be the way of peace, Isa. 57. 21. What peace can sinners have with God, what peace with their own consciences, what good, what comfort, can they expect in life, in death, or after death, who go on still in their trespasses? No peace so long as sin is persisted in; but as soon as it is repented of and forsaken, there is peace.

4. The execution was done immediately. When Joram heard of his mother's crimes, his heart failed him, he presently concluded the long-threatened day of reckoning was now come, and cried out, "*There is treachery, O Ahaziah; Jehu is our enemy, and it is time for us to shift for our safety.*" Both fled, and,

(1.) Joram king of Israel was slain presently, v. 24. Jehu dispatched him with his own hands. The bow was not drawn at a venture, as that which sent the fatal arrow through the joints of his father's harness, but Jehu directed the arrow between his shoulders as he fled, (it was one of God's arrows which he has ordained against the persecutor, Ps. 7. 13.) and it reached to his heart, so that he died upon the spot. He was now the top-branch of Ahab's house, and therefore was first cut off. He died a criminal, under the sentence of the law, which Jehu, the executioner, pursues in the disposal of the dead body. Naboth's vineyard was hard by, which put him in mind of that circumstance of the doom Elijah passed upon Ahab, *I will requite thee in this plat, said the Lord, (v. 25, 26.) for the blood of Naboth himself, and for the blood of his sons*, who were either put to death with him as partners in his crime, or secretly murdered after, lest they should bring an appeal, or find some way to avenge their father's death; or had broken their hearts for the loss of him; or (his whole estate being confiscated, as well as his vineyard) had lost their livelihoods, which was, in effect, to lose their lives; for this, the house of Ahab must be reckoned with; and that very piece of ground which he, with so much pride and pleasure, had made himself master of, at the expence of the guilt of innocent blood, now became the theatre on which his son's dead body lay exposed a spectacle to the world. Thus the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth. Higgaion. Selah.

(2.) Ahaziah king of Judah was pursued, and slain in a little time, and not far off, v. 27, 28. [1.] Though he was now in Joram's company, he had not been slain, but that he was joined with the house of Ahab both in affinity and in iniquity: he was one of them; so he had made himself by his sins, and therefore he must fare as they fare. Yet, [2.] Perhaps he had not at this time fallen with them, if he had not been found in company with them. It is a dangerous thing to associate with evil-doers; we may be untangled both in guilt and misery by it.

30. And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window. 31. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, *Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?* 32. And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, *Who is on my side? who?* And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. 33. And he said, *Throw her down.* So they threw her down; and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the

horses: and he trode her under foot. 34. And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, *Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter.* 35. And they went to bury her; but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. 36. Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, *This is the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel:* 37. And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, *This is Jezebel.*

The greatest delinquent in the house of Ahab, was, Jezebel: it was she that introduced Baal; slew the Lord's prophets; contrived the murder of Naboth; stirred up her husband first, and then her sons, to do wickedly; a *cursed woman* she is here called, v. 34. a curse to the country, and whom all that wished well to their country had a curse for: three reigns her reign had lasted, but now, at length, her day is come to fall. We read of a false prophetess in the church of Thyatira, that is compared to Jezebel, and called by her name, Rev. 2. 20. her wickedness the same, seducing God's servants to idolatry; a long space given her to repent, v. 21. as to Jezebel; and a fearful ruin brought upon her, at last, v. 22, 23. as here upon Jezebel. So that Jezebel's destruction may be looked upon as typical of the destruction of idolaters and persecutors, especially that great whore, that mother of harlots, that hath made herself drunk with the blood of saints, and the nations drunk with the wine of her fornications, when God shall put it into the heart of the kings of the earth to hate her, Rev. 17. 5, 6, 16. Now here we have,

1. Jezebel daring the judgment. She heard that Jehu had slain her son, and slain him for her whoredoms and witchcrafts, and thrown his dead body into the portion of Naboth, according to the word of the Lord, and that he was now coming to Jezreel, where she could not but expect herself to fall next a sacrifice to his revenging sword: now see how she meets her fate; she posted herself in a window at the entering of the gate, to affront Jehu, and set him at defiance.

1. Instead of hiding herself, as one afraid of divine vengeance, she exposed herself to it, and scorned to flee; mocked at fear, and was not affrighted. See how a heart, hardened against God, will brave it out to the last, *run upon him, even upon his neck*, Job. 15. 26. But never did any thus harden their hearts against him, and prosper.

2. Instead of humbling herself, and putting herself into close mourning for her son, she painted her face, and tired her head, that she might appear like herself, that is, (as she thought,) great and majestic, hoping thereby to daunt Jehu, to put him out of countenance, and to stop his career. The Lord God called to baldness and girding with sackcloth, but behold painting and dressing, walking contrary to God, Isa. 22. 12, 13. There is not a surer presage of ruin than an unhumbed heart under humbling providences. Let painted faces look in Jezebel's glass, and see how they like themselves.

3. Instead of trembling before Jehu, the instrument of God's vengeance, she thinks to make him tremble with that threatening question, *Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?* Observe, (1.) She took no notice of the hand of God gone out against her family, but flew in the face of him that was only the sword in his hand. We are very apt, when we are in trouble, to break out into a passion against the instruments of our trouble, when we ought to be submissive to God, and angry at ourselves only. (2.) She pleased herself with the thought, that what Jehu was now doing would cer-

tainly end in his own ruin, and that he would not have peace in it. He had cut her off from all pretensions to peace, v. 22. and now she thinks to cut him off likewise. Note, It is no new thing for those that are doing God's work to be looked upon as out of the way of peace. Active reformers, faithful reprovers, are threatened with trouble; but let them be in nothing terrified, Phil. 1. 28. (3.) She quoted a precedent, to deter him from the prosecution of this enterprise; "*Had Zimri peace?* No, he had not; he came to the throne by blood and treachery, and within seven days was constrained to burn the palace over his head, and himself in it; and canst thou expect to fare any better?" Had the case been parallel, it had been proper enough to give him this memorandum; for the judgments of God, upon those that have gone before us in any sinful way, should be warnings to us to take heed of treading in their steps. But the instance of Zimri was misapplied to Jehu: Zimri had no warrant for what he did, but was incited to it merely by his own ambition and cruelty; whereas Jehu was anointed by one of the sons of the prophets, and did this by order from heaven, which would bear him out. In comparing persons and things, we must carefully distinguish between the precious and the vile, and take heed, lest, from the fate of sinful men, we read the doom of useful men.

II. Jehu demanded aid against her. He looked up to the window, not daunted at the menaces of her impudent but impotent rage, and cried, *Who is on my side? who?* v. 32. He was called out to do God's work, in reforming the land, and punishing those that had debauched it; and here he calls out for assistance in the doing of it; looked if there were any to help, any to uphold, Isa. 63. 5. He lifts up a standard, and makes proclamation, as Moses, Exod. 32. 26. *Who is on the Lord's side?* And the psalmist, Ps. 94. 16. *Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers?* Note, when reformation work is set on foot, it is time to ask, "Who sides with it?"

III. Her own attendants delivering her up to his just revenge. Two or three chamberlains looked out to Jehu with such a countenance as encouraged him to believe they were on his side, and to them he called, not to seize or secure her till further orders, but immediately to throw her down, which was one way of stoning malefactors, casting them headlong from some steep place. Thus was vengeance taken on her for the stoning of Naboth: they threw her down, v. 33. If God's command would justify Jehu, his command would justify them. Perhaps they had a secret dislike of Jezebel's wickedness, and hated her, though they served her; or, it may be, she was barbarous and injurious to those about her, and they were pleased with this opportunity of being avenged on her; or, observing Jehu's success, they hoped thus to ingratiate themselves with him, and keep their places in his court. However it was, thus she was most shamefully put to death, dashed against the wall, and the pavement, and *then* trodden on by the horses, which were all besmeared with her blood and brains. See the end of pride and cruelty, and say, *The Lord is righteous.*

IV. The very dogs completing her shame and ruin, according to the prophecy. When Jehu had taken some refreshment in the palace, he bethought himself of shewing so much respect to Jezebel's sex and quality, as to bury her. As bad as she was, she was a daughter, a king's daughter, a king's wife, a king's mother; *Go, and bury her,* v. 34. But, though he had forgotten what the prophet said, (v. 10. *Dogs shall eat Jezebel*,) God had not forgotten it. While he was eating and drinking, the dogs had devoured her dead body, the dogs that *went about the city*, Ps. 59. 6. and fed upon the carrion, so that there was nothing left but her bare skull, (the painted face was gone,) and her feet and hands. The hungry dogs had no respect to the dignity of her extraction: a king's daughter was no more to them than a common person. When we pamper our bodies, and use them deliciously, let us think how vile they are, and that, shortly, they will be either a feast for worms under ground, or beasts above ground. When notice was brought of this to Jehu, he remembered the threatening, 1 Kings, 21. 23. *The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.* Nothing should remain of her but the monuments of her infamy. She had been

used to appear on public days in great state, and the cry was, "This is Jezebel. What a majestic port and figure! How great she looks!" But now it shall be said no more. We have often seen the wicked buried, Eccl. 8. 10. yet sometimes, as here, they have no burial, Eccl. 6. 3. Jezebel's name no where remained, but as stigmatized in sacred writ: they could not so much as say, "This is Jezebel's dust; This is Jezebel's grave;" or, "This is Jezebel's seed." Thus the name of the wicked shall rot, rot above ground.

CHAP. X.

We have, in this chapter, I. A further account of Jehu's execution of his commission. He cut off, 1. All Ahab's sons, v. 1. .10. 2. All Ahab's kindred, v. 11. .14, 17 3. Ahab's idolatry: his zeal against that, he took Jonadab to be witness to, v. 15, 16. summoned all the worshippers of Baal to attend, v. 18. .23. and slew them all, v. 24, 25. and then abolished that idolatry, v. 26. .28. II. A short account of the administration of his government. 1. The old idolatry of Israel was retained, the worship of the calves, v. 29. .31. 2. This brought God's judgments upon them by Hazael, with which his reign concludes, v. 32. .36.

1. **A**ND Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters, and sent to Samaria, unto the rulers of Jezreel, to the elders, and to them that brought up Ahab's *children*, saying, 2. Now as soon as this letter cometh to you, seeing your master's sons *are* with you, and *there are* with you chariots and horses, a fenced city also, and armour; 3. Look even out the best and meetest of your master's sons, and set *him* on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house. 4. But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, Behold, two kings stood not before him: how then shall we stand? 5. And he that *was* over the house, and he that *was* over the city, the elders also, and the bringers up *of the children*, sent to Jehu, saying, We *are* thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king: do thou *that which is* good in thine eyes. 6. Then he wrote a letter the second time to them, saying, If ye *be* mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by to-morrow this time. Now the king's sons, *being* seventy persons, *were* with the great men of the city, which brought them up. 7. And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent *them* to Jezreel. 8. And there came a messenger, and told him, saying, They have brought the heads of the king's sons. And he said, Lay ye them in two heaps at the entering in of the gate until the morning. 9. And it came to pass in the morning, that he went out, and stood, and said to all the people, Ye *be* righteous: behold, I conspired against my master, and slew him: but who slew all these? 10. Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spake concerning the house of Ahab: for the LORD hath done *that* which he spake by his servant Elijah. 11. So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab.

in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining. 12. And he arose, and departed, and came to Samaria. *And as he was at the shearing-house in the way,* 13. Jehu met with the brethren of Ahaziah king of Judah, and said, *Who are ye?* And they answered, *We are the brethren of Ahaziah; and we go down to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen.* 14. And he said, *Take them alive.* And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of the shearing-house, *even two and forty men; neither left he any of them.*

We left Jehu in quiet possession of Jezreel, triumphing over Joram and Jezebel; and must now attend his further motions. He knew the whole house of Ahab must be cut off, and therefore proceeds in this bloody work, and does not do it deceitfully, or by halves, Jer. 48. 10.

1. He got the heads of all the sons of Ahab cut off by their own guardians at Samaria. Seventy sons (or grandsons) Ahab had; Gideon's number, Judg. 8. 30. In such a number, that bare his name, his family was likely to be perpetuated, and yet it is extirpated all at once. Such a quiver full of arrows could not protect his house from divine vengeance. Numerous families, if vicious, must not expect to be long prosperous. These sons of Ahab were now at Samaria, a strong city, perhaps brought thither upon occasion of the war with Syria, as a place of safety, or upon notice of Jehu's insurrection; with them were the rulers of Jezreel, that is, the great officers of the court, who went to Samaria to secure themselves, or to consult what was to be done. Those of them that were yet under tuition had their tutors with them, who were intrusted with their education in learning, agreeable to their birth and quality, but, it is to be feared, brought them up in the idolatries of their father's house, and made them all worshippers of Baal. Jehu did not think fit to bring his forces to Samaria to destroy them, but, that the hand of God might appear the more remarkably in it, made their guardians their murderers.

1. He sent a challenge to their friends to stand by them, v. 2, 3. "You that are hearty well-wishers to the house of Ahab, and entire in its interests, now is your time to appear for it: Samaria is a strong city, you are in possession of it, you have forces at command, you may choose out the likeliest person of all the royal family to head you, you know you are not tied to the eldest, unless he be the best and meekest of your master's sons: if you have any spirit in you, shew it, and set one of them on his father's throne, and stand by him with your lives and fortunes." Not that he desired they should do this, or expected they would, but thus he upbraided them with their cowardice, and utter inability to contest with the divine counsels. "Do, if you dare, and see what will come of it." Those that have forsaken their religion, have often, with it, lost both their sense and their courage, and deserve to be upbraided with it.

2. Hereby he gained from them a submission. They prudently reasoned with themselves, *Behold, two kings stood not before him, but fell as sacrifices to his rage; how then shall we stand?* v. 4. Therefore they sent him a surrender of themselves, "We are thy servants, thy subjects, and will do all that thou shalt bid us, right or wrong, and will set up no body in competition with thee." They saw it was to no purpose to contend with him, and therefore it was their interest to submit to him. With much more reason may we thus argue ourselves into a subjection to the great God. Many kings and great men have fallen before his wrath, for their wickedness; and how then shall we stand? *Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?* No, we must either bend or break.

3. This is improved so far as to make them the executioners of

those whom they had the tuition of, v. 6. *If ye be mine, bring me the heads of your master's sons by to-morrow at this time.* Though he knew it must be done, and was loath to do it himself, one would think he could not expect they should do it. Could they betray such a trust? Could they be cruel to their master's sons? It seems, so low did they stoop in their adorations of the rising sun, that they did it; they cut off the heads of those seventy princes, and sent them in baskets a present to Jehu, v. 7. Learn hence not to trust in a friend, nor to put confidence in a guide, not governed by conscience. One can scarcely expect that he who has been false to his God should ever be faithful to his prince. But observe God's righteousness in their unrighteousness. These elders of Jezreel had been wickedly obsequious to Jezebel's order for the murder of Naboth, 1 Kings, 21. 11. She gloried, it is likely, in the power she had over them; and now the same base spirit makes them as pliable to Jehu, and as ready to obey his orders for the murder of Ahab's sons. Let none aim at an arbitrary power, lest they be found rolling a stone, which some time or other will return upon them. Princes that make their people slaves take the readiest way to make them rebels; and, by forcing men's consciences, as Jezebel did, they lose their hold of them.

When the separated heads were presented to him, he slyly upbraided them that were the executioners, yet owned the hand of God in it. (1.) He seems to blame those that had been the executioners of this vengeance. The heads were laid in two heaps, at the gate, the proper place of judgment. There he acquitted the people before God and the world, (v. 9. *Ye be righteous,*) and, by what the rulers of Samaria had now done, comparatively acquitted himself: "I slew but one, they have slain all these: I did it by conspiracy and with design; they have done this merely in compliance, and with an implicit obedience. Let not the people of Samaria, nor any of the friends of the house of Ahab, ever reproach me with what I have done, when their own elders; and the very guardians of the orphans, have done this." It is common for those who have done something too bad, to endeavour the mitigation of their own reproach, by drawing others in to do something worse. But, (2.) He resolves all into the righteous judgment of God, v. 10. *The Lord hath done that which he spake by Elijah.* God is not the Author of any man's sin, but, even by that which men do from bad principles, God serves his own purposes, and glorifies his own name; and is righteous in that wherein men are unrighteous. When the Assyrian is made the rod of God's anger, and the instrument of his justice, he meaneth not so neither doth his heart think so, Isa. 10. 7.

II. He proceeded to destroy all that remained of the house of Ahab, not only those that descended from him, but those that were in any relation to him, all the officers of his household, ministers of state, and those in command under him, called here his *great men*, v. 11. all his kinsfolks and acquaintance, who had been partners with him in his wickedness, and his priests or domestic chaplains, whom he employed in his idolatrous services, and who strengthened his hand, that he should not turn from his evil way. Having done this in Jezreel, he did the same in Samaria, v. 17. *slew all that remained to Ahab in Samaria.* This was bloody work, and is not now, in any case, to be drawn into a precedent. Let the guilty suffer, but not the guiltless for their sakes. Perhaps such terrible destructions as these were intended as types of the final destruction of all the ungodly. God has a sword, bathed in heaven, which will come down upon the people of his curse, and be filled with blood, Isa. 34. 5, 6. Then his eye will not spare, neither will he pity.

III. Providence bringing the brethren of Ahaziah in his way, as he was going on with this execution, he slew them likewise, v. 12. 14. The brethren of Ahaziah were slain by the Arabians, 2 Chron. 22. 1. but these were the sons of his brethren, as it is there explained, v. 8. and they are said to be princes of Judah, and to minister to Ahaziah. Several things concurred to make them obnoxious to the vengeance Jehu was now executing. 1. They were branches of Ahab's house, being descended from Athaliah, and therefore fell within his commission. 2. They were

anted with the wickedness of the house of Ahab. 3. They were now going to make their court to the princes of the house of Ahab, to *salute the children of the king and the queen*, Joram and Jezebel, which shewed they were linked to them in affection as well as in affinity. These princes, forty-two in number, being appointed as sheep for the sacrifice, were slain with solemnity, *at the pit of the shearing-house. The Lord is known by these judgments which he executeth.*

15. And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab *coming* to meet him: and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart *is* with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give *me* thine hand: and he gave *him* his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot. 16. And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD. So they made him ride in his chariot. 17. And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the LORD, which he spake to Elijah. 18. And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; *but* Jehu shall serve him much. 19. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice *to do* to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did *it* in subtlety, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal. 20. And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal. And they proclaimed *it*. 21. And Jehu sent through all Israel: and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not. And they came into the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was full from one end to another. 22. And he said unto him that *was* over the vestry, Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal. And he brought them forth vestments. 23. And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the LORD, but the worshippers of Baal only. 24. And when they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt-offerings, Jehu appointed four-score men without, and said, *If* any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escape, *he that letteth him go*, his life *shall be* for the life of him. 25. And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast *them* out, and went to the city of the house of Baal. 26. And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burnt them. 27. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of

Baal, and made it a draught-house unto this day. 28. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.

Jehu, pushing on his work, is here,

I. Courting the friendship of a good man, *Jehonadab the son of Rechab, v. 15, 16.* This Jehonadab, though mortified to the world, and meddling little with the business of it, (as appears by his charge to his posterity, which they religiously observed 300 years after, not to drink wine, nor dwell in cities, Jer. 35. 6, &c.) yet, upon this occasion, went to meet Jehu, that he might encourage him in the work to which God had called him. The countenance of good men is a thing which great men, if they be wise, will value, and value themselves by. David prayed, *Let those that fear thee, turn to me*, Ps. 119. 79. This Jehonadab, though no prophet, priest, or Levite, no prince, or ruler, was, we may suppose, very eminent for prudence and piety, and generally respected for that life of self-denial and devotion which he lived: Jehu, though a soldier, knew him, and honoured him. He did not indeed think of sending for him, but, when he met him, (though it is likely, he drove now as furiously as ever,) he stopt to speak to him; and we are here told what passed between them.

1. Jehu saluted him; he *blessed him*, so the word is; paid him the respect, and shewed him the good-will, that were owing to so great an example of serious godliness.

2. Jehonadab assured him that he was sincere in his interest, and a hearty well-wisher to his cause. Jehu professed that *his heart was right with him*; that he had a true affection for his person, and a veneration for the crown of his Nazariteship, and desired to know whether he had the same affection for him, and satisfaction in that crown of royal dignity which God had put upon his head, *Is thine heart right?* A question we should often put to ourselves: "I make a plausible profession, have gained a reputation among men, but, *is my heart right?* Am I sincere and inward with God?" Jehonadab gave him his word, *It is*, and gave him his hand as a pledge of his heart, *yielded to him*, (so giving the hand is rendered, 2 Chron. 30. 8.) concurred and covenanted with him, and owned him in the work both of revenge and of reformation he was now about.

3. Jehu took him up into his chariot, and took him along with him to Samaria. He *put some honour upon him*, by taking him into the chariot with him; (Jehonadab was not often in a chariot, especially with a king;) but he received more honour from him, and from the countenance he gave to his present work. All sober people would think the better of Jehu, when they saw Jehonadab in the chariot with him. This was not the only time that the piety of some has been made to serve the policy of others; and that designing men have strengthened themselves by drawing good men into their interests. Jehonadab was a stranger to the arts of fleshly wisdom, and has his *conversation in simplicity, and godly sincerity*; and therefore, if Jehu be a servant of God, and an enemy to Baal, he will be his faithful friend. "Come then," (says Jehu,) "come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord; and then thou wilt see reason to espouse my cause." This is commonly taken as not well said by Jehu, and as giving cause to suspect that his heart was not right with God in what he did, and that the zeal he pretended for the Lord, was really zeal for himself and his own advancement. For, (1.) He boasted of it, and spake as if God and man were mightily indebted to him for it. (2.) He desired it might be seen, and taken notice of, like the Pharisees, who did all, to be seen of men. An upright heart approves itself to God, and covets no more than his acceptance. If we aim at the applause of men, and make their praise our highest end, we are upon a false bottom. Whether Jehu looked any further, we cannot judge; however, Jehonadab went with him, and, it is likely, animated and assisted him in the further execution of his commission, v. 17. destroying all Ahab's friends in Samaria. A man may hate cruelty, and yet love justice; may be far from thirsting after blood, and yet may *wash his feet in the blood of the wicked*, Ps. 53. 10.

II. Continuing the destruction of all the worshippers of Baal. The service of Baal was the crying sin of the house of Ahab: that

... this idolatry was plucked up, but multitudes yet remained, that were infected with it, and would be in danger of infecting others. The law of God was express, that they were to be put to death; but they were so numerous, and so dispersed throughout all parts of the kingdom, and perhaps so alarmed with Jehu's beginnings, that it would be a hard matter to find them all out, and an endless task to prosecute and execute them one by one: Jehu's project therefore is to cut them all off together.

1. By a wile, by a fraud, he brings them together to the temple of Baal. He pretended he would worship Baal more than ever Ahab had done, v. 18. Perhaps he spoke this ironically, or to try the body of the people, whether they would oppose such a resolution as this, and would resent his threatening to increase his predecessor's idolatries, as they did Rehoboam's threatening to increase his predecessor's exactions, and say, "If it be so, we have no part in Jehu, nor inheritance in the son of Nimshi." But it rather seems to have been spoken purposely to deceive the worshippers of Baal, and then it cannot be justified. The truth of God needs not any man's lie. He issued out a proclamation, requiring the attendance of all the worshippers of Baal, to join with him in a sacrifice to Baal, v. 19, 20. not only the prophets and priests, but all, throughout the kingdom, who worshipped Baal, who were not near so many as they had been in Elijah's time. Jehu's friends, we may suppose, were aware of what he designed, and were not offended at it; but the bigotted besotted Baalites began to think themselves very happy, and that now they should see golden days again. *Joram had put away the image of Baal, ch. 3. 2.* if Jehu will restore it, they have what they would have, and come up to Samaria with joy from all parts to celebrate the solemnity; and were pleased to see the house of Baal crowded, v. 21. to see his priests in their vestments, v. 22. and themselves perhaps with some badges or other to notify their relation to Baal, for there were vestments for all his worshippers.

2. He takes care that none of the servants of the Lord should be among them, v. 23. This they took as a provision to preserve the worship of Baal from being profaned by strangers: but it was a wonder that they did not, by this, see themselves brought into a snare, and discern a design upon them. They that suffer themselves to be deceived by Baal, (as all idolaters were by their idols,) so marvel if they are deceived by Jehu to their destruction.

3. He gives order for the cutting of them all off, and Jehonadab joined with him therein, v. 23. When a strict search was made, lest some of the servants of God should, either for company or curiosity, be got among them, lest some wheat should be mixed with those tares; and when eighty men were set to stand guard at all the avenues to Baal's temple, that none might escape, v. 24. then the guards were sent in, to put them all to the sword, and to *minge their blood with their sacrifices*, in a way of just revenge, as they themselves had sometimes done, when, in their blind devotion, they *cut themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out*, 1 Kings, 18. 28. This was accordingly done, and the doing of it, though seemingly barbarous, was, considering the nature of their crime, really righteous; *The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*

4. The idolaters being thus destroyed, the idolatry itself is utterly abolished. The buildings about the house of Baal, (which were so many, and so stately, that they are here called a *city*;) where Baal's priests and their families lived, were destroyed: all the little images, statues, pictures, or shrines, which beautified Baal's temple, with the great image of Baal himself, were brought out and burnt, v. 26, 27. and the temple of Baal broken down, and made a dunghill, the common sink, or shore, of the city, that the remembrance of it might be blotted out, or made infamous. Thus was the worship of Baal quite destroyed, at least, for the present, out of Israel, though it had once prevailed so far, that there were but 7000 of all the thousands of Israel, that had not bowed the knee to Baal, and those concealed. Thus will God destroy all the gods of the heathen, and, sooner or later, triumph over them all.

29. Howbeit *from* the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed

not from after them, *to wit*, the golden calves that were in Beth-el, and that were in Dan. 30. And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing *that which is right* in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. 31. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin. 32. In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel; 33. From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan. 34. Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 35. And Jehu slept with his fathers: and they buried him in Samaria. And Jehoahaz his son reigned in his stead. 36. And the time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty and eight years.

Here is all the account of the reign of Jehu, though it continued twenty-eight years. The progress of it answered not to the glory of its beginning. We have here,

1. God's approbation of what Jehu had done. Many, it is probable, censured him as treacherous and barbarous, called him a *rebel*, a *usurper*, a *murderer*, and prognosticated ill concerning him, that a family thus raised would soon be ruined; but God said, *Well done*, (v. 30.) and then it signified little who said otherwise. 1. God pronounced that to be right which he had done. It is justly questionable, whether he did it from a good principle, and whether he did not take some false steps in the doing of it; and yet, (says God,) *Thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes*. The extirpating of idolaters and idolatry was a thing right in God's eyes, for it is an iniquity he visits as surely and severely as any other: it was according to all that was in his heart, all he desired, all he designed; Jehu went through with his work. 2. God promised him a reward, That his children of the fourth generation from him should sit upon the throne of Israel. This was more than what took place in any of the dignities or royal families of that kingdom; of the house of Ahab there were indeed four kings, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Joram, but the two last were brothers, so that it reached but to the third generation, and that whole family continued but about forty-five years in all, whereas Jehu's continued in four, beside himself, and, in all, about 120 years. Note, No services done for God shall go unrewarded.

11. Jehu's carelessness in what he was further to do. By this it appeared that his heart was not right with God, that he was partial in his reformation. 1. He did not put away all the evil. He departed from the sins of Ahab, but not from the sins of Jeroboam; discarded Baal, but adhered to the calves. The worship of Baal was indeed the greater evil, and more heinous in the sight of God, but the worship of the calves was a great evil: true conversion is not only from gross sin, but from all sin; not only from false gods, but from false worships. The worship of Baal weakened and diminished Israel, and made them beholden to the Sidonians, and therefore he could easily part with that: but the worship of the calves was a political idolatry, was begun, and kept up, for reasons of state, to prevent the return of the ten tribes to the house of David, and therefore Jehu clave to that. True con-

version is not only from wasteful sins, but from gainful sins; not only from those sins that are destructive to the secular interest, but from those that support and befriended it; in forsaking which, is the great trial, whether we can deny ourselves, and trust God. 2. He put away evil, but he did not mind that which was good; (v. 31.) *He took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel.* He abolished the worship of Baal, but did not keep up the worship of God, nor walk in his law. He had showed great care and zeal for the rooting out of a false religion, but, in the true religion, (1.) He showed no care, took no heed, lived at large, was not at all solicitous to please God, and do his duty; took no heed to the scriptures, to the prophets, to his own conscience, but walked at all adventures. Those that are heedless, it is to be feared, are graceless; for where there is a good principle in the heart, it will make men cautious and circumspect, desirous to please God, and jealous of doing any thing to offend him. (2.) He showed no zeal; what he did in religion, he did not do it with his heart, with all his heart, but he did it as if he did it not, without any liveliness or concern. It seems, he was a man that had little religion himself, and yet God made use of him as an instrument of reformation in Israel. It is a pity that those that do good to others, should always be good themselves.

III. The judgment that came upon Israel in his reign. We have reason to fear that when Jehu took no heed himself to walk in God's law, the people were generally as careless as he, both in their devotions, and in their conversations. There was a general decay of piety, and increase of profaneness; and therefore it is not strange that the next news we hear, is, *In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short,* v. 32. Their neighbours encroached upon them on every side; they were short in their duty to God, and therefore God cut them short in their extent, wealth, and power. Hazael king of Syria was, above any other, vexatious and mischievous to them, *smote them in all the coasts of Israel,* particularly the countries on the other side Jordan, which lay next him, and most exposed; on these he made continual inroads, and laid them waste. Now the Reubenites and Gadites smarted for their choice which their ancestors made of an inheritance on that side Jordan, which Moses reproved them for, Num. 32. Now Hazael did what Elisha foresaw he would do, and foretold. Yet, for doing it, God had a quarrel with him, and with his kingdom, as we may find, Amos 1. 3, 4. Because they of Damascus had *threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron,* therefore (says God) *I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad.*

Lastly, The conclusion of Jehu's reign, v. 34—36. Notice is taken, in general, of his might; but because he took no heed to serve God, the memorials of his mighty enterprises and achievements are justly buried in oblivion.

CHAP. XI.

The revolution in the kingdom of Israel was soon perfected in Jehu's settlement; we must now inquire into the affairs of the kingdom of Judah, which lost its head, (such as it was,) at the same time, and by the same hand, as Israel did: but things continued longer there in distraction than in Israel, yet, after some years, they were brought into a good posture, as we find in this chapter. I. Athaliah usurps the government, and destroys all the seed-royal, v. 1. II. Joash, a child of a year old, is wonderfully preserved, v. 2, 3. III. At six years' end, he is produced, and, by the agency of Jehoiada, made king, v. 4—12. IV. Athaliah is slain, v. 13—16. V. Both the civil and religious interests of the kingdom are well settled in the hands of Joash, v. 17—21. And thus, after some interruption, things returned with advantage into the old channel.

1. **A**ND when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose, and destroyed all the seed-royal. 2. But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons *which were slain*; and they hid him, *even him and his nurse*, in the bed-chamber, from Atha-

liah, so that he was not slain. 3. And he was with her hid in the house of the LORD six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land.

God had assured David of the continuance of his family, which is called his *ordaining a lamp for his anointed*; and this cannot but appear a great thing, now that we have read of the utter extirpation of so many royal families, one after another. Now here we have David's promised lamp almost extinguished, and yet wonderfully preserved.

I. It was almost extinguished by the barbarous malice of Athaliah, the queen-mother, who, when she heard that her son Ahaziah was slain by Jehu, *arose, and destroyed all the seed-royal,* (v. 1.) all that she knew to be akin to the crown. Her husband, Jehoram, had slain all his brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 21. 4. The Arabians had slain all Jehoram's sons, but Ahaziah, 2 Chron. 22. 1. Jehu had slain all their sons, (2 Chron. 22. 8.) and Ahaziah himself. Surely never was royal blood so profusely shed: happy the men of inferior birth, who live below envy and emulation! But, as if all this were but a small matter, Athaliah destroys all that were left of the seed-royal: it was strange that one of the tender sex could be so barbarous, that one who had been herself a king's daughter, a king's wife, and a king's mother, could be so barbarous to a royal family, and a family into which she was herself ingrafted; but she did it, 1. From a spirit of ambition; she thirsted after rule, and thought she could not get to it any other way; that none might reign with her, she slew even the infants and sucklings that might have reigned after her; for fear of a competitor, not any must be reserved for a successor; and, 2. From a spirit of revenge and rage against God; the house of Ahab being utterly destroyed, and her son Ahaziah among the rest, because he was akin to it; she resolved, as it were, by way of reprisal, to destroy the house of David, and cut off his line, in defiance of God's promise, to perpetuate it; a foolish attempt, and fruitless, for who can disannul what God hath promised? Grandmothers have been thought more fond of their grandchildren than they were of their own; yet Ahaziah's own mother is the wilful murderer of Ahaziah's own sons, and in their infancy too, when she was obliged, above any other, to nurse them, and take care of them; well might she be called, *Athaliah, that wicked woman,* (2 Chron. 24. 7.) Jezebel's own daughter: yet herein God was righteous, and visited the iniquity of Joram and Ahaziah, those degenerate branches of David's house, upon their children.

II. It was wonderfully preserved by the pious care of one of Joram's daughters, (who was wife to Jehoiada the priest,) who stole away one of the king's sons, Joash by name, and hid him, v. 2, 3. This was a brand plucked out of the fire; what number were slain, we are not told, but, it seems, this being a child in the nurse's arms, was not missed, or not inquired after, or, however, not found: the person that delivered him, was his own aunt, the daughter of wicked Joram; for those whom God will have protected, he will raise up protectors: the place of his safety was the house of the Lord, one of the chambers belonging to the temple, a place Athaliah seldom troubled; his aunt, by bringing him thither, put him under God's special protection, and so hid him by faith, as Moses was hid; now were David's words made good to one of his seed, Ps. 27. 5. *In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me.* With good reason did this Joash, when he grew up, set himself to repair the house of the Lord, for it had been a sanctuary to him; now was the promise made to David, bound up in one life, and yet it did not fail. Thus to the Son of David will God, according to his promise, secure a spiritual seed, which, though sometimes reduced to a small number, brought very low, and seemingly lost, will be perpetuated to the end of time, hidden sometimes, and unseen, but hidden in God's pavilion, and unhurt. It was a special providence that Joram, though, a king, a wicked king, married his daughter to Jehoiada a priest, a godly priest; some perhaps thought it a disparagement to the royal family, to marry a daughter to a clergyman, but it proved a

happy marriage, and the saving of the royal family from ruin; for Jehoiada's interest in the temple gave *her* an opportunity to preserve the child, and her interest in the royal family gave *him* an opportunity to set him on the throne: see the wisdom and care of Providence, and how it prepares for what it designs; and see what blessings they lay up in store for their families, that marry their children to those that are wise and good.

4. And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard, and brought them to him into the house of the LORD, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the LORD, and shewed them the king's son. 5. And he commanded them, saying, This is the thing that ye shall do; A third part of you that enter in on the sabbath shall even be keepers of the watch of the king's house; 6. And a third part shall be at the gate of Sur; and a third part at the gate behind the guard: so shall ye keep the watch of the house, that it be not broken down. 7. And two parts of all you that go forth on the sabbath, even they shall keep the watch of the house of the LORD about the king. 8. And ye shall compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand: and he that cometh within the ranges, let him be slain: and be ye with the king as he goeth out, and as he cometh in. 9. And the captains over the hundreds did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest commanded: and they took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that should go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada, the priest. 10. And to the captains over hundreds did the priest give king David's spears and shields, that were in the temple of the LORD. 11. And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple to the left corner of the temple, along by the altar and the temple. 12. And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony: and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king.

Six years Athaliah tyrannised; we have not a particular account of her reign, no doubt it was of a piece with the beginning; while Jehu was extirpating the worship of Baal in Israel, she was establishing it in Judah, as appears, 2 Chron. 24. 7. The court and kingdom of Judah had been debauched by their alliance with the house of Ahab, and now one of that house is a curse and plague to both, sinful friendships speed no better; all this while, Joash lay hid, entitled to a crown, and intended for it, and yet buried alive in obscurity; though the sons and heirs of heaven are now hidden, *the world knows them not*, 1 John, 3. 1. but the time is fixed when they shall appear in glory, as Joash in his seventh year: by that time he was ready to be shewed, not a babe, but, having served his first apprenticeship to life, and being arrived at his first climacterical year, he had taken a good step toward manhood; by that time the people were grown weary of Athaliah's tyranny, and ripe for a revolution: how that revolution was effected we are told.

I. The manager of this great affair was Jehoiada the priest, probably the high priest, or, at least, the *Sagan*, (as the Jews called him,) or suffragan to the high priest; by his birth and office, he was a man in authority, whom the people were bound by the law to observe and obey, especially when there was no rightful king upon the throne, Deut. 17. 12. By marriage he was allied to the royal family, and if all the seed-royal were destroyed, his wife, as daughter to Joram, had a better title to the crown than Athaliah had. By his eminent gifts and graces, he was fitted to serve his country, and better service he could not do it, than to free it from Athaliah's usurpation; and we have reason to think he did not make this attempt, till he had first asked counsel of God, and known his mind, either by prophets, or Urim, or both.

II. The management was very discreet, and as became so wise and good a man as Jehoiada was.

1. He concerted the matter with the *rulers of hundreds and the captains*, the men in office, ecclesiastical, civil, and military; he got them to him to the temple, consulted with them, laid before them the grievances they, at present, laboured under, gave them an oath of secrecy, and, finding them free and forward to join with him, shewed them the king's son, v. 4. and so well satisfied were they with his fidelity, that they saw no reason to suspect an imposition. We may well think what a pleasing surprise it was to the good people among them, who feared that the house and lineage of David were quite cut off, to find such a spark as this in the embers.

2. He posted the priests and Levites, who were more immediately under his direction, in the several avenues to the temple, to keep the guards, putting them under the command of the *rulers of hundreds*, v. 9. David had divided the priests into courses, which waited by turns; every sabbath-day morning, a new company came into waiting, but the company of the foregoing week did not go out of waiting till the sabbath evening, so that on the sabbath-day, when double service was to be done, there was a double number to do it, both they that were to come in, and they that were to go out; these Jehoiada employed to attend on this great occasion, he armed them, out of the magazines of the temple, with David's spears and shields, either his own or those he had taken from his enemies, which he devoted to God's honour, v. 10. If they were old and unfashionable, yet they that used them might, by their being David's, be reminded of God's covenant with him, which they were now acting in the defence of.

Two things they were ordered to do, (1.) To protect the young king from being insulted; they must *keep the watch of the king's house*, v. 5. *compass the king*, and *be with him*, v. 8. to guard him from Athaliah's partizans, for still there were those that thirsted after royal blood. (2.) To preserve the holy temple from being profaned by the concourse of people that would come together on this occasion, v. 6. *Keep the watch of the house, that it be not either broken through, or broken down*, and so strangers should crowd in, or such as were unclean; he was not so zealous for the projected revolution as to forget his religion; in times of the greatest hurry, care must be taken, *Ne detrimentum capiat ecclesia—That the holy things of God be not trenchd upon*. It is observable that Jehoiada appointed to each his place as well as his work, v. 6, 7. for good order contributes very much to the expediting and accomplishing of any great enterprise; let every man know, and keep, and make good his post, and then the work will be done quickly.

3. When the guards were fixed, then the king was brought forth, v. 12. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion*, for even in thy holy mountain thy king appears, a child indeed, but not such a one as brings a woe upon the land, for he was the son of nobles, the son of David, Eccl. 10. 17. A child indeed, but he had a good guardian, and, which was better, a good God, to go to. Jehoiada, without delay, proceeded to the coronation of this young king; for, though he was not yet capable of dispatching business, he would be growing up towards it by degrees; this was done with great solemnity, v. 12. (1.) In token of his being invested with kingly power, he *put the crown upon him*, though it was yet too large and heavy for his head; the regalia, it is probable, were kept in the

temple, and so the crown was ready at hand. (2.) In token of his obligation to govern by law, and to make the word of God his rule, he gave him the testimony, put a Bible into his hand, which he must *read in, all the days of his life*, Deut. 17, 18, 19. (3.) In token of his receiving the Spirit, to qualify him for this great work to which he before was called, he anointed him; though notice is taken of the anointing of their kings only in case of interruption, as here, and in Solomon's case, yet I know not but the ceremony might be used to all their kings, at least, those of the house of David, because their royalty was typical of Christ's, who was to be anointed above his fellows, above all the sons of David. (4.) In token of the people's acceptance of him, and subjection to his government, they clapped their hands for joy, and expressed their hearty good wishes to him, *Let the king live*; and thus they made him king, made him their king, consented to, and concurred with, the divine appointment. They had reason to rejoice in the period now put to Athaliah's tyranny, and the prospect they had of the restoration and establishment of religion, by a king under the tuition of so good a man as Jehoiada; they had reason to bid him welcome to the crown, whose right it was, and to pray, *Let him live*, who came to them as life from the dead, and in whom the house of David was to live. With such acclamations of joy and satisfaction must the kingdom of Christ be welcomed into our hearts, when his throne is set up there, and Satan the usurper is deposed; *Hosannah, blessed is he that comes*: clap hands, and say, "Let King Jesus live, live for ever, live and reign, in my soul, and in all the world;" it is promised, (Ps. 72. 15.) *He shall live, and prayer shall be made for him, and his kingdom, continually.*

13 And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard *and* of the people, she came to the people, into the temple of the LORD. 14. And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner *was*, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets: and Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason, treason. 15. But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges; and him that followeth her, kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of the LORD. 16. And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house; and there was she slain.

We may suppose it was designed, when they had finished the solemnity of the king's inauguration, to make a visit to Athaliah, and call her to an account for her murders, usurpations, and tyranny; but, like her mother Jezebel, she saved them the labour, went out to meet them, and hastened her own destruction.

1. Hearing the noise, she came in a fright to see what was the matter, v. 13. Jehoiada and his friends began in silence, but now that they found their strength, they proclaimed what they were doing. It seems, Athaliah was little regarded, else she had had intelligence brought her of this daring attempt, before with her own ears she heard the noise; had the design been discovered before it was perfected it might have been quashed, but now it was too late; when she heard the noise, it was strange that she was so ill advised as to come herself, and, for aught that appears, to come alone; surely she was not so neglected as to have none to go for her, or none to go with her, but she was wretchedly infatuated by the transport both of fear and indignation she was in; whom God will destroy, he befools.

2. Seeing what was done, she cried out for help: she saw the king's place by the pillar possessed by one to whom the princes and

people did homage, (v. 14.) and had reason to conclude her power at an end, which, she knew, was usurped; this made her rend her clothes, like one distracted, and cry, "Treason, treason! Come and help against the traitors." Josephus adds, that she cried to have him killed, that possessed the king's place. What was now doing, was the highest justice, yet it is branded as the highest crime; she herself was the greatest traitor, and yet is first and loudest in crying, Treason, treason! Those that are themselves most guilty, are commonly most forward to reproach others.

3. Jehoiada gave orders to put her to death, as an idolater, a usurper, and an enemy to the public peace; care was taken, (1.) That she should not be killed in the temple, or any of the courts of it, in reverence to that holy place, which must not be stained with the blood of any human sacrifice, though ever so justly offered. (2.) That whoever appeared for her, should die with her; "Him that follows her, to protect or rescue her, any of her attendants that resolve to adhere to her, and will not come into the interests of their rightful sovereign, *kill with the sword*, but not unless they follow her now," v. 15. According to these orders, she endeavouring to make her escape the back way to the palace, through the stalls, they pursued her, and there killed her, v. 16. *So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord*: thus give the bloody harlot blood to drink, for she is worthy.

17 And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they should be the LORD's people; between the king also and the people. 18. And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images brake they in pieces thoroughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. And the priest appointed officers over the house of the LORD: 19. And he took the rulers over hundreds, and the captains, and the guard, and all the people of the land; and they brought down the king from the house of the LORD, and came by the way of the gate of the guard to the king's house. And he sat on the throne of the kings. 20. And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet, and they slew Athaliah with the sword *beside* the king's house. 21. Seven years old *was* Jehoash when he began to reign.

Jehoiada has now got over the hardest part of his work; when, by the death of Athaliah, his young prince had his way to the throne cleared of all opposition, he is now to improve his advantages for the perfecting of the revolution, and the settling of the government.

Two things we have an account of here;

1. The good foundation he laid, by an original contract, v. 17. Now that prince and people were together in God's house, as it should seem; before they stirred, he took care that they should jointly covenant with God, and mutually covenant with each other, that they might rightly understand their duty both to God and to one another, and be firmly bound to it.

1. He endeavoured to settle and secure the interests of religion among them, by a covenant between them and God. King and people would then cleave most firmly to each other, when both had joined themselves to the Lord. God had already, on his part, promised to be their God; (Jehoiada could show them that in the book of the testimony;) now the king and people on their part must covenant and agree that *they will be the Lord's people*; in this covenant, the King stands upon the same level with the subjects, and is as much bound as any of them to serve the Lord. By this engagement they renounced Baal, whom many of them had worshipped, and resigned themselves to God's government.

It is well with a people, when all the changes that pass over them, help to revive, strengthen, and advance, the interests of religion among them. And those are likely to prosper who set out in the world under fresh and sensible obligations to God and their duty. By our bonds to God the bonds of every relation are strengthened; they *first gave themselves to the Lord*, and then to us, 2 Cor. 8. 5.

2. He then settled both the coronation oath, and the oath of allegiance, the *pacta conventa*—covenant, between the king and the people, by which the king was obliged to govern according to law, and to protect his subjects, and they obliged, while he did so, to obey him, and to bear faith and true allegiance to him. Covenants are of use, both to remind us of, and to bind us to, those duties which are already binding on us. It is good, in all relations, for the parties to understand one another fully, particularly in that between prince and subject, that the one may understand the limits of his power and prerogative, the other of his liberty and property; and never may the ancient land-marks, which our fathers have set before them, be removed.

II. The good beginnings he raised on those foundations.

1. Pursuant to their covenant with God, they immediately abolished idolatry, which the preceding kings, in compliance with the house of Ahab, had introduced, v. 18. *All the people of the land*, the mob, got together, to shew their zeal against idolatry; and every one, now that they were so well headed, would lend a hand to pull down Baal's temple, his altars, and his images. All his worshippers, it should seem, deserted him; only his priest Mattan stuck to his altar alone, though all men forsook Baal, he would not, and there he was slain, the best sacrifice that ever was offered upon that altar. Having destroyed Baal's temple, they appointed *officers over the house of God*, to see that the service of God was regularly performed by the proper persons, in due time, and according to the instituted manner.

2. Pursuant to their covenant with one another, they expressed a mutual readiness to, and satisfaction in, each other. (1.) The king was brought in state to the royal palace, and sat there on the throne of judgment, *the thrones of the house of David*, v. 19. ready to receive petitions and appeals, which he would refer it to Jehoiada to give answers to, and to give judgment upon. (2.) The people rejoiced, and Jerusalem was in quiet, v. 20. and Josephus says, they kept a feast of joy many days, making good Solomon's observation, Prov. 11. 10. *When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish, there is shouting.*

CHAP. XII.

This chapter gives us the history of the reign of Joash, which does not answer to that glorious beginning of it, which we had an account of in the foregoing chapter; he was not so illustrious at forty years old as he was at seven, yet his reign is to be reckoned one of the better sort, and appears much worse in Chronicles than it does here, 2 Chron. 24. for there we find the blood of one of God's prophets laid at his door; here we are only told, I. That he did well, while Jehoiada lived, v. 1. 3. II. That he was careful and active to repair the temple, v. 4. 16. III. That, after a mean composition with Hazael, v. 17, 18. he died ingloriously, v. 19. 21.

1. **I**N the seventh year of Jehu Jehoash began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. 2. And Jehoash did *that which was* right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him. 3. But the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.

The general account here given of Joash, is,

1. That he reigned forty years; as he began his reign when he was very young, he might, in the course of nature, have

continued much longer, for he was cut off when he was but forty seven years old, v. 1.

2. That he did that which was right, as long as Jehoiada lived to instruct him, v. 2. Many young men have come too soon to an estate, have had wealth, and power, and liberty, before they knew how to use it, and it has been of bad consequence to them; but against this danger Joash was well-guarded, (1.) By having such a good director as Jehoiada was, so wise, and experienced, and faithful to him. (2.) By having so much wisdom as to hearken to him and be directed by him, even when he was grown up. Note, It is a great mercy to young people, and especially to young princes, and all young men of consequence, to be under good direction, and to have those about them that will instruct them to do *that which is right in the sight of the Lord*; and they then do wisely, and well for themselves, when they are willing to be counselled and ruled by such: *a child left to himself brings his mother to shame*, but a child left to such a tuition may bring himself to honour and comfort.

3. That the *high places were not taken away*, v. 3. Up and down the country, they had altars both for sacrifice and incense, to the honour of the God of Israel only, but in competition with, and at least in implicit contempt of, his altar at Jerusalem. These private altars, perhaps, had been more used in the late bad reigns than formerly, because it was not safe to go up to Jerusalem, nor was the temple service performed as it should have been; and, it may be, Jehoiada connived at them, because some well-meaning people were glad of them when they could not have better, and he hoped that the reforming of the temple, and putting things into a good posture there, would, by degrees, draw people from their high places, and they would dwindle of themselves; or perhaps neither the king nor the priest had zeal enough to carry on their reformation so far, nor courage and strength enough to encounter such an inveterate usage.

4. And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the Lord, *even* the money of every one that passeth *the account*, the money that every man is set at, *and* all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the Lord, 5. Let the priests take *it* to them, every man of his acquaintance: and let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found. 6. But it was *so, that* in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash, the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house. 7. Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the *other* priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore receive no *more* money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house. 8. And the priests consented to receive no *more* money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house. 9. But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money *that was* brought into the house of the Lord. 10. And it was *so*, when they saw that *there was* much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money *that*

was found in the house of the LORD. 11. And they gave the money, being told, into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the LORD: and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders, that wrought upon the house of the LORD, 12. And to masons, and hewers of stone, and to buy timber and hewed stone to repair the breaches of the house of the LORD, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair it. 13. Howbeit there were not made for the house of the LORD bowls of silver, snuffers, basins, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of the LORD: 14. But they gave that to the workmen, and repaired therewith the house of the LORD. 15. Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully. 16. The trespass-money and sin-money was not brought into the house of the LORD: it was the priests'.

We have here an account of the repairing of the temple in the reign of Joash.

I. It seems, the temple was gone out of repair; though Solomon built it very strong, of the best materials, and in the best manner, yet, in time, it went to decay, and there were *breaches found in it*, v. 5. in the roofs, or walls, or floors, the ceiling, or wainscoting, or windows, or the partitions of the courts: even temples themselves are the worse for the wearing; the heavenly temple will never wax old. Yet it was not only the teeth of time that made these breaches, the sons of Athaliah had *broken up the house of God*, 2 Chron. 24. 7. and, out of enmity to the service of the temple, had damaged the buildings of it, and the priests had not taken care to repair the breaches in time, so that they went worse and worse; unworthy were those husbandmen to have this valuable vineyard let out to them upon such easy terms, who could not afford to keep the wine-press in due and tenantable repair, Matth. 21. 33. justly did their great Lord sue them for this permissive waste, and by his judgments recover *locum vastatum*—for dilapidations, (as the law speaks,) when this neglected temple was laid even with the ground.

II. The king himself was (as it should seem) the first and forwardest man that took care for the repair of it; we do not find that the priests complained of it, or that Jehoiada himself was active in it, but the king was zealous in the matter, 1. Because he was king, and God expects and requires from those who have power, that they use it for the maintenance and support of religion, the redress of grievances, and reparation of decays, for the exciting and engaging of ministers to do their part, and people their's. 2. Because the temple had been both his nursery and his sanctuary, when he was a child, in a grateful remembrance of which, he now appeared zealous for the honour of it. They who have experienced the comfort and benefit of religious assemblies, will make the reproach of them their burthen, (Zeph. 3. 18.) the support of them their care, and the prosperity of them their chief joy.

III. The priests were ordered to collect money for these repairs, and to take care that the work was done; the king had the affairs of his kingdom to mind, and could not himself inspect this affair, but he employed the priests to manage it, the fittest persons, and most likely, one would think, to be hearty in it. 1. He gave them orders for the levying of the money of the dedicated things; they must not stay till it was paid in, but they must call for it where they knew it was due in their respective districts, either as

redemption-money, by virtue of the law, Exod. 30. 13. or as estimation-money, by virtue of the law, Lev. 27. 2, 3. or as a free-will offering, v. 4. this they were to gather every man of his acquaintance, and it was supposed that there was no man but had acquaintance with some or other of the priests. Note, We should take the opportunity that God gives us of exciting those we have a particular acquaintance with, to that which is good. 2. He gave them orders for laying out the money they had levied, in *repairing the breaches of the house*, v. 5.

IV. This method did not answer the intention, v. 6. Little money was raised; either the priests were careless, and did not call to the people to pay in their dues, or the people had so little confidence in the priests' management, that they were backward to pay money into their hands; if they were distrusted without cause, it was the people's shame; if with, it was more their's; but what money was raised was not applied to the proper use, *the breaches of the house were not repaired*, the priests thought it might serve as well as it had done, and therefore put it off from time to time; church-work is usually slow work, but it is pity that churchmen, of all men, should be slow at it. Perhaps, what little money they raised, they thought it necessary to use for the maintenance of the priests, which must needs fall much short, when ten tribes were wholly revolted, and the other two wretchedly corrupted.

V. Another method was therefore taken; the king has his heart much upon it, to have *the breaches of the house repaired*, v. 7. His apostacy, at last, gives us cause to question whether he had as good an affection for the service of the temple as he had for the structure; many have been zealous for building and beautifying churches, and for other forms of godliness, who yet have been strangers to the power of it; however, we commend his zeal, and blame him not for reproving even his tutor Jehoiada himself, when he saw him remiss; and so convincing was his reproof, that the priests owned themselves unworthy to be any longer employed, and consented to the taking of some other measures, and the giving up of the money they had received, into other hands, v. 8. It was honestly done, when they found they had not spirit to do it themselves, not to hinder other people from doing it.

1. For raising money, v. 9, 10. The money was not paid into private hands, but put into a public chest, and then people brought it in readily, and in great abundance, not only their dues, but their free-will offerings for so good a work. The high priest and the secretary of state counted the money out of the chest, and laid it by *in specie* for the use to which it was appropriated. When public distributions are made faithfully, public contributions will be made cheerfully. The money that was given, (1.) Was dropt into the chest through a hole in the lid, past recall, to intimate, that what has been once resigned to God must never be resumed; *every man, as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give*. (2.) The chest was put on the right hand as they went in, which, some think, is alluded to in that rule of charity which our Saviour gives, *Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth*. But, while they were getting all they could, for the repair of the temple, they did not break in upon that which was the stated maintenance of the priests, v. 16. the trespass-money and the sin-money which were given to them by that law, Lev. 5. 15, 16. were reserved to them; let not the servants of the temple be starved, under colour of repairing the breaches of it.

2. For laying out the money that was raised. (1.) They did not put it into the hands of the priests, who were not versed in affairs of this nature, having other work to mind, but *into the hands of those that did the work*, or, at least, *had the oversight of it*, v. 11. They were fittest to be intrusted with this business, whose employment lay that way, *Tractant fabrilia fabri—Every artist has his trade assigned*; but let not those who are called to war, the holy warfare, entangle themselves in the affairs of this life. They that were thus intrusted, did the business, [1.] Carefully; purchasing materials, and paying workmen, v. 12. Business is done with expedition, when those are employed in it, that understand

it, and know which way to go about it. [2.] Faithfully; such a reputation they got for honesty, that there was no occasion to examine their bills, or audit their accounts; let all that are intrusted with public money, or public work, learn hence to deal faithfully, as those that know God will reckon with them, whether men do or no; those that think it is no sin to cheat the government, cheat the country, or cheat the church, will be of another mind, when God shall set their sins in order before them. (2.) They did not lay it out in ornaments for the temple, in vessels of gold or silver, but in necessary repairs first, *v. 13.* whence we may learn, in all our expences, to give that the preference which is most needful, and, in dealing for the public, to deal as we would for ourselves. After the repairs were finished, we find the overlaid plate turned into plate for the service of the temple, *2 Chron. 24. 14.*

17. Then Hazael king of Syria went up, and fought against Gath, and took it: and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem. 18. And Jehoash king of Judah took all the hallowed things that Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own hallowed things, and all the gold *that was found* in the treasures of the house of the LORD, and in the king's house, and sent *it* to Hazael king of Syria: and he went away from Jerusalem. 19. And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 20. And his servants arose, and made a conspiracy, and slew Joash in the house of Millo, which goeth down to Silla. 21. For Jozachar the son of Shineath, and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, smote him, and he died; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David: and Amaziah his son reigned in his stead.

When Joash had revolted from God, and was become both an idolater and a persecutor, the hand of the Lord went out against him, and his *last state was worse than his first.*

1. His wealth and honour became an easy prey to his neighbours. Hazael, when he had chastised Israel, *ch. 10. 32.* threatened Judah and Jerusalem likewise, took Gath, a strong city, *v. 17.* and thence intended to march with his forces against Jerusalem, the royal city, the holy city, but whose defence, on account of its sinfulness, was departed. Joash had neither spirit nor strength to make head against him, but gave him all the hallowed things, and all the gold that was found both in his exchequer, and in the treasures of the temple, *v. 18.* to hire him to march another way. If it were lawful to do this for the public safety, better part with the gold of the temple *than* expose the temple itself; yet, (1.) If he had not forsaken God, and forfeited his protection, his affairs had not been brought to *this* extremity, but he might have forced Hazael to retire. (2.) He diminished himself, and made himself very mean, lost the honour of a prince and a soldier, and of an Israelite too, in alienating the dedicated things. (3.) He impoverished himself and his kingdom. And, (4.) He tempted Hazael to come again, when he could bring home so rich a booty without striking a stroke. And it had this effect, for, the next year, the host of Syria came up against Jerusalem, destroyed the princes, and plundered the city, *2 Chron. 24. 23, 24.*

2. His life became an easy prey to his own servants. They conspired against him, and slew him, *v. 20, 21.* not aiming at his kingdom, for they opposed not his son's succeeding him, but to be avenged on him for some crime he had committed, and we are

told in Chronicles, that his murdering of the prophet, Jehoiada's son, was the provocation. In this, how unrighteous soever they were, (vengeance was not their's, nor did it belong to them to repay,) God was righteous; and this was not the only time that he let even kings know that it was at their peril, if they touched his anointed, and did his prophets any harm; and that, when he comes to make inquisition for blood, the blood of prophets will run the account very high. Thus fell Joash, who began in the spirit, and ended in the flesh. God usually sets marks of his displeasure upon apostates, even in this life; for they, of all sinners, do most *reproach the Lord.*

CHAP. XIII.

This chapter brings us again to the history of the kings of Israel, and particularly of the family of Jehu. We have here an account of the reign, I. Of his son Jehoahaz, which continued seventeen years. His bad character in general, v. 1, 2. The trouble he was brought into, v. 3. and the low ebb of his affairs, v. 7. His humiliation before God, and God's compassion toward him, v. 4, 5, and again, v. 23. His continuance in his idolatry notwithstanding, v. 6. His death, v. 8, 9. II. Of his grandson Joash, which continued sixteen years. Here is a general account of his reign in the usual form, v. 11, 13. but a particular account of the death of Elisha in his time. The kind visit the king made him, v. 14. and the encouragement he gave the king in his wars with Syria, v. 15, 19. His death and burial, v. 20. and a miracle wrought by his bones, v. 21. And, lastly, The advantages Joash gained against the Syrians, according to his predictions, v. 24, 25.

1. **I**N the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years. 2. And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom. 3. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all *their* days. 4. And Jehoahaz besought the LORD, and the LORD hearkened unto him: for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them. 5. (And the LORD gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime. 6. Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin, *but* walked therein: and there remained the grove also in Samaria.) 7. Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing. 8. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 9. And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash his son reigned in his stead.

This general account of the reign of Jehoahaz, and of the state of Israel during his seventeen years, though short, is long enough to let us see two things which are very affecting and instructive.

I. The glory of Israel raked up in the ashes, buried, and lost, and turned into shame. How unlike does Israel appear here to what it had been, and might have been! How is its crown profaned, and its honour laid in the dust!

1. It was the honour of Israel, that they worshipped the only living and true God, who is a Spirit, an eternal mind, and had rules, by which to worship him, of his own appointment: but, by *changing the glory of their incorruptible God into the similitude of an ox, the truth of God into a lie*, they lost this honour, and levelled themselves with the nations that worshipped the work of their own hands. We find here that the king *followed the sins of Jeroboam, v. 2.* and the people departed *not from them, but walked therein, v. 6.* There could not be a greater reproach than these two idolized calves were to a people, that were instructed in the service of God, and intrusted with the lively oracles. In all the history of the ten tribes, we never find the least shock given to that idolatry, but, in every reign, still the calf was their god, and they separated themselves to that shame.

2. It was the honour of Israel, that they were taken under the special protection of heaven; God himself was their Defence, the Shield of their help, and the Sword of their excellency. Happy wast thou, O Israel, upon this account. But here, as often before, we find them stript of this glory, and exposed to the insults of all their neighbours. They, by their sins, provoked God to anger, and then he *delivered them into the hands of Hazael and Ben-hadad, v. 3.* *Hazael oppressed Israel, v. 22.* Surely never was any nation so often plucked and pillaged by their neighbours as Israel was. This they brought upon themselves, by sin; when they had provoked God to pluck up their hedge, the goodness of their land did but tempt their neighbours to prey upon them. So low was Israel brought in this reign, by the many depredations which the Syrians made upon them, that the militia of the kingdom, and all the force they could bring into the field, were but *fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen*, a despicable muster, *v. 7.* Are the thousands of Israel come to this? *How is the gold become dim!* The debauching of a nation will certainly be the debasing of it.

II. Some sparks of Israel's ancient honour appearing in these ashes. It is not quite forgotten, notwithstanding all these quarrels, that this people is the Israel of God, and he the God of Israel. For,

1. It was the ancient honour of Israel, that they were a praying people; and here we find somewhat of that honour revived; for Jehoahaz their king, in his distress, *besought the Lord, v. 4.* applied himself for help, not to the calves, (what help could they give him?) but to the Lord. It becomes kings to be beggars at God's door, and the greatest of men to be humble petitioners at the footstool of his throne. Need will drive them to it.

2. It was the ancient honour of Israel, that they had *God nigh unto them in all that which they called upon him for, Deut. 4. 7.* and so he was here. Though he might justly have rejected the prayer, as an abomination to him, yet *the Lord hearkened unto Jehoahaz*, and to his prayer for himself and for his people, *v. 4.* and *he gave Israel a Saviour, v. 5.* not Jehoahaz himself, for, all his days, Hazael oppressed Israel, *v. 22.* but his son, to whom, in answer to his father's prayers, God gave success against the Syrians, so that he recovered the cities which they had taken from his father, *v. 25.* This gracious answer God gave to the prayer of Jehoahaz, not for his sake, or the sake of that unworthy people, but in remembrance of his covenant with Abraham, *v. 23.* which, in such exigencies as these, he had long since promised to have respect to, *Lev. 26. 42.* See how swift God is to shew mercy; how ready to hear prayers; how willing to find out any reason to be gracious; else he would not look so far back as that ancient covenant, which Israel had so often broken, and forfeited all the benefit of. Let this invite and engage us for ever to him, and encourage even those that have forsaken him to return and repent; for *there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared.*

10. In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king

of Judah, began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years. 11. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: *but* he walked therein. 12. And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 13. And Joash slept with his fathers; and Jeroboam sat upon his throne: and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. 14. Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! 15. And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. 16. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. 17. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them. 18. And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed. 19. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria *but* thrice.

We have here, Jehoash, or Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, and grandson of Jehu, upon the throne of Israel. Probably the house of Jehu intended some respect to the house of David, when they gave this heir-apparent to the crown the same name with him that was then king of Judah.

I. The general account here given of him and his reign is much the same with what we have already met with, and has little in it remarkable, *v. 10. .13.* He was none of the worst, and yet, because he kept up that ancient and politic idolatry of the house of Jeroboam, it is said, *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.* That one evil was enough to leave an indelible mark of infamy upon his name; for, how little evil soever men saw in it, it was, *in the sight of the Lord*, a very wicked thing; and we are sure that his judgment is according to truth. It is observable how lightly the inspired penman passes over his acts, and his might wherewith he warred, leaving it to the common historians to record them, while he takes notice only of the respect he shewed to Elisha. One good action shall make a better figure in God's book than twenty great ones; and, in his account, it gains a man a much better reputation to honour a prophet than to conquer a king and his army.

II. The particular account of what passed between him and Elisha has several things in it remarkable.

1. Elisha fell sick, *v. 14.* Observe, (1.) He lived long, for it was now about sixty years since he was first called to be a prophet. It was a great mercy to Israel, and especially to the sons of the

prophets, that he was continued so long, a burning and shining light. Elijah finished his testimony in a fourth part of that time. God's prophets have their day set them, some longer, others shorter, as Infinite Wisdom sees fit. (2.) All the latter part of his time, from the anointing of Jehu, which was forty-five years before Joash began his reign, we find no mention made of him, or of any thing he did, till we find him here upon his death-bed. He might be useful to the last, and yet not so famous as he had sometimes been. The time of his flourishing was less than the time of his living. Let not old people complain of obscurity, but rather be well pleased with retirement. (3.) The Spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, and yet he is not sent for to heaven in a fiery chariot, as Elijah was, but goes the common road out of the world, and is *visited with the visitation of all men*. If God honour some above others, who yet are not inferior to them in gifts or graces, who shall find fault? *May he not do what he will with his own?*

2. King Joash visited him in his sickness, and *wept over him*, v. 14. This was an evidence of some good in him, that he had a value and affection for a faithful prophet; so far was he from hating and persecuting him as a troubler of Israel, that he loved and honoured him as one of the greatest blessings of his kingdom, and lamented the loss of him. There have been those who would not be obedient to the word of God, and yet have had the faithful ministers of it so manifested in their consciences, that they could not but have an honour for them. Observe here, (1.) When the king heard of Elisha's sickness, he came to visit him, and to receive his dying counsel and blessing; and it was no disparagement to him, though a king, thus to honour one whom God honoured. Note, It may turn much to our spiritual advantage to attend the sick-beds and death-beds of good ministers, and other good men, that we may learn to die, and may be encouraged in religion, by the living comforts they have from it in a dying hour. (2.) Though Elisha was very old, had been a great while useful, and, in the course of nature, could not continue long, yet the king, when he saw him sick, and likely to die, wept over him. The aged are most experienced, and therefore can worst be spared. In many causes one old witness is worth ten young ones. (3.) He lamented him in the same words with which Elisha had himself lamented the removal of Elijah, *My father, my father*. It is probable he had heard or read them in that famous story. Note, Those that give just honours to the generation that goes before them, are often recompensed with the like from the generation that comes after them. He that watereth, that watereth with tears, shall be so watered also himself, when it comes to his own turn, Prov. 11. 25. (4.) This king was herein selfish; he lamented the loss of Elisha, because he was the chariots and horsemen of Israel, and therefore could be ill spared, when Israel was so poor in chariots and horsemen, as we find they were, v. 7. when they had in all but fifty horsemen and ten chariots. They who consider how much good men contribute to the defence of a nation, and the keeping off of God's judgments, will see cause to lament the removal of them.

3. Elisha gave the king great assurances of his success against the Syrians, Israel's present oppressors, and encouraged him to prosecute the war against him with vigour. Elisha was aware that therefore he was loath to part with him, because he looked upon him as the great bulwark of the kingdom against that common enemy, and depended much upon his blessings and prayers in his designs against them. "Well," says Elisha, "if that be it that makes thee thus sad, let not that trouble thee, thou shalt be victorious over the Syrians when I am in my grave: *'I die, but God will surely visit you'*. He has the residue of the Spirit, and can raise up other prophets to pray for you." God's grace is not tied to one hand. He can bury his workmen, and yet carry on his work.

To animate the king against the Syrians, he gives him a sign; orders him to *take bow and arrows*, v. 15. to intimate to him, that, in order to the deliverance of his kingdom from the Syrians, he must put himself into a military posture, and resolve to undergo the perils and fatigues of war; God would be the *Agent*, but he

must be the instrument. And, that he should be successful, he gives him a token, by directing him,

(1.) To shoot an arrow toward Syria, v. 16, 17. The king, no doubt, knew how to manage a bow better than the prophet did, and yet, because the arrow now to be shot was to have its significancy from the divine institution, as if he were now to be disciplined, he receives the words of command from the prophet. *Put thy hand upon the bow: Open the window: Shoot.* Nay, as if he had been a child that never drew a bow before, *Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands*, to signify that in all his expeditions against the Syrians, he must look up to God for direction and strength; must reckon his own hands not sufficient for him, but go on, in a dependence upon divine aid; *He teacheth my hands to war*, Ps. 18. 34.—144. 1. The trembling hands of a dying prophet, as they signified the concurrence and communication of the power of God, gave this arrow more force than the hands of the king in his full strength. The Syrians had made themselves masters of the country that lay eastward, ch. 10. 33. Thitherward, therefore, the arrow is directed, and such an interpretation given by the prophet of the shooting of this arrow, though shot, in one respect, at random, as made it, [1.] A commission to the king to attack the Syrians, notwithstanding their power and possession. [2.] A promise of success therein: it is the *arrow of the Lord's deliverance, even the arrow of deliverance from Syria*. It is God that commands deliverance; and, when he will effect it, who can hinder? The arrow of deliverance is his. He shoots out his arrows, and the work is done, Ps. 18. 14. *"Thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, where they are now encamped, or where they are to have a general rendezvous of their forces, till thou have consumed those of them that are vexations and oppressive to thee and thy kingdom."*

(2.) To *strike with the arrows*, v. 18, 19. The prophet having, in God's name, assured him of victory over the Syrians, he will now try him what improvement he will make of his victories, whether he will push them on with more zeal than Ahab did, when Ben-hadad lay at his mercy. For the trial of this, he bids him *smite with the arrows on the ground*: "Believe them brought to the ground by the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and laid at thy feet; and now shew me what thou wilt do to them when thou hast them down, whether thou wilt do as David did, when God gave him the necks of his enemies, beat them small as the dust before the wind," Ps. 18. 40, 42. The king shewed not that eagerness and flame which one might have expected upon this occasion, but smote thrice, and no more. Either out of foolish tenderness to the Syrians, he smote as if he were afraid of hurting them, at least of ruining them; willing to shew mercy to them that never did, nor ever would, shew mercy to him or his people. Or, perhaps, he smote but thrice, and very coldly, because he thought it but a silly thing, that it looked idle and childish for a king to beat the floor with his arrows; and thrice was often enough for him to play the fool, merely to please the prophet. But, by contemning the sign, he lost the thing signified, sorely to the grief of the dying prophet, who was wroth with him, and told him he should have smitten five or six times. Not being straitened in the power and promise of God, why should he be straitened in his own expectations and endeavours? Note, It cannot but be a trouble to good men to see those they wish well to stand in their own light, and forsake their own mercies; to see them lose their advantages against their spiritual enemies, and so give them advantage.

20. And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. 21. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he re-

vived, and stood up on his feet. 22. But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. 23. And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet. 24. So Hazael king of Syria died; and Ben-hadad his son reigned in his stead. 25. And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel.

We must here attend,

I. The sepulchre of Elisha: he died in a good old age, and they buried him; and what follows, shews,

1. What power there was in his life to keep off judgments; for, as soon as he was dead, the bands of the Moabites invaded the land; not great armies to face them in the field, but roving skulking bands, that murdered and plundered by surprise. God has many ways to chastise a provoking people. The king was apprehensive of danger only from the Syrians, but, behold, the Moabites invade him. Trouble comes sometimes from that point whence we least feared it. The mentioning of this, immediately upon the death of Elisha, intimates, that the removal of God's faithful prophets is a presage of judgments coming. When ambassadors are recalled, heralds may be expected.

2. What power there was in his dead body; it communicated life to another dead body, r. 21. This great miracle, though very briefly related, was a decided proof of his mission, and a confirmation of all his prophecies. It was also a plain indication of another life after this: when Elisha died, there was not an end of him, for he could not have done this. From operation we may infer existence. By this it appeared that the Lord was still the God of Elisha, therefore Elisha still lived, for *he is not the God of the dead, but of the living*. And it may, perhaps, have a reference to Christ, by whose death and burial the grave is made to all believers a safe and happy passage to life. It likewise intimated, that though Elisha was dead, yet, in the virtue of the promises made by him, Israel's interests, though they seemed quite sunk and lost, should revive and flourish again. The neighbours were carrying the dead body of a man to the grave, and, fearing to fall into the hands of the Moabites, a party of whom they saw at a distance near the place where the body was to be interred, they laid the corpse in the next convenient place, which proved to be Elisha's sepulchre. The dead man, upon touching his bones, revived, and, it is likely, went home again with his friends. Josephus relates the story otherwise: "That some thieves, having robbed and murdered an honest traveller, threw his dead body into Elisha's grave, and it immediately revived." Elijah was honoured in his departure, Elisha was honoured after his departure. God thus dispenses honours as he pleases, but, one day or other, the rest of all the saints will be glorious, Isa. 11. 10. It is good being near the saints, and having our lot with them both in life and death.

II. The sword of Joash king of Israel; and we find it successful against the Syrians.

1. The cause of his success was God's favour, v. 23. *The Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them* in their miseries, and *respect unto them*. The several expressions here, of the same import, call upon us to observe and admire the triumphs of divine goodness in the deliverance of such a provoking people. It was of the Lord's mercies that they were not consumed; because he would not destroy them as yet. He foresaw they would destroy themselves, as he did, but, as yet, he would relieve them, and give

them space to repent. The slowness of God's processes against sinners must be construed to the honour of his mercy, not the impeachment of his justice.

2. The effect of his success, was, Israel's benefit. He recovered out of the hands of Ben-hadad the cities of Israel which the Syrians were possessed of, v. 25. This was a great kindness to the cities themselves, which were hereby brought from under the yoke of oppression; and to the whole kingdom, which was much strengthened by the reduction of those cities. Thrice Joash beat the Syrians, just as often as he had struck the ground with the arrows, and then a full stop was put to the course of his victories. Many have repented, when it was too late, of their distrusts, and the straitness of their desires.

CHAP. XIV.

This chapter continues the history of the succession in the kingdoms both of Judah and Israel. I. In the kingdom of Judah, here is the entire history (as much as is recorded in this book) of Amaziah's reign; his good character, v. 1. 4. The justice he executed on the murderers of his father, v. 5, 6. His victory over the Edomites, v. 7. His war with Joash, and his defeat in that war, v. 8. 11. His fall, at last, by a conspiracy against him, v. 17. 20. And the beginning of the history of Azariah, v. 21, 22. II. In the kingdom of Israel, the conclusion of the reign of Joash, v. 15, 16. And the entire history of Jeroboam his son, the second of that name, v. 23. 29. How many great men are made to stand in a little compass in God's book!

I. **I**N the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel reigned Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah. 2. He was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 3. And he did *that which was right* in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did. 4. Howbeit the high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places. 5. And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father. 6. But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the Lord commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin. 7. He slew of Edom in the valley of salt ten thousand, and took Selah by war, and called the name of it Joktheel unto this day.

Amaziah is the king whom here we have an account of, the son and successor of Joash: let us take a view of him,

1. In the temple; and there he acted, in some measure, well, like Joash, but not like David, v. 3. He began well, but did not persevere. He *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, kept up his attendance on God's altars, and his attention to God's word, yet not like David. It is not enough to do that which our pious predecessors did, merely to keep up the usage, but we must do it as they did it, from the same principle of faith and devotion, and with the same sincerity and resolution. It is here taken notice of, as before, that *the high places were not taken away*, v. 4. It is hard to get clear of those corruptions which, by long usage, have gained both prescription and a favourable opinion.

2. On the bench; and there we have him doing justice on the traitors that murdered his father; not as soon as ever he came to the crown, lest it should have occasioned some disturbance, but he prudently deferred it till *the kingdom was confirmed in his hand*, v. 5. To weaken a factious party gradually, when it is not safe to provoke, often proves the way to ruin it effectually. Justice strikes surely by striking slowly, and is often executed most prudently, when it is not executed presently. Wisdom here is profitable to direct. Amaziah did thus, (1.) According to the rule of the law, that ancient rule, that *he that sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*. Never let traitors or murderers expect to come to their graves like other men: *let them flee to the pit, and let no man stay them*. (2.) Under the limitation of the law. *The children of murderers he slew not*, because the law of Moses had expressly provided that *the children should not be put to death for the fathers*, v. 6. It is probable that this is taken notice of, because there were those about him, that advised him to that rigour, both in revenge, because the crime was extraordinary, the murder of a king; and in policy, that the children might not plot against him, in revenge of their father's death. But against these insinuations he opposed the express law of God, Deut. 24. 16. which he was to judge by, and which he resolved to adhere to, and trust God with the issue. God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, because every man is guilty before him, and owes him a death; so that if he require the life for the father's sin, he does no wrong, the sinner having forfeited it already by his own: but he does not allow earthly princes to do thus; the children, before them, are innocent, and therefore must not suffer as guilty.

3. In the field; and there we find him triumphing over the Edomites, v. 7. Edom had *revolted from under the hand of Judah* in Joram's time, ch. 8. 22. now he makes war upon them to bring them back to their allegiance, kills 10,000, and takes the chief city of Arabia the stony, called *Silah*, a rock, and gave it a new name. We shall find a larger account of this expedition, 2 Chron. 25. 5, &c.

8. Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face. 9. And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that *was* in Lebanon sent to the cedar that *was* in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that *was* in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle. 10. Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory of *this*, and tarry at home: for why shouldst thou meddle to *thy* hurt, that thou shouldst fall, even thou, and Judah with thee? 11. But Amaziah would not hear. Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went up; and he and Amaziah king of Judah looked one another in the face at Beth-shemesh, which *belongeth* to Judah. 12. And Judah was put to the worse before Israel; and they fled every man to their tents. 13. And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits. 14. And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels *that were* found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of

the king's house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria.

For several successions after the division of the kingdoms, that of Judah suffered much by the *enmity* of Israel. After Asa's time, for several successions, it suffered more by the *friendship* of Israel, and by the alliance and affinity they made with them. But now we meet with hostility between them again, which had not been for some ages before.

1. Amaziah, upon no provocation, and without shewing any cause of quarrel, challenges Joash into the field, v. 8. "*Come, let us look one another in the face*; let us try our strength in battle." Had he challenged him to a personal duel only, the error had remained with himself, but each must bring all their forces into the field, and thousands of lives on both sides must be sacrificed to his capricious humour. Hereby he shewed himself proud, presumptuous, and prodigal of blood. Some think that he intended to avenge the injury which the dismissed disgusted Israelites had lately done to his country, in their return, 2 Chron. 25. 13. and that he had also the vanity to think of subduing the kingdom of Israel, and reuniting it to Judah. *A fool's lips thus enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes*. They that challenge are chargeable with that beginning of strife, which is as the letting forth of water. He that is eager either to fight, or to go to law, may perhaps have enough of it quickly, and be the first that repents it.

II. Joash sends him a grave rebuke for his challenge, with advice to withdraw it, v. 9, 10. 1. He mortifies his pride, by comparing himself to a cedar, a stately tree, and Amaziah to a thistle, a sorry weed; telling him, he was so far from fearing him, that he despised him, and scorned as much to have any thing to do with him, or make any alliance with him, as the cedar would to match his daughter to a thistle. The ancient house of David he thinks not worthy to be named the same day with the house of Jehu, though an upstart. How may a humble man smile to hear two proud and scornful men set their wits on work, to vilify and undervalue one another! 2. He foretells his fall: *a wild beast trode down the thistle*, and so put an end to his treaty with the cedar; so easily does Joash think his forces can crush Amaziah, and so unable does he think him to make any resistance. 3. He shews him the folly of his challenge; "*Thou hast indeed smitten Edom*, a weak, unarmed, undisciplined, body of men, and therefore thinkest thou canst carry all before thee, and subdue the regular forces of Israel with as much ease: *thine heart has lifted thee up*." See where the root of all sin lies; it is in the heart, thence it flows, and that must bear the blame: it is not Providence, the event, the occasion, whatever it is, that makes men proud, or secure, or discontented, or the like, but it is their own heart that does it, "*Thou art proud of the blow thou hast given to Edom*, as if that had made thee formidable to all mankind." Those wretchedly deceive themselves, that magnify their own performances, and, because they have been blessed with some little success and reputation, conclude themselves fit for any thing, and no less sure of it. 4. He counsels him to be content with the honour he had won, and not to hazard that, by grasping at more, that was out of his reach; *Why shouldst thou meddle to thy hurt*, as fools often do, that will be meddling? Prov. 20. 3. Many would have had wealth and honour enough, if they had but known when they had enough; he warns him of the consequence, that it would be fatal not to himself only, but to his kingdom, which he ought to protect.

III. Amaziah persisted in his resolution, and the issue was bad, he had better have tarried at home, for Joash gave him such a look in the face as to put him to confusion; challengers commonly prove to be on the losing side. 1. His army was routed and dispersed, v. 12. Josephus says, "When they were to engage, they were struck with such a terror, that they did not strike a stroke, but every one made the best of his way." 2. He himself was taken prisoner by the king of Israel, and then had enough of *looking him*

in the face. Amaziah's pedigree comes in here somewhat abruptly, (*the son of Joash, the son of Ahaziah,*) because, perhaps, he had gloried in the dignity of his ancestors, or because he now smarted for their iniquity. 3. The conqueror entered Jerusalem, which timely opened to him, and yet he brake down their wall, (and, as Josephus says, drove his chariot in triumph through the breach,) in reproach to them, and that he might, when he pleased, take possession of the royal city. 4. He plundered Jerusalem, took away all that was valuable, and returned to Samaria laden with spoils, *v. 14.* It was said of Joash, that he did that which was *evil in the sight of the Lord*, and of Amaziah, that he did *that which was right*; and yet Joash triumphs thus over Amaziah; and why so? Because God would shew, in Amaziah's fate, that he resists the proud, or because, whatever they were otherwise, Joash had lately been respectful to one of God's prophets, *ch. 13, 14.* but Amaziah had been abusive to another, *2 Chron. 25, 16.* and God will honour those who honour him and his prophets, but those who despise them, and him in them, shall be lightly esteemed.

15. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?* 16. And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his stead. 17. And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years. 18. And the rest of the acts of Amaziah, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?* 19. Now they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem: and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there. 20. And they brought him on horses: and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers, in the city of David. 21. And all the people of Judah took Azariah, which *was* sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. 22. He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers.

Here are three kings brought to their graves in these few verses.

1. Joash king of Israel, *v. 15, 16.* We attended his funeral once before, *ch. 13, 12, 13.* But, because the historian had occasion to give a further account of his life and actions, he again mentions his death and burial.

2. Amaziah king of Judah; 15 years he survived his conqueror the king of Israel, *v. 17.* A man may live a great while after he has been shamed, may be thoroughly mortified, (as Amaziah, no doubt, was,) and yet not dead; his acts are said to be found written in his annals, *v. 18.* but not his might, for his cruelty when he was a conqueror over the Edomites, and his insolence when he challenged the king of Israel, shewed him void of true courage. He was slain by his own subjects, who hated him for his mal-administration, *v. 19.* and made Jerusalem disagreeable to him, the ignominious breach made in their walls being occasioned by his folly and presumption; he fled to Lachish; how long he continued concealed or sheltered there, we are not told, but, at last, he was there murdered, *v. 19.* No further did the rage of the rebels extend, for they brought him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him there among his ancestors.

3. Azariah succeeded Amaziah, but not till 12 years after his father's death, for Amaziah died in the 15th year of Jeroboam, as appears by comparing *v. 23.* with *v. 2.* but Azariah did not begin his reign till the 27th of Jeroboam, *ch. 25, 1.* for he was but 4

years old at the death of his father, so that, for 12 years, till he came to be 16, the government was in the hands of protectors; he reigned very long, *ch. 15, 2.* and yet the account of his reign is here industriously huddled up, and broken off abruptly, *v. 22.* He built Elath, which had belonged to the Edomites, but, it is probable, was recovered by his father, *v. 7.* after that the king slept with his fathers, as if that had been all he did that was worth mentioning, or rather, it is meant of king Amaziah, he did it soon after he died.

23. In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, *and reigned* forty and one years. 24. And he did *that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 25. He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which *was* of Gath-hepher. 26. For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, *that it was* very bitter: for *there was* not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. 27. And the Lord said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. 28. Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, *which belonged to* Judah, for Israel, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?* 29. And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, *even* with the kings of Israel; and Zachariah his son reigned in his stead.

Here is an account of the reign of Jeroboam the second; I doubt it is an indication of the affection and adherence of the house of Jehu to the sins of *Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin*, that they called an heir-apparent to the crown by his name, thinking *that* an honourable name, which in the book of God is infamous, and stigmatized as much as any other.

I. His reign was long, the longest of all the reigns of the kings of Israel, he reigned 41 years; yet his cotemporary Azariah, the king of Judah, reigned longer, even 52 years; this Jeroboam reigned just as long as Asa had done, *1 Kings, 15, 10.* yet one did that which was good, and the other that which was evil. We cannot measure men's characters by the length of their lives, or of their outward prosperity; *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.*

II. His character was the same with that of the rest of those kings; *he did that which was evil*, *v. 24.* for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, he kept up the worship of the calves, and never left that, thinking there was no harm in it, because it had been the way of all his ancestors and predecessors; but a sin is never the less evil in God's sight, whatever it is in our's, for its being an ancient usage; and a frivolous plea it will be against doing good, that we have been accustomed to do evil.

III. Yet he prospered more than most of them, for though, in that one thing, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, yet, it is likely, in other respects, there was some good found in him, and therefore God owned him.

1. By prophecy; he raised up Jonah the son of Amittai, a Galilean, (so much were they mistaken, that said, *Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet*, John, 7. 52.) and by him intimated the purposes of his favour to Israel, notwithstanding their provocations, encouraged him and his kingdom to take up arms for the recovery of their ancient possessions, and (which would contribute no little to their success) assured them of victory. It is a sign that God has not cast off his people, if he continue faithful ministers among them; when Elisha was gone, who strengthened the hands of Joash, Jonah was sent to encourage his son. Happy is the land that has a succession of prophets running parallel with a succession of princes, that the word of the Lord may endure for ever; of this Jonah we read much in that little book of scripture that bears his name; it is probable that it was when he was a young man, and fit for such an expedition, that God sent him to Nineveh, and that it was when he had yet been but a little conversant with the visions of God, that he flew off and fretted as he did; and if so, this is an undoubted evidence of the forgiveness of his faults and follies, that he was afterward employed as a messenger of mercy to Israel. A commission amounts to a pardon, and he that had himself found mercy, notwithstanding his provocations, could the better encourage them with the hope of mercy, notwithstanding their's. Some that have been foolish and passionate, and have gone about their work very awkwardly at first, yet afterward have proved useful and eminent; men must not be thrown away for every fault.

2. By providence; the event was according to the word of the Lord, his arms were successful, he restored the coast of Israel, recovered those frontier towns and countries that lay from Hamath in the north, to the sea of the plain, that is, the sea of Sodom in the south, all which the Syrians had possessed themselves of, v. 25. Two reasons are here given why God blessed them with those victories, (1.) Because the distress was very great, which made them the objects of his compassion, v. 26. Though he saw not any signs of their repentance and reformation, yet *he saw their affliction, that it was very bitter*; they that lived in those countries which the enemies were masters of, were miserably oppressed and enslaved, and could call nothing their own; the rest, we may suppose, were much impoverished by the frequent incursions the enemy made upon them to plunder them, and continually terrified by their threatenings, so that *there was none shut up or left*, both towns and countries were laid waste, and stripped of their wealth, and no helper appeared. To this extremity were they reduced, in many parts of the country, in the beginning of Jeroboam's reign, when God, in mere pity to them, heard the cry of their affliction, (for no mention is made here of the cry of their prayers,) and wrought this deliverance for them by the hand of Jeroboam. Let those whose case is pitiable, take comfort from the divine pity: we read of God's bowels of mercy, Isa. 63. 15. Jer. 31. 20. and that he is full of compassion, Ps. 86. 15. (2.) Because the decree was not yet gone forth for their utter destruction; he had not as yet said, *he would blot out the name of Israel*, v. 27. and because he had not said it, he would not do it: if it be understood of the dispersion of the ten tribes, he did say it, and do it, not long after; (reprieves are not pardons;) if of the utter extirpation of the name of Israel, he never said it, nor will ever do it, for that name still remains under heaven in the *gospel—Israel*, and will, to the end of time; and because they, at present, bare that name, which was to have this lasting honour, he shewed them this favour, as well as for the sake of the ancient honour of that name, ch. 13. 23.

Lastly, Here is the conclusion of Jeroboam's reign; we read, v. 28. of his might, and how he warred, but, v. 29. *he slept with his fathers*; for the mightiest must yield to death, and there is no discharge in that war.

Many prophets there had been in Israel, a constant succession of them in every age, but none of the prophets had left any of their prophecies in writing, till those of this age began to do it, and their prophecies are part of the canon of scripture; it was in the reign of this Jeroboam that *Hosea* (who continued very long a

prophet) began to prophesy, and he was the first that wrote his prophecies, therefore the word of the Lord by him is called *the beginning of the word of the Lord*, Hos. 1. 2. Then *that part of the word of the Lord* began to be written; at the same time, *Amos* prophesied, and wrote his prophecy; soon after, *Micah*, and then *Isaiah*, in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah; thus God never left himself without witness, but, in the darkest and most degenerate ages of the church, raised up some to be burning and shining lights in it, to their own age, by their preaching and living, and a few, by their writings, to reflect light upon us on whom the ends of the world are come.

CHAP. XV.

In this chapter, I. The history of two of the kings of Judah is briefly recorded, 1. Of Azariah, or Uzziah, v. 1. .7. 2. Of Jotham his son, v. 32. .38. II. The history of many of the kings of Israel that reigned at the same time, is given us in short, five in succession, all of whom, except one, went down slain to the pit, and their murderers were their successors. 1. Zechariah, the last of the house of Jehu, reigned six months, and then was slain, and succeeded by Shallum, v. 8. .12. 2. Shallum reigned one month, and then was slain, and succeeded by Menahem, v. 13. .15. 3. Menahem reigned ten years, (or tyrannised rather, such was his barbarous cruelty, v. 16. and unreasonable exactions, v. 20.) and then died in his bed, and left his son to succeed him first, and then suffer for him, v. 16. .22. 4. Pekahiah reigned two years, and then was slain, and succeeded by Pekah, v. 23. .26. 5. Pekah reigned twenty years, and then was slain, and succeeded by Hoshea, the last of all the kings of Israel, (v. 27. .31.) for things were now working and hastening apace toward the final destruction of that kingdom.

1. **I**N the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel began Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah to reign. 2. Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem. 3. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done; 4. Save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places. 5. And the Lord smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house. And Jotham the king's son was over the house, judging the people of the land. 6. And the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 7. So Azariah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.

This is a short account of the reign of Azariah.

1. Most of it is general, and the same that has been given of others; he began young, and reigned long, v. 2. did, for the most part, that which was right, v. 3. It was happy for the kingdom, that a good reign was a long one: only he had not zeal and courage enough to take away the high places, v. 4.

2. That which is peculiar, v. 5. (that God smote him with a leprosy,) is more largely related, with the occasion of it, 2 Chron. 26. 16, &c. where we have also a fuller account of the glories of the former part of his reign, as well as of the disgraces of the latter part of it. He did that which was right, as Amaziah had done; like him, he began well, but failed before he finished. Here we are told, (1.) That he was a leper; the greatest of men are not only subject to the common calamities, but also to the common infirmities, of the human nature; and, if they be guilty of any heinous sin, they lie as open as the meanest to the most grievous strokes

of divine vengeance. (2.) God smote him with this leprosy, to chastise him for his presumptuous invasion of the priests' office; if great men be proud men, some way or other, God will humble them, and make them know he is both above them, and against them, for he resisteth the proud. (3.) That he was a leper *to the day of his death*; though we have reason to think he repented, and the sin was pardoned, yet, for warning to others, he was continued under this mark of God's displeasure as long as he lived, and perhaps it was for the good of his soul, that he was so. (4.) That he *dwelt in a several house*, as being made ceremonially unclean by the law, to the discipline of which, though a king, he must submit; he that presumptuously intruded into God's temple, and pretended to be a priest, is justly shut out from his own palace, and shut up as a prisoner or a recluse, ever after. We suppose that his *several house* was made as convenient and agreeable as might be; some translate it a *free house*, where he had liberty to take his pleasure: but, however, it was a great mortification to one that had been so much a man of honour, and a man of business, as he had been, to be cut off from society, and dwell always in a *several house*: it would almost make life itself a burthen, even to kings, though they have never any to converse with but their inferiors; the most contemplative men would soon be weary of it. (5.) That his son was his viceroy in the affairs both of his court, for he was *over the house*, and of his kingdom, for he was *judging the people of the land*; and it was both a comfort to him, and a blessing to his kingdom, that he had such a son to fill up his room.

8. In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, did Zachariah the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria six months. 9. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 10. And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people, and slew him, and reigned in his stead. 11. And the rest of the acts of Zachariah, behold, they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 12. This *was* the word of the LORD which he spake unto Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth *generation*. And so it came to pass. 13. Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the nine and thirtieth year of Uzziah king of Judah: and he reigned a full month in Samaria. 14. For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and smote Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and slew him, and reigned in his stead. 15. And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made, behold, they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 16. Then Menahem smote Tiphshah, and all that *were* therein, and the coasts thereof from Tirzah: because they opened not *to him*, therefore he smote it; and all the women therein that were with child he ripped up. 17. In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king of Judah, began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and *reigned* ten years in Samaria. 18. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD: he departed not all his days

from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 19. And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land: and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand. 20. And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, *even* of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and stayed not there in the land. 21. And the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 22. And Menahem slept with his fathers; and Pekahiah his son reigned in his stead. 23. In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and *reigned* two years. 24. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 25. But Pekah the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, conspired against him, and smote him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house, with Argob and Arieh, and with him fifty men of the Gileadites: and he killed him, and reigned in his room. 26. And the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, behold, they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 27. In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and *reigned* twenty years. 28. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 29. In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria. 30. And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah. 31. And the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, behold, they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

The best days of the kingdom of Israel were while the government was in Jehu's family; in his reign, and the next three, though there were many abominable corruptions and miserable grievances in Israel, yet the crown went in succession, the kings died in their beds, and some care was taken of public affairs; but now that those days are at an end, the history which we have in these verses, of about 33 years, represents the affairs of that kingdom in the utmost confusion imaginable; woe to them that were with child, (v.16.) and to them that gave suck in those days, for then must needs be great tribulations, when, for *the transgression of the land, many were the princes thereof*.

I. Let us observe something, in general, concerning these un

happy revolutions, and the calamities which must needs attend them, these bad times, as they may truly be called.

1. God had tried the people of Israel both with judgments and mercies, explained and enforced by his servants the prophets, and yet they continued impenitent and unreformed, and therefore God justly brought these miseries upon them; as Moses had warned them, *If ye will yet walk contrary to me, I will punish you yet seven times more*, Lev. 26. 21, &c.

2. God made good his promise to Jehu, that his sons, to the fourth generation after him, should sit upon the throne of Israel; which was a greater favour than was shewn to any of the royal families, either before or after him. God had said it should be so, *ch. 10. 30.* and we are told in this chapter, *v. 12.* that so it came to pass. See how punctual God is to his promises; these calamities God long designed for Israel, and they deserved them, yet they were not inflicted till that word had taken effect to the full; thus God rewarded Jehu for his zeal in destroying the worship of Baal and the house of Ahab; and yet, when the measure of the sins of the house of Jehu was full, God avenged upon it the blood then shed, called *the blood of Jezreel*, Hos. 1. 4.

3. All these kings did that which was *evil in the sight of the Lord for they walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat*; though at variance with one another, yet, in this, they agreed, to keep up idolatry, and the people loved to have it so; though they were emptied from vessel to vessel, that *taste remained in them, and that scent was not changed*. It was sad indeed, when their government was so often altered, (yet never for the better,) that, among all those contending interests, none of them should think it as much their interest to destroy the calves, as others had done to support them.

4. Each of these (except one) conspired against his predecessor, and slew him, *Shallum, Menahem, Pekah, and Hoshea*, all traitors and murderers, and yet all kings a while; one of them 10, another 20, and another 9 years; for God may suffer wickedness to prosper, and to carry away the wealth and honours a while, but, sooner or later, blood shall have blood, and he that dealt treacherously shall be dealt treacherously with; one wicked man is often made a scourge to another, and every wicked man, at length, a ruin to himself.

5. The ambition of the great men made the nation miserable; here is Tiphshah, a city of Israel, barbarously destroyed, with all the coasts thereof, by one of these pretenders, *v. 16.* and, no doubt, it was through blood that each of them waded to the throne, nor could any of these kings perish alone; no land can have greater pests, nor Israel worse troublers, than such men as care not how much the welfare and repose of their country are sacrificed to their revenge, and affectation of dominion.

6. While the nation was thus shattered by divisions at home, the kings of Assyria, first one, *v. 19.* and then another, *v. 29.* came against it, and did what they pleased; nothing does more toward the making of a nation an easy prey to a common enemy, than intestine broils, and contests for the sovereignty; happy the land where that is settled.

7. This was the condition of Israel, just before they were quite ruined, and carried away captives, for that was done in the ninth year of Hoshea, the last of these usurpers. If they had, in these days of confusion and perplexity, humbled themselves before God, and sought his face, that final destruction might have been prevented; but, when God judgeth, he will overcome; these factions, the fruit of an evil spirit sent among them, hastened that captivity; for a kingdom, thus divided against itself, will soon come to desolation.

II. Let us take a short view of the particular reigns.

1. Zachariah, the son of Jeroboam, began to reign in the thirty-eighth year of Azariah, or Uzziah, king of Judah, *v. 8.* Some of the most critical chronologers reckon, that, between Jeroboam and his son Zachariah, the throne was vacant 22 years, others 11 years, through the disturbances and dissensions that were in the kingdom; and then it was not strange that Zachariah was deposed before he was well seated on the throne; he reigned

but six months, and then Shallum *slew him before the people*, perhaps, as Caesar was slain in the senate, or he put him to death publicly as a criminal, with the approbation of the people, to whom he had, some way or other, made himself odious; so ended the line of Jehu.

2. But had Shallum peace, who slew his master? No, he had not, *v. 13.* one month of days measured his reign, and then he was cut off; perhaps to this the prophet, who then lived, refers, Hos. 5. 1. *Now shall a month devour them with their portions.* That dominion seldom lasts long which is founded in blood and falsehood. Menahem, either provoked by his crime, or animated by his example, soon served him as he had served his master, *slew him, and reigned in his stead, v. 14.* Probably, he was general of the army, which then lay encamped at Tirzah, and, hearing of Shallum's treason and usurpation, hastened to punish it, as Omri did that of Zimri in a like case, 1 Kings, 16. 17.

3. Menahem held the kingdom ten years, *v. 17.* But whereas we have heard that the *kings of the house of Israel were merciful kings*, 1 Kings, 20, 31. this Menahem (the scandal of his country) was so prodigiously cruel to those of his own nation, which hesitated, a little, at submitting to him, that he not only ruined a city, and the coasts thereof, but, forgetting that he himself was born of a woman, *ripped up all the women with child, v. 16.* We may well wonder that it ever should enter into the heart of any man, to be so barbarous, and to be so perfectly lost to humanity itself. By these cruel methods he hoped to strengthen himself, and to frighten all others into his interests; but, it seems, he did not gain his point; for when the king of Assyria came against him, (1.) So little confidence had he in his people, that he durst not meet him as an enemy, but was obliged, at a vast expence, to purchase a peace with him. (2.) Such need had he of help *to confirm the kingdom in his hand*, that he made it part of his bargain with him, (a bargain which, no doubt, the king of Assyria knew how to make a good hand of, another time,) that he should assist him against his own subjects that were disaffected to him. The money where, with he purchased his friendship, was a vast sum, no less than 1,000 talents of silver, *v. 19.* which Menahem exacted, it is probable, by military execution, *of all the mighty men of wealth*, very considerably sparing the poor, and laying the burthen (as was fit) on those that were best able to bear it; being raised, it was given *to the king of Assyria*, as pay for his army, fifty shekels of silver for each man in it; thus he got clear of the king of Assyria for this time, he stayed not to quarter in the land, *v. 20.* but his army now got so rich a booty with so little trouble, that it encouraged them to come again, not long after, when they laid all waste; thus was *he* the betrayer of his country that should have been the protector of it.

4. Pekahiah, the son of Menahem, succeeded his father, but reigned only two years, and then was treacherously slain by Pekah, falling under the load both of his own and of his father's wickedness. It is repeated concerning him, as before, that he *departed not from the sins of Jeroboam*; still that is mentioned to shew that God was righteous in bringing that destruction upon them; which came not long after, because they hated to be reformed, *v. 24.* Pekah, it seems, had some persons of figure in his interest, two of them are here named, *v. 25.* and with their help he compassed his design.

5. Pekah, though he got the kingdom by treason, kept it 20 years, *v. 27.* so long it was before his violent dealing returned upon his own head, but it returned at last. This Pekah, son of Remaliah, (1.) Made himself more considerable abroad than any of these usurpers, for he was, even in the latter end of his time, (in the reign of Ahaz, which began in his 17th year,) a great terror to the kingdom of Judah, as we find, Isa. 7. 1, &c. (2.) He lost a great part of his kingdom to the king of Assyria; several cities are here named, *v. 29.* which were taken from him, all the land of Gilead on the other side Jordan, and Galilee in the north, containing the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, were seized, and the inhabitants carried captive into Assyria. By this judgment God punished him for his attempt upon Judah and Jerusalem; it was then foretold, that within two or three years after he made that

attempt, before a child, then born, should be able to cry, *My father and my mother*, the riches of Samaria should be *taken away before the king of Assyria*, Isa. 8. 4. and here we have the accomplishment of that prediction. (3.) Soon after this, he left his life to the resentments of his countrymen, who, it is probable, were disgusted at him for leaving them exposed to a foreign enemy, while he was invading Judah; this Hoshea took advantage of, and, to gain his crown, seized his life, *slew him, and reigned in his stead*. Surely he was fond of a crown indeed, who, at this time, would run such a hazard as a traitor did: for the crown of Israel, now that it had lost the choicest of its flowers, and jewels, was lined more than ever with thorns, had, of late, been fatal to all the heads that had worn it, was forfeited to divine justice, and now ready to be laid in the dust; a crown which a wise man would not have taken up in the street, yet Hoshea not only ventures upon it, but ventures for it, and it cost him dear.

32. In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel, began Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah to reign. 33. Five and twenty years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. 34. And he did *that which was right* in the sight of the LORD: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. 35. Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the LORD. 36. Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, *are they not written* in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 37. In those days the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah. 38. And Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a short account of the reign of Jotham king of Judah, of whom we are told,

1. That he reigned very well, *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, v. 34. Josephus gives him a very high character, that he was pious toward God, just toward men, and laid out himself for the public good; that, whatever was amiss, he took care to have it rectified; and, in short, wanted no virtue that became a good prince. Though the high places were not taken away, yet, to draw people from them, and keep them close to God's holy place, he shewed great respect to the temple, and built the higher gate which he went through to the temple. If magistrates cannot do all they would, for the suppressing of vice and profaneness, let them do so much the more for the support and advancement of piety and virtue, and bringing of them into reputation. If they cannot pull down the high places of sin, yet let them build and beautify the high gate of God's house.

2. That he died in the midst of his days, v. 33. Of most of the kings of Judah we are told how old they were when they began their reign, and by that may compute how old they were when they died; but no account is kept of the *age* of any of the kings of Israel, (that I remember,) only of the years of their *reigns*. This honour God would put upon the kings of the house of David above those of other families. And by these accounts it appears that there was none of all the kings of Judah that reached David's age, 70, the common age of man. Asa's age I do not find, Uzziah lived to be 68, Manasseh 57, and Jehoshaphat 60; and these were the three oldest; many of them, that were of note, did

not reach 50. This Jotham died at 41. He was two great a blessing to be continued long to such an unworthy people. His death was a judgment, especially considering the character of his son and successor.

3. That in his days the confederacy was formed against Judah, by Rezin, and Remaliah's son, the king of Syria, and the king of Israel, which appeared so very formidable in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, that, upon notice of it, the heart of that prince was moved, and *the heart of the people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind*, Isa. 7. 2. The confederates were unjust in the attempt, yet it is here said, v. 37. *The Lord began to send them against Judah*, as he bade Shimei curse David, and took away from Job what the Sabeans robbed him of. Men are God's hand, the sword, the rod in his hand, which he makes use of as he pleases, to serve his own righteous counsels, though men be unrighteous in their intentions. This storm gathered in the reign of pious Jotham, but he came to his grave in peace, and it fell upon his degenerate son.

CHAP. XVI.

This chapter is wholly taken up with the reign of Ahaz: and we have quite enough of it, unless it were better. He had a good father, and a better son, and yet was himself one of the worst of the kings of Judah. I. He was a notorious idolater, v. 1. .4. II. With the treasures of the temple, as well as his own, he hired the king of Assyria to invade Syria and Israel, v. 5. .9. III. He took pattern, from an idol's altar which he saw at Damascus, for a new altar in God's temple, v. 10. .16. IV. He abused and embezzled the furniture of the temple, v. 17. .18. And so his story ends, v. 19. 20.

1. **I**N the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign. 2. Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not *that which was right* in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father. 3. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel. 4. And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

We have here a general character of the reign of Ahaz, few and evil were his days; few, for he died at thirty-six; evil, for we are here told,

1. That he *did not that which was right, like David*, v. 2. that is, he had none of that concern and affection for the instituted service and worship of God, which David was famous for. He had no love for the temple, made no conscience of his duty to God, nor had any regard to his law. Herein he was unlike David; it was his honour, that he was of the house and lineage of David, and it was owing to God's ancient covenant with David, that he was now upon the throne, which aggravated his wickedness, that he was a reproach to that honourable name and family, which therefore was really a reproach to him; (*Degeneranti genus opprobrium—A good extraction is a disgrace to him who degenerates from it*;) and that though he enjoyed the benefit of David's piety, he did not tread in the steps of it.

2. That he walked in *the way of the kings of Israel*, v. 3. who all worshipped the calves. He was not joined in any affinity with them, as Jehoram and Ahaziah were with the house of Ahab, but *ex mero motu—without any instigation*, walked in their way. The kings of Israel pleaded policy and reasons of state for their idolatry, but Ahaz had no such pretence, in him it was the most unreasonable impolitic thing that could be. They were his enemies, and had proved enemies to themselves too by their idolatry, yet he walked in their way.

3. That he *made his sons to pass through the fire*, to the honour of his dunghill deities. He burnt them, so it is expressly said of him, 2Chron. 28. 3. burnt some of them, and perhaps made others of them (Hezekiah himself not excepted, though afterward he was never the worse for it) to pass between two fires, or to be drawn through a flame, in token of their dedication to the idol.

4. That he did *according to the abomination of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out*. It was an instance of his great folly, that he would be guided by those in his religion, and follow them, whom he saw fallen into the ditch before his eyes; and of his great impiety, that he would conform to those usages which God had declared to be abominable to him; and set himself to write after the copy of those whom God had cast out, thus walking directly contrary to God.

5. That he *sacrificed in the high places*, v. 4. If his father had but had zeal enough to take them away, it might have prevented the debauching of his sons: but they that connive at sin know not what dangerous snares they lay for those that come after them. He forsook God's house, was weary of that place, where, in his father's time, he had often been detained before the Lord, and performed his devotions on high hills, where he had a better prospect, and under green trees, where he had a more pleasant shade. It was a religion little worth, which was guided by fancy, not by faith.

5. Then Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to war: and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him. 6. At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day. 7. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, *I am thy servant and thy son*: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. 8. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria. 9. And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.

Here is, 1. The attempt of his confederate neighbours, the kings of Syria and Israel, upon him. They thought to have made themselves masters of Jerusalem, and to have set a king of their own in it, Isa. 7. 6. In that, they fell short, but the king of Syria recovered Elath, a considerable port upon the Red sea, which Amaziah had taken from the Syrians, *ch.* 14. 22. What can they keep, that have lost their religion? Let them expect, thenceforward, to be always on the losing hand.

2. His project to get clear of them. Having forsaken God, he had neither courage nor strength to make head against his enemies, nor could he, with any boldness, ask help of God, but he made his court to the king of Assyria, and got him to come in for his relief. Those whose hearts condemn them, will go any whither in a day of distress, rather than to God. Was it because there was not a God in Israel, that he sent to the Assyrian for help? Was the Rock of ages removed out of its place, that he stayed himself on this broken reed? The sin itself was its own punishment; for though it is true that he gained his point, (the king of Assyria hearkened to him, and to serve his own turn, made a descent upon Damascus, whereby he gave a powerful diversion to the king of Syria, v. 9. and obliged him to let fall his design against Ahaz, carrying the Syrians captive to Kir, as Amos had expressly fore-

told, *ch.* 1. 5.) yet, considering all, he made but a bad bargain, for, to compass this,

(1.) He enslaved himself; v. 7. *I am thy servant and thy son*, that is, "I will be as dutiful and obedient to thee as to a master or father, if thou wilt but do me this good turn." Had he thus humbled himself to God, and implored his favour, he might have been delivered upon easier terms; he might have saved his money, and needed only to have parted with his sins; but if the prodigal forsake his father's house, he soon becomes a slave to the worst of masters, Luke, 15. 15.

(2.) He impoverished himself; for he took the silver and gold that were laid up in the treasury both of the temple and of the kingdom, and sent it to the king of Assyria, v. 8. Both church and state must be squeezed and exhausted, to gratify this his new patron and guardian. I know not what authority he had thus to dispose of the public stock; but it is common for those that have brought themselves into straits by one sin, to help themselves out by another; and those that have alienated themselves from God will make no difficulty of alienating any of his rights.

10. And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that *was* at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof. 11. And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it against king Ahaz came from Damascus. 12. And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon. 13. And he burnt his burnt-offering, and his meat-offering, and poured his drink-offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace-offerings, upon the altar. 14. And he brought also the brazen altar, which *was* before the Lord, from the fore-front of the house, from between the altar and the house of the Lord, and put it on the north side of the altar. 15. And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, upon the great altar burn the morning and burnt-offering, and the evening meat-offering, and the king's burnt-sacrifice, and his meat-offering, with the burnt-offering of all the people of the land, and their meat-offering, and their drink-offerings; and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt-offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brazen altar shall be for me to inquire by. 16. Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded.

Though Ahaz had himself sacrificed in high places, on hills, and under every green tree, v. 4. yet God's altar had hitherto continued in its place, and in use, and the *king's burnt-offering and his meat-offering*, v. 15. had been offered upon it by the priests that attended it; but here we have it taken away by wicked Ahaz, and another altar, an idolatrous one, put in the room of it—a bolder stroke than the worst of the kings had yet given to religion. We have here,

1. The model of this new altar, taken from one at Damascus, by the king himself, v. 10. The king of Assyria having taken Damascus thither Ahaz went, to congratulate him on his success, to return him thanks for the kindness he had done him by this expedition, and, as his servant and son, to receive his commands. Had he been faithful to his God, he had not needed to have crouched

thus to a foreign power. At Damascus, either while viewing the rarities of the place, or rather while joining with them in their devotions, (for when he was there, he thought it no harm to do as they did,) he saw an altar that pleased his fancy extremely, not such a plain old-fashioned one as that which he had been trained up in an attendance upon at Jerusalem, but curiously carved, it is likely, and adorned with image-work; there were many things about it which were significant, he thought, surprising, charming, and calculated to excite his devotion. Solomon had but a dull fancy, he thinks, compared with the ingenious artist that made this altar. Nothing will serve him but he must have an altar just like this: a pattern of it must be taken immediately; he cannot stay till he returns himself, but sends it before him in all haste, with orders to Urijah the priest, to get one made exactly according to this model, and have it ready against he came home. The pattern God shewed to Moses in the mount, or to David by the Spirit, was not comparable to this pattern sent from Damascus. The hearts of idolaters walked after their eyes, which are therefore said to go *a whoring after their idols*; but the true worshippers worship the true God by faith.

II. The making of it by Urijah the priest, v. 11. This Urijah, it is likely, was the chief priest, who, at this time, presided in the temple-service. To him Ahaz sent an intimation of his mind, (for we read not of any express orders he gave him,) to get an altar made by this pattern. And, without any dispute or objection, he put it in hand immediately, being perhaps as fond of it as the king was, at least, being very willing to humour the king, and desirous to curry favour with him. Perhaps he might have this excuse for gratifying the king herein, that, by this means, he might keep him to the temple at Jerusalem, and prevent his totally deserting it for the high places and the groves. "Let us oblige him in this," (thinks Urijah,) "and then he will bring all his sacrifices to us; for by this craft we get out living." But, whatever pretence he had, it was a most base wicked thing for him that was a priest, a chief priest, to make this altar in compliance with an idolatrous prince. For hereby, 1. He prostituted his authority, and profaned the crown of his priesthood, making himself a servant to the lusts of men. There is not a greater disgrace to the ministry than obsequiousness to such wicked commands as this was. 2. He betrayed his trust. As priest, he was bound to maintain and defend God's institutions, and to oppose and witness against all innovations; and for him to assist and serve the king, in setting up an altar to confront the altar which, by divine appointment, he was consecrated to minister at, was such a piece of treachery and perfidiousness, as may justly render him infamous to all posterity. Had he only connived at the doing of it, had he been frightened into it by menaces, had he endeavoured to dissuade the king from it, or but delayed the doing of it till he came home, that he might first talk with him about it, it had not been so bad; but so willingly to walk after his commandment, as if he were glad of the opportunity to oblige him, was such an affront to the God he served as was utterly inexcusable.

III. The dedicating of it. Urijah, perceiving that the king's heart was much upon it, took care to have it ready against he came down, and set it near the brazen altar, but somewhat lower and further from the door of the temple. The king was exceedingly pleased with it, approached to it with all possible veneration, and offered thereon his burnt-offering, &c. v. 12, 13. His sacrifices were not offered to the God of Israel, but to the gods of Damascus, as we find 2 Chron. 28, 23. and, when he borrowed the Syrians' altar, no marvel that he borrowed their gods. Naaman, the Syrian, embraced the God of Israel, when he got earth from the land of Israel to make an altar of.

IV. The removal of God's altar, to make room for it. Urijah was so modest, that he put this altar at the lower end of the court, and left God's altar in its place, *between this and the house of the Lord*, v. 14. But that would not satisfy Ahaz; he removed God's altar to an obscure corner, in the north side of the court, and put his own before the sanctuary, in the place of it. He thinks his new altar is much more stately, and much more sightly, and disgraces that; and therefore let that be laid aside as a vessel

in which there was no pleasure. His superstitious invention a first justled *with*, but at length justled *out*, God's sacred institution. Note, Those will soon come to make nothing of God, that will not be content to make him their all. Ahaz durst not (perhaps for fear of the people) quite demolish the brazen altar, and knock it to pieces; but, while he ordered all the sacrifices to be offered upon his new altar, v. 15. *The brazen altar* (says he) *shall be for me to inquire by*. Having thrust it out from the use for which it was instituted, which was to sanctify the gifts offered upon it, he pretends to advance it above its institution, which it is common for superstitious people to do. The altar was never designed for an oracle, yet Ahaz will have it for that use. The Romish church seemingly magnifies Christ's sacraments, yet wretchedly corrupts them. But some give another sense of Ahaz's purpose; "As for the brazen altar, I will consider what to do with it, and give order about it." The Jews say, that, afterward, of the brass of it he made that famous dial which was called *the dial of Ahaz*, ch. 20, 11. The base compliance of the poor-spirited priest with the presumptuous usurpations of an ill-spirited king, is again taken notice of, v. 16. *Urijah the priest did according to all that king Ahaz commanded*. Miserable is the case of great men, when those that should reprove them for their sins strengthen and serve them in their sins.

17. And king Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones. 18. And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the Lord for the king of Assyria. 19. Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 20. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

Here is, 1. Ahaz abusing the temple; not the building itself, but some of the furniture of it. (1.) He defaced the bases on which the lavers were set, 1 Kings, 7, 28, 29. and took down the molten sea, v. 17. These the priests used for washing; against them therefore he seems to have had a particular spite. It is one of the greatest prejudices that can be done to religion, to obstruct the purifying of the priests, the Lord's ministers. (2.) He removed the covert for the sabbath; erected either in honour of the sabbath, or for the conveniency of the priests, when, on the sabbath, they officiated in greater numbers than on other days. Whatever it was, it should seem, that, in removing it, he intended to put a contempt upon the sabbath, and so to open as wide an inlet as any other to all manner of impiety. (3.) The king's entry, which led to the house of the Lord, for the convenience of the royal family, (perhaps that ascent which Solomon had made, and which the queen of Sheba admired, 1 Kings, 10, 5.) he turned another way, to shew that he did not intend to frequent the house of the Lord any more. This he did for the king of Assyria, to oblige him, who perhaps returned his visit, and found fault with this entry, as an inconvenience and disparagement to his palace. When those that have had a ready passage to the house of the Lord, to please their neighbours, turn it another way, they are going down the hill apace toward their ruin.

2. Ahaz resigning his life in the midst of his days, at 36 years of age, v. 19. and leaving his kingdom to a better man, Hezekiah his son, v. 20. who proved as much a friend to the temple as he had been an enemy to it. Perhaps, this very son he had made to pass through the fire, and thereby dedicated him to Moloch; but God, by his grace, snatched him as a brand out of the burning.

CHAP. XVII.

This chapter gives us an account of the captivity of the ten tribes, and so finishes the history of that kingdom, after it had continued about 265 years, from the setting up of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. In it, we have, I. A short narrative of this destruction, v. 1. .6. II. Remarks upon it, and the causes of it, for the justifying of God in it, and for warning to others, v. 7. .23. III. An account of the nations which succeeded them in the possession of their land, and the mongrel religion set up among them, v. 24. .41.

IN the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years. 2. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. 3. Against him came up Shalmanezar king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. 4. And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as *he had done* year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. 5. Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. 6. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor *by the river of Gozan*, and in the cities of the Medes.

We have here the reign and ruin of Hoshea, the last of the kings of Israel, concerning whom observe,

I. That though he forced his way to the crown by treason and murder, as we read *ch. 15. 30.* yet he gained not the possession of it till seven or eight years after; for it was in the fourth year of Ahaz that he slew Pekah, but did not himself begin to reign till the twelfth year of Ahaz, *v. 1.* Whether by the king of Assyria, or by the king of Judah, or by some of his own people, does not appear, but, it seems, so long he was kept out of the throne he aimed at. Justly were his bad practices thus chastised, and the word of the prophet was thus fulfilled, *Hos. 10. 3. Now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the Lord.*

II. That though he was bad, yet not so bad as the kings of Israel that had been before him, *v. 2.* not so devoted to the calves as they had been. One of them, (that at Dan,) the Jews say, had been, before this, carried away by the king of Assyria in that expedition, *ch. 15. 29.* to which, perhaps, the prophet refers, *Hos. 8. 5. Thy calf, O Samaria, has cast thee off;* which made him put the less confidence in the other. And some say that this Hoshea took off the embargo which the former kings had put their subjects under, forbidding them to go up to Jerusalem to worship, which he permitted those to do that had a mind to it. But what shall we think of this dispensation of Providence, that the destruction of the kingdom of Israel should come in the reign of one of the best of its kings? *Thy judgments, O God, are a great deep.* God would hereby shew, that, in bringing this ruin upon them, he designed to punish, 1. Not only the sins of that generation, but of the foregoing ages, and to reckon for the iniquities of their fathers, who had been long in filling the measure, and treasuring up wrath against this day of wrath. 2. Not only the sins of their kings, but the sins of the people. If Hoshea was not so bad as the former kings, yet the people were as bad as those that went before them, and it was an aggravation of their badness,

and brought ruin the sooner, that their king did not set them so bad an example as the former kings had done, nor hinder them from reforming; he gave them leave to do better, but they did as bad as ever, which laid the blame of their sin and ruin wholly upon themselves.

III. That the destruction came gradually. They were for some time made tributaries, before they were made captives, to the king of Assyria, *v. 3.* and if that lesser judgment had prevailed to humble and reform them, the greater had been prevented.

IV. That they brought it upon themselves by the indirect course they took to shake off the yoke of the king of Assyria, *v. 4.* Had the king and people of Israel applied themselves to God, made their peace with him, and their prayers to him, they might have recovered their liberty, ease, and honour; but they withheld their tribute, and trusted to the king of Egypt to assist them in their revolt, which, if it had taken effect, had been but to change their oppressors. But Egypt became to them the staff of a broken reed. This provoked the king of Assyria to proceed against them with more severity. Men get nothing by struggling with the net, but entangle themselves the more.

V. That it was an utter destruction that came upon them.

1. The king of Israel was made a prisoner; he was shut up and bound; being, it is probable, taken by surprise, before Samaria was besieged.

2. The land of Israel was made a prey. The army of the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and made themselves masters of it, *v. 5.* and used them as traitors punished with the sword of justice, rather than as fair enemies.

3. The royal city of Israel was besieged, and, at length, taken. Three years it held out, after the country was conquered, and, no doubt, a great deal of misery they endured in that time, which is not particularly recorded; but the very brevity of the story, and the passing of this matter over lightly, methinks, intimate that they were abandoned of God, and he did not now regard the affliction of Israel, as sometimes he had done.

4. The people of Israel were carried captives into Assyria, *v. 6.* The generality of the people, those that were of any note, were forced away into the conqueror's country, to be slaves and beggars there. (1.) Thus he was pleased to exercise a dominion over them, and to shew that they were entirely at his disposal. (2.) By depriving them of their possessions and estates, real and personal, and exposing them to all the hardships and reproaches of a removal to a strange country, under the power of an imperious army, he chastised them for their rebellion, and their endeavour to shake off his yoke. (3.) Thus he effectually prevented all such attempts for the future, and secured their own country to himself. (4.) Thus he got the benefit of their service in his own country, as Pharaoh did that of their fathers; and so this unworthy people were lost, as they were found, and ended, as they began, in servitude, and under oppression. (5.) Thus he made room for those of his own country, that had little, and little to do, at home, to settle in a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. All these several ways, he served himself by this captivity of the ten tribes. We are here told in what places of his kingdom he disposed of them; in *Halah* and *Habor*, in places, we may suppose, far distant from each other, lest they should keep up a correspondence, incorporate again, and become formidable. There, we have reason to think, after some time, they were so mingled with the nations, that they were lost, and the name of Israel was no more in remembrance. They that forgot God, were themselves forgotten; they that studied to be like the nations, were buried among them; and they that would not serve God in their own land, were made to serve their enemies in a strange land. It is probable that they were the men of honour and estates who were carried captive, and that many of the meaner sort of people were left behind, many of every tribe, who either went over to Judah, or became subject to the Assyrian colonies, and their posterity, were *Galileans*, or *Samaritans*. But thus ended Israel as a nation; now they became *Lo-ammi*, not a people; and *Lo-ruhamah*, unpitied. Now Canaan spued them out. When we read their entry under

Hoshea the son of Nun, who would have thought that such as this should have been their exit under Hoshea the son of Elah? Thus Rome's glory in Augustus, sunk, many ages after, in Augustulus. Providence so ordered the eclipsing of the honour of the 10 tribes, that the honour of Judah the royal tribe, and Levi the holy tribe, which yet remained, might shine the brighter. Yet we find a number sealed of each of the 12 tribes, (Rev. 7.) except Dan. James writes to the 12 tribes scattered abroad, (Jam. 1. 1.) and Paul speaks of the 12 tribes which *instantly served God day and night*, Acts 26. 7. So that though we never read of the return of those that were carried captive, nor have any reason to credit the conjecture of some, that they yet remain a distinct body in some remote corner of the world: yet a remnant of them did escape, to keep up the name of Israel, till it came to be worn by the gospel-church, the spiritual Israel, in which it will ever remain, Gal. 6. 16.

7. For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, 8. And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel which they had made. 9. And the children of Israel did secretly *those things that were* not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high-places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. 10. And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: 11. And there they burnt incense in all the high-places, as *did* the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger. 12. For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing. 13. Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments *and* my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. 14. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. 15. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that *were* round about them, *concerning* whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. 16. And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. 17. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil

in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. 18. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. 19. Also Judah kept not the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. 20. And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight. 21. For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king; and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin. 22. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; 23. Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.

Though the destruction of the kingdom of the 10 tribes was but briefly related, it is in these verses largely commented upon by our historian, and the reasons of it assigned, not taken from the second causes, the weakness of Israel, their impolitic management, and the strength and growing greatness of the Assyrian monarch, these things are overlooked; but only from the First Cause.

1. It was *the Lord that removed Israel out of his sight*; whoever were the instruments, he was the Author, of this calamity. It was *destruction from the Almighty*; the Assyrian was but the *rod of his anger*, Isa. 10. 5. It was *the Lord that rejected the seed of Israel*, else their enemies could not have seized upon them, v. 20. *Who gave Jacob to the spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Will not the Lord?* Isa. 42. 24. We lose the benefit of national judgments, if we do not eye the hand of God in them, and the fulfilling of the scripture; for that also is taken notice of here; (v. 23.) *The Lord removed Israel out of his favour, and out of their own land, as he had said by all his servants the prophets*. Rather shall heaven and earth pass, than one tittle of God's word fall to the ground. When God's word and his works are compared, it will be found not only that they agree, but that they illustrate each other. But why would God ruin a people that were raised and incorporated, as Israel was, by miracles and oracles? Why would he undo that which himself had done, at so vast an expense? Was it purely an act of sovereignty? No, it was an act of necessary justice. For,

2. They provoked him to do this by their wickedness. Was it God's doing? Nay, it was their own; their *way and their doings procured all this to themselves*, and it was their own wickedness that did correct them. This the sacred historian shows here at large, that it might appear that God did them no wrong, and that others might hear and fear. Come, and see what it was that did all this mischief, that brake their power, and laid their honour in the dust; it was sin; that, and nothing else, separated between them and God; this is here very movingly laid open as the cause of all the desolations of Israel. He here shows,

1. What God had done for Israel, to engage them to serve him.

1. He gave them their liberty; (v. 7.) he *brought them from under the hand of Pharaoh* who oppressed them, asserted their freedom, (*Israel is my son*,) and effected their freedom with a high hand; thus they were bound in duty and gratitude to be his servants, for he had loosed their bonds; nor would he that rescued them out of the hand of the king of Egypt, have contradicted himself so far as to deliver them into the hand of the king of Assyria, as he did, if

they had not, by their iniquity, betrayed their liberty, and sold themselves. 2. He gave them their law, and was himself their king; they were immediately under a divine regimen; they could not plead ignorance of good and evil, sin and duty, for God had particularly charged them against those very things which here he charges them with, v.15. *That they should not do like the heathen.* Nor could they be in any doubt concerning their obligation to observe this charge, for they were *the commandments and statutes of the Lord their God*, v.13. so that no room was left to dispute whether they should keep them or no; he had not *dealt so with other nations*, Ps. 147. 19, 20. 3. He gave them *their land*, for he *cast out the heathen from before them*, (v.8.) to make room for them; and the casting out of them, for their idolatries, was as fair a warning as could be given to Israel not to do like them.

II. What they had done against God, notwithstanding these engagements which he had laid upon them.

1. In general; they *sinned against the Lord their God*, v.7. they *did those things that were not right*, v.9. but *secretly*; so wedded were they to their evil practices, that when they could not do them publicly, could not, for shame, or could not, for fear, they would do them secretly: an instance of their atheism, that they thought what was done in secret was from under the eye of God himself, and would not be required. Again, they wrought wicked things in such a direct contradiction to the divine law, that it seemed as if it were done on purpose to *provoke the Lord to anger*, v.11. in contempt of his authority, and defiance of his justice. They *rejected God's statutes, and his covenant*, v.15. would not be bound up either by his command, or the consent they themselves had given to the covenant, but threw off the obligations of both, and therefore God justly rejected them, v.20. See Hos. 4. 6. They *left all the commandments of the Lord their God*, v.16. left the way, left the work, which those commandments prescribed them, and directed them in; nay, lastly, they *sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord*, that is, they wholly addicted themselves to sin, as slaves to the service of those to whom they are sold, and, by their obstinate persisting in sin, so hardened their own hearts, that, at length, it was become morally impossible for them to recover themselves, as one that has sold himself has put his liberty past recall.

2. In particular; though they were guilty (no doubt) of many immoralities, and violated all the commands of the second table, yet nothing is here specified but their idolatry; *that was the sin that did most easily beset them*, that was, of all others, most provoking to God, it was the *spiritual adultery* that broke the marriage-covenant, and was the *inlet* of all other wickedness; this is again and again mentioned here as the sin that ruined them. (1.) They feared other gods, v.7. that is, worshipped them, and paid their homage to them, as if they feared their displeasure. (2.) They *walked in the statutes of the heathen*, which were contrary to God's statutes, v.8. *did as did the heathen*, v.11. *went after the heathen that were round about them*, v.15. so prostituting the honour of their peculiarity, and defeating God's design concerning them, which was, that they should be distinguished from the heathen. Must they that were taught of God, go to school to the heathen? They that were appropriated to God, take their measures from the nations that were abandoned by him? (3.) They *walked in the statutes of the idolatrous kings of Israel*, v.8. *in all the sins of Jeroboam*, v.22. When their kings assumed a power to alter, and add to, the divine institutions, they submitted to them, and thought the command of their kings would bear them out, in disobedience to the command of their God. (4.) They *built them high places in all their cities*, v.9. if it were but the tower of the watchmen, a country town that had no walls, but only a tower to shelter the watch in time of danger, or but a lodge for shepherds, it must be honoured with a high place, and that with an altar; if it were a fenced city, it must be further fortified with a high place; having forsaken God's holy place, they knew no end of high places, in which every man followed his own fancy, and directed his devotion to what god he pleased; sacred things were hereby profaned and laid common,

when their altars were as *heaps in the furrows of the field*, Hos. 12. 11. (5.) They *set them up images and groves, Asherim*, even *wooden images*, so some think that should be rendered which we translate *groves*; or *Ashtaroth*, so others, v.10. directly contrary to the second commandment. They served idols, v.12. the works of their own hands, and creatures of their own fancy, though God had warned them particularly not to do this thing. (6.) They *burnt incense in all the high places*, to the honour of strange gods, for it was to the dishonour of the true God, v.11. (7.) They followed vanity; idols are called so, because they could do neither good nor evil, but were the most insignificant things that could be; they that worshipped them were like unto them, and so they became vain and good for nothing, v.16. vain in their devotions, which were brutish and ridiculous, and so became vain in their whole conversation. (8.) Beside the molten images, even the two calves, they *worshipped all the host of heaven*, the sun, moon, and stars, for it is not meant of the heavenly host of angels, they could not rise so far above sensible things as to think of them; and withal, they served Baal, the deified heroes of the Gentiles, v.16. (9.) They *caused their children to pass through the fire*, in token of their dedicating of them to their idols; and, lastly, they used divinations and enchantments, that they might receive directions from the gods to whom they paid their devotions.

III. What means God used with them, to bring them off from their idolatries, and to how little purpose; he testified against them, shewed them their sins, and warned them of the fatal consequences of them by all the prophets, and all the seers, (for so the prophets had been formerly called) and had pressed them to *turn from their evil ways*, v.13. We have read of prophets, more or less, in every reign; though they had forsaken God's family of priests, he did not leave them without a succession of prophets, who made it their business to teach them the good knowledge of the Lord, but all in vain, v.14. they would not hear, but hardened their necks, persisted in their idolatries, and were like their fathers, that would not bow their necks to God's yoke, because they *did not believe in him*, did not receive his truths, nor would venture upon his promises: it seems to refer to their fathers in the wilderness; the same sin that kept them out of Canaan, turned these out, and that was unbelief.

IV. How God punished them for their sins; he *was very angry with them*, v.18. for, in the matter of his worship, he is a jealous God, and resents nothing more deeply than giving that honour to any creature which is due to him only; he afflicted them, (v.20.) and *delivered them into the hand of spoilers*, in the days of the judges and of Saul, and, afterward, in the days of most of their kings, to see if they would be awakened by the judgments of God to consider and amend their ways; but, when all these corrections did not prevail to drive out the folly, God first *rent Israel from the house of David*, under which they might have been happy. As Judah was hereby weakened, so Israel was hereby corrupted; for they made king a man who *drove them from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin*, v.21. This was a national judgment, and the punishment of their former idolatries; and, at length, he *removed them quite out of his sight*, v.18, 23. without giving them any hopes of a return out of their captivity.

Lastly, Here is a complaint against Judah in the midst of all, v.19. *Also Judah kept not the commandments of God*; though they were not as yet quite so bad as Israel, yet they *walked in the statutes of Israel*; and this aggravated the sin of Israel, that they communicated the infection of it to Judah; see Ezek. 23. 11. Those that bring sin into a country or family, bring a plague into it, and will have to answer for all the mischief that follows.

24. And the king of Assyria brought *men* from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. 25. And so it was at the begin-

ning of their dwelling there, *that* they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew *some* of them. 26. Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them; and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. 27. Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land. 28. Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Beth-el, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. 29. Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put *them* in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. 30. And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, 31. And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. 32. So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. 33. They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. 34. Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel; 35. With whom the LORD had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them: 36. But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched-out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice. 37. And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods. 38. And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. 39. But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. 40. Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. 41. So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and

their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

Never was land lost, (we say,) for want of an heir. When the children of Israel were dispossessed, and turned out of Canaan, the king of Assyria soon transplanted thither the supernumeraries of his own country, such as it could well spare, who should be servants to him, and masters to the Israelites that remained; and here we have an account of these new inhabitants, whose story is related here, that we may take our leave of Samaria, as also of the Israelites that were carried captive into Assyria.

1. Concerning the Assyrians that were brought into the land of Israel, we are here told,

1. That they possessed Samaria, and *dwelt in the cities thereof*, v. 24. It is common for lands to change their owners, but sad that the holy land should become a heathen land again; see what work sin makes.

2. That at their first coming God *sent lions among them*; they were probably insufficient to people the country, which occasioned *the beast of the field to multiply against them*, Exod. 23. 29. yet, beside the natural cause, there was a manifest hand of God in it, who is Lord of *hosts*, of all the creatures, and can serve his own purposes by which *he* pleases, small or great, lice or lions. God ordered them *this rough* welcome, to check their pride and insolence, and to let *them* know, that, though they had conquered Israel, the God of Israel had power enough to deal with them, that he could have prevented their settling here, by ordering lions into the service of Israel, and that he permitted it, not for their righteousness, but the wickedness of his own people, and that they were now under his visitation: they had lived without God in their own land, and were not plagued with lions; but if they do so in this land, it is at their peril.

3. That they sent a remonstrance of this grievance to the king their master, setting forth, it is likely, the loss their infant colony had sustained by the lions, and the continual fear they were in of them, that they looked upon it to be a judgment upon them for not worshipping the God of the land, which they could not, because they knew not how, v. 26. The God of Israel was the God of the whole world, but they ignorantly call him the *God of the land*, apprehending themselves therefore within his reach, and concerned to be upon good terms with him; herein they shamed the Israelites, who were not so ready to hear the voice of God's judgments as they were, and who had not served the *God of that land*, though he was the God of their fathers, and their great Benefactor, and though they were well instructed in the manner of his worship. Assyrians beg to be taught that which Israelites hated to be taught.

4. That the king of Assyria took care to have them taught *the manner of the God of the land*, v. 27, 28. not out of any affection to that God, but to save his subjects from the lions. On this errand he sent back one of the priests whom he had carried away captive: a prophet would have done them more good, for this was but one of the priests of the calves, and therefore chose to dwell at Beth-el for old acquaintance-sake; and, though he might teach them to do better than they did, he was not likely to teach them to do well, unless he had taught his own people better; however, he came and dwelt among them, to teach them how they should *fear the Lord*, whether he taught them out of the book of the law, or only by word of mouth, is uncertain.

5. That, being thus taught, they made a mongrel religion of it, worshipped the God of Israel for fear, and their own idols for love, v. 33. *They feared the Lord*, but they served their own gods; they all agreed to worship the God of the land, according to the manner, to observe the Jewish festivals and rites of sacrificing, but every nation made gods of their own besides, not only for their private use in their own families, but to be put *in the houses of their high places*, v. 29. The idols of each country are here named, v. 30, 31. The learned are at a loss for the significations of several of these names, and cannot agree by what representation,

these gods were worshipped. If we may credit the traditions of the Jewish doctors, they tell us, that Succoth-benoth was worshipped in a hen and chickens, Nergal in a cock, Ashima in a smooth goat, Nibhaz in a dog, Tartak in an ass, Adrammelech in a peacock, Anammelech in a pheasant. Our own tell us, more probably, That Succoth-benoth, signifying *the tents of the daughters*, was Venus; Nergal, being worshipped by the Cuthites or Persians, was *the fire*; Adrammelech and Anammelech were only distinctions of Moloch; see how vain idolaters were in their imaginations, and wonder at their sottishness. Our very ignorance concerning these idols teaches us the accomplishment of that word which God has spoken, That these false gods should all perish, Jer. 10. 11. they are all buried in oblivion, while the name of the true God shall continue for ever.

This medley superstition is here said to *continue unto this day*, v. 41. till the time when this book was written, and long after, above 300 years in all, till the time of Alexander the great, when Manasseh, brother to Jaddus the high priest of the Jews, having married the daughter of Sanballat, governor of the Samaritans, went over to them, got leave of Alexander to build a temple in mount Gerizzim, drew over many of the Jews to him, and prevailed with the Samaritans to cast away all their idols, and to worship the God of Israel only; yet their worship was mixed with so much superstition, that our Saviour tells them they knew not what they worshipped, John, 4. 22.

II. Concerning the Israelites that were carried into the land of Assyria; the historian has occasion to speak of them, v. 33. shewing that their successors in the land did as they had done, (*after the manner of the nations whom they carried away*,) they worshipped both the God of Israel and those other gods; but *what* did the captives do in the land of their affliction? Were they reformed, and brought to repentance, by their troubles? No, they do after the former manner, v. 34. When the two tribes were afterward carried into Babylon, they were cured by it of their idolatry, and therefore, after seventy years, they were brought back with joy; but the ten tribes were hardened in the furnace, and therefore were justly lost in it, and left to perish.

This obstinacy of their's is here aggravated by the consideration, 1. Of the honour God had put upon them, as the seed of Jacob, *whom he named Israel*, and from him they were so named, but were a reproach to *that worthy name by which they were called*. 2. Of the covenant he made with them, and the charge he gave them upon that covenant, which is here very fully recited, that they should *fear and serve the Lord Jehovah only*, who had brought them up out of Egypt, v. 36. That, having received his statutes and ordinances in writing, they should *observe to do them for evermore*, v. 37. and never forget that covenant which God had made with them, the promises and conditions of that covenant, especially that great article of it which is here thrice repeated, because it had been so often inculcated, and so much insisted on, that they *should not fear other gods*; he had told them, that, if they kept close to him, he would *deliver them out of the hand of all their enemies*, v. 39. yet, when they were in the hand of their enemies, and stood in need of deliverance, they were so stupid, and had so little sense of their own interest, that they did after the former manner, v. 40. they served both the true God and false gods, as if they knew no difference. *Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone*; so they did, and so did the nations that succeeded them: well might the apostle ask, *What then? Are we better than they?* No, in no wise, for both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, Rom. 3. 9.

CHAP. XVIII.

When the prophet had condemned Ephraim for lies and deceit, he comforted himself with this, that Judah yet ruled with God, and was faithful with the most holy, Hos. 11. 12. It was a very melancholy view which the last chapter gave us of the desolations of Israel; but this chapter shows us the affairs of Judah in a good posture at the same time, that it may appear God has not quite cast off the seed of Abraham, Rom. 11. 1. Hezekiah is here upon the throne, 1. Reforming his kingdom, v. 1. 16. 11. Prospering in all his under-

takings, v. 7, 8. and this, at the same time when the ten tribes were led captive, v. 9. 12. 111. Yet invaded by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, v. 13. His country put under contribution, v. 11. 16. Jerusalem besieged, v. 17. God blasphemed, himself reviled, and his people solicited to revolt, in a virulent speech made by Rab-shakeh, v. 18. 37. But how well it ended, and how much to the honour and comfort of our great reformer, we shall find in the next chapter.

1. **N**OW it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. 2. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. 3. And he did *that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, according to all that David his father did. 4. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. 5. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor *any* that were before him. 6. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. 7. And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. 8. He smote the Philistines, *even* unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

We have here a general account of the reign of Hezekiah; it appears, by comparing his age with his father's, that he was born when his father was about eleven or twelve years old, Divine Providence so ordering that he might be of full age, and fit for business then when the measure of his father's iniquity should be full. Here is,

1. His great piety, which was the more wonderful, because his father was very wicked and vile, one of the worst of the kings, yet he one of the best, which may intimate to us, 1. That what good there is in any, is not of nature, but of grace, free grace, sovereign grace, which, contrary to nature, grafts into the good olive that which was wild by nature, Rom. 11. 24. 2. That that grace gets over the greatest difficulties and disadvantages: Ahaz. it is likely, gave his son a bad education as well as a bad example; Urijah, his priest, perhaps, had the tuition of him; his attendants and companions, we may suppose, were such as were addicted to idolatry; and yet Hezekiah became eminently good: when God's grace will work, what can hinder it?

(1.) He was a genuine son of David, who had a great many degenerate ones, v. 3. He did *that which was right, according to all that David his father did*, with whom the covenant was made, and therefore he was entitled to the benefit of it. We have read of some of them who did that which was right, *but not like David*, ch. 14. 3. they did not love God's ordinances, nor cleave to them, so as he did; but Hezekiah was a second David, had such a love for God's word, and God's house, as he had. Let us not be frightened with an apprehension of the continual decay of virtue, as if, when times and men are bad, they must needs, of course, grow worse and worse; that does not follow, for, after many bad kings, God raised up one that was like David himself.

(2.) He was a zealous reformer of his kingdom, and, as we find, 2 Chron. 29. 3. he began betimes to be so, fell to work as soon

as ever he came to the crown, and lost no time; he found his kingdom very corrupt, the people in all things too superstitious; they had always been so, but in the last reign worse than ever; by the influence of his wicked father, a deluge of idolatry had overspread the land; his spirit was stirred against it, we may suppose, as Paul at Athens, while his father lived, and therefore, as soon as ever he had power in his hands, he set himself to abolish it, v. 4. though, considering how the people were wedded to it, he might think it could not be done without opposition.

[1.] The images and the groves were downright idolatrous, and of heathenish original; those he brake and destroyed; though his own father had set them up, and shewed an affection for them, that should not protect them. We must never dishonour God, in honour to our earthly parents.

[2.] The high places, though they had sometimes been used by the prophets upon special occasions, and had been hitherto connived at by the good kings, yet, (because they were an affront to the temple, and a breach of the law which required them to worship there only, and being from under the inspection of the priests, gave opportunity for the introducing of idolatrous usages,) Hezekiah, who made God's word his rule, not the example of his predecessors, removed them, made a law for the removal of them, the demolishing of the chapels, tabernacles, and altars, there erected, and the suppressing of the use of them, which law was put in execution with vigour; and, it is probable, the terrible judgments, which the kingdom of Israel was now under for their idolatry, made Hezekiah the more zealous, and the people the more willing to comply with him. It is well, when our neighbours' harms are our warnings.

[3.] The brazen serpent was originally of divine institution, and yet, because it had been abused to idolatry, he brake it to pieces. The children of Israel had brought that with them to Canaan; where they set it up, we are not told, but, it seems, it had been carefully preserved, as a memorial of God's goodness to their fathers in the wilderness, and a traditional evidence of the truth of that story, Numb. 21. 9. for the encouragement of the sick to apply themselves to God for a cure, and of penitent sinners to apply themselves to him for mercy. But, in process of time, when they began to worship the creature more than the Creator, they that would not worship images borrowed from the heathen, as some of their neighbours did, were drawn in by the tempter to burn incense to the brazen serpent, because that was made by order from God himself, and had been an instrument of good to them. But Hezekiah, in his pious zeal for God's honour, not only forbade the people to worship it, but, that it might never be so abused any more, he shewed the people that it was *Nehushtan*, nothing else but a *piece of brass*, and that therefore it was an idle wicked thing to burn incense to it; he then brake it to pieces; that is, as Bishop Patrick expounds it, ground it to powder, which he scattered in the air, that no fragment of it might remain. If any think that the just honour of the brazen serpent was hereby diminished, they will find it abundantly made up again, John, 3. 14. where our Saviour makes it a type of himself; good things, when idolized, are better parted with than kept.

(3.) Herein he was a nonsuch, v. 5. none of all the kings of Judah were like him, *either before or after him*. Two things he was eminent for, in his reformation, [1.] Courage and confidence in God: in abolishing idolatry, there was danger of disoblighing his subjects, and provoking them to rebel; but *he trusted in the Lord God of Israel* to bear him out in what he did, and save him from harm: a firm belief of God's all-sufficiency to protect and reward us, will conduce much to make us sincere, bold, and vigorous, in the way of our duty, like Hezekiah; when he came to the crown, he found his kingdom compassed with enemies, but he did not seek for succour to foreign aids, as his father did, but trusted the God of Israel to be the Keeper of Israel. [2.] Constancy and perseverance in his duty; for this, there was none like him, that he elave to the Lord with a fixed resolution, and never *departed from following him*, v. 6. Some of his predecessors, that began well, fell off, but he, like Caleb, followed the Lord *fully*; he not only

abolished all idolatrous usages, but kept God's commandments, and, in every thing, made conscience of his duty.

II. His great prosperity, v. 7, 8. he was with God, and then God was with him, and, having the special presence of God with him, *he prospered whithersoever he went*, had wonderful success in all his enterprises, in his wars, his buildings, and especially his reformation, for that good work was carried on with less difficulty than he could have expected. They that do God's work, with an eye to his glory, and with confidence in his strength, may expect to prosper in it; great is the truth, and will prevail. Finding himself successful, 1. He threw off the yoke of the king of Assyria, which his father had basely submitted to; this is called *rebelting against him*, because so the king of Assyria called it; but it was really an asserting of the just rights of his crown, which it was not in the power of Ahaz to alienate. If it was imprudent to make this bold struggle so soon, yet I see not that it was, as some think, unjust; when he had thrown out the idolatry of the nations, he might well throw off the yoke of their oppression. The surest way to liberty, is, to serve God. 2. He made a vigorous attack upon the Philistines, and smote them even unto Gaza, both the country-villages and the fortified towns, *the tower of the watchmen, and the fenced cities*, reducing those places which they had made themselves masters of in his father's time, 2 Chron. 28. 18. When he had purged out the corruptions his father had brought in, he might expect to recover the possessions his father had lost; of his victories over the Philistines Isaiah prophesied, *ch.* 14. 28, &c.

9. And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which *was* the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, *that* Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it. 10. And at the end of three years they took it: *even* in the sixth year of Hezekiah, *that is* the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. 11. And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor *by* the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: 12. Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, *and* all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear *them*, nor do *them*. 13. Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them. 14. And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me I will bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. 15. And Hezekiah gave *him* all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house. 16. At that time did Hezekiah cut off *the gold from* the doors of the temple of the LORD, and *from* the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

The kingdom of Assyria was now grown considerable, though we never read of it till the last reign; such changes there are in the affairs of nations and families: those that have been

despicable become formidable, and those, on the contrary, are brought low, that have made a great noise and figure. We have here an account,

I. Of the success of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, against Israel, his besieging Samaria, v.9. taking it, v.10. and carrying the people into captivity, v.11. with the reason why God brought this judgment upon them, v.12. *Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God*; this was related more largely in the chapter before, but it is here repeated, 1. As that which stirred up Hezekiah and his people to purge out idolatry with so much zeal, because they saw the ruin which it brought upon Israel: when their neighbour's house was on fire, and their own in danger, it was time to cast away the accursed thing. As that which Hezekiah much lamented, but had not strength to prevent: though the ten tribes had revolted from, and often been vexatious to, the house of David, no longer ago than in his father's reign, yet being of the seed of Israel, he could not be glad at their calamities. 3. As that which laid Hezekiah and his kingdom open to the king of Assyria, and made it much more easy for him to invade him; it is said of the ten tribes here, that they would neither *hear* God's commandments, nor *do* them, v.12. Many will be content to give God the hearing, that will give him no more, Ezek.33.31. but these, being resolved not to do their duty, did not care to hear of it.

II. Of the attempt of Sennacherib, the succeeding king of Assyria, against Judah, in which he was encouraged by his predecessor's success against Israel, whose honours he would vie with, and whose victories he would push forward. The descent he made upon Judah was a great calamity to that kingdom, by which God would try the faith of Hezekiah, and chastise the people, who are called *a hypocritical nation*, Isa.10.6. because they did not heartily comply with Hezekiah's reformation, nor willingly part with their idols, but kept them up in their hearts, and, perhaps, in their houses, though their high places were removed. Even times of reformation may prove troublous times, made so by those that oppose it, and then the blame is laid upon the reformers; this calamity will appear great upon Hezekiah, if we consider,

1. How much he lost of his country, v.13. The king of Assyria took all, or most, of the fenced cities of Judah, the frontier towns, and the garrisons; and then all the rest fell into his hands, of course; the confusion which the country was put into, by this invasion, is described by the prophet, Isa.10.28. .32.

2. How dear he paid for his peace; he saw Jerusalem itself in danger of falling into the enemies' hand, as Samaria had done, and was willing to purchase its safety at the expence, (1.) Of a mean submission; "*I have offended in denying the usual tribute, and am ready to make satisfaction, as shall be demanded,*" v.14. Where was Hezekiah's courage? Where his confidence in God? Why did he not advise with Isaiah before he sent this crouching message? (2.) Of a vast sum of money; 300 talents of silver, and 30 of gold; not to be paid annually, but as a present ransom, above 200,000 pounds; to raise this sum, he was forced not only to empty the public treasures, v.15. but to take the gold plates off from the doors of the temple, and from the pillars, v.16. Though *the temple sanctified the gold* which he had dedicated, yet, the necessity being urgent, he thought that he might make as bold with that, as his father David (whom he took for his pattern) did with the shew-bread, and that it was neither impious or imprudent to give a part for the preservation of the whole; his father Ahaz had plundered the temple, in contempt of it, 2 Chron.28.24. he had repaid with interest what his father took, and now, with all due reverence, he only begs leave to borrow it again in an exigence, and for a greater good, with a resolution to restore it in full, as soon as he should be in a capacity to do it.

17. And the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rab-saris and Rab-shakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood by

the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the high-way of the fuller's field. 18. And when they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which *was* over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder. 19. And Rab-shakeh said unto them, Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? 20. Thou sayest, (but *they are but* vain words,) *I have* counsel and strength for the war. Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? 21. Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruis'd reed, *even* upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him. 22. But if ye say unto me, We trust in the LORD our God: is not that he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem? 23. Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. 24. How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? 25. Am I now come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it. 26. Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rab-shakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand *it*; and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that *are* on the wall. 27. But Rab-shakeh said unto them, Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? *hath* he not *sent me* to the men which sit on the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss, with you? 28. Then Rab-shakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria: 29. Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you; for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand: 30. Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. 31. Hearken not unto Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and *then* eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern: 32. Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and

wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil-olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die: and hearken not unto Hezekiah when he persuadeth you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. 33. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 34. Where *are* the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where *are* the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? 35. Who *are* they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand? 36. But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not. 37. Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which *was* over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with *their* clothes rent, and told him the words of Rab-shakeh.

Here is,

I. Jerusalem besieged by Sennacherib's army, v. 17. he sent three of his great generals with a great host against Jerusalem. Is this the great king, the king of Assyria? No, never call him so; he is a base, false, perfidious man, and worthy to be made infamous to all ages; let him never be named with honour, that could do such a dishonourable thing as this, to take Hezekiah's money, which he gave him upon condition he should withdraw his army, and then, instead of quitting his country, according to the agreement, to advance against his capital city, and not send him his money again neither. Those are wicked men indeed, and, let them be ever so great, we will call them so, whose principle it is, not to make their promises binding, any further than is for their interest; now Hezekiah had too much reason to repent his treaty with Sennacherib, which had made him much the poorer, and never the safer.

II. Hezekiah, and his princes and people, railed upon by Rab-shakeh, the chief speaker of the three generals, and that had the most satirical genius; he was instructed, no doubt, by Sennacherib, what to say, who intended hereby to pick a new quarrel with Hezekiah; he had promised, upon the receipt of Hezekiah's money, to withdraw his army, and therefore cannot for shame make a forcible attack upon Jerusalem immediately, but he sends Rab-shakeh to persuade Hezekiah to surrender it, and if he refuse, that shall serve him for a pretence (and a very poor one) to besiege it, and, if it hold out, to take it by storm. Rab-shakeh has the impudence to desire audience of the king himself at the conduit of the upper pool, without the walls; but Hezekiah has the prudence to decline a personal treaty, and sends three commissioners, (the prime ministers of state,) to hear what he had to say, but with a charge to them, not to answer that fool according to his folly, v. 36. for they could not convince him, but would certainly provoke him, and Hezekiah had learned of his father David to believe that then God would hear, when he, as a deaf man, heard not, Ps. 38. 13. . 15. One interruption they gave him in his discourse, which was only to desire him that he would speak to them now in the Syrian language, and they would consider of what he said, and report it to the king, and if they did not give him a satisfactory answer, then he might appeal to the people, by speaking in the Jews' language, v. 26. This was a reasonable request, and agreeable to the custom of treaties, which is, that the plenipotentiaries should settle matters between themselves, before any thing be made public; but Hilkiah did not consider what an unreasonable charge he had to deal with: else he would not have made his

request, for it did but exasperate Rab-shakeh, and make him the more rude and boisterous, v. 27. Against all the rules of decency and honour, instead of treating with the commissioners, he menaced the soldiery, persuades them to desert or mutiny, threatens, if they held out, to reduce them to the last extremities of famine, and then goes on with his discourse, the scope of which, is, to persuade Hezekiah, and his princes, and people, to surrender the city. Observe how, in order to this,

1. He magnifies his master the king of Assyria; once and again he calls him, *That great king, the king of Assyria*, v. 19, 28. What an idol did he make of that prince whose creature he was! God is the great King, but Sennacherib was, in his eye, a little god, and he would possess them with the same veneration for him that he had, and thereby frighten them into a submission to him; but, to those who, by faith, see the King of kings in his power and glory, even the king of Assyria looks mean and little. What are the greatest of men, when either they come to compare with God, or God comes to contend with them? Ps. 82. 6, 7.

2. He endeavours to make them believe that it would be much for their advantage to surrender; if they held out, they must expect no other than to eat the refuse of all herbs, by reason of the want of provisions, which would be entirely cut off from them by the besiegers; but if they would capitulate, seek his favour with a present, and cast themselves upon his mercy, he would give them very good treatment, v. 31. I wonder with what face Rab-shakeh could speak of making an agreement with a present, when his master had so lately broken the agreement Hezekiah made with him, with that great present, v. 14. Can those expect to be trusted, that have been so grossly perfidious? But, *Ad populum phaleras*—*But gild the chain, and the vulgar will let you bind them*. He thinks to soothe up all with a promise, that, if they would surrender upon discretion, though they must expect to be prisoners and captives, yet it would really be happy for them to be so. One would wonder he should ever think to prevail by such gross suggestions as these, but that the devil does thus impose upon sinners every day by his temptation. He will needs persuade them, (1.) That their imprisonment would be to their advantage, for they should *eat every man of his own vine*, v. 31. Though the property of their estates would be vested in the conquerors, yet they should have the free use of them; but he does not explain it now to them as he would afterward, that it must be understood just as much and just as long, as the conqueror pleases. (2.) That their captivity would be much more to their advantage, *I will take you away to a land like your own land*; and what the better would they be for that, when they must have nothing in it to call their own?

3. That which he aims at, especially, is to convince them that it was to no purpose for them to stand it out; *What confidence is there wherein thou trustest?* So he insults over Hezekiah, v. 19. To the people he says, v. 29. *Let not Hezekiah deceive you into your own ruin, for he shall not be able to deliver you, you must either bend or break.* It were well, if sinners would submit to the force of this argument, in making their peace with God—That it is *therefore* our wisdom to yield to him, because it is in vain to contend with him: what confidence is that which those trust in, who stand it out against him? *Are we stronger than he?* Or what shall we get by setting briars and thorns before a consuming fire? But Hezekiah was not so helpless and defenceless as Rab-shakeh would here represent him.

Three things he supposes Hezekiah might trust to, and he endeavours to make out the insufficiency of each.

(1.) His own military preparations; *Thou sayest, I have counsel and strength for the war*; and we find that so he had, 2 Chron. 32. 3. But this Rab-shakeh turns off with a slight, *They are but vain words, thou art an unequal match for us*, v. 20. With the greatest haughtiness and disdain imaginable, he challenges him to produce 2000 men of all his people that knew how to manage a horse, and will venture to give him 2000 horses, if he can; he falsely insinuates that he had no men, or none fit to be soldiers, v. 22. thus he thinks to run him down with confidence

and banter, and will lay him any wager that one captain of the least of his master's servants is able to baffle him and all his forces.

(2.) His alliance with Egypt; he supposed that he trusted to Egypt for chariots and horsemen, (v. 24.) because the king of Israel had done so, and of this confidence he truly says, *It is a broken reed*; (v. 21.) it will not only fail a man when he leans on it, and expects it to bear his weight, but *it will run into his hand and pierce it*, and rend his shoulder, as the prophet further illustrates this similitude, with application to Egypt; (Ezek. 29. 6, 7.) so is the king of Egypt, says he; and truly so had the king of Assyria been to Ahaz, who trusted in him, but he *distressed him, and strengthened him not*, 2 Chron. 28. 20. They that trust to any arm of flesh, will find it no better than a broken reed; but God is the Rock of ages.

(3.) His interest in God, and relation to him; this was indeed the confidence in which Hezekiah trusted; (v. 22.) he supported himself by depending on the power and promise of God, with this he encouraged himself and his people; (v. 30.) *The Lord will surely deliver us*; (and again, v. 32.) this, he was sensible, was their great stay, and therefore he is most large in his endeavours to shake this, as David's enemies, who used all the arts they had, to drive him from his confidence in God, (Ps. 3. 2.—11. 1.) and thus did Christ's enemies, Matth. 27. 43.

Three things Rab-shakeh suggests to discourage their confidence in God, and they are all false.

[1.] That Hezekiah had forfeited God's protection, and thrown himself out of it, by *destroying the high places and the altars*, v. 22. Here he measures the God of Israel by the gods of the heathen, who delighted in the multitude of altars and temples, and concludes that Hezekiah had given a great offence to the God of Israel, in obliging his people to offer at one altar: thus is one of the best deeds he ever did in his life, misconstrued as impious and profane, by one that did not, or would not, know the law of the God of Israel; if that he represented by ignorant and malicious men as evil and a provocation to God, which is really good and pleasing to him, we must not think it strange; if this was to be sacrilegious, Hezekiah would ever be so.

[2.] That God had given orders for the destruction of Jerusalem, at this time; (v. 25.) *Am I now come up without the Lord?* This is all an empty boast; he did not himself think he had any commission from God to do what he did, (By whom should he have it?) but he makes this pretence, to amuse and terrify the people that were on the wall. If he had any colour at all for what he said, it might be taken from the notice which, perhaps, he had had, by the writings of the prophets, of the hand of God, in the destruction of the 10 tribes, and he thought he had as good a warrant for the seizing of Jerusalem as of Samaria; many that have fought against God, have pretended commissions from him.

[3.] That if Jehovah, the God of Israel, should undertake to protect them from the king of Assyria, yet he was not able to do it; with this blasphemy he concludes his speech, (v. 33.—35.) comparing the God of Israel with the gods of the nations whom he had conquered, and putting him upon the level with them, and concluding that because they could not defend and deliver their worshippers, the God of Israel could not defend and deliver his. See here, *First*, His pride; when he conquered a city, he reckoned himself to have conquered its gods, and valued himself mightily upon it; his high opinion of the idols, made him have a high opinion of himself as too hard for them. *Secondly*, His profaneness; the God of Israel was not a local deity, but the God of the whole earth, the only living and true God, the Ancient of days, and had often proved himself to be above all gods; yet he makes no more of Him than of the upstart fictitious gods of Hamath and Arpad, unfairly arguing that the gods (as some now say the priests) of all religions are the same, and himself above them all. The tradition of the Jews is, that Rab-shakeh was an apostate Jew, which made him so ready in the Jews' language; if so, his ignorance of the God of Israel was the less excusable, and his enmity the less strange, for apostates are commonly the most bitter and spiteful enemies, witness Julian. A great deal of art and management,

it must be owned, there is in this speech of Rab-shakeh, but withal, a great deal of pride, malice, falsehood, and blasphemy; one grain of sincerity would have been worth all this wit and rhetoric.

Lastly, We are told what the commissioners on Hezekiah's part did. 1. They held their peace; not for want of something to say, both on God's behalf and Hezekiah's: they might easily and justly have upbraided him with his master's treachery, and breach of faith, and have asked him, What religion encourages you to hope that that will prosper? At least, they might have given him that grave hint which Ahab gave to Ben-hadad's like insolent demands; (*Let not him that girdeth on the harness, boast as though he had put it off*;) but the king had commanded them not to answer him, and they observed their instructions. There is a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak, and there are those to whom to offer any thing religious or rational, is to cast pearls before swine. What can be said to a madman? It is probable that their silence made Rab-shakeh yet more proud and secure, and so his heart was lifted up and hardened to his destruction. 2. They rent their clothes, in detestation of his blasphemy, and in grief for the despised, afflicted condition of Jerusalem, the reproach of which was a burden to them. 3. They faithfully reported the matter to the king, their master, and *told him the words of Rab-shakeh*, that he might consider what was to be done, what course they should take, and what answer they should return to Rab-shakeh's summons.

CHAP. XIX.

Jerusalem's great distress we read of in the foregoing chapter, and left it besieged, insulted, threatened, terrified, and just ready to be swallowed up, by the Assyrian army. But in this chapter, we have an account of its glorious deliverance, not by sword or bow, but by prayer and prophecy, and by the hand of an angel. I. Hezekiah, in a great concern, sent to the prophet Isaiah, to desire his prayers, (v. 1.—5.) and received from him an answer of peace, v. 6, 7. II. Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah to frighten him into a surrender, v. 8.—13. III. Hezekiah, thereupon, by a very solemn prayer, recommended his case to God, the righteous Judge, and begged help from him, v. 14.—19. IV. God, by Isaiah, sent him a very comfortable message, assuring him of deliverance, v. 20.—31. V. The army of the Assyrians was all cut off by an angel, and Sennacherib himself slain by his own sons, v. 35.—37. And so God glorified himself, and saved his people.

1. **A**ND it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. 2. And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amos. 3. And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy; for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. 4. It may be, the LORD thy God will hear all the words of Rab-shakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left. 5. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. 6. And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. 7. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and

shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.

The contents of Rab-shakeh's speech being brought to Hezekiah, one would have expected (and it is likely Rab-shakeh did expect) that he should have called a council of war, and it should have been debated, whether it was best to capitulate or no. Before the siege, he had *taken counsel with his princes, and his mighty men*, 2 Chron. 32. 3. but that would not do now: his greatest relief is, that he has a God to go to, and what passed between him and his God, on this occasion, we have here an account of.

I. Hezekiah discovered deep concern at the dishonour done to God by Rab-shakeh's blasphemy. When he heard it, though at second hand, he *rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth*, v. 1. Good men were wont to do so, when they heard of any reproach cast on God's name; and great men must not think it any disparagement to them, to sympathize with the injured honour of the great God. Royal robes are not too good to be rent, nor royal flesh too good to be clothed with sackcloth, in humiliation for indignities done to God, and for the perils and terrors of his Jerusalem. This, God now called to, and was displeased with those who were not thus affected, Isa. 22. 12, 14. *Behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep*, though it was a *day of trouble and perplexity, in the valley of vision*, v. 5. which refers to this very event. The king in sackcloth, but many of his subjects in soft clothing.

II. He *went up to the house of the Lord*, according to the example of the psalmist, who, when he was grieved at the pride and prosperity of the wicked, *went into the sanctuary of God*, and there *understood their end*, Ps. 73. 17. He went to the house of God, to meditate and pray, and get his spirit into a sedate composed frame, after this agitation. He was not considering what answer to return to Rab-shakeh, but refers himself to God, *Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me*; Herbert. In the house of the Lord he found a place both of rest and refuge, a treasury, a magazine, a council-chamber, and all he needed, all in God. Note, When the church's enemies are very daring and threatening, it is the wisdom and duty of the church's friends to apply themselves to God, appeal to him, and leave their cause with him.

III. He sent to the prophet Isaiah, by honourable messengers, in token of the great respect he had for him, to desire his prayers, v. 2, 4. Eliakim and Shebna were two of those that had heard the words of Rab-shakeh, and were the better able both to possess and to affect Isaiah with the case. The elders of the priests were themselves to pray for the people in time of trouble, Joel, 2. 17. but they must go to engage Isaiah's prayers, because he could pray better, and had a better interest in heaven. The messengers were to go in sackcloth, because they were to represent the king, who was so clothed. Their errand to Isaiah was, *Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left*, that is, for Judah, which is but a remnant, now that the ten tribes are gone; for Jerusalem, which is but a remnant, now that the defended cities of Judah are taken. Note, 1. It is very desirable, and what we should be desirous of when we are in trouble, to have the prayers of our friends for us. In begging it, we honour God, we honour prayer, and we honour our brethren. 2. When we desire the prayers of others for us, that must not excuse us from praying for ourselves. When Hezekiah sent to Isaiah, to pray for him, he himself *went into the house of the Lord*, to offer up his own prayers. 3. Those who speak from God to us, we should in a particular manner desire to speak to God for us. *He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee*, Gen. 20. 7. The great Prophet is the great Intercessor. 4. Those are likely to prevail with God, that *lift up* their prayers, that is, that lift up their hearts in prayer. 5. When the interests of God's church are brought very low, so that there is but a remnant left, few friends, and those weak, and at a loss, then it is time to *lift up our prayer for that remnant*.

Two things are urged to Isaiah, to engage his prayers for them.

(1.) Their fears of the enemy, v. 3. "He is insolent and baughty, it is a day of rebuke and blasphemy, we are despised,

God is dishonoured, upon this account, it is a day of trouble, never were such a king and kingdom so trampled on and abused as we are; *our soul is exceedingly filled with the contempt of the proud*; and it is a *sword in our bones*, to hear them reproach our confidence in God, and say, Where is now your God? And, which is worst of all, we see not which way we can help ourselves, and get clear of the reproach. Our cause is good, our people are faithful, but we are quite overpowered with numbers; the children are brought to the birth, now is the time, the critical moment, when, if ever, we must be relieved; one successful blow, given to the enemy, would accomplish our wishes. But, alas! we are not able to give it; *there is not strength to bring forth*. Our case is as deplorable, and calls for as speedy help, as that of a woman in travail, that is quite spent with her throes, so that she has not strength to bear the child. Compare with this, Hos. 13. 13. We are ready to perish; *if thou canst do any thing, have compassion upon us, and help us*."

(2.) Their hopes in God. To him they look, on him they depend, to appear for them; one word from him will turn the scale, and save the sinking remnant; if he but reprove the words of Rab-shakeh, that is, disprove them, v. 4. if he undertake to convince and confound the blasphemer, all will be well. And this they trust he will do, not for his merit's sake, but for his own honour's sake, because he has *reproached the living God*, by levelling him with deaf and dumb idols. They have reason to think the issue will be good, for they can interest God in the quarrel; Ps. 74. 22. *Arise, O God, plead thine own cause*. "He is the Lord thy God," say they to Isaiah, "*thine*, whose glory thou art concerned for, and whose favour thou art interested in. He has heard and known the blasphemous words of Rab-shakeh, and therefore, it may be, he will hear and rebuke them. We hope he will. Help us, with thy prayers, to bring the cause before him, and then we are content to leave it with him."

IV. God, by Isaiah, sent to Hezekiah, to assure him that he would glorify himself in the ruin of the Assyrians. Hezekiah sent to Isaiah, not to inquire concerning the event, as many did that sent to the prophets, (*Shall I recover?* or the like,) but to desire his assistance in his duty. It was this that he was solicitous about; and therefore God let him know what the event should be, in recompence of his care to do his duty, v. 6, 7. 1. God interests himself in the cause; *They have blasphemed me*. 2. He encourages Hezekiah, who was much dismayed; *Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard*: they are but words, (though swelling and fiery words,) and words are but wind. 3. He promised to frighten the king of Assyria worse than Rab-shakeh had frightened him; *I will send a blast upon him*, that pestilential breath which killed his army, upon which, terrors shall seize him, and drive him into his own country, where death shall meet him. This short threatening from the **mouth of God** would do execution, when all the impotent menaces **that came from Rab-shakeh's mouth** would vanish into air.

8. So Rab-shakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. 9. And when he heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee: he sent messengers again unto Hezekiah, saying, 10. Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? 12. Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph,

and the children of Eden which *were* in Thelasar? 13. Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah? 14. And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. 15. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest *between* the chernbims, thou art the God, *even* thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. 16. LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. 17. Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, 18. And have cast their gods into the fire: for they *were* no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. 19. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou *art* the LORD God, *even* thou only.

Rab-shakeh, having delivered his message, and received no answer, (which silence, whether he took it for a consent or a slight, does not appear,) left his army before Jerusalem, under the command of the other generals, and went himself, to attend the king his master for further orders. He found him besieging Libnah, a city that had revolted from Judah, *ch.* 8. 22. Whether he had taken Lachish or no, is not certain; some think he departed from it, because he found the taking of it impracticable, *v.* 8. However, he was now alarmed with the rumour that the king of the Cushites, who bordered upon the Arabians, was coming out against him with a great army, *v.* 9. This made him very desirous to gain Jerusalem with all speed. To take it by force would cost him more time and men than he could well spare, and therefore he renews his attack upon Hezekiah, to persuade him tamely to surrender it. Having found him an easy man once, *ch.* 18. 14. when he said, *That which thou puttest on me I will bear*, he hoped again to frighten him into a submission, but in vain. Here,

1. Sennacherib sent a letter Hezekiah, a railing letter, a blasphemous letter, to persuade him to surrender Jerusalem, because it would be to no purpose for him to think of standing it out. His letter is to the same purport with Rab-shakeh's speech; there is nothing new offered in it. Rab-shakeh had said to the people, *Let not Hezekiah deceive you*, *ch.* 18. 29. Sennacherib writes to Hezekiah, *Let not thy God deceive thee*, *v.* 10. Those that have the God of Jacob for their help, and whose hope is in the Lord their God, need not fear being deceived by him, as the heathen were by their gods.

To terrify Hezekiah, and drive him from his anchor, he magnifies himself, and his own achievements. See how proudly he boasts, 1. Of the *lands* he had conquered, *v.* 11. all lands; and destroyed utterly! How are the mole-hills of his victories swelled to mountains! So far was he from destroying all lands, that, at this time, the land of Cush, and Tirhakah its king, were a terror to him. What vast hyperboles may one expect in proud men's praises of themselves! 2. Of the *gods* he had conquered, 12. "Each vanquished nation had its gods, which were so far from being able to deliver them, that they fell with them; and shall thy God deliver thee?" 3. Of the *kings* he had conquered, *v.* 13. *the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad*. Whether he means the prince or the idol, he means to make himself appear greater

than either, and therefore very formidable, and the *terror of the mighty in the land of the living*.

II. Hezekiah encloses this in another letter, a praying letter, a believing letter, and sends it to the King of kings, who judges among the gods. Hezekiah was not so haughty, as not to receive the letter, though we may suppose the superscription did not give him his due titles; when he had received it, he was not so careless as not to read it; when he had read it, he was not in such a passion as to write an answer to it in the same provoking language; but he immediately went up to the temple, presented himself, and then *spread the letter before the Lord*, *v.* 14. Not as if God needed to have letters shewed him, (he knew what was in it before Hezekiah did,) but hereby he signified that he acknowledged God in all his ways, that he desired not to aggravate the injuries his enemies did him, or to make them appear worse than they were, but desired they might be set in a true light; and that he referred himself to God, and his righteous judgment, upon the whole matter. Hereby likewise he would affect himself in the prayer he came to the temple to make; and we have need of all possible helps to quicken us in that duty.

In the prayer which Hezekiah prayed over this letter,

1. He adores the God whom Sennacherib had blasphemed, *v.* 15. calls him the *God of Israel*, because Israel was his peculiar people; and the *God that dwelt between the cherubims*, because there was the peculiar residence of his glory upon earth; but gives glory to him as the *God of the whole earth*, and not, as Sennacherib fancied him to be, the *God of Israel only*, and confined to the temple. "Let them say what they will, thou art sovereign Lord, for thou art the God, the God of gods; sole Lord, even thou alone; universal Lord of all the kingdoms of the earth; and rightful Lord, for thou hast made heaven and earth. Being Creator of all, by an incontestable title, thou art Owner and Ruler of all."

2. He appeals to God concerning the insolence and profaneness of Sennacherib, *v.* 16. "*Lord, hear; Lord, see*. Here it is under his own hand." Had Hezekiah only been abused, he would have passed it by; but it is God, the living God, that is reproached, the jealous God. *Lord, what wilt thou do for thy great name?*

5. He owns Sennacherib's triumphs over the gods of the heathen, but distinguishes between them and the God of Israel, *v.* 17, 18. They have indeed *cast their gods into the fire*; for they *were* no gods, unable either to help themselves, or their worshippers, and therefore no wonder that they have destroyed them; and, in destroying them, though they know it not, they really served the justice and jealousy of the God of Israel, who has determined to extirpate all the gods of the heathen. But they are deceived, who think they can therefore be too hard for him. He is none of the gods whom men's hands have made, he has himself made all things, *Ps.* 115. 3, 4.

4. He prays that God would now glorify himself in the defeat of Sennacherib, and the deliverance of Jerusalem out of his hands, *v.* 19. "*Now therefore save us*; for, if we be conquered, as other lands are, they will say that thou art conquered, as the gods of those lands were: but, Lord, distinguish thyself, by distinguishing us, and let all the world know, and be made to confess, that thou art the Lord God, the self-existent, sovereign God, *even thou only*, and that all pretenders are vanity and a lie." Note, The best pleas in prayer are those which are taken from God's honour; and therefore the Lord's prayer begins with *Hallowed be thy name*, and concludes with *Thine is the glory*.

20. Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, *That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard*. 21. This is the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. 22.

Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted *thy* voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? *even* against the holy *One* of Israel. 23. By thy messengers thou hast reproached the LORD, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon, and will cut down the tall cedar-trees thereof, *and* the choice fir-trees thereof: and I will enter into the lodgings of his borders, *and into* the forest of his Carmel. 24. I have digged and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places. 25. Hast thou not heard long ago *how* I have done it, *and* of ancient times that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities *into* ruinous heaps. 26. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were *as* the grass of the field, and *as* the green herb, *as* the grass on the house-tops, and *as* corn blasted before it be grown up. 27. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. 28. Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest. 29. And this *shall be* a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof. 30. And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. 31. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. 32. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. 33. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. 34. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

We have here the gracious copious answer which God gave to Hezekiah's prayer. The message which he sent him by the same hand, v. 6, 7. one would think, had been an answer sufficient to his prayer; but, that he might have strong consolation, he is encouraged by two immutable things, *in which it was impossible for God to lie*, Heb. 6. 18. In general, God assures him that his prayer was heard, his prayer against Sennacherib, v. 20. Note, The case of those is miserable, that have the prayers of God's people against them. For if the oppressed cry to God against the oppressor, *he will hear*, Exod. 22. 23. God hears and answers; *bears with the saving strength of his right hand*, Ps. 20. 6.

This message speaks two things.

1. Confusion and shame to Sennacherib and his forces. It is

here foretold that he should be humbled and broken. The prophet elegantly directs his speech to him, as he does, Isa. 10. 5. *O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger*. Not that this message was sent to him, but what is here said to him he was made to know by the event; Providence spake it to him with a witness; and perhaps his own heart was made to whisper this to him; for God has more ways than one of speaking to sinners in his wrath, so as to *vex them in his sore displeasure*, Ps. 2. 5.

Sennacherib is here represented,

1. As the scorn of Jerusalem, v. 21. He thought himself the terror of the daughter of Zion, that chaste and beautiful virgin, and that by his threats he could force her to submit to him; "But, being a virgin in her Father's house, and under his protection, she defies thee, despises thee, laughs thee to scorn. Thine impotent malice is ridiculous; he that sits in heaven laughs at thee, and therefore so do those that abide under his shadow." By this word God intended to silence the fears of Hezekiah and his people. Though to an eye of sense the enemy looked formidable, to an eye of faith he looked despicable.

2. As an enemy to God; and that was enough to make him miserable. Hezekiah pleaded this; "Lord, he has reproached thee," v. 16. "He has," saith God, "and I take it as against myself," v. 22. *Whom hast thou reproached?* Is it not the Holy One of Israel, whose honour is dear to him, and who has power to vindicate it, which the gods of the heathen have not? *Nemo me impune lacesset—No one shall provoke me with impunity*.

3. As a proud vain-glorious fool, that spake *great swelling words of vanity*, and *boasted of a false gift*, by his boasts, as well as by his threats, reproaching the Lord. For, (1.) He magnified his own achievements out of measure, and quite above what really they were, v. 23, 24. This was not in the letter he wrote, but God lets Hezekiah know, that he not only saw what was written there, but heard what he said elsewhere, probably in the speeches he made to his councils or armies. Note, God takes notice of the boasts of proud men, and will call them to an account, that he *may look upon them, and abase them*, Job, 40. 11. What a mighty figure does Sennacherib think he makes! Driving his chariots to the tops of the highest mountains, forcing his way through woods and rivers, breaking through all difficulties, making himself master of all he had a mind to; nothing could stand before him, or be withheld from him; no hills too high for him to climb, no trees too strong for him to fell, no waters too deep for him to dry up, as if he had the power of a God to speak and it is done. (2.) He took to himself the glory of doing these great things, whereas they were all *the Lord's doing*, v. 25, 26. Sennacherib, in his letter, had appealed to what Hezekiah had heard, v. 11. *Thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done*; but, in answer to that, he is reminded of what God has done for Israel of old, drying up the Red sea, leading them through the wilderness, planting them in Canaan; "What are all thy doings to these? And as for the desolations thou hast made in the earth, and particularly in Judah, thou art but the instrument in God's hand, a mere tool: it is *I that have brought it to pass*; I gave thee thy power, gave thee thy success, and made thee what thou art; raised thee up to lay waste fenced cities, and so to punish them for their wickedness, and *therefore their inhabitants were of small power*." What a foolish insolent thing was it for him to exalt himself above God, and against God, upon that which he had done by him and under him. Sennacherib's boasts here are expounded, Isa. 10. 13, 14. *By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, &c.* and they are answered, v. 15. *Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?* It is surely absurd for the fly upon the wheel to say, What a dust do I make! Or for the sword in the hand to say, What execution do I do! If God be the principal Agent in all that is done, boasting is for ever excluded.

4. As under the check and rebuke of that God whom he blasphemed. All his motions were, (1.) Under the divine cognizance, v. 27. "I know thy abode, and what thou dost secretly devise and design; *thy going out and coming in*, marches and counter-marches, and thy rage against me and my people, the

tumult of thy passions, the tumult of thy preparations, the noise and bluster thou makest, I know it all." That was more than Hezekiah did, who wished for intelligence of the enemy's motions; but what need, when the eye of God was a constant spy upon him? 2 Chron. 16. 9. (2.) Under the divine controul, v. 28. "*I will put my hook in thy nose, thou great Leviathan,*" Job, 41. 1, 2. "*My bridle in thy jaws, thou great Behemoth. I will restrain thee, manage thee, turn thee where I please, send thee home, re infecta—disappointed of thy aim.*" Note, It is a great comfort to all the church's friends, that God has a hook in the nose, and a bridle in the jaws, of all her enemies; can make even their wrath to serve and praise him, and then restrain the remainder of it: *Here shall its proud waves be staid.*

11. Salvation and joy to Hezekiah and his people. This shall be a sign to them of God's favour, and that he is reconciled to them, and *his anger is turned away*, Isa. 12. 1. a wonder in their eyes, (for so a sign sometimes signifies,) a token for good, and an earnest of the further mercy God has in store for them, that a good issue shall be put to their present distress in every respect.

1. Provisions were scarce and dear; and what should they do for food? The fruits of the earth were devoured by the Assyrian army, Isa. 32. 9, 10, &c. Why, they shall not only dwell in the land, but *verily they shall be fed*. If God save them, he will not starve them, nor let them die by famine, when they had escaped the sword: "*Eat ye this year that which groweth of itself, and you shall find enough of that. Did the Assyrians reap what you sowed? You shall reap what you did not sow.*" But the next year was the sabbatical year, when the land was to rest, and they must neither sow nor reap. What must they do that year? Why, *Jehovah-jireh*, The Lord will provide, God's blessing shall save them seed and labour, and, that year too, the voluntary productions of the earth shall serve to maintain them, to remind them that the earth brought forth before there was a man to till it, Gen. 1. 11. And then, the third year, their husbandry should return into its former channel, and they should sow and reap as they used to do.

2. The country was laid waste, families were broken up and scattered, and all was in confusion; how should it be otherwise, when it was over-run by such an army? As to this, it is promised that *the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah*, that is, of the country people, shall yet again be planted in their own habitations, upon their own estates, shall take root there, shall increase and grow rich, v. 30. See how their prosperity is described; it is *taking root downward, and bearing fruit upward*, being well-fixed, and well-provided for themselves, and then doing good to others. Such is the prosperity of the soul; it is taking root downward by faith in Christ, and then being fruitful in fruits of righteousness.

3. The city was shut up, none went out or came in; but now the remnant in Jerusalem and Zion shall go forth freely, and there shall be none to hinder them, or make them afraid, v. 31. Great destruction had been made both in city and country, but in both there was a remnant that escaped, which typified the saved remnant of Israelites indeed, as appears by comparing Isa. 10. 22, 23. (which speaks of this very event,) with Rom. 9. 27, 28. they shall go forth into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

4. The Assyrians were advancing toward Jerusalem, and would, in a little time, besiege it in form, and it was in great danger of falling into their hands. But it is here promised that the siege they feared should be prevented; though the enemy were now (as it should seem) encamped before the city, yet they were never to *come into the city*, no, nor so much as to *shoot an arrow* into it, v. 32, 33. He shall be forced to retire with shame, and, a thousand times, to repent his undertaking. God himself undertakes to defend the city, v. 34. and that person, that place, cannot but be safe, which he undertakes the protection of.

5. The honour and truth of God are engaged for the doing of all this. These are great things, but how will they be effected? Why, *the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this*, v. 31. He is Lord of hosts, has all creatures at his beck, therefore he is able to do it; he is *jealous for Jerusalem with great jealousy*, Zech. 1. 14. having

espoused her a chaste virgin to himself, he will not suffer her to be abused, v. 21. "You have reason to think yourselves unworthy that such great things should be done for you; but God's own zeal will do it." His zeal, (1.) For his own honour, v. 34. "I will do it for my own sake, to make me an everlasting name." God's reasons of mercy are fetched from within himself. (2.) For his own truth; "I will do it for my servant David's sake; not for the sake of his merit, but the promise made to him, and the covenant made with him, those sure mercies of David." Thus all the deliverances of the church are wrought for the sake of Christ, the Son of David.

35. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they *were* all dead corpses.

36. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.

37. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

Sometimes it was long ere prophecies were accomplished, and promises performed; but here the word was no sooner spoken than the work was done.

1. The army of Assyria was entirely routed. That night which immediately followed the sending of this message to Hezekiah, when the enemy was just set down before the city, and were preparing (as we now say) to open the trenches, that night was the main body of their army slain upon the spot by an angel, v. 35. Hezekiah had not force sufficient to sally out upon them, and attack their camp, nor would God do it by sword or bow; but he sent his angel, a destroying angel, in the dead of the night, to make an assault upon them, which their sentinels, though never so wakeful, could neither discover nor resist. It was *not by the sword of a mighty man, or of a mean man*, that is, not of any man at all, but of an angel, that the Assyrian army was to fall, Isa. 31. 8. such an angel as slew the first-born of Egypt. Josephus says it was done by a pestilential disease, which was instant death to them. The number slain was very great, 185,000 men, and Rab-shakeb, it is likely, among the rest. When the besieged *arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses*, scarcely a living man among them. Some think the 76th psalm was penned on this occasion, where we read that the *stout-hearted were spoiled, and slept their sleep*, their last, their long sleep, v. 5. See how great, in power and might, the holy angels are, when one angel, in one night, could make so great a slaughter. See how weak the mightiest of men are before almighty God: who ever hardened himself against him, and prospered? The pride and blasphemy of the king are punished by the destruction of his army. All these lives are sacrificed to God's glory, and Zion's safety. The prophet shews that *therefore* God suffered this vast rendezvous to be made, *that they might be gathered as sheaves into the floor*, Mic. 4. 12, 13.

11. The king of Assyria was hereby put into the utmost confusion; ashamed to see himself, after all his proud boasts, thus defeated, and disabled to pursue his conquests, and secure what he had, (for this, we may suppose, was the flower of his army,) and continually afraid of falling under the like stroke himself. *He departed, and went, and returned*; the manner of the expression intimates the great disorder and distraction of mind he was in, v. 36. and it was not long before God cut him off too, by the hands of *two of his own sons*, v. 37. 1. They that did it were very wicked, to kill their own father, (whom they were bound to protect,) and in the act of his devotion; monstrous villany! But, 2. God was

righteous in it. Justly are the sons suffered to rebel against their father that begat them, when he was in rebellion against the God that made him. They whose children are undutiful to them ought to consider whether they have not been so to their father in heaven. The God of Israel had done enough to convince him that he was the only true God, whom therefore he ought to worship; yet he persists in his idolatry, and seeks to his false god for protection against a God of irresistible power. Justly is his blood mingled with his sacrifices who will not be convinced by such a plain and dear-bought demonstration of his folly in worshipping idols.

His sons that murdered him were suffered to escape, and no pursuit made after them, his subjects, perhaps, being weary of the government of so proud a man, and thinking themselves well rid of him. And his sons would be looked upon as the more excusable in what they had done, if it be true (as Bishop Patrick suggested) that he was now vowing to sacrifice them to his god, so that it was for their own preservation that they sacrificed him. His successor was another son, *Esarhaddon*, who (as it should seem) did not aim, like his father, to enlarge his conquests, but rather to improve them; for he it was that first sent colonies of Assyrians to inhabit the country of Samaria, though it is mentioned before, *ch. 17.24.* as appears, *Ezra, 4.2.* where the Samaritans say, it was *Esarhaddon* that brought them thither.

CHAP. XX.

In this chapter, we have, I. Hezekiah's sickness, and his recovery from that, in answer to prayer, in performance of a promise, in the use of means, and confirmed with a sign, v. 1. . 11. II. Hezekiah's sin, and his recovery from that, v. 12. . 19. In both these, Isaiah was God's messenger to him. III. The conclusion of his reign, v. 20, 21.

1. **I**N those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. 2. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, 3. I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done *that which is good* in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. 4. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 5. Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. 6. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. 7. And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. 8. And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What *shall be* the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day? 9. And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? 10. And Hezekiah answered, It is a light

thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. 11. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD; and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.

The historian, having shewed us blaspheming Sennacherib destroyed in the midst of the prospects of life, here shews us praying Hezekiah delivered in the midst of the prospects of death; the days of the former shortened, of the latter prolonged.

I. Here is Hezekiah's sickness. In those days, that is, in the same year in which the king of Assyria besieged Jerusalem, for he reigning, in all, twenty-nine years, and surviving this fifteen years, this must be in his fourteenth year, and so was that, *ch. 18.13.* Some think it was at the time that the Assyrian army was besieging the city, or preparing for it, because God promises, *v. 6. I will defend the city*, which promise was afterwards repeated, when the danger came to be most imminent, *ch. 19.34.* Others think it was soon after the defeat of Sennacherib; and then it shews us the uncertainty of all our comforts in this world: Hezekiah, in the midst of his triumphs in the favour of God, and over the forces of his enemies, is seized with sickness, and under the arrest of death; we must therefore always rejoice with trembling. It should seem he was sick of the plague, for we read of the boil or plague-sore, *v. 7.* The same disease which was killing to the Assyrians was trying to him; God took it from him, and put it upon his enemies. Neither greatness nor goodness can exempt from sickness, from sore and mortal sicknesses. Hezekiah, lately favoured of heaven, above most men, yet is sick unto death, in the midst of his days—under forty, and yet sick and dying, and perhaps he was the more apprehensive of its being fatal to him, because his father died when he was about his age, two or three years younger; “In the midst of life we are in death.”

II. Warning brought him to prepare for death; it is brought by Isaiah, who had been twice, in the former chapter, a messenger of good tidings to him; we cannot expect to receive from God's prophets any other than what they have received from the LORD, and we must welcome that, be it pleasing or displeasing; he tells him, 1. That his disease was mortal, and, if he were not recovered by a miracle of mercy, would be certainly fatal; *Thou shalt die, and not live.* 2. That, therefore, he must, with all speed, get ready for death; this we should feel highly concerned to do, when we are in health, but are most loudly called to do, when we come to be sick; set the heart in order, by renewed acts of repentance, and faith, and resignation to God, with cheerful farewells to this world, and welcomes to another; and, if it be not done before, (which is the best and wisest course,) set the house in order, make thy will, settle thy estate, put thine affairs in the best posture thou canst, for the ease of those that shall come after thee. Isaiah speaks not to Hezekiah of his *kingdom*, only of his *house*; David, being a prophet, had authority to appoint who should reign after him; but other kings did not pretend to bequeath their crowns, as part of their goods and chattels.

III. His prayer hereupon; *He prayed unto the LORD, v. 2.* Is any sick? Let him be prayed for, let him be prayed with, and let him pray. Hezekiah had found, in the foregoing chapter, that it was not in vain to wait upon God, but that the prayers of faith bring in answers of peace, therefore will he *call upon God as long as he lives.* Happy returns of prayer are engagements and encouragements to continue instant in prayer; he had now received the sentence of death within himself, and, 1. If it were reversible, it must be reversed by prayer. When God purposes mercy, he will, *for this, be inquired of, Ezek. 36.37.* We have not, if we ask not, or ask amiss. 2. If not, prayer is one of the best preparations for death, because by it we fetch in strength and grace from God, to enable us to finish well. Observe,

(1.) The circumstances of this prayer. [1.] *He turned his face to the wall*, probably as he lay in his bed; this he did, perhaps, for privacy; he could not retire to his closet, as he used to do, but

he retired as well as he could, turned from the company that were about him, to converse with God. When we cannot be so private as we would be in our devotions, nor perform them with the usual outward expressions of reverence and solemnity, yet we must not therefore omit them, but compose ourselves to them as well as we can; or, as some think, he turned his face toward the temple, to shew how willingly he would have gone up thither, to pray this prayer, (as he did, *ch. 19. 1, 14.*) if he had been able, and remembering what encouragements were given to all the prayers that should be made in or toward that house. Christ is our Temple; to him we must have an eye in all our prayers; for no man, no service, *comes to the Father, but by him.* [2.] He *wept sore*; some gather from hence that he was unwilling to die; it is in the nature of man to have some dread of the separation of soul and body, and it was not strange if the Old-Testament saints, to whom another world was but darkly revealed, were not so willing to leave this as St. Paul and other New-Testament saints were; there was also something peculiar in Hezekiah's case, he was now in the midst of his usefulness, had begun a good work of reformation, which, he feared, if he should die, through the corruption of the people, would fall to the ground; if this was before the defeat of the Assyrian army, as some think, he might therefore be loath to die, because his kingdom was in imminent danger of being ruined; however, it does not appear that he had now any son; Manasseh, that succeeded him, was not born till three years after, and, if he die childless, both the peace of his kingdom, and the promise to David, would be in danger: but, perhaps, these were only tears of importunity, and expressions of a lively affection in prayer; Jacob wept, and made supplication, and our blessed Saviour, though most willing to die, yet offered up strong cries, with tears, to Him whom he knew to be *able to save him*, Heb. 5. 7. Let Hezekiah's prayer interpret his tears, and in that we find nothing that intimates him to have been under any of that fear of death which has either bondage or torment.

(2.) The prayer itself; "*Remember now, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth*; and either spare me to live, that I may continue thus to walk, or, if my work be done, receive me to that glory which thou hast prepared for those that have thus walked." Observe here, [1.] The description of Hezekiah's piety; he had had his conversation in the world with right intentions, "*I have walked before thee, as under thine eye, and with an eye ever toward thee*; from a right principle, *in truth, and with an upright heart*; and by a right rule, *I have done that which is good in thy sight.*" [2.] The comfort he now had in reflection upon it; it made his sick-bed easy. Note, The testimony of conscience for us, that we have walked with God in our integrity, will be much our support and rejoicing when we come to look death in the face, 2 Cor. 1. 12. [3.] The humble mention he makes of it to God, *Lord, remember it now*; not as if God needed to be put in mind of any thing by us, he is greater than our hearts, and knows all things; or, as if the reward were of debt, and might be demanded as due, it is Christ's righteousness only that is the purchase of mercy and grace; but our own sincerity may be pleaded as the condition of the covenant which God has wrought in us; "*It is the work of thine own hands Lord, own it.*" Hezekiah does not pray, "*Lord, spare me*," or, "*Lord, take me, God's will be done*;" but, *Lord, remember me; whether I live or die, let me be thine.*

IV. The answer which God immediately gave to this prayer of Hezekiah's; the prophet was got but to the middle court, when he was sent back with another message to Hezekiah, v. 4, 5. to tell him that he should recover; not that there is with God yea or nay, or that he ever says and unsays; but, upon Hezekiah's prayer, which he foresaw, and which his Spirit inclined him to, God did that for him which otherwise he would not have done. God here calls Hezekiah *the captain of his people*, to intimate that he would relieve him for his people's sake, because, in this time of war, they could ill spare such a captain: he calls himself *the God of David*, to intimate that he would relieve him, out of a regard to the covenant made with David, and the promise that he would always ordain a lamp for him.

In this answer, 1. God honours his prayers by the notice he

takes of them, and the reference he has to them in this message, *I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears*; prayers that have much life and affection in them are, in a special manner, pleasing to God. 2. God exceeds his prayers; he only begged that God would remember his integrity, but God here promises, (1.) To recover him from his illness, *I will heal thee*: diseases are his servants; as they go whither he sends them, so they come when he remands them, Matth. 8. 8, 9. *I am the Lord that healeth thee*, Exod. 15. 26. (2.) To restore him to such a degree of health, that, *on the third day, he should go up to the house of the Lord*, to return thanks; God knew Hezekiah's heart, how dearly he loved the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwelt, and that, as soon as he was well, he would go to attend on public ordinances; thitherward he turned his face when he was sick, and thitherward he would turn his feet when he was recovered; and therefore, because nothing would please him better, he promises him this, *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee*; the man whom Christ healed was, soon after, *found in the temple*, John, 5. 14. (3.) To add fifteen years to his life would not bring him to be an old man, it would reach but to fifty-four or fifty-five; yet that was longer than he had lately expected to live. His lease was renewed, which he thought was expiring; we have not the instance of any other that was told beforehand just how long he should live; that good man, no doubt, made a good use of it, but God has wisely kept us at uncertainties, that we may be always ready. (4.) To deliver Jerusalem from the king of Assyria, v. 6. This was the thing which Hezekiah's heart was upon as much as his own recovery, and therefore the promise of this is here repeated; if this was after the raising of the siege, yet there was cause to fear Sennacherib's rallying again; No, says God, *I will defend this city.*

V. The means which were to be used for his recovery, v. 7. Isaiah was his physician; he ordered an outward application, a very cheap and common thing, "*Lay a lump of figs to the boil*, to ripen it, and bring it to a head, that the matter of the disease may be discharged that way;" this might contribute something to the cure, and yet, considering to what a height the disease was come, and how suddenly it was checked, the cure was no less than miraculous. Note, 1. It is our duty, when we are sick, to make use of such means as are proper to help nature, else we do not trust God, but tempt him. 2. Plain and ordinary medicines must not be despised, for many such God has graciously made serviceable to man, in consideration of the poor. 3. What God appoints he will succeed and make effectual.

VI. The sign which was given for the encouragement of his faith. 1. He begged it; not in any distrust of the power or promise of God, or as if he staggered at that, but because he looked upon the things promised to be very great things, and worthy to be so confirmed, and because it had been usual with God thus to glorify himself, and favour his people; and he remembered how much God was displeased with his father for refusing to ask a sign, Isa. 7. 10, 12. Observe, Hezekiah asked, "*What is the sign*, not that I shall go up to the thrones of judgment, or up to the gate, but *up to the house of the Lord*?" therefore he desired to recover, that he might glorify God *in the gates of the daughter of Zion*. It is not worth while to live for any other purpose than to serve God. 2. It was put to his choice whether the sun should go back or go forward, for it was equal to Omnipotence, and it would be the more likely to confirm his faith, if he chose that which he thought the more difficult of the two; perhaps to this that of this prophet may refer, Isa. 45. 11. *Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.* It is supposed that the degrees were half hours, and that it was just noon when the proposal was made, and the question is, "*Shall the sun go back to its place at seven in the morning, or forward to its place at five in the evening*?" 3. He humbly desired the sun might go back ten degrees, because, though either would be a great miracle, yet, it being the natural course of the sun to go forward, its going back would seem more strange, and would be more significant of Hezekiah's returning to the days of

his youth, Job, 33. 25. and the lengthening out of the day of his life. It was accordingly done, upon the prayer of Isaiah, v. 11. he cried unto the Lord by special warrant and direction, and God brought the sun back ten degrees, which appeared to Hezekiah, (for the sign was intended for him,) by the going back of the shadow upon the dial of Ahaz, which, it is likely, he could see through his chamber-window; and the same was observed upon all other dials, even in Babylon, 2 Chron. 32. 31. Whether this retrograde motion of the sun was gradual, or *per saltum*—suddenly; whether it went back at the same pace that it used to go forward, which would make the day ten hours longer than usual; or whether it darted back on a sudden, and, after continuing a little while, was restored again to its usual place, so that no change was made in the state of the heavenly bodies, (as the learned Bishop Patrick thinks,) we are not told: but this work of wonder shews the power of God in heaven as well as on earth, the great notice he takes of prayer, and the great favour he bears to his chosen. The most plausible idolatry of the heathen was their's that worshipped the sun, yet that was hereby convicted of the most egregious folly and absurdity, for by this it appeared that their god was under the check of the God of Israel. Dr. Lightfoot suggests that the fifteen songs of degrees, Ps. 120, &c. might, perhaps, be so called, because selected by Hezekiah to be sung to his stringed instruments, Isa. 38. 20. in remembrance of the degrees on the dial when the sun went back, and the fifteen years added to his life; and he observes how much of these psalms is applicable to Jerusalem's distress and deliverance, and Hezekiah's sickness and recovery.

12. At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. 13. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and *all* the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not. 14. Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, *even* from Babylon. 15. And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. 16. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord. 17. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. 18. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. 19. Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days? 20. And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and

how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 21. And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

Here is,

I. An embassy sent to Hezekiah by the king of Babylon, to congratulate him on his recovery, v. 12. The kings of Babylon had hitherto been only deputies and tributaries to the kings of Assyria, and Nineveh was the royal city: we find Babylon subject to the king of Assyria, ch. 17. 24. But this king of Babylon began to set up for himself, and, by degrees, things were so changed, that Assyria became subject to the kings of Babylon. This king of Babylon sent to compliment Hezekiah, and ingratiate himself with him upon a double account. 1. Upon the account of religion. The Babylonians worshipped the sun, and, perceiving what honour their god had done to Hezekiah, in going back for his sake, they thought themselves obliged to do honour to him likewise. It is good having those our friends whom we perceive to be the favourites of heaven. 2. Upon the account of civil interest. If the king of Babylon was now meditating a revolt from the king of Assyria, it was policy to get Hezekiah into his interest, in answer to whose prayers, and for whose protection, heaven had given that fatal blow to the king of Assyria. He found himself obliged to Hezekiah, and his God, for the weakening of the Assyrian forces, and had reason to think he could not have a more powerful and valuable ally, than one that had so good an interest in the upper world. He therefore made his court to him with all possible respect, by ambassadors, letters, and a present.

II. The kind entertainment Hezekiah gave to these ambassadors, v. 13. It was his duty to be civil to them, and receive them with the respect due to ambassadors; but he exceeded, and did it to a fault. 1. He was too fond of them. He *hearkened unto them*. Though they were idolaters, yet he became intimate with them, was forward to come into a confederacy with the king their master, and granted them all they came for. He was more open and free than he should have been, and stood not so much upon his guard. What reason had he, that was in covenant with God, so eagerly to catch at an alliance with a heathen prince, or to value himself at all upon his respectful notice? What honour could this embassy add to one whom God had so highly favoured, that he should please himself so much with it? 2. He was too fond of shewing them his palace, his treasures, and his magazines, that they might see, and might report to their master, what a great king he was, and how well worthy of the honour their master did him. It is not said that he shewed them the temple, the book of the law, and the manner of his worship, that he might proselyte them to the true religion, which he had now a fair opportunity of doing; but, in compliment to them, lest that should affront them, he waved that, and shewed them the rich furniture of his closet, that house of his precious things, the wealth he had heaped up since the king of Assyria had emptied his coffers, his *silver, and gold, and spices*. All the valuable things he had, he shewed them, either himself or by his officers. And what harm was there in this? What is more commonly, and (as we think) more innocently, done, than to shew strangers the riches and rarities of a country? To shew our friends our houses and their furniture, our gardens, stables, and libraries? But if we do this in the pride of our hearts, as Hezekiah did, to gain applause from men, and not giving praise to God, it turns into sin to us, as it did to him.

III. The examination of Hezekiah concerning this matter, v. 14, 15. Isaiah, who had often been his comforter, is now his reprover. The blessed Spirit is both, John, 16. 7, 8. Ministers must be both, as there is occasion. Isaiah spake in God's name, and therefore called him to account as one having authority: "Who are these? Whence come they? What is their business? What have they seen?" Hezekiah not only submitted to the examina-

tion, (did not ask him, "Why should you concern yourself, and question me about this affair?") but made an ingenuous confession, *There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.* Why then did he not bring them to Isaiah, and shew him to them, who was, without doubt, the best treasure he had in his dominions, and who, by his prayers and prophecies, had been instrumental in all those wonders which these ambassadors came to inquire into? I hope Hezekiah had the same value for Isaiah now, that he had in his distress; but it had become him to shew it, by bringing these ambassadors to him in the first place, which might have prevented the false step he took.

IV. The sentence passed upon him for his pride and vanity, and the too great relish he had of the things of the world, after that intimate acquaintance he had so lately been admitted into with divine things. The sentence is, v. 17, 18. 1. That the treasures he was so proud of should hereafter become a prey, and his family should be robbed of them all. It is just with God, to take that from us which we make the matter of our pride, and in which we put our confidence. 2. That the king of Babylon, he was so fond of an alliance with, should be the enemy that should make a prey of them. Not that it was for this sin that that judgment should be brought upon them: the sins of Manasseh, his idolatries, and murders, were the cause of that calamity; but it is now foretold to Hezekiah, to convince him of the folly of his pride, and of the value he had for the king of Babylon, and to make him ashamed of it. Hezekiah was fond of assisting the king of Babylon to rise, and to reduce the exorbitant power of the kings of Assyria; but he is told that the snake he is cherishing will, ere long, sting the bosom that cherishes it, and that his royal seed shall become the king of Babylon's slaves; which was fulfilled, Dan. 1. 1, &c. Hezekiah could not have been more mortified than by such a thought. Babylon will be the ruin of those that are fond of Babylon. Wise therefore and happy are they that *come out from her*, Rev. 18. 4.

V. Hezekiah's humble and patient submission to this sentence, v. 19. Observe how he argues himself into this submission. 3. He lays it down for a truth, that *good is the word of the Lord*, even this word, though a threatening, for every word of his is so. It is not only just, but good; for as he does no wrong to any, so he means no hurt to good men. "It is good; for he will bring good out of it, and do me good by the foresight of it." We should believe this concerning every providence, that it is good, is working for good. 2. He takes notice of that in this word, which was good, that he should not live to see this evil, much less to share in it. He makes the best of the bad; "Is it not good? Yes, certainly it is, and better than I deserve." Note, (1.) True penitents, when they are under divine rebukes, call them not only just, but good; not only submit to, but accept of, the punishment of their iniquity. So Hezekiah did, and by this it appeared that he was indeed *humbled for the pride of his heart*. (2.) When, at any time, we are under dark dispensations, or have dark prospects, public or personal, we must take notice of what is *for* us, as well as of what is *against* us, that we may, by thanksgiving, honour God, and may in our patience possess our own souls. (3.) As to public affairs, it is good, and we are bound to think it so, *if peace and truth be in our days*. That is, [1.] Whatever else we want, it is good if we have peace and truth; if we have the true religion professed and protected, bibles and ministers, and enjoy these in peace, not terrified with the alarms of war or persecution. [2.] Whatever trouble may come when we are gone, it is good if all be well in our days. Not that we should be unconcerned for posterity, it is a grief to foresee evils; but we should own that the deferring of judgments is a great favour in general; and to have them deferred so long as that we may die in peace, is a particular favour to us, for charity begins at home. We know not how we shall bear the trial, and therefore have reason to think it well, if we may but get safe to heaven before it comes.

Lastly, Here is the conclusion of Hezekiah's life and story, v. 20, 21. In 2 Chronicles, book 2. ch. 29, 30, and 31. much more is recorded of Hezekiah's work of reformation than is in this book

of Kings; and it seems that in the civil chronicles, not now extant, there were many things recorded of his might, and the good offices he did for Jerusalem, particularly his bringing water by pipes into the city. To have water in plenty, without striving for it, and without being terrified with the noise of archers in the drawing of it, to have it at hand, and convenient for us, is to be reckoned a great mercy, for the want of water would be a great calamity. But here this historian leaves him *asleep with his fathers*, and a son in his throne that proved very untoward; for parents cannot give grace to their children. Wicked Abaz was the son of a godly father, and the father of a godly son; holy Hezekiah was the son of a wicked father, and the father of a wicked son. When the land was not reformed, as it *should* have been, by a good reign, it was plagued and ripened for ruin by a bad one; yet then tried again with a good one, that it might appear how loath God was to cut off his people.

CHAP. XXI.

In this chapter, we have a short but sad account of the reigns of two of the kings of Judah, Manasseh and Amon. I. Concerning Manasseh, all the account we have of him here, is, 1. That he devoted himself to sin, to all manner of wickedness, idolatry, and murder, v. 1. 9. and v. 16. 2. That therefore God devoted him, and Jerusalem for his sake, to ruin, v. 10. 18. In the book of Chronicles, we have an account of his troubles, and his repentance. II. Concerning Amon we are only told that he lived in sin, v. 19. 22. Died quickly by the sword, and left good Josiah his successor, v. 23. 26. By these two reigns Jerusalem was much debauched, and much weakened, and so hastened apace towards its destruction, which slumbered not.

1. **M**ANASSEH was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzi-bah. 2. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 3. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. 4. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. 5. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6. And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke *him* to anger. 7. And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the LORD said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: 8. Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers: only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them. 9. But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do

more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel.

How delightful were our meditations on the last reign! How many pleasing views had we of Sion in its glory, that is, in its purity and in its triumphs, of *the king in his beauty!* For the reference (Isa. 33. 17.) is to Hezekiah; and, as it follows there, v. 20. Jerusalem was a *quiet habitation*, because a *city of righteousness*, Isa. 1. 26. But now we have melancholy work upon our hands, unpleasant ground to travel, and cannot but drive heavily. *How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!* The beauty of Jerusalem is stained, and all her glory, all her joy, sunk and gone. These verses give such an account of this reign, as make it, in all respects, the reverse of the last, and, in a manner, the ruin of it.

I. Manasseh began young. He was but twelve years old when he began to reign, v. 1. born when his father was about forty-two years old, three years after his sickness. If he had sons before, either they were dead, or set by as unpromising. As yet, they knew of nothing bad in him, and they hoped he would prove good; but he proved very bad, and perhaps his coming to the crown so young might help to make it so, which yet will by no means excuse him, for his grandson Josiah came to it younger than he, and yet acted well. But being young, 1. He was puffed up with his honour, and proud of it; and, thinking himself very wise, because he was very great, valued himself upon his undoing what his father had done. It is too common for novices to be lifted up with pride, and so to fall into the condemnation of the devil. 2. He was easily wrought upon and drawn aside by seducers, that lay in wait to deceive. They that were enemies to Hezekiah's reformation, and retained an affection for the old idolatries, flattered him, and so gained his ear, and used his power at their pleasure. Many have been undone by coming too soon to their honours and estates.

II. He reigned long, longest of any of the kings of Judah, fifty-five years. This was the only very bad reign that was a long one; Joram was but eight years, and Ahaz's sixteen; as for Manasseh's, we hope that in the beginning of his reign, for some time, affairs continued to move in the course that his father left them in; and that in the latter end of his reign, after his repentance, religion got head again; and, no doubt, when things were at the worst, God had his remnant that kept their integrity. Though he reigned long, yet, some of this time, he was a prisoner in Babylon, which may well be looked upon as a drawback from these years, though they are reckoned in the number, because then he repented, and began to reform.

III. He reigned very ill. 1. *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord;* and which, having been well educated, he could not but know was so; v. 2. *He wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord,* as if on purpose to provoke him to anger, v. 6. 2. *He did after the abominations of the heathen,* v. 2. and as did Ahab, v. 3. not taking warning by the destruction both of the nations of Canaan, and the house of Ahab, for their idolatry; nay, v. 9. *he did more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed.* When the holy seed degenerate, they are commonly worse than the worst of the profane.

More particularly, (1.) *He rebuilt the high places which his father had destroyed,* v. 3. Thus did he trample upon the dust, and affront the memory, of his worthy father, though he knew how much he was favoured of God, and honoured of men. He concurred, it is probable, with Rab-shakeh's sentiments, ch. 18. 22. that Hezekiah had done ill in destroying those high places, and pretended the honour of God, and the edification and convenience of the people, in rebuilding them. This he began with, but proceeded to that which was much worse: for, (2.) *He set up other gods, Baal and Ashteroth,* (which we translate a grove,) and all the host of heaven, the sun and moon, the other planets, and the constellations; these he worshipped and served, v. 3. gave their names to the images he made, and then did homage to them, and prayed for help from them. To these he built altars, v. 5. and

offered sacrifices, no doubt, on these altars. (3.) *He made his son pass through the fire,* by which he dedicated him a votary to Moloch, in contempt of the seal of circumcision by which he had been dedicated to God. (4.) *He made the devil his oracle,* and, in contempt both of Urim and prophecy, he used enchantments and dealt with familiar spirits, v. 6. like Saul. Conjurers and fortune-tellers, who pretended, by the stars or the clouds, lucky and unlucky days, good and bad omens, the flight of birds, or the entrails of beasts, to foretell things to come, were great men with him, his intimates, his confidants; their arts pleased his fancy, and gained his belief, and his counsels were under their direction. (5.) We find afterward, v. 16. that he shed innocent blood very much in gratification of his own passion and revenge; some, perhaps, were secretly murdered, others taken off by colour of law. Probably, much of the blood he shed was their's that opposed idolatry, and witnessed against it, that would not bow the knee to Baal. *The blood of the prophets* is, in a particular manner, charged upon Jerusalem, and it is probable that he put to death many of them. The tradition of the Jews is, that he caused the prophet Isaiah to be sawn asunder; and many think the apostle refers to that, Heb. 11. 37. where he speaks of those that had so suffered.

Three things are here mentioned as aggravations of Manasseh's idolatry. [1.] That he set up his images and altars in the house of the Lord, v. 4. in the two courts of the temple, v. 5. in the very house of which God had said to Solomon, *Here will I put my name,* v. 7. Thus he defied God to his face, and impudently affronted him with his rivals immediately under his eye, as one that was neither afraid of God's wrath, nor ashamed of his own folly and wickedness. Thus he desecrated what had been consecrated to God, and did, in effect, turn God out of his own house, and put the rebels in possession of it. Thus, when the faithful worshippers of God came to the place he had appointed for the performance of their duty to him, they found, to their great grief and terror, other gods ready to receive their offerings. God had said that here he would record his name, here he would put it for ever, and here it was, accordingly, preserved, while the idolatrous altars were kept at a distance; but Manasseh, by bringing them into God's house, did what he could to altar the property, and to make the name of the God of Israel to be no more in remembrance. [2.] That hereby he put a great slight upon the word of God, and his covenant with Israel. Observe the favour he had shewed to that people, in putting his name among them—the kindness he intended them, never to make them move out of that good land—and the reasonableness of his expectations from them, *only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them,* v. 7, 8. Upon these good terms did Israel stand with God, and had as fair a prospect of being happy as any people could have: but they hearkened not, v. 9. They would not be kept close to God, either by his precepts or by his promises, both were cast behind their back. [3.] That hereby he seduced the people of God, debauched them, and drew them into idolatry, v. 9. he made Judah to sin, v. 11. as Jeroboam had made Israel to sin. His very example was enough to corrupt the generality of unthinking people, who would do as their king did, right or wrong. All that aimed at preferment would do as the court did; and others thought it safest to comply, for fear of making their king their enemy. Thus, one way or other, the holy city became a harlot, and Manasseh made her so. Those will have a great deal to answer for, that not only are wicked themselves, but help to make others so.

10. And the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying, 11. Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols; 12. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever

heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. 13. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down. 14. And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; 15. Because they have done *that which was* evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day. 16. Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD. 17. Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 18. And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza: and Amon his son reigned in his stead.

Here is the doom of Judah and Jerusalem read, and it is a heavy doom. The prophets were sent, in the first place, to teach them the knowledge of God, to remind them of their duty, and direct them in it; if they succeeded not in that, their next work was to reprove them for their sins, and to set them in view before them, that they might repent and reform, and return to their duty: if in this they prevailed not, but sinners went on frowardly, their next work was to foretell the judgments of God, that the terror of them might awaken those to repentance who would not be made sensible of the obligations of his love, or else that the execution of them, in their season, might be a demonstration of the divine mission of the prophets that foretold them. The prophets were deputed judges to those that would not hear and receive them as teachers. We have here,

I. A recital of the crime: the indictment is read, upon which the judgment is grounded, v. 11. Manasseh has done wickedly himself, though he knew better things, has even justified the Amorites, whose copy he wrote after, by outdoing them in impieties, and debauched the people of God, whom he has taught to sin, and forced to sin; and, beside that, (though that was bad enough,) *he has filled Jerusalem with innocent blood*, v. 16. has multiplied his murders in every corner of the city, and filled the measure of Jerusalem's blood-guiltiness (Matth. 23. 32.) up to the brim, and all this, against the crown and dignity of the King of kings, the peace of his kingdom, and the statutes in these cases made and provided.

II. A prediction of the judgment God would bring upon them for this. *They have done that which was evil*, and therefore *I am bringing evil upon them*, v. 12. it will come, and it is not far off. The judgment should be, 1. Very terrible and amazing, the very report of it should *make men's ears to tingle*, v. 12. that is, their hearts to tremble. It should make a great noise in the world, and occasion many speculations. 2. It should be copied out (as the sins of Jerusalem had been) from Samaria, and the house of Ahab, v. 13. When God lays righteousness to the line, it shall be the line of Samaria, measuring out to Jerusalem that which had been the lot of Samaria; when he lays judgment to the plummet, it shall be *the plummet of the house of Ahab*, marking out for the same ruin to which that wretched family was devoted. See Isa. 28. 17. Note, Those who resemble and imitate others in their sins, must expect to fare as they fared. 3. That it should be an utter destruction: *I will wipe it as a man wipes a dish*. This

intimates, (1.) That every thing should be put into disorder, and their state subverted; they should be turned upside down, and all their foundations put out of course. (2.) That the city should be emptied of its inhabitants, which had been the filth of it, as a dish is emptied when it is wiped: they shall all be carried captive, *the land shall enjoy her sabbaths*, and be laid by as a dish when it is wiped. See the comparison of the boiled pot, not much unlike this, Ezek. 24. 1. . 14. (3.) That yet this should be in order to the purifying, not the destroying, of Jerusalem. The dish shall not be dropt, nor broken to pieces, or melted down, but only wiped. This shall be the fruit, the taking away of the sinners first, and then of the sin. 4. That *therefore* they should be destroyed, because they should be deserted, v. 14. *I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance*. Justly are those that forsake God, forsaken of him; nor does he ever leave any, till they have first left him: but when God has forsaken a people, their defence is departed, and they become a prey, an easy prey, to all their enemies. Sin is spoken of here as the alpha and omega of their miseries. (1.) Old guilt came in remembrance, as that which began to fill the measure, v. 15. *They have provoked me to anger* from their conception and birth as a people, *since the day their fathers came out of Egypt*. The men of this generation, treading in their fathers' steps, are justly reckoned with for their fathers' sins. (2.) The guilt of blood was it that filled the measure, v. 16. Nothing has a louder cry, nor brings a sorer vengeance, than that.

This is all we have here of Manasseh; he stands convicted and condemned; but we hope in the book of Chronicles to hear of his repentance, and acceptance with God. Mean time, we must be content, in this place, to have only one intimation of his repentance, (for so we are willing to take it,) that he was buried, it is likely by his own order, *in the garden of his own house*, v. 18. for, being truly humbled for his sins, he judged himself *no more worthy to be called a son*, a son of David, and therefore not worthy to have even his dead body buried *in the sepulchres of his fathers*. True penitents take shame to themselves, not honour; yet, having lost the credit of an innocent, the credit of a penitent was the next best he was capable of; and better it is, and more honourable, for a sinner to die repenting, and be buried in a garden, than to die impenitent, and be buried in the abbey.

19. Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haraz of Jotbah. 20. And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did. 21. And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them: 22. And he forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the LORD. 23. And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and slew the king in his own house. 24. And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead. 25. Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 26. And he was buried in his sepulchre in the garden of Uzza; and Josiah his son reigned in his stead.

Here is a short account of the short and inglorious reign of Amon, the son of Manasseh. Whether Manasseh, in his blind and brutish zeal for his idols, had sacrificed his other sons; or whether, having been dedicated to his idols, they were refused by the

people, so it was, that his successor was a son not born till he was forty-five years old. And of him we are here told,

1. That his reign was very wicked. *He forsook the God of his fathers, v. 22. disobeyed the commands given to his fathers, and disclaimed the covenant made with his fathers, and walked not in the way of the Lord, but in all the way which his father walked in, v. 20, 21.* He trod in the steps of his father's idolatry, and revived that which he, in the latter end of his days, had put down. Note, Those who set bad examples, though they may repent themselves, yet cannot be sure that those whom they have drawn into sin by their example, will repent; it is often otherwise.

2. That his end was very tragical. He having rebelled against God, his own servants conspired against him, and slew him; probably, upon some personal disgust, when he had reigned but two years, v. 23. His servants, who should have guarded him, murdered him; his own house, that should have been his castle of defence, was the place of his execution. He had profaned God's house with his idols, and now God suffered his own house to be polluted with his blood. How unrighteous soever they were that did it, God was righteous, who suffered it to be done.

Two things the people of the land did, by their representatives, hereupon. (1.) They did justice on the traitors that had slain the king, and put them to death; for, though he was a bad king, he was *their* king, and it was a part of their allegiance to him to avenge his death. Thus they cleared themselves from having any hand in the crime, and did what was incumbent on them to deter others from the like villanous practices. (2.) They did a kindness to themselves, in *making Josiah his son king in his stead*, whom, probably, the conspirators had a design to put by: but the people stood by him, and settled him in the throne: encouraged, it may be, by the indications he gave, even in his early days, of a good disposition. Now they made a happy change, from one of the worst, to one of the best, of all the kings of Judah. "Once more," says God, "they shall be tried with a reformation: and if that succeed, well; if not, then, after that, I will cut them down." Amon was buried in the same garden where his father was, v. 26. If his father put himself under that humiliation, the people will put him under it.

CHAP. XXII.

This chapter begins the story of the reign of good king Josiah, whose goodness shines the brighter, because it came just after so much wickedness, which he had the honour to reform; and just before so great a destruction, which yet he had not the honour to prevent. Here, after his general character, v. 1, 2, we have a particular account of the respect he paid, I. To God's house, which he repaired, v. 3, 7. II. To God's book, which he was much affected with the reading of, v. 8, 11. III. To God's messengers, whom he, thereupon, consulted, v. 12, 14. And by whom he received from God an answer, threatening Jerusalem's destruction, v. 15, 17, but promising favour to him, v. 18, 20. Upon which, he set about that glorious work of reformation, which we have an account of in the next chapter.

1. **JOSIAH** was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. 2. And he did *that which was right in the sight of the LORD*, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left. 3. And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, *that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying,* 4. Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: 5. And let them deliver it into the hand of the

doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which *is* in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house. 6. Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. 7. Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully. 8. And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. 9. And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD. 10. And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

Concerning Josiah, we are here told,

1. That he was very young when he began to reign, v. 1. but eight years old. Solomon says, *Woe unto thee, O land, when thy king is a child*; but happy art thou, O land, when thy king is such a child. Our English Israel had once a king that was such a child, Edward VI. Josiah, being young, had not received any bad impressions from the example of his father and grandfather, but soon saw their errors, and God gave him grace to take warning by them. See Ezek. 18. 14, &c.

II. That he did *that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, v. 2. See the sovereignty of divine grace: the father passed by and left to perish in his sin; the son a chosen vessel. See the triumphs of that grace; Josiah born of a wicked father, no good education, nor good example given him, but many about him, who no doubt, advised him to tread in his father's steps, and few that gave him any good counsel: and yet the grace of God makes him an eminent saint, *cuts him off from the wild olive, and grafts him into the good olive*, Rom. 11. 24. Nothing is too hard for that grace to do. He walked in a good way, and turned not aside (as some of his predecessors had done who begun well) *to the right hand or to the left*: there are errors on both hands, but God kept him in the right way, he fell not either into superstition or profaneness.

III. That he took care for the repair of the temple. This he did in the 18th year of his reign, v. 3. compare 2 Chron. 34. 3. He began much sooner to *seek the Lord*, as appears, 2 Chron. 34. 3. but it is to be feared the work of reformation went slowly on, and met with much opposition, so that he could not effect what he desired and designed, till his power was thoroughly confirmed. The consideration of the time we unavoidably lost in our minority should quicken us, when we come to years, to act with so much the more vigour in the service of God. Having begun late, we had need work hard; he sent Shaphan, the secretary of state, to Hilkiah the high priest, to take an account of the money that was collected for this use by the door-keepers, v. 4. for, it seems, they took much the same way of raising the money that Joash took, ch. 12. 9. When people gave by a little at a time, the burthen was insensible, and, the contribution being voluntary, it was not complained of. This money, so collected, he ordered him to lay out for the repair of the temple, v. 5, 6. And now, it seems, the workmen (as in the days of Joash) acquitted themselves so well, that *there was no reckoning made with them*, v. 7. which is certainly mentioned

to the praise of the workmen, that they gained such a reputation for honesty, but whether to the praise of those that employed them I know not; a man should count money, (we say,) after his own father; it had not been amiss to have *reckoned with the workmen*, that others also might be satisfied of their honesty.

IV. That, in the repairing of the temple, *the book of the law* was happily found and brought to the king, v. 8, 10. Some think it was the autograph, or original manuscript, of the five books of Moses, under his own hand; others think it was only an ancient and authentic copy; most likely it was that which, by the command of Moses, was laid up in the most holy place, Deut. 31. 24, &c.

1. It seems, this book of the law was lost and missing, either it was carelessly mislaid and neglected, thrown by into a corner, (as some throw their Bibles,) by those that knew not the value of it, and forgotten there; or, it was maliciously concealed by some of the idolatrous kings, or their agents, who were restrained by the providence of God, or their own consciences, from burning and destroying it, but buried it, in hopes it would never see the light again; or, (as some think,) it was carefully laid up by some of its friends, lest it should fall into the hands of its enemies: whoever were the instruments of its preservation, we ought to acknowledge the hand God in it; if this was the only authentic copy of the Pentateuch then in being, which had (as I may say) so narrow a turn for its life, and was so near perishing, I wonder the hearts of all good people did not tremble for that sacred treasure, as Eli's for the ark, and I am sure we now have reason to thank God, upon our knees, for that happy providence by which Hilkiah had found this book at this time, found it when *he sought it not*, Isa. 65. 1. If the holy scriptures had not been of God, they had not been in being at this day; God's care of the Bible, is a plain indication of his interest in it.

2. Whether this was the only authentic copy in being or no, it seems, the things contained in it were new, both to the king himself and to the high priest, for the king, upon the reading of it, rent his clothes; we have reason to think the command for the king's writing a copy of the law, and that for the public reading of the law every seventh year, Deut. 17. 18.—31. 10, 11. had neither of them been observed of a long time, and when the instituted means of keeping up religion are neglected, religion itself will soon go to decay; yet, on the other hand, if the book of the law was lost, it seems difficult to determine what rule Josiah went by in doing that which was *right in the sight of the Lord*, and how the priests and people kept up the rites of their religion: I am apt to think that the people generally took up with abstracts of the law, like our abridgements of the statutes, which the priests, to save themselves the trouble of writing, and the people of reading, the book at large, had furnished them with; a sort of ritual, directing them in the observances of their religion, but leaving out what they thought fit, and particularly the promises and threatenings, Lev. 26. and Deut. 28, &c. for I observe, that those were the portions of the law which Josiah was so much affected with, v. 13. for those were new to him; no summaries, extracts, or collections, out of the Bible, (though they may have their use,) can be effectual to convey and preserve the knowledge of God and his will, like the Bible itself: it was no marvel that the people were so corrupt, when the book of the law was such a scarce thing among them; where that vision is not, the people perish; they that endeavoured to debase them, no doubt, used all the arts they could to get that book out of their hands; the Church of Rome could not keep up the use of images, but by forbidding the use of the scriptures.

3. It was a great instance of God's favour, and a token for good to Josiah and his people, that the book of the law was thus reasonably brought to light, to direct and quicken that blessed reformation which Josiah had begun; it is a sign that God has mercy in store for a people, when he magnifies his law among them, and makes that honourable, and furnishes them with means for the increase of scripture knowledge; the translating of the scriptures into vulgar tongues was the glory, strength, and joy, of the Reformation from Popery. It is observable, that they

were about a good work, repairing the temple, when they found the book of the law; they that do their duty, according to their knowledge, shall have their knowledge increased; to him that has, shall be given; the book of the law was an abundant recompence for all their care and cost about the repair of the temple.

4. Hilkiah, the priest, was exceedingly pleased with the discovery; "O," says he to Shaphan, "rejoice with me, for *I have found the book of the law*, *εὕρηκα, εὕρηκα, I have found, I have found*, that jewel of inestimable value; here, carry it to the king; it is the richest jewel of his crown, read it before him; he walks in *the way of David his father*, and if he be like him, he will love the book of the law, and bid that welcome, that will be his delight and his counsellor.

11. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. 12. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the Son of Michaiiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, 13. Go ye, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us. 14. So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her. 15. And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, 16. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, *even* all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: 17. Because they have forsaken me, and have burnt incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. 18. But to the king of Judah which sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, *As touching* the words which thou hast heard; 19. Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard *thee*, saith the LORD. 20. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

We hear no more of the repairing of the temple; no doubt, that good work went on well, but the book of the law that was found in it occupies us now, and well it may: it is not laid up in

the king's cabinet as a piece of antiquity, a rarity to be admired, but it is read before the king. Those put the truest honour upon their Bibles, that study them, and converse with them, daily, feed on that bread, and walk by that light: men of honour and business must look upon an acquaintance with God's word to be their best business and honour.

Now, here we have,

I. The impressions which the reading of the law made upon Josiah; he rent his clothes, as one ashamed of the sin of his people, and afraid of the wrath of God; he had long thought the case of his kingdom bad, by reason of the idolatries and impieties that had been found among them, but he never thought it so bad as he perceived it to be, by the book of the law now read to him; the rending of his clothes signified the rending of his heart, for the dishonour done to God, and the ruin he saw coming upon his people.

II. The application he made to God hereupon; *Go, inquire of the Lord for me, v. 13.* Inquire, 1. "What we shall do; what course we shall take to turn away God's wrath, and prevent the judgments which our sins have deserved." Convictions of sin and wrath should put us upon this inquiry, *What shall we do to be saved? Wherewithal shall we come before the Lord?* If we will thus inquire, inquire quickly, before it be too late. 2. "What we may expect, and must provide for." He acknowledges, *Our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this book*; if this be the rule of right, certainly our fathers have been much in the wrong. Now that *the commandment came, sin revived*, and appeared sin; in the glass of the law, he saw the sins of his people more numerous and more heinous than he had before seen them, and more exceeding sinful. He infers hence certainly, "*Great is the wrath that is kindled against us*"; if this be the word of God, as, no doubt, it is, and he will be true to his word, as, no doubt, he will be, we are all undone; I never thought the threatenings of the law so severe, and the curses of the covenant so terrible, as now I find them to be; it is time to look about us, if these be in force against us." Note, Those who are truly apprehensive of the weight of God's wrath, cannot but be very solicitous to obtain his favour, and inquisitive how they may make their peace with him; magistrates should inquire for their people, and study how to prevent the judgments of God that they see hanging over them.

This inquiry Josiah sent, (1.) By some of his great men, who are named, v. 12. and again, v. 14. Thus he put an honour upon the oracle, by employing those of the first rank to attend it. (2.) To Huldah the prophetess, v. 14. The spirit of prophecy, that inestimable treasure, was sometimes put not only into *earthen vessels*, but into the *weaker vessels*, that *the excellency of the power might be of God*. Miriam had helped to lead Israel out of Egypt, Mic. 6. 4. Deborah judged them, and now Huldah instructed them in the mind of God: and her being a wife was no prejudice at all to her being a prophetess, *marriage is honourable in all*. It was a mercy to Jerusalem, that, when Bibles were scarce, they had prophets, as that, afterward, when prophecy ceased, they had more Bibles; for God never leaves himself without witness, because he will leave sinners without excuse. Jeremiah and Zephaniah prophesied at this time, yet the king's messengers made Huldah their oracle, probably because, her husband having a place at court, (for he was keeper of the wardrobe,) they had had more and longer acquaintance with her, and greater assurances of her commission than of any other; they had, it is likely, consulted her upon other occasions, and had found that the word of God in her mouth was truth. She was near, for she dwelt at Jerusalem, in a place called *Mishneh*, the second rank of buildings from the royal palace. The Jews say that she prophesied among the women, the court ladies, being herself one of them, who, it is probable, had their apartments in that place. Happy the court that had a prophetess within the verge of it, and knew how to value her!

III. The answer he received from God to his inquiry; Huldah returned it, not in the language of a courtier, "Pray give my humble service to his majesty, and let him know that this is the message I have for him from the God of Israel," but in the dialect

of a prophetess, speaking from Him before whom all stand upon the same level, *Tell the man that sent you to me, v. 15.* Even kings, though gods to us, are men to God, and shall so be dealt with, for *with him there is no respect of persons*.

1. She lets him know what judgments God had in store for Judah and Jerusalem; (v. 16, 17.) *My wrath shall be kindled against this place*; and what is hell itself but the fire of God's wrath kindled against sinners? Observe the degree and duration of it; it is so kindled that *it shall not be quenched*; the decree is gone forth, it is too late now to think of preventing it, the iniquity of Jerusalem shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering. Hell is unquenchable fire. It has reference, (1.) To their sins; "They have committed them, as it were, with design, and on purpose to provoke me to anger; it is a fire of their own kindling; they would provoke me, and, at length, I am provoked." (2.) To God's threatenings; "The evil I bring is according to the words of the book which the king of Judah has read, the scripture is fulfilled in it; they that would not be bound by the precept, shall be bound by the penalty." God will be found no less terrible to impenitent sinners, than his word makes him to be.

2. She lets him know what mercy God has in store for him. (1.) Notice is taken of his great tenderness and concern for the glory of God, and the welfare of his kingdom; (v. 19.) *Thine heart was tender*. Note, God will distinguish those that distinguish themselves. The generality of the people were hardened, and their hearts unhumiliated, so were the wicked kings, his predecessors; but Josiah's heart was tender, he received the impressions of God's word, trembled at it, and yielded to it; he was exceedingly grieved for the dishonour done to God by the sins of his fathers and of his people; he was afraid of the judgments of God, which he saw coming upon Jerusalem, and earnestly deprecated them: this is tenderness of heart, and thus he *humbled himself before the Lord*, and expressed these pious affections by rending his clothes, and weeping before God, probably in his closet; but he that sees in secret says it was *before him*, and he heard it, and put every tear of tenderness into his bottle. Note, Those that most fear God's wrath are least likely to feel it; it should seem that those words, (Lev. 26. 32.) much affected Josiah, *I will bring the land into desolation*; for when he heard of *the desolation and of the curse*, that is, that God would forsake them, and *separate them to evil*, (for till it came to that they were neither desolate nor accursed,) then he rent his clothes, that went to his heart. (2.) A reprieve is granted till after his death; (v. 20.) *I will gather thee to thy fathers*. The saints then, no doubt, had a comfortable prospect of happiness on the other side death, else, being gathered to their fathers, would not have been so often made the matter of a promise as we find it was. Josiah could not prevail to prevent the judgment itself, but God promised him he should not live to see it, which (especially considering that he died in the midst of his days, before he was forty years old) would have been but a small reward for his eminent piety, if there were not another world in which he should be abundantly recompensed, Heb. 11. 16. When the righteous is *taken away from the evil to come, he enters into peace*, Isa. 57. 1, 2. This is promised to Josiah here, *Thou shalt go to thy grave in peace*; which refers not to the manner of his death, for he was killed in a battle, but to the time of it; it was a little before the captivity in Babylon, that great trouble, in comparison with which the rest were as nothing, so that he might be truly said to die in peace that did not live to share in that; he died in the love and favour of God, which secure such a peace as no circumstances of dying, no not dying in the field of war, could alter the nature of, or break in upon.

CHAP. XXIII.

We have here, I. The happy continuance of the goodness of Josiah's reign, and the progress of the reformation he began; *rending the law, (v. 1, 2.) renewing the covenant, (v. 3.) cleansing the temple, (v. 4.) and rooting out idols and idolatry, with all the relics thereof, in all places, as far as his power reached; (v. 5, 20.) keeping a solemn passover, (v. 21, 23.) and clearing the country*

of witches; (v. 21.) and, in all this, acting with extraordinary vigour, v. 25. II. The unhappy conclusion of it, in his untimely death, as a token of the continuance of God's wrath against Jerusalem, v. 26. 30. III. The more unhappy consequences of his death, in the bad reigns of his two sons, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, that came after him, v. 31. 37.

1 AND the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. 2. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. 3. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all *their* heart and all *their* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

Josiah had received a message from God, that there was no preventing the ruin of Jerusalem, but that he only should deliver his own soul; yet he does not therefore sit down in despair, and resolve to do nothing for his country, because he cannot do all he would; no, he will do his duty, and then leave the event to God; a public reformation is the thing resolved on; if any thing prevent the threatened ruin, it must be that; and here we have the preparations for that reformation.

1. He summoned a general assembly of the states, the elders, the magistrates, or representatives, of Judah and Jerusalem, to meet him *in the house of the Lord*, with the priests and prophets, the ordinary and extraordinary ministers, that, they all joining in it, it might become a national act, and so be the more likely to prevent national judgments; they were all called to attend, (v. 1, 2.) that the business might be done with the more solemnity, that they might all advise and assist in it, and that those who were against it might be discouraged from making any opposition; parliaments are no diminution at all to the honour and power of good princes, but a great support to it.

2. Instead of making a speech to this convention, he ordered the book of the law to be read to them; nay, it should seem he read it himself, (v. 2.) as one much affected with it, and desirous that they should be so too. Josiah thinks it not below him to be a reader, any more than Solomon did to be a preacher, nay, and David himself to be a door-keeper, in the house of God. Beside the convention of the great men, he had a congregation of the *men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, to hear the law read: it is really the interest of princes to promote the knowledge of the scriptures in their dominions. If the people be but as steadfastly resolved to obey by law, as he is to govern by law, the kingdom will be happy; all people are concerned to know the scripture, and all in authority to spread the knowledge of it.

3. Instead of proposing laws for the confirming of them in their duty, he proposed an association, by which they should all jointly engage themselves to God, v. 3. The book of the law was the book of the covenant, that, if they would be to God a people, he would be to them a God; they here engage themselves to do their part, not doubting but that then God would do his. (1.) The covenant was, that they should walk after the Lord, in compliance with his will, in his ordinances and providences, should answer all his calls, and attend all his motions; that they should make conscience of all his commandments, moral, ceremonial, and judicial, and should carefully observe them *with all their heart and all their soul*, with all possible care and caution, sincerity, vigour, courage, and resolution, and so fulfil the conditions of this covenant, in

dependence upon the promises of it. (2.) The covenanters were, the king himself, in the first place, who stood by his pillar, (ch. 11. 14.) and publicly declared his consent to this covenant, to set them an example, and to assure them not only of his protection, but of his presidency, and all the furtherance his power could give them in their obedience; it is no abridgement of the liberty, even of princes themselves, to be in bonds to God: *all the people* likewise stood to the covenant, that is, they signified their consent to it, and promised to abide by it; it is of good use, with all possible solemnity, to oblige ourselves to our duty, and it is especially seasonable after notorious backslidings to sin, and decays in that which is good: he that bears an honest mind does not shrink from positive engagements; fast bind, fast find.

4. And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Beth-el. 5. And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. 6. And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. 7. And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove. 8. And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beer-sheba, and brake down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city. 9. Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren. 10. And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech. 11. And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. 12. And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into

the brook Kidron. 13. And the high places that *were* before Jerusalem, which *were* on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile. 14. And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men. 15. Moreover the altar that *was* at Beth-el, *and* the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, *and* stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. 16. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. 17. Then he said, What title *is* that that I see? And the men of the city told him, *It is* the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Beth-el. 18. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria. 19. And all the houses also of the high places that *were* in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke *the LORD* to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Beth-el. 20. And he slew all the priests of the high places that *were* there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem. 21. And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as *it is* written in the book of this covenant. 22. Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; 23. But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, *wherein* this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem. 24. Moreover the *workers with* familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

We have here an account of such a reformation as we have not met with in all the history of the kings of Judah, such thorough riddance made of all the abominable things, and such foundations laid of a glorious good work; and here I cannot but wonder at

two things; 1. That so many wicked things should be got in, and kept standing so long, as we find here removed. 2. That, notwithstanding the removal of these wicked things, and the hopeful prospects here given of a happy settlement, yet, within a few years, Jerusalem was utterly destroyed, and even this did not save it, for the generality of the people, after all, hated to be reformed. *The founder melteth in vain, and therefore, reprobate sileer shall men call them, Jer. 6. 29, 30.*

Let us here observe,

1. What abundance of wickedness there was, and had been, in Judah and Jerusalem; one would not have believed it possible that in Judah, where God was known, in Israel, where his name was great, in Salem, in Zion, where his dwelling-place was, such abominations should be found as here we have an account of. Josiah had now reigned 18 years, and had himself set the people a good example, and kept up religion according to law; and yet, when he came to make inquisition for idolatry, the depth and extent of the dunghill he had to carry away are almost incredible.

1. Even in the house of the Lord, that sacred temple which Solomon built, and dedicated to the honour, and for the worship, of the God of Israel, there were found vessels, all manner of utensils, for the worship of Baal, *and of the grove, (or Ashtoreth,)* and *of all the host of heaven, v. 4.* Though Josiah had suppressed the worship of idols, yet the provisions made for that worship were all carefully preserved, even in the temple itself, to be used again, whenever the present restraint should be taken off; nay, even in the grove itself, the image of it was yet standing in the temple; (v. 6.) some make it the image of Venus, the same with Ashtoreth.

2. Just at the entering in of the house of the Lord was a stable for horses, kept (would you think it?) for a religious use; they were holy horses, *given to the sun, (v. 11.)* as if he needed them, *who rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race; (Ps. 19. 5.)* or rather, they would thus represent to themselves the swiftness of his motion, which they much admired, making their religion to conform to the poetical fictions of the chariot of the sun, the follies of which, even a little philosophy, without any divinity, would have exposed and made them ashamed of. Some say that those horses were to be led forth in pomp, every morning, to meet the rising sun; others, that the worshippers of the sun rode out upon them to adore the rising sun; it should seem that they drew the chariots of the sun, which the people worshipped; strange that ever men, who had the written word of God among them, should be thus *vain in their imaginations!*

3. Hard by the house of the Lord there were houses of the sodomites, where all manner of lewdness and filthiness, even that which was most unnatural, was practised, and, under pretence of religion, in honour of their impure deities; corporal and spiritual whoredom went together, and the vile affections which they were given up to were the punishment of their vain imaginations; they that dishonoured their God were justly left thus to dishonour themselves, Rom. 1. 24, &c. There were women that *wove hangings for the grove, (v. 7.)* tents which encompassed the image of Venus, where the worshippers committed all manner of lewdness, and this *in the house of the Lord*; they did ill that made our Father's house a house of merchandise, they did worse that made it a den of thieves, but those did worst of all that made it (*Horrendum dictu!—Horrible to relate!*) a brothel, in an impudent defiance of the holiness of God and his temple; well might the apostle call them *abominable idolatries.*

4. There were many idolatrous altars found, (v. 12.) some in the palace, *on the top of the upper chamber of Akaz*; the roofs of their houses being flat, they made them their high-places, and set up altars upon them, (Jer. 19. 13. Zeph. 1. 5.) domestic altars; the kings of Judah did so: and though Josiah never used them, yet to this time they remained there. Manasseh had built altars for his idols in the house of the Lord; when he repented, he removed them, and *cast them out of the city, (2 Chron. 33. 15.)* but, not destroying them, his son Amon, it seems, had brought them again into the courts of the temple, there Josiah found them, and thence *he brake them down, v. 12.*

5. There was *Tophet*, in the valley of the son of Hinnom, very near Jerusalem, where the image of Molech (that god of unnatural cruelty, as others were of unnatural uncleanness) was kept, to which some sacrificed their children, burning them in the fire, others dedicated them making them to pass through the fire, (v. 10.) *labouring in the very fire*, Hab. 2. 13. It is supposed to have been called *Tophet*, from *toph*, a drum, because they beat drums at the burning of the children, that their shrieks might not be heard.

6. There were *high places before Jerusalem*, which Solomon had built, v. 13. The altars and images on those high places, we may suppose, had been taken away by some of the preceding godly kings, or, perhaps, Solomon himself had removed them when he became a penitent, but the buildings, or some parts of them, remained, with other high places, till Josiah's time. They that introduce corruptions into religion know not how far they will reach, nor how long they will last; antiquity is no certain proof of verity: there were also high places all the kingdom over, from Geba to Beersheba, (v. 8.) and *high places of the gates, in the entering in of the gate of the governor*. In those high places (Bishop Patrick thinks) they burnt incense to those tutelary gods, to whom their idolatrous kings had committed the protection of their city; and, probably, the governor of the city had a private altar for his *Penantes—his household gods*.

7. There were idolatrous priests, that officiated at all those idolatrous altars; (v. 5.) Chemarim, black men, or that wore black; see Zeph. 1. 4. They that sacrificed to Osiris, or that wept for Tammuz, Ezek. 8. 14. or that worshipped the infernal deities, put on black garments as mourners. Those idolatrous priests, the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places; they were, it should seem, priests of the house of Aaron who thus profaned their dignity, and there were others also who had no right at all to the priesthood, who burnt incense to Baal.

8. There were conjurers and wizards, and such as *dealt with familiar spirits*, v. 24. When they worshipped the devil as their god, no marvel that they consulted him as their oracle.

II. What a full destruction good Josiah made of all those relics of idolatry; such is his zeal for the Lord of hosts, and his holy indignation against all that is displeasing to him, that nothing shall stand before him; the law was, that the monuments of the Canaanites' idolatry must be all destroyed, Deut. 7. 5. much more of the idolatry of the Israelites, in whom it was much more impious, profane, and perfidious.

1. He orders Hilkiah, and the other priests, to clear the temple, that was their province, v. 4. Away with all the vessels that were made for Baal. They must never be employed in the service of God, no, nor reserved for any common use, they must all be burnt, and the ashes of them carried to Bethel; that place had been the common source of idolatry, for there was set up one of the calves, and that lying next to Judah, thence the infection had spread into that kingdom, and therefore now he makes it the lay-stall of idolatry, the dunghill to which he carries the filth and off-scouring of all things, that, if possible, it might be made loathsome to those that had been fond of it.

2. The idolatrous priests were all put down: those of them that were not of the house of Aaron, or had sacrificed to Baal, or other false gods, he put to death, according to the law, v. 20. he *slew them upon their own altars*, the most acceptable sacrifice that ever had been offered upon them, a sacrifice to the justice of God; those that were descendants from Aaron, and yet had burnt incense in the high places, but to the true God only, he forbade ever to approach the altar of the Lord, they had forfeited that honour, v. 9. he *brought them out of the cities of Judah*, v. 8. that they might not do mischief in the country by secretly keeping up their old idolatrous usages; but he allowed them to eat of the unleavened bread, (the bread of the meat-offering, Lev. 2. 4, 5.) among their brethren, with whom they were to reside, that, being under their eye, they might be kept from doing hurt, and taught to do well; that bread, that unleavened bread, (heavy and unpleasant as it was,) was better than they deserved, and that would

serve to keep them alive; but whether they were permitted to eat of all the sacrifices, as blemished priests were, Lev. 21. 22, which is called, in general, *the bread of their God*, may be justly questioned.

3. All the images were broken to pieces, and burnt; the image of the grove, (v. 6.) some goddess or other, was reduced to ashes, and the ashes cast upon the graves of the common people, (v. 6.) the common burying-place of the city; by the law, a ceremonial uncleanness was contracted by the touch of a grave, so that, in casting them here, he declared them most impure, and none could touch them without making themselves unclean by it: *he cast it into the graves*, so the Chaldee, intimating that he would have all idolatry buried out of his sight, as a loathsome thing, and forgotten, as dead men are out of mind, v. 14. he *filled the places of the groves with the bones of men*; as he carried the ashes of the images to the graves, to mingle them with dead men's bones, so he carried dead men's bones to the places where the images had been, and put them in the room of them, that, both ways, idolatry might be rendered loathsome, and the people kept both from the dust of the images, and from the ruins of the places where they had been worshipped; dead men, and dead gods, were much alike, and fittest to go together.

4. All the wicked houses were suppressed, those nests of impiety that harboured idolaters, the houses of the sodomites, v. 7. (down with them, down with them, rase them to the foundations;) the high places were, in like manner, broken down, and levelled with the ground, v. 8. even that which belonged to the governor of the city, for no man's greatness or power may protect him in idolatry or profaneness; let governors be obliged, in the first place, to reform, and then the governed will be the sooner influenced; he defiled the high places, (v. 8. and again, v. 13.) did all he could to render them abominable, and put the people out of conceit with them, as Jehu did when he made the house of Baal a draught-house, 2 Kings, 10. 27. Tophet, which, contrary to other places of idolatry, was in a valley, whereas they were on hills or high places, was likewise defiled, (v. 10.) was made the burying-place of the city; concerning this we have a whole sermon, Jer. 19. 1, 2. &c. where it is said, *They shall bury in Tophet*, and the whole city is threatened to be made like Tophet.

5. The horses that had been given to the sun were taken away, and put to common use, and so were delivered from the vanity to which they were made subject; and the chariots of the sun (What pity was it that those horses and chariots should be kept as the chariots and horsemen of Israel!) he burned with fire; and if the sun be a flame, they never resembled him so much as they did when they were chariots of fire.

6. The workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, were put away, v. 24. Those of them that were convicted of witchcraft, it is likely, he put to death, and so deterred others from those diabolical practices; in all this, he had a sincere regard to the words of the law which were written in the book lately found, v. 24. he made that his rule, and kept that in his eye throughout this reformation.

III. How his zeal extended itself to the cities of Israel that were within his reach; the ten tribes were carried captive, the Assyrian colonies did not fully people the country, so that, it is likely, many cities had put themselves under the protection of the kings of Judah, 2 Chron. 30. 1.—34. 6. These he here visits, to carry on his reformation: as far as our influence goes, our endeavours should go to do good, and bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end.

1. He defiled and demolished Jeroboam's altar at Bethel, with the high place and the grove that belonged to it, v. 15, 16. The golden calf, it should seem, was gone, (*Thy calf, O Samaria, has cast thee off*,) but the altar was there, which those that were wedded to their old idolatries made use of still; this was, (1.) Defiled, v. 16. Josiah, in his pious zeal, was ransacking the old seats of idolatry, and spied the sepulchres in the mount, in which, probably, the idolatrous priests were buried, not far from the altar at which they had officiated, and which they were so fond of, that

They were desirous to lay their bones by it; these he opened, took out the bones, and *burnt them upon the altar*, to shew that thus he would have done by the priests themselves, if they had been alive, as he did by those whom he found alive; (v. 20.) thus he polluted the altar, desecrated it, and made it odious. It is threatened against idolaters, (Jer. 8. 1, 2.) that *their bones shall be spread before the sun*; that which is there threatened, and this which is here executed, (bespeaking their *iniquity to be upon their bones*, Ezek. 32. 27.) are an intimation of a punishment after death, reserved for those that live and die impenitent in that or any other sin: the burning of the bones, if that were all, is a small matter; but if it signify the torment of the soul in a worse flame, (Luke, 16. 24.) it is very dreadful. This, as it was Josiah's act, seems to be the result of a very sudden resolve; he had not done it, but that he happened to turn himself, and spy the sepulchres, and yet it was foretold above 350 years before, when this altar was first built by Jeroboam, 1 Kings, 13. 2. God always foresees, and has sometimes foretold as certain, that which yet to us seems most contingent; *the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord*; king Josiah's was so, and he turned it (or ever he himself was aware, Cant. 6. 12.) to do this; no word of God shall fall to the ground. (2.) It was demolished; he brake down the altar and all its appertinances, (v. 15.) burnt what was combustible, and, since an idol is nothing in the world, he went as far toward the annihilating of it as he could, for he *stamped it small to powder*, and made it *as dust before the wind*.

2. He destroyed all the houses of the high places, all those synagogues of Satan that were in the cities of Samaria, v. 19. These the kings of Israel built, and God raised up this king of Judah to pull them down, for the honour of the ancient house of David, from which the ten tribes had revolted; the priests he justly made sacrifices *upon their own altars*, v. 20.

3. He carefully preserved the sepulchre of that man of God who came from Judah to foretell this, which now a king who came from Judah executed; this was that good prophet who *proclaimed these things against the altar of Bethel*, and yet was himself slain by a lion for disobeying the word of the Lord; but, to shew that God's displeasure against him went no further than his death, but ended there, God so ordered it, that, when all the graves about his were disturbed, his was safe, (v. 17, 18.) and no man moved his bones; he was entered into peace, and therefore shall rest in his bed, Isa. 57. 2. The old lying prophet, who desired to be buried as near him as might be, it should seem, knew what he did, for his dust also being mingled with that of the good prophet, was preserved for his sake; see Numb. 23. 10.

Lastly, We are here told what a solemn passover Josiah and his people kept, after all this. When they had cleared the country of the old leaven, then they applied themselves to the keeping of the feast; when Jehu had destroyed the worship of Baal, yet he took no heed to walk in the commandments and ordinances of God, but Josiah considered that we must learn to do well, and not *only* cease to do evil, and that the way to keep out all abominable customs, is to keep up all instituted ordinances; (see Lev. 18. 30.) and therefore he commanded all the people to keep the passover, which was not only a memorial of their deliverance out of Egypt, but a token of their dedication to him that brought them out, and their communion with him: this he found written in the *book of the law*, here called *the book of the covenant*; for, though the divine authority may deal with us in a way of absolute command, divine grace condescends to federal transactions, and therefore he observed it. We have not such a particular account of this passover as of that in Hezekiah's time, (2 Chron. 30.) but, in general, that *there was not holden such a passover in any of the foregoing reigns*, no, not from the days of the judges; (v. 22.) which, by the way, intimates, that though the account which the book of Judges gives of the state of Israel under that dynasty looks but melancholy, yet there were then some golden days. This passover, it seems, was extraordinary for the number and devotion of the communicants, their sacrifices and offerings, and their exact observance of the laws of the feast; and it was not now, as in Hezekiah's passover, when

many communicated that were not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary, and the Levites were permitted to do the priests' work. We have reason to think, that, during all the remainder of Josiah's reign, religion flourished, and the feasts of the Lord were very carefully observed; but, in this passover, the satisfaction they took in the covenant lately renewed, the reformation in pursuance of it, and the revival of an ordinance which they had lately found the divine original of in the book of the law, and which had long been neglected or carelessly kept, put them into transports of holy joy; and God was pleased to recompense their zeal, in destroying idolatry, with uncommon tokens of his presence and favour; all this concurred to make it a distinguished passover.

25. And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there *any* like him. 26. Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. 27. And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there. 28. Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 29. In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates; and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. 30. And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead.

Upon the reading of these verses, we must say, Lord, though *thy righteousness be as the great mountains*, evident, conspicuous, and past dispute, yet *thy judgments are a great deep*, unfathomable, and past finding out, Ps. 36. 6. What shall we say to this?

1. It is here owned that Josiah was one of the best kings that ever sat upon the throne of David, v. 25. As Hezekiah was a nonsuch for faith and dependence upon God in straits, (ch. 18. 5.) so Josiah was a nonsuch for sincerity and zeal in carrying on a work of reformation. For this, there was none like him, 1. That he *turned to the Lord*, from whom his fathers had revolted. It is true religion to turn to God as one we have chosen and love. He did what he could to turn his kingdom also to the Lord. 2. That he did this *with his heart and soul*; his affections and aims were right in what he did. Those make nothing of their religion, that do not make heart-work of it. 3. That he did it with *all his heart*, and *all his soul*, and *all his might*; with vigour, and courage, and resolution: he could not otherwise have broken through the difficulties he had to grapple with. What great things may we bring to pass in the service of God, if we be but lively and hearty in it! 4. That he did this, *according to all the law of Moses*; in an exact observance of that law, and with an actual regard to it. His zeal did not transport him into any irregularities, but, in all he did, he walked by rule.

II. Notwithstanding this, he was cut off by a violent death, in the midst of his days, and his kingdom was ruined within a few years after. Consequent upon such a reformation as this, one would have expected nothing but the prosperity and glory both of king and kingdom; but, quite contrary, we find both under a cloud.

1. Even the reformed kingdom continues marked for ruin. For all this, *v. 26. The Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath.* That is certainly true, which God spake by the prophet, Jer. 18. 7, 8. That if a nation, doomed to destruction, *turn from the evil of sin, God will repent of the evil of punishment;* and therefore we must conclude that Josiah's people, though they submitted to Josiah's power, did not heartily imbibe Josiah's principles. They were turned by force, they did not voluntarily *turn from their evil way,* but still continued their affection for their idols; and therefore he that knows men's hearts, would not recall the sentence, which was, That Judah should be removed, as Israel had been, and Jerusalem itself, *v. 27.* Yet even this destruction was intended to be their effectual reformation; so that we must say, not only that the criminals had filled their measure, and were ripe for ruin, but also that the disease was come to a crisis, and was ready for a cure; and this shall be all the fruit, even the taking away of sin.

2. As an evidence of this, even the reforming king is cut off in the midst of his usefulness, in mercy to him, that he might not see the evil which was coming upon his kingdom; but in wrath to his people, for his death was an inlet to their desolations. The king of Egypt waged war, it seems, with the king of Assyria, (so the king of Babylon is now called,) Josiah's kingdom lay between them; he therefore thought himself concerned to oppose the king of Egypt, and check the growing, threatening greatness of his power; for though, at this time, he protested that he had no design against Josiah, yet if he should prevail to unite the river of Egypt and the river Euphrates, the land of Judah would soon be overflowed between them; therefore *Josiah went against him,* and was killed in the first engagement, *v. 29, 30.* Here, (1.) We cannot justify Josiah's conduct; he had no clear call to engage in this war, nor do we find that he asked counsel of God by Urim, or prophets, concerning it. What had he to do, to appear and act as a friend and ally to the king of Assyria? *Should he help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?* If the kings of Egypt and Assyria quarrelled, he had reason to think God would bring good out of it to him and his people, and make them instrumental to weaken one another. Some understand the promise made to him, (That he should *come to his grave in peace,*) in a sense in which it was not performed, because, by his miscarriage in this matter, he forfeited the benefit of it. God has promised to keep us *in all our ways;* but if we go out of our way, we throw ourselves out of his protection. I understand the promise so, as that I believe it was fulfilled, for he *died in peace* with God and his own conscience, and saw not, nor had any immediate prospect of, the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans; yet I understand the providence to be a rebuke to him for his rashness. (2.) We must adore God's righteousness, in taking away such a jewel from an unthankful people that knew not how to value it. They greatly lamented his death, 2 Chron. 35. 25. urged to it by Jeremiah, who told them the meaning of it, and what a threatening omen it was; but they had not made a due improvement of the mercies they enjoyed by his life, of which God taught them the worth by the want.

31. Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 32. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done. 33. And Pharaoh-nechob put him in bands at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, that he might

not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold. 34. And Pharaoh-nechob made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there. 35. And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh; he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it unto Pharaoh-nechob. 36. Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. 37. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done.

Jerusalem saw not a good day after Josiah was laid in his grave, but one trouble came after another, till, within 22 years, it was quite destroyed. Of the reign of two of his sons here is a short account; the former we find here a prisoner, and the latter a tributary, to the king of Egypt, and both so in the very beginning of their reign. The king of Egypt having slain Josiah, though he had not any design upon Judah, yet, being provoked by the opposition which Josiah gave him, now it should seem, he bent all his force against his family and kingdom. If Josiah's sons had trodden in his steps, they would have fared the better for his piety; but deviating from them, they fared the worse for his rashness.

1. Jehoahaz, a younger son, was first made king by *the people of the land;* probably, because he was observed to be of a more active, warlike genius than his elder brother, and likely to make head against the king of Egypt, and to avenge his father's death, which perhaps the people were more solicitous about, in point of honour, than the keeping up and carrying on his father's reformation; and the issue was accordingly.

1. He did ill, *v. 32.* Though he had a good education, and a good example, given him, and many a good prayer, we may suppose, put up for him, yet he *did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord,* and it is to be feared, began to do so in his father's lifetime, for his reign was so short, that he could not, in that, show much of his character. He did *according to all that his wicked fathers had done.* Though he had not time to do much, yet he had chosen his patterns, and showed whom he intended to follow, and whose steps he intended to tread in; and, having done this, he is here reckoned to have done according to all the evil which they did, whom he proposed to imitate. The choice of persons whom the young take for their example, is of serious consequence; an error in this choice is fatal. Phil. 3. 17, 18.

2. Doing ill, no wonder that he fared ill. He was but three months a prince, and was then made a prisoner, and lived and died so. The king of Egypt seized him, and put him in bands, *v. 33.* fearing lest he should give him disturbance, and carried him to Egypt, where he died soon after, *v. 34.* This Jehoahaz is that young lion whom Ezekiel speaks of in his *lamentation for the princes of Israel,* that learned to *catch the prey and devour men,* (that was the evil which he did in the sight of the Lord,) but *the nations heard of him, he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with chains into the land of Egypt,* Ezek. 19. 1—4. See Jer. 22. 10—12.

11. Eliakim, another son of Josiah, was made king by the king of Egypt; it is not said *in the room of Jehoahaz,* (his reign was so short, that it was scarcely worth taking notice of,) but *in the room of Josiah.* The crown of Judah had, hitherto, always descended from a father to a son, and never, till now, from one brother to

another; once, the succession had so happened in the house of Ahab, but never, till now, in the house of David. The king of Egypt, having used his power in making him king, further shewed it in changing his name, he called him *Jehoiakim*, a name that has reference to Jehovah, for he had no design to make him renounce, or forget, the religion of his country; all people will walk in the name of their God, and let him do so. The king of Babylon did not do so by those whose names he changed, Dan. 1. 7.

Of this *Jehoiakim* we are here told, 1. That the king of Egypt made him poor, exacted from him a vast tribute of 100 talents of silver, and a talent of gold, (v. 33.) which, with much difficulty, he squeezed out of his subjects, and gave to Pharaoh, v. 35. Formerly, the Israelites had spoiled the Egyptians, now, the Egyptians spoil Israel: see what woeful changes sin makes. 2. That which made him poor, yet did not make him good; notwithstanding the rebukes of Providence he was under, by which he should have been convinced, humbled, and reformed, he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, (v. 37.) and so prepared against himself greater judgments; for such God will send, if lesser do not do the work for which they are sent.

CHAP. XXIV.

Things are here ripening for, and hastening toward, the utter destruction of Jerusalem. We left Jehoiakim on the throne, placed there by the king of Egypt: now here we have, I. The troubles of his reign, how he was brought into subjection by the king of Babylon, and severely chastised for attempting to shake off the yoke, (v. 2. 6.) and how Egypt also was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, v. 7. II. The desolations of his son's reign, which continued but three months: and then he, and all his great men, being forced to surrender at discretion, were carried captives to Babylon, v. 8. 16. III. The preparatives of the next reign, (which was the last of all,) for the utter ruin of Jerusalem, which the next chapter will give us an account of, v. 17. 20.

1. **I**N his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. 2. And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets. 3. Surely at the commandment of the LORD came *this* upon Judah, to remove *them* out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; 4. And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon. 5. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 6. So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. 7. And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt.

We have here the first mention of a name which makes a great figure both in the histories and in the prophecies of the Old Testament; it is that of *Nebuchadnezzar*, king of Babylon, (v. 1.) that head of gold. A potent prince, and one that was the terror of the mighty in the land of the living; and yet his name had not been known in sacred writ, if it had not been employed in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity of the Jews.

1. He made Jehoiakim his tributary, and kept him in subjection three years, v. 1. Nebuchadnezzar began his reign in the fourth year of Jehoiakim; in his eighth year he made him his prisoner, but restored him, upon his promise of faithfulness to him; that promise he kept about three years, but then rebelled, probably, in hopes of assistance from the king of Egypt. If Jehoiakim had served his God as he should have done, he had not been servant to the king of Babylon; but God would thus make him know the difference between his service and the service of the kings of the countries, 2 Chron. 12. 8. If he had been content with his servitude, and true to his word, his condition had been no worse; but, rebelling against the king of Babylon, he plunged himself into more trouble.

II. When he rebelled, he sent his forces against him to destroy his country, bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, who were all now in the service and pay of the king of Babylon, (v. 2.) and withal retained, and now shewed, their ancient enmity to the Israel of God. Yet no mention is here made of their commission from the king of Babylon, but only of that from the King of kings. *The Lord sent against him all these bands.* And again, (v. 3.) *Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah,* else the commandment of Nebuchadnezzar could not have brought it. Many are serving God's purposes who are not aware of it.

Two things God intended in suffering Judah to be thus harassed. 1. The punishment of the sins of Manasseh, which God now visited upon the *third and fourth generation*. So long he waited before he visited them, to see if the nation would repent; but they continued impenitent, notwithstanding Josiah's endeavours to reform them, and ready to relapse, upon the first turn, into their former idolatries; now that the old bond was put in suit, they were called up, upon the former judgment; that was revived, which God had laid up in store, and sealed among his treasures, (Deut. 32. 34. Job, 14. 17.) and, in remembrance of that, he removed Judah out of his sight, and let the world know that *time will not wear out the guilt of sin*, and that reprieves are not pardons. All that Manasseh did was called to mind, but especially the *innocent blood that he shed*, much of which, we may suppose, was the blood of God's witnesses and worshippers, *which the Lord would not pardon*. Is there then any unpardonable sin but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? This is meant of the remitting of the temporal punishment: though Manasseh repented, and we have reason to think that even the persecutions and murders he was guilty of were pardoned, so that he was delivered from the wrath to come; yet, as they were national sins, they lay still charged upon the land, crying for national judgments. Perhaps, some were now living who were aiding and abetting; and the present king was guilty of innocent blood, as appears, Jer. 22. 17. See what a provoking sin murder is, how loud it cries, and how long! See what need nations have to lament the sins of their fathers, lest they smart for them. 2. God intended hereby the accomplishment of the prophecies; it was according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets. Rather shall Judah be removed out of his sight, nay, rather shall heaven and earth pass away, than any word of God fall to the ground. Threatenings will be fulfilled as certainly as promises, if the sinner's repentance prevent not.

III. The king of Egypt was likewise subdued by the king of Babylon, and a great part of his country taken from him, v. 7. It was but lately that he had oppressed Israel, (ch. 23. 33.) now he is himself brought down, and disabled to attempt any thing for the recovery of his losses, or the assistance of his allies; he dares not come any more out of his land. Afterward, he attempted to give Zedekiah some relief, but was obliged to retire, Jer. 37. 7.

IV. Jehoiakim, seeing his country laid waste, and himself ready to fall into the enemy's hand, as it should seem, died of a broken heart, in the midst of his days, v. 6. So *Jehoiakim slept with his fathers*; but it is not said that he was buried with them; for, no doubt, the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled, that he should not be lamented, as his father was, but buried with the burial of an ass, (Jer. 22. 18, 19.) and his dead body cast out, Jer. 36. 30.

8. Jehoiachin *was* eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. And his mother's name *was* Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. 9. And he *did that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. 10. At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. 11. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it. 12. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign. 13. And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. 14. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, *even* ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. 15. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, *those* carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. 16. And all the men of might, *even* seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all *that were* strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon. 17. And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah. 18. Zedekiah *was* twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 19. And he *did that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 20. For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

This should have been the history of king Jehoiachin's *reign*, but, alas! it is only the history of king Jehoiachin's *captivity*, as it is called, Ezek. 1. 2. He came to the crown, not to have the honour of wearing it, but the shame of losing it; *Ideo tantum renerat, ut exiret—He came in, only to go out.*

I. His reign was short and inconsiderable; he reigned but three months, and then was removed and carried captive to Babylon, as his father, it is likely would have been, if he had but lived so much longer. What an unhappy young prince was this, that was thrust into a falling house, a sinking throne! What an unnatural father had he, who begat him to suffer for him! and by his own sin and folly had left himself nothing to bequeath to his son but his own miseries! Yet this young prince reigned long enough to shew that

he justly smarted for his fathers' sins, for he trod in their steps, v. 9. *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as they had done; he did nothing to cut off the entail of the curse, to discharge the encumbrances of his crown, and therefore (Transit cum onere—The encumbrance descends with the crown) with his own iniquity that of his fathers shall come into the account.*

II. The calamities that came upon him, and his family, and people, in the very beginning of his reign, were very grievous.

1. Jerusalem was besieged by the king of Babylon, v. 10, 11. He had sent his forces to ravage the country, (v. 2.) now he came himself, and laid siege to the city. Now the word of God was fulfilled, (Deut. 28. 49, &c.) *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, of fierce countenance, that shall first eat the fruit of thy land, and then besiege thee in all thy gates.*

2. Jehoiachin immediately surrendered at discretion. As soon as he heard the king of Babylon was come in person against the city, his name being, at this time, become very formidable, he beat a parley, and went out to him, v. 12. Had he made his peace with God, and taken the method that Hezekiah did in the like case, he needed not to have feared the king of Babylon, but might have held out with courage, honour, and success; (one should have chased a thousand;) but, wanting the faith and piety of an Israelite, he had not the resolution of a man, of a soldier, of a prince. He and his royal family, his mother and wives, his servants and princes, delivered themselves up prisoners of war; this was the consequence of their being servants of sin.

3. Nebuchadnezzar rifled the treasures both of the church and of the state, and carried away the silver and gold of both, v. 13. Now the word of God, by Isaiah, was fulfilled, (ch. 20. 17.) *All that is in thine house shall be carried to Babylon.* Even the vessels of the temple which Solomon had made, and laid up in store, to be used as the old ones were worn out, he cut off from the temple, and began to cut them in pieces, but, upon second thoughts, reserved them for his own use, for we find Belshazzar drinking wine in them, Dan. 5. 2, 3.

4. He carried away a great part of Jerusalem into captivity, to weaken it, that he might effectually secure to himself the dominion of it, and prevent its revolt, and to enrich himself with the wealth or service of those he took away; there had been some carried away, eight years before this, in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, and the third of Jehoiakim; among them were Daniel and his fellows, See Dan. 1. 1, 2. They had approved themselves so well, that this politic prince coveted more of them. Now he carried off, (1.) The young king himself, and his family; (v. 15.) and we find, (ch. 25. 27. 29.) that, for 37 years, he continued a close prisoner. (2.) All the great men, the princes and officers, whose riches were *kept for the owners thereof to their hurt*, (Ezek. 5. 13.) tempting the enemies to make a prey of them first. (3.) All the military men, the *mighty men of valour*, (v. 14.) *the mighty of the land*, (v. 15.) *the men of might, even all that were strong and apt for war*, v. 16. These could not defend themselves, and the conqueror would not leave them to defend their country, but took them away, to be employed in his service. (4.) All the craftsmen and smiths who made weapons of war; in taking them, he did, in effect, disarm the city, according to the Philistines' policy, 1 Sam. 13. 19. In this captivity, Ezekiel the prophet was carried away, (Ezek. 1. 1, 2.) and Mordecai, Esth. 2. 6. This Jehoiachin was also called *Jecooniah*, 1 Chron. 3. 16. and, in contempt, *Coniah*, Jer. 22. 24. where his captivity is foretold.

III. The successor whom the king of Babylon appointed in the room of Jehoiachin. God had written him childless, (Jer. 22. 30.) and therefore his uncle was intrusted with the government. The king of Babylon made Mattaniah king, the son of Josiah, and to remind him, and let all the world know, that he was his creature, he changed his name, and called him *Zedekiah*, v. 17. God had sometimes charged it upon his people, *They have set up kings, but not by me*; (Hos. 13. 4.) and now, to punish them for that, the king of Babylon shall have the setting up of their kings. Those are justly deprived of their liberty, that use it, and insist upon it, against God's authority. This Zedekiah was the last of the kings

of Judah: the name which the king of Babylon gave him signifies, *The justice of the Lord*, which was a presage of the glorifying of God's justice in his ruin.

1. See how impious this Zedekiah was. Though the judgments of God upon his three immediate predecessors might have been a warning to him not to tread in their steps, yet *he did that which was evil*, like all the rest, v. 19.

2. See how impolitic he was. As his predecessor lost his courage, so he his conduct, with his religion, for he *rebelled against the king of Babylon*, (v. 20.) whose tributary he was, and so provoked him whom he was utterly unable to contend with, and who, if he had continued true to him, would have protected him; which was the most foolish thing he could do, and hastened the ruin of his kingdom. This came to pass *through the anger of the Lord, that he might cast them out from his presence*. Note, When those that are intrusted with the counsels of a nation act unwisely and against their true interest, we ought to take notice of the displeasure of God in it. It is for the sins of a people that God *removes the speech of the trusty, and takes away the understanding of the aged, and hides from their eyes the things that belong to the public peace*. Whom God will destroy, he infatuates.

CHAP. XXV.

Ever since David's time, Jerusalem had been a celebrated place; beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth; while the book of Psalms lasts, that name will sound great. In the New Testament, we read much of it, when it was, as here, ripening again for its ruin. In the close of the Bible, we read of a new Jerusalem; every thing therefore that concerns Jerusalem, is worthy our regard. In this chapter, we have, I. The utter destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans; the city besieged and taken, (v. 1. 4.) the houses burnt, (v. 8, 9.) the wall broken down, (v. 10.) and the inhabitants carried away into captivity, v. 11, 12. The glory of Jerusalem was, 1. That it was the royal city, there were set the thrones of the house of David; but that glory is here departed, for the prince is made a most miserable prisoner, the seed royal destroyed, (v. 5. 7.) and the principal officers put to death, v. 18. 21. 2. That it was the holy city, there was the testimony of Israel; but that glory is departed, for Solomon's temple is burnt to the ground, (v. 9.) and the sacred vessels that remained are carried away to Babylon, v. 13. 17. Thus is Jerusalem become as a widow, Lam. 1. 1. Ichabod, Where is the glory? II. The distraction and dispersion of the remnant that was left in Judah under Gedaliah, v. 22. 26. III. The countenance which, after 37 years' imprisonment, was given to Jehoiachin the captive king of Judah, v. 27. 30.

AND it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about. 2. And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. 3. And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. 4. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden; (now the Chaldees were against the city round about;) and the king went the way toward the plain. 5. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. 6. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. 7. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

We left king Zedekiah in rebellion against the king of Babylon, (ch. 24. 20.) contriving and endeavouring to shake off his yoke, when he was no way able to do it, nor took the right method, by making God his friend first. Now here we have an account of the fatal consequences of that attempt.

I. The king of Babylon's army laid siege to Jerusalem, v. 1. What should hinder them, when the country was already in their possession? ch. 24. 2. They *built forts against the city round about*, whence, by such arts of war as they then had, they battered it; sent into it instruments of death, and kept out of it the necessary supports of life. Formerly, Jerusalem had been compassed with the favour of God as with a shield, but now their defence was departed from them, and their enemies surrounded them on every side. Those that by sin have provoked God to leave them, will find that *innumerable evils will compass them about*. Two years this siege lasted: at first, the army retired, for fear of the king of Egypt; (Jer. 37. 11.) but, finding him not so powerful as they thought, they soon returned, with a resolution not to quit the city till they had made themselves masters of it.

II. During this siege, the famine prevailed, (v. 3.) so that, for a long time, they *ate their bread by weight, and with care*, Ezek. 4. 16. Thus they were punished for their gluttony and excess, their *fulness of bread, and feeding themselves without fear*; at length, *there was no bread for the people of the land*, that is, the common people, the soldiers, whereby they were weakened, and rendered unfit for service; now they ate their own children for want of food; see this foretold by one prophet, (Ezek. 5. 10.) and bewailed by another, Lam. 4. 3, &c. Jeremiah earnestly persuaded the king to surrender, (Jer. 38. 17.) but his heart was hardened, to his destruction.

III. At length, the city was taken by storm, it was broken up, (v. 4.) the besiegers made a breach in the wall, at which they forced their way into it; the besieged, unable any longer to defend it, endeavoured to quit it, and make the best of their way; many, no doubt, were put to the sword, the victorious army being much exasperated by their obstinacy.

IV. The king, his family, and all his great men, made their escape in the night, by some secret passages which the besiegers either had not discovered, or did not keep their eye upon, v. 4. But those as much deceive themselves, who think to escape God's judgments, as those who think to brave them; the feet of him that flees from them will as surely fail as the hands of him that fights against them; when God judges, he will overcome. Intelligence was given to the Chaldeans of the king's flight, and which way he was gone, so that they soon overtook him, v. 5. His guards were scattered from him, every man shifting for his own safety. Had he put himself under God's protection, that would not have failed him now: he presently fell into the enemies' hands, and here we are told what they did with him.

1. He was brought to the king of Babylon, and tried by a council of war, for rebelling against him who set him up, and to whom he had sworn fidelity; God and man had a quarrel with him for this; see Ezek. 17. 16, &c. The king of Babylon now lay at Riblah, (which lay between Judea and Babylon,) that he might be ready to give orders both to his court at home and his army abroad.

2. His sons were slain before his eyes, though children, that this doleful spectacle, the last his eyes were to behold, might leave an impression of grief and horror upon his spirit as long as he lived; in slaying his sons, they shewed their indignation at his falsehood, and, in effect, declared that neither he, nor any of his, were fit to be trusted, and therefore that they were not fit to live.

3. His eyes were put out, by which he was deprived of that common comfort of human life, which is given even to them that are in misery, and to the bitter in soul, the light of the sun; by which he was also disabled for any service. He dreaded being mocked, and therefore would not be persuaded to yield; (Jer. 38. 19.) but that which he feared came upon him with a witness, and, no doubt, added much to his misery; for as they that are deaf, suspect that every body talks of them, so they that are

blind, suspect that every body laughs at them; by this, two prophecies, that seemed to contradict one another, were both fulfilled. Jeremiah prophesied that Zedekiah should be brought to Babylon, Jer. 32. 5.—34. 3. Ezekiel prophesied that he should not see Babylon, Ezek. 12. 13. He was brought thither, but, his eyes being put out, he did not see it; thus he ended his days, before he ended his life.

4. He was *bound in fetters of brass*, and so *carried to Babylon*; he that was blind needed not be bound, (his blindness fettered him,) but, for his greater disgrace, they led him bound; only, whereas common malefactors are laid in iron, (Ps. 105. 18.—107. 10.) he, being a prince, was bound with fetters of brass; but that the metal was somewhat nobler and lighter, was little comfort, while still he was in fetters: let it not seem strange, if those that have been held in the cords of iniquity come to be thus *held in the cords of affliction*, Job, 36. 8.

8. And in the fifth month, on the seventh *day* of the month, which *is* the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: 9. And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great *man's* house burnt he with fire. 10. And all the army of the Chaldees, that *were* with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about. 11. Now the rest of the people that *were* left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carry away. 12. But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land *to be* vine-dressers and husbandmen. 13. And the pillars of brass that *were* in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brazen sea that *was* in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon. 14. And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. 15. And the fire-pans, and the bowls, *and* such things as *were* of gold, *in* gold, and of silver, *in* silver, the captain of the guard took away. 16. The two pillars, one sea, and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD; the brass of all these vessels was without weight. 17. The height of the one pillar *was* eighteen cubits, and the chapter upon it *was* brass: and the height of the chapter three cubits; and the wreathen-work, and pomegranates upon the chapter round about, all of brass: and like unto these had the second pillar with wreathen-work. 18. And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door: 19. And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence, which *were* found in the city, and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered the people of

the land, and threescore men of the people of the land that *were* found in the city. 20. And Nebuzar-adan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah: 21. And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away out of their land.

Though we have reason to think that the army of the Chaldeans were much enraged against the city for holding out with so much stubbornness, yet they did not therefore put all to fire and sword as soon as they had taken the city, (which is too commonly done in such cases,) but, about a month after, (compare v. 8. with v. 3.) Nebuzar-adan was sent with orders to complete the destruction of Jerusalem; this space God gave them to repent, after all the foregoing days of his patience, but in vain, their hearts (for aught that appears) were still hardened, and therefore execution is awarded to the utmost.

1. The city and temple are burnt, v. 9. It does not appear that the king of Babylon designed to send any colonies to people Jerusalem, and therefore he ordered it to be laid in ashes, as a nest of rebels. At the burning of the king's house, and the houses of the great men, one cannot so much wonder; (the inhabitants had, by their sins, made them combustible;) but that the house of the Lord should perish in these flames, that that holy and beautiful house should be burnt with fire, (Isa. 64. 11.) is very strange, that house which David prepared for, and which Solomon built, at such a vast expence; that house which had the eye and heart of God perpetually upon it, (1 Kings, 9. 3.) might not that have been snatched as a brand out of this burning? No, it must not be fire-proof against God's judgments; this stately structure must be turned into ashes, and, it is probable, the ark in it, for the enemies, having heard how dear the Philistines paid for the abusing of it, durst not seize that, nor did any of its friends take care to preserve it, for then we should have heard of it again in the second temple; one of the apocryphal writers does indeed tell us that the prophet Jeremiah got it out of the temple, and conveyed it to a cave in mount Nebo on the other side Jordan, and hid it there; (2 Macc. 2. 4, 5.) but that could not be, for Jeremiah was a close prisoner at that time. By the burning of the temple, God would shew how little he cares for the external pomp of his worship, when the life and power of religion are neglected; the people trusted to the temple, as if that would protect them in their sins; (Jer. 7. 4.) but God, by this, lets them know, that, when they had profaned it, they would find it but a refuge of lies. This temple had stood about 420, some say, 430 years; the people having forfeited the promises made concerning it, those promises must be understood of the gospel-temple, which is God's rest for ever. It is observable that the second temple was burnt by the Romans, the same month, and the same day of the month, that the first temple was burnt by the Chaldeans, which, Josephus says, was the 10th of August.

2. The walls of Jerusalem are demolished, (v. 10.) as if the victorious army would be revenged on them that had kept them out so long, or, at least, prevent the like opposition another time. Sin unwalls a people, and takes away their defence. These walls were never repaired till Nehemiah did it.

3. The residue of the people are carried away captive to Babylon, v. 11. Most of the inhabitants had perished by sword or famine, or had made their escape when the king did, (for it is said, v. 5. *His army was scattered from him*;) so that there were very few left, who, with the deserters, making in all but 832 persons, (as appears, Jer. 52. 29.) were carried away into captivity; only the poor of the land were left behind, (v. 12.) to till the ground, and dress the vineyards, for the Chaldeans. Sometimes poverty is a protection; for they that have nothing have nothing to lose. When the rich Jews, who had been oppressive to the poor, were made strangers, nay, prisoners, in an enemy's country, the poor, whom they had despised and oppressed, had liberty and peace.

their own country; thus Providence sometimes remarkably humbles the proud, and favours them of low degree.

4. The brazen vessels, and other appertinences of the temple, are carried away, those of silver and gold being most of them gone before; those two famous columns of brass, *Jachin* and *Boaz*, which signified the *strength* and *stability* of the house of God, were broken to pieces, and the brass of them carried to Babylon, v. 13. When the things signified were sinned away, what should the signs stand there for? Ahaz had profanely *cut off the borders of the bases*, and put *the brazen sea upon a pavement of stones*; (ch. 16. 17.) justly therefore are the bases themselves, and the brazen sea, delivered into the enemy's hand. It is just with God to take away his ordinances from those that profane and abuse them, that curtail and depress them. Some things remained of gold and silver, (v. 15.) which were now carried off; but most of this plunder was brass, such a vast quantity of it, that it is said to be *without weight*, v. 16. The carrying away of *the vessels wherewith they ministered*, (v. 14.) put an end to the ministration. It was a righteous thing with God to deprive those of the benefit of his worship, who had slighted it so long, and preferred false worship before it; they that would have many altars, now shall have none.

5. Several of the great men are slain in cold blood; Seraiah the chief priest, who was the father of Ezra, (as appears, Ezra, 7. 1.) the second priest, who, when there was occasion, officiated for him, and three door-keepers of the temple, (v. 18.) the general of the army, five privy-counsellors, (afterward, they made them up seven, Jer. 52. 25.) the secretary of war, or pay-master of the army, and sixty country gentlemen who had concealed themselves in the city; these, being persons of some rank, were brought to the king of Babylon, (v. 19, 20.) who ordered them to be all put to death, (v. 12.) when, in reason, they might have hoped that surely the bitterness of death was past. These the king of Babylon's regency looked upon as most active in opposing him; but Divine Justice, we may suppose, looked upon them as ringleaders in that idolatry and impiety which were punished by these desolations. This completed the calamity: *so Judah was carried away out of their land*, about 860 years after they were put in possession of it by Joshua. Now the scripture was fulfilled, *The Lord shall bring thee, and the king which thou shalt set over thee, into a nation which thou hast not known*, Deut. 28. 36. Sin kept their fathers forty years out of Canaan, and now turned them out: the Lord is known by those judgments which he executes, and makes good that word which he has spoken; (Amos, 3. 2.) *You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*.

22. And *as for* the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, ruler. 23. And when all the captains of the armies, they, and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, there came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Jobanan the son of Careah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men. 24. And Gedaliah sware to them, and to their men, and said unto them, Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon; and it shall be well with you. 25. But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, came, and ten

men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah. 26. And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose, and came to Egypt: for they were afraid of the Chaldees. 27. And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison; 28. And he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon; 29. And changed his prison-garments: and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life. 30. And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life.

In these verses, we have,

I. The dispersion of the remaining people, the city of Jerusalem was quite laid waste; some people there were in the land of Judah, (v. 22.) that had weathered the storm, and (which was no small favour at this time, Jer. 45. 5.) *had their lives given them for a prey*. Now see,

1. What a good posture they were put into; the king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah, one of themselves, to be their governor and protector under him, a very good man, and one that would make the best of the bad; (v. 22.) his father Ahikam was one that countenanced and protected Jeremiah, when the princes had vowed his death, Jer. 26. 24. It is probable that this Gedaliah, by the advice of Jeremiah, had gone over to the Chaldeans, and had approved himself so well, that the king of Babylon trusted him with the government; he resided not at Jerusalem, but at Mizpah, in the land of Benjamin, a place famous in Samuel's time; thither those came who had fled from Zedekiah, (v. 4.) and put themselves under his protection, (v. 23.) which he assured them of, if they would be patient and peaceable under the government of the king of Babylon, v. 24. Gedaliah, though he had not the pomp and power of a sovereign prince, yet might have been a greater blessing to them than many of their kings had been, especially having such a privy-counsellor as Jeremiah, who was now with them, and interested himself in their affairs, Jer. 40. 5, 6.

2. What a fatal breach was made upon them, soon afterward, by the death of Gedaliah, within two months after he entered upon his government. The utter extirpation of the Jews, for the present, was determined, and therefore it is in vain for them to think of taking root again, the whole land must be plucked up; (Jer. 45. 4.) yet this hopeful settlement is dashed to pieces, not by the Chaldeans, but by some of themselves: the things of their peace were so hidden from their eyes, that they knew not when they were well off, nor would believe when they were told.

(1.) They had a good governor of their own, and him they slew, out of spite to the Chaldeans, because he was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, v. 25. Ishmael, who was of the royal family, envying Gedaliah's advancement, and the happy settlement of the people under him, though he could not propose to set up himself, resolved to ruin him, and basely slew him and all his friends, both Jews and Chaldees: Nebuchadnezzar would not, could not, have been a more mischievous enemy to their peace, than this degenerate branch of the house of David was.

(2.) They were as yet in their own good land, but they forsook it, and went to Egypt, for fear of the Chaldees, v. 26. The Chaldeans had reason enough to be offended at the murder of Gedaliah; but if those that remained had humbly remonstrated,

alleging that it was only the act of Ishmael and his party, we may suppose that they who were innocent of it, nay, who suffered greatly by it, would not have been punished for it; but, under pretence of this apprehension, contrary to the counsel of Jeremiah, they all went to Egypt, where, it is probable, they mixed with the Egyptians by degrees, and were never heard of more as Israelites; thus was there a full end made of them by their own folly and disobedience, and Egypt had the last of them, that the last verse of that chapter of threatenings might be fulfilled, after all the rest, Deut. 28. 68. *The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again.* These events are more largely related by the prophet Jeremiah, ch. 40. to ch. 45. *Quaque ipse miserrima vidit, et quorum pars magna fuit—Which scenes he was doomed to behold, and in which he bore a melancholy part.*

II. The reviving of the captive prince; of Zedekiah we hear no more, after he was carried blind to Babylon; it is probable that he did not live long, but that, when he died, he was buried with some marks of honour, Jer. 34. 5. Of Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, who surrendered himself, (ch. 24. 12.) we are here told, that, as soon as Evil-merodach came to the crown, upon the death of his father Nebuchadnezzar, he released him out of prison, (where he had lain 37 years, and was now 55 years old,) *spoke kindly to him,* paid more respect to him than to any other of the kings his father had left in captivity, (v. 28.) gave him princely clothing instead of his prison-garments, maintained him in his own palace, (v. 29.) and allowed him a pension for himself and his family, in some measure corresponding to his rank, *a daily rate for every day as long as he lived.* Consider this,

1. As a very happy change of Jehoiachin's condition; to have honour and liberty, after he had been so long in confinement and disgrace, the plenty and pleasure of a court, after he had been so long accustomed to the straits and miseries of a prison, was like the return of the morning after a very dark and tedious night. Let none say that they shall never see good again, because they have long seen little but evil; the most miserable know not what blessed turn Providence may yet give to their affairs, nor what

comforts they are reserved for, *according to the days wherein they have been afflicted,* Ps. 90. 15. However, the death of afflicted saints is to them such a change as this here was to Jehoiachin; it will release them out of their prison, shake off the body, that prison-garment, and open the way to their advancement; will send them to the throne, to the table, of the King of kings, the glorious liberty of God's children.

2. As a very generous act of Evil-merodach's; he thought that his father made the yoke of his captives too heavy, and therefore, with the tenderness of a man, and the honour of a prince, made it lighter; it should seem, all the kings he had in his power were favoured, but Jehoiachin above them all; some think, for the sake of the antiquity of his family, and the honour of his renowned ancestors, David and Solomon; none of the kings of the nations, it is likely, were descended from so long a race of kings in a direct lineal succession, and by a male line, as the king of Judah. The Jews say that this Evil-merodach had been himself imprisoned by his own father, when he returned from his madness, for some mismanagement at that time, and that in prison he contracted a friendship with Jehoiachin, in consequence of which, as soon as he had it in his power, he shewed him this kindness as a sufferer, as a fellow-sufferer. Some suggest that Evil-merodach had learned from Daniel and his fellows the principles of the true religion, and was well affected to them, and, upon that account, favoured Jehoiachin.

3. As a kind dispensation of Providence, for the encouragement of the Jews in captivity, and the support of their faith and hope concerning their enlargement in due time; this happened just about the midnight of their captivity; thirty-six of the seventy years were now past, and almost as many were yet behind, and now to see their king thus advanced would be a comfortable earnest to them of their own release in due time, in the set time: *unto the upright there thus ariseth light in the darkness, to encourage them to hope, even in the cloudy and dark day, that at evening time it shall be light; when therefore we are perplexed, let us not be in despair.*

AN
E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH

Practical Observations,

OF THE FIRST BOOK OF

C H R O N I C L E S.

IN common things, repetition is thought needless and nauseous; but in sacred things, *precept must be upon precept, and line upon line*. To me, says the apostle, *to write the same things is not grievous, but for you it is safe*, Phil. 3. 1. These books of Chronicles are, in a great measure, repetition; so are much of the second and third of the four evangelists: and yet no tautologies, either here or there, no *vain repetitions*. We may be ready to think, that, of all the books of holy scripture, we could best spare these two books of Chronicles. Perhaps we might, and yet we could very ill spare them; for there are many most excellent useful things in them, which we find not elsewhere. And as for what we find here which we have already met with, 1. It might be of great use to those who lived when these books were first published, before the cannon of the Old Testament was completed, and the particles of it put together; for it would remind them of what was more fully related in the other books. Abstracts, abridgements, and references, are of use in divinity as well as law. That, perhaps, may not be said in vain, which yet has been said before. 2. It is still of use, that *out of the mouth of two witnesses every word may be established*, and that, being inculcated, it may be remembered. The penman of these books is supposed to be Ezra, that *ready scribe in the law of the Lord*, Ezra, 7. 6. It is a groundless story of that apocryphal writer, 2 Esdr. 14. 21, &c. that, all the law being burnt, Ezra was divinely inspired to write it all over again, which yet might take rise from the books of Chronicles, where we find, though not all the same story repeated, yet the names of all those who were the subjects of that story. These books are called, in the Hebrew, *Words of days*; journals, or annals, because, by divine direction, collected out of some public and authentic records. The collection was made after the captivity, and yet the language of the originals, written before, is sometimes retained, as 2 Chron. 5. 9. *There it is unto this day*, which must have been written before the destruction of the temple. The Septuagint calls it, *A book* (Παραλειπομένων) *of things left*, or overlooked, by the preceding historians; and several such things there are in it. It is the rereward, the gathering host, of this sacred camp, which gathers up what remained, that nothing might be lost. In this first book, we have,

- I. A collection of sacred genealogies, from Adam to David: and they are none of those which the apostle calls *endless genealogies*, but we have their use and end in Christ, ch. 1. .9. Divers little passages of history are here inserted, which we had not before.
- II. A repetition of the history of the translation of the kingdom from Saul to David, and of the triumph of David's reign, with large additions, ch. 10. .21.
- III. An original account of the settlement David made of the ecclesiastical affairs, and the preparation he made for the building of the temple, ch. 22. .29. These are *words of days*, of the oldest days, of the best days, of the Old-Testament church. The reigns of kings, and dates of kingdoms, as well as the lives of common persons, are reckoned by *days*; for a little time often gives a great turn, and yet all time is nothing to eternity.

CHAP. I.

This chapter, and many that follow it, repeat the genealogies we have hitherto met with in the sacred history, and put them all together, with considerable additions. We may be tempted, it may be, to think it had been well if they had not been written, because, when they come to be compared with other parallel places, there are differences found, which we can scarcely accommodate to our satisfaction; yet we must not therefore stumble at the word, but bless God that the things necessary to salvation are plain enough. And, since the wise God has thought fit to write these things to us, we should not pass them over unread. All scripture is profitable, though not all alike profitable; and we may take occasion for good thoughts and meditations even from those parts of scripture that do not abound, as much as other parts do, with profitable remarks. These genealogies, 1. Were then of great use, when they were here preserved, and put into the hands of the Jews after their return from Babylon; for the captivity, like the deluge, had put all into confusion, and they, in that dispersion and despair, would be in danger of losing the distinctions of their tribes and families. This therefore revives the ancient land-marks even of some of the tribes that were carried captive into Assyria. Perhaps it might invite the Jews to study the sacred writings which had been neglected, to find the names of their ancestors, and the rise of their families in them. 2. They are still of some use for the illustrating of the scripture story, and especially for the clearing of the prophecies of the Messiah, that it might appear that our blessed Saviour was, according to the prophecies which went before of him, the Son of David, the son of Judah, the son of Abraham, the son of Adam. And now that he is come, for whose sake these registers were preserved, the Jews since have so lost all their genealogies, that even that of the priests, the most sacred of all, is forgotten, and they know not of any one man in the world that can prove himself of the house of Aaron. When the building is reared, the scaffolds are removed. When the promised Seed is come, the line that was to lead to him is broken off.

In this chapter, we have an abstract of all the genealogies in the book of Genesis, till we come to Jacob. I. The descents from Adam to Noah and his sons, out of Gen. 5. v. 1. .4. II. The posterity of Noah's sons, by which the earth was repopled, out of Gen. 10. v. 5. .23. III. The descents from Shem to Abraham, out of Gen. 11. v. 24. .28. IV. The posterity of Ishmael, and of Abraham's sons by Keturah, out of Gen. 25. v. 29. .35. V. The posterity of Esau, out of Gen. 36. v. 36. .54. These, it is likely, were passed over lightly in Genesis; and therefore, according to the law of the school, we are made to go that lesson over again which we did not learn well.

1. **A**DAM, Sheth, Enosh, 2. Kenan, Mahala-leel, Jered, 3. Henoah, Methuselah, Lamech, 4. Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 5. The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. 6. And the sons of Gomer; Ashchenaz and Riphath, and Togarmah. 7. And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. 8. The sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. 9. And the sons of Cush; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabta, and Raamah, and Sabtecha. And the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan. 10. And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be mighty upon the earth. 11. And Mizraim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Nephtuhim. 12. And Pathrusim, and Casluhim, (of whom came the Philistines,) and Caphthorim. 13. And Canaan begat Zidon his first-born, and Heth; 14. The Jebusite also, and the Amorite, and the Girgashite, 15. And the Hivite, and the Archite, and the Sinite, 16. And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite. 17. The sons of Shem; Elam, and Ashur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram, and Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Meshech. 18. And Arphaxad begat Shelah, and Shelah begat Eber. 19. And unto Eber were born two sons: the name

of the one was Peleg; because in his days the earth was divided: and his brother's name was Joktan. 20. And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah, 21. Hadoram also, and Uzal, and Diklah, 22. And Ebal, and Abimael, and Sheba, 23. And Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab. All these were the sons of Joktan. 24. Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, 25. Eber, Peleg, Reu, 26. Serug, Nabor, Terah, 27. Abram; the same is Abraham.

This paragraph has *Adam* for its first word, and *Abraham* for its last. Between the creation of the former, and the birth of the latter, were 2,000 years; almost the one half of which time Adam himself lived. Adam was the common father of our flesh, Abraham the common father of the faithful. By the breach which the former made of the covenant of innocency, we were all made miserable; by the covenant of grace made with the latter, we all are, or may be, made happy. We all are, by nature, the seed of Adam, branches of that wild olive. Let us see to it, that, by faith, we become the seed of Abraham, (Rom. 4. 11, 12.) that we be planted into the good olive, and partake of its root and fatness.

I. The four first verses of this paragraph, and the four last, which are linked together by Shem, (v. 4, 24.) contain the sacred line of Christ from Adam to Abraham, and are inserted in his pedigree; the order, Luke, 3. 34. .38. ascends, here it descends. This genealogy proves the falsehood of that reproach, *As for this man, we know not whence he is.* Bishop Patrick well observes here, that a genealogy being to be drawn of the families of the Jews, this appears as the peculiar glory of the Jewish nation, that they alone were able to derive their pedigree from the first man that God created, which no other nation pretended to, but abused themselves and their posterity with fabulous accounts of their originals; the Arcadians fancying that they were before the moon; the people of Thessaly that they sprang from stones; the Athenians that they grew out of the earth; much like the vain imaginations which some of the philosophers had of the origin of the universe. The account which the holy scripture gives, both of the creation of the world and of the rise of nations, carries with it as clear evidences of its own truth, as those idle traditions do of their own vanity and falsehoods.

II. All the verses between, repeat the account of the replenishing of the earth by the sons of Noah after the flood. 1. He begins with those who were strangers to the church, the sons of Japheth, who were planted in the isles of the Gentiles, those western parts of the world, the countries of Europe. Of these he gives a short account, (v. 5. .7.) because with these the Jews had hitherto had little or no dealings. 2. He proceeds to those, many of whom had been enemies to the church, the sons of Ham, who moved southward towards Africa, and those parts of Asia which lay that way. Nimrod son of Cush began to be an oppressor, probably, to the people of God in his time. But Mizraim, from whom came the Egyptians, and Canaan, from whom came the Canaanites, are both of them names of great note in the Jewish story; for, with their descendants, the Israel of God had severe struggles to get out of the land of Egypt, and into the land of Canaan; and therefore the branches of Mizraim are particularly recorded, v. 11, 12. and of Canaan, v. 13. .16. See at what a rate God valued Israel, when he gave *Egypt for their ransom*, (Isa. 43. 3.) and cast out all these nations before them, Ps. 80. 8. 3. He then gives an account of those that were the ancestors and allies of the church, the posterity of Shem, v. 17. .23. These peopled Asia, and spread themselves eastward; the Assyrians, Syrians, Chaldeans, Persians, and Arabians, descended from these. At first, the originals of the respective nations were known; but, at this day, we have reason to think the nations are all so mingled with one another, by the enlargement of commerce and dominion, the transplanting of colonies, the carrying

away of captives, and many such occasions, that no one nation, nor the greatest part of any, is descended entire from any of these fountains. Only this we are sure of, that God has *created of one blood all nations of men*; they are all descended from one Adam, one Noah. *Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?* Mal. 2. 10. Our register hastens to the line of Abraham, breaking off abruptly from all the other families of the sons of Noah, but that of Arphaxad, from whom Christ was to come. The great promise of the Messiah (says Bishop Patrick) was translated from Adam to Seth, from him to Shem, from him to Eber, and so to the Hebrew nation, who were intrusted, above all nations, with that sacred treasure, till the promise was performed, and the Messiah was come, and then that nation was made *not a people*.

28. The sons of Abraham; Isaac, and Ishmael.

29. These *are* their generations: The first-born of Ishmael, Nebaioth; then Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, 30. Mishma, and Damah, Massa, Hadad, and Tema, 31. Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael. 32. Now the sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: she bare Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. And the sons of Jokshan; Sheba, and Dedan. 33. And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Ephraim, and Henoah, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these *are* the sons of Keturah. 34. And Abraham begat Isaac. The sons of Isaac; Esau and Israel. 35. The sons of Esau; Eliphaz, Renel, and Jeshu, and Jaalam, and Korah. 36. The sons of Eliphaz; Teman, and Omar, Zephi, and Gatam, Kenaz, and Timna, and Amalek. 37. The sons of Renel; Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. 38. And the sons of Seir; Lotan, and Shobal, and Zibeon, and Anah, and Dishon, and Ezar, and Dishan. 39. And the sons of Lotan; Hori, and Homam: and Timan *was* Lotan's sister. 40. The sons of Shobal; Alian, and Manahath, and Ebal, Shephi, and Onam. And the sons of Zibeon; Aiah, and Anah. 41. The sons of Anah; Dishon. And the sons of Dishon; Amram, and Eshban, and Ithran, and Cheran. 42. The sons of Ezar; Bilhan, and Zavan, and Jakan. The sons of Dishan; Uz, and Aran. 43. Now these *are* the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before *any* king reigned over the children of Israel; Bela the son of Beor: and the name of his city *was* Dinhabah. 44. And when Bela was dead, Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead. 45. And when Jobab was dead, Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his stead. 46. And when Husham was dead, Hadad the son of Bedad, which smote Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his stead: and the name of his city *was* Avith. 47. And when Hadad was dead, Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his stead. 48. And when Samlah was dead, Shaul of Rehoboth by the river reigned in his stead. 49. And when Shaul was dead, Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead. 50. And

when Baal-hanan was dead, Hadad reigned in his stead: and the name of his city *was* Pai; and his wife's name *was* Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezabab. 51. Hadad died also. And the dukes of Edom were; duke Timnah, duke Aliah, duke Jetheth, 52. Duke Aholibamah, duke Elah, duke Pinon, 53. Duke Kenaz, duke Teman, duke Mibzar, 54. Duke Magdiel, duke Iram. These *are* the dukes of Edom.

All nations, but the seed of Abraham, are already shaken off from this genealogy; they have no part or lot in this matter. *The Lord's portion is his people*, them he keeps account of, and knows by name; but those who are strangers to him he beholds afar off. Not that we are to conclude that therefore no particular persons of any other nation, but the seed of Abraham, found favour with God. It was a truth, before Peter perceived it, *that in every nation he that feared God, and wrought righteousness, was accepted of him*. Multitudes will be brought to heaven out of *all nations*, (Rev. 7. 9.) and we are willing to hope there were many, very many, good people in the world, that lay out of the pale of God's covenant of peculiarity with Abraham, whose names were in the book of life, though not descended from any of the following families written in his book. *The Lord knows them that are his*. But Israel was a chosen nation, elect in type; and no other nation, in its national capacity, was so dignified and privileged as the Jewish nation was. That is the holy nation, which is the subject of the sacred story; and therefore we are next to shake off all the seed of Abraham, but the posterity of Jacob only, which were all incorporated into one nation, and joined to the Lord, while the other descendants from Abraham, for aught that appears, were estranged both from God and from one another.

I. We shall have little to say to the *Ishmaelites*; they were the sons of the bond-woman, that were to be cast out, and not to be heirs with the child of the promise; and their case was to represent that of the unbelieving Jews, who were rejected, (Gal. 4. 22, &c.) and therefore there is little notice taken of that nation. Ishmael's twelve sons are just named here, (v. 29. . 31.) to shew the performance of the promise God made to Abraham, in answer to his prayer for him, that, for Abraham's sake, he should become a great nation, and particularly that he should beget twelve princes, Gen. 17. 20.

II. We shall have little to say to the *Midianites*, who descended from Abraham's children by Keturah; they were *children of the east*, (probably Job was one of them,) and were dismissed from Isaac, the heir of the promise, (Gen. 25. 6.) and therefore they are only named here, v. 32. The sons of Jokshan, the son of Keturah, are named also, and the sons of Midian, (v. 32, 33.) who became most eminent, and perhaps gave denomination to all these families, as Judah to the Jews.

III. We shall not have much to say to the *Edomites*; they had an inveterate enmity to God's Israel; yet, because they descended from Esau the son of Isaac, we have here an account of their families, and the names of some of their famous men, v. 35, to the end. Some slight differences there are between some of the names here, and as we had them, Gen. 36, whence this whole account is taken. Three or four names, that were written with a *Vau* there, are written with a *Jod* here; probably, the pronunciation being altered, as is usual in other languages. We now write many words very differently from what they were written but 200 years ago.

Let us take occasion, from the reading of these genealogies, to think, 1. Of the multitudes that have gone through this world, have acted their part in it, and then quitted it. Job, even in his early day, saw not only *every man drawing after him*, but *innumerable before him*, Job, 21. 33. All these, and all their's, had their day; many of them made a mighty noise and figure in the world; but their day came to fall, and their place knew them no more. The paths of death are trodden paths, but, *Vestigia nulla*

retrosum—None can retrace their steps. 2. Of the providence of God, which keeps up the generations of men, and so preserves that degenerate race, though guilty and obnoxious, in being upon earth. How easily could he cut it off without either a deluge or a conflagration! Write but all the children of men childless, as some are, and, in a few years, the earth will be eased of its burthen under which it groans; but the divine patience lets the trees that cumber the ground, not only grow, but propagate. As one generation, even of sinful men, passes away, another comes, (Eccl. 1:4. Numb. 32:14.) and will do so while the earth remains. *Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.*

CHAP. II.

We are now come to what was principally intended, the register of the children of Israel, that distinguished people, that were to dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations. Here is, I. The names of the twelve sons of Israel, v. 1, 2. And then, II. An account of the tribe of Judah, which has the preccency, not so much for the sake of David, as for the sake of the Son of David, our Lord, who sprang out of Judah, Heb. 7:14. 1. The first descendants from Judah, down to Jesse, v. 3, 12. 2. The children of Jesse, v. 13, 17. 3. The posterity of Hezron, not only through Ram, from whom David came, but through Caleb, v. 18, 20. Segub, (v. 21, 24.) Jerahmeel, (v. 25, 33, and so to v. 41.) and more by Caleb, (v. 42, 49.) with the family of Caleb the son of Hur, v. 50, 55. The best exposition we can give of this and the following chapters, and which will give the clearest view of them, is, those genealogical tables which were published with some of the first impressions of the last English Bible, about an hundred years ago, and continued for some time; and it is pity but they were revived in some of our latter editions; for they are of great use to those who diligently search the scriptures. They are said to be drawn up by that great master in scripture-learning, Mr. Hugh Broughton. We meet with them sometimes in old Bibles.

1. **THESE** are the sons of Israel; Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, 2. Dan, Joseph, and Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. 3. The sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah: *which* three were born unto him of the daughter of Shua the Canaanitess. And Er, the first-born of Judah, was evil in the sight of the LORD, and he slew him. 4. And Tamar his daughter-in-law, bare him Pharez and Zerah. All the sons of Judah *were* five. 5. The sons of Pharez; Hezron, and Hamul. 6. And the sons of Zerah; Zimri, and Ethan, and Heman, and Calcol, and Dara; five of them in all. 7. And the sons of Carmi; Achar, the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the thing accursed. 8. And the sons of Ethan; Azariah. 9. The sons also of Hezron, that were born unto him; Jerahmeel, and Ram, and Chelubai. 10. And Ram begat Amminadab; and Amminadab begat Nahshon, prince of the children of Judah; 11. And Nahshon begat Salma, and Salma begat Boaz, 12. And Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, 13. And Jesse begat his first-born Eliab, and Abinadab the second, and Shimma the third, 14. Nathaneel the fourth, Raddai the fifth, 15. Ozem the sixth, David the seventh: 16. Whose sisters were Zeruiah, and Abigail. And the sons of Zeruiah; Abishai, and Joab, and Asahel, three. 17. And Abigail bare Amasa: and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmeelite.

Here is,

1. The family of Jacob. His twelve sons are here named, that illustrious number so often celebrated almost throughout the

whole Bible, from the first to the last book of it. At every turn, we meet with the twelve tribes that descended from these twelve patriarchs. The personal character of several of them was none of the best, (the four first were much blemished,) and yet the covenant was entailed on their seed; for it was of grace, free grace, that it was said, *Jacob have I loved: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

2. The family of Judah. That tribe was most praised, most increased, and most dignified, of any of the tribes, and therefore the genealogy of it is the first and largest of them all. In the account here given of the first branches of that illustrious tree, which Christ was to be the Top-branch of, we meet, (1.) With some that were very *bad*. Here is Er, Judah's eldest son, that was *evil in the sight of the Lord*, and was cut off, in the beginning of his days, by a stroke of divine vengeance; the *Lord slew him*, v. 3. His next brother, Onan, was no better, and fared no better. Here is Tamar, with whom Judah, her father-in-law, committed incest, v. 4. And here is Achan, called *Achar*, a troubler, that troubled Israel by taking of the accursed thing, v. 7. Note, The best and most honourable families may have those belonging to them that have their blemishes. (2.) With some that were very *wise and good*, as Heman and Ethan, Calcol and Dara, who were not, perhaps, the immediate sons Zerah, but descendants from him, and are named because they were the glory of their father's house: for when the Holy Ghost would magnify the wisdom of Solomon, he declares him wiser than these four men, who, though the sons of Mahol, are called *Ezrahites*, from Zerah, 1 Kings, 4:31. That four brothers should be eminent for wisdom and grace, was a rare thing. (3.) With some that were very *great*, as Nahshon, who was prince of the tribe of Judah, when the camp of Israel was formed in the wilderness, and so led the van in that glorious march; and Salma, or Salmon, who was in that post of honour when they entered Canaan, v. 10, 11.

3. The family of Jesse, of which a particular account is kept for the sake of David, and the Son of David, who is *a Rod out of the stem of Jesse*, Isa. 11:1. Hence it appears that David was a seventh son, and that his three great commanders, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, were the sons of one of his sisters, and Amasa of another. Three of the four went down slain to the pit, though they were the terror of the mighty.

18. And Caleb, the son of Hezron, begat *children* of Azubah his wife, and of Jerioth: her sons are these; Jeshur, and Shobab, and Ardon. 19. And when Azubah was dead, Caleb took unto him Ephrath, which bare him Hur. 20. And Hur begat Uri, and Uri begat Bezaleel. 21. And afterward Hezron went in to the daughter of Machir, the father of Gilead, whom he married when he was threescore years old, and she bare him Segub. 22. And Segub begat Jair, who had three and twenty cities in the land of Gilead. 23. And he took Geshur, and Aram, with the towns of Jair, from them, with Kenath, and the towns thereof, *even* threescore cities: All these *belonged to* the sons of Machir, the father of Gilead. 24. And after that Hezron was dead in Caleb-ephrahah, then Abiah, Hezron's wife, bare him Asher the father of Tekoa. 25. And the sons of Jerahmeel the first-born of Hezron were, Ram the first-born, and Bunah, and Oren, and Ozem, and Ahijah. 26. Jerahmeel had also another wife, whose name was Atarah: she was the mother of Onam. 27. And the sons of Ram the first-born of Jerahmeel

were, Maaz, and Jamin, and Eker. 28. And the sons of Onam were, Shammai, and Jada. And the sons of Shammai; Nadab, and Abishur. 29. And the name of the wife of Abishur *was* Abihail, and she bare him Ahban, and Molid. 30. And the sons of Nadab; Seled, and Appaim: but Seled died without children. 31. And the sons of Appaim; Ishi. And the sons of Ishi; Sheshan. And the children of Sheshan; Ahlai. 32. And the sons of Jada the brother of Shammai; Jether, and Jonathan: and Jether died without children. 33. And the sons of Jonathan; Peleth, and Zaza. These were the sons of Jerahmeel. 34. Now Sheshan had no sons, but daughters; and Sheshan had a servant, an Egyptian, whose name *was* Jarha. 35. And Sheshan gave his daughter to Jarha his servant to wife, and she bare him Attai. 36. And Attai begat Nathan, and Nathan begat Zabad, 37. And Zabad begat Ephlal, and Ephlal begat Obed, 38. And Obed begat Jehu, and Jehu begat Azariah, 39. And Azariah begat Helez, and Helez begat Eleasah, 40. And Eleasah begat Sisamai, and Sisamai begat Shallum, 41. And Shallum begat Jekamiah, and Jekamiah begat Elishama. 42. Now the sons of Caleb the brother of Jerahmeel *were*, Mesha his first-born, which *was* the father of Ziph: and the sons of Mareshah the father of Hebron. 43. And the sons of Hebron; Korah, and Tappuah, and Rekem, and Shema. 44. And Shema begat Raham, the father of Jorkoan: and Rekem begat Shammai. 45. And the son of Shammai *was* Maon: and Maon *was* the father of Beth-zur. 46. And Ephah, Caleb's concubine, bare Haran, and Moza, and Gazez: and Haran begat Gazez. 47. And the sons of Jahdai; Regem, and Jotham, and Geshan, and Pelet, and Ephah, and Shaaph. 48. Maachah, Caleb's concubine, bare Sheber, and Tirhanah. 49. She bare also Shaaph the father of Madmannah, Sheva the father of Machbenah, and the father of Gibeaz: and the daughter of Caleb *was* Achsa. 50. These were the sons of Caleb the son of Hur, the first-born of Ephratah: Shobal the father of Kirjath-jearim, 51. Salma the father of Beth-lehem, Hareph the father of Beth-gader. 52. And Shobal the father of Kirjath-jearim had sons; Haroeh, and half of the Manabethites. 53. And the families of Kirjath-jearim; the Ithrites, and the Puhites, and the Shumathites, and the Mishraites: of them came the Zareathites, and the Eshtaulites. 54. The sons of Salma; Beth-lehem, and the Netophathites, Ataroth, the house of Joab, and half of the Manabethites, the Zorites. 55. And the families of the scribes which dwelt at Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and Suchathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hemath, the father of the house of Rechab.

The persons mentioned in the first seventeen verses are most of them such as we read of, and most of them such as we read much of, in other scriptures. But there are very few of those here, that are mentioned any where else. It should seem the tribe of Judah were more full and exact in their genealogies than any other of the tribes; in which we must acknowledge a special providence, for the clearing of the genealogies of Christ.

1. Here we find Bezaleel, who was head-workman in building the tabernacle, Exod. 31. 2.

2. Hezron, who was the son of Pharez, (v. 5.) is the father of all this progeny; his sons, Caleb and Jerahmeel, being very fruitful, and he himself likewise, even in his old age, for he left his wife pregnant when he died, v. 24. This Hezron was one of the 70 that went down with Jacob into Egypt; (Gen. 46. 12.) there his family thus increased, as the other oppressed families there did. We cannot but suppose that he died during the Israelites' bondage in Egypt; and yet it is here said he died in Caleb-epluratah, that is, Beth-lehem in the land of Canaan, v. 24. Perhaps, though the body of the people continued in Egypt, yet some that were more active than the rest, at least before their bondage came to be extreme, visited Canaan sometimes, and got footing there, though afterwards they lost it. The achievements of Jair, here mentioned, (v. 22, 23.) we had an account of, Numb. 32. 41. and, it is supposed, they were long after the conquest of Canaan. The Jews say, Hezron married his third wife when he was sixty years old, (v. 21.) and another after, (v. 24.) because he had a great desire of posterity in the family of Pharez, from whom the Messiah was to descend. Here is mention of one that *died without children*, (v. 30.) and another, (v. 32.) and of one that *had no sons, but daughters*, v. 34. Let not those that are either of these ways afflicted think their case new or singular. Providence orders these affairs of families by an uncontested sovereignty, as pleaseth him; giving children, or withholding them, or giving all of one sex. He is not bound to please us, but we are bound to acquiesce in his good pleasure. To those that love him, he will himself be better than ten sons, and give them in his house a place and a name better than of sons and daughters. Let not them therefore that are written childless, envy the families that are built up and replenished. Shall our eye be evil, because God's is good? Here is mention of one who had an only daughter, and married her to his servant an Egyptian, v. 34, 35. If it be mentioned to his praise, we must suppose that this Egyptian was proselyted to the Jewish religion, and that he was very eminent for wisdom and virtue; else it had not become a true-born Israelite to match a daughter to him, especially an only daughter. If Egyptians become converts, and servants do worthily, neither their parentage, nor their servitude, should be a bar to their preferment. Such a one this Egyptian servant might be, that she who married him, might live as happily with him, as if she had married one of the rulers of her tribe. The pedigree of several of these terminate, not in a person, but in a place or country; as one is said to be the *father of Kirjath-jearim*, (v. 50.) another of *Beth-lehem*, (v. 51.) which was afterwards David's city; because these places fell to their lot in the division of the land.

Lastly, Here are some that are said to be *families of scribes*, (v. 55.) such as kept up learning in their family, especially scripture-learning, and taught the people the good knowledge of God. Among all these great families, we are glad to find some that were *families of scribes*. Would to God that all the Lord's people were *prophets*! all the families of Israel, families of scribes, well instructed to the kingdom of Heaven, and able to bring out of their treasury things new and old!

CHAP. III.

Of all the families of Israel, none was so illustrious as the family of David. That is the family which was mentioned in the chapter before, v. 15. Here we have a full account of it. I. David's sons, v. 1. . 9. II. His successors in the throne as long as the kingdom continued, v. 10. . 16. III. The remains of his family in, and after, the captivity, v. 17. . 21. From this family, as concerning the flesh, Christ came

1. **N**OW these were the sons of David; which were born unto him in Hebron; the first-born, Amnon, of Abinoam the Jezreelitess: the second, Daniel, of Abigail the Carmelitess: 2. The third, Absalom the son of Maachab the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur: the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith: 3. The fifth, Shephatiah of Abital: the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah his wife. 4. *These* six were born unto him in Hebron; and there he reigned seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years. 5. And these were born unto him in Jerusalem; Shimea, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon, four, of Bath-shua the daughter of Ammiel: 6. Ibhar also, and Elishama, and Eliphelet, 7. And Nogah, and Nepheg, and Japhia, 8. And Elishama, and Eliada, and Eliphelet, nine. 9. *These were* all the sons of David, beside the sons of the concubines, and Tamar their sister.

We had an account of David's sons, 2 Sam. 3. 2, &c. and 5. 14, &c. 1. He had many sons; and, no doubt, wrote as he thought, (Ps. 127. 5.) *Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of these arrows.* 2. Some of them were a grief to him, as Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. And we do not read of any of them that imitated his piety and devotion, except Solomon, and he came far short of it. 3. One of them, which Bath-sheba bore to him, he called *Nathan*, probably in honour of Nathan the prophet, who reproved him for his sin in that matter, and was instrumental to bring him to repentance. It seems, he loved him the better for it as long as he lived. It is wisdom to esteem those our best friends that deal faithfully with us. From this son of David our Lord Jesus descended, as appears, Luke, 3. 31. 4. Here are two Elishamas, and two Eliphelets, v. 6, 8. Probably, the two former were dead, and therefore David called two more by their names; which he would not have done if there had been any ill omen in it, as some fancy. 5. David had many concubines, but their children are not named, as not worthy of the honour; (v. 9.) the rather, because the concubines had dealt treacherously with David in the affair of Absalom. 6. Of all David's sons, Solomon was chosen to succeed him; perhaps not for any personal merits, (his wisdom was God's gift,) but so, *Father, because it seemed good unto thee.*

10. And Solomon's son was Rehoboam; Abia, his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat his son, 11. Joram his son, Ahaziah his son, Joash his son. 12. Amaziah his son, Azariah his son, Jotham his son, 13. Ahaz his son, Hezekiah his son, Manasseh his son, 14. Amon his son, Josiah his son. 15. And the sons of Josiah were, the first-born Johanan, the second Jehoiakim, the third Zedekiah, the fourth Shallum. 16. And the sons of Jehoiakim; Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son. 17. And the sons of Jeconiah; Assir, Salathiel his son, 18. Malchiram also, and Pedaiab, and Shenazar, Jecamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah. 19. And the sons of Pedaiab were, Zerubbabel, and Shimei: and the sons of Zerubbabel; Meshullam, and Hananiah, and Shelomith their sister: 20. And Hashubah, and Ohel, and Berechiah, and Hesadiah, Jushab-hesed,

five. 21. And the sons of Hananiah; Pelatiah, and Jesaiah: the sons of Rephaiah, the sons of Arnan, the sons of Obadiah, the sons of Shechaniah. 22. And the sons of Shechaniah; Shemaiah: and the sons of Shemaiah; Hettush, and Igeal, and Bariah, and Neariah, and Shaphat, six. 23. And the sons of Neariah; Elioenai, and Hezekiah, and Azrikam, three. 24. And the sons of Elioenai were, Hodaiah, and Eliashib, and Pelaiah, and Akkub, and Johanan, and Delaiah, and Anani, seven.

David having nineteen sons, we may suppose them to have raised many noble families in Israel, whom we never hear of in the history. But the scripture gives us an account only of the descendants of Solomon here, and of Nathan, Luke, 3. The rest had the honour to be the sons of David; but these only had the honour to be related to the Messiah. The sons of Nathan were his fathers, as man; the sons of Solomon his predecessors, as king. We have here,

1. The great and celebrated names by which the line of David is drawn down to the captivity; the kings of Judah in a lineal succession; the history of whom we have had at large in the two books of Kings, and shall meet with again in the second book of Chronicles. Seldom has a crown gone in a direct line from father to son for seventeen descents together, as here. This was the recompence of David's piety. About the captivity, the lineal descent was interrupted, and the crown went from one brother to another, and from a nephew to an uncle; which was a presage of the eclipsing of the glory of that house.

2. The less famous, and most of them very obscure, names, in which the house of David subsisted after the captivity. The only famous man of that house that we meet with at their return from captivity was Zerubbabel, elsewhere called *the son of Salathiel*, but appearing here to be his grandson, (v. 17. . 19.) which is usual in scripture. Belshazzar is called *Nebuchadnezzar's son*, but was his grandson. Salathiel is said to be *the son* of Jeconiah, because adopted by him, and because, as some think, he succeeded him in the dignity to which he was restored by Evil-merodach; otherwise, Jeconiah was written childless: he was *the signet God plucked from his right hand*, (Jer. 22. 24.) and in his room Zerubbabel was placed; and therefore God saith to him, (Hag. 2. 23.) *I will make thee as a signet.* The posterity of Zerubbabel here bear not the same names that they do in the genealogies, Matth. 1. or Luke, 3. but those, no doubt, were taken from the then herald's office, the public registers which the priests kept of all the families of Judah, especially that of David.

The last person named in this chapter is Anani; of whom Bishop Patrick says, that the Targum adds these words, *He is the king Messiah, who is to be revealed*; and some of the Jewish writers give this reason, because it is said, (Dan. 7. 13.) *The Son of man came gnim gnanani—with the clouds of heaven.* The reason indeed is very foreign and far-fetched; but that learned man thinks it may be made use of as an evidence that their minds were always full of the thoughts of the Messiah, and that they expected it would not be very long after the days of Zerubbabel, before the set time of his approach would come.

CHAP. IV.

In this chapter, we have, I. A further account of the genealogies of the tribe of Judah, the most numerous, and most famous of all the tribes. The posterity of Shobab the son of Hur; (v. 1. . 4.) of Ashur the posthumous son of Hebron, who was mentioned, ch. 2. 24. with something particular concerning Jubah; (v. 5. . 10.) of Chelub, and others; (v. 11. . 20.) of Shelah, v. 21. . 23. II. An account of the posterity and cities of Simron, their conquest of Gedor, and of the Amalekites in mount Seir, v. 24. . 43.

1. **T**HE sons of Judah; Pharez, Hezron, and Carmi, and Hur, and Shobal. 2. And Reaiah the son of Shobal begat Jabath, and Jabath begat Ahumai, and Lahad. These are the families of the Zorathites. 3. And these were of the father of Etam; Jezreel, and Ishma, and Idbash: and the name of their sister was Hazeleponi. 4. And Pennel the father of Gedor, and Ezer the father of Hushah. These are the sons of Hur, the first-born of Ephraim, the father of Beth-lehem. 5. And Ashur the father of Tekoah had two wives, Helah and Naarah. 6. And Naarah bare him Ahuzam, and Hopher, and Temen, and Haahashtari. These were the sons of Naarah. 7. And the sons of Helah were, Zereth, and Jezoar, and Ethnan. 8. And Coz begat Anub, and Zobebah, and the families of Aharhel the son of Harum. 9. And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. 10. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me. And God granted him that which he requested.

One reason, no doubt, why Ezra is here the most particular in the register of the tribe of Judah, is, because that tribe was it which, with its appendages, Simeon, Benjamin, and Levi, made up the kingdom of Judah; which not only long survived the other tribes in Canaan, but, in process of time, now, when this was written, returned out of captivity, when the generality of the other tribes were lost in the kingdom of Assyria.

The most remarkable person in this paragraph, is, Jabez. It is not said whose son he was; nor does it appear in what age he lived; but, it should seem, he was the founder of one of the families of Aharhel, mentioned, v. 8. Here is,

I. The reason of his name: his mother gave him the name with this reason, *Because I bare him with sorrow*, v. 9. All children are born with sorrow; for the sentence upon the woman is, *In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children*: but some with much more sorrow than others. Usually, the sorrow in bearing is afterward forgotten, for joy that the child is born; but here, it seems, it was so extraordinary, that it was remembered when the child came to be circumcised, and care taken to perpetuate the remembrance of it while he lived. Perhaps, the mother called him *Jabez*, as Rachel called her son *Benoni*, when she was dying of the sorrow. Or, if she recovered it, yet thus she recorded it, 1. That it might be a continual memorandum to herself, to be thankful to God as long as she lived, for supporting her under, and bringing her through, that sorrow. It may be of use to be often reminded of our sorrows, that we may always have such thoughts of things as we had in the day of our affliction, and may learn to rejoice with trembling. 2. That it might likewise be a memorandum to him what this world is, into which she bare him, a vale of tears, in which he must expect few days and full of trouble. The sorrow he carried in his name might help to put a seriousness upon his spirit. It might also remind him to love and honour his mother, and labour, in every thing, to be a comfort to her who brought him into the world with so much sorrow. It is piety in children thus to requite their parents. 1 Tim. 5. 4.

II. The eminency of his character: *he was more honourable than his brethren*, qualified above them by the divine grace, and

digified above them by the divine providence: they did virtuously, but he excelled them all. Now the sorrow with which his mother bare him was abundantly recompensed. That son which of all the rest cost her most dear, she was happy in, and was made glad in proportion to the affliction, Ps. 90. 15. We are not told upon what account he was *more honourable than his brethren*; whether because he raised a greater estate, or was preferred to the magistracy, or signalized himself in war; we have most reason to think it was upon the account of his learning and piety; not only because these, above any thing, put honour upon a man, but because we have reason to think that in these Jabez was eminent; 1. In learning; because we find that *the families of the scribes dwelt at Jabez*, (ch. 2. 55.) a city which, it is likely, took its name from this name. The Jews say that he was a famous doctor of the law, and left many disciples behind him. And it should seem, by the mentioning of him so abruptly here, that his name was well known, when Ezra wrote this. 2. In piety; because we find here that he was a praying man. His inclination to devotion made him truly honourable; and by prayer he obtained those blessings from God which added much to his honour. The way to be truly great, is to be truly good, and to pray much.

III. The prayer he made, probably, like Solomon's prayer for wisdom, just when he was setting out in the world: he set himself to acknowledge God in all his ways, put himself under the divine blessing and protection, and prospered accordingly. Perhaps, these were the heads on which he enlarged in his daily prayers; for this purpose, it was his constant practice to pray alone, and with his family, as Daniel. Some think that it was upon some particular occasion, when he was straitened and threatened by his enemies, that he prayed this prayer. Observe,

1. To whom he prayed. Not to any of the gods of the Gentiles: no, he called on the God of Israel, the living and true God, who alone can hear and answer prayer; and, in prayer, had an eye to him as the God of Israel, a God in covenant with his people, the God with whom Jacob wrestled and prevailed, and was thence called *Israel*.

2. What was the nature of his prayer. (1.) As the margin reads it, it was a solemn vow, *If thou wilt bless me indeed, &c.* and then the sense is imperfect, but may easily be filled up from Jacob's vow, or some such like, *then thou shalt be my God*. He does not express his promise, but leaves it to be understood; either because he was afraid to promise in his own strength, or because he resolved to devote himself entirely to God. He does, as it were, give God a blank paper, let him write what he pleases: "Lord, if thou wilt bless me and keep me, do what thou wilt with me, I will be at thy command and disposal, for ever." (2.) As the text reads it, it was the language of a most ardent and affectionate desire, *O that thou wouldest bless me!*

3. What was the matter of his prayer. Four things he prayed for: (1.) That God would *bless him indeed*. "That, blessing, thou wilt bless me; bless me greatly with manifold and abundant blessings." Perhaps, he had an eye to the promise of God made to Abraham, (Gen. 22. 17.) *In blessing, I will bless thee*. "Let that blessing of Abraham come upon me." Spiritual blessings are the best blessings; and those are blessed indeed, who are blessed with them. God's blessings are real things, and produce real effects. We can but wish a blessing, he commands it: those whom he blesses are blessed indeed. (2.) That he would *enlarge his coast*; that he would prosper his endeavours for the increase of what fell to his lot, either by work or war. That God would enlarge our hearts, and so enlarge our portion in himself, and in the heavenly Canaan, ought to be our desire and prayer. (3.) That God's hand might be with him. The prayer of Moses for this tribe of Judah, was, That his own hands might be sufficient for him: (Deut. 33. 7.) but Jabez expects not that, unless he have God's hand with him, and the presence of his power. God's hand with us, to lead us, protect us, strengthen us, and to work all our works in us and for us, is indeed a hand sufficient for us, all-sufficient. (4.) That he would *keep him from evil*; the evil of sin,

the evil of trouble, all the evil designs of his enemies, that they might not hurt nor grieve him, nor make him a *Jabez* indeed, a man of sorrow. In the original, there is an allusion to his name, *Father in heaven, deliver me from evil.*

4. What was the success of his prayer. *God granted him that which he requested*; prospered him remarkably, and gave him success in his undertakings, in his studies, in his worldly business, in his conflicts with the Canaanites; and so he became *more honourable than his brethren.* God was of old ready to hear prayer, and *his ear is not yet heavy.*

11. And Chelub the brother of Shuah begat Mehir, which *was* the father of Eshton. 12. And Eshton begat Beth-rapha, and Paseah, and Tehinnah the father of Ir-nabash. *These are* the men of Rechab. 13. And the sons of Kenaz; Othniel, and Seraiah: and the sons of Othniel; Hathath. 14. And Meonothai begat Ophrah: and Seraiah begat Joab, the father of the valley of Charashim, for they were craftsmen. 15. And the sons of Caleb the son of Jephunneh; Iru, Elah, and Naam: and the sons of Elah, even Kenaz. 16. And the sons of Jehaleleel; Ziph, and Ziphah, Tiria, and Asareel. 17. And the sons of Ezra *were*, Jether, and Mered, and Ephraim, and Jalon: and she bare Miriam, and Shammai, and Ishbah the father of Eshtemoa. 18. And his wife Jehudijah bare Jered the father of Gedor, and Heber the father of Socho, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah. And *these are* the sons of Bitiah the daughter of Pharaoh, which Mered took. 19. And the sons of *his* wife Hodiah the sister of Naham, the father of Keilah the Garmite, and Eshtemoa the Maachathite. 20. And the sons of Shimon *were*, Amnon, and Rinnah, Benhanan, and Tilon. And the sons of Ishi *were*, Zobeth, and Ben-zobeth. 21. The sons of Shelah the son of Judah *were*, Er the father of Lecah, and Laadah the father of Mareshah, and the families of the house of them that wrought fine linen, of the house of Ashbea. 22. And Jokim, and the men of Chozeba, and Joash, and Saraph, who had the dominion in Moab, and Jashubilehem. And *these are* ancient things. 23. *These were* the potters, and those that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work.

We may observe in these verses,

1. That here is a whole family of craftsmen, handicraft-tradesmen, that applied themselves to all sorts of manufactures, in which they were ingenious and industrious above their neighbours, v. 14. There was a valley where they lived, which was, from them, called *The valley of craftsmen.* They that are craftsmen, are not therefore to be looked upon as mean men. These craftsmen, though two of a trade often disagree, yet chose to live together, for the improving of arts, by comparing notes, and that they might support one another's reputation.

2. That one of these married Pharaoh's daughter; (v. 18.) that *was* the common name of the kings of Egypt. If an Israelite in

Egypt, before the bondage began, while Joseph's merits were yet fresh in mind, was preferred to be the king's son-in-law, it is not to be thought strange; few Israelites could, like Moses, refuse an alliance with the court.

3. That another is said to be the *father of the house of them that wrought fine linen*, v. 21. It is inserted in their genealogy as their honour, that they were the best weavers in the kingdom; and they brought up their children, from one generation to another, to the same business, not aiming to make them gentlemen. This Laadah is said to be the *father of them that wrought fine linen*; as, before the flood, Jubal is said to be the *father of musicians*, and Jabal of *shepherds*, &c. His posterity inhabited the city of Mareshah, the manufacture or staple-commodity of which place was linen-cloth, with which their kings and priests were clothed.

4. That another family had had *dominion in Moab*, but were now in *servitude in Babylon*, v. 22, 23. (1.) It was found among the *ancient things*, that they had the *dominion in Moab*; probably, in David's time, when that country was conquered, they transplanted themselves thither, and were put in places of power there, which they held for several generations; but this was a great while ago, time out of mind. (2.) Their posterity were now potters and gardeners, as is supposed, in Babylon, where they *dwelt with the king for his work*; got a good livelihood by their industry, and therefore cared not for returning with their brethren to their own land, after the years of captivity were expired. They that now have dominion know not what their posterity may be reduced to, nor what mean employments they may be glad to take up with. But they were unworthy the name of *Israelites*, that would dwell among *plants and hedges*, rather than be at the pains to return to Canaan.

24. The sons of Simeon *were*, Nemuel, and Jemin, Jarib, Zerah, and Shaul: 25. Shallum his son, Mibsam his son, Mishma his son. 26. And the sons of Mishma; Hamuel his son, Zacchur his son, Shimei his son. 27. And Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters; but his brethren had not many children, neither did all their family multiply, like to the children of Judah. 28. And they dwelt at Beer-sheba, and Moladah, and Hazar-shual, 29. And at Bilhah, and at Ezem, and at Tolad, 30. And at Bethuel, and at Hormah, and at Ziklag, 31. And at Beth-marcaboth, and Hazar-susim, and at Beth-birei, and at Shaaraim. *These were* their cities unto the reign of David. 32. And their villages *were*, Etam, and Ain, Rimmon, and Tochen, and Ashan, five cities: 33. And all their villages that *were* round about the same cities, unto Baal. *These were* their habitations, and their genealogy. 34. And Meshobab, and Jamlech, and Joshah the son of Amaziah, 35. And Joel, and Jedu, the son of Josibiah, the son of Seraiah, the son of Asiel, 36. And Elioenai, and Jaakobah, and Jeshohaiah, and Asaiah, and Adiel, and Jesimiel, and Benaiah, 37. And Ziza the son of Shiphi, the son of Allon, the son of Jedaiah, the son of Shimri, the son of Shemaiah: 38. *These mentioned by their names were* princes in their families: and the house of their fathers increased greatly. 39. And they went to the entrance of Gedor, *even* unto the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks. 40. And they

found fat pasture and good, and the land *was* wide, and quiet, and peaceable; for *they* of Ham had dwelt there of old. 41. And these written by name came in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and smote their tents, and the habitations that were found there, and destroyed them utterly unto this day, and dwelt in their rooms: because *there was* pasture there for their flocks. 42. And *some* of them, *even* of the sons of Simeon, five hundred men, went to mount Seir, having for their captains, Pelatiah, and Neariah, and Rephaiah, and Uzziel, the sons of Ishi. 43. And they smote the rest of the Amalekites that were escaped, and dwelt there unto this day.

We here have some of the genealogies of the tribe of Simeon, (though it was not a tribe of great note,) especially the princes of that tribe, v. 38. Of this tribe it is said that they *increased greatly*, but *not like to the children of Judah*, v. 27. They whom God increases ought to be thankful, though they see others that are more increased.

Here observe, 1. The cities allotted them, v. 28. Of which see Josh. 19.1, &c. When it is said that they were their's *unto the reign of David*, it intimates, that, when the ten tribes revolted from the house of David, many of the Simeonites quitted these cities, because they lay within Judah, and seated themselves elsewhere.

2. The ground they got elsewhere. When those of this tribe, that revolted from the house of David, were carried captive with the rest into Assyria, those that adhered to Judah were remarkably owned of God, and prospered in their endeavours to enlarge their coasts. It was in the days of Hezekiah, that a generation of Simeonites, whose tribe had long crouched and truckled, was animated to make these bold efforts. (1.) Some of them attacked a place in Arabia, (as it would seem,) called the *entrance of Gedor*, inhabited by the posterity of cursed Ham, v. 40. made themselves masters of it, and dwelt there. This adds to the glory of Hezekiah's pious reign, that as his kingdom in general prospered, so did particular families. It is said that they found fat pastures, and yet the *land was quiet*; even then when the kings of Assyria were giving disturbance to all their neighbours, this land escaped their alarms. The inhabitants being shepherds, who molested none, were not themselves molested, till the Simeonites came and drove them out, and succeeded them, not only in the plenty, but in the peace, of their land. Those who dwell (as we do) in a fruitful country, and whose land is wide, and quiet, and peaceable, have reason to own themselves indebted to that God who *appoints the bounds of our habitation*. (2.) Others of them, to the number of 500, under the command of four brethren, here named, made a descent upon mount Seir, and smote the remainder of the devoted Amalekites, and took possession of their country, v. 42, 43. Now the curses on Ham and Amalek had a further accomplishment, when they seemed dormant, if not dead; as had also the curse on Simeon, that he should be divided and scattered, Gen. 49.7. yet to him it was turned into a blessing; for the families of Simeon, which thus transplanted themselves into those distant countries, are said to *dwell there unto this day*, v. 43. by which, it should seem, they escaped the calamities of the captivity. Providence sometimes sends those out of trouble that are designed for preservation.

CHAP. V.

This chapter gives us some account of the two tribes and a half that were seated on the other side Jordan. I. Of Reuben, v. 1. .10. II. Of Gad, v. 11. .17. III. Of the half-tribe of Manassah, v. 23, 24. IV. Concerning all three acting in conjunction, we are told, 1. How they conquered the Hagarites, v. 18. .22. 2. How they were, at length, themselves conquered, and made captives, by the king of Assyria, because they had forsaken God, v. 25, 26.

1. **N**OW the sons of Reuben the first-born of Israel, (for he *was* the first-born; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright: 2. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him *came* the chief ruler: but the birthright *was* Joseph's:.) 3. The sons, *I say*, of Reuben the first-born of Israel *were*, Hanoah, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. 4. The sons of Joel; Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son, 5. Micah his son, Reaia his son, Baal his son, 6. Beerah his son, whom Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria carried away *captive*: he *was* prince of the Reubenites. 7. And his brethren by their families, when the genealogy of their generations was reckoned, *were*, the chief, Jeiel, and Zechariah, 8. And Bela the son of Azaz, the son of Shema, the son of Joel, who dwelt in Aroer, even unto Nebo and Baal-meon. 9. And eastward he inhabited unto the entering in of the wilderness from the river Euphrates: because their cattle were multiplied in the land of Gilead. 10. And in the days of Saul they made war with the Hagarites, who fell by their hand: and they dwelt in their tents throughout all the east *land* of Gilead. 11. And the children of Gad dwelt over against them in the land of Bashan unto Salcah: 12. Joel the chief, and Shapham the next, and Jaanai, and Shaphat in Bashan. 13. And their brethren of the house of their fathers *were*, Michael, and Meshullam, and Sheba, and Jorai, and Jachan, and Zia, and Heber, seven. 14. These *are* the children of Abihail the son of Huri, the son of Jaroah, the son of Gilead, the son of Michael, the son of Jeshishai, the son of Jahdo, the son of Buz; 15. Ahi the son of Abdiel, the son of Guni, chief of the house of their fathers. 16. And they dwelt in Gilead in Bashan, and in her towns, and in all the suburbs of Sharon, upon their borders. 17. All these were reckoned by genealogies in the days of Jotham king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam king of Israel.

We have here an extract out of the genealogies,

1. Of the tribe of Reuben. Where we have,

(1.) The reason why this tribe is thus postponed. It is confessed that he was the first-born of Israel, and, upon that account, might challenge the precedence; but he forfeited his birth-right by defiling his father's concubine, and was, for that, sentenced *not to excel*, Gen. 49.4. Sin lessens men, thrusts them down from their excellency. Seventh-commandment sins, especially, leave an indelible stain upon men's names and families, a reproach which time shall not wipe away. Reuben's seed, to the last, bear the disgrace of Reuben's sin. Yet, though that tribe was degraded, it was not discarded or disinherited. The sully of the honour of an Israelite is not the losing of his happiness. Reuben loses his birth-right, yet it does not devolve upon Simeon, the next in order; for it was typical; and therefore must attend, not the

course of nature, but the choice of grace. The advantages of the birthright were, dominion, and a double portion. Reuben having forfeited these, it was thought too much that both should be transferred to any one, and therefore they were divided. [1.] Joseph had the double portion; for two tribes descended from him, Ephraim and Manasseh, each of whom had a child's part; for so Jacob by faith blessed them; (Heb. 11. 21. Gen. 48. 15, 22.) and each of those two was as considerable, and made as good a figure, as any one of the twelve, except Judah. But, [2.] Judah had the dominion; on him the dying patriarch entailed the sceptre, Gen. 49. 10. Of him came the chief ruler, David first, and, in the fulness of time, Messiah the Prince, Mic. 5. 2. This honour was secured to Judah, though the birthright was Joseph's; and, having this, he needed not envy him the double portion.

(2.) The genealogy of the princes of this tribe, the chief family of it, (many, no doubt, being omitted,) to Beerah, who was head of this clan when the king of Assyria carried them captive, v. 4. . 6. Perhaps he is mentioned as prince of the Reubenites at that time, because he did not do his part to prevent it.

(3.) The enlargement of the coasts of this tribe. They increasing, and their cattle being multiplied, they crowded out their neighbours the Hagarites, and extended their conquests, though not to the river Euphrates, yet to the wilderness, which abutted upon that river, v. 9, 10. Thus God did for his people as he promised them; he cast out the enemy from before them by little and little, and gave them their land as they had occasion for it, Exod. 23. 30.

2. Of the tribe of Gad. Some great families of that tribe are here named, v. 12. Seven, that were the children of Abihail, whose pedigree is carried upward from the son to the father, v. 14. . 15. as that, v. 4, 5. is brought downward from father to son. These genealogies were perfected in the days of Jotham king of Judah, but were begun some years before in the reign of Jeroboam II. king of Israel. What particular reason there was for taking these accounts then, does not appear; but it was just before they were carried away captive by the Assyrians; as appears, 2 Kings, 15. 29, 32. When the judgments of God were ready to break out against them for their wretched degeneracy and apostasy, then were they priding themselves, in their genealogies, that they were the children of the covenant; as the Jews, in our Saviour's time, who, when they were ripe for ruin, boasted, *We have Abraham to our father*. Or, there might be a special providence in it, and a favourable intimation that though they were, for the present, cast out, they were not cast off for ever. What we design to call for hereafter, we keep an inventory of.

18. The sons of Reuben, and the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, of valiant men, men able to bear buckler and sword, and to shoot with bow, and skilful in war, *were* four and forty thousand seven hundred and threescore, that went out to the war. 19. And they made war with the Hagarites, with Jetur, and Nephish, and Nodab. 20. And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that *were* with them; for they cried to God in the battle, and he was entreated of them, because they put their trust in him. 21. And they took away their cattle; of their camels fifty thousand, and of sheep two hundred and fifty thousand, and of asses two thousand, and of men an hundred thousand. 22. For there fell down many slain, because the war *was* of God. And they dwelt in their steads until the captivity. 23. And the children of the half-tribe of Manasseh dwelt in the land: they increased from Bashan unto Baal-hermon, and

Senir, and unto mount Hermon. 24. And these *were* the heads of the house of their fathers, even Ephraim, and Ishi, and Eliel, and Azriel, and Jeremiah, and Hodaviah, and Jahdiel, mighty men of valour, famous men, *and* heads of the house of their fathers. 25. And they transgressed against the God of their fathers, and went a-whoring after the gods of the people of the land, whom God destroyed before them. 26. And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Hala, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan, unto this day.

The heads of the half-tribe of Manasseh, that were seated on the other side Jordan, are named here, v. 23, 24. Their lot, at first, was Baskan; but afterward they increased so much in wealth and power, that they spread far north, even unto Hermon.

Two things only are here recorded concerning these tribes on the other side Jordan, in which they were all concerned. They all shared,

1. In a glorious victory over the *Hagarites*; so the Ishmaelites were now called, to remind them that they were *the sons of the bond-woman*, that was *cast out*. We are not told when this victory was obtained: whether it be the same with that of the Reubenites, which is said (v. 10.) to be *in the days of Saul*; or whether that success of one of these tribes animated and excited the other two to join with them in another expedition, is not certain. It seems, though in Saul's time the common interests of the kingdom were weak and low, some of the tribes that acted separately did well for themselves. We are here told, (1.) What a brave army these frontier-tribes brought into the field against the Hagarites, 44,000 men and upward, all strong and stout, and skilful in war; so many effective men, that knew how to manage their weapons, v. 18. How much more considerable might Israel have been than they were in the time of the judges, if all the tribes had acted in conjunction! (2.) What course they took to engage God for them: they *cried to God*, and *put their trust in him*. Now they acted as Israelites indeed. [1.] As the seed of believing Abraham, they *put their trust in God*. Though they had a powerful army, they relied not on that, but on the Divine Power. They depended on the commission they had from God to wage war with their neighbours for the enlarging of their coasts, if there was occasion, even with those that were very far off, beside the devoted nations. See Deut. 20. 15. They depended on God's providence to give them success. [2.] As the seed of praying Jacob, they *cried unto God*, especially *in the battle*, when, perhaps, at first, they were in danger of being overpowered. See the like done, 2 Chron. 13. 14. In distress, God expects we should cry to him; he distrains upon us for this tribute, this rent. In our spiritual conflicts, we must look up to Heaven for strength; and it is the believing prayer that will be the prevailing prayer. (3.) We are told what success they had: *God was entreated of them*, though need drove them to him; so ready is he to hear and answer prayer. They were helped against their enemies; for God never yet failed any that trusted in him. And then they routed the enemy's army, though far superior in number to their's, slew many, (v. 22.) took 100,000 prisoners, enriched themselves greatly with the spoil, and settled themselves in their country, v. 21, 22. And all this, *because the war was of God*, undertaken in his fear, and carried on in a dependence upon him. If the battle be the Lord's, there is reason to hope it will be successful. Then we may expect to prosper in any enterprise, and then only, when we take God along with us.

2. They shared, at length, in an inglorious captivity. Had they kept close to God and their duty, they had continued to enjoy both their ancient lot and their new conquests; but they *transgressed against the God of their fathers, v. 25.* They lay upon the borders, and conversed most with the neighbouring nations, by which means they learned their idolatrous usages, and transmitted the infection to the other tribes; for this, God had a controversy with them. He was a *Husband to them*, and no marvel that his jealousy burned like fire, when they went *a-whoring after other gods.* Justly is a bill of divorce given to the adulteress. *God stirred up the spirit of the kings of Assyria*, first one, and then another, against them, served his own purposes by the designs of those ambitious monarchs, employed them to *chastise* these revolters first, and, when that reduced them not, then wholly to *root them out, v. 26.* These tribes were first placed, and they were first displaced. They would have the best land, not considering that it lay most exposed. But those who are governed more by sense than by reason or faith in their choices, may expect to fare accordingly.

CHAP. VI.

Though Joseph and Judah shared between them the forfeited honours of the birthright, yet Levi was first of all the tribes dignified and distinguished with an honour more valuable than either the precedence or the double portion; and that was, the *priesthood.* That tribe God set apart for himself; it was Moses's tribe, and perhaps for his sake was thus favoured. Of that tribe we have an account in this chapter. *I. Their pedigree; the first fathers of the tribe, (v. 1..3.) the line of the priests, from Aaron to the captivity, (v. 4..15.) and of someother of their families, v. 16..30. II. Their work; the work of the Levites, (v. 31..48.) and of the priests, v. 19..53. III. The cities appointed them in the land of Canaan, v. 54..81.*

1. **T**HE sons of Levi; Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 2. And the sons of Kohath; Amram, Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel. 3. And the children of Amram; Aaron, and Moses, and Miriam. The sons also of Aaron; Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 4. Eleazar begat Phinehas, Phinehas begat Abishua, 5. And Abishua begat Bukki, and Bukki begat Uzzi, 6. And Uzzi begat Zerachiah, and Zerachiah begat Meraiotb, 7. Meraiotb begat Amariah, and Amariah begat Abitub, 8. And Abitub begat Zadok, and Zadok begat Ahimaaz, 9. And Ahimaaz begat Azariah, and Azariah begat Johanan, 10. And Johanan begat Azariah, (he *it is* that executed the priest's office in the temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem,) 11. And Azariah begat Amariah, and Amariah begat Abitub, 12. And Abitub begat Zadok, and Zadok begat Shallum, 13. And Shallum begat Hilkiah, and Hilkiah begat Azariah, 14. And Azariah begat Seraiah, and Seraiah begat Jehozadak, 15. And Jehozadak went *into captivity*, when the LORD carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. 16. The sons of Levi; Gershom, Kohath, and Merari. 17. And these *be* the names of the sons of Gershom; Libni, and Shimei. 18. And the sons of Kohath *were*, Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel. 19. The sons of Merari; Mahli, and Mushi. And these *are* the families of the Levites according to their fathers. 20. Of Gershom; Libni his son, Jahath his son, Zimnah

his son, 21. Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son, Jeaterai his son. 22. The sons of Kohath; Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son, 23. Elkanah his son, and Ebiasaph his son, and Assir his son, 24. Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uziah his son, and Shaul his son. 25. And the sons of Elkanah; Amasai, and Ahimoth, 26. *As for* Elkanah: the sons of Elkanah; Zophai his son, and Nahath his son, 27. Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, Elkanah his son. 28. And the sons of Samuel; the firstborn Vashni, and Abiah. 29. The sons of Merari; Mahli, Libni his son, Shimei his son, Uzza his son, 30. Shimei his son, Haggiah his son, Asaiah his son.

The priests and Levites were more concerned than any other Israelites to preserve their pedigree clear, and to be able to prove it, because all the honours and privileges of their office depended upon their descent. And we read of those who, though perhaps they really were children of the priests, yet, because they could not find the register of their genealogies, nor make out their descent by any authentic record, were, *as polluted, put from the priesthood*, and forbidden to eat of the holy things, Ezra, 2. 62, 63.

It is but very little that is here recorded of the genealogies of this sacred tribe.

1. The first fathers of it are here named twice, v. 1, 16. Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, are three names which we were very conversant with in the book of Numbers, when the families of the Levites were marshalled, and had their work assigned them. Aaron, and Moses, and Miriam, we have known much more of than their names, and cannot pass them over here without remembering that this was that Moses and Aaron whom God honoured in making them the instruments of Israel's deliverance and settlement, and *figures of him that was to come*; Moses as a prophet, and Aaron as a priest. And the mention of Nadab and Abihu (though, having no children, there was no occasion to bring them into the genealogy) cannot but remind us of the terrors of that divine justice, which they were made monuments of for offering strange fire, that we may always fear before him.

2. The line of Eleazar, the successor of Aaron, is here drawn down to the time of the captivity, v. 4..15. It begins with Eleazar, who came out of the house of bondage in Egypt, and ends with Jehozadak, who went into the house of bondage in Babylon. Thus, for their sins, they were left as they were found: which might also intimate, that the Levitical priesthood made nothing perfect; that was to be done by the *bringing in of a better hope*. All these here named were not high priests; for, in the time of the judges, that dignity was, upon some occasion or other, brought into the family of Ithamar, of which Eli was; but in Zadok it returned again to the right line. Of Azariah it is here said, (v. 10.) *He it is that executed the priest's office in the temple that Solomon built.* It is supposed that this was that Azariah who bravely opposed the presumption of king Uzziah when he invaded the priest's office, (2 Chron. 26. 17.) though he ventured his neck by it. This was done like a priest, like one that was truly zealous for his God. He that thus boldly maintained and defended the priest's office, and made good its barriers against such a daring insult, may well be said to *execute it*; and this honour is put upon him for it, while Urijah, one of his successors, for a base compliance with king Ahaz, in building him an idolatrous altar, has the disgrace put upon him of being left out of this genealogy, as, perhaps, some others are. But some think that this remark upon this Azariah should have been added to his grandfather of the same name, (v. 9.) who was the son of Ahimaaz, and that that was he who first officiated in Solomon's temple.

3. Some other of the families of the Levites are here accounted for. One of the families of Gershon (that of Libni) is here drawn down as far as Samuel, who had the honour of a prophet added to that of a Levite. One of the families of Merari (that of Mahli) is likewise drawn down for some descents, v. 29, 30.

31. And these *are they* whom David set over the service of song in the house of the Lord, after that the ark had rest. 32. And they ministered before the dwelling-place of the tabernacle of the congregation with singing, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem: and *then* they waited on their office according to their order. 33. And these *are* they that waited with their children: Of the sons of the Kohathites; Heman a singer, the son of Joel, the son of Shemuel, 34. The son of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Eliel, the son of Toah, 35. The son of Zuph, the son of Elkanah, the son of Mahath, the son of Amasai, 36. The son of Elkanah, the son of Joel, the son of Azariah, the son of Zephaniah, 37. The son of Tahath, the son of Assir, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, 38. The son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel. 39. And his brother Asaph, (who stood on his right hand, *even* Asaph the son of Berachiah, the son of Shimea, 40. The son of Michael, the son of Baaseiah, the son of Matethiah, 41. The son of Ethni, the son of Zerah, the son of Adaiah, 42. The son of Ethan, the son of Zimmah, the son of Shimei, 43. The son of Jahath, the son of Gershon, the son of Levi. 44. And their brethren the sons of Merari *stood* on the left hand: Ethan the son of Kishi, the son of Abdi, the son of Malluch, 45. The son of Hashabiah, the son of Amaziah, the son of Hilkiah, 46. The son of Amzi, the son of Bani, the son of Shamer, 47. The son of Mahli, the son of Mushi, the son of Merari, the son of Levi. 48. Their brethren also the Levites *were* appointed unto all manner of service of the tabernacle of the house of God. 49. But Aaron and his sons offered upon the altar of the burnt-offering, and on the altar of incense, *and were appointed* for all the work of the *place* most holy, and to make an atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded. 50. And these *are* the sons of Aaron; Eleazar his son, Phinehas his son, Abishua his son, 51. Bukki his son, Uzzi his son, Zerahiah his son, 52. Meraioth his son, Amariah his son, Ahitub his son, 53. Zadok his son, Ahimaaz his son.

When the Levites were first ordained in the wilderness, much of the work then appointed them lay in carrying, and taking care of, the tabernacle and the utensils of it, while they were in their march through the wilderness. In David's time their number was increased; and, though the greater part of them were dispersed all the nation over, to teach the people the good knowledge of the

Lord, yet, of those that attended the house of God, there was not constant work for them all; and therefore David, by special commission and direction from God, new-modelled the Levites, as we shall find in the latter part of this book. Here we are told what the work was which he assigned them.

1. *Singing-work*, v. 31. David was raised up on high to be the sweet psalmist of Israel, (2 Sam. 23. 1.) not only to pen psalms, but to appoint the singing of them in the house of the Lord; (not so much because he was musical, as because he was devout;) and this he did *after that the ark had rest*. While that was in captivity, obscure, and unsettled, the harps were hung upon the willow-trees: singing was then thought unseasonable; (when the bridegroom is taken away, they shall fast;) but, the harps being resumed, and the songs revived, at the bringing up of the ark, they were continued afterward; for we should rejoice as much in the prolonging of our spiritual privileges as in the restoring of them. When the service of the ark was superseded by its rest, they had other work put out for them, (for Levites should never be idle,) and were employed in the service of song. Thus, when the people of God come to the rest which remains for them above, they shall take leave of all their burthens, and be employed in everlasting songs. These singers kept up that service in the tabernacle till the temple was built, and then they *waited on their office* there, v. 32. When they came to that stately magnificent house, they kept as close, both to their office and to their order, as they had done in the tabernacle. It is pity that the preference of the Levites should ever make them remiss in their business.

We have here an account of the three great masters who were employed in the service of the sacred song, with their respective families; for they *waited with their children*, that is, such as descended from them, or were allied to them, v. 33. Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were the three that were appointed to this service, one of each of the three houses of the Levites, that there might be an equality in the distribution of this work and honour, and each might know his post; such an admirable order was there in this quire-service.

1. Of the house of Kohath, was Heman with his family, (v. 33.) a man of a sorrowful spirit, if it be the same Heman that penned the 88th psalm, and yet a singer. He was the grandson of Samuel the prophet, the son of Joel, of whom it is said that *he walked not in the ways of Samuel*; (1 Sam. 8. 2, 3.) but, it seems, though the son did not, the grandson did. Thus does the blessing entailed on the seed of the upright sometimes pass over one generation, and fasten upon the next. And this Heman, though the grandson of that mighty prince, did not think it below him to be a precentor in the house of God. David himself was willing to have been a door-keeper. Rather we may look upon this preference of the grandson in the church as a recompence for the humble modest resignation which the grandfather made of his authority in the state. Many such ways God has of making up his people's losses, and balancing their disgraces. Perhaps David, in making Heman the chief, had some respect to his old friend Samuel.

2. Of the house of Gershon, was Asaph, called *his brother*, because in the same office, and of the same tribe, though of another family. He was posted on Heman's right hand in the quire, v. 39. Several of the psalms bear his name, either penned by him, or tuned by him, as the chief musician. It is plain that he was the penman of some psalms; for we read of those that praised the Lord in the words of David and of Asaph; for he was a seer as well as a singer, 2 Chron. 29. 30. His pedigree is run up here, through names utterly unknown, as high as Levi, v. 39. . 43.

3. Of the house of Merari, was Ethan, (v. 44.) who was appointed to Heman's left hand. His pedigree is also run up to Levi, v. 47. If these were the Heman and Ethan that penned the 88th and 89th psalms, there appears no reason here why they should be called *Ezrahites*, (see the titles of those psalms,) as there does why those should be called so who are mentioned *ch.* 2. 6. and who were the sons of Zerah.

11. There was *serving-work*, abundance of service to be done *in the tabernacle of the house of God*, (v. 48.) to provide water and fuel;

to wash and sweep, and carry out ashes; to kill and slay, and boil the sacrifices; and to all such services there were Levites appointed, those of other families, or perhaps those that were not fit to be singers, that had either no good voice, or no good ear. *As every one has received the gift, so let him minister.* They that could not sing, must not therefore be laid aside as good for nothing; though they were not fit for that service, there was other service they might be useful in.

III. There was *sacrifice-work*, and that was to be done by the priests only, v. 49. They only were to sprinkle the blood, and burn the incense; as for *the work of the place most holy*, that was to be done by the high priest only. Each had his work, and they both needed one another, and both helped one another in it. Concerning the work of the priests, we are here told, 1. What was the end they were to have in their eye; they were to *make an atonement for Israel*, to mediate between the people and God; not to magnify and enrich themselves, but to serve the public. They were *ordained for men*. 2. What was the rule they were to have in their eye; they presided in God's house, yet must do as they were bidden, according to all that God commanded. That law the highest are subject to.

54. Now these *are* their dwelling-places throughout their castles in their coasts, of the sons of Aaron, of the families of the Kohathites; for their's was the lot. 55. And they gave them Hebron in the land of Judah, and the suburbs thereof round about it. 56. But the fields of the city, and the villages thereof, they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh. 57. And to the sons of Aaron they gave the cities of Judah, *namely*, Hebron, *the city* of refuge, and Libnah with her suburbs, and Jattir, and Eshtimoth, with their suburbs, 58. And Hilen with her suburbs, Debir with her suburbs, 59. And Ashan with her suburbs, and Beth-shemesh with her suburbs: 60. And out of the tribe of Benjamin; Geba with her suburbs, and Alemeth with her suburbs, and Anathoth with her suburbs. All their cities throughout their families *were* thirteen cities. 61. And unto the sons of Kohath, *which were* left of the family of that tribe, *were cities given* out of the half-tribe, *namely*, out of the half-tribe of Manasseh, by lot, ten cities. 62. And to the sons of Gershom throughout their families out of the tribe of Issachar, and out of the tribe of Asher, and out of the tribe of Naphtali, and out of the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, thirteen cities. 63. Unto the sons of Merari *were given* by lot, throughout their families, out of the tribe of Reuben, and out of the tribe of Gad, and out of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities. 64. And the children of Israel gave to the Levites *these* cities with their suburbs. 65. And they gave by lot out of the tribe of the children of Judah, and out of the tribe of the children of Simeon, and out of the tribe of the children of Benjamin, these cities, which are called by *their* names. 66. And *the residue* of the families of the sons of Kohath had cities of their coasts out of the tribe of Ephraim. 67. And they gave unto them, *of* the cities of refuge, Shechem in mount Ephraim with her suburbs; *they gave* also Gezer with her

suburbs, 68. And Jokmeam with her suburbs, and Beth-horon with her suburbs, 69. And Aijalon with her suburbs, and Gath-rimmon with her suburbs: 70. And out of the half-tribe of Manasseh; Aner with her suburbs, and Bileam with her suburbs, for the family of the remnant of the sons of Kohath. 71. Unto the sons of Gershom *were given* out of the family of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Golan in Bashan with her suburbs, and Ashtaroth with her suburbs: 72. And out of the tribe of Issachar; Kedesh with her suburbs, Daberath with her suburbs, 73. And Ramoth with her suburbs, and Anem with her suburbs: 74. And out of the tribe of Asher; Mashal with her suburbs, and Abdon with her suburbs, 75. And Hukok with her suburbs, and Rehob with her suburbs: 76. And out of the tribe of Naphtali; Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs, and Hammon with her suburbs, and Kirjathaim with her suburbs. 77. Unto the rest of the children of Merari *were given* out of the tribe of Zebulun, Rimmon with her suburbs, Tabor with her suburbs: 78. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho, on the east side of Jordan, *were given them* out of the tribe of Reuben, Bezer in the wilderness with her suburbs, and Jahzah with her suburbs. 79. Kedemoth also with her suburbs, and Mephaath with her suburbs: 80. And out of the tribe of Gad; Ramoth in Gilead with her suburbs, and Mahanaim with her suburbs, 81. And Heshbon with her suburbs, and Jazer with her suburbs.

We have here an account of the Levites' cities; they are here called their *castles*, (v. 54.) not only because walled and fortified, and well guarded by the country, (for it is the interest of every nation to protect its ministers,) but because they and their possessions were, in a particular manner, the care of the Divine Providence: as God was their Portion, so God was their Protection; and a cottage will be a castle to those that abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

This account is much the same with that which we had, Josh. 21. We need not be critical in comparing them; (What good will it do us?) nor will it do any hurt to the credit of the holy scripture, if the names of some of the places be not just the same here that they were there. We know it is common for cities to have several names; *Sarum* and *Salisbury*, *Salop* and *Shrewsbury*, are more unlike than *Hilen* (v. 58.) and *Holon*, (Josh. 21. 15.) *Ashan* (v. 59.) and *Ain*, (Josh. 21. 16.) *Alemeth* (v. 60.) and *Almon*, Josh. 21. 18. And time changes names.

We are only to observe, that, in this appointment of cities for the Levites, God took care, 1. For the accomplishment of dying Jacob's prediction concerning this tribe, that it should be *scattered in Israel*, Gen. 49. 7. 2. For the diffusing of the knowledge of himself and his law to all parts of the land of Israel; every tribe had Levites' cities in it; and so every room was furnished with a candle, so that none could be ignorant of his duty, but it was either his own fault, or the Levites'. 3. For a comfortable maintenance for those that ministered in holy things. Beside their tithes and offerings, they had glebe-lands, and cities of their own to dwell in. Some of the most considerable cities of Israel fell to the Levites' lot. Every tribe had benefit by the Levites; and therefore every tribe must contribute to their support. Let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him that teacheth, and do it cheerfully.

CHAP. VII.

In this chapter, we have some account of the genealogies, I. Of Issachar, v. 1. 5. II. Of Benjamin, v. 6. 12. III. Of Naphtali, v. 13. IV. Of Manasseh, v. 11. 19. V. Of Ephraim, v. 20. 29. VI. Of Asher, v. 30. 40. Here is no account either of Zebulun or Dan. Why they only should be omitted, we can assign no reason; only it is the disgrace of the tribe of Dan, that idolatry began in that colony of the Danites which fixed in Laish, and called it Dan, and there one of the golden calves was set up by Jeroboam. Dan is omitted, Rev. 7.

1. **N**OW the sons of Issachar were, Tola, and Puah, Jashub, and Shimrom, four. 2. And the sons of Tola: Uzzi, and Rephaiah, and Jeriel, and Jahmai, and Jibsam, and Shemuel, heads of their father's house, *to wit*, of Tola; *they were* valiant men of might in their generations; whose number *was* in the days of David two and twenty thousand and six hundred. 3. And the sons of Uzzi: Izrahiah; and the sons of Izrahiah: Michael, and Obadiah, and Joel, Ishiah, five: all of them chief men. 4. And with them, by their generations, after the house of their fathers, *were* bands of soldiers for war, six and thirty thousand *men*: for they had many wives and sons. 5. And their brethren, among all the families of Issachar, *were* valiant men of might, reckoned in all by their genealogies fourscore and seven thousand. 6. *The sons* of Benjamin; Bela, and Becher, and Jediael, three. 7. And the sons of Bela: Ezbon, and Uzzi, and Uzziel, and Jerimoth, and Iri, five; heads of the house of *their* fathers, mighty men of valour; and were reckoned by their genealogies twenty and two thousand and thirty and four. 8. And the sons of Becher: Zemira, and Joash, and Eliezer, and Elioenai, and Omri, and Jerimoth, and Abiah, and Anathoth, and Alameth. All these *are* the sons of Becher. 9. And the number of them, after their genealogy by their generations, heads of the house of their fathers, mighty men of valour, *was* twenty thousand and two hundred. 10. The sons also of Jediael; Bilhan: and the sons of Bilhan; Jeush, and Benjamin, and Ehud, and Chenaanah, and Zethan, and Tharshish, and Abishahar. 11. All these the sons of Jediael, by the heads of their fathers, mighty men of valour, *were* seventeen thousand and two hundred *soldiers*, fit to go out for war *and* battle. 12. Shuppim also, and Huppim, the children of Ir, *and* Hushim, the sons of Aher. 13. The sons of Naphtali; Jahziel, and Guni, and Gezer, and Shallum, the sons of Bilhah. 14. The sons of Manasseh; Ashriel, whom she bare: (*but* his concubine the Aramitess bare Machir the father of Gilead: 15. And Machir took to wife *the sister* of Huppim and Shuppim, whose sister's name *was* Maachab:) and the name of the second *was* Zelophehad: and Zelophehad had daughters. 16. And Maachab the wife of Machir bare a son,

and she called his name Peresh; and the name of his brother *was* Sheresh: and his sons *were* Ulam and Rakem. 17. And the sons of Ulam; Bedan. These *were* the sons of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh. 18. And his sister Ham-moleketh bare Ishod, and Abiezer, and Mahalah. 19. And the sons of Shemida were, Abian, and Shechem, and Likhi, and Aniam.

We have here a short view given us,

1. Of the tribe of Issachar, whom Jacob had compared to a *strong ass, couching between two burthens*; (Gen. 49. 14.) an industrious tribe, that minded their country-business very close, and *rejoiced in their tents*, Dent. 33. 18. And here it appears, (1.) That they were a numerous tribe; for they had many wives: so fruitful their country was, that they saw no danger of overstocking the pasture; and so ingenious the people were, that they could find work for all hands. Let no people complain of their numbers, provided they suffer none to be idle. (2.) That they were a valiant tribe; *men of might*, (v. 2, 5.) *chief men*, v. 3. They that were inured to labour and business were, of all others, the fittest to serve their country when there was occasion. The number of the respective families, as taken in the days of David, is here set down, amounting in the whole to above 145,000 men fit for war. The account, some think, was taken when Joab numbered the people, 2 Sam. 24. But I rather think it refers to some other computation that was made perhaps among themselves; because it is said, (1 Chron. 27. 24.) that that account was not inserted into the chronicles of king David, it having offended God.

2. Of the tribe of Benjamin. Some account is given of this tribe here, but a much larger in the next chapter. The militia of this tribe scarcely reached to 60,000; but they are said to be *mighty men of valour*, v. 7, 9, 11. *Benjamin shall raven as a wolf*, Gen. 49. 27. It was the honour of this tribe that it produced Saul the first king, and more its honour, that it adhered to the rightful kings of the house of David, when the other tribes revolted.

Here is mention (v. 12.) of Hushim the sons of Aher. The sons of Dan are said to be *Hushim*, (Gen. 46. 23.) and therefore some read Aher appellatively, *Hushim the sons of another*, that is, another of Jacob's sons; or the sons of a stranger, which Israelites should not be; but such the Danites were, when they set up Micah's graven and molten image among them.

3. Of the tribe of Naphtali, v. 13. The first fathers only of that tribe are named, the very same that we find, Gen. 46. 24. only that *Shillem* there, is *Shallum* here. None of their descendants are named, perhaps because their genealogies were lost.

4. Of the tribe of Manasseh, that part of it which was seated within Jordan; for of the other part we had some account before, ch. 5. 23, &c. Of this tribe, observe, (1.) That one of them married an Aramitess, that is, a Syrian, v. 14. This was during their bondage in Egypt, so early did they begin to mingle with the nations. (2.) That though the father married a Syrian, Machir, the son of that marriage, perhaps, seeing the inconvenience of it in his father's house, took to wife a daughter of Benjamin, v. 15. It is good for the children to take warning by their father's mistakes, and not stumble at the same stone. (3.) Here is mention of *Bedan*, (v. 17.) who, perhaps, is the same with that Bedan, who is mentioned as one of Israel's deliverers, 1 Sam. 12. 11. Jair, perhaps, who was of Manasseh, (Judg. 10. 3.) was the man.

20. And the sons of Ephraim; Shuthelah, and Bered his son, and Tahath his son, and Eladah his son, and Tahath his son, 21. And Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son, and Ezer, and Elead, whom the men of Gath *that were* born in *that* land slew, because they came down to take away their

cattle. 22. And Ephraim their father mourned many days, and his brethren came to comfort him. 23. And when he went in to his wife, she conceived, and bare a son, and he called his name Beriah, because it went evil with his house. 24. (And his daughter *was* Sherah, who built Beth-horon the nether, and the upper, and Uzzen-she-rah.) 25. And Repliah *was* his son, also Resheph, and Telah his son, and Tahan his son, 26. Laadan his son, Ammihud his son, Elishania his son, 27. Nen his son, Jehoshua his son. 28. And their possessions and habitations *were*, Beth-el and the towns thereof, and eastward Naaran, and westward Gezer, with the towns thereof; Shechem also and the towns thereof, unto Gaza and the towns thereof: 29. And by the borders of the children of Manasseh, Beth-shean and her towns, Taanach and her towns, Megiddo and her towns, Dor and her towns. In these dwelt the children of Joseph the son of Israel. 30. The sons of Asher; Imnah, and Isuah, and Ishuai, and Beriah, and Serah their sister. 31. And the sons of Beriah; Heber, and Malchiel, who *is* the father of Birzavith. 32. And Heber begat Japhlet, and Shomer, and Hotham, and Shua their sister. 33. And the sons of Japhlet; Pasach, and Bimhal, and Ashvath: these *are* the children of Japhlet. 34. And the sons of Shamer; Ahi, and Rohgah, Jehubbah, and Aram. 35. And the sons of his brother Helem; Zophah, and Imna, and Shelesh, and Amal. 36. The sons of Zophah; Suah, and Harnepher, and Shual, and Beri, and Imrah, 37. Bezer, and Hod, and Shamma, and Shilshah, and Ithran, and Beera. 38. And the sons of Jether; Jephunneh, and Pispah, and Ara. 39. And the sons of Ulla; Arah, and Haniel, and Rezia. 40. All these *were* the children of Asher, heads of *their* father's house, choice and mighty men of valour, chief of the princes. And the number throughout the genealogy of them that were apt to the war *and* to battle *was* twenty and six thousand men.

We have here an account,

I. Of the tribe of Ephraim. Great things we read of that tribe, when it came to maturity. Here we have an account of the disasters of its infancy, while it was in Egypt, as it should seem; for Ephraim himself was alive when those things were done; which yet is hard to imagine, if it were, as is here computed, seven generations off. Therefore I am apt to think that either it was another Ephraim, or that those who were slain were the immediate sons of that Ephraim that was the son of Joseph. In this passage, which is here only related, we have,

I. The great breach that was made upon the family of Ephraim. The men of Gath, Philistines, giants, slew many of the sons of that family, *because they came down to take away their cattle*, v. 21. It is uncertain who were the aggressors here. (1.) Some make the men of Gath the aggressors, men *born in the land of Egypt*, but now resident in Gath, that they came down into the land of Goshen, to drive away the Ephraimites' cattle, and slew

the owners, because they stood up in the defence of them. Many a man's life has been exposed and betrayed by his wealth; so far is it from being a strong city. (2.) Others think that the Ephraimites made a descent upon the men of Gath to plunder them, presuming that the time was come when they should be put in possession of Canaan; but they paid dear for their rashness and precipitation. They that will not wait God's time, cannot expect God's blessing. I rather think that the men of Gath came down upon the Ephraimites; because the Israelites in Egypt were shepherds, not soldiers; abounded in cattle of their own, and therefore were not likely to venture their lives for their neighbours' cattle: and the words may be read, *The men of Gath slew them, for they came down to take away their cattle*. Zabad the son of Ephraim, and Shuthelah, and Ezer, and Elead, his grand-children, were, as Dr. Lightfoot thinks, the men that were slain. Jacob had foretold that the seed of Ephraim should become a *multitude of nations*, (Gen. 48. 19.) and yet that plant is thus nipped in the bud. God's providences often seem to contradict his promises; but when they do so, they really magnify the promise, and make the performance of it, notwithstanding, so much the more illustrious. The Ephraimites were the posterity of Joseph, and yet his power could not protect them, though some think he was yet living. The sword devours one as well as another.

2. The great grief which oppressed the father of the family, hereupon: *Ephraim mourned many days*. Nothing brings the aged to the grave with more sorrow, than their following the young that descend from them to the grave first; especially if in blood. It is often the burthen of those that live to be old, that they see those go before them, of whom they said, *These same shall comfort us*. It was a brotherly, friendly, office, which his brethren did, when *they came to comfort him* under this great affliction, to express their sympathy with him, and concern for him, and to suggest that to him which would support and quiet him under this sad providence. Probably, they reminded him of the promise of increase with which Jacob had blessed him, when he laid his right hand upon his head. Although his house was not so with God as he hoped, but a house of mourning, a shattered family, yet that promise was sure, 2 Sam. 23. 5.

3. The repair of this breach, in some measure, by the addition of another son to his family in his old age, (v. 23.) like Seth, *another seed instead of that of Abel whom Cain slew*, Gen. 4. 25. When God thus restores comfort to his mourners, *makes glad according to the days wherein he afflicted*, setting the mercies over against the crosses, we ought therein to take notice of the kindness and tenderness of Divine Providence; it is as if *it repented God concerning his servants*, Ps. 90. 13, 15. Yet, joy that a man was born into his family could not make him forget his grief; for he gives a melancholy name to this son, *Beriah, in trouble*; for he was born when the family was in mourning, when *it went evil with his house*. It is good to have in remembrance the affliction and the misery, the wormwood and the gall, that our souls may be *humbled within us*, Lam. 3. 19. What name more proper for *man that is born of a woman*, than *Beriah*, because born into a troublesome world? It is added, as a further honour to the house of Ephraim, (1.) That a daughter of that tribe, *Sherah* by name, at the time of Israel's settling in Canaan, built some cities, either at her own charge, or by her own care; one of them bare her name, *Uzzen-she-rah*, v. 24. A virtuous woman may be as great an honour and blessing to a family, as a mighty man. (2.) That a son of that tribe was employed in the conquest of Canaan, *Joshua the son of Nun*, v. 27. In this also the breach made on Ephraim's family was further repaired; and perhaps the resentments of this injury, formerly done by the Canaanites to the Ephraimites, might make him more vigorous in the war.

II. Of the tribe of Asher. Some men of note of that tribe are here named. Their militia was not numerous, in comparison with some other tribes, only 26,000 men in all; but their princes were *choice and mighty men of valour, chief of the princes*; (v. 40.) and perhaps it was their wisdom, that they coveted not to *make*

named, and many more numbered, who were *chief of the fathers*, (v. 9.) who ought to be remembered with honour, as Israelites indeed.

2. The priests, v. 10. It was their praise, that they came with the first. Who should lead in a good work, if the priests, the Lord's ministers, do not? It was the people's praise, that they would not come without them; for who but the priests should keep knowledge? Who but the priests should bless them in the name of the Lord? (1.) It is said of one of them, that he was *the ruler of the house of God*, v. 11. Not the chief ruler, for Joshua was then the high priest; but the sagan, the next under him, his deputy, who, perhaps, applied himself more to the business than the high priest himself. In the house of God, it is requisite that there be rulers, not to make new laws, but to take care that the laws of God be duly observed by priests as well as people. (2.) It is said of many of them, that they were *very able men for the service of the house of God*, v. 13. In the house of God, there is service to be done, constant service; and it is well for the church, when those are employed in that service who are able for it; *able ministers of the New Testament*, 2 Cor. 3. 6. The service of the temple was such as required, at all times, especially in this critical juncture, when they were newly come out of Babylon, great courage and vigour of mind, as well as strength of body; and therefore they are praised as *mighty men of valour*.

14. And of the Levites; Shemaiah the son of Hashub, the son of Azrikam, the son Hashabiah, of the sons of Merari; 15. And Bakbakkar, Heresh, and Galal, and Mattaniah the son of Micah, the son of Zichri, the son of Asaph; 16. And Obadiah the son of Shemaiah, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun; and Berechiah the son of Asa, the son of Elkanah, that dwelt in the villages of the Netophathites. 17. And the porters were, Shallum, and Akkub, and Talmon, and Ahiman, and their brethren: Shallum *was* the chief; 18. Who hitherto *waited* in the king's gate eastward: They *were* porters in the companies of the children of Levi. 19. And Shallum the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his brethren, of the house of his father, the Korahites *were* over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle: and their fathers, *being* over the host of the LORD, *were* keepers of the entry. 20. And Phineas, the son of Eleazar, was the ruler over them in time past, *and* the LORD *was* with him. 21. And Zechariah, the son of Meshelemiah, *was* porter of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 22. All these *which were* chosen to be porters in the gates *were* two hundred and twelve. These were reckoned by their genealogy in their villages, whom David and Samuel the seer did ordain in their set office. 23. So they and their children *had* the oversight of the gates of the house of the LORD, *namely*, the house of the tabernacle, by wards. 24. In four quarters were the porters, toward the east, west, north, and south. 25. And their brethren, *which were* in their villages, *were* to come after seven days, from time to time, with them. 26. For these Levites, the four chief porters,

were in *their* set office, and were over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God. 27. And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge *was* upon them, and the opening thereof every morning *pertained* to them. 28. And *certain* of them had the charge of the ministering vessels, that they should bring them in and out by tale. 29. *Some* of them also *were* appointed to oversee the vessels, and all the instruments of the sanctuary, and the fine flour and the wine, and the oil, and the frankincense, and the spices. 30. And *some* of the sons of the priests made the ointment of the spices. 31. And Mattithiah, *one* of the Levites, who *was* the first-born of Shallum, the Korahite, had the set office over the things that were made in the pans. 32. And *other* of their brethren, of the sons of the Kohathites, *were* over the shew-bread, to prepare it every sabbath. 33. And these *are* the singers, chief of the fathers of the Levites, *who, remaining* in the chambers, *were* free: for they were employed in *that* work day and night. 34. These chief fathers of the Levites *were* chief throughout their generations; these dwelt at Jerusalem.

We have here a further account of the good posture which the affairs of religion were put into, immediately upon their return out of Babylon. They had smarted for their former *neglect* of ordinances, and under the late *want* of ordinances; both these considerations made them very zealous and forward in setting up the worship of God among them; and so they began their work at the right end. Instances hereof we have here.

1. Before the house of the Lord was built, they had the house of the tabernacle; a plain and moveable tent, which they made use of in the mean time. They that cannot yet reach to have a temple, must not be without a tabernacle; but be thankful for that, and make the best of it. Never let God's work be left undone, for want of a place to do it in.

2. In allotting to the priests and Levites their respective employments, they had an eye to the model that was drawn up by David, and Samuel the seer, v. 22. Samuel, in his time, had drawn the scheme of it, and laid the foundation, though the ark was then in obscurity; and David afterward finished it; both by immediate direction from God. Or David, as soon as he was anointed, had this matter in his mind, and consulted Samuel about it, though he was then in his troubles, and the plan was formed in concert between them. This, perhaps, had been little regarded for many ages; but now, after a long interruption, it is revived. In dividing the work, they observed these ancient land-marks.

3. The most of them dwelt at Jerusalem; (v. 34.) yet there were some that dwelt in the villages, (v. 16, 22.) because, it may be, there was not yet room for them in Jerusalem; but, however, they were employed in the service of the tabernacle, (v. 25.) *they were to come after seven days from time to time*. They had their week's attendance in their turns.

4. Many of the Levites were employed as porters at the gates of the house of God; four chief porters, (v. 26.) and, under them, to the number of 212, v. 22. They had the oversight of the *gates*, (v. 23.) were keepers of the *thresholds*, (as it is in the margin, v. 19.) and keepers of the *entry*. This seemed a mean office; and yet David would rather have it, than *dwell in the tents of wickedness*, Ps. 84. 10. Their office was, (1.) To open the doors of God's house every morning, (v. 27.) and shut them at night. (2.) To keep off the unclean, and hinder those from thrusting in that were forbidden by the law. (3.) To direct and introduce into the courts of the Lord, those that came thither to worship, and to shew them

whither to go, and what to do, that they might not incur punishment. This required care, and diligence, and constant attendance. Ministers have work to do of this kind.

5. Here is one Phinehas, a son of Eleazar, that is said to be a ruler over them in time past; (v. 20.) not the famous high priest of that name, but, (as is supposed) an eminent Levite, of whom it is here said, that the Lord was with him; or, as the Chaldee reads it, the Word of the Lord was his helper; the Eternal Word, who is Jehovah the mighty one, on whom help is laid.

6. It is said of some of them, that because the charge was upon them, they lodged round about the house of God, v. 27. It is good for ministers to be near their work, that they may give themselves wholly to it. The Levites pitched about the tabernacle, when they marched through the wilderness. Then, they were porters in one sense, bearing the burthens of the sanctuary; now, porters in another sense, attending the gates and the doors—in both instances keeping the charge of the sanctuary.

7. Every one knew his charge. Some were intrusted with the plate, the ministering vessels, to bring them in and out by tale; (v. 28.) others were appointed to prepare the fine flour, wine, oil, &c.; (v. 29.) others, that were priests, made up the holy anointing oil; (v. 30.) others took care of the meat-offerings; (v. 31.) others of the shew-bread, v. 32. As in other great houses, so in God's house, the work is likely to be done well, when every one knows the duty of his place, and makes a business of it. God is the God of order: but that which is every body's work will be no body's work.

8. The singers were employed in that work, day and night, v. 33. They were the chief fathers of the Levites, that made a business of it; not mean singing-men, that made a trade of it. They remained in the chambers of the temple, that they might closely and constantly attend it; and were therefore discharged from all other services. It should seem, some companies were continually singing, at least, at stated hours, both day and night. Thus was God continually praised, as it is fit he should be, who is continually doing good. Thus devout people might, at any hour, have assistance in their devotion. Thus was that temple a figure of the heavenly one, where they rest not, day nor night, from praising God, Rev. 4. 8. *Blessed are they that dwell in thine house, they will be still praising thee.*

35. And in Gibeon dwelt the father of Gibeon, Jehiel, whose wife's name was Maachah: 36. And his first-born son Abdon, then Zur, and Kish, and Baal, and Ner, and Nadab, 37. And Gedor, and Abio, and Zechariah, and Mikloth. 38. And Mikloth begat Shimeam: and they also dwelt with their brethren at Jerusalem, over against their brethren. 39. And Ner begat Kish; and Kish begat Saul; and Saul begat Jonathan, and Malchi-shua, and Abinadab, and Esh-baal. 40. And the son of Jonathan was Merib-baal: and Merib-baal begat Micah. 41. And the sons of Micah were, Pithon, and Melech, and Tahrea, and Ahaz. 42. And Ahaz begat Jarah; and Jarah begat Alemeth, and Azmaveth, and Zimri; and Zimri begat Moza; 43. And Moza begat Binea; and Rephaiah his son, Eleasah his son, Azel his son. 44. And Azel had six sons, whose names are these, Azrikam, Bocheru, and Ishmael, and Sheariah, and Obadiah, and Hanan. These were the sons of Azel.

These verses are the very same with *ch.* 8. 29..33. giving an account of the ancestors of Saul, and the posterity of Jonathan. There, it is the conclusion of the genealogy of Benjamin; here, it

is an introduction to the story of Saul. We take the repetition as we find it; but if we admit that there are in the original, especially in these books, some errors of the transcribers, I should be tempted to think this repetition arose from a blunder. Some one, in copying out these genealogies, having written those words, v. 34. (*These dwelt in Jerusalem*,) cast his eye on the same words, *ch.* 8. 28. (*These dwelt in Jerusalem*,) and so went on with what followed there; and, when he perceived his mistake, was loath to make a blot in his book, and so let it stand. We have a rule in our law, *Redundans non nocet—Redundancies do no harm.*

CHAP. X.

The design of Ezra, in these books of the Chronicles, was to preserve the records of the house of David, which, though much sunk and lessened, in a common eye, by the captivity, yet grew more and more illustrious in the eyes of those that lived by faith, by the nearer approach of the Son of David. And therefore he repeats, not the history of Saul's reign, but only of his death, by which way was made for David to the throne. In this chapter, we have, I. The fatal rout which the Philistines gave to Saul's army, and the fatal stroke which he gave himself, v. 1..7. II. The Philistines' triumph therein, v. 8..10. III. The respect which the men of Jabesh-gilead shewed the royal corpse, v. 11, 12. IV. The reason of Saul's rejection, v. 13, 14.

1. **N**OW the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. 2. And the Philistines followed hard after Saul, and after his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. 3. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was wounded of the archers. 4. Then said Saul to his armour-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumscribed come and abuse me. But his armour-bearer would not; for he was sore afraid. So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. 5. And when his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise on the sword, and died. 6. So Saul died, and his three sons, and all his house died together. 7. And when all the men of Israel that were in the valley saw that they fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, then they forsook their cities, and fled: and the Philistines came and dwelt in them.

This account of Saul's death is the same with that which we had, 1 Sam. 31. 1, &c. We need not repeat the exposition of it. Only let us observe,

1. Princes sin, and the people suffer for it. It was a bad time with Israel, when they fled before the Philistines, and fell down slain; (v. 1.) when they quitted their cities, and the Philistines came, and dwelt in them, v. 7. We do not find that they were, at this time, guilty of idolatry, as they had been before, in the days of the judges, and were after, in the days of the kings. Samuel had reformed them, and they were reformed; and yet they are thus given to the spoil, and to the robbers. No doubt, there was enough in them to deserve it; but that which Divine Justice had chiefly an eye to, was, the sin of Saul. Note, Princes and great men should, in a special manner, take heed of provoking God's wrath; for if they kindle that fire, they know not how many may be consumed by it for their sakes.

2. Parents sin, and the children suffer for it. When the measure of Saul's iniquity was full, and his day came to fall, (which

David foresaw, 1 Sam. 26. 10.) he not only descended into battle, and perished himself, but his sons (all but Ish-bosheth) perished with him, and Jonathan among the rest, that gracious, generous, man; for *all things come alike to all*. Thus was the iniquity of the fathers visited upon the children; and they fell as parts of the condemned father. Note, They that love their seed must leave their sins, lest they perish, not alone in their iniquity, but bring ruin on their families with themselves, or entail a curse upon them when they are gone.

3. Sinners sin, and, at length, suffer for it themselves, though they be long reprieved; for, though sentence be not executed speedily, it will be executed. It was so upon Saul; and the manner of his fall was such, as, in divers particulars, answered to his sin. (1.) He had thrown a javelin more than once at David, and missed him; but the archers hit him, and he was wounded of the archers. (2.) He had commanded Doeg to slay the priests of the Lord; and now, in despair, he commands his armour-bearer to *draw his sword, and thrust him through*. (3.) Him that had disobeyed the command of God, in not destroying the Amalekites, his armour-bearer disobeys, in not destroying him. (4.) He that was the murderer of the priests, is justly left to himself to be his own murderer; and his family is cut off who cut off the city of the priests. See, and say, *The Lord is righteous*.

8. And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his sons fallen in mount Gilboa. 9. And when they had stripped him, they took his head, and his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to carry tidings unto their idols, and to the people. 10. And they put his armour in the house of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon. 11. And when all Jabesh-gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, 12. They arose, all the valiant men, and took away the body of Saul, and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh, and buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven days. 13. So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, *even* against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking *counsel* of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; 14. And inquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.

Here, 1. From the triumph of the Philistines over the body of Saul, we may learn, (1.) That the greater dignity men are advanced to, the greater disgrace they are in danger of falling into. Saul's dead body, because he was a king, was abused more than any other of the slain. Advancement makes men a mark for malice. (2.) That if we give not to God the glory of our successes, even the Philistines will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us; for, when they had obtained a victory over Saul, they *sent tidings to their idols*. Poor idols, that knew not what was done a few miles off, till the tidings were brought them; nor then neither! They also put Saul's armour in the house of their gods, v. 10. Shall Dagon have so great a room in their triumphs, and the true and living God be forgotten in ours?

2. From the triumph of the men of Jabesh-gilead in the rescue of the bodies of Saul and his sons, we learn that there is a respect owing to the remains of the deceased, especially of dead princes. We are *not* to inquire concerning the eternal state; that must be left to God; but we must treat the dead body, as those who

remember it has been united to an immortal soul, and must be so again.

3. From the triumphs of divine justice in the ruin of Saul, we may learn, (1.) That the sin of sinners will certainly find them out, sooner or later; *Saul died for his transgression*. (2.) That no man's greatness can exempt him from the judgment of God. (3.) Disobedience is a killing thing. Saul died for *not keeping the word of the Lord*, by which he was ordered to destroy the Amalekites. (4.) Consulting with witches is a sin that fills the measure of iniquity as soon as any thing. Saul inquired of one that had a familiar spirit, and inquired not of the Lord, therefore he slew him, v. 13. 14. Saul slew himself, and yet it is said, *God slew him*. What is done by wicked hands, is yet done by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. They that abandon themselves to the Devil, shall be abandoned to him; so shall their doom be. It is said, 1 Sam. 28. 6. Saul did inquire of the Lord, and he answered him not: but here it is said, *Saul did not inquire of God*; for he did not till he was brought to the last extremity; and then it was too late.

CHAP. XI.

In this chapter, is repeated, I. The elevation of David to the throne immediately upon the death of Saul, by common consent, v. 1. 3. II. His gaining the castle of Zion out of the hands of the Jebusites, v. 4. 9. III. The catalogue of his worthies, and the great men of his kingdom, v. 10. 47.

1. **T**HEN all Israel gathered themselves to David unto Hebron, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. 2. And moreover in time past, even when Saul was king, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD thy God said unto thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be ruler over my people Israel. 3. Therefore came all the elders of Israel to the king to Hebron; and David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the LORD; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the LORD by Samuel. 4. And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus, where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land. 5. And the inhabitants of Jebus said to David, Thou shalt not come hither. Nevertheless David took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David. 6. And David said, Whosoever smiteth the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain. So Joab the son of Zeruiah went first up, and was chief. 7. And David dwelt in the castle; therefore they called it the city of David. 8. And he built the city round about, even from Millo round about: and Joab repaired the rest of the city. 9. So David waxed greater and greater: for the LORD of hosts was with him.

David is here brought to the possession,

1. Of the throne of Israel, after he had reigned seven years in Hebron, over Judah only. In consideration of his relation to them, (v. 1.) his former good services, and especially the divine designation, (v. 2.) they anointed him their king; he covenanted to protect them, and they to bear faith and true allegiance to him, v. 3. Observe, (1.) God's counsels will be fulfilled at last, whatever difficulties lie in the way. If God had said, *David shall rule*, it is in vain to oppose it. (2.) Men that have long stood in their

own light, when they have long wearied themselves with their lying vanities, it is to be hoped, will understand the things that belong to their peace, and return to *their own mercies*. (3.) Between prince and people there is an original contract, which both ought religiously to observe. If ever any prince might have claimed an absolute, despotic power, David might, and might as safely as any, have been intrusted with it; and yet he made a covenant with the people, took the coronation-oath, to rule by law.

2. Of the strong-hold of Zion, which was held by the Jebusites till David's time. Whether God had a particular eye upon it as a place fit to make a royal city, or that he had a promise of it from God, it seems that one of his first exploits was to make himself master of that fort; and when he had it, he called it the *city of David*, v. 6. To this, reference is had, Ps. 2. 6, *I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion*. See here what quickens and engages resolution in great undertakings. (1.) Opposition. When the Jebusites set David at defiance, and said, *Thou shalt not come hither*, he resolved to force it, whatever it cost him. (2.) Prospect of preferment. When David proposed to give the general's place to him that would lead the attack upon the castle of Zion, Joab was fired with the proposal, and he *went up first and was chief*. It has been said, "Take away honour out of the soldier's eye, and you cut off the spurs from his heels."

10. These also *are* the chief of the mighty men whom David had, who strengthened themselves with him in his kingdom, *and* with all Israel to make him king, according to the word of the LORD concerning Israel. 11. And this *is* the number of the mighty men whom David had; Jashhobeam an Hachmonite, the chief of the captains: he lifted up his spear against three hundred, slain *by him* at one time. 12. And after him *was* Eleazar the son of Dodo the Aholite, who *was one* of the three mighties. 13. He was with David at Pas-dammim, and there the Philistines were gathered together to battle, where was a parcel of ground full of barley, and the people fled from before the Philistines. 14. And they set themselves in the midst of *that* parcel and delivered it, and slew the Philistines; and the LORD saved *them* by a great deliverance. 15. Now three of the thirty captains went down to the rock to David, into the cave of Adullam, and the host of the Philistines encamped in the valley of Rephaim. 16. And David *was* then in the hold, and the Philistines' garrison *was* then at Beth-lehem. 17. And David longed, and said, O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Beth-lehem, that *is* at the gate! 18. And the three brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Beth-lehem that *was* by the gate, and took *it*, and brought *it* to David: but David would not drink *of* it, but poured it out to the LORD, 19. And said, My God forbid it me, that I should do this thing: shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy? For with *the jeopardy of* their lives they brought it: therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mightiest. 20. And

Abishai the brother of Joab, he was chief of the three; for, lifting up his spear against three hundred, he slew *them*, and had a name among the three. 21. Of the three, he was more honourable than the two, for he was their captain: howbeit, he attained not to the *first* three. 22. Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lion-like men of Moab; also he went down, and slew a lion in a pit, in a snowy day. 23. And he slew an Egyptian, a man of *great* stature, five cubits high, and in the Egyptian's hand *was* a spear like a weaver's beam, and he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. 24. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had a name among the three mighties. 25. Behold, he was honourable among the thirty, but attained not to the *first* three: and David set him over his guard. 26. Also the valiant men of the armies *were*, Asahel the brother of Joab, Elhanan the son of Dodo of Beth-lehem. 27. Shammoth the Harorite, Helez the Pelonite, 28. Ira the son of Ikkeish the Tekoite, Abiezer the Antothite, 29. Sibbecai the Hushathite, Ilai the Aholite, 30. Maharai the Netophathite, Heled the son of Baanah the Netophathite, 31. Ithai the son of Ribai of Gibeah, *that pertained* to the children of Benjamin, Benaiah the Pirathonite, 32. Hurai of the brooks of Gaash, Abiel the Arbathite. 33. Azmaveth the Baharumite, Eliahba the Shaalbonite, 34. The sons of Hashem the Gizonite, Jonathan the son of Shage the Hararite, 35. Abiham the son of Sacar the Hararite, Eliphal the son of Ur, 36. Hephher the Mecherathite, Ahijah the Pelonite. 37. Hezro the Carmelite, Naarai the son of Ezbai, 38. Joel the brother of Nathan, Mibhar the son of Haggeri, 39. Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Berothite, the armour-bearer of Joab the son of Zeruiah, 40. Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite. 41. Uriah the Hittite, Zabad the son of Ahlai, 42. Adina the son of Shiza the Reubenite, a captain of the Reubenites, and thirty with him, 43. Hanan the son of Maachah, and Joshaphat the Mithnite. 44. Uzzia the Ashterathite, Shama and Jehiel the sons of Hothan the Aroerite, 45. Jedaiel the son of Shimri, and Joha his brother the Tizite, 46. Eliel the Mahavite, and Jeribai, and Jashaviah, the sons of Elnaam, and Ithmah the Moabite, 47. Eliel, and Obed, and Jasiel the Mesobaite.

We have here an account of David's Worthies, the great men of his time that served him, and were preferred by him. The first edition of this catalogue we had, 2 Sam. 23. 8, &c. This is much the same, only that those named here, from v. 41. to the end, are added. Observe,

1. The connexion of this catalogue with that which is said concerning David, v. 9. (1.) *David waxed greater and greater*, and these were his mighty men. Much of the strength and honour of great men is borrowed from their servants, and depends upon them, which cannot but somewhat diminish pomp and power, in the opinion of those that are wise. David is great, because he has great men about him; take these away, and he is where he was. (2.) *The Lord of hosts was with him, and these were the mighty men which he had.* God was with him, and wrought for him, but by men and means, and the use of second causes. By this it appeared that God was with him, that he inclined the hearts of those to come over to him, that were able to serve his interest. As if God be for us, none can be against us; so if God be for us, all shall be for us, that we have occasion for. Yet David ascribed his success and increase, not to the hosts he had, but to the *Lord of hosts*; not to the mighty men that were with him, but to the mighty God, whose presence with us is all in all.

2. The title of this catalogue; (v. 10.) *These are the men who strengthened themselves with him.* In strengthening him, they strengthened themselves, and their own interest; for his advancement was their's. What we do in our places for the support of the kingdom of the Son of David, we shall be gainers by. In strengthening it, we strengthen ourselves. It may be read, *They held strongly with him, and with all Israel.* Note, When God has work to do, he will not want fit instruments to do it with. If it be work that requires mighty men, mighty men shall be either found, or made, to effect it, *according to the word of the Lord.*

3. That which made all these men honourable, was, the good service that they did to their king and country; they helped to make David king, v. 10. A good work! They slew the Philistines, and other public enemies, and were instrumental to save Israel. Note, The way to be great, is, to do good. Nor did they gain this honour without labour, and the hazard of their lives. The honours of Christ's kingdom are prepared for those that *fight the good fight of faith*, that labour and suffer, and are willing to venture all, even life itself, for Christ and a good conscience. It is by a patient continuance in well-doing, that we must seek for glory, and honour, and immortality; and they that are faithful to the Son of David, shall find their names registered and enrolled much more to their honour than these are in the records of fame.

4. Among all the great exploits of David's mighty men, here is nothing great mentioned concerning David himself, but his *pouring out water before the Lord*, which he had *longed for*, v. 18, 19. Four very honourable dispositions of David appeared in that action, which, for aught I know, make it as great as any of the achievements of those Worthies. (1.) Repentance for his own weakness. It is really an honour to a man, when he is made sensible that he has said or done any thing unadvisedly, to unsay it, and undo it again, by repentance; as it is a shame to a man, when he has said or done amiss, to stand to it. (2.) Denial of his own appetite. He longed for the water of the well of Beth-lehem; but when he had it, he would not drink it, because he would not so far humour himself and gratify a foolish fancy. He that has such a rule as this *over his own spirit, is better than the mighty.* It is an honour to a man to have the command of himself; but he that will command himself, must sometimes cross himself. (3.) Devotion toward God. That water which he thought too good, too precious, for his own drinking, he *poured out to the Lord*, for a *drink-offering*. If we have any thing better than another, let God be honoured with it, who is the best, and should have the best. (4.) Tenderness of his servants. It put him into the greatest confusion imaginable, to think that three brave men should hazard their lives, to fetch water for him. In his account, it turns the water into blood. It is the honour of great men not to be prodigal of the blood of those they employ, but, in all the commands they give them, to put their own souls into their sons' stead.

5. In the wonderful achievements of these heroes, the power of God must be acknowledged. How could one slay 300, and another the same number, (v. 11, 20.) another two lion-like men,

(v. 22.) and another an Egyptian giant, (v. 23.) if they had not had the extraordinary presence of God with them, according to that promise, (Josh. 23. 10.) *One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God fighteth for you.*

6. One of these Worthies is said to be an Ammonite, (v. 39.) another a Moabite; (v. 46.) and yet the law was, that an Ammonite, and a Moabite, should not enter into the congregation of the Lord, Deut. 23. 3. These, it is likely, had approved themselves so hearty for the interest of Israel, that in their case it was thought fit to dispense with that law, and the rather, because it was an indication that the Son of David would have Worthies among the Gentiles: with him there is neither Greek nor Jew.

CHAP. XII.

What the mighty men did toward making David king, we read in the foregoing chapter. Here we are told what the many did towards it. It was not all at once, but gradually, that David ascended the throne. His kingdom was to last; and, therefore, like fruits that keep longest, it ripened slowly. After he had long waited for the vacancy of the throne, it was at two steps, and those above seven years distant, that he ascended it. Now we are here told, I. What help came in to him, to Ziklag, to make him king of Judah, v. 1. . 22. II. What help came in to him, in Hebron, to make him king over all Israel, above seven years after, v. 23. . 40.

1. **N**OW these are they that came to David to Ziklag, while he yet kept himself close, because of Saul the son of Kish: and they were among the mighty men, helpers of the war. 2. They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in *hurling stones*, and *shooting arrows* out of a bow, *even* of Saul's brethren of Benjamin. 3. The chief was Ahiezer, then Joash, the sons of Shemaah the Gibeathite; and Jeziel, and Pelet, the sons of Azmaveth; and Berachah, and Jehu the Antothite, 4. And Ismaiah the Gibeonite, a mighty man among the thirty, and over the thirty; and Jeremiah, and Jahaziel, and Johanan, and Josabad the Gederathite, 5. Elusai, and Jerimoth, and Bealiah, and Shemariah, and Shephatiah the Haruphite, 6. Elkanah, and Jesiah, and Azareel, and Joezer, and Jashobeam, the Korhites, 7. And Joelah, and Zebadiah, the sons of Jeroham of Gedor. 8. And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David, into the hold to the wilderness, men of might, and men of war, fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains; 9. Ezer the first, Obadiah the second, Eliab the third, 10. Mishmannah the fourth, Jeremiah the fifth, 11. Attai the sixth, Eliel the seventh, 12. Johanan the eighth, Elzabad the ninth, 13. Jeremiah the tenth, Machbanai the eleventh. 14. These were of the sons of Gad, captains of the host: one of the least was over an hundred, and the greatest over a thousand. 15. These are they that went over Jordan in the first month, when it had overflowed all his banks, and they put to fight all them of the valleys, both toward the east, and toward the west, 16. And there came of the children of Benjamin and Judah to the hold unto

David. 17. And David went out to meet them, and answered and said unto them, If ye be come peaceably unto me, to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you; but if *ye be come* to betray me to mine enemies, seeing *there is* no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look *thereon*, and rebuke it. 18. Then the spirit came upon Amasai, *who was* chief of the captains, *and he said*, Thine *are we*, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace *be* unto thee, and peace *be* to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee. Then David received them, and made them captains of the band. 19. And there tell *some* of Manasseh to David; (when he came with the Philistines against Saul to battle, but they helped them not, for the lords of the Philistines, upon advisement, sent him away, saying, He will fall to his master Saul, to the jeopardy of our heads;) 20. As he went to Ziklag, there tell to him of Manasseh, Adnah, and Jozabad, and Jediael, and Michael, and Jozabad, and Elihu, and Zilthai, captains of the thousands that *were* of Manasseh. 21. And they helped David against the band of the rovers: for they *were* all mighty men of valour, and were captains in the host. 22. For, at *that* time, day by day, there came to David to help him, until it *was* a great host, like the host of God.

We have here an account of them that appeared and acted as David's friends, upon the death of Saul, to bring about the revolution. All the forces he had, while he was persecuted, was but 600 men, those served for his guards; but when the time was come that he must begin to act offensively, Providence brought in more to his assistance. Even while he *kept himself close, because of Saul*, v. 1. he did not appear to invite or encourage his friends, and well-wishers, to come in to him, not foreseeing that the death of Saul was so near. God was inclining and preparing them to come over to him with seasonable succours. They that trust God to do his work for them in his own way and time, shall find his providence outdoing all their forecast and contrivance. The war was God's, and he found out helpers of the war, whose forwardness to act for the man God designed for the government, is here recorded to their honour.

I. Some, even of Saul's brethren, of the tribe of Benjamin, and akin to him, came over to David, v. 2. What moved them to it, we are not told; probably, a generous indignation at the base treatment which Saul, one of their tribe, gave him, animated them to appear the more vigorously for him, that the guilt and reproach of it might not lie upon them. These Benjamites are described to be men of great dexterity, that were trained up in shooting and slinging, and used both hands alike; ingenious, active men; a few of these might do David a great deal of service. Several of the leading men of them are here named. See Judges 20. 16.

II. Some of the tribe of Gad, though seated on the other side Jordan, had such a conviction of David's title to, and fitness for, the government, that they *separated themselves from their brethren*, (laudable separation it was,) to go to David, though he was *in the hold in the wilderness*, v. 8. probably, some of his strong holds in the wilderness of Engedi: they were but few, eleven in all, here named, but they added much to David's strength. Those that had hitherto come in to his assistance, were most of them men of broken fortunes, distressed, discontented, and soldiers of fortune, that came to him rather for protection, than to do him any service,

1 Sam. 22. 2. But these Gadites were brave men, *men of war, and fit for the battle*, v. 8. For, 1. They were *able-bodied men*, men of incredible swiftness, not to fly from, but to fly upon, the enemy, and to pursue the scattered forces; in this they were *as swift as the roes upon the mountains*, so that no man could run from them; and yet they had *faces like the faces of lions*, so that no man could out-fight them. 2. They were disciplined men, trained up to military exercise; they could handle shield and buckler, use both offensive and defensive weapons. 3. They were officers of the militia in their own tribe, v. 14. so that though they did not bring soldiers with them, they had them at command, hundreds, thousands. 4. They were daring men, that could break through the greatest difficulties. Upon some expedition or other, perhaps this to David, they swam over Jordan, when it *overflowed all its banks*, v. 15. Those are fit to be employed in the cause of God, that venture thus in a dependence upon the divine protection. 5. They were men that would go through with the business they engaged in. What enemies they were that they met with in the vallies, when they had passed Jordan, does not appear; but they put them to flight with their lion-like faces, and pursued them with matchless fury, both *toward the east, and toward the west*; which way soever they turned, they followed the blow, and did not do their work by halves.

III. Some of Judah and Benjamin came to him, v. 16. Their leader was Amasai; whether the same with that Amasa that afterward sided with Absalom, (2 Sam. 17. 25.) or no, does not appear. Now here we have,

1. David's prudent treaty with them, v. 17. He was surprised to see them, and could not but conceive some jealousy of the intentions of their coming, having been so often in danger by the treachery of the men of Ziph, and the men of Keilah, who yet were all men of Judah. He might well be timorous, whose life was so much struck at; might well be suspicious, who had been deceived in so many, that he said, in his haste, *All men are liars*. No marvel that he meets these men of Judah with caution. Observe how he puts the matter to themselves, how fairly he deals with them. As they are, they shall find him; so shall all that deal with the Son of David. (1.) If they be faithful and honourable, he will be their rewarder. "*If ye be come peaceably unto me, to help me*, though ye come late, and have left me exposed a great while; though ye bring no great strength with you to turn the scale for me, yet I will thankfully accept your good-will, and *my heart shall be knit unto you*; I will love you and honour you, and do you all the kindness I can." Affection, respect, and service, that are cordial and sincere, will find favour with a good man, as they do with a good God, though clogged with infirmities, and turning to no great account. But, (2.) If they be false, and come to betray him into the hands of Saul, under colour of friendship, he leaves them to God to be their Avenger, as he is, and will be, of every thing that is treacherous and perfidious. Never was man more violently run down, than David was, (except the Son of David himself,) and yet he had the testimony of his conscience, that there was no wrong in his hands. He meant no harm to any man, which was his rejoicing in the day of evil, and enabled him, when he feared treachery, to commit his cause to him that judges righteously. He will not be judge in his own cause, though a wise man; nor avenge himself, though a man of valour; but let the righteous God, who hath said, *Vengeance is mine*, do both. *The God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it*. Observe, in this appeal, [1.] He calls God, the *God of our fathers*, both his fathers and theirs. Thus he reminds them not to deal ill with him; for they were both descendants from the same patriarchs; they both were dependents on the same God. Thus he encourages himself to believe that God would right him, if he were abused; for he was the *God of his fathers*, and therefore a blessing was entailed on him; and a God to all Israel, and therefore not only a Judge to all the earth, but particularly concerned in determining controversies between contending Israelites. [2.] He does not imprecate any fearful judgment upon them, though they should deal treacherously, but very modestly refers himself to the divine wisdom and justice;

The Lord *look thereon*, and judge as he sees, (for he sees men's hearts,) and *rebuke it*. It becomes those that appeal to God to express themselves with great temper and moderation; for the wrath of man *works not the righteousness of God*.

2. Their hearty closure with him, v. 18. Amasai was their spokesman, on whom the *Spirit of the Lord came*: not a spirit of prophecy, but a spirit of wisdom and resolution, according to the occasion, putting words into his mouth, unpremeditated, which were proper both to give David satisfaction, and to animate those that accompanied him. Nothing could be said *finer*, more lively, or more pertinent to the occasion. For himself and all his associates, (1.) He professes a very cordial adherence to David, and his interest, against all that opposed him, and a resolution to stand by him with the hazard of all that was dear to him, *Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse*. In calling him *son of Jesse*, they remind themselves that he was lineally descended from Nahshon and Salmon, who, in their days, were princes of the tribe of Judah. Saul called him so in disdain, (1 Sam. 20. 27.—22. 7.) but they look upon it as his honour. They were convinced that he was on God's side, and that God was on his side; and therefore *Thine are we, David, and on thy side*. It is good, if we must side, to side with those that side with God, and have God with them. (2.) He wishes prosperity to David and his cause, not drinking a health, but praying for peace to him and all his friends and well-wishers: "*Peace, peace be unto thee*, all the good thy heart desires, and *peace be to thine helpers*, among whom we desire to be reckoned, that peace may be on us." (3.) He assures him of help from heaven: "*For thy God helpeth thee*: therefore we wish peace may be, and therefore we doubt not but peace shall be, to thee and thy helpers. God is thy God, and those that have him for their God, no doubt, have him for their Helper in every time of need and danger." From these expressions of Amasai, we may take instruction how to testify our affection and allegiance to the Lord Jesus; his we must be without reservation, or power of revocation; on his side we must be forward to appear and act; to his interest we must be hearty well-wishers; Hosanna, prosperity to his gospel and kingdom; for his God helpeth him, and will, till he have put down all opposing rule, principality, and power.

3. David's cheerful acceptance of them into his interest and friendship. Charity and honour teach us to let fall our jealousies, as soon as satisfaction is given us; *David received them*, and preferred them to be *captains of the band*.

IV. Some of Manasseh likewise joined in with him, v. 19. Providence gave them a fair opportunity to do it, when he and his men marched through their country, upon this occasion. Achish took David with him when he went out to fight with Saul; but the lords of the Philistines obliged him to withdraw. We have the story, 1 Sam. 29. 4, &c. In his return, some great men of Manasseh, who had no heart to go join with Saul against the Philistines, struck in with David, and very seasonably, to help him *against the band of Amalekites*, who had plundered Ziklag; they were not many, but they were all mighty men, and did David good service upon that occasion, 1 Sam. 30. See how Providence provides. David's interest grew strangely, just then when he had occasion to make use of it, v. 22. Auxiliary forces flocked in daily, *till he had a great host*. When the promise comes to the birth, leave it to God to find strength to bring forth.

23. And these *are* the numbers of the bands that *were* ready armed to the war, *and* came to David to Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the LORD. 24. The children of Judah that bare shield and spear *were* six thousand and eight hundred, ready armed to the war. 25. Of the children of Simeon, mighty men of valour for the war, seven thousand and one hundred. 26. Of the children of Levi four thousand and six hundred. 27. And Jehoiada *was* the

leader of the Aaronites, and with him *were* three thousand and seven hundred; 28. And Zadok, a young man mighty of valour, and of his father's house twenty and two captains. 29. And of the children of Benjamin, the kindred of Saul, three thousand: for hitherto the greatest part of them had kept the ward of the house of Saul. 30. And of the children of Ephraim twenty thousand and eight hundred, mighty men of valour, famous throughout the house of their fathers. 31. And of the half tribe of Manasseh eighteen thousand, which were expressed by name, to come and make David king. 32. And of the children of Issachar, *which were men* that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them *were* two hundred; and all their brethren *were* at their commandment. 33. Of Zebulun, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, with all instruments of war, fifty thousand, which could keep rank: *they were* not of double heart. 34. And of Naphtali a thousand captains, and with them with shield and spear thirty and seven thousand. 35. And of the Danites expert in war twenty and eight thousand and six hundred. 36. And of Asher, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, forty thousand. 37. And on the other side of Jordan, of the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and of the half tribe of Manasseh, with all manner of instruments of war for the battle, an hundred and twenty thousand. 38. All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel *were* of one heart to make David king. 39. And there they were with David three days, eating and drinking: for their brethren hath prepared for them. 40. Moreover, they that were nigh them, *even* unto Issachar, and Zebulun, and Naphtali, brought bread on asses, and on camels, and on mules, and on oxen, *and* meat, meal, cakes of figs, and bunches of raisins, and wine, and oil, and oxen, and sheep abundantly: for *there was* joy in Israel.

We have here an account of those who were active in perfecting the settlement of David upon the throne, after the death of Ishbosheth. We read, ch. 11. 1. and before, 2 Sam. 5. 1. that *all the tribes of Israel came*, either themselves, or by their representatives, to Hebron, to make David king; now here we have an account of the quota which every tribe brought in *ready armed to the war*, in case there should have been any opposition, v. 23. We may observe here,

1. That those tribes that lived nearest brought in the fewest; Judah but 6,800, (v. 24.) Simeon but 7,100, (v. 25.) whereas Zebulun, that lay remote, brought 50,000, Asher, 40,000, and the two tribes and a half on the other side Jordan, 120,000. Not as, if the next adjacent tribes were cold in the cause; but they shewed as much of their prudence in bringing few, since all the rest lay so near within call, as the others did of their zeal in bringing so many. The men of Judah had enough to do to entertain those that came from afar.

2. The Levites themselves, and the priests, called here the *Aaronites*, appeared very hearty in this cause, and were ready, if there were occasion, to fight for David, as well as pray for him; because they knew he was called of God to the government, *v. 26. . 28.*

3. Even some of the kindred of Saul came over to David; (*v. 29.*) not so many as of the other tribes, because a foolish affection for their own tribe, and a jealousy for the honour of it, kept many of them long in the sinking interest of Saul's family. Kindred should never over-rule conscience. Call no man *Father* to this extent, but God only.

4. It is said of most of those, that they were *mighty men of valour*, (*v. 25, 28, 30.*) of others, that they were *expert in war*, (*v. 35, 36.*) and of them all, that they *could keep rank*, *v. 38.* They had a great deal of martial fire, and yet were governable, and subject to the rules of order; warm hearts, but cool heads.

5. Some were so considerate as to bring with them arms, and all instruments for war; (*v. 24, 33, 37.*) for how could they think that David should be able to furnish them?

6. The men of Issachar were the fewest of all, but 200; and yet as serviceable to David's interest, as those that brought in the greatest numbers; these few being, in effect, the whole tribe. For, (1.) They were men of *great conduct*, above any of their neighbours; men that *had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.* They understood the natural times, could *discern the face of the sky*, were weather-wise, could advise their neighbours in the proper times for ploughing, sowing, reaping, &c.; the *ceremonial times*, the times appointed for the solemn feasts; therefore they are said to *call the people to the mountoin*, (*Deut. 33. 19.*) for almanacks were not then so common as now. Or, rather, the *political times*; they understood public affairs, the temper of the nation, and the tendencies of the present events. It is the periphrasis of statesmen, that they *know the times*, *Esth. 1. 13.* Those of that tribe were greatly intent on public affairs, and had good intelligence from abroad; and they made a good use of it; they knew *what Israel ought to do*: from their observation and experience, they learned both their own and other's duty and interest. In this critical juncture, they knew Israel ought to make David king. It was not only expedient, but necessary; the present posture of affairs called for it. The men of Issachar dealt mostly in country-business, and did not much intermeddle in public affairs; which gave them an opportunity of observing others, and conversing with themselves. A stander-by sees sometimes more than a gamester. (2.) They were men of great interests; for *all their brethren were at their commandment*. The commonalty of that tribe having *bowed their shoulders to bear*, (*Gen. 49. 15.*) the great men had them at their beck. Hence we read of the *princes of Issachar*, *Judg. 5. 15.* They knew how to rule, and the rest knew how to obey. It is happy indeed, when those that should lead are intelligent and judicious; and those who are to follow, modest and obsequious.

7. It is said of them all, that they engaged in this enterprise, *with a perfect heart*; (*v. 38.*) and particularly of the men of Zebulun, that they were *not of double heart*, *v. 33.* They were, in this matter, *Israelites indeed, in whom was no guile.* And this was their perfection, that they were of one heart in it, *v. 38.* None had any separate interests, but all for the public good.

Lastly, The men of Judah, and others of the adjacent tribes, prepared for the victualling of their respective camps, when they came to Hebron, *v. 39, 40.* They that were at the least pains in travelling to this convention or congress of the states, thought themselves obliged to be at so much the more charge in entertaining the rest, that there might be something of an equality. A noble feast was made, (*was made for laughter*, *Ecc. 10. 19.*) upon this occasion, for there was *joy in Israel*, *v. 40.* And good reason; for *when the righteous bear rule, the city rejoices.* Thus, when the throne of Christ is set up in a soul, there is, ought to be, great joy in that soul: and provision is made for the feasting of it; not, as here, for two or three days, but for the whole life, *ray*, for eternity.

CHAP. XIII.

In the foregoing chapter we have David made king, by which the civil government was happily settled. In this chapter care is taken about religion. I. David consults with the representatives of the people about bringing up the ark out of its obscurity into a public place; and it is resolved on, v. 1. . 4. II. With a great deal of solemnity and joy, it is carried from Kirjath-jearim, v. 5. . 8. III. Uzza is struck dead for touching it; which, for the present, spoils the solemnity, and stops the proceedings, v. 9. . 11.

1. **A**ND David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. 2. And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, *If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the LORD our God*, let us send abroad unto our brethren every where, *that are left in all the land of Israel*, and with them *also* to the priests and Levites *which are in their cities and suburbs*, that they may gather themselves unto us: 3. And let us bring again the ark of our God to us; for we inquired not at it in the days of Saul. 4. And all the congregation said that they would do so; for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people. 5. So David gathered all Israel together, from Shihor of Egypt even unto the entering of Hemath, to bring the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim. 6. And David went up, and all Israel, to Baalah, *that is, Kirjath-jearim*, which *belonged to Judah*, to bring up thence the ark of God the LORD, that dwelleth *between* the cherubims, whose name is called *on it*. 7. And they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. 8. And David and all Israel played before God with all *their* might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.

Here is,

1. David's pious proposal to bring up the ark of God to Jerusalem, that the *royal city* might be the *holy city*, *v. 1. . 3.* This part of the story we had not in Samuel. We may observe in this proposal,

1. That as soon as David was well seated on his throne, he had thoughts concerning the ark of God; *Let us bring that to us, v. 3.* Two things he aimed at herein. (1.) To do honour to God, by shewing respect to his ark, the token of his presence. As soon as he had power in his hand, he would use it for the advancement and encouragement of religion. Note, It ought to be the first and great care of those that are enriched and preferred, to honour God with their honours, and to serve him, and the interests of his kingdom among men, with their wealth and power. David said not, "What pompos thing shall I do now?" or, "What pleasant thing?" but, "What pious thing, to have the comfort and benefit of that sacred oracle. Let us bring it to us, not only that we may be a credit to it, but that it may be a blessing to us." They that honour God, profit themselves. Note, It is the wisdom of those who are settling out in the world, to take God's ark with them, and to make his oracles their counsellors, and his laws their rule. Those are likely to proceed in the favour of God, who thus begin in the fear of God.

2. That he consulted with the leaders of the people about it, *v. 1.* Though it was, without doubt, a *very good work*, and, being

king, he had authority to command the doing of it; yet he chose rather to do it by consultation; (1.) That he might shew respect to the great men of the kingdom, and put honour upon them. Though they made him king, yet he would not rule with a high hand; saying, "We will and command, and it is our royal pleasure that you do so and so; and we will be obeyed;" but, "*If it seem good to you*, and you think that the motion comes from the Lord our God, let us send out orders for this purpose." No prince that is wise will covet to be absolute. The people's allegiance is best secured by taking their concurrence in their representatives. Happy then art thou, O Britain! (2.) That he might be advised by them in the manner of doing it; whether just now, whether publicly. David was a very intelligent man himself, and yet consulted with his captains; *for in the multitude of counsellors there is safety*. It is wisdom to make use of the wisdom of others. (3.) That, they joining in it, it might pass the better for a national act, and so might procure a national blessing.

3. That he would have all the people summoned to attend on this occasion, both for the honour of the ark, and for the people's satisfaction and edification, v. 2. Observe, (1.) He calls the common people *brethren*; which bespeaks his humility and condescension, (notwithstanding his advancement,) and the tender concern he had for them. Thus our Lord Jesus is not ashamed to call his people *brethren*, Heb. 2. 11. (2.) He speaks of the people as a remnant that was escaped; *Our brethren that are left in all the land of Israel*. They had been under scattering providences. Their wars with the Philistines, and with the house of Saul, had wasted the country, and cut off many. We now hope to see an end of these troubles: let them that are left be quickened by late judgments, and present mercies, to seek unto God. (3.) He takes care that the priests and Levites, especially, should be summoned to attend the ark; for it was their province in a particular manner. Thus Christian magistrates should stir up ministers to do their duty, when they see them remiss. (4.) That all this is upon supposition, that it is *of the Lord their God*. Though it should *seem good to you* and me, yet, if it be not *of the Lord our God*, we will not do it. Whatever we undertake, this must be our inquiry; "Is it of the Lord? Is it agreeable to his mind? Can we approve ourselves to him in it? May we expect that he will own us?" (5.) That thus it was requisite they should amend what had been amiss in the last reign, and, as it were, atone for their neglect; "*For we inquired not at it in the days of Saul*"; and that was the reason things went so ill with us: let that original error be amended, and then we may hope to see our affairs in a better posture." Observe, David makes no peevish reflections upon Saul. He does not say, "Saul never cared for the ark, at least, in the latter end of his reign;" but, in general, *We inquired not at it*; making himself with others guilty of the neglect. It better becomes us to judge ourselves than others. Humble good men lament their own share in national guilt, and take shame to themselves, Dan. 9. 5, &c.

II. The people's ready agreement to this proposal: (v. 4.) *The thing was right in the eyes of all the people*. Nobody could say to the contrary, but that it was a very good work, and seasonable; so that it was resolved, *nemine contradicente—unanimously*, that they would do so. They that prudently propose a good work, and lead in it, will perhaps find a more ready concurrence in it than they expected. Great men know not what a great deal of good they are capable of doing by their influence on others.

III. The solemnity of bringing up the ark, (v. 5, &c.) which we read before, 2 Sam. 6. 1, &c. Here therefore we shall only observe, 1. That it is worth while to travel far to attend the ark of God. They came out of all parts of the country, from the *river of Egypt*, the utmost part south, to the entering of Hemath, which lay furthest north, (v. 5.) to grace this solemnity. 2. That we have reason greatly to rejoice in the revival of neglected ordinances, and the return of the tokens of God's presence. When the light of religion shines out of obscurity, when it is openly and freely professed, is brought into reputation, and countenanced by princes and great ones, it is such a happy omen to a people as is worthy

to be welcomed with all possible expressions of joy. 3. When, after long disuse, ordinances come to be revived, it is too common for even wise and good men to make some mistakes. Who would have thought that David would have committed such an error as this, to carry the ark upon a cart? v. 7. Because the Philistines so carried it, and a special providence drove the cart, (1 Sam. 6. 12.) he thought they might do so too. But we must walk by rule, not by example, when it varies from the rule; even those examples which Providence has owned are not to be followed, in violation of the rule.

9. And when they came unto the threshing-floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled. 10. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God. 11. And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzza: wherefore that place is called Perez-uzza to this day. 12. And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me? 13. So David brought not the ark home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. 14. And the ark of God remained with the family of Obed-edom in his house three months. And the LORD blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had.

This breach upon Uzza, which caused all the joy to cease, we had an account of, 2 Sam. 6. 6, &c.

1. Let the sin of Uzza warn us all to take heed of presumption, rashness, and irreverence, in dealing about holy things, (v. 9.) and not to think that a good intention will justify a bad action. In our communion with God, we must carefully watch over our own hearts, lest familiarity breed contempt, and we think God is any way beholden to us.

2. Let the punishment of Uzza convince us that the God with whom we have to do is a jealous God. His death, like that of Nadab and Abihu, proclaims aloud that God will be *sanctified in those that come nigh unto him*, (Lev. 10. 3.) and that the nearer they are to him, the more displeased he is with their presumptions. Let us not dare to trifle with God in our approaches to him; and yet let us, through Christ, *come boldly to the throne of grace*; for we are under the dispensation of liberty and grace, not of bondage and terror.

3. Let the damp this gave to the joy of Israel be a memorandum to us, always to rejoice with trembling, and to *serve the Lord with fear*, even then when we *serve him with gladness*.

4. Let David's displeasure, upon this occasion, caution us to take heed to our spirits, when we are under divine rebukes, lest, instead of submitting to God, we quarrel with him. If God be angry with us, shall we dare be angry with him?

5. Let the stop thus put to the solemnity caution us not to be driven off from our duty by those providences which are only intended to drive us from our sins. David should have gone on with this work, notwithstanding the breach made upon Uzza; so might the breach have been made up.

Lastly, Let the blessing which the ark brought with it to the house of Obed-edom encourage us to welcome God's ordinances into our houses, as those that believe the ark is a guest nobody shall lose by; nor let it be the less precious to us, for its being to some a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. If the gospel be to some a savour of death unto death, as the ark was to Uzza, yet let us receive it in the love of it, and it will be to us a savour of life unto life.

CHAP. XIV.

¶ *this chapter, we have, I. David's kingdom established, v. 1, 2. II. His family built up, v. 3, 7. III. His enemies, the Philistines, routed in two campaigns, v. 8, 17. This is repeated here from 2 Sam. 5. 11, &c.*

1. **N**OW Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and timber of cedars, with masons and carpenters, to build him an house. 2. And David perceived that the LORD had confirmed him king over Israel, for his kingdom was lifted up on high, because of his people Israel. 3. And David took more wives at Jerusalem: and David begat more sons and daughters. 4. Now these *are* the names of *his* children which he had in Jerusalem; Shammua, and Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon, 5. And Ibhar, and Elishua, and Elpalet, 6. And Nogab, and Nepheg, and Japhia, 7. And Elishama, and Beeliada, and Eliphalet.

We may observe here,

1. There is no man that has such a sufficiency in himself, but he has need of his neighbours, and has reason to be thankful for their help. David had a very large kingdom, Hiram a very little one; yet David cannot build him a house to his mind, unless Hiram furnish him both workmen and materials, (v. 1.) which is a reason why we should despise none, but, as we have opportunity, be obliging to all.

2. It is a great satisfaction to a wise man, to be settled, and to a good man, to see the special providence of God in his settlement. The people had made David king; but he could not be easy, nor think himself happy, till he perceived that *the Lord had confirmed him king over Israel*, v. 1. Who shall unfix me, if God hath fixed me?

3. We must look upon all our advancements as designed for our usefulness. *David's kingdom was lifted up on high*, not for his own sake, that he might look great; but because of his people Israel, that he might be a guide and protector to them. We are *therefore* blessed, that we may be blessings. See Gen. 12. 2. We are not born, nor do we live, for ourselves.

4. It is hard to thrive, and not grow secure and indulgent to the flesh. It was David's infirmity, that, when he was settled in his kingdom, *he took more wives*; (v. 3.) yet the numerous issue he had, added to his honour and strength. Lo, *children are a heritage of the Lord*. We had an account of David's children, not only in Samuel, but in this book, *ch. 3. 1*, &c. and now here again; for it was their honour to have such a father.

8. And when the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over all Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek David: and David heard of it, and went out against them. 9. And the Philistines came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. 10. And David inquired of God, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? and wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto him, Go up, for I will deliver them into thine hand. 11. So they came up to Baal-perazim, and David smote them there. Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand like the breaking forth of waters: therefore they called the name of that place Baal-perazim. 12. And

when they had left their gods there, David gave a commandment, and they were burnt with fire. 13. And the Philistines yet again spread themselves abroad in the valley. 14. Therefore David inquired again of God; and God said unto him, Go not up after them; turn away from them, and come upon them over against the mulberry-trees. 15. And it shall be, when thou shalt hear a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry-trees, *that* then thou shalt go out to battle: for God is gone forth before thee to smite the host of the Philistines. 16. David therefore did as God commanded him: and they smote the host of the Philistines, from Gibeon even to Gazer. 17. And the fame of David went out into all lands; and the LORD brought the fear of him upon all nations.

This narrative of David's triumph over the Philistines, is much the same with that, 2 Sam. 5. 17, &c.

1. Let the attack which the Philistines made upon David, forbid us to be secure in any settlement or advancement, and engage us to expect molestation in this world. When we are most easy, something or other may come to be a terror or vexation to us. Christ's kingdom will thus be insulted by the serpent's seed, especially when it makes any advances.

2. Let David's inquiry of God, once and again, upon occasion of the Philistines' invading him, direct us in all our ways to acknowledge him, in distress to fly to him, when we are wronged, to appeal to him, and when we know not what to do, to ask counsel at his oracles, to put ourselves under his conduct, and to beg of him to shew us the right way.

3. Let David's success encourage us to resist our spiritual enemies, in observance of divine directions, and in dependence on divine strength. Resist the Devil, and he shall fly as the Philistines did before David.

4. Let the sound of the going in the tops of the mulberry-trees, direct us to attend God's motions, both in his providence and in the influence of his Spirit. When we perceive God to go before, let us gird up our loins, gird on our armour, and follow him.

5. Let David's burning the gods of the Philistines, when they fell into his hands, teach us a holy indignation against idolatry, and all the remains of it.

6. Let David's thankful acknowledgment of the hand of God in his successes, direct us to bring all our sacrifices of praise to God's altar. *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory.*

Lastly. Let the name of David, not only in his own kingdom, but among his neighbours, be looked upon as a type and figure of the exalted honour of the Son of David; (v. 17.) *The fame of David went out into all lands*; he was generally talked of, and admired by all people, and *the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations*. All looked upon him as a formidable enemy, and a desirable ally. Thus has God highly exalted our Redeemer, and given him a name above every name.

CHAP. XV.

The bringing in of the ark to the city of David, was a very good work; it was resolved upon, ch. 13. 3. and attempted, but not perfected; it lay by the way in the house of Obed-edom. Now this chapter gives us an account of the completing of that good work. I. How it was done more regularly than before. 1. A place was prepared for it, v. 1. 2. The priests were ordered to carry it, v. 2, 15. 3. The Levites had their offices assigned them in attending on it, v. 16, 21. II. How it was done more successfully than before, v. 25. 1. The Levites made no mistake in their work, v. 26. 2. David and his people met with no damp upon their joy, v. 27, 28. As for Michal's despising David, it was nothing, v. 29.

1. **A**ND David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. 2. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever. 3. And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the LORD unto his place, which he had prepared for it. 4. And David assembled the children of Aaron, and the Levites: 5. Of the sons of Kohath; Uriel the chief, and his brethren an hundred and twenty: 6. Of the sons of Merari; Asaiah the chief, and his brethren two hundred and twenty: 7. Of the sons of Gershon; Joel the chief, and his brethren an hundred and thirty: 8. Of the sons of Elizaphan; Shemaiah the chief, and his brethren two hundred: 9. Of the sons of Hebron; Eliel the chief, and his brethren fourscore: 10. Of the sons of Uzziel; Amminadab the chief, and his brethren an hundred and twelve. 11. And David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Asaiah, and Joel, Shemaiah, and Eliel, and Amminadab, 12. And said unto them, Ye *are* the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, *both* ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel unto *the place that I have prepared for it*. 13. For because ye *did it* not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order. 14. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves, to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel. 15. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded, according to the word of the LORD. 16. And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren *to be* the singers with instruments of music, psalteries, and harps, and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy. 17. So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel; and of his brethren, Asaph the son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari their brethren, Ethan the son of Kushaiah; 18. And with them their brethren of the second degree, Zechariah, Ben, and Jaaziel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Unni, Eliab, and Benaiah, and Maaseiah, and Mattithiah, and Elipheleh, and Mikneiah, and Obed-edom, and Jeiel, the porters. 19. So the singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, *were appointed* to sound with cymbals of brass; 20. And Zechariah, and Aziel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Unni, and Eliab, and Maaseiah, and Benaiah, with psalteries on Alamoth; 21. And Mattithiah, and Elipheleh, and

Mikneiah, and Obed-edom, and Jeiel, and Azziah, with harps on the Sheminith to excel. 22. And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, *was* for song: he instructed about the song, because he *was* skillful. 23. And Berachiah and Elkanah *were* door-keepers for the ark. 24. And Shebaniah, and Jehoshaphat, and Nethaneel, and Amasai, and Zechariah, and Benaiah, and Eliezer, the priests, did blow with the trumpets before the ark of God: and Obed-edom and Jehiah *were* door-keepers for the ark.

Preparation is here made for the bringing of the ark home to the city of David, from the house of Obed-edom. It is here owned that in the former attempt, though it was a very good work, and in it they *sought God*, yet they *sought him not after the due order*, v. 13. "We did not go about our work considerably; and therefore we sped so ill." Note, 1. It is not enough that we do that which is good, but we must do it well; nor enough that we seek God in a due ordinance, but we must seek him in a due order. 2. When we have suffered for our irregularities, we must learn thereby to be more regular; then we answer the end of chastisement.

Let us see how the matter was mended.

1. David now prepared a place for the reception of the ark, before he brought it to him; and thus he sought in the due order. He had not time to *build a house*, but he *pitched a tent* for it; (v. 1.) probably, according to the pattern shewed to Moses in the mount, or as near it as might be, of curtains and boards. Observe, When he made houses for himself in the city of David, he prepared a place for the ark. Note, Wherever we build for ourselves, we must be sure to make room for God's ark, for a church in the house.

2. David now ordered that the Levites or priests should carry the ark upon their shoulders. Now he bethought himself of that which he could not but know before, that *none ought to carry the ark but the Levites*, v. 2. The Kohathites carried it in their ordinary marches, and therefore had no wagons allotted them, because their work was to *bear upon their shoulders*, Numb. 7. 9. But, upon extraordinary occasions, as when they passed Jordan, and compassed Jericho, the priests carried it. This rule was express, and yet David himself forgot it, and put the ark upon a cart. Note, Even they that are very knowing in the word of God, yet have it not always so ready to them as were to be wished, when they have occasion to use it. Wise and good men may be guilty of an oversight, which, as soon as they are aware of, they will correct. David does not go about to justify what had been done amiss, nor to lay the blame on others, but owns himself guilty, with others, of not seeking God in a due order, and now takes care not only to summon the Levites to the solemnity, (as he did all Israel, v. 3. and had done before, ch. 13. 2.) but to see that they were assembled, (v. 4.) especially the sons of Aaron, v. 11. To them he gives that solemn charge, (v. 12.) *Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites, therefore bring up the ark of the Lord*. It is expected that those who are advanced above others in dignity, go before others in duty; "You are the chief, and therefore more is expected from you than from others, both by way of service yourselves, and influence on the rest. You did it not at first, neither did your duty yourselves, nor took care to instruct us; and we smarted for it, *the Lord made a breach upon us*. We have all smarted for your neglect: *this has been by your means*;" (see Mal. 1. 9.) "therefore sanctify yourselves, and mind your business." When those that suffered for doing ill, thus learn to do better, the correction is well bestowed.

3. The Levites and priests were sanctified themselves, (v. 14.) and were ready to carry the ark on their shoulders, according to the law, v. 15. Note, Many that are very remiss in their duty.

if they were but faithfully told of it, would reform, and do better. The breach upon Uzza made the priests more careful to sanctify themselves, that is, to cleanse themselves from all ceremonial pollution, and to compose themselves for the solemn service of God, so as to strike a reverence upon the people. Some are made examples, that others may be made exemplary, and very cautious.

4. Officers were appointed to be ready to bid the ark welcome, with all possible expressions of joy, v.16. David ordered the chief of the Levites to nominate those that they knew to be proficient for this service. Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were now first appointed, v.17. They undertook to sound with cymbals, (v.19.) others with psalteries, (v.20.) others with harps, on the *Sheminith*, or *eighth*, eight notes higher or lower than the rest, according to the rules of concert, v.21. Some that were priests, blew with the trumpet, (v.24.) as was usual at the removal of the ark, (Numb.10.8). and at solemn feasts, Ps.81.3. And one was appointed for song, (v.22.) for he was skilful in it, could sing well himself, and instruct others. Note, As every man has *received the gift*, so he ought to *minister the same*, 1 Pet.4.10. And those that excel in any endowment, should not only use it for the common good themselves, but teach others also, and not grudge to make others as wise as themselves. This way of praising God by musical instruments had not hitherto been in use: but David, being a prophet, instituted it by divine direction, and added it to the other *cerual ordinances* of that dispensation, as the apostle calls them, Heb.9.10. The New Testament keeps up singing of psalms, but has not appointed church-music. Some were appointed to be porters, (v.18.) others door-keepers for the ark, (v.23, 24.) and one of them was Obed-edom, who reckoned it, no doubt, a place of honour, and accepted it as a recompence for the entertainment he had given to the ark. He had been, for three months, house-keeper to the ark, and indeed its landlord. But when he might not be so any longer, such an affection had he for it, that he was glad to be its door-keeper.

25. So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD, out of the house of Obed-edom, with joy. 26. And it came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams. 27. And David *was* clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song, with the singers: David also *had* upon him an ephod of linen. 28. Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps. 29. And it came to pass, *as* the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul, looking out at a window, saw king David dancing and playing: and she despised him in her heart.

All things being got ready for the carrying of the ark to the city of David, and its reception there, we have here an account of the solemnity of its conveyance thither from the house of Obed-edom.

1. God helped the Levites that carried it. The ark was no very great burthen, that they who carried it needed any extraordinary help. But, (1.) It is good to take notice of the assistance of the Divine Providence, even in those things that fall within the compass

of our natural powers: if God did not help us, we could not stir a step. (2.) In all our religious exercises, we must particularly derive help from Heaven. See Acts, 26. 22. All our sufficiency for holy duties is from God. (3.) The Levites, perhaps, remembering the breach upon Uzza, were ready to tremble when they took up the ark; but God helped them, that is, he encouraged them to it, silenced their fears, and strengthened their faith. (4.) God helped them to do it decently and well, and without making any mistake. If we perform any religious duties, so as to escape a breach, and come off with our lives, we must own it was God that helped us; for had we been left to ourselves, we should have been guilty of some fatal miscarriages. God's ministers, that bear the vessels of the Lord, have special need of divine help in their ministrations, that God in them may be glorified, and his church edified. And if God help the Levites, the people have the benefit of it.

2. When they experienced the tokens of God's presence with them, they offered sacrifices of praise to him, v. 26. This also he helped them to do. They offered these bullocks and rams, perhaps, by way of atonement for the former error, that that might not now be remembered against them, as well as by way of acknowledgment for the help now received.

3. There were great expressions of rejoicing used; the sacred music played, David danced, the singers sang, and the common people shouted, v. 27, 28. This we had before, 2 Sam. 6. 14, 15. Learn hence, (1.) That we serve a good Master, who delights to have his servants sing at their work. (2.) That times of public reformation are, and should be, times of public rejoicing. Those are unworthy of the ark, that are not glad of it. (3.) It is not any disparagement to the greatest of men to shew themselves zealous in the acts of devotion. Michal indeed despised David, (v. 29.) but *her* despising him did not make him at all despicable; he did not regard it himself, nor did any that were wise and good (and why should we covet the esteem of any but such?) think the worse of him.

CHAP. XVI.

This chapter concludes that great affair of the settlement of the ark in the royal city, and, with it, the settlement of the public worship of God during the reign of king David. Here is, I. The solemnity with which the ark was fixed, v. 1..6. II. The psalm David gave to be sung on this occasion, v. 7..36. III. The setting of the constant worship of God in order, thenceforward, v. 37..43.

1. **SO** they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it: and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace-offerings before God. 2. And when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace-offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD. 3. And he dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. 4. And he appointed *certain* of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record, and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel: 5. Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, Jeiel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Mattithiah, and Eliab, and Benaiah, and Obed-edom: and Jeiel with psalteries and with harps; but Asaph made a sound with cymbals; 6. Benaiah also and Jahaziel the priests with trumpets continually before the ark of the covenant of God.

It was a glorious day when the ark of God was safely lodged in the tent David had pitched for it. That good man had his heart much upon it, could not sleep contentedly till it was done, Ps. 132. 4. The circumstances of the ark were now, 1. Better than what they had been. It had been obscure in a country-town, in the fields of the wood; now it is removed to a public place, to the royal city, where all might have resort to it. It had been neglected, as a despised broken vessel; now it is attended with veneration, and God is inquired of by it. It had borrowed a room in a private house, which it enjoyed by the good-will of an individual; now it has a habitation of its own, entire to itself, is set in the midst of it, and not crowded into a corner. Note, Though God's word and ordinances may be clouded and eclipsed for a time, they shall at length shine out of obscurity. Yet, 2. They were much short of what was intended in the next reign, when the temple was to be built. This was but a tent, a poor mean dwelling, yet this was the tabernacle, the temple, which David, in his psalms, often speaks of with so much affection. David, who pitched a tent for the ark, and continued steadfast to it, did far better than Solomon, who built a temple for it, and yet, in his latter end, turned his back upon it. The church's poorest times were it purest.

Now David is easy in his mind; the ark is fixed, and fixed near him. Now see how he takes care,

(1.) That God have the glory of it. Two ways he gives him honour upon this occasion; [1.] By sacrifices; (v. 1.) burnt-offerings, in adoration of his perfections; peace-offerings, in acknowledgment of his favours. [2.] By songs; he appointed Levites to record this story in a song for the benefit of others, or to celebrate it themselves, by *thanking and praising the God of Israel*, v. 4. All our rejoicings must express themselves in thanksgivings to Him from whom all our comforts are received.

(2.) That the people have the joy of it. They shall fare the better for this day's solemnity; for he gives them all what was worth coming for, a royal treat, in honour of the day; (v. 3.) in which David shewed himself generous to his subjects, as he had found God gracious to him. They whose hearts are enlarged with holy joy should shew it by being open-handed. But (which was far better) he gave them also a *blessing in the name of the Lord*, as a father, as a prophet; (v. 2.) he prayed to God for them, and commended them to his grace. *In the name of the Word of the Lord*, so the Targum, the Essential Eternal Word, who is Jehovah, and through whom all blessings come to us.

7. Then on that day David delivered first *this psalm* to thank the LORD into the hand of Asaph and his brethren. 8. Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. 9. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. 10. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. 11. Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually. 12. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth: 13. O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob, his chosen ones. 14. He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. 15. Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; 16. *Even of the covenant* which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; 17. And hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, *and to Israel for an everlasting covenant*, 18. Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance;

19. When ye were but few, even a few, and strangers in it. 20. And *when* they went from nation to nation, and from *one* kingdom to another people; 21. He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes, 22. *Saying*, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm. 23. Sing unto the LORD, all the earth; shew forth from day to day his salvation. 24. Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. 25. For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. 26. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. 27. Glory and honour are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place. 28. Give unto the LORD, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. 29. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. 30. Fear before him, all the earth: the world also shall be stable, that it be not moved. 31. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice: and let men say among the nations, The LORD reigneth. 32. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof: let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein. 33. Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD, because he cometh to judge the earth. 34. O give thanks to the LORD, for *he is good*; for his mercy endureth for ever. 35. And say ye, Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to thy holy name, *and glory in thy praise*. 36. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel for ever and ever. And all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD.

We have here the thanksgiving-psalm which David, by the Spirit, composed, and delivered to the chief musician, to be sung upon occasion of the public entry the ark made into the tent prepared for it; some think he had appointed this hymn to be daily used in the temple-service, as duly as the day came; whatever other psalms they sung, they must not omit this. David had penned many psalms before this, some in the time of his troubles by Saul. This was composed before; but was now first delivered into the hand of Asaph, for the use of the church. It is gathered out of several psalms. From the beginning to v. 23. is taken from Ps. 105. 1, &c.; and then v. 23. to v. 34. is the whole 96th psalm, with little variation; v. 34. is taken from Ps. 136. 1. and divers others; and then the two last verses are taken from the close of Ps. 106; which, some think, warrants us to do likewise, to make up hymns out of David's psalms, a part of one, and a part of another, put together, so as may be most proper to express and excite the devotion of Christians.

These psalms will be best expounded in their proper places; (if the Lord will;) here we take them as they are put together, with a design to *thank the Lord*; (v. 7.) a great duty, to which we need to be excited, and in which we need to be assisted.

1. Let God be glorified in our praises, let his honour be the centre in which all the lines meet. Let us glorify him by our thanksgivings, *Give thanks to the Lord*; by our prayers, *Call on his name*; (v. 8.) by our songs, *Sing psalms unto him*; by our dis-

course, *Talk ye of all his wondrous works*, v. 9. Glorify him as a great God, and greatly to be praised; (v. 25.) as supreme God, (above all gods,) as sole God; for all others are idols, v. 26. Glorify him as most bright and blessed in himself, *Glory and honour are in his presence*; (v. 27.) as Creator, *The Lord made the heavens*; as the Ruler of the whole creation, *His judgments are in all the earth*; (v. 14.) and as our's, *He is the Lord our God*. Thus must we give unto the Lord the glory due to his name, (v. 28, 29.) and own it, and much more, his due.

2. Let others be edified and instructed. *Make known his deeds among the people*, v. 8. *Declare his glory among the heathen*, (v. 24.) that those who are strangers to him may be led into acquaintance with him, allegiance to him, and the adoration of him. Thus must we serve the interests of his kingdom among men, that all the earth may fear before him, v. 30.

3. Let us be ourselves encouraged to triumph and trust in God. They that give glory to God's name are allowed to *glory in it*, (v. 10.) to value themselves upon their relation to God, and venture themselves upon his promise to them. *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord*, much more they that have found him. *Seek him, and his strength, and his face*; that is, seek him by the ark of his strength, in which he manifests himself.

4. Let the everlasting covenant be the great matter of our joy and praise; (v. 15.) *Be ye mindful of his covenant*. In the parallel place it is, *He will be ever mindful of it*, Ps. 105. 8. Seeing God never will forget it, we never must. The covenant is said to be commanded; because God has obliged us to obey the conditions of it, and because he has both authority to make the promise, and ability to make it good. This covenant was ancient, yet never to be forgotten. It was made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were long since dead; (v. 16., 18.) yet still sure to the spiritual seed, and the promises of it pleasurable.

5. Let God's former mercies to his people of old, to our ancestors and predecessors in profession, be commemorated by us now, with thankfulness to his praise. Let it be remembered, how God protected the patriarchs in their unsettled condition, when they came strangers to Canaan, and were sojourners in it; when they were few, and might easily have been swallowed up; when they were continually upon the remove, and so exposed; when there were many that bore them ill-will, and sought to do them mischief; yet no man was suffered to do them wrong; not the Canaanites, Philistines, Egyptians; kings were reprov'd, and plagued, for their sakes. Pharaoh was so, and Abimelech. They were the *anointed of the Lord*, sanctified by his grace, sanctified to his glory, and had received the unction of the Spirit. They were his prophets, instructed in the things of God themselves, and commissioned to instruct others; (and prophets are said to be *anointed*, 1 Kings, 19. 16. Isa. 61. 1.) and therefore, if any touch them, they touch the apple of God's eye; if any harm them, it is at their peril, v. 19., 22.

6. Let the great salvation of the Lord be especially the subject of our praises; (v. 23.) *Shew forth from day to day his salvation*; that is, (says Bishop Patrick,) his promised salvation by Christ. We have reason to celebrate that from day to day; for we daily receive the benefit of it, and it is a subject that can never be exhausted.

7. Let God be praised by a due and constant attendance upon him in the ordinances he has appointed; *Bring an offering, then, the fruit of the ground, now, the fruit of the lips, of the heart*, (Heb. 13. 15.) and *worship him in the beauty of holiness*, in the holy place, and in a holy manner, v. 29. Holiness is the beauty of the Lord, the beauty of all sanctified souls, and all religious performances.

8. Let God's universal monarchy be the fear and joy of all people. Let us reverence it; *Fear before him, all the earth*. And let us rejoice in it; *Let the heavens be glad and rejoice, because the Lord reigns*; and that establishes the world, so that, though it be moved, it cannot be removed, nor the measures broken, which Infinite Wisdom has taken in the government of it, v. 30, 31.

9. Let the prospect of the judgment to come, inspire us with an

awful pleasure. Let earth and sea, fields and woods, though in the great day of the Lord they will all be consumed, yet rejoice that he will come, doth come, to *judge the earth*, v. 32, 33.

10. In the midst of our praises, we must not forget to pray for the succour and relief of those saints and servants of God, that are in distress; (v. 35.) *Save us, gather us, deliver us from the heathen*, those of us that are scattered and oppressed. When we are rejoicing in God's favours to us, we must remember our afflicted brethren, and pray for their salvation and deliverance as our own. We are members one of another; and therefore, when we mean, "Lord, save them," it is not improper to say, "Lord, save us."

Lastly, Let us make God the Alpha and Omega of all our praises. He began, (v. 8.) *Give thanks to the Lord*; he concludes, (v. 36.) *Blessed be the Lord*. And whereas, in the place whence this doxology is taken, (Ps. 106. 48.) it is added, *Let all the people say, Amen; Hallelujah*; here we find that they did according to that directory: *All the people said, Amen, and praised the Lord*. When the Levites had finished this psalm of prayer and praise, then, and not till then, the people that attended signified their consent and concurrence, by saying, *Amen*. And so they praised the Lord, much affected, no doubt, with this newly instituted way of devotion, which had been hitherto used in the schools of the prophets only, 1 Sam. 10. 5. And if this way of praising God please the Lord better than an ox or a bullock that has horns and hoofs, the humble shall see it, and be glad, Ps. 69. 31, 32.

37. So he left there before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, Asaph and his brethren, to minister before the ark continually, as every day's work required; 38. And Obed-edom with his brethren, threescore and eight; Obed-edom also the son of Jeduthun and Hosah to be porters; 39. And Zadok the priest, and his brethren the priests, before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high-place that was at Gibeon, 40. To offer burnt-offerings unto the LORD upon the altar of the burnt-offering continually morning and evening, and to do according to all that is written in the law of the LORD, which he commanded Israel; 41. And with them Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest that were chosen, who were expressed by name, to give thanks to the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever; 42. And with them Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those that should make a sound, and with musical instruments of God. And the sons of Jeduthun were porters. 43. And all the people departed every man to his house: and David returned to bless his house.

The worship of God is not only to be the work of a solemn day now and then, brought in to grace a triumph; but it ought to be the work of every day. David therefore settles it here for a constancy; puts it into a method, which he obliged those that officiated to observe in their respective posts.

In the tabernacle of Moses, and afterward in the temple of Solomon, the ark and the altar were together; but ever since Eli's time, they had been separated, and still continued so till the temple was built. I cannot conceive what reason there was, why David, who knew the law, and was zealous for it, did not either bring the ark to Gibeon, where the tabernacle and the altar were, or bring them to mount Zion, where the ark was. Perhaps the curtains and hangings of Moses's tabernacle were so worn with time and weather, that they were not fit to be removed, nor fit to be a

shelter for the ark; and yet he would not make all new, but only a tent for the ark, because the time was at hand when the temple should be built. Whatever was the reason, all David's time they were asunder; but he took care that neither of them should be neglected.

1. At Jerusalem, where the ark was, Asaph and his brethren were appointed to attend, to *minister before the ark continually*, with songs of praise, as *every day's work required*, v. 37. No sacrifices were offered there, nor incense burnt, because the altars were not there; but David's prayers were *directed as incense*, and *the lifting up of his hands as the evening sacrifice*, Ps. 141. 2. So early did spiritual worship take place of ceremonial.

2. Yet the ceremonial worship, being of divine institution, must by no means be omitted; and therefore at Gibeon, where the altars were, the priests attended; for their work was to sacrifice and burn incense; and that they did *continually, morning and evening, according to the law of Moses*, v. 39, 40. These must be kept up, because, however in their own nature they were inferior to the moral services of prayer and praise, yet, as they were types of the mediation of Christ, they had a great deal of honour put upon them, and the observance of them was of great consequence. Here Zadok attended, to preside in the service of the altar; as (it is probable) Abiathar settled at Jerusalem, to attend the ark, because he had the breast-plate of judgment, which must be consulted before the ark: this is the reason why we read, that, in David's time, both Zadok and Abiathar were the priests; (2 Sam. 8. 17.—20. 25.) one, where the altar was, and the other, where the ark was. At Gibeon, where the altars were, David also appointed *singers to give thanks to the Lord*; and the burden of all their songs must be, *For his mercy endureth for ever*, v. 41. They did it *with musical instruments of God*; such instruments as were appointed and appropriated to this service, not such as they used on other occasions. Between common mirth, and holy joy, there is a vast difference; and the limits and distances between them, must be carefully observed and kept up.

Matters being thus settled, and the affairs of religion put into a happy channel, (1.) The people were satisfied, and went home pleased. (2.) David returned to bless his house, resolving to keep up his family-worship still, which public worship must not supersede.

CHAP. XVII.

This excellent chapter is the same with 2 Sam. 7. It will be worth while to look back upon what was there said upon it. Two things in general we have in it; I. God's gracious acceptance of David's purpose to build him a house, and the promise he made thereupon, v. 1. .15. II. David's gracious acceptance of God's good promise to build him a house, and the prayer he made thereupon, v. 16. .27.

1. **N**OW it came to pass, as David sat in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD *remaineth* under curtains. 2. Then Nathan said unto David, Do all that *is* in thine heart; for God *is* with thee. 3. And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, 4. Go and tell David my servant, Thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in: 5. For I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Israel unto this day; but have gone from tent to tent, and from *one* tabernacle *to another*. 6. Wheresoever I have walked with all Israel, spake I a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people, saying, Why have ye not built me an house of cedars? 7. Now therefore thus shalt thou say unto my servant David,

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the shepcote, *even* from following the sheep, that thou shouldest be ruler over my people Israel: 8. And I have been with thee whithersoever thou hast walked, and have cut off all thine enemies from before thee, and have made thee a name like the name of the great men that *are* in the earth. 9. Also I will ordain a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, and they shall dwell in their place, and shall be moved no more; neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the beginning, 10. And since the time that I commanded judges *to be* over my people Israel. Moreover I will subdue all thine enemies. Furthermore, I tell thee that the LORD will build thee an house. 11. And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go *to be* with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. 12. He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever. 13. I will be his father, and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took *it* from *him* that was before thee: 14. But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for evermore. 15. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

Let us observe here,

I. How desirous and solicitous good people should be, to serve the interests of God's kingdom in the world, to the utmost of their capacity. David could not be easy in a house of cedar, while the ark was lodged within curtains, v. 1. The concerns of the public should always be near our hearts. What pleasure can we take in our own prosperity, if we see not the good of Jerusalem? When David is advanced to wealth and power, see what his cares and projects are. Not, "What shall I do for my children, to get portions for them? What shall I do to fill my coffers, and enlarge my dominions?" But, "What shall I do for God, to serve and honour him?" They that are contriving where to bestow their fruits and their goods, would do well to inquire what condition the ark is in, and whether some may not be well bestowed upon it.

II. How ready God's prophets should be to encourage every good purpose. Nathan was no sooner aware of David's good design, than he bade him *go, and do all that was within his heart*; (v. 2.) for he had no reason to doubt that God was with him in it. Ministers should stir up the gifts and graces that are in others, as well as in themselves.

III. How little God affects external pomp and splendour in his service. His ark was content with a tabernacle, (v. 5.) and he never so much as mentioned the building of a house for it; no, not when he had fixed his people in great and goodly cities which they builded not, Deut. 6. 10. He commanded the judges to *feed his people*, but never bid them *build him a house*, v. 6. We may well be content a while with mean accommodations; God's ark was so.

IV. How graciously God accepts his people's good purposes, yea, though he himself prevents the performance of them. David must not *build this house*, v. 4. He must prepare for it, but not do it; as Moses must bring Israel within sight of Canaan, but must then leave it to Joshua to put them in possession of it. It is the prerogative of Christ to be both the Author and Finisher of his

work. Yet he must not think that, because he was not permitted to build the temple, 1. His preferment was in vain; no, "*I took thee from the sheep-cote*, though not to be a builder of the temple, yet to be ruler over my people Israel; that is honour enough for thee, leave the other to one that shall come after thee," v. 7. Why should one man think to engross all the business, and to bring every good work to perfection; let something be left for them that succeed. God had given him victories, and made him a name, (v. 8.) and, further, intended by him to establish his people Israel, and secure them against their enemies, v. 9. That must be his work, who is a man of war, and fit for it, and he must let building of churches alone for one that was never cut out for a soldier. Nor, 2. Must he think that his good purpose was in vain, and that he should lose the reward of it; no, it being God's act to prevent the execution of it, he shall be as fully recompensed as if he had done it. *The Lord will build thee a house*, and annex the crown of Israel to it, v. 10. If there be a willing mind, it shall not only be accepted, but thus rewarded. Nor, 3. Must he think that because he might not do this good work, therefore it would never be done, and that it was in vain to think of it; no, *I will raise up thy seed, and he shall build me a house*, v. 11, 12. God's temple shall be built in the time appointed, though we may not have the honour of helping to build it, or the satisfaction of seeing it built. Nor, 4. Must he confine his thoughts to the temporal prosperity of his family, but must entertain himself with the prospect of the kingdom of the Messiah, who should descend from his loins, and whose throne should be *established for evermore*, v. 14. Solomon was not himself so settled in God's house as he should have been, nor was his family settled in the kingdom; "*But there shall one descend from thee, whom I will settle in my house, and in my kingdom;*" which intimates that he should be both a high priest over the house of God, and should have the sole administration of the affairs of God's kingdom among men, all power both in heaven and in earth, in the house, and in the kingdom, in the church, and in the world. He shall be a *priest upon his throne*, and the *counsel of peace shall be between them both*, and he shall build the temple of the Lord, Zech. 6. 12, 13.

16. And David the king came and sat before the LORD, and said, Who *am* I, O LORD God, and what *is* mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? 17. And yet this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God; for thou hast *also* spoken of thy servant's house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O LORD God. 18. What can David *speake* more to thee for the honour of thy servant? for thou knowest thy servant. 19. O LORD, for thy servant's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness, in making known all *these* great things. 20. O LORD, *there is* none like thee, neither *is there any* God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. 21. And what one nation in the earth *is* like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem *to be* his own people, to make thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before thy people, whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt? 22. For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, LORD, becamest their God. 23. Therefore now, LORD, let the thing that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and concerning his house, be established for ever and

do as thou hast said. 24. Let it even be established, that thy name may be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts *is* the God of Israel, *even* a God to Israel: and *let* the house of David thy servant *be* established before thee. 25. For thou, O my God, hast told thy servant that thou wilt build him an house: therefore thy servant hath found *in his heart* to pray before thee. 26. And now, LORD, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant. 27. Now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever; for thou blessest, O LORD, and *it shall be* blessed for ever.

We have here David's solemn address to God, in answer to the gracious message he had now received from him. By faith he receives the promises, embraces them, and is persuaded of them, as the patriarchs, Heb. 11. 12. How humbly does he here abase himself, and acknowledge his own unworthiness! How highly does he advance the name of God, and admire his condescending grace and favour! With what devout affections does he magnify the God of Israel, and what a value has he for the Israel of God! With what an assurance does he build upon the promise, and with what a lively faith does he put it in suit! What an example is this to us of humble, believing, fervent, prayers! The Lord enable us all thus to seek him! These things were largely observed, 2 Sam. 7. We shall therefore here observe only those few expressions, in which the prayer, as we find it here, differs from the record of it there, and has something added to it.

I. That which is there expressed by way of question, (*Is this the manner of men, O Lord God?*) is here an acknowledgment, "*Thou hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree.*" Thou hast made me a great man, and then treated me accordingly." God, by the covenant-relations into which he admits believers, the titles he gives them, the favours he bestows on them, and the preparations he has made for them, regards them according to the estate of men of high degree, though they are mean and vile. Having himself distinguished them, he treats them as persons of distinction, according to the quality he has been pleased to put upon them. Some give these words here another reading, *Thou hast looked upon me in the form of a man, who art in the highest, the Lord God;* or, *Thou hast made me to see, according to the form of a man, the majesty of the Lord God.*" And so it points at the Messiah; for as Abraham, so David, saw his day, and was glad; saw it by faith, saw him in *fashion as a man, the Word made flesh*; and yet saw his *glory as that of the only-begotten of the Father*. And this was it, that God spake concerning his house for a great while to come, the foresight of which affected him more than any thing. And let it not be thought strange that David should speak so plainly of the two natures of Christ, who in spirit called him *Lord*, though he knew he was to be his *Son*, (Ps. 110. 1.) and foresaw him *lower than the angels* for a little while, but afterward *crowned with glory and honour*, Heb. 2. 6, 7.

II. What can David say more unto thee, it is here added, *for the honour of thy servant?* v. 18. Note, The honour God puts upon his servants, by taking them into covenant and communion with himself is so great, that they need not, they cannot, desire to be more highly honoured. Were they to sit down and wish, they could not speak more for their own honour, than that which the word of God has spoken.

III. It is very observable that what in Samuel is said to be *for thy word's sake*, is here said to be *for thy servant's sake*, v. 18. Jesus Christ is both *the Word of God*, (Rev. 19. 13.) and *the Servant of God*; (Isa. 42. 1.) and it is for his sake, upon the score of his mediation, that the promises are both made, and made good, to all believers; it is in him, that they are *yea and amen*. For his sake

is done, for his sake it is made known; to him we owe all this greatness, from him we are to expect all these great things; they are the *unsearchable riches of Christ*, which, if by faith we see in themselves, and see in the hand of the Lord Jesus, we cannot but magnify as great things, the only true greatness, and speak honourably of accordingly.

IV. In Samuel, the Lord of hosts is said to be the *God over Israel*; here he is said to be the *God of Israel*, even a *God to Israel*, v. 24. His being the *God of Israel*, bespeaks his having the name of their *God*, and so calling himself; his being a *God to Israel*, bespeaks his answering to the name, his filling up the relation, and doing all that to them which might be expected from him. There were those that were called *gods* of such and such nations, gods of Assyria and Egypt, gods of Hamad and Arpad; but they were no gods to them, for they stood them in no stead at all, were mere ciphers, and nothing but a name; but the *God of Israel* is a *God to Israel*; all his attributes and perfections redound to their real benefit and advantage. *Happy therefore, thrice happy, is the people whose God is Jehovah*; for he will be a God to them, a God all-sufficient.

V. The closing words in Samuel, are, *With thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever*. That is the language of a holy desire. But the closing words here are the language of a most holy faith; *For thou blessest, O Lord, and it shall be blessed for ever*, v. 27. 1. He is therefore encouraged to beg a blessing, because God had intimated to him that he had blessings in store for him and his family; "*Thou blessest, O Lord, and therefore unto thee shall all flesh come for a blessing; unto thee do I come for the blessing promised to me.*" Promises are intended to direct and excite prayer. Has God said, *I will bless*? Let our hearts answer, *Lord bless me*. 2. He is therefore earnest for the blessing, because those whom God blesses are truly and eternally blessed. *Thou blessest, and it shall be blessed*. Men can but *beg* the blessing, it is God that *commands* it; what he designs he effects, what he promises he performs; saying and doing are not two things with him. Nay, *it shall be blessed for ever*. His blessings shall not be revoked, cannot be opposed, and the benefits conferred by them, are such as will survive time and days. David's prayer concludes as God's promise did, (v. 14.) with that which is *for ever*. God's word looks at things eternal, and so should our desires and hopes.

CHAP. XVIII.

David's piety and his prayer we had an account of in the foregoing chapter; here follows immediately that which one might reasonably expect, an account of his prosperity; for they that seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, as David did, shall have other things added to them, as far as God sees good for them. Here is, I. His prosperity abroad. He conquered the Philistines, (v. 1.) the Moabites, (v. 2.) the king of Zobah, (v. 3, 4.) the Syrians, (v. 5, 8.) made the king of Hamath his tributary (v. 9, 11.) and the Edomites, v. 12, 13. II. His prosperity at home. His court and kingdom flourished, v. 14, 17. All this we had an account of before, 2 Sam. 8.

1. **N**OW after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them, and took Gath and her towns out of the hand of the Philistines. 2. And he smote Moab; and the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts. 3. And David smote Hadarezer king of Zobah unto Hamath, as he went to establish his dominion by the river Euphrates. 4. And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: David also houghed all the chariot-horses, but reserved of them an hundred chariots. 5. And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadarezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men. 6. Then David put garrisons in

Syria-Damascus; and the Syrians became David's servants, and brought gifts. Thus the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went. 7. And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadarezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. 8. Likewise from Tibbath, and from Chun, cities of Hadarezer, brought David very much brass, wherewith Solomon made the brazen sea, and the pillars, and the vessels of brass.

After this, it is said, (v. 1.) David did those great exploits. After the sweet communion he had had with God by the word and prayer in the foregoing chapter, he went on in his work with an extraordinary vigour and courage, *conquering, and to conquer*. Thus Jacob, after his vision, lifted up his feet, Gen. 29. 1.

We have taken a view of these victories before, and shall now only observe,

1. Those that have been long enemies to the Israel of God, will be brought down at last. The Philistines had, for several generations, been vexations to Israel, but now *David subdued them*, v. 1. Thus shall all opposing *rule, principality, and power*, he, at the end of time, put down by the Son of David, and the most inveterate enemies shall fall before him.

2. Such is the uncertainty of this world, that frequently men lose their wealth and power, then when they think to confirm it. Hadarezer was smitten as he went to establish his dominion, v. 3.

3. *A horse is a vain thing for safety*, so David said; (Ps. 33. 17.) and, it seems, he believed what he said, for he *houghed the chariot-horses*, v. 4. Being resolved not to trust to them, (Ps. 20. 7.) he would not use them.

4. The enemies of God's church are often made to ruin themselves by helping one another, v. 5. The Syrians of Damascus were smitten when they came to help Hadarezer. When hand thus joins in hand, they shall not only not go unpunished, but thereby they shall be gathered as the sheaves into the floor, Mic. 4. 11, 12.

5. The wealth of the sinner sometimes proves to have been laid up for the just. The Syrians brought gifts, v. 6. Their shields of gold and their brass, were brought to Jerusalem, v. 7, 8. As the tabernacle was built of the spoils of the Egyptians, so the temple of the spoils of other gentile nations. A happy presage of the interest the Gentiles should have in the gospel-church.

9. Now when Tou king of Hamath heard how David had smitten all the host of Hadarezer king of Zobah; 10. He sent Hadoram his son to king David, to inquire of his welfare, and to congratulate him because he had fought against Hadarezer, and smitten him; (for Hadarezer had warred with Tou;) and *with him* all manner of vessels of gold and silver and brass. 11. Then also king David dedicated unto the Lord, with the silver and the gold that he brought from all these nations; from Edom, and from Moab, and from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines, and from Amalek. 12. Moreover Abishai the son of Zeruiah slew of the Edomites in the valley of salt eighteen thousand. 13. And he put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became David's servants. Thus the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went. 14. So David reigned over all Israel, and executed judgment and justice among all his people. 15. and Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host;

and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, recorder. 16. And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Abimelech the son of Abiahar, *were* the priests; and Shavsha was scribe. 17. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was* over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and the sons of David *were* chief about the king.

Here let us learn,

1. That it is our interest to make those our friends, who have the presence of God with them. The king of Hamath, hearing of David's great success, sent to congratulate him, and to court his favour with a noble present, v. 9, 10. It is in vain to contend with the Son of David: *Kiss the Son*, therefore, *lest he be angry*; let the kings and judges of the earth, and all inferior people too, be thus wise, thus instructed. The presents we are to bring him are not *vessels of gold and silver*, as here; (those shall be welcome to him who have no such presents to bring;) but our hearts and sincere affections, our ourselves, our whole selves, we must present to him as living sacrifices.

2. That what God blesses us with, we must honour him with. The presents of his friends, as well as the spoils of his enemies, *David dedicated unto the Lord*; (v. 11.) that is, he laid them up toward the building and enriching of the temple. That is most truly and most comfortably our own, which we have consecrated unto the Lord, and which we use for his glory. Let our *merchandise and our hire be holiness to the Lord*, Isa. 23. 18.

3. That those who take God along with them whithersoever they go, may expect to prosper, and be preserved, whithersoever they go. It was said before, (v. 6.) and here again, (v. 13.) that *the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went*. Those are always under the eye of God, that have God always in their eye.

4. God gives men power, not that they may look great with it, but that they may do good with it. When David reigned over all Israel, he *executed judgment and justice among all his people*, and so answered the end of his elevation. He was not so intent on his conquests abroad, as to neglect the administration of justice at home. Herein he served the purposes of the kingdom of providence, and of that God who *sits in the throne judging right*; and was an eminent type of the Messiah, the *sceptre of whose kingdom is a right sceptre*.

CHAP. XIX.

The story is here repeated of David's war with the Ammonites, and the Syrians their allies, and the victories he obtained over them, which we read just as it is here related, 2 Sam. 10. Here is, I. David's civility to the king of Ammon, in sending an embassy of condolence to him, on occasion of his father's death, v. 1, 2. II. His great incivility to David, in the base usage he gave to his ambassadors, v. 3, 4. III. David's just resentment of it, and the war which broke out, thereupon, in which the Ammonites acted politically, in bringing the Syrians to their assistance, (v. 6, 7.) Joab did bravely, (v. 8. .13.) and Israel was once and again victorious, v. 14. .19.

1. **N**OW it came to pass after this, that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his stead. 2. And David said, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, because his father shewed kindness to me. And David sent messengers to comfort him concerning his father. So the servants of David came into the land of the children of Ammon to Hanun, to comfort him. 3. But the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? are not his servants come unto thee for to search, and to overthrow, and to spy

out the land? 4. Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved them, and cut off their garments in the midst hard by their buttocks, and sent them away. 5. Then there went *certain*, and told David how the men were served. And he sent to meet them: for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and *then* return.

Let us here observe,

1. That it becomes good people to be neighbourly, and especially to be grateful. David will pay respect to Hanun, because he is his neighbour; and religion teaches us to be civil and obliging to all, to honour all men, and to be ready to do all offices of kindness to those we live among; nor must difference in religion be an obstruction to it. But, beside this, David remembers the kindness which his father shewed to him. They that have received kindness must return it, as they have ability and opportunity: they that have received it from the parents must return it to the children, when they are gone.

2. That, as saith the proverb of the ancients, *Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked*, 1 Sam. 24. 13. The vile person will speak villany, and the instruments of the churl will be evil, to *destroy those with lying words that speak right*, Isz. 32. 6, 7. They that are base, and design ill themselves, are apt to be jealous, and to suspect ill of others without cause. Hanun's servants suggested that David's ambassadors came as spies; as if so great and mighty a man as David needed to do so mean a thing. If he had any design upon the Ammonites, he could effect it by open force, and had no occasion for any fraudulent practices; or, as if a man of such virtue and honour would do so base a thing. Yet Hanun hearkened to the suggestion, and, against the law of nations, treated David's ambassadors villainously.

3. Masters ought to protect their servants, and, with the greatest tenderness, to concern themselves for them, if they come by any loss or damage in their service. David did so for his ambassadors (v. 5.) Christ will do so for his ministers; and let all masters thus *give unto their servants that which is just and equal*.

6. And when the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the children of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia, and out of Syria-maachah, and out of Zobah. 7. So they hired thirty and two thousand chariots, and the king of Maachah and his people, who came and pitched before Medeba. And the children of Ammon gathered themselves together from their cities, and came to battle. 8. And when David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men. 9. And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array before the gate of the city: and the kings that were come *were* by themselves in the field. 10. Now when Joab saw that the battle was set against him before and behind, he chose out of all the choice of Israel, and put *them* in array against the Syrians. 11. And the rest of the people he delivered unto the hand of Abishai his brother, and they set *themselves* in array against the children of Ammon. 12. And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children

of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will help thee. 13. Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God: and let the LORD do *that which is good in his sight*. 14. So Joab and the people that *were* with him drew nigh before the Syrians unto the battle; and they fled before him. 15. And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, they likewise fled before Abishai his brother, and entered into the city. Then Joab came to Jerusalem. 16. And when the Syrians saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they sent messengers, and drew forth the Syrians that *were* beyond the river: and Shophach, the captain of the host of Hadarezer, *went* before them. 17. And it was told David; and he gathered all Israel, and passed over Jordan, and came upon them, and set *the battle* in array against them. So when David had put the battle in array against the Syrians, they fought with him. 18. But the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew of the Syrians seven thousand men, *which fought in* chariots, and forty thousand footmen, and killed Shophach the captain of the host. 19. And when the servants of Hadarezer saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they made peace with David, and became his servants: neither would the Syrians help the children of Ammon any more.

We may see here,

1. How the hearts of sinners that are marked for ruin, are hardened to their destruction. The children of Ammon saw that they *had made themselves odious to David*, (v. 6.) and then it had been their wisdom to have desired conditions of peace, to have humbled themselves, and offered any satisfaction for the injury they had done him; the rather because they had made themselves not only odious to David, but obnoxious to the justice of God, who is *King of nations*, and will assert the injured rights, and maintain the violated laws, of nations. But, instead of this, they prepared for war, and so brought upon themselves, by David's hand, those desolations which he never intended them.

2. How the courage of brave men is heightened and invigorated by difficulties. When Joab saw that the battle was set against him, before and behind, (v. 10.) instead of meditating a retreat, he doubled his resolution; and, though he could not double, he divided his army, and not only spake, but acted, like a gallant man, that had great presence of mind when he saw himself surrounded. He engaged with his brother for mutual assistance; (v. 12.) excited himself, and the rest of the officers, to act vigorously in their respective posts, with an eye to God's glory, and their country's good, not to any honour and advantage of their own; and then left the issue to God: *Let the Lord do that which is right in his sight*.

3. How vain the greatest art and strength are against justice and equity. The Ammonites did their utmost; they brought as good a force into the field, and disposed it with as much policy as possible; yet, having a bad cause, and acting in defence of wrong, it would not do; they were put to the worst. Right will prevail, and triumph at last.

4. To how little purpose it is for those to rally again, and reinforce themselves, that have not God on their side. The Syrians, though no way concerned in the merits of the cause, but serving only as mercenaries to the Ammonites, when they were

beaten, thought themselves concerned to retrieve their honour; and therefore called in the assistance of the Syrians on the other side Euphrates; but to no purpose, still they *fled before Israel*: (v. 18.) they lost 7000 men, who are said to be the men of 700 chariots, 2 Sam. 10. 18. For, as now, in a man of war for sea-service, they allot ten men to a gun, so then, in land-service, ten men to a chariot.

5. Those who have *meddled with strife that belongs not to them*, and have found that they *meddled to their own hurt*, do well to learn wit at length, and meddle no further. The Syrians, finding that Israel was the conquering side, not only brake off their alliance with the Ammonites, and would help them no more. (v. 19.) but *made peace with David, and became his servants*. Let those who have in vain stood it out against God, be thus wise for themselves, and *agree with him quickly while they are in the way*. Let them become his servants; for they cannot but see themselves undone, if they be his enemies.

CHAP. XX.

Here is a repetition of the story of David's wars, I. With the Ammonites, and the taking of Rabbah, v. 1. 3. II. With the giants of the Philistines, v. 4. 8.

1. **A**ND it came to pass, that after the year was expired, at the time that kings go out to battle, Joab led forth the power of the army, and wasted the country of the children of Ammon, and came and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried at Jerusalem. And Joab smote Rabbah, and destroyed it. 2. And David took the crown of their king from off his head, and found it to weigh a talent of gold, and *there were* precious stones in it, and it was set upon David's head: and he brought also exceeding much spoil out of the city. 3. And he brought out the people that *were* in it, and cut *them* with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes. Even so dealt David with all the cities of the children of Ammon. And David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

How the army of the Ammonites, and their allies, was routed in the field, we read in the foregoing chapters. Here we have the destruction of Rabbath, the metropolis of their kingdom, (v. 1.) the putting of their king's crown upon David's head, (v. 2.) and the great severity that was used toward the people, v. 3. This we had a more full account of, 2 Sam. 11. and 12. and cannot but remember by this sad token, that, while Joab was besieging Rabbah, David fell into that great sin in the matter of Uriah.

But it is observable, that though the rest of the story be repeated, that is not; a hint only is given of it in those words, (*But David tarried at Jerusalem*,) which lie here in a parenthesis. If he had been abroad with his army, he had been out of the way of that temptation; but, indulging his ease, he fell into uncleanness. Now, as the relating of the sin David fell into, is an instance of the impartiality and fidelity of the sacred writers; so the avoiding of the repetition of it here, when there was a fair occasion given to speak of it again, is designed to teach us, that though there may be a just occasion to speak of the faults and miscarriages of others, yet we should not take delight in the repetition of them. That should always be looked upon as an unpleasing subject, which, though sometimes one cannot help falling upon, yet one would not choose to dwell upon, any more than we should love to rake in a dunghill. The persons, or actions, we can say no good of, we had best say nothing of.

4. And it came to pass after this, that there arose war at Gezer with the Philistines; at which time Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Sippai *that was* of the children of the giant, and they were subdued. 5. And there was war again with the Philistines; and Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear-staff *was* like a weaver's beam. 6. And yet again there was war at Gath, where was a man of *great* stature, whose fingers and toes *were* four and twenty, six *on each hand*, and six *on each foot*: and he also was the son of the giant. 7. But when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea David's brother slew him. 8. These were born unto the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

The Philistines were nearly subdued, *ch. 18. 1.* but as, in the destruction of the Canaanites by Joshua, the sons of Anak were last subdued, (*Josh. 11. 21.*) so here, in the conquest of the Philistines, the giants of Gath were last brought down. In the conflicts between grace and corruption, there are some sins, which, like these giants, keep their ground a great while, and are not mastered without much difficulty, and a long struggle: but judgment will be brought forth into victory at last.

Observe, 1. We never read of giants among the Israelites, as we do of giants among the Philistines; the giants of Gath, but not giants of Jerusalem. The growth of God's plants is in usefulness, not in bulk. They who covet to have *cubits added to their stature*, do not consider that it will but make them more unwieldy. In the balance of the sanctuary, David far outweighs Goliath.

2. The servants of David, though men of ordinary stature, were too hard for the giants of Gath, in every encounter; because they had God on their side, who takes pleasure in abasing lofty looks, and mortifying the giants that are in the earth, as he did of old by the deluge, though they were men of renown. Never let the church's friends be disheartened by the power and pride of the church's enemies. We need not fear great men against us, while we have the great God for us. What will a finger more on each hand do, or a toe more on each foot, in contest with Omnipotence?

3. These giants *defied Israel*, (*v. 7.*) and were thus made to pay for their insolence. None are more visibly marked for ruin, than those who reproach God and his Israel. God will do great things, rather than suffer the enemy to *behave themselves proudly*, *Deut. 32. 27.* The victories of the Son of David, like those of David himself, are gradual. *We see not yet all things put under him*; but it will be seen shortly: and death itself, the last enemy, like these giants, triumphed over.

CHAP. XXI.

As this rehearsal makes no mention of David's sin in the matter of Uriah, so neither of the troubles of his family, that followed upon it; not a word of Absalom's rebellion, or Sheba's. But David's sin, in numbering the people, is here related, because, in the atonement made for that sin, an intimation was given of the spot of ground on which the temple should be built. Here is, I. David's sin, in forcing Joab to number the people, 1. 4. II. David's sorrow for what he had done, as soon as he perceived the sinfulness of it, v. 5. 8. III. The sad dilemma (or trilemma rather) he was brought to, when it was put to him to choose how he would be punished for this sin, and what rod he would be beaten with, v. 9. 13. IV. The woful havoc which was made by the pestilence in the country, and the narrow escape which Jerusalem had from being laid waste by it, v. 14. 16 V. David's repentance and sacrifice upon this occasion, and the staying of the plague thereupon, v. 17. 30. This woful story we met with, and meditated upon, 2 Sam. 24.

1. **A**ND Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. 2. And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know *it*. 3. And Joab answered, The **LORD** make his people an hundred times so many more as they *be*: but, my lord the king, *are* they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? 4. Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. 5. And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all *they of* Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah *was* four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword. 6. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab.

Numbering the people, one would think, was no bad thing. Why should not the shepherd know the count of his flock? But God sees not as man sees. It is plain it was wrong in David to do it, and a great provocation to God; because he did it in the pride of his heart: and there is no sin that has in it more of contradiction, and therefore more of offence, to God, than pride. The sin was David's, he alone must bear the blame of it: but here we are told,

I. How active the tempter was in it; (*v. 1.*) *Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David* to do it. It is said, *2 Sam. 24. 1.* that *the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David* to do it. The righteous judgments of God are to be observed and acknowledged even in the sins and unrighteousness of men. We are sure that God is not the Author of sin, he *tempts no man*; and therefore when it is said that he moved David to do it, it must be explained by what is intimated here, that, for wise and holy ends, he permitted the devil to do it. Here we trace this foul stream to its fountain.

1. That Satan, the enemy of God and all good, should *stand up against Israel*, is not strange. It is what he aims at, to weaken the strength, diminish the numbers, and eclipse the glory, of God's Israel, to whom he is a *Satan*, a sworn *adversary*. But, 2. That he should influence David, the man after God's own heart, to do a wrong thing, may well be wondered at. One would think him one of those whom the wicked one touches not. No, even the best saints, till they come to heaven, are forbidden to think themselves out of the reach of Satan's temptations.

Now, when Satan meant to do Israel a mischief, what course did he take? He did not *move God against them to destroy them*, as he did against Job, (*ch. 2. 3.*) but he provoked David, the best friend they had, to number them, and so to offend God, and set him against them. Note, (1.) The devil does us more mischief by tempting us to sin against our God, than he does by accusing us before our God. He destroys none but by their own hands. (2.) The greatest spite he can do to the church of God, is, to tempt the rulers of the church to pride; for none can conceive the fatal consequence of that sin in all, especially in church-rulers. *Ye shall not be so*, Luke, 22. 26.

II. How passive the instrument was. Joab was the person employed, an active man in public business; but to this he was perfectly forced, and did it with the greatest reluctance imaginable.

1. He put in a remonstrance against it, before he began it. No man more forward than he in any thing that really tended to the honour of the king, or the welfare of the kingdom; but in this

matter, he would gladly be excused. For, (1.) It was a *needless* thing, there was no occasion at all for it. God had promised to multiply them, and he needed not question the accomplishment of that promise: they were all his servants, and he needed not doubt of their loyalty and affection to him. Their number was as much his strength as he could desire. (2.) It was a *dangerous* thing. In doing it, he might be a cause of trespass to Israel, and might provoke God against them. This Joab apprehended, and yet David himself did not. The most learned in the laws of God, are not always the most quick-sighted in the application of those laws.

2. He was quite weary of it before he had done it; for *the king's word was abominable to Joab, v. 6.* Time was, when whatever king David did *pleased all the people*; (2 Sam. 3. 36.) but now there was a general disgust at these orders, which confirmed Joab in his dislike of them, so that though the produce of this muster was really very great, yet he had no heart to perfect it, but left two tribes unnumbered, (v. 5, 6.) two considerable ones, Levi and Benjamin; and, perhaps, was not very exact in numbering the rest, because he did not do it with any pleasure; which might be one occasion of the difference between the sums here and 2 Sam. 24. 9.

7. And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel. 8. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. 9. And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying, 10. Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three *things*: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. 11. So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee, 12. Either three years famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. 13. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great *are* his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man. 14. So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men. 15. And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 16. And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. 17. And David said unto God, *Is it not I that* commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and

done evil indeed; but *as for* these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

David is here under the rod for numbering the people; that rod of correction which drives out the foolishness that is bound up in the heart, the foolishness of pride. Let us briefly observe,

I. How he was corrected. If God's dearest children do amiss, they must expect to smart for it.

1. He is given to understand that God is displeased; and that is no small uneasiness to so good a man as David, v. 7. God takes notice of, and is displeased with, the sins of his people; and no sin is more displeasing to him than pride of heart: nor is any thing more humbling, and grieving, and mortifying, to a gracious soul, than to see itself under God's displeasure.

2. He is put to his choice, whether he will be punished by war, famine, or pestilence; for punished he must be, and by one of these. Thus, for his further humiliation, he is put into a strait, a great strait; and has the error of all the three judgments impressed upon his mind, no doubt, to his great amazement, while he is considering which he shall choose.

3. He hears of 70,000 of his subjects, who, in a few hours, were struck dead by the pestilence, v. 14. He was proud of the multitude of his people, but divine justice took a course to make them fewer. Justly is that taken from us, weakened, or embittered, to us, which we are proud of. David must have the people numbered: *Bring me the number of them*, says he, *that I may know it.* But now God numbers them after another manner, *numbers to the sword*, Isa. 65. 12. And David had another number of them brought, more to his confusion than that was to his satisfaction, namely, the number of the slain: a black bill of mortality, which is a drawback to his muster-roll.

4. He sees the destroying angel, with his sword drawn against Jerusalem, v. 16. This could not but be very terrible to him, as it was a visible indication of the anger of Heaven, and threatened the utter destruction of that beloved city. Pestilences make the greatest devastations in the most populous places. The sight of an angel, though coming peaceably, and on a friendly errand, has made even mighty men to tremble; how dreadful then must this sight be, of an angel with a drawn sword in his hand, a flaming sword, like that of the cherubim, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life! While we lie under the wrath of God, the holy angels are armed against us, though we see them not as David did.

II. How he bore the correction.

1. He made a very penitent confession of his sin, and prayed earnestly for the pardon of it, v. 8. Now he owns that he had sinned, had sinned greatly, had done foolishly, very foolishly; and he entreats, that, however he might be corrected for it, the iniquity of it might be done away.

2. He accepted the punishment of his iniquity; "Let thy hand be on me and on my father's house. I submit to the rod, only let me be the sufferer, for I am the sinner; mine is the guilty head at which the sword should be pointed."

3. He cast himself upon the mercy of God, (though he knew he was angry with him,) and did not entertain any hard thoughts of him. However it be, *Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great*, v. 13. Good men, even when God frowns upon them, think well of him: *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*

4. He expressed a very tender concern for the people, and it went to his heart to see them plagued for his transgression: *These sheep, what have they done?*

18. Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 19. And David went up at

the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD. 20. And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat. 21. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked, and saw David, and went out of the threshing-floor, and bowed himself to David with *his* face to the ground. 22. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of *this* threshing-floor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD; thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people. 23. And Ornan said unto David, Take *it* to thee, and let my lord the king do *that which is* good in his eyes: lo, I give *thee* the oxen *also* for burnt-offerings, and the threshing-instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat-offering; I give it all. 24. And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take *that which is* thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt-offerings without cost. 25. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. 26. And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering. 27. And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof. 28. At that time, when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. 29. For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt-offering, *were* at that season in the high-place at Gibeon. 30. But David could not go before it to inquire of God; for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

We have here the controversy concluded, and, upon David's repentance, his peace made with God. *Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away.*

1. A stop was put to the progress of the execution, v. 15. When David repented him of the sin, God repented him of the judgment, and ordered the destroying angel to *stay his hand*, and *sheath his sword*, v. 27.

2. Direction was given to David to rear an altar in the threshing-floor of Ornan, v. 18. The angel commanded the prophet Gad to bring David this direction. The same angel that had, in God's name, carried on the war, is here forward to set on foot the treaty of peace; for angels do not desire the woeful day. The angel could have given this order to David himself: but he chose to do it by his seer, that he might put an honour upon the prophetic office. Thus the revelation of Jesus Christ was notified by the angel to John, and by him to the churches. The commanding of David to build an altar, was a blessed token of reconciliation; for if God had been pleased to kill him, he would not have appointed, because he would not have accepted, a sacrifice at his hands.

3. David immediately made a bargain with Ornan for the threshing-floor; for he would not serve God at other people's charge. Ornan generously offered it him gratis, not only in complaisance to the king, but because he had himself *seen the angel*, v. 20. which so terrified him, that he and his four sons hid themselves, as unable to bear the brightness of his glory, and afraid of his drawn

sword. Under these apprehensions, he was willing to do any thing toward making the atonement. Those that are duly sensible of the terrors of the Lord, will do all they can, in their places, to promote religion, and all the methods of reconciliation for the turning away of God's wrath.

4. God testified his acceptance of David's offerings on this altar: he *answered him from heaven by fire*, v. 26. To signify that God's anger was turned away from him, the fire that might justly have fastened upon the sinner, fastened upon the sacrifice, and consumed that; and, upon this, the destroying sword was returned into its sheath. Thus Christ was made sin, and a curse, for us, and it pleased the Lord to bruise him, that through him God might be to us, not a consuming Fire, but a reconciled Father.

5. He continued to offer his sacrifices upon this altar. The brazen altar which Moses made, was at Gibeon, v. 29. and there all the sacrifices of Israel were offered: but David was so terrified at the sight of the sword of the angel, that he *could not go thither*, v. 30. The business required haste, when the plague was begun. Aaron must go quickly, nay, he must *run*, to make atonement, Numb. 16. 46, 47. And the ease here was no less urgent; so that David had not time to go to Gibeon: nor durst he leave the angel, with his sword drawn over Jerusalem, lest the fatal stroke should be given, before he came back. And therefore God, in tenderness to him, bade him build an altar in that place, dispensing with his own law concerning one altar, because of the present distress, and accepting the sacrifices offered on this new altar, which was not set up in opposition to that, but in concurrence with it. The symbols of unity were not so much insisted on, as unity itself. Nay, when the present distress was over, (as it should seem,) David, as long as he lived, sacrificed there, though the altar at Gibeon was still kept up; for God had owned the sacrifices that were here offered, and had testified his acceptance of them, v. 28. On those administrations in which we have experienced the tokens of God's presence, and have found that he is with us of a truth, it is good to continue our attendance. "Here God has graciously met me, and therefore I will still expect to meet with him."

CHAP. XXII.

Out of the eater comes forth meat. *It was upon occasion of the terrible judgment inflicted on Israel for the sin of David, that God gave intimation of the setting up of another altar, and of the place where he would have the temple to be built; upon which, David was excited with great vigour to make preparation for the great work; wherein, though he had long since designed it, it should seem, he was, of late, grown remiss, till awakened by the alarm of that judgment. The tokens of God's favour he received, after those of his displeasure, 1. Directed him to the place, v. 1. 11. Encouraged and quickened him to the work. 1. He set himself to prepare for the building, v. 2..5. 2. He instructed Solomon, and gave him a charge concerning this work, v. 6..16. 3. He commanded the princes to assist him in it, v. 17..19. There is a great deal of difference between the frame of David's spirit in the beginning of the former chapter, and in the beginning of this. There, in the pride of his heart, he was numbering the people; here, in his humility, preparing for the service of God. There corruption was uppermost; (but the well of living water in the soul, though it may be muddied, will work itself clear again;) grace here has recovered the upper hand.*

1. **T**HEN David said, This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel. 2. And David commanded to gather together the strangers that *were* in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones, to build the house of God. 3. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; 4. Also cedar-trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar-wood to David. 5. And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender,

and the house *that is* to be builded for the LORD *must be* exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will *therefore* now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.

Here is,

I. The place for the building of the temple, v. 1. *Then David said*, by inspiration of God, and as a declaration of his mind, *This is the house of the Lord God*. If a temple must be built for God, it is fit that it be left to him to choose the ground, for all the earth is his; and this is the ground he makes choice of: it had pertained to a Jebusite, and, perhaps, there was not a spot of ground besides, in or about Jerusalem, that did so; a happy presage of the setting up of the gospel-temple among the Gentiles. See Acts, 15. 16, 17. The ground was a threshing-floor; for the church of the living God is his floor, his threshing, and *the corn of his floor*, Isa. 21. 10. Christ's fan is in his hand, thoroughly to purge his floor. This is to be the house, because this is the altar; the temple was built for the sake of the altar: there were altars long before there were temples.

II. Preparations made for that building. David must not build it, but he would do all he could towards it; he *prepared abundantly before his death*, v. 5. It intimates, that the consideration of his age and growing infirmities, which shewed him his death approaching, quickened him, toward his latter end, to be very diligent in making this preparation. What our hands find to do for God, and our souls, and our generation, let us do it, with all our might, before our death, because after death there is no device nor working.

Now we are here told,

1. What induced him to make such preparation: two things he considered; (1.) That Solomon was young and tender, and not likely to apply himself with any great vigour to this business at first; so that, unless he found the wheels set a-going, he would be in danger of losing a great deal of time at first, the rather, because, being young, he would be tempted to put it off; whereas, if he found the materials got ready to his hand, the most difficult part of the work would be over, and it would excite and encourage him to go about it in the beginning of his reign. Note, Those that are aged and experienced should consider those that are young and tender, and provide them what help they can, that they may make the work of God as easy to them as possible. (2.) That the house must be exceeding magnificent, very stately and sumptuous, strong and beautiful, every thing about it the best in its kind; for a good reason, it was intended for the honour of the great God, the Lord of the whole earth, and was to be a type of Christ, in whom all fulness dwells, and in whom are hid all treasures. Men were then to be taught by sensible methods: the grandeur of the house would help to affect the worshippers with a holy awe and reverence of God, and would invite strangers to come to see it, as the wonder of the world, who thereby would be brought acquainted with the true God; therefore it is here designed to be of fame and glory throughout all countries. David foretold this good effect of its being magnificent; (Ps. 68. 29.) *Because of thy temple at Jerusalem, shall kings bring presents unto thee*.

2. What preparation he made: in general, he prepared abundantly, as we shall find afterward; cedar and stones, iron and brass, are here specified, v. 2. 4. Cedar he had from the Tyrians and the Zidonians; *The daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift*, Ps. 45. 12. He also got workmen together, *the strangers that were in the land of Israel*. Some think that he employed them, because they were generally better artists, and more ingenious in manual operations, than the Israelites; or rather, because he would not employ the free-born Israelites in any thing that looked mean and servile. They were delivered from the bondage of making bricks in Egypt, and must not return to hew stone. These strangers were proselytes to the Jewish religion, who, though not enslaved, yet were not of equal dignity with Israelites.

6. Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD God of Israel. 7. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: 8. But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. 9. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. 10. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I *will be* his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever. 11. Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee. 12. Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God. 13. Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfil the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses with concerning Israel: be strong, and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed. 14. Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight: for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto. 15. Moreover, *there are* workmen with thee in abundance, hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work. 16. Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, *there is* no number. Arise *therefore*, and be doing, and the LORD be with thee.

Though Solomon was young and tender, he was capable of receiving instructions concerning the work for which he was designed; accordingly, his father here gives him instructions. When David came to the throne, he had many things to do, for the foundations were all out of course; but Solomon had only one thing in charge, and that was, *to build a house for the Lord God of Israel*, v. 6. Now,

1. He tells him why he did not do it himself. It was in his mind to do it, (v. 7.) but God forbade him, because *he had shed much blood*, v. 8. Some think it refers to the blood of Uriah, which fastened such a reproach upon him, as rendered him unworthy the honour of building the temple; but that honour was forbidden him before he had shed that blood: therefore it must be meant, as it is here explained, of the blood he shed in his wars, for he had been a man of war from his youth; which, though shed very justly and honourably, and in the service of God and Israel, yet made him unfit to be employed in this service, or rather less fit than another that had never been called to such bloody work. God, by assigning this as the reason of laying David aside from this work, shewed how precious human life is to him, and intended a

type of him who should build the gospel-temple, not by *destroying men's lives*, but *saving them*, Luke, 9. 56.

II. He gives him the reason why he imposed this task upon him.

1. Because God had designed him for it, nominated him as the man that should do it; *A son shall be born to thee*, that shall be called *Solomon*, and *he shall build a house for my name*, v. 9. 10. Nothing is more powerful to engage us to, and encourage us in, any service for God, than to know that hereunto we are appointed. 2. Because he would have leisure and opportunity to do it. He should be a man of rest, and therefore should not have his time, or thoughts, or wealth, diverted from this business. He should have rest from his enemies abroad, (none of them should invade or threaten him, or give him provocation,) and he should have peace and quietness at home; and therefore let him build the house. Note, When God gives rest, he expects work. 3. Because God had promised to establish his kingdom. Let this encourage him to honour God, that God had honour in store for him; let him build up God's house, and God will build up his throne. Note, God's gracious promises should quicken and invigorate our religious service.

III. He delivers him an account of the vast preparations he had made for this building; (v. 14.) not in a way of pride and vain-glory. (he speaks of it as a poor thing; *I have, in my poverty, prepared*, margin,) but as an encouragement to Solomon to engage cheerfully in the work, for which so solid a foundation was laid. The treasure here mentioned of 100,000 talents of gold, and 1,000,000 talents of silver, amounts to such an incredible sum, that most interpreters either allow an error in the copy, or think the talent here signifies no more than a plate or piece; *ingots* we call them. I am inclined to suppose that a certain number is here put for an uncertain, because it is said, (v. 16.) that of the gold and silver, as well as of the brass and iron, there was no number; and that David here includes all the dedicated things (ch. 18. 11.) which he designed *for the house of the Lord*; that is, not only for the building of it, but for the treasure of it; and, putting all together, it might come near what is here spoken of. Hundreds and thousands are numbers which we often use to express that which is very much, when yet we would not be understood strictly.

IV. He charges him to keep God's commandments, and to take heed to his duty in every thing, v. 13. He must not think, by building the temple, to purchase a dispensation to sin; no, on the contrary, his doing that, would not be accepted, nor accounted of, if he did not *take heed to fulfil the statutes which the Lord charged Moses with*, v. 13. Though he was to be king of Israel, he must always remember that he was a subject to the God of Israel.

V. He encourages him to go about this great work, and to go on in it; (v. 13.) "*Be strong, and of good courage*; though it is a vast undertaking, thou needest not fear coming under the reproach of the foolish builder, who began to build, and was not able to finish; it is God's work, and it shall come to perfection; *dread not, nor be dismayed*." In our spiritual work, as well as in our spiritual warfare, we have need of courage and resolution.

VI. He quickens him not to rest in the preparations he had made, but to add thereto, v. 14. Those that enter into the labours of others, and build upon their advantages, must still be improving.

Lastly, He prays for him; *The Lord give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel*, v. 12. Whatever charge we have, if we see God giving us the charge, and calling us to it, we may hope he will give us wisdom for the discharge of it. Perhaps Solomon had an eye to this prayer of his father for him, in the prayer he offered for himself, *Lord, give me a wise and understanding heart*. He concludes, (v. 16.) *Up, and be doing, and the Lord be with thee*. Hope of God's presence must not slacken our endeavours; though the Lord be with us, we must *rise, and be doing*, which, if we do, we have reason to believe he is, and will be, with us. Work out your salvation, and God will work in you.

17. David also commanded all the princes of

Israel to help Solomon his son, *saying*, 18. *Is not the LORD your God with you? and hath he not given you rest on every side? for he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people*. 19. Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.

David here engages the princes of Israel to assist Solomon in the great work he had to do, and every one to lend him a hand toward the carrying of it on. Those that are in the throne cannot do the good they would, unless those about the throne set in with them. David would therefore have the princes to advise Solomon, and quicken him, and make the work as easy to him as they could, by promoting it every one in his place.

1. He shews them what obligations they lay under to be zealous in this matter, in gratitude to God for the great things he had done for them; he had given them victory, and rest, and a good land for an inheritance, v. 18. The more God has done for us, the more we should study to do for him.

2. He presses that upon them, which should make them zealous in it; (v. 19.) "*Set your heart and soul to seek God*, place your happiness in his favour, and keep your eye upon his glory; seek him as your chief good and highest end, and this, *with your heart and soul*; make religion your choice and business; and then you will grudge no pains or cost to promote the building of his sanctuary." Let but the heart be sincerely engaged for God, and the head and hand, the estate and interest, and all, will be cheerfully employed for him.

CHAP. XXIII.

David, having given charge concerning the building of the temple, in this and the following chapters, settles the method of the temple service, and puts into order the offices of it. In the late irregular times, and during the wars in the beginning of his reign, we may suppose that though the Levitical ordinances were kept up, yet it was not in the order, nor with the beauty and exactness, that were desirable. Now David, being a prophet, as well as a prince, by divine warrant and direction, set in order the things that were wanting. In this chapter, I. He declared Solomon to be his successor, v. 1. II. He numbered the Levites, and appointed them to their respective offices, v. 2. 5. III. He took an account of the several families of the Levites, v. 6. 33. IV. He made a new reckoning of them from twenty years old, and appointed them their work, v. 21. 32. And in this, he prepared for the temple, as truly as when he laid up gold and silver for it; for the place is of small account, in comparison with the work.

1. **S** when David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel. 2. And he gathered together all the princes of Israel, with the priests and the Levites. 3. Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and upward: and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty and eight thousand; 4. Of which, twenty and four thousand were to set forward the work of the house of the LORD, and six thousand were officers and judges: 5. Moreover four thousand were porters: and four thousand praised the LORD with the instruments which I made, *said David*, to praise *therewith*. 6. And David divided them into courses among the sons of Levi, *namely*, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 7. Of

the Gershonites *were*, Laadan, and Shimei. 8. The sons of Laadan; the chief *was* Jehiel, and Zetham, and Joel, three. 9. The sons of Shimei; Shelomith, and Haziël, and Haran, three. These *were* the chief of the fathers of Laadan. 10. And the sons of Shimei *were*, Jahath, Zina, and Jeush, and Beriah. These four *were* the sons of Shimei. 11. And Jahath was the chief, and Zizah the second: but Jeush and Beriah had not many sons; therefore they were in one reckoning, according to *their* father's house. 12. The sons of Kohath; Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, four. 13. The sons of Amram; Aaron, and Moses: and Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons for ever, to burn incense before the LORD, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name for ever. 14. Now *concerning* Moses the man of God, his sons were named of the tribe of Levi. 15. The sons of Moses *were*, Gershom, and Eliezer. 16. Of the sons of Gershom, Shebuel *was* the chief. 17. And the sons of Eliezer *were*, Rehabiah the chief. And Eliezer had none other sons; but the sons of Rehabiah were very many. 18. Of the sons of Izhar; Shelomith the chief. 19. Of the sons of Hebron; Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jehaziel the third, and Jekameam the fourth. 20. Of the sons of Uzziel; Micah the first, and Jesiah the second. 21. The sons of Merari; Mahli, and Mushi. The sons of Mahli; Eleazar, and Kish. 22. And Eleazar died, and had no sons, but daughters: and their brethren the sons of Kish took them. 23. The sons of Mushi; Mahli, and Eder, and Jerimoth, three.

- Here we have,

I. The crown entailed, according to the divine appointment, v. 1. David made Solomon king, not to reign with him, or reign under him, but only to reign after him. This he did, 1. When he was old and full of days. He was but 70 years old when he died, and yet he was full of days, *satur dierum*—*satisfied with living* in this world. When he found himself going off, he shewed his strong desire for the prosperity of the kingdom when he should be gone, and pleased himself with the hopeful prospects of a happy settlement, both in church and state. 2. He did it in parliament, in a solemn assembly of all the princes of Israel, which made Adonijah's attempt to break in upon Solomon's title, and set it aside, notwithstanding this public recognition and establishment of it, the more impudent, impious, and ridiculous. Note, The settling and securing of the crown in the interests of the temple, is a great blessing to a people, and a great satisfaction to those who are themselves leaving the world.

II. The Levites numbered, according to the rule in Moses's time, from 30 years old to 50, Numb. 4. 2, 3. Their number, in Moses's time, by this rule, was 8,580; (Numb. 4. 47, 48.) but now it was increased above four-fold, much more in proportion than the rest of the tribes; for the serviceable men of Levi's tribe were now 38,000; unless we suppose that here those were reckoned who were above 50, which was not the case there. Joab had not numbered the Levites, (*ek. 21. 6.*) but David now did; not in pride, but for a good purpose, and then he needed not fear wrath for it.

III. The Levites distributed to their respective posts, (v. 4, 5.) that every hand might be employed, (for, of all men, an idle

Levite makes the worst figure,) and that every part of the work might be carefully done. Now, 1. It was for the honour of God, that so great a number of servants attended his house, and the business of it. Much of the state of great men consists in the greatness of their retinue. When God kept house in Israel, see what a great household he had, and all well fed and well taught. But what were these to the attendants of his throne above, and the innumerable company of angels? 2. It was the happiness of Israel, that they had among them such a considerable body of men, who were obliged by their office to promote and keep up religion among them. If the worship of God go to decay in Israel, let it not be said that it was for want of due provision for the support of it, but that they who should have done it were careless and false.

The work assigned the Levites was four-fold. (1.) Some, and indeed far the greater number, were to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. Twenty-four thousand, almost two-thirds, were appointed for this service, to attend the priests in killing the sacrifices; slaying them; washing them; cutting them up; burning them; to have the meat-offerings and drink-offerings ready, to carry out dirt, and keep all the vessels and utensils of the temple clean, and every thing in its place, that the service might be performed both with expedition and with exactness. These served a thousand a week, and so went round in twenty-four courses. Perhaps, while the temple was in building, some of these were employed to set forward that work, to assist the builders, at least to quicken them, and keep good order among them, and the decorum which became temple-work. (2.) Others were officers and judges, not in the affairs of the temple, and in controversies that arose there, (for there, we may suppose, the priests presided,) but in the country; they were magistrates, to give the laws of God in charge, to resolve difficulties, and to determine controversies that arose upon them. Of these there were 6000 in the several parts of the kingdom, that assisted the princes and elders of every tribe, in the administration of justice. (3.) Others were porters, to guard all the avenues of the house of God, to examine them that desired entrance, and to resist those that would force an entrance. These were the life-guards of the temple, and, probably, were armed accordingly. (4.) Others were singers, and players on instruments, whose business it was to keep up that part of the service; this was a new-erected office.

IV. The Levites mustered, and disposed of into their respective families and kindreds, that an account of them might the better be kept, and those that neglected their duty might the more easily be discovered, by calling over the roll, and obliging them to answer to their names, which each family might do for itself. When those of the same family were employed together, it would engage them to love and assist one another. When Christ sent forth his disciples, two and two, he put together those that were brethren. Two families were here joined in one, (v. 11.) because they had not many sons. Those that are weak and little, separately, may be put together, and appear considerable.

That which is most observable in the account of the families of the Levites, is, that the posterity of Moses (that great man) stood upon the level with common Levites, and had no dignities or privileges at all peculiar to them; while the posterity of Aaron were advanced to the priests' office, to *sanctify the most holy things*, v. 13. It is said indeed of the grandson of Moses, Rehabiah, that *his sons were highly multiplied*, v. 17. margin. When God proposed to him, that, if he would let fall his intercession for Israel, he would make of him a great nation, he generously refused it; in recompence for which, his family is here greatly increased, and makes up in number what it wants in figure, in the tribe of Levi. Now, 1. The levelling of Moses's family with the rest, is an evidence of his self-denial. Such an interest had he both with God and man, that, if he had aimed to raise his own family, to dignify and enrich that, he might easily have done it; but he was no self-seeking man, as appears from his leaving to his children no marks of distinction; which was a sign that he had the Spirit of God, and not the spirit of the world. 2. The elevation of Aaron's family above the rest, was a recompence for his self-denial. When Moses (his

younger brother) was made a god to Pharaoh, and he only his prophet or spokesman, to observe his orders, and do as he was bidden, Aaron never disputed it, nor insisted upon his seniority, but readily took the inferior post God put him in, submitted to Moses, and, upon occasion, called him *his Lord*; and, because he thus submitted himself, in his own person, to his junior, in compliance with the will of God, God highly exalted his family, even above that of Moses himself. Those that are content to stoop are in the fairest way to rise. Before honour is humility.

24. These *were* the sons of Levi after the house of their fathers; *even* the chief of the fathers, as they were counted by number of names by their polls, that did the work for the service of the house of the LORD, from the age of twenty years and upward. 25. For David said, The LORD God of Israel hath given rest unto his people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem for ever: 26. And also unto the Levites; they shall no *more* carry the tabernacle, nor any vessels of it for the service thereof. 27. For by the last words of David the Levites *were* numbered from twenty years old and above: 28. Because their office *was* to wait on the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of the LORD, in the courts, and in the chambers, and in the purifying of all holy things, and the work of the service of the house of God; 29. Both for the shew-bread, and for the fine flour for meat-offering, and for the unleavened cakes, and for *that which is baked in the pan*, and for that which is fried, and for all manner of measure and size; 30. And to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even; 31. And to offer all burnt-sacrifices unto the LORD in the sabbaths, in the new moons, and on the set feasts, by number, according to the order commanded unto them, continually before the LORD: 32. And that they should keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the holy *place*, and the charge of the sons of Aaron their brethren, in the service of the house of the LORD.

Here is,

I. An alteration made in the computation of the effective men of the Levites; that, whereas, in Moses's time, they were not enlisted, or taken into service, till they were thirty years old, nor admitted as probationers till twenty-five, (Numb. 8. 24.) David ordered, by direction from God, that they should be numbered *for the service of the house of the Lord*, from the age of twenty years and upward, v. 24. This order he confirmed by his last words, v. 27. When he put his last hand to the draught of this establishment, he expressly appointed this to be done for ever after; yet not he, but the Lord.

1. Perhaps the young Levites, having no work appointed them till twenty-five years old, had many of them got a habit of idleness, or grew addicted to their pleasures, which proved both a blemish to their reputation, and a hinderance to their usefulness afterward; to prevent which inconvenience, they are set to work, and brought under discipline, at twenty years old. Those that will be eminent must learn to take care, and take pains, betimes.

2. When the work of the Levites was to carry burthens, heavy burthens, the tabernacle and the furniture of it, God would not call any to it, till they were come to their full strength; for he

considers our frame, and, in service as well as sufferings, will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear. But now God had given rest to his people, and made Jerusalem his dwelling-place for ever, so that there was no more occasion to carry the tabernacle and the vessels thereof; the service was much easier, and what would not over-work them, nor over-load them, if they entered upon it at twenty years old.

3. Now the people of Israel were multiplied, and there was a more general resort to Jerusalem, and would be when the temple was built, than had ever been to Shiloh, or Nob, or Gibeon; it was therefore requisite there should be more hands employed in the temple-service, that every Israelite who brought an offering might find a Levite ready to assist him. When more work is to be done, it is pity but there should be more workmen fetched in for the doing of it. When the harvest is plenteous, why should the labourers be few?

II. A further account of the Levites' work. What the work of the priests was, we were told, v. 13. To *sanctify the most holy things, to burn incense before the Lord, and to bless in his name*; that work the Levites were not to meddle with, and yet they had work enough, and good work, according to that to which they were appointed, v. 4, 5.

1. Those of them that were to *set forward the work of the house of God*, (v. 4.) were therein to *wait on the sons of Aaron*; (v. 28.) were to do the drudgery-work (if any work for God is to be called *drudgery*) of the house of God, to keep the courts and chambers clean, set things in their places, and have them ready when there was occasion to use them. They were to prepare the shew-bread, which the priests were to set on the table, to provide the flour and cakes for the meat-offerings, that the priests might have every thing ready to their hands.

2. Those of them that were judges and officers had an eye upon all *measure and size*, v. 29. The standards of all weights and measures were kept in the sanctuary; and the Levites had the care of them, to see that they were exact, and to try other weights and measures by them when they were appealed to.

3. The work of the singers was, to *thank and praise the Lord*, (v. 30.) at the offering of the morning and evening sacrifices, and other oblations on the sabbaths, new moons, &c. v. 31. Moses appointed that they should blow with trumpets over their burnt-offerings, and other sacrifices, and on their solemn days, Numb. 10. 10. The sound of this was awful, and might be affecting to the worshippers, but was not articulate, nor such a reasonable service as this which David appointed, of singing psalms on those occasions. As the Jewish church grew up from its infancy, it grew more and more intelligent in its devotions, till it came, at length, in the gospel, to *put away childish things*, 1 Cor. 13. 11. Gal. 4. 3, 9.

4. The work of the porters, (v. 5.) was, to keep the *charge of the tabernacle, and of the holy place*, that none might come nigh but such as were allowed, and those no nearer than was allowed them, v. 32. They were likewise to keep the charge of the sons of Aaron, to be at their beck, and go on their errands, who yet are called *their brethren*, to be a memorandum to the priests, that, though they were advanced to a high station, yet they were *hewn out of the same rock* with common Levites, and therefore must not lord it over them, but, in all instances, treat them as brethren.

CHAP. XXIV.

This chapter gives us a more particular account of the distribution of the priests and Levites into their respective classes, for the more regular discharge of their offices, according to their families. I. Of the priests, v. 1. . 19. II. Of the Levites, v. 20. . 31.

I. **N**OW these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron; Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 2. But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children: therefore Eleazar and Ithamar executed

the priest's office. 3. And David distributed them, both Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, according to their offices in their service. 4. And there were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar; and *thus* were they divided. Among the sons of Eleazar *there were* sixteen chief men of the house of *their* fathers, and eight among the sons of Ithamar according to the house of their fathers. 5. Thus were they divided by lot, one sort with another; for the governors of the sanctuary, and governors of *the house* of God, were of the sons of Eleazar, and of the sons of Ithamar. 6. And Shemaiah the son of Nethaneel the scribe, *one* of the Levites, wrote them before the king, and the princes, and Zadok the priest, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and *before* the chief of the fathers of the priests and Levites: one principal household being taken for Eleazar, and *one* taken for Ithamar. 7. Now the first lot came forth to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, 8. The third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, 9. The fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin, 10. The seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, 11. The ninth to Jeshuah, the tenth to Shecaniah, 12. The eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim, 13. The thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth to Jeshibeab, 14. The fifteenth to Bilgah, the sixteenth to Immer. 15. The seventeenth to Hezir, the eighteenth to Apses, 16. The nineteenth to Pethabiah, the twentieth to Jehezkel, 17. The one and twentieth to Jachin, the two and twentieth to Gamul, 18. The three and twentieth to Delaiah, the four and twentieth to Maaziah. 19. These *were* the orderings of them in their service to come into the house of the LORD, according to their manner, under Aaron their father, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him.

The particular account of these establishments is of little use to us now; but, when Ezra published it, it was of great use to direct their church-affairs, after their return from captivity, into the old channel again. The title of this record we have, v. 1. *These are the divisions of the sons of Aaron*; not by which they divided one from another, or were at variance one with another; (it is pity there should ever be any such divisions among the sons of Israel, but especially among the sons of Aaron;) but the distribution of them, in order to the dividing of their work among themselves; it was a division which God made, and was made for him.

1. This distribution was made for the more regular discharge of their office. God was, and still is, the God of order, and not of confusion, particularly in the things of his worship. Number, without order, is but a clog, and an occasion of tumult; but, when every one has, and knows, and keeps, his place and work, the more the better. In the mystical body every member has its use, for the good of the whole, Rom. 12. 4, 5. 1 Cor. 12. 12.

2. It was made by lot, that the disposal thereof might be of the Lord, and so all quarrels and contentions might be prevented, and no man could be charged with partiality, nor could any say that they had wrong done them. As God is the God of order, so

he is the God of peace. Solomon says of the lot, that it *causeth contention to cease*.

3. The lot was cast publicly, and with great solemnity, in the presence of the king, princes, and priests, that there might be no room for any fraudulent practices, or the suspicion of them. The lot is an appeal to God, and ought to be managed with corresponding reverence and sincerity. Matthias was chosen to the apostleship by lot, with prayer; (Acts, 1. 24, 26.) and I know not but it might be still used, in faith, in parallel cases, as an instituted ordinance. We have here the name of the public notary that was employed in writing the names, and drawing the lots, (v. 6.) *Shemaiah, one of the Levites*.

4. What those priests were chosen to, was, to preside in the affairs of the sanctuary, (v. 5.) in their several courses and turns. That which was to be determined by the lot was only the precedence, not who should serve, (for they chose all the chief men,) but who should serve first, and who next, that every one might know his course, and attend in it. Of the twenty-four chief men of the priests, sixteen were of the house of Eleazar, and eight of Ithamar; for the house of Ithamar might well be supposed to have dwindled since the sentence passed on the family of Eli, who was of that house. The method of drawing the lots is intimated, v. 6. one chief household being taken for Eleazar, and one for Ithamar. The sixteen chief names of Eleazar were put in one urn, the eight for Ithamar in another, and they drew out of them alternately, as long as those for Ithamar lasted, and then out of those only for Eleazar; or two for Eleazar, and then one for Ithamar, throughout.

5. Among these twenty-four courses, the eighth is that of Abijah, or Abia, (v. 10.) which is mentioned, Luke, 1. 5. as the course which Zechariah was of, the father of John Baptist; by which it appears, that those courses which David now settled, though interrupted, perhaps, in the bad reigns, and long broken off by the captivity, yet continued in succession till the destruction of the second temple by the Romans. And each course was called by the name of him in whom it was first founded, as the high priest is here called *Aaron*, (v. 19.) because succeeding in his dignity and power, though we read not of any of them that bore that name. Whoever was high priest must be revered and observed by the inferior priests as their father, as Aaron their father. Christ is High Priest over the house of God, to whom all believers, being made priests, are to be in subjection.

20. And the rest of the sons of Levi *were these*: of the sons of Amram; Shubael: of the sons of Shubael; Jehdeiah. 21. Concerning Rehabiah: of the sons of Rehabiah, the first *was* Isshiah. 22. Of the Izharites; Shelomoth: of the sons of Shelomoth; Jahath. 23. And the sons of *Hebron*; Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, Jekameam the fourth. 24. Of the sons of Uzziel; Micah: of the sons of Micah; Shamir. 25. The brother of Micah *was* Isshiah: of the sons of Isshiah; Zechariah. 26. The sons of Merari *were* Mahli and Mushi: the sons of Jaaziah; Beno, 27. The sons of Merari by Jaaziah; Beno, and Shoham, and Zaccur, and Ibri. 28. Of Mahli *came* Eleazar, who had no sons. 29. Concerning Kish: the son of Kish *was* Jerahmeel. 30. The sons also of Mushi; Mahli, and Eder, and Jerimoth. These *were* the sons of the Levites after the house of their fathers. 31. These likewise cast lots over against their brethren the sons of Aaron, in the presence of David the king, and Zadok, and Ahimelech, and the chief of the fathers of the priests

and Levites, even the principal father over against their younger brethren.

Most of the Levites here named were mentioned before, *ch.* 23. 16, &c. They were of those who were to attend the priests in the service of the house of God. But they are here mentioned again as heads of the twenty-four courses of Levites, (and about so many are here named,) who were to attend the twenty-four courses of the priests: they are therefore said to *cast lots over against their brethren*, (so they are called, not their lords,) *the sons of Aaron*, who were not to lord it over God's clergy, as the original word is, 1 Pet. 5. 3. And, that the whole disposal of the affair might be of the Lord, the principal fathers cast lots over against their younger brethren; that is, those that were of the elder house came upon the level with those of the younger families, and took their place, not by seniority, but as God by the lot directed. Note, In Christ no difference is made between bond and free, elder and younger. The younger brethren, if they be faithful and sincere, shall be no less acceptable to Christ than the principal fathers.

CHAP. XXV.

David, having settled the courses of these Levites that were to attend the priests in their ministrations, proceeds, in this chapter, to put those into a method that were appointed to be singers and musicians in the temple. Here is, I. The persons that were to be employed, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, (v. 1.) their sons, (v. 2. 6.) and other skilful persons, v. 7. II. The order in which they were to attend, determined by lot, v. 8. 31.

1. **M**OREOVER David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals: and the number of the workmen according to their service was: 2. Of the sons of Asaph; Zaccur, and Joseph, and Nethaniah, and Asarelah, the sons of Asaph under the hands of Asaph, which prophesied according to the order of the king. 3. Of Jeduthun: the sons of Jeduthun; Gedaliah, and Zeri, and Jeshaiah, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the hands of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the LORD. 4. Of Heman: the sons of Heman; Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, and Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, and Romamti-ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth: 5. All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to lift up the horn. And God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. 6. All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. 7. So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the LORD, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight.

Observe,

I. Singing the praises of God is here called *prophesying* (v. 1. 3.) not that all those who were employed in this service were honoured with the visions of God, or could foretell things to come. Heman indeed is said to be the *king's seer in the words of God*; (v. 5.) but the psalms they sang were composed by prophets, and many of them were prophetic; and the edification of the church was intended in it, as well as the glory of God. In Samuel's time, singing the praises of God went by the name of *prophesying*, (1 Sam. 10. 5.—19. 20.) and perhaps that is intended in what St. Paul calls *prophesying*, 1 Cor. 11. 4.—14. 24.

II. This is here called a *service*, and the persons employed in it, *workmen*, v. 1. Not but that it is the greatest liberty and pleasure to be employed in praising God: what is heaven but that? But it intimates that it is our duty to make a business of it, and stir up all that is within us to it; and that, in our present state of corruption and infirmity, it will not be done, as it should be done, without labour and struggle. We must take pains with our hearts, to bring them, and keep them, to this work, and to engage all that is within us.

III. Here were, in compliance with the temper of that dispensation, a great variety of musical instruments used, *harps, psalteries, cymbals*, (v. 1, 6.) and here was one that *lifted up the horn*, (v. 5.) that is, used wind-music. The bringing of such concert of music into the worship of God now, is what none pretend to.* But those who use such concerts for their own entertainment, should feel themselves obliged to preserve them always free from any thing that savours of immorality or profane-ness; by this consideration, that time was when they were sacred; and then they were justly condemned who brought them into common use: (Amos, 6. 5.) *They invented to themselves instruments of music like David*.

IV. The glory and honour of God were principally intended in all this temple-music, whether vocal or instrumental. It was to *give thanks, and praise the Lord*, that they were employed, v. 3. It was in the songs of the Lord that they were *instructed*, (v. 7.) that is, for songs in the house of the Lord, v. 6. This agrees with the intention of the perpetuating of psalmody in the gospel-church, which is, to *make melody with the heart, in conjunction with the voice, unto the Lord*, Eph. 5. 19.

V. The order of the king is likewise taken notice of, v. 2. and again, v. 6. In those matters, indeed, David acted as a prophet; but his taking care for the due and regular observance of divine institutions, both ancient and modern, is an example to all in authority to use their power for the promoting of religion, and the enforcing of the laws of Christ. Let them thus be *ministers of God for good*.

VI. The fathers presided in this service; Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun; (v. 1.) and the children were *under the hands of their father*, v. 2, 3, 6. This gives a good example to parents to train up their children, and indeed to all seniors to instruct their juniors, in the service of God, and particularly in praising of him, than which there is no part of our work more necessary, or more worthy to be transmitted to the succeeding generations. It gives also an example to the younger to *submit themselves to the elder*, (whose experience and observation fit them for direction,) and, as far as may be, to do what they do, *under their hand*. It is probable that Heman, Asaph, and Jeduthun, were bred up under Samuel, and had their education in the schools of the prophets, which he was the founder and president of; then they were pupils, now they came to be masters. Those that would be eminent must begin early, and take time to prepare themselves. This good work of singing God's praises Samuel revived, and set on foot, but lived not to see it brought to the perfection it appears in here. Solomon perfects what David began, so David perfects what Samuel began. Let all, in their day, do what they can for God and his church, though they cannot carry it so far as they would:

* It is obvious that Mr. HENRY would not express himself thus, were he now living.—Ed.

when they are gone, God can, out of stones, raise up others, who shall build upon their foundation, and bring forth the top-stone.

VII. There were others also, beside the sons of these three great men, who are called their *brethren*, (probably, because they had been wont to join with them in their private concerts,) who were *instructed in the songs of the Lord*, and were cunning or well skilled therein, v. 7. They were all Levites, and were in number 288. Now, 1. These were a good number, and a competent number to keep up the service in the house of God; for they were all skilful in the work to which they were called. When David the king was so much addicted to divine poesy and music, many others, all that had a genius for it, applied their studies and endeavours that way. Those do religion a great deal of good service that bring the exercises of religion into reputation. 2. Yet these were but a small number in comparison with the 4000 whom David appointed thus to *praise the Lord*, ch. 23. 5. Where were all the rest, when only 288, and those but by 12 in a course, were separated to this service? It is probable that all the rest were divided into as many courses, and were to follow as these led. Or, perhaps, these were for song in the house of the Lord, (v. 6.) with whom any that worshipped in the courts of that house might join; and the rest were disposed of, all the kingdom over, to preside in the country congregations, in this good work: for though the sacrifices instituted by the hand of Moses might be offered but at one place, the psalms penned by David might be sung every where, 1 Tim. 2. 8.

8. And they cast lots, ward against ward, as well the small as the great, the teacher as the scholar. 9. Now the first lot came forth for Asaph to Joseph: the second to Gedaliah, who with his brethren and sons *were* twelve: 10. The third to Zaccur, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 11. The fourth to Izri, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 12. The fifth to Nethaniah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 13. The sixth to Bukkiah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 14. The seventh to Jesharelah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 15. The eighth to Jeshaiiah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 16. The ninth to Mattaniah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 17. The tenth to Shimei, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 18. The eleventh to Azareel, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 19. The twelfth to Hashabiah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 20. The thirteenth to Shubael, *he*, his son, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 21. The fourteenth to Mattithiah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 22. The fifteenth to Jeremoth, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 23. The sixteenth to Hananiah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 24. The seventeenth to Joshbekashah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 25. The eighteenth to Hanani, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 26. The nineteenth to Mallothi, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 27. The twentieth to Eliathah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren,

were twelve: 28. The one and twentieth to Hothir, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 29. The two and twentieth to Giddalti, *he* his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 30. The three and twentieth to Mahazioth, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 31. The four and twentieth to Romantizer, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve.

Twenty-four persons are named in the beginning of this chapter, as sons of those three great men, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun. Ethan was the third, (ch. 6. 44.) but, probably, he was dead before the establishment was perfected, and Jeduthun came in his room.* Of these three, Providence so ordered it, that Asaph had four sons, Jeduthun six,† and Heman fourteen, in all twenty-four, (who were named, v. 2. .4.) who were all qualified for the service, and called to it. But the question was, In what order must they serve? This was determined by lot, to prevent strife for precedence; a sin which most easily besets many that otherwise are good people.

1. The lot was thrown impartially. They were placed in twenty-four companies, twelve in a company, in two rows, twelve companies in a row, and so they cast lots, *ward against ward*, putting them all upon a level, small and great, teacher and scholar; they did not go according to their age, or according to their standing, or the degrees they had taken in the music schools; but it was referred to God, v. 8. Small and great, teachers and scholars, stand alike before God, who goes not according to our rules of distinction and precedence. See Matth. 20. 23.

2. God determined it as he pleased, taking account, it is probable, of the personal merits of the persons, which are much more considerable than seniority of age, or priority of birth. Let us compare them with the preceding catalogue, and we shall find that, (1.) Joseph was the second son of Asaph. (2.) Gedaliah, the eldest son of Jeduthun. (3.) Zaccur, the eldest of Asaph. (4.) Izri, the second of Jeduthun. (5.) Nethaniah, the third of Asaph. (6.) Bukkiah, the eldest of Heman. (7.) Jesharelah, the youngest of Asaph. (8.) Jeshaiiah, the third of Jeduthun. (9.) Mattaniah, the second of Heman. (10.) Shimei, the youngest of Jeduthun. (11.) Azareel, the third of Heman. (12.) Hashabiah, the fourth of Jeduthun. (13.) Shubael, the fourth of Heman. (14.) Mattithiah, the fifth of Jeduthun. (15.) Jeremoth, the fifth of Heman. (16.) Hananiah, the sixth. (17.) Joshbekashah, the eleventh. (18.) Hanani, the seventh. (19.) Mallothi, the twelfth. (20.) Eliathah, the eighth. (21.) Hothir, the thirteenth. (22.) Giddalti, the ninth. (23.) Mahazioth, the fourteenth. And, lastly, Romantizer, the tenth. See how God increased some, and preferred the younger before the elder.

3. Each of these had in his chorus the number of twelve, called *their sons and their brethren*; because they observed them as sons, and concurred with them as brethren. Probably, twelve, some for the voice, and others for the instrument, made up the concert. Let us learn with one mind, and one mouth, to glorify God; and that will be the best concert.

CHAP. XXVI.

We have here an account of the business of the Levites. That tribe had made but a very small figure, all the time of the judges, till Eli and Samuel appeared. But when David revived religion, the Levites were, of all men, in the greatest reputation. And happy it was, that they had Levites who were men of sense, fit to support the honour of their tribe. We have here an account, I. Of the Levites that were appointed to be porters, v. 1. .19. II. Of those that were appointed to be treasurers and store-keepers, v. 20. .28. III. Of those that were officers and judges in the country, and were intrusted with the administration of public affairs, v. 29. .32.

1. CONCERNING the divisions of the porters: Of the Korhites was Meshelemiah the son of

* Or, perhaps, Ethan and Jeduthun were two names for the same person.—En.

† Only five are mentioned, v. 3; Shimei, mentioned, v. 17. is supposed to have been the sixth.—Ed.

Kore, of the sons of Asaph. 2. And the sons of Meshelemiah *were*, Zechariah the first-born, Jedaiel the second, Zebadiah the third, Jathniel the fourth, 3. Elam the fifth, Jehohanan the sixth, Elioenai the seventh. 4. Moreover the sons of Obed-edom *were*, Shemaiah the first-born, Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, and Sacar the fourth, and Nethaneel the fifth, 5. Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh, Peulthai the eighth: for God blessed him. 6. Also unto Shemaiah his son *were* sons born, that ruled throughout the house of their father: for they *were* mighty men of valour. 7. The sons of Shemaiah; Othni, and Rephael, and Obed, Eizabad, whose brethren *were* strong men, Elihu, and Semachiah. 8. All these of the sons of Obed-edom: they and their sons and their brethren, able men for strength for the service, *were* threescore and two of Obed-edom. 9. And Meshelemiah had sons and brethren, strong men, eighteen. 10. Also Hosah, of the children of Merari, had sons; Simri the chief, (for *though* he was not the first-born, yet his father made him the chief;) 11. Hilkiah the second, Tebaliah the third, Zechariah the fourth: all the sons and brethren of Hosah *were* thirteen. 12. Among these *were* the divisions of the porters, *even* among the chief men, *having* wards one against another, to minister in the house of the LORD. 13. And they cast lots, as well the small as the great, according to the house of their fathers; for every gate. 14. And the lot eastward fell to Shelemiah. Then for Zechariah his son, a wise counsellor, they cast lots; and his lot came out northward. 15. To Obed-edom southward; and to his sons the house of Asuppin. 16. To Shuppin and Hosah *the lot came forth* westward, with the gate Shallecheth, by the causeway of the going up, ward against ward. 17. Eastward *were* six Levites, northward four a day, southward four a day, and toward Asuppin two *and* two. 18. At Parbar westward, four at the causeway, *and* two at Parbar. 19. These *are* the divisions of the porters among the sons of Kore, and among the sons of Merari.

Observe, 1. There were porters appointed to attend the temple, who guarded all the avenues that led to it, opened and shut all the outer gates, and attended at them, not only for state, but for service, to direct and instruct those who were going to worship in the courts of the sanctuary, in the conduct they were to observe, to encourage those that were timorous, to send back the strangers and unclean, and to guard against thieves, and others that were enemies to the house of God. In allusion to this office, ministers are said to have the *keys of the kingdom of heaven* committed to them, (Matth. 16. 19.) that they may admit, and exclude, according to the law of Christ.

2. Of several of those that were called to this service, it is taken notice of, that they were *mighty men of valour*, (v. 6.) *strong men*, (v. 7.) *able men*, (v. 8.) and of one of them, that he was a *wise counsellor*, (v. 14.) who, probably, when he had *used this office of a deacon well*, and given proofs of more than ordinary wisdom,

purchased to himself a good degree, and was preferred from the gate to the council-board, 1 Tim. 3. 13. As for those that excelled in strength of body, and courage and resolution of mind, they were thereby qualified for the post assigned them; for whatever service God calls men to, he either finds them fit, or makes them so.

3. The sons of Obed-edom were employed in this office, sixty-two of that family. This was he that entertained the ark with reverence and cheerfulness; and see how he was rewarded for it: (1.) He had eight sons, (v. 5.) *for God blessed him*. The increase and building up of families are owing to the divine blessing; and a great blessing it is to a family to have many children, when they are, as those here, able for, and eminent in, the service of God. (2.) His sons were preferred to places of trust in the sanctuary. They had faithfully attended the ark in their own house, and now were called to attend it in God's house. He that is trusty in little, shall be trusted with more. He that keeps God's ordinances in his own tent, is fit to have the custody of them in God's tabernacle, 1 Tim. 3. 4, 5. *I have kept thy law*, says David, and *this I had, because I kept thy precepts*, Ps. 119. 55, 56.

4. It is said of one here, that *though he was not the first-born, his father made him the chief*, (v. 10.) either because he was very excellent, or because the elder son was very weak. He was made chief, perhaps not in inheriting the estate, (for that was forbidden by the law, Deut. 21. 16, 17.) but in this service, which required personal qualifications.

5. The porters, as the singers, had their post assigned them by lot; so many at such a gate, and so many at such a one, that every one might know his post, and make it good, v. 13. It is not said that they were cast into twenty-four courses, as before; but here are the names of about twenty-four, (v. 1. . 11.) and the posts assigned are twenty-four, v. 17, 18. We have therefore reason to think they were distributed into as many companies. Happy they who dwell in God's house; for, as they are well-fed, well-taught, and well-employed, so they are well-guarded. *Men* attended at the gates of the temple, but *angels* at the gates of the new Jerusalem, Rev. 21. 12.

20. And of the Levites, Abijah *was* over the treasures of the house of God, and over the treasures of the dedicated things. 21. *As concerning* the sons of Laadan; the sons of the Gershonite Laadan, chief fathers, *even* of Laadan the Gershonite, *were*, Jehieli. 22. The sons of Jehieli; Zetham, and Joel his brother, *which were* over the treasures of the house of the LORD. 23. Of the Amramites, *and* the Izharites, the Hebronites, *and* the Uzzielites: 24. And Shebuel the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, *was* ruler of the treasures. 25. And his brethren by Eliezer; Rehabiah his son, and Jeshaiah his son, and Joram his son, and Zichri his son, and Shelomith his son. 26. Which Shelomith and his brethren *were* over all the treasures of the dedicated things, which David the king and the chief fathers, the captains over thousands and hundreds, and the captains of the host, had dedicated. 27. Out of the spoils won in battles did they dedicate to maintain the house of the LORD. 28. And all that Samuel the seer, and Saul the son of Kish, and Abner the son of Ner, and Joab the son of Zeruiah, had dedicated; *and* whosoever had dedicated *any thing*, *it was* under the hand of Shelomith, and of his brethren.

Observe, 1. There were *treasures of the house of God*. A great house cannot be well kept without stores of all manner of provisions. Much was expended daily upon the altar; flour, wine, oil, salt, fuel, beside the lamps; quantities of these were to be kept beforehand, beside the sacred vestments and utensils. These were the *treasures of the house of God*. And because money answers all things, doubtless they had an abundance of it, which was received from the people's offerings, wherewith they bought in what they had occasion for. And, perhaps, much was laid up for an exigence. These treasures typified the plenty there is in our Heavenly Father's house, enough and to spare. In Christ, the true Temple, are hid *treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and unsearchable riches*.

2. There were *treasures of dedicated things*; dedicated mostly out of the spoils won in battle, (v. 27.) as a grateful acknowledgment of the Divine Protection. Abraham gave Melchisedec the *tenth of the spoils*, Heb. 7. 4. In Moses's time, the officers of the army, when they returned victorious, brought, of their spoils, an *oblation to the Lord*, Numb. 31. 50. Of late, this pious custom had been revived; and not only Samuel and David, but Saul and Abner and Joab, had dedicated of their spoils to the honour and support of the house of God, v. 28. Note, The more God bestows upon us, the more he expects from us in works of piety and charity. Great successes call for proportionable returns. When we look over our estates, we should consider, "Here are convenient things, rich things, it may be, and fine things; but where are the dedicated things?" Men of war must honour God with their spoils.

3. These treasures had treasurers, those that were over them, (v. 20, 26.) whose business it was to keep them, that neither *moth nor rust* might corrupt them, nor *thieves break through and steal*; to give out as there was occasion, and to see they were not wasted, embezzled, or alienated to any common use; and it is probable that they kept accounts of all that was brought in, and how it was laid out.

29. Of the Izharites, Chenaniah and his sons were for the outward business over Israel, for officers and judges. 30. And of the Hebronites, Hashabiah and his brethren, men of valour, a thousand and seven hundred, were officers among them of Israel on this side Jordan westward, in all business of the LORD, and in the service of the king. 31. Among the Hebronites was Jerijah the chief, even among the Hebronites, according to the generations of his fathers. In the fortieth year of the reign of David they were sought for, and there were found among them mighty men of valour at Jazer of Gilead. 32. And his brethren, men of valour, were two thousand and seven hundred chief fathers, whom king David made rulers over the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, for every matter pertaining to God, and affairs of the king.

All the offices of the house of God being well provided with Levites, we have here an account of those that were employed as officers and judges, in the outward business, which must not be neglected, no, not for the temple itself. The magistracy is an ordinance of God for the good of the church, as truly as the ministry is. And here we are told,

1. That the Levites were employed in the administration of justice, in concurrence with the princes and elders of the several tribes, who could not be supposed to understand the law so well as the Levites, who made it their business to study it. None of

those Levites who were employed in the service of the sanctuary, none of the singers or porters, were concerned in this outward business; either one was enough to engage the whole man, or it was presumption to undertake both.

2. Their charge was both in all business of the Lord, and in the service of the king, v. 30. and again, v. 32. They managed the affairs of the country, as well ecclesiastical as civil, took care both of God's tithes and the king's taxes; punished offences committed immediately against God and his honour, and those against the government and the public peace; guarded both against idolatry and against injustice; and took care to put the laws in execution against both. Some, it is likely, applied themselves to the affairs of religion, others to secular affairs; and so, between both, God and the king were well served. It is happy with a kingdom, when its civil and sacred interests are thus interwoven, and jointly minded and advanced.

3. There were more Levites employed as judges with the two tribes and a half on the other side Jordan, than with all the rest of the tribes; there were two thousand seven hundred; whereas, on the west side of Jordan, there were one thousand seven hundred, v. 30, 32. Either because those remote tribes were not so well furnished as the rest with judges of their own; or, because they, lying furthest from Jerusalem, and on the borders of the neighbouring nations, were most in danger of being infected with idolatry, and most needed the help of Levites to prevent it. The frontiers must be well guarded.

4. This is said to be done (as were all the foregoing settlements) in the fortieth year of the reign of David; (v. 31.) that was the last year of his reign. We should be so much the more industrious to do good, as we see the day approaching. If we live not to enjoy the fruit of our labours, grudge it not to those that shall come after us.

CHAP. XXVII.

In this chapter, we have the civil list, including the military. I. The twelve captains for every several month of the year, v. 1. .15. II. The princes of the several tribes, v. 16. .24. III. The officers of the court, v. 25. .34.

1. **N**OW the children of Israel after their number, to wit, the chief fathers and captains of thousands and hundreds, and their officers that served the king in any matter of the courses, which came in and went out month by month throughout all the months of the year, of every course were twenty and four thousand. 2. Over the first course for the first month was Jashobeam the son of Zabdiel: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 3. Of the children of Perez was the chief of all the captains of the host for the first month. 4. And over the course of the second month was Doda an Ahohite, and of his course was Mikloth also the ruler: in his course likewise were twenty and four thousand. 5. The third captain of the host for the third month was Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, a chief priest: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 6. This is that Benaiah, who was mighty among the thirty, and above the thirty: and in his course was Ammizabad his son. 7. The fourth captain for the fourth month was Asahel the brother of Joab, and Zebadiah his son after him: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 8. The fifth captain for the fifth month was Shamhuth the Izrahite:

and in his course *were* twenty and four thousand. 9. The sixth *captain* for the sixth month *was* Ira the son of Ikkesb the Tekoite: and in his course *were* twenty and four thousand. 10. The seventh *captain* for the seventh month *was* Helez the Pelonite, of the children of Ephraim: and in his course *were* twenty and four thousand. 11. The eighth *captain* for the eighth month *was* Sibbecai the Hushathite, of the Zarhites: and in his course *were* twenty and four thousand. 12. The ninth *captain* for the ninth month *was* Abiezer the Anetothite, of the Benjamites: and in his course *were* twenty and four thousand. 13. The tenth *captain* for the tenth month *was* Maharai the Netophathite, of the Zarhites: and in his course *were* twenty and four thousand. 14. The eleventh *captain* for the eleventh month *was* Benaiah the Pirathonite, of the children of Ephraim: and in his course *were* twenty and four thousand. 15. The twelfth *captain* for the twelfth month *was* Heldai the Netophathite, of Othniel: and in his course *were* twenty and four thousand.

We have here an account of the militia of the kingdom, and the regulation of that. David was himself a man of war, and had done great things with the sword; he had brought into the field great armies: now here we are told how he marshalled them, when God had given him rest from all his enemies. He did not keep them all together; for that would have been a hardship on them and the country; yet he did not disband and disperse them all; then he had left his kingdom naked, and his people would have forgotten the arts of war, wherein they had been instructed. He therefore contrives to keep up a constant force, and yet not a standing army. The model is very prudent.

1. He kept up 24,000 constantly in arms, I suppose, in a body, and disciplined, in one part or other of the kingdom; the freeholders carrying their own arms, and bearing their own charges, while they were up. This was a sufficient strength for the securing of the public peace and safety. Those that are Israelites indeed, must learn war; for we have enemies to grapple with, whom we are concerned constantly to stand upon our guard against.

2. He changed them every month; so that the whole number of the militia amounted to 288,000; perhaps about a fifth part of the able men of the kingdom. By being thus distributed into twelve courses, they were all instructed in, and accustomed to, military exercises; and yet none were compelled to be in service, and at expences, above one month in the year, which they might very well afford, unless upon extraordinary occasions, and then they might all be got together quickly. It is the wisdom of governors, and much their praise, while they provide for the public safety, to contrive how to make it effectual, and yet easy, and as little as possible burthensome to the people.

3. Every course had a commander in chief over it, beside the subaltern officers that were rulers over thousands, and hundreds, and fifties; there was one general officer to each course or legion. All these twelve great commanders are mentioned among David's worthies and champions, 2 Sam. 23. and 1 Chron. 11. They had first signalized themselves by their great actions, and then they were advanced to those great performances. It is well with a kingdom, when honour thus attends merit. Benaiah is here called a *chief priest*, v. 4. But *cohen* signifying both a *priest* and a *prince*, it might better be translated here a *chief ruler*, or (as in the margin) a *principal officer*. Dodai had Mikloth, (v. 4.) either for his

substitute when he was absent or infirm, or for his successor when he was dead. Benaiah had his son under him, v. 6. Asahel had his son after him; (v. 7.) and by that it seems that this plan of the militia was laid in the beginning of David's reign; for Asahel was killed by Abner, while David reigned in Hebron. When his wars were over, he revived this method, and left the military affairs in this posture, for the peaceable reign of his son Solomon. When we think ourselves most safe, yet, while we are here in the body, we must keep in a readiness for spiritual conflicts: *Let not him that girdeth on the harness, boast as he that puts it off.*

16. Furthermore over the tribes of Israel: the ruler of the Reubenites *was* Eliezer the son of Zichri: of the Simeonites, Shephatiah the son of Maachah: 17. Of the Levites, Hashabiah the son of Kemuel: of the Aaronites, Zadok: 18. Of Judah, Elihu, *one* of the brethren of David: of Issachar, Omri the son of Michael: 19. Of Zebulun, Ishmaiah the son of Obadiah: of Naphtali, Jerimoth the son of Azriel: 20. Of the children of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Azaziah: of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joel the son of Pedaiiah: 21. Of the half-tribe of Manasseh in Gilead, Iddo the son of Zechariah: of Benjamin, Jaasiel the son of Abner: 22. Of Dan, Azareel the son of Jeroham. These *were* the princes of the tribes of Israel. 23. But David took not the number of them from twenty years old and under: because the Lord had said he would increase Israel like to the stars of the heavens. 24. Joab the son of Zeruiah began to number, but he finished not, because there fell wrath for it against Israel; neither was the number put in the account of the chronicles of king David. 25. And over the king's treasures *was* Azmaveth the son of Adiel: and over the store-houses in the fields, in the cities, and in the villages, and in the castles, *was* Jehonathan the son of Uzziah: 26. And over them that did the work of the field for tillage of the ground *was* Ezri the son of Chelub. 27. And over the vineyards *was* Shimei the Ramathite: over the increase of the vineyards for the wine-cellars *was* Zabdi the Shiphmite. 28. And over the olive-trees and the sycamore-trees that *were* in the low plains *was* Baal-hanan the Gedarite: and over the cellars of oil *was* Joash: 29. And over the herds that fed in Sharon *was* Shitrai the Sharonite: and over the herds that *were* in the valleys *was* Shaphat the son of Adlai. 30. Over the camels also *was* Obil the Ishmaelite: and over the asses *was* Jehdeiah the Meronothite: 31. And over the flocks *was* Jaziz the Hagerite. All these *were* the rulers of the substance which *was* king David's. 32. Also Jonathan David's uncle *was* a counsellor, a wise man, and a scribe. and Jehiel the son of Hachmoni *was* with the king's sons. 33. And Ahithophel *was* the king's counsellor; and Hushai the Archite *was* the king's companion: 34. And after Ahithophel *was* Jehoiada

the son of Benaiah, and Abiathar: and the general of the king's army was Joab.

We have here an account,

I. Of the princes of the tribes: something of the ancient order instituted by Moses in the wilderness was still kept up, that every tribe should have its prince or chief. It is probable that it was kept up all along, either by election or by succession, in the same family; and those are here named who were found in that office when this account was taken. Elihu, or Eliab, who was prince of Judah, was the eldest son of Jesse, and descended in a right line from Nahshon and Salmon, the princes of this tribe in Moses's time. Whether these princes were of the nature of lord-lieutenants that guided them in their military affairs, or chief-justices that presided in their courts of judgment, does not appear. Their power, we may suppose, was much less, now that all the tribes were united under one king, than it had been, when, for the most part, they acted separately. Our religion obliges us to be subject, not only to the king, as supreme, but unto governors under him, (1 Pet. 2. 13, 14.) the princes that decree justice. Of Benjamin, was Jaaziel the son of Abner, v. 21. Though Abner was David's enemy, and opposed his coming to the throne, yet David would not oppose the preferment of his son, but, perhaps, nominated him to this post of honour; which teaches us to render good for evil.

II. Of the numbering of the people, v. 23, 24. It is here said, 1. That when David ordered the people to be numbered, he forbade the numbering of those under twenty years old, thinking thereby to save the reflection which what he did might otherwise cast upon the promise, that they should be innumerable; yet it was but a poor salvo; for it had never been customary to number those under twenty, and the promise of their numbers chiefly respected the effective men. 2. That that account which David took of the people, in the pride of his heart, turned to no good account; for it was never perfected, nor done with exactness, nor was it ever recorded as an authentic account: Joab was disgusted with it, and did it by halves; David was ashamed of it, and willing it should be forgotten, because there fell wrath for it against Israel. A good man cannot, in the reflection, please himself with that which he knows God is displeased with; cannot make use of that, nor take comfort in that, which is obtained by sin.

III. Of the officers of the court.

1. The rulers of the king's substance, (as they are called, v. 31.) such as had the oversight and charge of the king's tillage, his vineyards, his olive-yards, his herds, his camels, his asses, his flocks. Here are no officers for state, none for sport, no master of the wardrobe, no master of the ceremonies, no master of the horse, no master of the hounds, but all for substance, agreeable to the simplicity and plainness of those times. David was a great soldier, a great scholar, and a great prince, and yet a great husband of his estate, kept a great deal of his ground in his own hand, and stocked it, not for pleasure, but for profit; for the king himself is served of the field, Eccl. 5. 9. Those magistrates that would have their subjects industrious must be themselves examples of industry, and application to business. We find, however, that, afterward, the poor of the land were thought good enough to be vine-dressers and husbandmen, 2 Kings, 25. 12. Now David put his great men to preside in these employments.

2. The attendants on the king's person. They were such as were eminent for wisdom, being designed for conversation. His uncle, who was a wise man, and a scribe, not only well-skilled in politics, but well-read in the scriptures, was his counsellor, v. 32. Another, who, no doubt, excelled in learning and prudence, was tutor to his children. Ahithophel, a very cunning man, was his counsellor: but Hushai, an honest man, was his companion and confidant. It does not appear that he had many counsellors; but those he had were men of great abilities. Much of the wisdom of princes is seen in the choice of their ministry. But David, though he had all these trusty counsellors about him, preferred his Bible before them all: (Ps. 119. 24.) *Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors.*

CHAP. XXVIII.

The account we have of David's exit, in the beginning of the first book of Kings, does not make his sun near so bright as that given in this and the following chapter, where we have his solemn farewell both to his son and his subjects, and must own that he finished well. In this chapter, we have, I. A general convention of the states summoned to meet, v. 1. II. A solemn declaration of the divine entail, both of the crown, and of the honour of building the temple, upon Solomon, v. 2. .7. III. An exhortation, both to the people, and to Solomon, to make religion their business, v. 8. .10. IV. The model and materials delivered to Solomon for the building of the temple, v. 11. .19. V. Encouragement given him to undertake it, and proceed in it, v. 20, 21.

1. **A**ND David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men, unto Jerusalem. 2. Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: *as for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building:* 3. But God said unto me, thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou *hast been* a man of war, and hast shed blood. 4. Howbeit the LORD God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father, to be king over Israel for ever: for he hath chosen Judah *to be* the ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father he liked me to make *me* king over all Israel: 5. And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. 6. And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him *to be* my son, and I will be his father. 7. Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments, as at this day. 8. Now therefore, in the sight of all Israel, the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave *it* for an inheritance for your children after you for ever. 9. And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. 10. Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do *it*.

A great deal of service David had done in his day, had *served his generation according to the will of God*, Acts, 13.36. But now the time draws nigh that he must die, and, as a type of the Son of David, the nearer he comes to his end, the more busy he is, and does his work with all his might. He is now a little recovered from the bad indisposition mentioned 1 Kings, 1.1. when they covered him with clothes, and he gat no heat: but what cure is there for old age? He therefore improves his recovery, as giving him an opportunity of doing God and his country a little more service.

I. He summons all the great men to attend him, that he might take leave of them altogether, v. 1. Thus Moses did, (Deut. 31.28.) and Joshua, ch. 23.2.—24.1. David would not declare the settlement of the crown, but in the presence, and to the satisfaction, of those that were the representatives of the people.

II. He addresses them with a great deal of respect and tenderness. He not only by an effort quitted his bed, to give them the meeting, (the occasion putting new spirits into him,) but he rose out of his chair, and *stood up upon his feet*, (v. 2.) in reverence to God, whose will he was to declare, and in reverence to this solemn assembly of the Israel of God, as if he looked upon himself, though *major singulis—greater than any individual among them*, yet *minor universis—less than the whole of them together*. His age and infirmities, as well as his dignity, might well have allowed him to keep his seat; but he would shew that he was indeed humbled for the pride of his heart, both in the numbers of his people, and his dominion over them. Then, it was too much his pleasure that they were all his *servants*, (ch. 21.3.) now, he calls them his *brethren*, whom he loved, his people whom he took care of, not his servants whom he had the command of. *Hear me, my brethren, and my people*. It becomes superiors thus to speak with affection and condescension, even to their inferiors; they will not be the less honoured for it, but the more loved. Thus he engages their attention to what he was about to say.

III. He declares the purpose he had formed to build a temple for God, and God's disallowing of that purpose, v. 2, 3. This he had signified to Solomon before, ch. 22.7, 8. *A house of rest for the ark* is here said to be *a house of rest for the footstool of our God*; for heaven is his throne of glory; the earth, and the most magnificent temples that can be built upon it, are but his footstool. So much difference is there between the manifestations of the divine glory in the upper and the lower world. Angels surround his throne, Isa. 6.1. We, poor worms, do but *worship at his footstool*, Ps. 99.5.—132.7. As an evidence of the sincerity of his purpose to build the temple, he tells them that he had made ready for it, but that God would not suffer him to proceed, because he had appointed other work for him to do, which was enough for one man, namely, the managing of the wars of Israel; he must serve the public with the sword, another must do it with the line and plummet. Times of rest are building times, Acts, 9.31.

IV. He produces his own title first, and then Solomon's, to the crown; both were undoubtedly *jure divino—divine*. They could make out such a title as no monarch on earth can; the Lord God of Israel chose them both immediately, by prophecy, not providence, v. 4, 5. No right of primogeniture is pretended; *Detur digniori, not seniori—It went by worth, not by age*. 1. Judah was not the eldest son of Jacob, yet God chose that tribe to be the ruling tribe; Jacob entailed the sceptre upon it, Gen. 49.10. 2. It does not appear that the family of Jesse was the senior house of that tribe; from Judah, it is certain that it was not, for Shelah was before Pharez; whether from Nahshon and Salmon, is not certain. Ram, the father of Nahshon, had an elder brother, (1 Chron. 2.9.) perhaps so had Boaz, Obed, Jesse; yet, "*God chose the house of my father*." 3. David was the youngest son of Jesse, yet God liked him to make him king; so it seemed good unto him. God takes whom he likes, and likes whom he makes like himself, as he did David, a man after his own heart. 4. Solomon was one of the youngest sons of David, and yet God chose him to sit upon the throne, because he was the likeliest of them all to build the temple, the wisest and best inclined.

V. He opens to them God's gracious purposes concerning Solomon; (v. 6, 7.) *I have chosen him to be my son*. Thus he declares the decree, that the Lord had said to Solomon, as a type of Christ, *Thou art my son*, (Ps. 2.7.) the son of my love; for he was called *Jedidiah*, because the Lord loved him, and Christ is his beloved Son. Of him, God said, as a figure of him that was to come, 1. *He shall build my house*; Christ is both the Founder, and the Foundation, of the gospel-temple. 2. *I will establish his kingdom for ever*. This must have its accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah, which shall continue in his hands through all the ages of time, (Isa. 9.7. Luke, 1.33.) and shall then be delivered up to God, even the Father, yet, perhaps, to be delivered back to the Redeemer for ever. As to Solomon, this promise of the establishment of his kingdom is here made conditional; *If he be constant to do my commandments, as at this day*. Solomon was now very towardly and good; "If he continue so, his kingdom shall continue, otherwise, not." Note, If we be constant to our duty, then, and not otherwise, we may expect the continuance of God's favour. Let those that are well taught, and begin well, take notice of this—if they be constant, they are happy; perseverance wears the crown, though it wins it not.

VI. He charges them to adhere steadfastly to God and their duty, v. 8. Observe, 1. The matter of this charge: *Keep, and seek for, all the commandments of the Lord your God*. The Lord was their God, his commandments must be their rule, they must have respect to them all, must make conscience of keeping them, and, in order thereunto, must seek for them, that is, must be inquisitive concerning their duty; search the scriptures, take advice, seek the law at their mouth whose lips were to keep this knowledge, and pray to God to teach and direct them. God's commandments will not be kept without great care. 2. The solemnity of it. He charges them in the sight of all Israel, who would all have notice of this public charge, and in the audience of their God. God is witness, and this congregation is witness, that they have good counsel given them, and fair warning; if they do not take it, it is their fault, and God and man will be witnesses against them. See 1 Tim. 5.21. 2 Tim. 4.1. Those that profess religion, as they tender the favour of God, and their reputation with men, must be faithful to their profession. 3. The motive to observe this charge; it was the way to be happy, to have the peaceable possession of this good land themselves, and to preserve the entail of it upon their children.

VII. He concludes with a charge to Solomon himself, v. 9, 10. He is much concerned that he should be religious. He was to be a great man, but he must not think religion below him; a wise man, and this will be his wisdom. Observe, 1. The charge he gives him. He must look upon God as the God of his father, his good father, who had devoted him to God, and educated him for God. He was born in God's house, and therefore bound in duty to be his; brought up in his house, and therefore bound in gratitude. *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not*. He must know God, and serve him; we cannot serve God aright, if we do not know him; and in vain do we know him, if we do not serve him; serve him with heart and mind. We make nothing of religion, if we do not mind it, and make heart-work of it; serve him with a perfect, that is, an upright, heart; for sincerity is our gospel-perfection; and with a willing mind, from a principle of love, and as a willing people, cheerfully, and with pleasure. 2. The arguments to enforce this charge. Two arguments of general inducement. (1.) That the secrets of our souls are open before God; he searches all hearts, even the hearts of kings, which to men are unsearchable, Prov. 25.3. We must *therefore* be sincere, because, if we deal deceitfully, God sees it, and cannot be imposed upon; we must *therefore* employ our thoughts, and engage them in God's service, because he fully understands all the imaginations of them, both good and bad. (2.) That we are happy or miserable here, and for ever, according as we do, or do not, serve God. *If we seek him diligently, he will be found of us*, and that is enough to make us happy, Heb. 11.6. If we forsake him, desert his service, and turn from following him, he will cast us off for ever.

that is enough to make us miserable. Note, God never casts any off, till they have first cast him off. Here is one argument peculiar to Solomon: (v. 10.) "*Thou art to build a house for the sanctuary; therefore seek and serve God, that that work may be done from a good principle, in a right manner, and may be accepted.*" 3. The means prescribed in order hereunto, and they are prescribed to us all. (1.) Caution. *Take heed; beware of every thing that looks like, or leads to, that which is evil.* (2.) Courage. *Be strong, and do it.* We cannot do our work as we should, unless we put on resolution, and fetch in strength from divine grace.

11. Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy-seat, 12. And the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries of the dedicated things: 13. Also for the courses of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and for all the vessels of service in the house of the LORD. 14. *He gave* of gold by weight for *things* of gold, for all instruments of all manner of service; *silver also* for all instruments of silver by weight, for all instruments of every kind of service: 15. Even the weight for the candlesticks of gold, and for their lamps of gold, by weight for every candlestick, and for the lamps thereof: and for the candlesticks of silver by weight, *both* for the candlestick, and *also* for the lamps thereof, according to the use of every candlestick. 16. And by weight *he gave* gold for the tables of shew-bread, for every table; and *likewise* silver for the tables of silver: 17. Also pure gold for the flesh-hooks, and the bowls, and the cups: and for the golden basins *he gave* gold by weight for every basin: and *likewise* silver by weight for every basin of silver: 18. And for the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, that spread out *their wings*, and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD. 19. All *this*, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by *his hand* upon me, *even* all the works of this pattern. 20. And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do *it*: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, *even* my God, *will be* with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD. 21. And, behold, the courses of the priests and the Levites, *even they shall be with thee*, for all the service of the house of God: and *there shall be* with thee for all manner of workmanship every willing skilful man, for any manner of service: also the princes and all the people *will be* wholly at thy commandment.

As for the general charge that David gave his son, to seek God and serve him, the book of the law was, in that, his only rule, and there needed no other; but, in building the temple, David was now to give him three things.

1. A model of the building, because it was to be such a building as neither he nor his architects ever saw. Moses had a pattern of the tabernacle shewed him in the mount, (Heb. 8. 5.) so had David of the temple, by the immediate hand of God upon him, v. 19. It was given him in writing, probably, by the ministry of an angel, or as clearly and exactly represented to his mind, as if it had been in writing. But it is said, (v. 12.) *He had this pattern by the Spirit.* The contrivance either of David's devotion, or of Solomon's wisdom, must not be trusted to in an affair of this nature. The temple must be a sacred thing, and a type of Christ; there must be in it, not only convenience, but significancy: it was a kind of sacrament, and therefore it must not be left to man's art or invention to contrive it; but it must be framed by divine institution. Christ, the true Temple, the church, the gospel-temple, and heaven the everlasting temple, all are framed according to the divine counsels, and the plan laid in the divine wisdom, ordained before the world, for God's glory and our's. This pattern David gave to Solomon, that he might know what to provide, and might go by a certain rule. When Christ left with his disciples a charge to build his gospel-church, he gave them an exact model of it, ordering them to observe that, and that only, which he commanded. The particular models are here mentioned; of the porch, which was higher than the rest, like a steeple; then the houses, both the holy place, and the most holy, with the rooms adjoining, which were for treasuries, chambers, and parlours, especially *the place of the mercy-seat*: (v. 11.) of the courts likewise, and the chambers about them, in which the dedicated things were laid up. Bishop Patrick supposes, that, among other things, the tabernacle which Moses reared, and all the utensils of it, which there was now no further occasion for, were laid up here; signifying, that, in the fulness of time, all the Mosaic economy, all the rites and ceremonies of that dispensation, should be respectfully laid aside, and something better come in their room. He gave him a table of the courses of the priests, patterns of the vessels of service, (v. 13.) and a pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, v. 18. Beside the two cherubims over the mercy-seat, there were two much larger, whose wings reached from wall to wall, (1 Kings, 6. 23, &c.) and of these David here gave Solomon the pattern, called a *chariot*; for the angels are the chariots of God, Ps. 68. 17.

2. Materials for the most costly of the utensils of the temple. That they might not be made any less than the patterns, he weighed out the exact quantity for each vessel, both of gold and silver, v. 14. In the tabernacle there was but one golden candlestick, in the temple ten, (1 Kings, 7. 49.) besides silver ones, which, it is supposed, were hand-candlesticks, v. 15. In the tabernacle there was but one table; but in the temple, beside that on which the shew-bread was set, there were ten others, for other uses, (2 Chron. 4. 8.) beside silver tables. For, this house being much larger than that, it would look bare if it had not furniture proportionable. The gold for the altar of incense is particularly said to be *refined gold*, (v. 18.) purer than any of the rest; for that was typical of the intercession of Christ, than which nothing is more pure and perfect.

3. Directions which way to look for help in this great undertaking. "Fear not opposition, fear not the charge, care, and trouble, fear not miscarrying in it, as in the case of Uzza; fear not the reproach of the foolish builder, that began to build and was not able to finish. Be not dismayed; (1.) God will help thee, and thou must look up to him in the first place; (v. 20.) *The Lord God, even my God*, whom I have chosen and served, who has all along been present with me, and prospered me, and to whom, from my own experience of his power and goodness, I commend thee; he will be with thee, to direct, strengthen, and prosper, thee; he will not fail thee nor forsake thee." Note, We may be sure that God, who owned our fathers, and carried them through the services of their day, will, in like manner, if we be faithful to him,

go along with us in our day, and will never leave us while he has any work to do in us, or by us. The same that was Joshua's encouragement, (Josh. 1. 5.) and Solomon's here, is given to all believers, Heb. 13. 5. *He will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* God never leaves any, unless they first leave him. (2.) "Good men will help thee, v. 21. The priests and Levites will advise thee, and thou mayest consult with them. Thou hast good workmen, who are both willing and skilful;" and those are two very good properties in a workman, especially in those that work at the temple. And, *lastly*, "The princes and the people will be so far from opposing or retarding the work, that they will be wholly at thy command, every one, in his place, ready to further it." Then good work is likely to go on, when all parties concerned are hearty in it, and none secretly clog it, but all drive on heartily in it.

CHAP. XXIX.

David had said what he had to say, to Solomon. But he had something more to say to the congregation, before he parts with them. I. He presses them to contribute, according to their ability, toward the building and furnishing of the temple, v. 1. .5. II. They made their presents accordingly with great generosity, v. 6. .9. III. David offered up solemn prayers and praises to God upon that occasion, (v. 10. .20.) with sacrifices, v. 21. IV. Solomon was, hereupon, enthroned, with great joy and magnificence, v. 22. .25. V. David, soon after this, finished his course, v. 26. .30. And it is hard to say which shines brighter here, the setting sun, or the rising sun.

I. FURTHERMORE David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom God alone hath chosen, *is yet* young and tender, and the work *is* great: for the palace *is* not for man, but for the LORD God. 2. Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for *things to be made* of gold, and the silver for *things* of silver, and the brass for *things* of brass, the iron for *things* of iron, and wood for *things* of wood; onyx-stones, and *stones* to be set, glistening stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble-stones in abundance. 3. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, *which* I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, 4. *Even* three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses *withal*: 5. The gold for *things* of gold, and the silver for *things* of silver, and for all manner of work *to be made* by the hands of artificers. And who *then* is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD? 6. Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly, 7. And gave for the service of the house of God of gold five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. 8. And they with whom *precious* stones were found gave *them* to the treasure of the house of the LORD, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite. 9. Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered

willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.

We may here observe,

1. How handsomely David accosted the great men of Israel, to engage them to contribute toward the building of the temple. It is our duty to *provoke one another to love, and to do good works*; not only to do good ourselves, but to draw in others to do good too, as much as we can. There were many very rich men in Israel, they were all to share in the benefit of the temple, and of those peaceable days which were to befriend the building of it; and, therefore, though he would not impose on them, as a tax, what they should give toward it, he would recommend the present as a fair occasion for a free-will offering; because what is done in works of piety and charity should be done willingly, and not by constraint; for God loves a cheerful giver.

1. He would have them consider that Solomon was young and tender, and needed help; but that he was the person whom God had chosen to do this work, and therefore was well-worthy their assistance. It is good service to encourage those in the work of God that are as yet young and tender.

2. That the work was great, and all hands should contribute to the carrying of it on. The palace to be built was not for man, but for the Lord God; and the more was contributed toward the building, the more magnificent it would be, and therefore the better would it answer the intention.

3. He tells them what great preparations had been made for this work. He did not intend to throw all the burthen upon them, nor that it should be built wholly by contributions; but that they should shew their good will, by adding to what was done, v. 2. *I have prepared with all my might*; that is, "I have made it my business." Work for God must be done with all our might, or we shall bring nothing to pass in it.

4. He sets them a good example. Beside what was dedicated to this service out of the spoils and presents of the neighbouring nations, which was for the building of the house, (of which before, ch. 22. 14.) he had, out of his own share, offered largely for the beautifying and enriching of it, 3000 talents of gold, and 7000 talents of silver; (v. 4, 5.) and this, because he had set his affection to the house of his God. He gave all this, not as Papists build churches, in commutation of penance, or to make atonement for sin; nor as Pharisees give alms, to be seen of men; but purely because he loved the habitation of God's house; so he professed, (Ps. 26. 8.) and here he proved it. Those who set their affection upon the service of God, will think no pains or cost too much to bestow upon it. And then our offerings are pleasing to God, when they come from love. They that set their affection on things above, will set their affection on the house of God, through which our way to heaven lies. Now this he gives them an account of, to stir them up to do likewise. Note, Those who would draw others to that which is good, must lead themselves. Those especially who are advanced above others, in place and dignity, should particularly contrive how to make their light shine before men, because the influence of their example is more powerful and extensive than that of other people.

5. He stirs them up to do as he had done; (v. 5.) *And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?* (1.) We must, each of us, in our several places, serve the Lord, and consecrate our service to him, separate it from other things that are foreign, and interfere with it, and direct and design it for the honour and glory of God. (2.) We must make the service of God our business; must *fill our hands to the Lord*, so the Hebrew phrase is. They, who engage themselves in the service of God will have their hands full; there is work enough for the whole man in that service. The filling of our hands with the service of God, intimates that we must serve him only, serve him liberally, and serve him in the strength of grace derived from him. (3.) We must be free herein, do it willingly and speedily, do it this

day, when we are in a good mind. Who is willing? Now let him shew it.

11. How handsomely they all contributed toward the building of the temple, when they were thus stirred up to it. Though they were persuaded to it, yet it is said, *They offered willingly*, v. 6. So he said, who knew their hearts. Nay, they offered with a perfect heart, from a good principle, and with a sincere respect to the glory of God, v. 9. How generous they were, appears by the sum total of the contributions, v. 7, 8. They gave like themselves, like princes, like princes of Israel. And a pleasant day's work it was: for, 1. The people rejoiced; which may be meant of the people themselves that offered: they were glad of the opportunity of honouring God thus with their substance, and glad of the prospect of bringing this good work to perfection. Or, the common people rejoiced in the generosity of their princes, that they had such rulers over them as were forward to this good work. Every Israelite is glad to see temple-work carried on with vigour. 2. David rejoiced with great joy, to see the good effect of his psalms, and the other helps of devotion he had furnished them with; rejoiced that his son and successor would have those about him that were so well affected to the house of God, and that this work, which his heart was so much set upon, was likely to go on. Note, It is a great reviving to good men, when they are leaving the world, too see those they leave behind zealous for religion, and likely to keep it up; *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.*

10. Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. 11. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all *that is* in the heaven and in the earth *is thine*; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. 12. Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all. 13. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. 14. But who *am* I, and what *is* my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. 15. For we *are* strangers before thee, and sojourners, as *were* all our fathers: our days on the earth *are* as a shadow, and *there is* none abiding. 16. O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name *cometh* of thine hand, and *is* all thine own. 17. I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee. 18. O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee: 19. And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all *these things*, and to build the palace *for* the which I

have made provision. 20. And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the LORD your God. And all the congregation blessed the LORD God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the LORD, and the king. 21. And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the LORD, and offered burnt-offerings unto the LORD, on the morrow after that day, *even* a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, *and* a thousand lambs, with their drink-offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel: 22. And did eat and drink before the LORD on that day with great gladness. And they made Solomon the son of David king the second time, and anointed *him* unto the LORD *to be* the chief governor, and Zadok *to be* priest.

We have here,

1. The solemn address which David made to God upon occasion of the noble subscriptions of the princes toward the building of the temple; (v. 10.) *Wherefore David blessed the Lord*, not only alone in his closet, but *before all the congregation*. This I expected, when we read (v. 9.) that *David rejoiced with great joy*; for such a devout man as he, would, no doubt, make that the matter of his thanksgiving, which was so much the matter of his rejoicing. He that looked round with comfort, would certainly look up with praise. David was now old, and looked upon himself as near his end; and it well becomes aged saints, and dying saints, to have their hearts much enlarged in praise and thanksgiving. This will silence their complaints of their bodily infirmities, and help to make the prospects of death itself less. David's psalms, toward the latter end of the book, are most of them psalms of praise. The nearer we come to the world of everlasting praise, the more we should speak the language, and do the work, of that world. In this address,

1. He adores God, and ascribes glory to him, as the God of Israel, *blessed for ever and ever*. Our Lord's prayer ends with a doxology, much like this which David here begins with; *for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory*. This is properly praising God, with holy awe and reverence, and agreeable affection, acknowledging, (1.) His infinite perfections; not only that he is great, powerful, glorious, &c. but that his is the greatness, power, and glory; that is, he has them in, and of, himself; he is the Fountain and Centre of every thing that is bright and blessed. All that we can, in our most exalted praises, attribute to him, he has an unquestionable title to. His is the *greatness*, his greatness is immense, and incomprehensible; and all others are little, are nothing, in comparison of him. His is the *power*, and it is almighty and irresistible; power belongs to him, and all the power of all the creatures is derived from him, and depends upon him. His is the *glory*; for his glory is his own end, and the end of the whole creation. All the glory we can give him with our hearts, lips, and lives, comes infinitely short of what is his due. His is the *victory*; he transcends and surpasses all, and is able to conquer and subdue all things to himself; and his victories are incontestable, uncontrollable. And his is the *majesty*, real and personal; with him is terrible majesty, inexpressible, and inconceivable. (2.) His sovereign dominion, as rightful Owner and Possessor of all; "*All that is in the heaven, and in the earth, is thine*, and at thy disposal, by the indisputable right of creation; and as supreme Ruler and Commander of all: *thine is the kingdom*, and all kings are thy subjects; for thou art Head, and art to be exalted and worshipped as Head above all." (3.) His universal influence and agency. All that are rich and honourable among the children of men have their riches and honours from God. This acknowledgment he would have the princes take notice of, and join in, that they might not think they had merited any thing of God by their ge-

nerosity; for from God they had their riches and honour; and what they had returned to him was but a small part of what they had received from him. Whoever are great among men, it is God's hand that makes them so; and whatever strength we have, it is God that gives it us, as the *God of Israel our Father*, v. 10. Ps. 68. 35.

2. He acknowledges with thankfulness the grace of God enabling them to contribute so cheerfully toward the building of the temple; (v. 13, 14.) *Now therefore, our God, we thank thee.* Note, The more we do for God, the more we are indebted to him for the honour of being employed in his service, and for grace enabling us, in any measure, to serve him. *Does he therefore thank that servant?* Luke, 17. 9. No: but that servant has a great deal of reason to thank him. He thanks God that they were *able to offer so willingly*. Note, (1.) It is a great instance of the power of God's grace in us, to be able to do the work of God willingly. He works *both to will and to do*; and it is in the day of his power that his people are made willing, Ps. 110. 3. (2.) We must give God all the glory of all the good that is at any time done by ourselves or others. Our own good works must not be the matter of our pride, nor the good works of others the matter of our flattery, but both the matter of our praise: for certainly it is the greatest honour and pleasure in the world, faithfully to serve God.

3. He speaks very humbly of himself and his people, and the offerings they had now presented to God.

(1.) For himself, and those that joined with him, though they were princes, he wondered that God should take such notice of them, and do so much for them: (v. 14.) *Who am I, and what is my people?* David was the most honourable person, and Israel the most honourable people, then in the world; yet thus does he speak of himself and them, as unworthy the divine cognizance and favour. David now looks very great, presiding in an august assembly, appointing his successor, and making a noble present to the honour of God; and yet he is little and low in his own eyes: *Who am I, O Lord?* for, (v. 15.) *We are strangers before thee, and sojourners, poor despicable creatures.* Angels in heaven are at home there, saints on earth are but strangers here: *Our days on the earth are as a shadow.* David's days had as much of substance in them as most men's: for he was a great man, a good man, a useful man, and now, an old man; one that lived long, and lived to good purpose: and yet he puts himself not only into the number, but in the front, of those who must acknowledge that their *days on the earth are as a shadow*; which intimates that our life is a vain life, a dark life, a transient life, and a life that will have its period either in perfect light, or perfect darkness. The next words explain it, *There is no abiding*, Heb. *no expectation*. We cannot expect any great matters from it, nor can we expect any long continuance of it. This is mentioned here, as that which forbids us to boast of the service we do to God: alas! it is confined to a scantling of time, it is the service of a frail and short life, and therefore what can we pretend to merit by it?

(2.) As to their offerings, *Lord*, says he, *of thine own have we given thee*, (v. 14.) and again, (v. 16.) *It cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own.* "We have it from thee as a free gift, and therefore are bound to use it for thee; and what we present to thee is but rent or interest from thine own." "In like manner" (says Bishop Patrick) "we ought to acknowledge God in all spiritual things, referring every good thought, good purpose, good work, to his grace, from whom we receive it." *Let him that glories, therefore, glory in the Lord.*

(3.) He appeals to God concerning his own sincerity in what he did, v. 17. It is a great satisfaction to a good man, to think that *God tries the heart, and has pleasure in uprightness*; that, whoever misinterpret or condemn it, he is acquainted with, and approves of, the *way of the righteous*. It was David's comfort, that God knew with what pleasure he both offered his own, and saw the people's, offering. He was neither proud of his own good work, nor envious of the good works of others.

(4.) He prays to God both for the people and for Solomon, that both might hold on as they began. In this prayer, he addresses

himself to God, as the *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, a God in covenant with them, and with us for their sakes. "Lord, give us grace to make good our part of the covenant, that we may not forfeit the benefit of it." Or thus: "They were kept in their integrity by the grace of God establishing their way; let the same grace that was sufficient for them, be so for us." [1.] For the people he prays, (v. 18.) that what good God had put into their minds, he would always keep there, that they might never be worse than they were now; might never lose the convictions they were now under, nor cool in their affections to the house of God; but always have the same thoughts of things as they now seemed to have. Great consequences depend upon what is innermost, and what uppermost, in the imagination of the thoughts of our heart; what we aim at, and what we love to think of. If any good have got possession of our hearts, or the hearts of our friends, it is good by prayer to commit the custody of it to the grace of God: "Lord, keep it there, keep it for ever there. David has prepared materials for the temple; but, Lord, do thou prepare their hearts for such a privilege;" *establish* their hearts, so the margin. "Confirm their resolutions; they are in a good mind, keep them so, when I am gone, them and their's for ever." [2.] For Solomon he prays, (v. 19.) *Give him a perfect heart.* He had charged him (ch. 28. 9.) to serve God *with a perfect heart*, now here he prays to God to give him such a heart. He does not pray, "Lord, make him a rich man, a great man, a learned man;" but, "Lord, make him an honest man;" for that is better than all. "Lord, *give him a perfect heart*, not only in general, to *keep thy commandments*, but in particular, to *build the palace*, that he may do that service with a single eye." Yet his building the house would not prove him to have a perfect heart, unless he made conscience of keeping God's commandments. It is not helping to build churches that will save us, if we live in disobedience to God's law.

II. The cheerful concurrence of this great assembly in this great solemnity.

1. They joined with David in the adoration of God. When he had done his prayer, he called to them to testify their concurrence; (*Now bless the Lord your God*, v. 20.) which accordingly they did, by *bowing down their heads*, a gesture of adoration. Whoever is the mouth of the congregation, those only have the benefit who join with him, not by *bowing down the head*, so much as by *lifting up the soul*.

2. They paid their respects to the king, looking upon him as an instrument in God's hand of much good to them; and, in honouring him, they honoured God.

3. The next day, they offered abundance of sacrifices to God, (v. 21.) both burnt-offerings, which were wholly consumed, and peace-offerings, which the offerer had the greatest part of to himself. Hereby they testified a generous gratitude to God for the good posture their public affairs were in, though David was going the way of all the earth.

4. They feasted, and rejoiced, before God, v. 22. In token of their joy in God, and communion with him, they feasted upon their peace-offerings, in a religious manner, before the Lord. What had been offered to God, they feasted upon; by which was intimated to them, that they should be never the poorer for their late liberal contributions to the service of the temple; they themselves should feast upon the comfort of it.

5. They made Solomon king the second time. He having been before anointed, in haste, upon occasion of Adonijah's rebellion, it was thought fit to repeat it, for the greater satisfaction of the people. They *anointed him to the Lord*. Magistrates must look upon themselves as set apart for God, to be his ministers, and must rule accordingly in the fear of God. Zadok also was anointed to be priest, in the room of Abiathar, who had lately forfeited this honour. Happy art thou, O Israel, under such a prince, and such a pontiff.

23. Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father, and prospered: and all Israel obeyed him. 24. And all the princes,

and the mighty men, and all the sons likewise of king David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king. 25. And the Lord magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him *such* royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel. 26. Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. 27. And the time that he reigned over Israel *was* forty years; seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three *years* reigned he in Jerusalem. 28. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead. 29. Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they *are* written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer, 30. With all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him, and over Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries.

These verses bring king Solomon to his throne; and king David to his grave. Thus the rising generation thrusts out that which went before, and says, "Make room for us." Every one has his day.

I. Here is Solomon rising; (v. 23.) *Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord.* Not his throne which he prepared in the heavens, but the throne of Israel is called *the throne of the Lord*, because he is not only King of all nations, and all kings rule under him, but he was, in a peculiar manner, King of Israel, 1 Sam. 12. 12. He had the founding, he had the filling, of their throne, by immediate direction. The municipal laws of their kingdom were divine! Urim and prophets were the privy counsellors of their princes, therefore is their throne called *the throne of the Lord*. Solomon's kingdom typified the kingdom of the Messiah, and his is indeed *the throne of the Lord*; for the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to him; hence he calls him *his King*, Ps. 2. 6. Being set on the *throne of the Lord*, the throne to which God called him, he prospered. They that follow the divine guidance may expect success by the divine blessing. Solomon prospered; for,

1. His people *paid honour to him*, as one to whom honour is due. *All Israel obeyed him*; that is, were ready to swear allegiance to him; (v. 23.) the *princes and mighty men*, and even *the sons of David*, though, by seniority, their title to the crown was prior to his, and they might think themselves wronged by his advancement;

God thought fit to make him king, and made him fit to be so, and therefore they all *submitted themselves to him*. God inclined their hearts to do so, that his reign might, from the first, be peaceable. His father was a better man than he, and yet came to the crown with much difficulty; after long delay, and by many and slow steps. David had more faith, and therefore had it more tried. They *submitted themselves*, Heb. *They gave the hand under Solomon*, that is, bound themselves by oath to be true to him. Putting the hand under the thigh, was a ceremony anciently used in swearing; or, they were so entirely devoted, that they would put their hand under his feet to serve him.

2. God put honour upon him; for those that honour him, he will honour: *The Lord magnified Solomon exceedingly*, v. 25. His very countenance and presence, I am apt to think, had something in them very great and awful: all he said, and all he did, commanded respect. None of all the judges or kings of Israel, his predecessors, made such a figure as he did, nor lived in such splendour.

II. Here is David's setting; that great man going off the stage. The historian here brings him to the end of his day, leaves him asleep, and draws the curtains about him.

1. He gives a summary account of the years of his reign, v. 26, 27. He reigned forty years, as Moses did, Othniel, Deborah, Gideon, Eli, Samuel, and Saul, who were before him, and Solomon, after him.

2. He gives a short account of his death, (v. 28.) that he died *full of days, riches, and honour*; that is, (1.) Loaded with them. He was very old and very rich, and very much honoured both of God and man. He had been a man of war from his youth, and, as such, had his soul continually in his hand; yet he was not cut off in the midst of his days, but was preserved through all the dangers of a military life, lived to a good old age, and died in peace, died in his bed, and yet in the bed of honour. (2.) Satiated with them. He was *full of days, riches, and honour*; that is, he had enough of this world, and of the riches and honours of it, and knew when he had enough, for he was very willing to die and leave it, having said, (Ps. 49. 15.) *God shall receive me*; and, (Ps. 23. 4.) *Thou art with me*. A good man will soon be full of days, riches, and honour; but will never be satisfied with them; no satisfaction but in God's loving-kindness.

3. For a fuller account of David's life and reign, he refers his reader to the histories or records of those times, which were written by Samuel while he lived, and continued, after his death, by Nathan and Gad, v. 29. *There was related what was observable in his government at home, and his wars abroad, the times*, that is, the events of *the times that went over him*, v. 29, 30. These registers were then in being, but are now lost. Note, Good use may be made of those histories of the church, which are authentic, though not sacred, or of divine inspiration.

AN

E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH

Practical Observations,

OF THE SECOND BOOK OF

C H R O N I C L E S.

THIS book begins with the reign of Solomon, and the building of the temple, and continues the history of the kings of Judah thenceforward, to the captivity; and so concludes with the fall of that illustrious monarchy, and the destruction of the temple. That monarchy of the house of David, as it was prior in time, so it was superior in worth and dignity, to all those four celebrated ones which Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of. The Babylonian monarchy I reckon to begin in Nebuchadnezzar himself; *Thou art that head of gold*: That lasted but about seventy years; the Persian monarchy, in several families, about one hundred and thirty; the Grecian, in their several branches, about three hundred; and three hundred more went far with the Roman; but as I reckon David a greater hero than any of the founders of those monarchies, and Solomon a more magnificent prince than any of those that were the glories of them, so the succession was kept up in a lineal descent throughout the whole monarchy, which continued considerable between four and five hundred years; and, after a long eclipse, shone forth again in the kingdom of the Messiah, *of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end*. This history of the Jewish monarchy, as it is more authentic, so it is more entertaining and more instructive, than the histories of any of those monarchies. We had the story of the house of David before in the first and second books of Kings, intermixed with that of the kings of Israel, which *there* took more room than that of Judah; but here we have it entire. Much is repeated here, which we had before, yet many of the passages of the story are enlarged upon, and divers added, which we had not before, especially relating to the affairs of religion; for it is a church-history, and it is written for our learning, to let nations and families know that then, and then only, they can expect to prosper, when they keep in the way of their duty to God; for, all along, the good kings prospered, and the wicked kings suffered. The peaceable reign of Solomon we have, *ch. 1..9*. The blemished reign of Rehoboam, *ch. 10..12*. The short but busy reign of Abijah, *ch. 13*. The long and happy reign of Asa, *ch. 14..16*. The pious and prosperous reign of Jehoshaphat, *ch. 17..20*. The impious and infamous reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah, *ch. 21, 22*. The unsteady reigns of Joash and Amaziah, *ch. 24, 25*. The long and prosperous reign of Uzziah, *ch. 26*. The regular reign of Jotham, *ch. 27*. The profane and wicked reign of Ahaz, *ch. 28*. The gracious glorious reign of Hezekiah, *ch. 29..32*. The wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon, *ch. 33*. The reforming reign of Josiah, *ch. 34, 35*. The ruining reigns of his sons, *ch. 36*. Put all these together, and the truth of that word of God will appear; *Them that honour me I will honour; but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed*. The learned Mr. Whiston, in his chronology, suggests that the historical books which were written after the captivity, namely, the two books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, have more mistakes in names and numbers than all the books of the Old Testament besides, through the carelessness of transcribers; but though that should be allowed, the things are so very minute, that we may be confident, *The foundation of God stands sure, notwithstanding*.

CHAP. I.

In the close of the foregoing book, we read how God magnified Solomon, and Israel obeyed him; God and Israel concurred to honour him. Now, here, we have an account, I. How he honoured God by sacrifice, (v. 1..6.) and by prayer, v. 7..12. II. How he honoured Israel, by increasing their strength, wealth, and trade, v. 13..17.

1. **A**ND Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the LORD his God *was* with him, and magnified him exceedingly. 2. Then Solomon spake unto all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every governor in all Israel, the chief of the fathers. 3. So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that *was* at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. 4. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim to *the place which* David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem. 5. Moreover the brazen altar, that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the LORD: and Solomon and the congregation sought unto it. 6. And Solomon went up thither to the brazen altar before the LORD, which *was* at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt-offerings upon it. 7. In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee. 8. And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead. 9. Now, O LORD God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. 10. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, *that is so great?* 11. And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: 12. Wisdom and knowledge *is* granted unto thee: and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had, that *have been* before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.

Here is,

I. Solomon's great prosperity, v. 1. Though he had a contested title, yet, God being with him, he was *strengthened in his kingdom*; his heart and hands were strengthened, and his interest in the people. God's presence will be our strength.

II. His great piety and devotion. His father was a prophet, a

psalmist, and he kept mostly to the ark; but Solomon having read much in his Bible concerning the tabernacle which Moses built, and the altars there, paid more respect to them than, it should seem, David had done. Both did well, and let neither be censured. Let not the man whose zeal is employed chiefly in one religious direction, despise him whose zeal is employed chiefly in another. Let them not judge, or despise, one another.

1. All his great men must thus far be good men, that they must join with him in worshipping God. He spake to the captains and judges, the governors and chief of the fathers, to go with him to Gibeon, v. 2, 3. Authority and interest are well bestowed on those that will thus use them for the glory of God, and the promoting of religion. It is our duty to engage with whom we have influence, in the solemnities of religion, and it is very desirable to have many join with us in those solemnities; the more the better, it is the liker to heaven. Solomon began his reign with this public pious visit to God's altar, and it was a very good omen. Magistrates are then likely to do well for themselves and their people, when they thus take God along with them at their setting out.

2. He offered abundance of sacrifices to God there, (v. 6.) *a thousand burnt-offerings*, and perhaps a greater number of peace-offerings, on which he and his company *feasted before the Lord*. Where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap accordingly. His father David had left him flocks and herds in abundance, (1 Chron. 27, 29, 31.) and thus he gave God his dues out of them. The ark was at Jerusalem, (v. 4.) but the altar was at Gibeon, (v. 5.) and thither he brought his sacrifices; for *it is the altar that sanctifieth every gift*.

4. He prayed a good prayer to God: this, with the answer to it, we had before, 1 Kings, 3, 5, &c. (1.) God bade him ask what he would; not only that he might put him in the right way of obtaining the favours that were intended him, (*Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full,*) but that he might try him, how he stood affected, and might discover what was in his heart. Men's characters appear in their choices and desires. What wouldest thou have? tries a man as much as, What wouldest thou do? Thus God tried whether Solomon was one of the *children of this world*, that say, *Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us*. As we choose we shall have, and that is likely to be our portion to which we give the preference, whether the wealth and pleasure of this world, or spiritual riches and delights. (2.) Like a genuine son of David, he chose spiritual blessings rather than temporal. His petition here is, *Give me wisdom and knowledge*. He owns those to be desirable gifts, and God the Giver of them, Prov. 2, 6. God gave the faculty of understanding, and to him we must apply ourselves for the furniture of it. Two things are here pleaded, which we had not in Kings; [1.] *Thou hast made me reign in my father's stead*, v. 8. "Lord, thou hast put me into this place; and therefore I can in faith ask of thee grace to enable me to do the duty of it." What service we have reason to believe God calls us to, we have reason to hope he will qualify us for. But that is not all; "Lord, thou hast put me into this place in the stead of David, the great and good man that filled it up so well: therefore give me wisdom, that Israel may not suffer damage by the change. Must I reign in my father's stead? Lord, give me my father's spirit." Note, The eminency of those that went before us, and the obligation that lies upon us to keep up and carry on the good work they were engaged in, should provoke us to a gracious emulation, and quicken our prayers to God for wisdom and grace, that we may do the work of God in our day, as faithfully and well as they did in their's. [2.] *Let thy promise to David my father be established*, v. 9. He means the promise concerning his successor. "In performance of that promise, *Lord, give me wisdom*." We do not find that wisdom was any of the things promised, but it was necessary in order to the accomplishment of what was promised, 2 Sam. 7, 13..15. The promise was, *He shall build a house for my name, I will establish his throne, he shall be my son, and my mercy shall not depart from him*. "Now, Lord, unless you give me wisdom, thy house will not be built, nor my throne established; I shall behave in a manner unbecom-

ing my relation to thee as a Father, shall forfeit thy mercy, and lose it away; therefore, *Lord, give me wisdom.*" Note, *First*, God's promises are our best pleas in prayer; *Remember thy word unto thy servant.* *Secondly*, Children may take the comfort of the promises of that covenant which their parents, in their baptism, laid claim to, and took hold of, for them. *Thirdly*, The best way to obtain the benefit of the promises and privileges of the covenant, is, to be earnest in prayer with God for wisdom and grace to do the duties of it.

4. He received a gracious answer to this prayer, v. 11, 12. (1.) God gave him the wisdom that he asked for, because he asked for it. Wisdom is a gift that God gives as freely and liberally as any gift, to those that value it and wrestle for it, and will resolve to make use of it; and he upbraids not the poor petitioners with their folly, James, 1. 5. God's grace shall never be wanting to those who sincerely desire to know and do their duty. (2.) God gave him the wealth and honour which he did not ask for, because he asked not for it. Those that pursue present things most earnestly are most likely to miss of them; while those that refer themselves to the providence of God, if they have not the most of those things, have the most comfort in them. Those that make this world their end, come short of the other, and are disappointed in this too; but those that make the other world their end, shall not only obtain that, and full satisfaction in it, but shall take as much as is convenient of this world in their way.

13. Then Solomon came *from his journey* to the high place that *was* at Gibeon, to Jerusalem, from before the tabernacle of the congregation, and reigned over Israel. 14. And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, which he placed in the chariot-cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. 15. And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem *as plenteous* as stones, and cedar-trees made he as the sycamore-trees that *are* in the vale for abundance. 16. And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price. 17. And they fetched up, and brought forth out of Egypt a chariot for six hundred *shekels* of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so brought they out *horses* for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, by their means.

Here is, 1. Solomon's entrance upon the government; (v. 13.) *he came from before the tabernacle, and reigned over Israel.* He would not do any acts of government till he had done his acts of devotion; would not take honour to himself till he had given honour to God; first the tabernacle, and then the throne. But when he had obtained wisdom from God, he did not bury his talent, but as he had received the gift, ministered the same, did not give up himself to ease and pleasure, but minded business; he reigned over Israel.

2. The magnificence of his court; (v. 4.) *He gathered chariots and horsemen.* Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not; for the king was forbidden to multiply horses, Deut. 17. 16. I do not remember that ever we find his good father in a chariot, or on horseback; a mule was the highest he mounted. We should endeavour to excel those that went before us in goodness, rather than in grandeur.

3. The wealth and trade of his kingdom. He made silver and gold very cheap and common, v. 15. The increase of gold lowers the value of it; but the increase of grace advances its price; the more men have of that, the more they value it; *how much better therefore is it to get wisdom than gold!* He opened also a trade

with Egypt, whence he imported horses and linen yarn, which he exported again to the kings of Syria, with great advantage, no doubt, v. 16, 17. This we had before, 1 Kings, 10. 28, 29. It is the wisdom of princes to promote industry, and encourage trade, in their dominions. Perhaps Solomon took the hint of setting up the linen-manufacture, bringing linen-yarn out of Egypt, working it into cloth, and then sending that to other nations, from what his mother taught when she specified this, among other employments of the virtuous woman, *She maketh fine linen, and selleth it, and delivereth girdles of it to the merchant,* Prov. 31. 24. In all labour there is profit.

CHAP. II.

Solomon's trading, which we read of in the close of the foregoing chapter, and the encouragement he gave both to merchandise and manufacture, were very commendable. But building was the work he was designed for, and to that business he is here applying himself. Here is, I. Solomon's determination to build the temple and a royal palace, and his appointing of labourers to be employed herein, v. 1, 2, 17, 18. II. His request to Hiram king of Tyre, to furnish him both with artists and materials, v. 3. 10. III. Hiram's obliging answer to, and compliance with, his request, v. 11. 16.

1. **A**ND Solomon determined to build an house for the name of the LORD, and an house for his kingdom. 2. And Solomon told out threescore and ten thousand men to bear burthens, and fourscore thousand to hew in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred to oversee them. 3. And Solomon sent to Hiram the king of Tyre, saying, As thou didst deal with David my father, and didst send him cedars to build him an house to dwell therein, *even so deal with me.* 4. Behold, I build an house to the name of the LORD my God, to dedicate *it* to him, and to burn before him sweet incense, and for the continual shew-bread, and for the burnt-offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths, and on the new-moons, and on the solemn feasts of the LORD our God. This *is* an ordinance for ever to Israel. 5. And the house which I build *is* great: for great *is* our God above all gods. 6. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? Who *am* I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him? 7. Send me now therefore a man cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave with the cunning men that *are* with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father did provide. 8. Send me also cedar-trees, fir-trees, and algum-trees, out of Lebanon: for I know that thy servants can skill to cut timber in Lebanon; and, behold, my servants *shall be* with thy servants. 9. Even to prepare me timber in abundance: for the house which I am about to build *shall be* wonderful great. 10. And, behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil.

Solomon's wisdom was given him, not merely for speculation to entertain himself, (though it is indeed a princely entertainment,) nor merely for conversation to entertain his friends, but for action; and therefore to action he immediately applies himself. Observe,

1. His resolution with himself concerning his business; (v. 1.) *He determined to build, in the first place, a house for the name of the Lord.* It is fit that he who is the first should be first served; first a temple, and then a palace; a house, not so much for himself and his own convenience and magnitude, as for the kingdom, for the honour of it among its neighbours, and for the decent reception of the people, whenever they had occasion to apply themselves to their prince; so that in both he aimed at the public good. Those are the wisest men that lay out themselves most for the honour of the name of the Lord, and the welfare of communities: we are not born for ourselves, but for God and our country.

II. His embassy to Hiram, king of Tyre, to engage his assistance in the prosecution of his designs. The purport of his errand to him is much the same here as we had it, 1 Kings, 5. 2, &c. only here it is more largely set forth.

1. The reasons why he makes this application to Hiram are here more fully represented, for information to Hiram, as well as for inducement.

(1.) He pleads his father's interest in Hiram, and the kindness he had received from him; (v. 3.) *As thou didst deal with David, so deal with me.* As we must shew kindness to, so we may expect kindness from, our father's friends; and with them should cultivate a correspondence.

(2.) He represents his design in building the temple: he intended it for a place of religious worship, (v. 4.) that all the offerings which God had appointed for the honour of his name might be offered up there. The house was built that it might be dedicated to God, and used in his service; this we should aim at in all our business, that our havings and doings may be all to the glory of God. He mentions divers particular services that were there to be performed, for the instruction of Hiram. The mysteries of the true religion, unlike those of the Gentile superstition, coveted not concealment.

(3.) He endeavours to possess Hiram with very great and high thoughts of the God of Israel, by expressing the mighty veneration he had for his holy name. *Great is our God above all gods, above all idols, above all princes.* Idols are nothing, princes are little, and both under the controul of the God of Israel; and therefore, [1.] "The house must be great; not in proportion to the greatness of that God to whom it is to be dedicated, (for between finite and infinite there can be no proportion,) but in some proportion to the great value and esteem we have for this God." [2.] "Yet, be it ever so great, it cannot be a habitation for the great God: let not Hiram think that the God of Israel, like the gods of the nations, *dwells in temples made with hands*, (Acts, 17. 24.) no, the *heaven of heavens cannot contain him*. It is intended only for the convenience of the priests and worshippers, that they may have a fit place wherein to burn sacrifice before him." [3.] He looked upon himself, though a mighty prince, as unworthy the honour of being employed in this great work; *Who am I, that I should build a house?* It is part of the wisdom wherein we ought to walk toward them that are without, carefully to guard against all misapprehension which any thing we say or do may occasion concerning God; so Solomon does here in his treaty with Hiram.

2. The requests he makes to him are more particularly set down here. (1.) He desires Hiram would furnish him with a good hand to work, (v. 7.) *Send me a man.* He had *cunning men* with him in Jerusalem and Judah, whom David provided, 1 Chron. 22. 15. Let them not think but that the Jews had some among them that were artists; but *send me a man* to direct them. "There are ingenious men in Jerusalem, but not such engravers as are in Tyre; and therefore, since temple-work must be the best in its kind, let me have the best workmen that can be got." (2.) With good materials to work on; (v. 8.) cedar, and other timber in abundance; (v. 8, 9.) for the house must be *wonderful great*, that is, very stately and magnificent, no cost must be spared, nor any contrivance wanting in it.

3. Here is Solomon's engagement to maintain the workmen, (v. 10.) to give them so much wheat and barley, so much wine and oil. He did not feed his workmen with bread and water, but with plenty, and every thing of the best. They that employ labourers, ought to take care they be not only well paid, but well provided for with sufficient of that which is wholesome and fit for them. Let the rich masters do for their poor workmen as they would be done by, if the tables were turned.

11. Then Hiram the king of Tyre answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon, *Because the Lord hath loved his people, he hath made thee king over them.* 12. Hiram said moreover, *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, that made heaven and earth, who hath given to David the king a wise son, endued with prudence and understanding, that might build an house for the Lord, and an house for his kingdom.* 13. And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, of Hiram my father's; 14. The son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father *was* a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which shall be put to him, with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of my lord David thy father. 15. Now therefore the wheat, and the barley, the oil, and the wine, which my lord hath spoken of, let him send unto his servants: 16. And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need; and we will bring it to thee in floats by sea to Joppa; and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem. 17. And Solomon numbered all the strangers that *were* in the land of Israel, after the numbering wherewith David his father had numbered them; and they were found an hundred and fifty thousand and three thousand and six hundred. 18. And he set threescore and ten thousand of them *to be* bearers of burthens, and fourscore thousand *to be* hewers in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred overseers to set the people a-work.

Here we have,

1. The return which Hiram made to Solomon's embassy, in which he shews a great respect for Solomon, and a readiness to serve him. Lesser people may learn of those great ones to be neighbourly and complaisant.

1. He congratulates Israel, on having such a king as Solomon was; (v. 13.) *Because the Lord loved his people, he has made thee king.* Note, A wise and good government is a great blessing to a people, and may well be accounted a singular token of God's favour. He does not say, *Because he loved thee*, (though that was true, 2 Sam. 12. 24.) *he made thee king*, but because he *loved his people*. Princes must look upon themselves as preferred for the public good, not for their own personal satisfaction, and should rule so, as to prove that they were given in love, and not in anger.

2. He blesses God for raising up such a successor to David, v. 12. It should seem that Hiram was not only very well affected

to the Jewish nation, and well-pleased with their prosperity, but that he was proselyted to the Jewish religion, and worshipped Jehovah, *the God of Israel*, (who was not known by that name to the neighbouring nations,) as *the God that made heaven and earth*, and as the Fountain of power as well as being; for he sets up kings. Now that the people of Israel kept close to the law and worship of God, and so preserved their honour, the neighbouring nations were as willing to be instructed by them in the true religion, as *they* had been, in the days of their apostacy, to be infected with the idolatries and superstitions of their neighbours. This made them high, that they lent to many nations and did not borrow, lent truth to them, and did not borrow error from them; as when they did the contrary, it was their shame.

3. He sent him a very ingenious curious workman, that would not fail to answer his expectations in every thing. One that had both Jewish and Gentile blood meeting in him; for his mother was an Israelite, (Hiram thought she was of the tribe of Dan, and therefore says so here, v. 14. but, it seems, she was of the tribe of Naphtali, 1 Kings, 7. 14.) his father was a Tyrian; a good omen of uniting Jew and Gentile in the gospel-temple; as it was afterward when the building of the second temple was greatly furthered by Darius, (Ezra, 6.) who is supposed to have been the son of Eslier, an Israelite by the mother's side.

4. He engaged for the timber, as much as he would have occasion for, and undertook to deliver it at Joppa; and, withal, signified his dependence upon Solomon for the maintenance of the workmen, as he had promised, v. 15, 16. This agreement we had, 1 Kings, 5. 8, 9.

II. The orders which Solomon gave about the workmen. He would not employ the free-born Israelites in the drudgery-work of the temple itself, not so much as to be overseers of it; in this, he employed the strangers who were proselyted to the Jewish religion, who had not lands of inheritance in Canaan, as the Israelites had, and therefore applied themselves to trades, and got their living by their ingenuity and industry: there was, at this time, a vast number of them in the land, (v. 17.) who, if they were of any of the devoted nations, perhaps fell within the case, and therefore fell under the law, of the Gibeonites, to be hewers of wood for the congregation; if not, yet, being, in many cases, well provided for by the law of Moses, and put upon an equal footing with the native Israelites, they were bound in gratitude to do what they could for the service of the temple; yet, no doubt, they were well paid, in money, or money's worth; the law was, *Thou shalt not oppress a stranger*. The distribution of them we have here, (v. 2. and again, v. 18.) in all, 150,000. Canaan was a fruitful land, that found meat for so many mouths more than the numerous natives; and the temple a vast building, that found work for so many hands. Mr. Fuller suggests that the expedient peculiar to this structure, of framing all before-hand, must needs increase the work; I think it rather left so much the more room for this vast multitude of hands to be employed in it; for in the forest of Lebanon they might all be at work together, without crowding one another, which they could not have been upon mount Zion. And if there had not been such vast numbers employed, so large and curious a fabric, which was begun and ended in seven years, might, for aught I know, have been as long in building as St. Paul's.

CHAP. III.

It was a much larger and more particular account of the building of the temple, which we had in the book of Kings, than is here in this book of Chronicles. In this chapter we have, I. The place and time of building the temple, v. 1, 2. II. The dimensions and rich ornaments of it, v. 3, .9. III. The cherubins in the most holy place, v. 10, .13. IV. The veil, v. 14. V. The two pillars, v. 15, .17. Of all which we have already had an account, 1 Kings, 6. 7.

I. **T**HEN Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah,

where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 2. And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign. 3. Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed for the building of the house of God. The length by cubits after the first measure was threescore cubits, and the breadth twenty cubits. 4. And the porch that was in the front of the house, the length of it was according to the breadth of the house, twenty cubits, and the height was an hundred and twenty: and he overlaid it within with pure gold. 5. And the greater house he ceiled with fir-tree, which he overlaid with fine gold, and set thereon palm-trees and chains. 6. And he garnished the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim. 7. He overlaid also the house, the beams, the posts, and the walls thereof, and the doors thereof, with gold; and graved chernubims on the walls. 8. And he made the most holy house, the length whereof was according to the breadth of the house, twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits: and he overlaid it with fine gold, amounting to six hundred talents. 9. And the weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. And he overlaid the upper chambers with gold.

Here is, 1. The place where the temple was built. Solomon was neither at liberty to choose, nor at a loss to fix, the place. It was before determined, (1 Chron. 22. 1.) which was an ease to his mind. (1.) It must be at Jerusalem; for that was the place where God had chosen to put his name there. The royal city must be the holy city: *there must be the testimony of Israel; for there are set the thrones of judgment*, Ps. 122. 4, 5. (2.) It must be on mount Moriah; which, some think, was that very place in the land of Moriah where Abraham offered Isaac, Gen. 22. 2. So the Targum says expressly, adding, *But he was delivered by the word of the Lord, and a ram provided in his place*. That was typical of Christ's sacrifice of himself; therefore fitly was the temple, which was likewise a type of him, built there. (3.) It must be where the Lord appeared to David, and answered him by fire, 1 Chron. 21. 18, 26. There atonement was made once; and therefore, in remembrance of that, there atonement must still be made. There where God has met with me, it is to be hoped that he will still. (4.) It must be in the place which David had prepared, not only which he had purchased with his money, but which he had pitched upon by divine direction. It was Solomon's wisdom not to inquire out a more convenient place, but to acquiesce in the appointment of God, whatever might be objected against it. (5.) It must be in the threshing-floor of Ornan, which, if (as a Jebusite) it gives encouragement to the Gentiles, yet it obliges us to look upon temple-work as that which requires the labour of the mind, no less than threshing-work does that of the body.

2. The time when it was begun; not till the fourth year of Solomon's reign, v. 2. Not that the three first years were trifled away, or spent in deliberating whether they should build the temple or no; but they were employed in the necessary preparations for it, wherein three years would be soon gone, considering how many hands were to be got together, and set to work. Some conjecture that this was a sabbatical year, or year of release and rest to the land, when the people, being discharged from their

husbandry, might more easily lend a hand to the beginning of this work; and then the year it was finished would fall out to be another sabbatical year, when they would likewise have leisure to attend the solemnity of the dedication of it.

3. The dimensions of it; in which Solomon was instructed, (v.3.) as he was in other things, by his father. *This was the foundation* (so it may be read) *which Solomon laid for the building of the house.* This was the rule he went by, so many cubits the length and breadth, after the first measure, that is, according to the measure first fixed, which there was no reason to make any alteration of, when the work came to be done: for the dimensions were given by divine wisdom; and *what God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, or taken from it,* Eccl.3.14. His first measure will be the last.

4. The ornaments of the temple; the timber-work was very fine, and yet, within, it was overlaid with pure gold, (v.4.) with fine gold, (v.5.) and that embossed with palm-trees and choins. It was of gold of Parvaim, (v.6.) the best gold. The beams and posts, the walls and doors, were overlaid with gold, v.7. The most holy place, which was ten yards square, was all overlaid with fine gold; (v.8.) even the upper chambers, or rather the upper floor or roof; top, bottom, and sides, were all overlaid with gold. Every nail, or screw, or pin, with which the golden plates were fastened to the walls that were overlaid with them, weighed 50 shekels, or was worth so much; workmanship and all. A great many precious stones were dedicated to God, (1 Chron.29.2,8.) and these were set here and there, where they would shew to the best advantage. The finest houses now pretend to no better garnishing than good paint on the roof and walls; but the ornaments of the temple were more substantially rich. It was set with precious stones, because it was a type of the new Jerusalem, which has therefore no temple in it, because it is all temple, the walls, gates, and foundations of which are said to be of precious stones and pearls, Rev.21.18,19,21.

10. And in the most holy house he made two cherubims of image-work, and overlaid them with gold. 11. And the wings of the cherubims were twenty cubits long: one wing of the one cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was likewise five cubits, reaching to the wing of the other cherub. 12. And one wing of the other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was five cubits also, joining to the wing of the other cherub. 13. The wings of these cherubims spread themselves forth twenty cubits: and they stood on their feet, and their faces were inward. 14. And he made the vail of blue, and purple, and crimson, and fine linen, and wrought cherubims thereon. 15. Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits high, and the chapter that was on the top of each of them was five cubits. 16. And he made chains, as in the oracle, and put them on the heads of the pillars; and made an hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains. 17. And he reared up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz.

Here is an account, 1. Of the two cherubims, which were set up in the holy of holies. There were two already over the ark, which

covered the mercy-seat with their wings; those were small ones. Now that the most holy place was enlarged, though those were continued, (being appurtenances to the ark, which was not to be made new, as all the other utensils of the tabernacle were,) yet those two large ones were added, doubtless, by divine appointment, to fill up the holy place; which otherwise would look bare, like a room unfurnished. These cherubims are said to be of image-work, (v.10.) designed, it is likely, to represent the angels who attend the Divine Majesty. Each wing extended five cubits, so that the whole was 20 cubits, (v.12,13.) which was just the breadth of the most holy place, v.8. They stood on their feet, as servants, their faces inward toward the ark, (v.13.) that it might appear they were not set there to be adored, (for then they would have been made sitting, as on a throne, and their faces toward their worshippers,) but rather as themselves attendants on the invisible God. We must not worship angels, but we must worship with angels; for we are come into communion with them, (Heb.12.22.) and must do the will of God as the angels do it. The thought that we are worshipping him before whom the angels cover their faces, will help to inspire us with reverence in all our approaches to God. Compare 1 Cor.11.10. with Isa.6.2.

2. Of the vail that parted between the temple and the most holy place, v.14. This denoted the darkness of that dispensation, and the distance which the worshippers were kept at; but, at the death of Christ, this vail was rent; for through him we are made nigh, and have boldness not only to look, but to enter, into the holiest. On this he wrought cherubims, Heb. *he caused them to ascend*, that is, they were made in raised work, embossed. Or he made them on the wing in an ascending posture, to remind the worshippers to lift up their hearts, and to scar upward in their devotions.

3. Of the two pillars which were set up before the temple. Both together were somewhat above 35 cubits in length, (v.15.) about 18 cubits high a-piece; see 1 Kings, 7.15, &c. We there took a view of those pillars, Jachin and Boaz, establishment and strength in temple-work, and by it.

CHAP. IV.

We have here a further account of the furniture of God's house. I. Those things that were of brass: the altar for burnt-offerings, (v.1.) the sea and lavens to hold water, (v.2..6.) the plates with which the doors of the court were overlaid, (v.9.) the vessels of the altar, and other things, v.10..18. II. Those that were of gold: the candlesticks and tables, (v.7,8.) the altar of incense, (v.19.) and the appurtenances of each of these, v.20..22. All these, except the brazen altar, (v.1.) were accounted for more largely, 1 Kings, 7.23, &c.

1. **M**OREOVER he made an altar of brass, twenty cubits the length thereof, and twenty cubits the breadth thereof, and ten cubits the height thereof. 2. Also he made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. 3. And under it was the similitude of oxen, which did compass it round about: ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about. Two rows of oxen were cast, when it was cast. 4. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward. 5. And the thickness of it was an hand-breadth, and the brim of it like the work of the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies: and it

received and held three thousand baths. 6. He made also ten lavers, and put five on the right hand, and five on the left, to wash in them: such things as they offered for the burnt-offering they washed in them; but the sea *was* for the priests to wash in. 7. And he made ten candlesticks of gold according to their form, and set *them* in the temple, five on the right hand, and five on the left. 8. He made also ten tables, and placed *them* in the temple, five on the right side, and five on the left. And he made an hundred basins of gold. 9. Furthermore he made the court of the priests, and the great court, and doors for the court, and overlaid the doors of them with brass. 10. And he set the sea on the right side of the east end, over against the south.

David often speaks with much affection, both of the *house of the Lord*, and of the *courts of our God*. Both without doors and within there was that which typified the grace of the gospel, and shadowed out *good things to come*, of which the substance is Christ.

1. There were those things in the open court, in the view of all people, which were very significant.

1. There was the *brazen altar*, v. 1. The making of this was not mentioned in the Kings. On this all the sacrifices were offered, and it sanctified the gift. This altar was much larger than that which Moses made in the tabernacle; that was five cubits square, this was twenty cubits square. Now Israel was become both more numerous and more rich, and, it was to be hoped, more devout, (for every age should aim to be wiser and better than that which went before it,) it was expected that there would be a greater abundance of offerings brought to God's altar than had been; it is therefore made such a capacious scaffold, that it might hold them all, and none might excuse themselves from bringing those testimonies of their devotion, by alleging that there was not room to receive them. God had greatly enlarged their borders, it was therefore fit that they should enlarge his altars. Our returns should bear some proportion to our receivings. It was ten cubits high, so that the people who worshipped in the courts might see the sacrifices burnt, and their eye might affect their heart with sorrow for sin: "It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not thus consumed, and that this is accepted as an expiation of my guilt." They might thus be led to consider the great Sacrifice which should be offered, in the fulness of time, to take away sin, and abolish death, which the blood of bulls and goats could not possibly do. And with the smoke of the sacrifices their heart might ascend to heaven, in holy desires toward God and his favour. In all our devotions we must keep the eye of faith fixed upon Christ, the great Propitiation. How they went up to this altar, and carried the sacrifices up to it, we are not told; some think, by a plain ascent, like a hill: if by steps, doubtless they were so contrived as that the end of the law (mentioned Exod. 20. 26.) might be answered.

2. There was the molten sea, a very large brass pan, in which they put water for the priests to wash in, v. 2, 5. It was put just at the entrance into the court of the priests, like the font at the church-door. If it were filled to the brim, it would hold 3,000 baths, as here; (v. 5.) but, in common, there were only 2,000 baths in it, 1 Kings, 7. 26. The Holy Ghost, by this, signified, (1.) Our great gospel-*privilege*, that *the blood of Christ cleanse*th from all sin, 1 John, 1. 7. To us there is a *fountain opened* for all believers, (who are spiritual priests, Rev. 1. 5, 6.) nay, for *all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to wash in*, from sin, which is uncleanness. There is a fulness of merit in Jesus Christ for all those that by faith apply themselves to him for the purifying of their consciences, that they may serve the *living God*, Heb. 9. 14.

(2.) Our great gospel-*duty*, which is, to cleanse ourselves, by true repentance, from all the pollutions of the flesh, and the corruption that is in the world. Our hearts must be sanctified, or we cannot sanctify the name of God. They that draw nigh to God must *cleanse their hands, and purify their hearts*, Jam. 4. 8. *If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me*; and he that is washed, still needs to wash his feet, to renew his repentance, whenever he goes in to minister, John, 13. 10.

3. There were *ten lavers* of brass, in which *they washed such things as they offered for the burnt-offerings*; (v. 6.) as the priests must be washed, so must the sacrifices. We must not only purify ourselves in preparation for our religious performances, but carefully put away all those vain thoughts, and corrupt aims, which cleave to our performances themselves, and pollute them.

4. The doors of the court were overlaid with brass, (v. 9.) both for strength and beauty, and that they might not be rotted with the weather, to which they were exposed. *Gates of brass* we read of, Ps. 107. 16.

11. There were those things in the *house of the Lord*, (into which the priests went only in to minister,) that were very significant. All was of gold there. The nearer we come to God, the purer we must be, the purer we shall be.

1. There were *ten golden candlesticks*, according to the form of that one which was in the tabernacle, v. 7. The written word is a lamp and a light, shining in a dark place. In Moses's time they had but one candlestick, the Pentateuch; but the additions, which, in process of time, were to be made of other books of scripture, might be signified by this increase of the number of the candlesticks. Light was growing. The candlesticks are the churches, Rev. 1. 20. Moses set up but one, the church of the Jews; but, in the gospel-temple, not only believers, but churches, are multiplied.

2. There were *ten golden tables*; (v. 1.) *tables whereon the shew-bread was set*, v. 19. Perhaps every one of the tables had twelve loaves of shew-bread on it. As the house was enlarged, the housekeeping was. *In my Father's house there is bread enough for the whole family*. To those tables belonged a hundred golden basins, or dishes; for God's table is well furnished.

3. There was a *golden altar*, (v. 19.) on which they burnt incense. It is probable that this was enlarged in proportion to the brazen altar. Christ, who, once for all, made atonement for sin, ever lives, making intercession, in virtue of that atonement.

11. And Hiram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basins. And Hiram finished the work that he was to make for king Solomon for the house of God; 12. *To wit*, the two pillars, and the pommels, and the chapters *which were* on the top of the two pillars, and the two wreaths to cover the two pommels of the chapters *which were* on the top of the pillars; 13. And four hundred pomegranates on the two wreaths; two rows of pomegranates on each wreath, to cover the two pommels of the chapters *which were* upon the pillars. 14. He made also bases, and lavers made he upon the bases; 15. One sea, and twelve oxen under it. 16. The pots also, and the shovels, and the flesh-hooks, and all their instruments, did Hiram his father make to king Solomon for the house of the LORD of bright brass. 17. In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah. 18. Thus Solomon made all these vessels in great abundance: for the weight of the brass could not be found out. 19. And Solomon made all the

vessels that *were* for the house of God, the golden altar also, and the tables whereon the shew-bread *was set*; 20. Moreover the candlesticks with their lamps, that they should burn after the manner before the oracle, of pure gold; 21. And the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs, *made he of gold, and that perfect gold*; 22. And the snuffers, and the basins, and the spoons, and the censers, *of pure gold*: and the entry of the house, the inner doors thereof for the most holy *place*, and the doors of the house of the temple, *were of gold*.

We have here such a summary, even of the brass-work and the gold-work of the temple, as we had before, (1 Kings, 7. 13, &c.) in which we have nothing more to observe, than, (1.) That Hiram the workman was very punctual; *he finished all that he was to make*, (v. 11.) and left no part of his work undone. *Hiram his father*, he is called, v. 16. Probably it was a sort of nick-name by which he was commonly known, *Father Hiram*; for the king of Tyre called him *Hiram Abi, my father*; in compliance with whom Solomon called him his, he being a great artist, and *father of the artificers* in brass and iron. He acquitted himself well, both for ingenuity and industry. (2.) Solomon was very generous. He made *all the vessels in great abundance*, (v. 18.) many of a sort, that many hands might be employed, and so the work might go on with expedition; or, that some might be laid up for use when others were worn out. Freely he has received, and he will freely give. When he had made vessels enough for the present, he would not convert the remainder of the brass to his own use; it is devoted to God, and it shall be used for him.

CHAP. V.

The temple being built and furnished for God, we have here, I. Possession given to him, by bringing in the dedicated things, (v. 1.) but especially the ark, the token of his presence, v. 2. .10. II. Possession taken by him, in a cloud, v. 11. .14. For if any man open the door of his heart to God, he will come in, Rev. 3. 20.

1. **T**HUS all the work that Solomon made for the house of the LORD was finished: and Solomon brought in *all* the things that David his father had dedicated; and the silver, and the gold, and all the instruments, put he among the treasures of the house of God. 2. Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. 3. Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast which *was* in the seventh month. 4. And all the elders of Israel came; and the Levites took up the ark. 5. And they brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that *were* in the tabernacle, these did the priests *and* the Levites bring up. 6. Also king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel that were assembled unto him before the ark, sacrificed sheep and oxen, which could not be told nor numbered for multitude. 7. And the priests brought

in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, to the oracle of the house, into the most holy *place, even* under the wings of the cherubims: 8. For the cherubims spread forth *their* wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above. 9. And they drew out the staves *of the ark*, that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the oracle; but they were not seen without. And there it is unto this day. 10. *There was* nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put *therein* at Horeb when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.

This agrees with what we had, 1 Kings, 8. 2, &c. where an account was given of the solemn introducing of the ark into the new-erected temple.

1. There needed no great solemnity for the bringing in of the dedicated things, v. 1. They added to the wealth, and perhaps were so disposed as to add to the beauty, of it; but they could not add to the holiness, for it was the *temple that sanctified the gold*, Matth. 23. 17. See how just Solomon was both to God and to his father. Whatever David had dedicated to God, however much he might have liked it himself, he would by no means alienate it, but put it among the treasures of the temple. Those children that would inherit their godly parents' blessing, must religiously pursue their pious intentions, and not defeat them. When Solomon had made all the vessels of the temple in abundance, (ch. 4. 18.) many of the materials were left, which he would not convert to any other use, but laid them up in the treasury, for a time of need. Dedicated things must not be alienated. It is a sacrilege to do it.

2. But it was fit that the ark should be brought in with great solemnity; and so it was. All the other vessels were made new, and larger, in proportion to the house, than they had been in the tabernacle; but the ark, the mercy-seat, and the cherubims, was the same; for the presence and the grace of God are the same in little assemblies that they are in large ones, in the poor condition of the church that they are in its prosperous estate; wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, there is he as truly present with them as if there were two or three thousand. The ark was brought in, attended by a very great assembly of the elders of Israel, who came to grace the solemnity; and a very sumptuous appearance, no doubt, they made, v. 2. .4. It was carried by the priests, (v. 7.) brought into the most holy place, and put under the wings of the great cherubim which Solomon had set up there, v. 7, 8. *There they are unto this day*; not the day when this book was written after the captivity, but when that was written out of which this story was transcribed. Or, they were there (so it might better be read) unto this day, the day of Jerusalem's desolations, that fatal day, Ps. 137. 7. The ark was a type of Christ, and, as such, a token of the presence of God. That gracious promise, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*, does, in effect, bring the ark into our religious assemblies, if we, by faith and prayer, put that promise in suit: and this we should be most solicitous and earnest for; *Lord, if thy presence go not up with us*, wherefore should we go up? The temple itself, if Christ leave it, is a desolate place, Matth. 23. 38.

3. With the ark they brought up the tabernacle, and all the *holy vessels that were in the tabernacle*, v. 5. They were not alienated, because they had been dedicated to God; not altered or melted down for the new work, because there was no need of them: but they were carefully laid up as monuments of antiquity; and, probably, as many of the vessels as were fit for use were still used.

4. This was done with great joy. They kept a holy feast upon the occasion, (v. 5.) and *sacrificed sheep and oxen without number*, v. 6. Note, (1.) The establishment of the public worship of God,

according to his institution, and with the tokens of his presence, is, and ought to be, matter of great joy to any people. (2.) When Christ is formed in a soul, the law written in the heart, the ark of the covenant settled there, so that it becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost, there is true satisfaction in that soul. (3.) Whatever we have the comfort of, we must, by the sacrifices of praise, give God the glory of, and not be straitened therein; for *with such sacrifices God is well pleased*. If God favour us with his presence, we must honour him with our services, the best we have.

11. And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place: (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait by course: 12. Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets:) 13. It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying, *For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever*: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD: 14. So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

Solomon, and the elders of Israel, had done what they could to grace the solemnity of the introduction of the ark; but God, by testifying his acceptance of what they did, put the greatest honour upon it. The cloud of glory that filled the house, beautified it more than all the gold with which it was overlaid, or the precious stones with which it was garnished; and yet that was no glory, in comparison with the glory of the gospel-dispensation, 2 Cor. 3. 8. 10. Observe,

I. How God took possession of the temple; he *filled it with a cloud*, v. 13. 1. Thus he signified his acceptance of this temple to be the same to him that the tabernacle of Moses was, and assured them that he would be the same in it; for it was by a cloud that he made his public entry into that, Exod. 40. 34. 2. Thus he considered the weakness and infirmity of those to whom he manifested himself, who could not bear the dazzling lustre of the divine light, it would have overpowered them; he therefore *spreads a cloud upon it*, Job. 26. 9. Christ revealed things unto his disciples as they were able to bear them, and in parables, which wrapped up divine things as in a cloud. 3. Thus he would affect all that worshipped in his courts with holy reverence and fear. Christ's disciples were afraid when they entered into a cloud, Luke. 9. 34. 4. Thus he would intimate the darkness of that dispensation, by reason of which they could not steadfastly look to the end of those things which were now abolished, 2 Cor. 3. 13.

II. When he took possession of it. 1. *When the priests were come out of the holy place*, v. 11. This is the way of giving possession. All must come out, that the rightful owner may come in. Would we have God dwell in our hearts? We must leave room for him; let every thing else give way. We are here told, that upon this occasion the whole family of the priests attended, and not any one particular course; *all the priests that were present were sanctified*, (v. 11.) because there was work enough for them

all, when such a multitude of sacrifices were to be offered, and because it was fit that they should all be eye-witnesses of this solemnity, and receive the impressions of it. 2. When the singers and musicians praised God, then the house was filled with a cloud. This is very observable; it was not when they *offered sacrifices*, but when they *sang the praises of God*, that God gave them this token of favour; for the sacrifice of praise *pleaseth the Lord* better than that of an ox or bullock, Ps. 69. 31. All the singers and musicians were employed, those of each of the three families; and, to complete the concert, 120 priests, with their trumpets, joined with them, all standing at the east end of the altar, on that side of the court which lay outmost toward the people, v. 12. And when this part of the service began, the glory of God appeared. Observe, (1.) It was when they were unanimous, when they were as one, to make one sound. The Holy Ghost descended on the apostles, when they met with one accord, Acts. 2. 1. Where unity is, the Lord commands the blessing. (2.) It was when they were lively and hearty, and *lifted up their voice to praise the Lord*. Then we serve God acceptably, when we are fervent in spirit, serving him. (3.) It was when they were, in their praises, celebrating the everlasting mercy and goodness of God. As there is no one saying oftener repeated in scripture than this, *His mercy endureth for ever*, (26 times in one psalm, Ps. 136. and often elsewhere,) so there is none more signally owned from heaven; for it was not the expression of some rapturous flights that the priests were singing when the glory of God appeared, but this plain song, *He is good, and his mercy endureth for ever*. This should endear those words to us. God's goodness is his glory, and he is pleased when we give him the glory of it.

III. What was the effect of it. The *priests themselves could not stand to minister, by reason of the cloud*, (v. 14.) which, as it was an evidence that the law made men priests that had infirmity, so (as Bishop Patrick observes) it was a plain intimation that the Levitical priesthood should cease, and stand no longer to minister, when the Messiah should come, in whom *the fulness of the Godhead should dwell bodily*. In him the glory of God dwelt among us, but covered with a cloud. The Word was made flesh; and when he comes to his temple, like a refiner's fire, *who may abide the day of his coming?* And *who shall stand when he appeareth?* Mal. 3. 1, 2.

CHAP. VI.

The glory of the Lord, in the vehicle of a thick cloud, having filled the house which Solomon built, by which God manifested his presence there, he immediately improves the opportunity, and addresses himself to God, as a God now, in a peculiar manner, nigh at hand. I. He makes a solemn declaration of his intention in building this house, to the satisfaction of the people, and the honour of God, both which he blessed, v. 1. 11. II. He makes a solemn prayer to God, that he would please graciously to accept and answer all the prayers that should be made in, or toward, that house, v. 12. 42. This whole chapter we had before, with very little variation, (1 Kings, 8. 12. 55.) to which it may not be amiss here to look back.

1. **THEN** said Solomon, The LORD hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. 2. But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever. 3. And the king turned his face, and blessed the whole congregation of Israel: and all the congregation of Israel stood. 4. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who hath with his hands fulfilled that which he spake with his mouth to my father David, saying, 5. Since the day that I brought forth my people out of the land of Egypt, I chose no city among all the tribes of Israel to build an house in, that my name might be there: neither chose I any man to be a ruler over my

people Israel: 6. But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel. 7. Now it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 8. But the LORD said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart: 9. Notwithstanding thou shalt not build the house; but thy son which shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house for my name. 10. The LORD therefore hath performed his word that he hath spoken: for I am risen up in the room of David my father, and am set on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 11. And in it have I put the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, that he made with the children of Israel.

It is of great consequence, in all our religious actions, that we design well, and that our eye be single. If Solomon had built this temple in the pride of his heart, as Ahasuerus made his feast, only to *shew the riches of his kingdom, and the honour of his majesty*, it would not have turned at all to his account. But he here declares upon what inducements he undertook it, and they are such as not only justify, but magnify, the undertaking.

1. He did it for the glory and honour of God; this was his highest and ultimate end in it. It was *for the name of the Lord God of Israel*, (v. 10.) to be a house of habitation for him, v. 2. He has indeed, as to us, *made darkness his pavilion*; (v. 1.) but let this house be the residence of that darkness; for it is in the upper world that he dwells in light, such as no eye can approach.

2. He did it in compliance with the choice God had been pleased to make of Jerusalem, to be the city in which he would record his name; (v. 6.) *I have chosen Jerusalem*. A great many stately buildings there were in Jerusalem for the king, his princes, and the royal family. If God choose that place, it is fit that there be a building for him, which may excel all the rest. Were men thus honoured there, let God be thus honoured.

3. He did it in pursuance of his father's good intentions, which he never had an opportunity to put in execution. *It was in the heart of David my father to build a house for God*; the project was his, be it known, to his honour, (v. 7.) and God approved of it, though he permitted him not to put it in execution; (v. 8.) *Thou didst well that it was in thine heart*. Temple-work is often thus done; one sows, and another reaps; (John, 4. 37, 38.) one age begins that which the next brings to perfection; and let not the wisest of men think it any disparagement to them, to pursue the good designs which those that went before them have laid, and to build upon their foundation. Every good piece is not an original.

4. He did it in performance of the word which God had spoken. God had said, *Thy son shall build the house for my name*; and now he had done it, v. 9, 10. The service was appointed him, and the honour of it designed him, by the divine promise: so that he did not do it of his own head, but was called of God to do it. It is fit that he who appoints the work should have the appointing of the workmen; and those may go on in their work with great satisfaction, who see their call to it clear.

12. And he stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands: 13. For Solomon had made a brazen scaffold, of five cubits long, and five

cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court, and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven, 14. And said, O LORD God of Israel, *there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth*; which keepest covenant, and *shewest* mercy unto thy servants, that walk before thee with all their hearts: 15. Thou which hast kept with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him; and spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day. 16. Now therefore, O LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit upon the throne of Israel; yet so that thy children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me. 17. Now then, O LORD God of Israel, let thy word be verified, which thou hast spoken unto thy servant David. 18. But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! 19. Have respect therefore to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee: 20. That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there; to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth toward this place. 21. Hearken therefore unto the supplications of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place: hear thou from thy dwelling-place, *even* from heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive. 22. If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to make him swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house; 23. Then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head; and by justifying the righteous, by giving him according to his righteousness. 24. And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house; 25. Then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers. 26. When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them; 27. Then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the

sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance. 28. If there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, if there be blasting, or mildew, locusts, or caterpillars; if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness *there be*: 29. *Then* what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house: 30. Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest: (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men:) 31. That they may fear thee, to walk in thy ways, so long as they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. 32. Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched out arm; if they come and pray in this house; 33. Then hear thou from the heavens, *even* from thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee, as *doth* thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name. 34. If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name; 35. Then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. 36. If they sin against thee, (for *there is* no man which sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before *their* enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near; 37. Yet *if* they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly: 38. If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul, in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and *toward* the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name: 39. Then hear thou from the heavens, *even* from thy dwelling-place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee. 40. Now, my God, let, I beseech thee, thine eyes be open, and *let* thine

ears be attent unto the prayer *that is made* in this place. 41. Now therefore arise, O LORD God, into thy resting-place, thou, and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness. 42. O LORD God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant.

Solomon had, in the foregoing verses, signed and sealed, as it were, the deed of dedication, by which the temple was appropriated to the honour and service of God. Now here he prays the consecration-prayer, by which it was made a figure of Christ, the great Mediator, through whom we are to offer all our prayers, and to expect all God's favours, and to whom we are to have an eye in every thing wherein we have to do with God.

We opened the particulars of this prayer, 1 Kings 8. and therefore shall now only glean up some few passages in it which may be the proper subjects of our meditation.

I. Here are some doctrinal truths occasionally laid down. As, 1. That the God of Israel is a Being of incomparable perfection. We cannot describe him; but this we know, there is *none like him in heaven or in earth*, v. 14. All the creatures have their fellow-creatures, but the Creator has not his peer. He is infinitely above all, and *over all*, *God blessed for ever*. 2. That he is, and will be, true to every word that he has spoken; and all that serve him in sincerity shall certainly find him both faithful and kind. Those that set God always before them, and *walk before him with all their hearts*, shall find him as good as his word, and better; he will both keep covenant with them, and shew mercy to them, v. 14. 3. That he is a Being infinite and immense, whom the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain, and to whose felicity nothing is added by the utmost we can do in his service, v. 18. He is infinitely beyond the bounds of the creation, and infinitely above the praises of all intelligent creatures. 4. That he, and *he only*, *knows the hearts of the children of men*, v. 30. All men's thoughts, aims, and affections, are naked and open before him; and, however the imaginations and intents of our hearts may be concealed from men, angels, and devils, they cannot be hid from God, who knows not only what is in the heart, but the heart itself, and all the beatings of it. 5. That there is no such thing as a sinless perfection to be found in this life; (v. 36.) *There is no man which sinneth not*; nay, which *doeth good and sinneth not*; so he writes, agreeable to what he here says, Eccl. 7. 20.

II. Here are some suppositions or cases put, which are to be taken notice of. 1. He supposes that if doubts and controversies arose between man and man, both sides would agree to appeal to God, and lay an oath upon the person whose testimony must decide the matter, v. 22. The religious reverence of an oath, as it was ancient, so, it may be presumed, it will continue as long as there are any remains of conscience and right reason among men. 2. He supposes that though Israel enjoyed a profound peace and tranquillity, troublesome times would come. He did not think the mountain of their prosperity stood so strong, but that it might be moved; nay, he expected sin would move it. 3. He supposes that those who had not called upon God at other times, yet, in their affliction, would seek him early and earnestly. "When they are in distress, they will confess their sins and confess thy name, and make supplication to thee." Trouble will drive those to God, who had said to him, Depart, v. 24, 26, 28. 4. He supposes that strangers would come from afar to worship the God of Israel, and to pay homage to him; and this also might reasonably be expected, considering what worthless things the gods of the nations were, and what proofs the God of Israel had given of his being Lord of the whole earth.

III. Here are petitions very pertinent.

1. That God would own this house, and have an eye to it, as the place of which he said that he would put his name there, v. 20.

He could not, in faith, have asked God to shew such peculiar favour to this house above any other, if he himself had not said that it should be his rest for ever. The prayer that will speed, must be warranted by the word. We may therefore with humble confidence pray to God to be well-pleased with us in Jesus Christ, because he has declared himself well-pleased in him; *This is my beloved Son*; but he says not now of any house, "*This is my beloved place.*"

2. That God would hear and accept the prayers which should be made in, or toward, that place, v. 21. He asks not that God should help them, whether they prayed for themselves or no, but that God would help them, in answer to their prayers. Even Christ's intercessions do not supersede, but encourage, our supplications. He prays that God would hear from his dwelling-place, even from heaven; that is his dwelling-place still; not this temple; and thence help must come. *When thou hearest, forgive.* Note, The forgiveness of one sin is that which makes way for all the other answers to our prayers, *Removendo prohibens*—*The evil which it drives away, it keeps away.*

3. That God would give judgment according to equity, upon all the appeals that should be made to him, v. 23, 30. This we may, in faith, pray for, for we are sure it shall be done. God sitteth on the throne, judging right.

4. That God would return in mercy to his people, when they repented and reformed, and sought unto him, v. 25, 27, 38, 39. This we also may, in faith, pray for, building upon the repeated declarations God has made of his readiness to accept penitents.

5. That God would bid the strangers welcome to this house, and answer their prayers; (v. 33.) for if there be in duty, why should there not be in privilege, one law for the stranger, and one born in the land, Lev. 24. 22.

6. That God would, upon all occasions, own and plead the cause of his people Israel, against all the opposers of it, (v. 35.) *maintain their cause*; and again, v. 39. If they be the Israel of God, their cause is the cause of God, and he will espouse it.

Lastly, He concludes this prayer with some expressions which he had learned of his good father, and borrowed from one of his psalms. We had them not in the Kings, but here we have them, v. 41, 42. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; and how can we express ourselves in better language to God, than that of his own Spirit? But these words were of use, in a special manner, to direct Solomon, because they had reference to this very work that he was now doing. We have them, Ps. 132. 8. 10. He prays, (v. 41.) (1.) That God would take possession of the temple, and keep possession; that he would make it his resting-place. *Thou and the ark*; what will the ark do, without the God of the ark? Ordinances, without the God of the ordinances? (2.) That he would make the ministers of the temple public blessings, *clothe them with salvation*, that is, not only save them, but make them instrumental to save others, by offering the sacrifices of righteousness. (3.) That the service of the temple might turn abundantly to the joy and satisfaction of all the Lord's people. *Let thy saints rejoice in goodness*, that is, in the *goodness of thy house*, Ps. 65. 4. Let all that come hither to worship, like the Eunuch, go away rejoicing. He pleads two things, v. 42.

[1.] His own relation to God: "*Turn not away the face of thine anointed.*" Lord, thou hast appointed me to be king, and wilt not thou own me? [2.] God's covenant with his father: *Remember the mercies of David thy servant.* The piety of David toward God, so some understand it, so the word sometimes signifies, his pious care of the ark, and concern for it. See Ps. 132. 1, 2, &c. Or, the promises of God to David, which were mercies to him, his great support and comfort in all his troubles. We may plead, as Solomon does here, with an eye to Christ. We deserve that God should turn away our face, that he should reject us and our prayers; but we come in the name of the Lord Jesus, *thine anointed, thy Messiah*, so the word is; *thy Christ*, so the LXX. Him thou hearest always, and wilt never *turn away his face*. We have no righteousness of our own to plead, but, Lord, *remember the mercies of David thy servant.* Christ is God's Servant,

(Isa. 42. 1.) and is called *David*, Hos. 3. 5. Lord, remember his mercies, and accept of us on the account of them. Remember his tender concern for his Father's honour, and man's salvation, and what he did and suffered from that principle. Remember the promises of the everlasting covenant, which free grace has made to us in Christ, and which are called *the sure mercies of David*, Isa. 55. 3. and Acts, 13. 34. This must be all our desire, and all our hope, all our prayer, and all our plea, for it is all our salvation.

CHAP. VII.

In this chapter we have God's answer to Solomon's prayer. I. His public answer by fire from heaven, which consumed the sacrifices, (v. 1.) with which the priests and people were much affected, v. 2, 3. By that token of God's acceptance, they were encouraged to continue the solemnities of the feast for fourteen days, and Solomon was encouraged to pursue all his designs for the honour of God, v. 4. 11. II. His private answer by word of mouth, in a dream or vision of the night, v. 12. 22. Most of these things we had before, 1 Kings, 8. and 9.

1. **N**OW when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. 2. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house. 3. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, *saying, For he is good*; for his mercy *endureth* for ever. 4. Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. 5. And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. 6. And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of music of the LORD, which David the king had made to praise the LORD, because his mercy *endureth* for ever, when David praised by their ministry; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood. 7. Moreover Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that *was* before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt-offerings, and the fat of the peace-offerings, because the brazen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt-offerings, and the meat-offerings, and the fat. 8. Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt. 9. And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days. 10. And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his peo-

ple. 11. Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected.

Here is,

I. The gracious return which God immediately made to Solomon's prayer. *The fire came down from heaven, and consumed the sacrifice, v. 1.* In this way, God testified his acceptance of Moses, (Lev. 9. 24.) of Gideon, (Judg. 6. 21.) of David, (1 Chron. 21. 26.) of Elijah; (1 Kings, 18. 38.) and, in general, to accept the burnt-sacrifice, is, in the Hebrew phrase, to turn it to ashes, Ps. 20. 3. The fire came down here, not upon the killing of the sacrifices, but the praying of the prayer. This fire intimated that God was, 1. Glorious in himself; for *our God is a consuming Fire*, terrible even in his holy places. This fire breaking forth (as it is probable) out of the thick darkness, made it the more terrible, as on mount Sinai, Exod. 24. 16, 17. The sinners in Zion had reason to be afraid at this sight, and to say, *Who among us shall dwell near this devouring fire?* Isa. 33. 14. And yet, 2. Gracious to Israel; for this fire, which might justly have consumed them, fastened upon the sacrifice which was offered in their stead, and consumed that; by which God signified to them, that he accepted their offerings, and that his anger was turned away from them. Let us apply this, (1.) To the sufferings of Christ; when it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief, in that he shewed his good-will to men, having laid on him the iniquity of all. His death was our life, and he was made sin and a curse, that we might inherit righteousness and a blessing. That sacrifice was consumed, that we might escape: *Here am I, let these go away.* (2.) To the sanctification of the Spirit, who descends like fire, burning up our lusts and corruptions, those beasts that must be sacrificed, or we are undone; and kindling in our souls a holy fire of pious and devout affections, always to be kept burning on the altar of the heart. The surest evidence of God's acceptance of our prayers, is the descent of this holy fire upon us; *Did not our hearts burn within us?* Luke, 24. 32. As a further evidence that God accepted Solomon's prayer, still *the glory of the Lord filled the house.* The heart that is thus filled with a holy awe and reverence of the divine glory, in consequence of God's manifesting himself in his greatness, and (which is no less his glory) in his goodness, is thereby owned as a living temple.

II. The grateful return made to God for this gracious token of his favour.

1. The people worshipped and praised God, v. 3. When they saw the fire of God come down from heaven thus, they did not run away affrighted, but kept their ground in the courts of the Lord, and took occasion from it, (1.) With reverence to adore the glory of God; they bowed their faces to the ground, and worshipped, thus expressing their awful dread of the Divine Majesty, their cheerful submission to the Divine Authority, and the sense they had of their own unworthiness to come into God's presence, and their inability to stand before the power of his wrath. (2.) With thankfulness to acknowledge the goodness of God; even then when the fire of the Lord came down, they praised him, saying, *He is good, for his mercy endureth for ever.* That is a song never out of season, and for which our hearts and tongues should be never out of tune. However it be, yet God is good. When he manifests himself as a consuming Fire to sinners, his people can rejoice in him as their Light. Nay, they had reason to say that in this God was good; *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed*, but the sacrifice in our stead, for which we are bound to be very thankful.

2. The king and all the people offered sacrifices in abundance, v. 4, 5. With these they feasted this holy fire, and bade it welcome to the altar. They had offered sacrifices before, but now they increased them. Note, The tokens of God's favour to us should enlarge our hearts in his service, and make us to abound therein more and more. The king's example stirred up the people. Good work is then likely to go on, when the leaders

of a people lead in it. The sacrifices were so numerous, that the altar could not contain them all; but, rather than any of them should be turned back, (though we may suppose the blood of them all was sprinkled upon the altar,) the flesh of the burnt-offerings, and the fat of the peace-offerings, were burnt *in the midst of the court*, (v. 7.) which Solomon either hallowed for that service, or hallowed by it. In case of necessity, the pavement might be an altar.

3. The priests did their part, they waited on their offices; and the singers and musicians on their's, (v. 6.) with the instruments that David made, and the hymn that David had put into their hand, as some think it may be read, meaning that, 1 Chron. 16. 7. Or, as we read it, *when David praised by their ministry.* He employed, directed, and encouraged, them in this work of praising God; and therefore their performances were accepted as his act, and he is said *to praise by their ministry.*

4. The whole congregation expressed the greatest joy and satisfaction imaginable. They kept the feast of the dedication of the altar seven days, from the second to the ninth; the tenth day was the day of atonement, when they were to afflict their souls for sin, and that was not unseasonable in the midst of their rejoicings; on the fifteenth day began the feast of tabernacles, which continued to the twenty-second, and they did not part till the twenty-third. We must never grudge the time that we spend in the worship of God, and communion with him; nor think it long, or grow weary of it.

5. Solomon went on in his work, and prosperously effected all he designed, for the adorning both of God's house and his own, v. 11. Those that begin with the service of God are likely to go on successfully in their own affairs. It was Solomon's praise, that what he undertook he went through with, and it was by the grace of God that he prospered in it.

12. And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. 13. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people: 14. If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. 15. Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. 16. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. 17. And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments; 18. Then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel. 19. But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; 20. Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a by-word among all nations. 21. And this

house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house? 22. And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

That God accepted Solomon's prayer, appeared by the fire from heaven. But a prayer may be accepted, and yet not answered in the letter of it; and therefore God appeared to him in the night, as he did once before, (*ch. 1.7.*) and after a day of sacrifice too, as then: and gave him a particular answer to his prayer. We had the substance of it before, 1 Kings, 9.2..9.

1. He promised to own this house for a *house of sacrifice to Israel*, and a *house of prayer for all people*, Isa. 56.7. v.12,16. *My name shall be there for ever*, that is, "There will I make myself known, and there will I be called upon."

2. He promised to answer the prayers of his people, that should at any time be made in that place, v.13..15. (1.) National judgments are here supposed; (v.13.) famine and pestilence. By the locusts devouring the land, may be meant enemies as greedy as locusts, and laying all waste. (2.) National repentance, prayer, and reformation, are required, v.14. God expects that his people, who are called by his name, if they have dishonoured his name by their iniquity, should honour it by accepting the punishment of their iniquity. They must humble themselves under his hand, must pray for the removal of the judgment, must seek the face and favour of God; and yet all this will not do, unless they turn from their wicked ways, and return to the God from whom they have revolted. (3.) National mercy is then promised; that God will forgive their sin, which brought the judgment upon them, and then heal their land, redress all their grievances. Pardoning mercy makes way for healing mercy, 'Ps.103.3. Matth.9.2.

3. He promised to perpetuate Solomon's kingdom, upon condition that he persevered in his duty, v.17,18. If he hoped for the benefit of God's covenant with David, he must imitate the example of David.

But he sets before him death as well as life, the curse as well as the blessing. (1.) He supposes it possible that though they had this temple built to the honour of God, yet they might be drawn aside to worship other gods, v.19. He knew their proneness to backslide into that sin. (2.) He threatens it as certain, that, if they did so, it would certainly be the ruin of both church and state. [1.] It would be the ruin of their state, v.20. "Though they have taken deep root, and taken root long, in this good land, yet I will pluck them up by the roots, extirpate the whole nation, pluck them up as men pluck up weeds out of their garden, which are thrown to the dunghill." [2.] It would be the ruin of their church. This sanctuary would be no sanctuary to them, to protect them from the judgments of God, as they imagined, saying, *The temple of the Lord are we*, Jer.7.4. "This house, which is high, not only for the magnificence of its structure, but for the designed ends and uses of it, shall be an astonishment, it shall come down wonderfully, (Lam.1.9.) to the amazement of all the neighbours."

CHAP. VIII.

In this chapter we are here told, I. What cities Solomon built, v.1..6. II. What workmen Solomon employed, v.7..17. III. What care he took about a proper settlement for his wife, v.11. IV. What a good method he put the temple-service into, v.12..16. V. What treasure he had with foreign countries, v.17,1

1. **A**ND it came to pass at the end of twenty years, wherein Solomon had built the house of the LORD, and his own house, 2. That the cities which Hiram had restored to Solomon, Solomon built them, and caused the children of Israel to dwell there. 3. And Solomon went to Hamath-zobah, and prevailed against it. 4. And he built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the store-cities, which he built in Hamath. 5. Also he built Beth-horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates, and bars; 6. And Baalath, and all the store-cities that Solomon had, and all the chariot-cities, and the cities of the horsemen, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and throughout all the land of his dominion. 7. As for all the people that were left of the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which were not of Israel, 8. But of their children, who were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel consumed not, them did Solomon make to pay tribute until this day. 9. But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no servants for his work; but they were men of war, and chief of his captains, and captains of his chariots and horsemen. 10. And these were the chief of king Solomon's officers, even two hundred and fifty, that bare rule over the people. 11. And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the LORD hath come.

This we had, 1 Kings, 9.10..24. and therefore shall only observe here,

1. Though Solomon was a man of great learning and knowledge, yet he spent his days, not in contemplation, but in action, not in his study, but in his country, in building cities, and fortifying them; in a time of peace preparing for a time of war, which is as much a man's business, as it is in summer to provide food for winter.

2. As he was a man of business himself, and did not consult his own ease, so he employed a great many hands, kept abundance of people to work. It is the interest of a state by all means possible to promote and encourage industry, and to keep its subjects from idleness. A great many strangers there were in Israel, many that remained of the Canaanites; and they were welcome to live there, but not to live and do nothing. The men of Laish, who had no business, were an easy prey to the invaders, Judg.8.17.

3. When Solomon had begun with building the house of God, and made good work and quick work of that, he prospered in all his undertakings, so that he built all that he desired to build, v.6. Those who have a genius for building, find that one object draws on another, and the latter must amend and improve the former. Now observe, (1.) How the Divine Providence gratified even Solomon's humour, and gave him success, not only in all that he needed to build, and that was for his advantage to build, but in all that he had a mind to build. So indulgent a Father God is

sometimes to the innocent desires of his children that serve him. Thus he pleased Jacob with that promise, *Joseph shall put his hand on thine eyes.* (2.) Solomon knew how to set bounds to his desires. He was none of them that enlarge them endlessly, and can never be satisfied, but knew when to draw in; for he finished all he desired, and then he desired no more: he did not sit down and fret that he had not more cities to build, as Alexander did that he had not more worlds to conquer, Hab. 2. 5.

4. That one reason why Solomon built a palace on purpose for the queen, and removed her and her court to it, was, because he thought it by no means proper that she should *dwell in the house of David*, (v. 11.) considering that that had been a place of great piety, and perhaps her house was a place of great vanity. She was proselyted, it is likely, to the Jewish religion; but it is a question whether all her servants were. Perhaps they had among them the idols of Egypt, and a great deal of profaneness and debauchery. Now, though Solomon had not zeal and courage enough to suppress and punish what was amiss there, yet he so far consulted the honour of his father's memory, that he would not suffer that place to be thus profaned, where the ark of God had been, and where holy David had prayed many a good prayer, and sung many a sweet psalm. Not that all the places where the ark had been were so holy, as never to be put to a common use, for then the houses of Abinadab and Obed-edom must have been so; but, the place where it had been so long, and had been so publicly attended on, was so venerable, that it was not fit to be the place of so much gaiety, not to say iniquity, as was to be found, I fear, in the court that Pharaoh's daughter kept. Note, Between things sacred and things common the ancient land-marks ought to be kept up. It was an outer court of the temple that was the *court of the women*.

12. Then Solomon offered burnt-offerings unto the LORD on the altar of the LORD, which he had built before the porch. 13. Even after a certain rate every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, *even* in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles. 14. And he appointed, according to the order of David his father, the courses of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges, to praise and minister before the priests, as the duty of every day required: the porters also by their courses at every gate: for so had David the man of God commanded. 15. And they departed not from the commandment of the king unto the priests and Levites, concerning any matter, or concerning the treasures. 16. Now all the work of Solomon was prepared unto the day of the foundation of the house of the LORD, and until it was finished. *So* the house of the LORD was perfected. 17. Then went Solomon to Ezion-geber, and to Eloth, at the sea-side in the land of Edom. 18. And Hiram sent him by the hands of his servants ships, and servants that had knowledge of the sea; and they went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and took thence four hundred and fifty talents of gold, and brought *them* to king Solomon.

Here is, 1. Solomon's devotion. The building of the temple was in order to the service of the temple; whatever cost he was

at in rearing the structure, if he had neglected the worship that was to be performed there, it would all have been to no purpose. Assisting the devotion of others will not atone for our own neglects. When Solomon had built the temple,

(1.) He kept up the holy sacrifices there, according to the law o' Moses, v. 12, 13. In vain had the altar been built, and in vain had fire come down from heaven, if sacrifices had not been constantly brought as the food of that altar, and the fuel of that fire. There were daily sacrifices, *a certain rate every day*, as duly as the day came; weekly sacrifices on the sabbath, double to what was offered on other days; monthly sacrifices *on the new moons*; and yearly sacrifices at the three solemn feasts. They are spiritual sacrifices that are now required of us, which we are to bring daily and weekly; and it is good to be in a settled method of devotion.

(2.) He kept up the holy songs there, according to the law of David, who is here called *the man of God*, as Moses was, because he was both instructed and authorized of God to make these establishments; and Solomon took care to see them observed, *as the duty of every day required*, v. 14. Solomon, though a wise and great man, and the builder of the temple, did not attempt to amend, alter, or add to, what the man of God had, in God's name, commanded, but closely adhered to that, and used his authority to have that duly observed; and then *none departed from the commandment of the king, concerning any matter*, v. 15. He observed God's laws, and then all obeyed his orders. When the service of the temple was put into this good order, then, it is said, *The house of the Lord was perfected*, v. 16. The work was the main matter, not the place; the temple was unfinished till all this was done.

2. Solomon's merchandise. He did himself in person visit the sea-port towns of Eloth and Ezion-geber; for they that deal much in the world will find it their interest, as far as they can, to inspect their affairs themselves, and to see with their own eyes, v. 17. Canaan was a rich country, and yet must send to Ophir for gold. The Israelites were a wise and understanding people, and yet must be beholden to the king of Tyre for *men that had knowledge of the seas*; (v. 18.) and yet Canaan was God's peculiar land, and Israel God's peculiar people: which teaches us, that grace, and not gold, is the best riches; and acquaintance with God, and his law, not with arts and sciences, the best knowledge.

CHAP. IX.

Solomon here continues to appear great, both at home and abroad. We have this account of his grandeur, 1 Kings, 10. nothing is here added; but his defection, toward his latter end, which we have there, (ch. 11.) is here omitted; and the close of this chapter brings him to the grave with an unstained reputation. Perhaps none of the chapters in the Chronicles agree so much with a chapter in the Kings as this does with 1 Kings, 10. verse for verse, only that the two first verses there are put into one here, and verse 25. here is taken from 1 Kings, 4. 26. and the three last verses here from 1 Kings, 11. 41. 43. Here is, 1. The honour which the queen of Sheba did to Solomon, in the visit she made him to hear his wisdom, v. 1. 12. Many instances given of the riches and splendour of Solomon's court, v. 13. 28. 111. The conclusion of his reign, v. 29. 31.

1. **A**ND when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to prove Solomon with hard questions at Jerusalem, with a very great company, and camels that bare spices, and gold in abundance, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. 2. And Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not. 3. And when the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built, 4. And the meat of his table, and the sitting

of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel; his cup-bearers also, and their apparel; and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her. 5. And she said to the king, *It was* a true report which I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom: 6. Howbeit I believed not their words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen *it*: and, behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: *for* thou exceedest the fame that I heard. 7. Happy *are* thy men, and happy *are* these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom. 8. Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on his throne, *to be* king for the LORD thy God: because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made he thee king over them, to do judgment and justice. 9. And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices great abundance, and precious stones: neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon. 10. And the servants also of Hiram, and the servants of Solomon, which brought gold from Ophir, brought algum-trees and precious stones. 11. And the king made *of* the algum-trees terraces to the house of the LORD, and to the king's palace, and harps and psalteries for singers: and there were none such seen before in the land of Judah. 12. And king Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside *that* which she had brought unto the king. So she turned, and went away to her own land, she and her servants.

This passage of story has been largely considered in the Kings; yet, because our Saviour has proposed it as an example to us, in our inquiries after him, (Matth. 12. 42.) we must not pass it over without observing briefly,

1. *Those who honour God, he will honour*, 1 Sam. 2. 30. Solomon had greatly honoured God in building, beautifying, and dedicating, the temple; all his wisdom, and all his wealth, were employed for the making of that a consummate piece: and now God made his wisdom and wealth to redound greatly to his reputation. The way to have both the credit and comfort of all our endowments, and all our enjoyments, is, to consecrate them to God, and use them for him.

2. Those who know the worth of true wisdom will grudge no pains or cost to compass it. The queen of Sheba put herself to a great deal of trouble and expence to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and yet, learning from him to serve God, and do her duty, she thought herself well paid for her pains. Heavenly wisdom is that *pearl of great price*, for the purchase of which, if we part with all, we make a good bargain.

3. As every man has received the gift, so he ought to minister the same for the edification of others, as he has opportunity. Solomon was communicative of his wisdom, and willing to teach others what he knew himself. Being taught of God, freely he had received, and freely he gave. Let them that are rich in wisdom, as well as wealth, learn *to do good, and be ready to distribute. Give to every one that asketh.*

4. Good order in a family, a great family, especially in the

things of God, and a regular discharge of the duties of religious worship, are highly expedient, and to be much admired wherever found. The queen of Sheba was exceedingly affected to see the propriety with which Solomon's servants attended him, and with which both he and they attended in the house of God. David's ascent to the house of the Lord was also pleasant and interesting, Ps. 42. 4.

5. Those are happy who have the opportunity of a constant converse with such as are knowing, wise, and good. The queen of Sheba thought Solomon's servants happy, who continually *heard his wisdom*; for, it seems, even to them he was communicative. And it is observable, that the posterity of those who had places in his court were willing to have the names of their ancestors forgotten, and thought themselves sufficiently distinguished and dignified when they were called the *children of Solomon's servants*; (Ezra, 2. 55. Neh. 7. 57.) so eminent were they, it was honour enough to be named from them.

6. We ought to rejoice, and give God thanks, for the gifts, graces, and usefulness, of others. The queen of Sheba blessed God for the honour he put upon Solomon, and the favour he did to Solomon, in advancing him to the throne, v. 8. By giving God the praise of the prosperity of others, we share in the comfort of it; whereas, by envying the prosperity of others, we lose the comfort even of our own. The happiness both of king and kingdom she traces up to the fountain of all bliss, the divine favour: it was because *thy God delighted in thee*, and because he *loved Israel*. Those mercies are doubly sweet which we can taste the kindness and good-will of God in, as our God.

7. It becomes those that are wise and good to be generous according to their place and power. The queen of Sheba was so to Solomon, Solomon was so to her, v. 9, 12. They both knew how to value wisdom, and therefore were neither of them covetous of their money, but cultivated the acquaintance, and confirmed the friendship, they had contracted, by mutual presents. Our Lord Jesus has promised to give us all our desire: *Ask, and it shall be given you.* Let us study what we shall render to him, and not think any thing too much to do, or suffer, or part with, for him.

13. Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and threescore and six talents of gold; 14. Beside *that which* chapmen and merchants brought. And all the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon. 15. And king Solomon made two hundred targets *of* beaten gold: six hundred *shekels* of beaten gold went to one target. 16. And three hundred shields *made he of* beaten gold: three hundred *shekels* of gold went to one shield. And the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. 17. Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. 18. And *there were* six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold, *which were* fastened to the throne, and stays on each side of the sitting-place, and two lions standing by the stays: 19. And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps. There was not the like made in any kingdom. 20. And all the drinking-vessels of king Solomon *were of* gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon *were of* pure gold: none *were of* silver; it was *not* any thing accounted of in the days of Solomon. 21. For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram

every three years once came the ships of Tarshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. 22. And king Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. 23. And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart. 24. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and raiment, harness, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. 25. And Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; whom he bestowed in the chariot-cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. 26. And he reigned over all the kings from the river even unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt. 27. And the king made silver in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar-trees made he as the sycamore-trees that *are* in the low plains in abundance. 28. And they brought unto Solomon horses out of Egypt, and out of all lands. 29. Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, *are* they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer against Jeroboam the son of Nebat? 30. And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. 31. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.

We have here Solomon in his throne, and Solomon in his grave; for the throne would not secure him from the grave. *Mors sceptri lignibus aequat—Death wrenches from the hand the sceptre as well as the spade.*

I. Here is Solomon reigning in wealth and power, in ease and fulness, such as, for aught I know, could never since be paralleled by any king whatsoever. I cannot pretend to be critical in comparing the grandeur of Solomon with that of some of the great princes of the earth; but the most illustrious of them were famed for their wars, whereas Solomon reigned 40 years in profound peace. Some of those, that might be thought to vie with Solomon, affected retirement, kept people in awe by keeping them at a distance; nobody must see them, or come near them, upon pain of death. But Solomon went much abroad, and appeared in public business; so that, all things considered, the promise was fulfilled, that God would give him riches, and wealth, and honour, such as *no kings have had, or shall have, ch. 1. 11.*

1. Never any prince appeared in public with greater splendour than Solomon did, which, to those that judge by the sight of the eye, as most people do, would very much recommend him. He had 200 targets, and 300 shields, all of beaten gold, carried before him, (v. 15, 16.) and sat upon a most stately throne; (v. 17. . 19.) *There was not the like in any kingdom.* The lustre wherein he appeared was typical of the spiritual glory of the kingdom of the Messiah, and but a faint representation of his throne, which is above every throne. Solomon's pomp was all artificial; and therefore our Saviour prefers the natural beauty of the *lilies of the field* before it; (Matth. 6. 29.) *Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.*

2. Never any prince had greater plenty of gold and silver, though there were no gold or silver mines in his own kingdom. Either, he made himself master of the mines in other countries,

and, having a populous country, sent hands to dig out those rich metals; or, having a fruitful country, he exported the commodities of it, and with them fetched home all this gold that is here spoken of, v. 13, 14. . 21.

3. Never any prince had such presents brought him by all his neighbours as Solomon had: *All the kings of Arabia, and governors of the country, brought him gold and silver, v. 14.* Not as tribute which he extorted from them, but as free-will offerings to procure his favours, or in a way of exchange for some of the productions of his husbandry, corn, or cattle. All the kings of the earth brought him presents, that is, all in those parts of the world, (v. 24, 28.) because they coveted his acquaintance and friendship. Herein he was a type of Christ, to whom, as soon as he was born, the wise men of the east brought presents, *gold, frankincense, and myrrh*, (Matth. 2. 11.) and to whom all that are about him must bring presents, Ps. 76. 11. Rom. 12. 1.

4. Never any prince was so renowned for wisdom, so courted, so consulted, so admired, v. 23. *The kings of the earth* (for it was too great a favour for common persons to pretend to) *sought to hear his wisdom*; either his natural philosophy, or his skill in physic, or his state policy, or his rules of prudence for the conduct of human life, or perhaps the principles of his religion, and the reasons of it. The application which they then made to Solomon to hear his wisdom, will aggravate, shame, and condemn, men's general contempt of Christ, and his gospel. Though in them are *hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, yet none of the princes of this world* desire to know them, for they are foolishness to them, 1 Cor. 2. 8, 14.

II. Here is Solomon dying; stripped of his pomp, and leaving all his wealth and power, not to one concerning whom he knew not *whether he would be a wise man or a fool*, (Eccl. 2. 19.) but who, he knew, would be a fool. This was not only vanity, but vexation of spirit, v. 29. . 31.

It is very observable that no mention is here made of Solomon's departure from God in his latter days, not the least hint given of it. 1. Because the Holy Ghost would teach us not to take delight in repeating the faults and follies of others. If those that have been in reputation for wisdom, and honour, misbehave, though it may be of use to take notice of their misconduct, for warning to ourselves and others, yet we must not be forward to mention it, once speaking of it is enough; why should that unpleasing string be again struck upon? Why can we not do as the sacred historian here does, speak largely of that in others which is praise-worthy, without saying any thing of their blemishes, yea, though they have been gross and obvious. This is but doing as we would be done by. 2. Because, though he fell, yet he was not utterly cast down. *Therefore his sin is not again recorded, because it was repented of, and pardoned, and so became as if it had never been.* Scripture-silence sometimes speaks. I am willing to believe that its silence here, concerning the sin of Solomon, is an intimation that none of the sins he committed were mentioned against him, Ezek. 33. 16. When God pardons sin, he *casts it behind his back, and remembers it no more.*

CHAP. X.

This chapter is copied almost verbatim from 1 Kings, 12. 1. . 19. where it was opened at large. Solomon's defection from God was not repeated, but the defection of the ten tribes from his family is, in this chapter: where we find, I. How foolish Rehoboam was, in his treating with them, v. 1, 5. . 14. II. How wicked the people were, in complaining of Solomon, (v. 2. . 4.) and forsaking Rehoboam, v. 16. . 19. III. How just and righteous God was, in all this; (v. 15.) his counsel was thereby fulfilled. With him are strength and wisdom; both the deceived and the deceiver (the fool and the knave) are his; (Job, 12. 16.) that is, are made use of by him, to serve his purposes.

1. **A**ND Rehoboam went to Shechem: for to Shechem were all Israel come to make him king. 2. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was in Egypt, whither he had fled from the presence of Solomon the king, heard

it, that Jeroboam returned out of Egypt. 3. And they sent and called him. So Jeroboam and all Israel came and spake to Rehoboam, saying, 4. Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee. 5. And he said unto them, Come again unto me after three days. And the people departed. 6. And king Rehoboam took counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye *me* to return answer to this people? 7. And they spake unto him, saying, If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever. 8. But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him. 9. And he said unto them, What advice give ye that we may return answer to this people, which have spoken to me, saying, Ease somewhat the yoke that thy father did put upon us? 10. And the young men that were brought up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou answer the people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou *it* somewhat lighter for us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little *finger* shall be thicker than my father's loins. 11. For whereas my father put a heavy yoke upon you, I will put more to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but *I will chastise you with scorpions.*

We may observe here,

1. The wisest and best cannot give every body content. Solomon enriched and advanced his kingdom, did all (one would think) that could be done to make them happy and easy; and yet either he was indiscreet in burthening them with the imposition of taxes and services, or, at least, there was some colour of reason to think him so. No man is perfectly wise. It is probable that it was when Solomon had declined from God and his duty, that his wisdom failed him, and God left him to himself to act thus impolitely. Even Solomon's treasures were exhausted by his love of women; and, probably, it was to maintain them, and their pride, luxury, and idolatry, that he squeezed his subjects.

2. Turbulent and ungrateful spirits will find fault with the government, and complain of grievances, when they have very little reason to do so. Had they not peace in Solomon's time? Never plundered by invaders, as formerly, never put in fear by the alarms of war, nor obliged to jeopard their lives in the high-places of the field. Had they not plenty? Meat enough, and money enough? What would they more? *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint! — O happy, if they knew their happy state!* And yet they complain that Solomon made their yoke grievous. If any complain thus of the yoke of Christ, that they may have a pretence to break his bands in sunder, and cast away his cords from them, we are sure that he never gave them any cause at all for the complaint, whatever Solomon did. His yoke is easy, and his burthen light. He never *made us serve with an offering, nor wearied us with incense*

3. Many ruin themselves, and their interests, by tramping upon and provoking their inferiors. Rehoboam thought, that, because he was king, he might rule it as his father had done, have what

he would, and do what he would, and carry all before him. But, though he wore his father's crown, he wanted his father's head-piece, and ought to have considered, that, being quite a different man from what his father was, he ought to take other measures: such a wise man as Solomon may do as he will, but such a fool as Rehoboam must do as he can. The high-mettled horse may be kicked and spurred by him that has the art of managing him; but if an unskilful horseman do it, it is at his peril. Rehoboam paid dear for threatening, and talking big, and thinking to carry it with a high hand. It was Job's wisdom, as well as his virtue, that he *despised not the cause of his man-servant, or maid-servant*, when they argued with him, (Job, 31.13.) but heard them patiently, considered their reasons, and gave them a soft answer. And the like tender consideration of those in subjection, and a forwardness to make them easy, will be the comfort and praise of all in authority, in the church, in the state, and in families.

4. Moderate counsels are generally wisest and best. Gentleness will do what violence will not do. Most people love to be accosted mildly. Rehoboam's old experienced counsellors directed him to this method; (v.7.) "*Be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them*, and thou art sure of them for ever." Good words cost nothing but a little self-denial, and yet they purchase great things.

5. God often fulfils the counsels of his own wisdom by infatuating men, and giving them up to the counsels of their own folly. No more needs be done to ruin men than to leave them to themselves, and their own pride and passion.

12. So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king bade, saying, Come again to me on the third day. 13. And the king answered them roughly; and king Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men, 14. And answered them after the advice of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto: my father chastised you with whips, but *I will chastise you with scorpions.* 15. So the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was of God, that the LORD might perform his word, which he spake by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 16. And when all Israel *saw* that the king would not hearken unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? and *we have none inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to your tents, O Israel: and now, David, see to thine own house.* So all Israel went to their tents. 17. But *as for* the children of Israel that dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. 18. Then king Rehoboam sent Hadoram that *was* over the tribute; and the children of Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. But king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to *his* chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. 19. And Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.

We may learn here,

1. That, when public affairs are in a ferment, violent proceedings do but make bad worse. Rough answers (such as Rehoboam here gave) do but stir up anger, and bring oil to the flames. The pilot has need to steer steady in a storm. Many have been driven to the mischief they did not intend, by being too severely dealt with for what they did intend.

2. That, whatever the devices and designs of men are, God is, by all, doing his own work, and fulfilling the word which he has spoken, no iota or tittle of which shall fall to the ground. The cause of the king's obstinacy and want of thought was of God, that he might perform the word which he spake by Ahijah, v. 15. This does not at all excuse Rehoboam's folly, nor lessen the guilt of his haughtiness and passion, that God was pleased to serve his own ends by it.

3. That worldly wealth, honour, and dominion, are very uncertain things. *Solomon reigned over all Israel*, and, one would think, had done enough to secure the monarchy entire to his family for many ages; and yet he is scarcely cold in his grave, before ten of the twelve tribes finally revolt from his son. All the good services he had done for Israel are now forgotten. *What portion have we in David?* Thus is the government of Christ cast off by many, notwithstanding all he has done to oblige the children of men for ever to himself; they say, *We will not have this man to reign over us*. But this rebellion will certainly be their ruin.

4. That God often visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. Solomon forsakes God, and therefore not he, but his son after him, is forsaken by the greatest part of his people. Thus God, by making the penal consequences of sin to last long, and visibly to continue after the sinner's death, would give an indication of its malignity, and perhaps some intimation of the perpetuity of its punishment. He that sins against God, not only wrongs his soul, but perhaps wrongs his seed more than he thinks of.

5. That when God is fulfilling his threatenings, he will take care that, at the same time, promises do not fall to the ground. When Solomon's iniquity is remembered, and for it his son loses ten tribes, David's piety is not forgotten, nor the promise made to him; but, for the sake of that, his grandson had two tribes preserved to him. The failings of the saints shall not frustrate any promise made to Christ their Head. They shall be chastised, but the covenant not broken, Ps. 89. 31. . 34.

CHAP. XI.

We are here going on with the history of Rehoboam. I. His attempt to recover the ten tribes he had lost, and the letting fall of that attempt, in obedience to the divide command, v. 1. . 4. II. His successful endeavours to preserve the two tribes that remained, v. 5. . 12. III. The resort of the priests and Levites to him, v. 13. . 17. IV. An account of his wives and children, v. 18. . 22.

1. **A**ND when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam. 2. But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 3. Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, 4. Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me. And they obeyed the words of the LORD, and returned from going against Jeroboam. 5. And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defence in Judah. 6. He built even Beth-lehem, and Etam, and Tekoa, 7. And Beth-zur, and Shoco, and Adullam, 8. And Gath, and Mareshah, and Ziph, 9. And Adoraim, and Lachish, and Azekah, 10. And Zorah, and Aijalon, and Hebron, which are in Judah and in Benjamin fenced cities.

11. And he fortified the strong holds, and put captains in them, and store of victual, and of oil and wine. 12. And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side.

How the ten tribes deserted the house of David, we read in the foregoing chapter. They had formerly sat loose to that family, (2 Sam. 20. 1, 2.) and now they quite threw it off; not considering how much it would weaken the common interest, and take Israel down from that pitch of glory at which it had arrived in the last reign. But thus the kingdom must be corrected as well as the house of David.

1. Rehoboam, at length, like a bold man, raises an army, with a design to reduce the revolted, v. 1. Judah and Benjamin were not only resolved to continue their allegiance to him, but ready to give him the best assistance they could, for the recovery of his right. Judah was his own tribe, that owned him some years before the rest did; Benjamin was the tribe in which Jerusalem, or the greatest part of it, stood; which perhaps was one reason why that tribe clave to him.

2. Yet, like a conscientious man, when God forbade him to prosecute this design, in obedience to him, he let it fall; either because he revered the divine authority, or because he knew that he should not prosper, if he should go contrary to God's command, but, instead of retrieving what was lost, would be in danger of losing what he had. It is dangerous undertaking any thing, but especially undertaking a war, contrary to the will of God. God calls him, (v. 3.) *Rehoboam the son of Solomon*, to intimate that this was determined for the sin of Solomon, and it would be to no purpose to oppose a decree that was gone forth. They obeyed the words of the Lord; and though it looked mean, and would turn to their reproach among their neighbours, yet, because God would have it so, they laid down their arms.

3. Like a discreet man, he fortified his own country. He saw it was to no purpose to think of reducing those that were revolted. A few good words might have prevented their defection, but now all the force of his kingdom cannot bring them back; the thing is done, and so it must rest; it is his wisdom to make the best of it. Perhaps the same young counsellors that had advised him to answer them roughly, urged him to fight them, notwithstanding the divine inhibitions; but he had paid dear enough for being advised by them, and therefore now, we may suppose, his aged and experienced counsellors were hearkened to, and they advised him to submit to the will of God concerning what was lost, but to make it his business to keep what he had. It was, probably, by their advice that, (1.) He fortified his frontiers, and many of the principal cities of his kingdom, which, in Solomon's peaceable reign, no care had been taken for the defence of. (2.) He furnished them with good store of victuals and arms, v. 11, 12. Because God forbade him to fight, he did not therefore sit down sullen, and say that he would do nothing for the public safety, if he might not do that, but prudently provided against an attack. They that may not be conquerors, yet may be builders.

13. And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. 14. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD: 15. And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. 16. And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the

LORD God of their fathers. 17. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon. 18. And Rehoboam took him Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David to wife, and Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse; 19. Which bare him children; Jeush, and Shamariah, and Zerah. 20. And after her he took Maachah the daughter of Absalom; which bare him Abijah, and Attai, and Ziza, and Shelomith. 21. And Rehoboam loved Maachah the daughter of Absalom above all his wives and his concubines: (for he took eighteen wives, and threescore concubines; and begat twenty and eight sons, and threescore daughters.) 22. And Rehoboam made Abijah the son of Maachah the chief, to be ruler among his brethren: for he thought to make him king. 23. And he dealt wisely, and dispersed of all his children throughout all the countries of Judah and Benjamin, unto every fenced city: and he gave them victual in abundance. And he desired many wives.

See here,

I. How Rehoboam was strengthened by the accession of the priests and Levites, and all the devout and pious Israelites, to him; even all that were true to their God and their religion.

1. Jeroboam cast them off; that is, he set up such a way of worship as he knew they could not, in conscience, comply with, which obliged them to withdraw from his altar, and at the same time he would not allow them to go up to Jerusalem, to worship at the altar there; so that he totally cast them off from executing the priests' office, v. 14. And very willing he was that they should turn themselves out of their places, that room might be made for those mean and scandalous persons whom he ordained priests for the high places, v. 15. Compare 1 Kings, 12. 31. No marvel if he that cast off God, cast off his ministers; they were not for his purpose, would not do whatever he bid them do, would not serve his gods, nor worship the golden image which he had set up.

2. They, thereupon, left their suburbs and possessions, v. 14. Out of the lot of each tribe, the Levites had cities allowed them, where they were comfortably provided for, and had opportunity of doing much good. But now they were driven out of all their cities, except those in Judah and Benjamin. One would think their maintenance well-settled, and yet they lost it. It was a comfort to them, that the law so often reminded them that the Lord was their Inheritance, and therefore that they should find him, when they were turned out of their house and possessions. But why did they leave their possessions? (1.) Because they saw they could do no good among their neighbours, in whom (now that Jeroboam set up his calves) the old proneness to idolatry revived. (2.) Because they themselves would be in continual temptation to some base compliance, and in danger of being drawn insensibly to that which was evil. If we pray, in sincerity, not to be led into temptation, we shall get and keep as far as we can out of the way of it. (3.) Because, if they retained their integrity, they had reason to expect persecution from Jeroboam and his sons. The priests they made for the devils would not let the Lord's priests be long among them. No secular advantages whatsoever should draw us thither, or detain us there, where we are in danger of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

3. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, (v. 14.) and presented themselves to Rehoboam, v. 13. margin. Where should God's priests and Levites be, but where his altar was? Thither they came,

because it was their business to attend at the times appointed. (1.) It was a mercy to them, that they had a place of refuge to flee to; and that, when Jeroboam cast them off, there were those so near, that would entertain them, and bid them welcome, and they were not forced into the lands of the heathen. (2.) It was an evidence that they loved their work better than their maintenance, in that they left their suburbs and possessions in the country, (where they might have lived at ease upon their own,) because they were restrained from serving God there, and cast themselves upon God's providence, and the charity of their brethren, in coming to a place where they might have the free enjoyment of God's ordinances, according to his institution. Poverty, in the way of duty, is to be chosen rather than plenty, in the way of sin. Better live upon alms, or die in a prison, with a good conscience, than roll in wealth and pleasure, with a prostituted one. (3.) It was the wisdom and praise of Rehoboam and his people, that they bid them welcome, though they crowded themselves, perhaps, to make room for them. Conscientious refugees will bring a blessing along with them to the countries that entertain them, as they leave a curse behind them with those that expel them. *Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth truth may enter in; it will be good policy.* See Isa. 26. 1, 2.

4. When the priests and Levites came to Jerusalem, all the devout pious Israelites of every tribe followed them. Such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, that made conscience of their duty to God, and were sincere and resolute in it, they left the inheritance of their fathers, and went and took houses in Jerusalem, that they might have free access to the altar of God, and be out of the temptation to worship the calves, v. 16. Note, (1.) That is best for us which is best for our souls; and, in all our choices, advantages for religion must take place of all outward conveniences. (2.) Where God's faithful priests are, his faithful people should be. If Jeroboam cast off God's ministers, every true-born Israelite will think himself obliged to own them, and stand by them. *Forsake not the Levite, the out-cast Levite, as long as thou livest.* When the ark removes, remove ye, and go after it, Josh. 3. 3.

5. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah, (v. 17.) not only by the addition of so many persons to it, who, it is likely, brought what they could of their effects with them, but, by their piety and their prayers, they procured a blessing upon the kingdom which was a sanctuary to them. See Zech. 12. 5. It is the interest of a nation to protect and encourage religion and religious people, and adds more than any thing to its strength. They made him and his people strong, three years: for so long they walked in the way of David and Solomon, their good way; but when they forsook that, and so threw themselves out of God's favour and protection, the best friends they had could no longer help to strengthen them. We retain our strength while we cleave to God and our duty, and no longer.

II. How Rehoboam was weakened by indulging himself in his pleasures. He desired many wives, as his father did; (v. 23.) yet, 1. In this, he was more wise than his father, that he does not appear to have married strange wives. The wives mentioned here were not only daughters of Israel, but of the family of David: one was a descendant from Eliab, David's brother; (v. 18.) another from Absalom, probably, David's son; (v. 20.) another from Jerimoth, David's son. 2. In this he was more happy than his father, that he had many sons and daughters; whereas we read not of more than one son that his father had. One can scarcely imagine that he had no more; but if he had, they were not worth mentioning; whereas several of Rehoboam's sons are here named, (v. 19, 20.) as men of note, and such active men, that he thought it his wisdom to disperse them throughout the countries of Judah and Benjamin; (v. 23.) either, (1.) That they might not be rivals with his son Abijah, whom he designed for his successor; or rather, (2.) Because he could repose a confidence in them, for the preserving of the public peace and safety, could trust them with fenced cities, which he took care to have well-victualled, that they might stand him in stead, in case of an invasion. Thus he, that acted foolishly at first, dealt wisely afterward. After-wisdom is better than none at all: nev

they say, "Wit is never good till it is bought;" though his was dear bought with the loss of a kingdom.

CHAP. XII.

This chapter gives us a more full account of the reign of Rehoboam than we had before in Kings, and it is a very melancholy account. Methinks we are in the book of Judges again; for, I. Rehoboam and his people did evil in the sight of the Lord, v. 1. II. God, thereupon, sold them into the hands of Shishak king of Egypt, who greatly oppressed them, v. 2..4. III. God sent a prophet to them, to expound to them the judgment, and to call them to repentance, v. 5. IV. They, thereupon, humbled themselves, v. 6. V. God, upon their repentance, turned from his anger, (v. 7, 12.) and yet left them under the marks of his displeasure, v. 8..11. Lastly, Here is a general character of Rehoboam and his reign, and the conclusion of it, v. 13..16.

1. **A**ND it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him. 2. And it came to pass, *that* in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD, 3. With twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people *were* without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians. 4. And he took the fenced cities which *pertained* to Judah, and came to Jerusalem. 5. Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak. 6. Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The LORD *is* righteous. 7. And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; *therefore* I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. 8. Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries. 9. So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made. 10. Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed *them* to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house. 11. And when the king entered into the house of the LORD, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard-chamber. 12. And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well.

Israel was very much disgraced and weakened by being divided into two kingdoms; yet the kingdom of Judah, having both the temple and the royal city, both the house of David and the house of Aaron, might have done very well, if they had continued in the way of their duty; but here we have all out of order there.

I. Rehoboam and his people left God. He *forsook the law of the Lord*, and so, in effect, forsook God, and *all Israel with him*, v. 1. He had his happy triennium, when he walked in the way of David and Solomon, (*ch. 11. 7.*) but it expired, and he grew remiss in the worship of God; in what instances we are not told, but he fell off, and Judah with him, here called *Israel*, because they walked in the evil ways which Jeroboam had drawn the kingdom of Israel into. This he did, *when he had established the kingdom and strengthened himself*. As long as he thought his throne tottered, he kept to his duty, that he might make God his friend; but when he found it stood firm, he thought he had no more occasion for religion; he was safe enough without it. Thus *the prosperity of fools destroys them. Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked*. When men prosper, and are in no apprehension of troubles, they are ready to say to God, *Depart from us*.

II. God quickly brought troubles upon them, to awaken them, and recover them to repentance, before their hearts were hardened. It was but in the fourth year of Rehoboam, that they began to corrupt themselves, and, in the fifth year, the king of Egypt came up against them with a vast army, *took the fenced cities of Judah, and came against Jerusalem*, v. 2..4. This great calamity came upon them so soon after they began to desert the worship of God, by a hand they had little reason to suspect, (having had a great deal of friendly correspondence with Egypt in the last reign,) and came with so much violence, 'all the fenced cities of Judah, which Rehoboam had lately fortified and garrisoned, and on which he relied much for the safety of his kingdom, falling rapidly into the hands of the enemy, without making any resistance,) that the whole was, obviously, of the Lord, because they had transgressed against him.

III. Lest they should not readily, or not rightly, understand the meaning of this providence, God, by the word, explains the scourge, v. 5. When the princes of Judah were all met at Jerusalem, probably in a great council of war, to concert measures for their own safety in this critical juncture, he sent a prophet to them, the same that had brought them an injunction from God not to fight against the ten tribes, (*ch. 11. 2.*) Shemaiah by name; he told them plainly that the reason why Shishak prevailed against them was, not because they had been impolitic in the management of their affairs, (which perhaps the princes in this congress were, at this time, scrutinizing,) but because they had forsaken God. God never leaves any, till they first leave him.

IV. The rebukes both of the word and of the rod being thus joined, the king and princes humbled themselves before God for their iniquity, penitently acknowledged the sin, and patiently accepted the punishment of it, saying, *The Lord is righteous*, v. 6. "We have none to blame but ourselves; let God be clear when he judgeth." Thus it becomes us, when we are under the rebukes of Providence, to justify God, and judge ourselves; even kings and princes must either bend or break before God; either be humbled or be ruined.

V. Upon the profession they made of repentance, God shewed them some favour, saved them from ruin, and yet left them under some remaining fears of the judgment, to prevent their revolt again.

1. God, in mercy, prevented the destruction they were now upon the brink of. Such a vast, and now victorious, army as Shishak had, having made themselves masters of all the fenced cities, what other could be expected, than that the whole country, and even Jerusalem itself, would, in a little time, be their's? But when God saith, *Here shall the proud waves be stayed*; the most threatening force strangely dwindles, and becomes impotent. Here again, the destroying angel, when he comes to Jerusalem, is forbidden to destroy that: *My wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem*; not at this time, not by this hand, not utterly to destroy it, v. 7, 12. Note, Those that acknowledge God righteous in afflicting them, shall find him gracious. They that humble

themselves before him, shall find favour with him. So ready is the God of mercy to take the first occasion to shew mercy. If we have humbled hearts under humbling providences, the affliction has done its work, and it shall either be removed, or the property of it altered.

2. He granted them some deliverance, not complete, but in part; he gave them some advantages against the enemy, so that they recruited a little; he *gave them deliverance for a little while*, so some. They reformed but partially, and for a little while, soon relapsing again; and as their reformation was, so was their deliverance. Yet it is said, (v. 12.) *In Judah things went well*, and began to look with a better face. (1.) In respect of piety; *There were good things in Judah*, so it is in the margin; good ministers, good people, good families, who were made better by the calamities of their country. Note, In times of great corruption and degeneracy, it is some comfort if there be a remnant, among whom good things are found; this is a ground of hope in Israel. (2.) In respect of prosperity. In Judah things went ill, when all the fenced cities were taken; (v. 4.) but when they repented, the posture of their affairs altered, and things went well. Note, If things do not go so well as we could wish, yet we have reason to take notice of it with thankfulness, if they go better than was to have been expected, better than formerly, and better than we deserved; we should own God's goodness, if he do but grant us some deliverance.

3. Yet he left them to smart sorely by the hand of Shishak, both in their liberty and in their wealth.

(1.) In their liberty; (v. 8.) *They shall be his servants*; that is, they shall be much at his mercy, and be put under contribution by him, and some of them, perhaps, be taken prisoners, and held in captivity by him, *that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries*. They complained, it may be, of the strictness of their religion, and therefore *forsake the law of the Lord*, (v. 1.) because they thought it a yoke too hard, too heavy, upon them. "Well," saith God, "let them mend their service if they can; let the neighbouring princes rule them a while, since they are not willing that I should rule them, and let them try how they like that; they might have served God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, and would not; let them serve their enemies then in hunger and thirst, (Deut. 28. 47, 48.) till they think of returning to their first Master, for then it was better with them," Hos. 2. 7. This, some think, is the meaning of that, (Ezek. 20. 24, 25.) *Because they despised my statutes, I gave them statutes that were not good*. Note, [1.] The more God's service is compared with other services, the more reasonable and easy it will appear. [2.] Whatever difficulties or hardships we may imagine there are in the way of obedience, it is better, a thousand times, to go through them, than to expose ourselves to the punishment of disobedience. Are the laws of temperance thought hard? The effects of intemperance will be much harder. The service of virtue is perfect liberty; the service of lust is perfect slavery.

(2.) In their wealth. The king of Egypt plundered both the temple and the exchequer, the treasures of both which Solomon left very full; but he *took them away*; yea he *took all*, all he could lay his hands on, v. 9. This was what he came for. David and Solomon, who walked in the way of God, filled the treasures, one by war, and the other by merchandise; but Rehoboam, who forsook the law of God, emptied them. The taking away of the golden shields, and the substituting of brazen ones in their place, (v. 9. . 11.) we had an account of before, 1 Kings, 14. 25. . 28.

13. So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned: for Rehoboam *was* one and forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name *was* Naamah an Ammonitess. 14. And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek

the LORD. 15. Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, *are* they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies? And *there were* wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. 16. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David: and Abijah his son reigned in his stead.

The story of Rehoboam's reign is here concluded, much as the story of the other reign concludes. Two things especially are observable here;

1. That he was, at length, well *fixed in his kingdom*, v. 13. His fenced cities in Judah did not answer his expectation, so he now *strengthened himself in Jerusalem*, and made it his business to fortify that; and there he reigned seventeen years in *the city which the Lord had chosen to put his name there*. This intimates his honour and privilege, that he had his royal seat in the holy city, which yet was but an aggravation of his impiety; near the temple, but far from God. Frequent skirmishes there were between his subjects and Jeroboam's, such as amounted to *continued wars*; (v. 15.) but he held his own, and reigned; and, as it should seem, did not so grossly *forsake the law of God* as he had done done (v. 1.) in his fourth year.

2. That he was never rightly fixed in his religion; (v. 14.) he never quite cast off God; and yet, in this, he did evil, that he *prepared not, he engaged not, his heart to seek the Lord*. See what the fault is laid upon. (1.) He did not serve the Lord, because he did not seek the Lord. He did not pray, as Solomon did, for wisdom and grace. If we prayed better, we should be every way better. Or, he did not consult the word of God, did not seek to that as his oracle, nor take directions from that. (2.) He made nothing of his religion, because he did not set his heart to it; never minded it with any closeness of application, had never any hearty disposition to it, nor ever came up to a steady resolution in it. What little goodness he had, passed away like the morning cloud. And *therefore* he did evil, because he was never determined for that which is good. Those are easily drawn by Satan to any evil, who are wavering and inconstant in that which is good, and are never persuaded to make religion their business.

CHAP. XIII.

We have here a much fuller account of the reign of Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, than we had in the Kings. There we found that his character was *no better than his father's*; he walked in the sins of his father, and his heart was not right with God, 1 Kings, 15. 2, 3. But here we find him *more brave and successful in war than his father was*. He reigned but three years, and was chiefly famous for a glorious victory he obtained over the forces of Jeroboam. Here is, I. The armies brought into the field on both sides, v. 3. II. The remonstrance which Abijah made before the battle, setting forth the justice of his cause, v. 4. . 12. III. The distress which Judah was brought into by the policy of Jeroboam, v. 13, 14. IV. The victory they obtained notwithstanding by the power of God, v. 15. . 20. V. The conclusion of Abijah's reign, v. 21, 22.

1. **N**OW in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam, began Abijah to reign over Judah. 2. He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *also* was Michaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. 3. And Abijah set the battle in array with an army of valiant men of war, *even* four hundred thousand chosen men: Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, *being* mighty men

of valour. 4. And Abijah stood up upon mount Zemaraim, which *is* in mount Ephraim, and said, Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel; 5. Ought ye not to know, that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, *even* to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt? 6. Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon, the son of David, is risen up, and hath rebelled against his lord. 7. And there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial, and have strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tender-hearted, and could not withstand them. 8. And now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD, in the hand of the sons of David; and ye *be* a great multitude, and *there are* with you golden calves, which Jeroboam made you for gods. 9. Have ye not cast out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests, after the manner of the nations of *other* lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, *the same* may be a priest of *them that are* no gods. 10. But as for us, the LORD *is* our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests which minister unto the LORD, *are* the sons of Aaron, and the Levites *wait* upon *their* business. 11. And they burn unto the LORD, every morning and every evening, burnt-sacrifices and sweet incense: the shew-bread also *set they in order* upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the LORD our God; but ye have forsaken him. 12. And, behold, God himself *is* with us for *our* captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the LORD God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper.

Abijah's mother was called *Maachah*, the daughter of Absalom, *ch.* 11. 20; here she is called *Michaiah*, the daughter of Uriel. It is most probable that she was a grand-daughter of Absalom, by his daughter Tamar, 2 Sam. 14. 27. and that her immediate father was this Uriel. But we are here to attend Abijah into the field of battle, with Jeroboam king of Israel.

1. God gave him leave to engage with Jeroboam, and owned him in it, though he would not permit Rehoboam to do it, *ch.* 11. 4. 1. Jeroboam, it is probable, was now the aggressor, and what Abijah did, was in his own necessary defence. Jeroboam, it may be, happening to survive Rehoboam, claimed the crown of Judah by survivorship, at least, hoped to get it from this young king, upon his accession to the throne. Against these impudent pretensions, it was brave in Abijah to take up arms, and God stood by him. 2. When Rehoboam attempted to recover his 10 tribes, Jeroboam was upon his good behaviour, and there must be some trial of him; but now that he had discovered what manner of man he was, by setting up the calves, and casting off the priests, Abijah is allowed to chastise him; and it does not appear that he intended any more; whereas Rehoboam aimed at no less than the utter reduction of the 10 tribes, which was contrary to the counsel of God.

II. Jeroboam's army was double in number to that of Abijah,

v. 3, for he had ten tribes to raise an army out of, Abijah had but two. Yet the inferior number proves victorious; for the battle is not always to the strong, nor the cause to the majority.

III. Abijah, before he fought them, reasoned with them, to persuade them, though not to return to the house of David, (that matter was settled by the divine determination, and he acquiesced,) yet to desist from fighting against the house of David. He would not have them *withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hands of the sons of David*, *v.* 8. but at least to be content with what they had. Note, It is good to try reason before we use force. If the point may be gained by dint of argument, better so than by dint of sword. We must never fly to violent methods, till all the arts of persuasion have been tried in vain. War, that *ultima ratio regum*—that *last resort of kings*, should be preceded by every expedient calculated to prevent it. Fair reasoning may do a great deal of good, and prevent a great deal of mischief: *How forcible are right words!* Abijah was got with his army into the heart of their country; for he made this speech upon a hill in mount Ephraim, where he might be heard by Jeroboam, and the principal officers, with whom, it is probable, he desired to have a treaty, which they consented to. It has been usual for great generals to make speeches to their own soldiers, to animate them; this speech of Abijah had that tendency, but was directed to Jeroboam and all Israel.

Two things Abijah takes to make out for the satisfaction of his own men, and the conviction of the enemy.

1. That he had right on his side, *a jus divinum—a divine right*: You know, or ought to know, that *God gave the kingdom to David and his sons for ever*, *v.* 5. not by common providence, his usual way of disposing kingdoms, but by a covenant of salt, a lasting covenant, a covenant made by sacrifice, which was always salted; so Bishop Patrick. All Israel had owned that David was a king of God's making, and that God had entailed the crown upon his family; so that Jeroboam's taking the crown of Israel, at first, was not justifiable: yet it is not certain that he refers chiefly to that, for he knew that Jeroboam had a grant from God of the 10 tribes; his attempt, however, now to disturb the peace and possession of the king of Judah, was by no means excusable; for when the 10 tribes were given him, two were reserved for the house of David. He shows, (1.) That there was a great deal of dishonesty and disingenuity in his first setting up of himself. He *rebelled against his lord*, who had preferred him, 1 Kings 11. 28. and basely took advantage of Rehoboam's weakness in a critical juncture, when, in gratitude to his old master, and in justice to his title, he ought rather to have stood by him, and helped to secure the people in their allegiance to him, than to head a party against him, and make a prey of him; which was unworthily done, and when he could not expect to prosper. They that supported him are here called *vain men*, (a character perhaps borrowed from Judg. 11. 3.) men that did not act from any steady principle, but were given to change, and men of Belial, that were for shaking off the yoke of government, and setting those over them, that would do just as they would have them do. (2.) That there was a great deal of impiety in his present attempt; for, in fighting against the house of David, he *fought against the kingdom of the Lord*. They who oppose right, oppose the righteous God who sits in the throne judging right, and cannot promise themselves success in so doing. Right may indeed go by the worst for a time; but it will prevail at last.

2. That he had God on his side. This he insists much upon, that the religion of Jeroboam and his army was false and idolatrous; but for his part, he, and his people, the men of Judah had the pure worship of the true and living God among them. It appears from the character given of Abijah, 1 Kings 15. 3. that he was not himself truly religious, and yet here he encouraged himself in this war, chiefly from the religion of his kingdom. For, (1.) Whatever he was otherwise, it should seem that he was no idolater, or if he connived at the high-places and images, *ch.* 14. 3, 5. yet he constantly kept up the temple-

service. (2.) Whatever corruptions there were in the kingdom of Judah, the state of religion among them was better than in the kingdom of Israel, with which they were now contending. (3.) It is common for those that deny the power of godliness, to boast of the form of it. (4.) It was the cause of his kingdom that he was pleading; and though he was not himself so good as he should be, yet he hoped that, for the sake of the good men and good things that were in Judah, God would now appear for them. Many that have little religion themselves, yet have so much sense and grace as to value it in others. See how he describes,

[1.] The apostasy of Israel from God. "*You are a great multitude,*" said he, "far superior to us in numbers; but we need not fear you, for you have that among yourselves that is enough to ruin you. For," *First*, "You have calves for your gods, (v. 8.) that are unable to protect and help you, and will certainly cause the true and living God to oppose you. Those will be Achans, troublers of your camp." *Secondly*, "You have base men for your priests, v. 9. You have cast off the tribe of Levi, and the house of Aaron, whom God appointed to minister in holy things; and, in conformity to the custom of the idolatrous nations, make any man a priest that has a mind to the office, and will be at the charge of the consecration, though ever so much a scandal to the office." Yet such, though very unfit to be priests, were fittest of all to be *their* priests; for what more agreeable to gods that were no gods, than priests that were no priests? Like to like, both pretenders and usurpers.

[2.] The adherence of Judah to God. "*But as for us,* (v. 10.) *we have not forsaken God.* Jehovah is our God, the God of our fathers, the God of Israel, who is able to protect us, and give us success. He is with us, for we are with him." *First*, "At home in his temple; we keep his charge, v. 10, 11. We worship no images, have no priests but what he has ordained, no rites of worship but what he has prescribed: both the temple-service and the temple-furniture are of his appointing; his appointment we abide by, and neither add nor diminish. These we have the comfort of, these we now stand up in the defence of; so that upon a religious, as well as a civil, account, we have the better cause." *Secondly*, Here in the camp, he is our Captain, and we may therefore be sure that he is with us, because we are with him, v. 12. And, as a token of his presence, we have here with us his priests, sounding his trumpets according to the law, as a testimony against you, and an assurance to us, that in the day of battle we shall be remembered before the Lord our God, and saved from our enemies;" for so this sacred signal is explained, Numb. 10. 9. Nothing is more effectual to imbolden men, and put spirit into them, than to be sure that God is with them, and fights for them. He concludes with fair warning to his enemies. "*Fight not against the God of your fathers:* it is folly to fight against the God of almighty power; but it is treachery, and base ingratitude, to fight against your fathers' God, and you cannot expect to prosper."

13. But Jeroboam caused an ambushment to come about behind them; so they were before Judah, and the ambushment *was* behind them. 14. And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle *was* before and behind: and they cried unto the LORD, and the priests sounded with the trumpets. 15. Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. 16. And the children of Israel fled before Judah: and God delivered them into their hand. 17. And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter: so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men. 18. Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and

the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD God of their fathers. 19. And Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and took cities from him, Beth-el with the towns thereof, and Jeshanah with the towns thereof, and Ephraim with the towns thereof. 20. Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again in the days of Abijah: and the LORD struck him, and he died. 21. But Abijah waxed mighty, and married fourteen wives, and begat twenty and two sons, and sixteen daughters. 22. And the rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways, and his sayings, are written in the story of the prophet Iddo.

We do not find that Jeroboam offered to make any answer at all to Abijah's speech; though it was much to the purpose, he resolved not to heed it, and therefore heard it as though he heard it not; he came to fight, not to dispute; the longest sword, he thinks, will determine the matter, not the better cause: let us therefore see the issue, whether right and religion carry the day or no.

I. Jeroboam, who trusted to his politics, was beaten. He was so far from fair reasoning, that he was not for fair fighting; we may suppose that he felt a sovereign contempt for Abijah's harangue. "One stratagem," thinks he, "is worth twenty such speeches, we will soon give him an answer to all his arguments, he shall soon find himself overpowered with numbers, surrounded on every side with the instruments of death, and then let him boast of his religion and his title to the crown." A parley, it is probable, was agreed on, yet Jeroboam basely takes the advantage of it, and, while he was treating, *laid his ambushment behind them*, against all the laws of arms. What honour could be expected in a *servant when he reigned?* Abijah was *for peace*, but *when he spake, they were for war*, Ps. 120. 7.

II. Abijah and his people, who trusted in their God, came off conquerors, notwithstanding the disproportion of their strength and numbers.

1. They were brought into a great strait, put into a great fright, *for the battle was before and behind*. A good cause, and one which is designed to be victorious, may, for a season, be involved in embarrassment and distress. It was David's case. *They compassed me about like bees*, Ps. 118. 10. . 12.

2. In their distress, when danger was on every side, which way should they look but upward for deliverance? It is an unspeakable comfort, that no enemy, (not the most powerful or politic,) no stratagem or ambushment, can cut off our communication with heaven; our way thitherward is always open. (1.) *They cried unto the Lord*, v. 14. We hope they did this, before they engaged in this war, but the distress they were in made them renew their prayers, and quickened them to be importunate. God brings his people into straits, that he may teach them to cry unto him. Earnest praying is crying. (2.) *They relied on the God of their fathers*, depended upon his power to help them, and committed themselves to him, v. 18. The prayer of faith is the prevailing prayer, and this is that by which we overcome the world, *even our faith*, 1 John, 5. 4. (3.) *The priests sounded the trumpets*, to animate them, by giving them an assurance of God's presence with them. It was not only a martial but a sacred sound, and put life into their faith. (4.) They shouted in confidence of victory, "The day is our own, for God is with us." To the cry of prayer they added the shout of faith, and so became more than conquerors.

3. Thus they obtained a complete victory. *As the men of Judah shouted for joy in God's salvation, God smote Jeroboam* and his army with such terror and amazement, that they could not strike a stroke, but fled with the greatest precipitation imaginable, and the conquerors gave no quarter, so that they put to the sword 500,000 chosen men; (v. 17.) more, it is said, than ever we read

of in any history to have been killed in one battle; but the battle was the Lord's, who would thus chastise the idolatry of Israel, and own the house of David. But see the sad effect of division; it was the blood of Israelites that was thus shed like water by Israelites, while the heathen, their neighbours, to whom the name of Israel had formerly been a terror, cried, *Aha, so would we have it!*

4. The consequence of this, was, that the children of Israel, though they were not brought back to the house of David, (which by so great a blow surely they would have been, had not the determinate counsel of God been otherwise,) yet, for that time, were *brought under*, v. 18. Many cities were taken, and remained in the possession of the kings of Judah; as Bethel particularly, v. 19. What became of the golden calf there, when it came into the hands of the king of Judah, we are not told; perhaps it was removed to some place of greater safety, and, at length, to Samaria; (Hos. 8. 5.) yet in Jehu's time we find it at Bethel, 2 Kings, 10. 29. Perhaps Abijah, when it was in his power to demolish it, suffered it to stand, for *his heart was not perfect* with God; and, not improving what he had got for the honour of God, he soon lost it all again.

Lastly, The death both of the conquered and of the conqueror, not long after.

1. Jeroboam never looked up after this defeat, though he survived it two or three years. He could not recover *strength again*, v. 20. The Lord struck him either with some bodily disease, of which he languished; or with melancholy and trouble of mind, his heart was broken, and vexation at his loss brought his head, probably, by this time, a hoary head, with sorrow to the grave. He escaped the sword of Abijah, but God struck him: there is no escaping his sword.

2. Abijah waxed mighty upon it. What number of wives and children he had before, does not appear; but now he multiplied his wives to 14 in all, by whom he had 38 children, v. 21. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of those arrows. It seems, he had ways peculiar to himself, and sayings of his own, which were recorded with his acts in the history of those times, v. 22. But the number of his months was cut off in the midst, and, soon after his triumph, death conquered the conqueror. Perhaps he was too much lifted up with his victories, and therefore God would not let him live long to enjoy the honour of them.

CHAP. XIV.

In this and the two following chapters, we have the history of the reign of Asa; a good reign, and a long one. In this chapter, we have, I. His piety, v. 1..5. II. His policy, v. 6..8. III. His prosperity, and particularly a glorious victory he obtained over a great army of Ethiopians that came out against him, v. 9..15.

1. **S**O Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land was quiet ten years. 2. And Asa did *that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God*: 3. For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: 4. And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. 5. Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him. 6. And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the LORD had given him rest. 7. Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build

these cities, and make about *them* walls, and towers, gates, and bars, *while the land is yet before us*, because we have sought the LORD our God, we have sought *him*, and he hath given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered. 8. And Asa had an army of men that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand: all these *were* mighty men of valour.

Here is,

I. Asa's general character; (v. 2.) He did *that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God*. 1. He aimed at pleasing God; studied to approve himself to him. Happy they that walk by this rule, to do that, not which is right in their own eyes, or in the eye of the world, but which is so in God's eyes. 2. He saw God's eye always upon him, and that helped much to keep him to what is good and right. 3. God graciously accepted of him in what he did, and approved it as good and right.

II. A blessed work of reformation which he set on foot immediately upon his accession to the crown.

1. He removed and abolished idolatry. Since Solomon admitted it in the latter end of his reign, nothing had been *done* to suppress it, and so, we presume, it had got ground; strange gods were worshipped, and had their altars, images, and groves; and the temple-service, though kept up by the priests, (ch. 13. 10.) was neglected by many of the people. Asa, as soon as he had power in his hands, made it his business to destroy all those idolatrous altars and images, (v. 3, 5.) they being a great provocation to a jealous God, and a great temptation to a careless unthinking people. He hoped, by destroying the idols, to reform the idolaters, which he aimed at, rather than to ruin them.

2. He revived and established the pure worship of God; and, since the priests did their part in attending God's altars, he obliged the people to do their's; (v. 4.) He commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and not the gods of the heathen, and to do the law and the commandments; that is, to observe all divine institutions, which many had utterly neglected. In doing this, the land was quiet before him, v. 5. though they were much in love with their idols, and very loath to leave them, yet the convictions of their consciences sided with the commands of Asa, and they could not, for shame, refuse to comply with them. Note, They that have power in their hands, and will use it vigorously for the suppression of profaneness and the reformation of manners, will not meet with so much difficulty and opposition therein, as, perhaps, they feared. Vice is a sneaking thing, and virtue has reason enough on its side to make *all iniquity stop her mouth*, Ps. 107. 42.

III. The tranquillity of his kingdom, after constant alarms of war during the two last reigns. In his days, the land was quiet ten years; (v. 1.) no war with the kingdom of Israel, who did not recover the blow given them in the last reign, for a great while. Abijah's victory, which was owing, under God, to his courage and bravery, laid a foundation for Asa's peace, which was the reward of his piety and reformation. Though Abijah had little religion himself, he was instrumental to prepare the way for one that had much. If Abijah had not done what he did to quiet the land, Asa could not have done what he did to reform it; for, *Inter arma, silent leges*—Amidst the din of arms, the voice of law is unheard.

IV. The prudent improvement he made of that tranquillity; The land had rest, for the LORD had given him rest. Note, If God give quietness, who then can make trouble? Job, 34. 29. Those have rest indeed, to whom God gives rest; peace indeed, to whom Christ gives peace, *not as the world giveth*, John, 14. 27. Now, 1. Asa takes notice of the rest they had as the gift of God.

He hath given us rest on every side. Note, God must be acknowledged, with thankfulness, in the rest we are blessed with, of body and mind, family and country. The rest was the reward of the reformation begun; *Because we have sought the Lord our God, he has given us rest.* Note, As the frowns and rebukes of Providence should be observed for a check to us in an evil way, so the smiles of Providence should be taken notice of for our encouragement in that which is good. See Hag. 2. 18, 19. Mal. 3. 10. We find by experience that it is good to *seek the Lord*; it gives us rest; while we pursue the world, we meet with nothing but vexation. 2. He consults with his people, by their representatives, how to make a good use of the present gleams of peace they enjoyed; and concludes with them, (1.) That they must not be idle, but busy. Times of rest from war should be employed in work, for we must always find ourselves something to do. In the years when he had no war, he said, "Let us build; still let us be doing." When the churches had rest, they were built up, Acts, 9. 31. When the sword is sheathed, take up the trowel. (2.) That they must not be secure, but prepare for wars. In times of peace we must be getting ready for trouble, expect it, and lay up in store for it. [1.] He fortified his principal cities with walls, towers, gates, and bars, v. 7. "This let us do," says he, "while the land is yet before us;" that is, "while we have opportunity and advantage for it, and have nothing to hinder us." He speaks as if he expected that, some way or other, trouble would arise, when it would be too late to fortify, and when they would wish they had done it. So they built, and prospered. [2.] He had a good army ready to bring into the field; (v. 8.) not a standing army, but the militia or trained-bands of the country. Judah and Benjamin were mustered severally; and Benjamin (which, not long ago, was called *little Benjamin*, Ps. 68. 27.) had almost as many soldiers as Judah, came as near as 28 to 30, so strangely had that tribe increased of late. The blessing of God can make a *little one to become a thousand*. It should seem these two tribes were differently armed, both offensively and defensively. The men of Judah guarded themselves with targets, the men of Benjamin with shields, the former much larger than the latter, 1 Kings, 10. 16, 17. The men of Judah fought with spears, when they closed in with the enemy; the men of Benjamin drew bows, to reach the enemy at a distance; both did good service, and neither could say to the other, I have no need of thee. Different gifts and employments are for the common good.

9. And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah. 10. Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. 11. And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee. 12. So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. 13. And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the LORD, and before his host; and they carried away very much spoil. 14. And they smote all the cities round about Gerar; for the fear of the LORD came upon them: and they spoiled all the

cities; for there was exceeding much spoil in them. 15. They smote also the tents of cattle, and carried away sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem.

Here is,

1. Disturbance given to the peace of Asa's kingdom by a formidable army of Ethiopians that invaded them, v. 9, 10. Though still they sought God, yet this fear came upon them, that their faith in God might be tried, and that God might have an opportunity of doing great things for them. It was a vast number that the Ethiopians brought against him, *a thousand thousand men*; and now he found the benefit of having an army ready raised against such a time of need. That provision which we thought needless, may soon appear to be of great advantage.

2. The application Asa made to God, on occasion of the threatening cloud which now hung over his head, v. 11. He, that sought God in the day of his peace and prosperity, could, with holy boldness, cry to God in the day of his trouble, and call him *his God*. His prayer is short, but has much in it. (1.) He gives to God the glory of his infinite power and sovereignty. *It is nothing with thee to help and save*, by many or few, by them that are mighty, or by them that have no power. See 1 Sam. 14. 6. God works in his own strength, not in the strength of instruments; (Ps. 21. 13.) nay, it is his glory to *help the weakest*, and *perfect strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings*. "We do not say, Lord, take our part, for we have a good army for thee to work by; but, take our part, for without thee we have no power." (2.) He takes hold of their covenant-relation to God as their's. *O Lord our God*, and again, "Thou art our God, whom we have chosen and cleave to as our's, and who hast promised to be our's." (3.) He pleads their dependence upon God, and the eye they had to him, in this expedition. He was well prepared for it, yet trusted not to his preparation; but, "Lord, we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude, by warrant from thee, aiming at thy glory, and trusting to thy strength." (4.) He interests God in their cause. "Let not man" (*mortal man*, so the word is), "prevail against thee. If he prevail against us, it will be said that he prevails against thee, because thou art our God, and we rest on thee, and go forth in thy name, which thou hast encouraged us to do. The enemy is a mortal man; make it to appear what an unequal match he is for an immortal God. Lord, maintain thine own honour; hallowed be thy name."

3. The glorious victory God gave him over his enemies; (1.) God defeated the enemy, and put their forces into disorder; (v. 12.) *The Lord smote the Ethiopians*, smote them with terror, and an unaccountable consternation, so that they fled, and knew neither why nor whither. (2.) Asa and his soldiers took the advantage God gave them against the enemy. [1.] They destroyed them. *They fell before the Lord*, (for who can stand before him?) and before his host, either an invisible host of angels, that were employed to destroy them, or the host of Israel, called *God's host*, because owned by him. [2.] They took the plunder of their camp; *carried away very much spoil* from the slain, and from the baggage. [3.] They smote the cities that were in league with them, to which they fled for shelter, and carried off the spoil of them, (v. 14.) and they were not able to make any resistance, *for the fear of the Lord came upon them*; that is, a fear which God struck them with, to that degree that they had no heart to withstand the conquerors. [4.] They fetched away the cattle out of the enemy's country, in vast numbers, v. 15. Thus the wealth of the sinners is laid up for the just.

CHAP. XV.

Asa and his army were now returning in triumph from the battle, laden with spoils, and adorned with the trophies of victory; the pious prince, we may now suppose, studying what he should render to God for this great favour. He knows that the work of reformation, which he had begun in his kingdom

is not perfected; his enemies abroad were subdued, but there were more dangerous enemies at home, that were yet unconquered; idols in Judah and Benjamin: his victory over the former emboldens him vigorously to renew his attack upon the latter. Now, here we have, I. The message which God sent him, by a prophet, to engage him to, and encourage him in, the prosecution of his reformation, v. 1..7. II. The life which this message put into that good cause, and their proceedings, in pursuance of it. Idols removed, v. 8. The spoil dedicated to God, v. 9..11. A covenant made with God, and a law for the punishing of idolaters, v. 12..15. A reformation at court, v. 16. Dedicated things brought into the house of God, v. 18. All well, but that the high places were permitted, v. 17. And the effect of this was great peace, v. 19.

1. **AND** the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: 2. And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD *is* with you, while ye be with him; and if ye forsake him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. 3. Now for a long season Israel *hath been* without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. 4. But when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them. 5. And in those times *there was* no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations *were* upon all the inhabitants of the countries. 6. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity. 7. Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.

It was a great happiness to Israel that they had prophets among them; yet, while they were thus blessed, they were strangely addicted to idolatry, whereas, when the spirit of prophecy was ceased under the second temple, and the canon of the Old Testament was completed, (which was constantly read in their synagogues,) they were pure from idolatry; for the scriptures are of all other the *most sure word of prophecy*, and most effectual, and the church could not be so easily imposed upon by a counterfeit Bible as by a counterfeit prophet.

Here was a prophet sent to Asa and his army, when they returned victorious from the war with the Ethiopians, not to compliment them and congratulate them on their success, but to quicken them to their duty; that is the proper business of God's ministers, even with princes and the greatest of men. The *Spirit of God* came upon the prophet, (v. 1.) both to instruct him what he should say, and to enable him to say it with clearness and boldness.

I. He told them plainly upon what terms they stood with God: let them not think, that, having obtained this victory, all was their own for ever; no, he lets them know they were upon their good behaviour. Let them do well, and it will be well with them, otherwise not. 1. *The Lord is with you, while you be with him.* This is both a word of comfort, that those who keep close to God shall always have his presence with them; and also a word of caution, "He is *with you*, while you be with him, but no longer; you have now a signal token of his favourable presence with you, but the continuance of it depends upon your perseverance in the way of your duty." 2. "If you seek him, he will be found of you." Sincerely desire his favour, and aim at it, and you shall obtain it. Pray, and you shall prevail. He never said, nor ever will, *Seek ye me, in vain.*" See Heb. 11.6. But, 3. "If you forsake him, and his ordinances, he is not tied to you, but will certainly forsake you, and then you are undone, your present triumphs will be no security to you; woe to you, when God departs."

II. He set before them the dangerous consequence of forsaking God, and his ordinances, and that there was no way of having

grievances redressed, but by repenting, and returning unto God. When Israel forsook their duty, they were over-run with a deluge of atheism, impiety, irreligion, and all irregularity, (v. 3.) and were continually embarrassed with vexatious and destroying wars, foreign and domestic, v. 5, 6. But when their troubles drove them to God, they found it not in vain to seek him, v. 4. But the question is, What time does this refer to?

1. Some think it looks as far back as the days of the judges. A long season ago, Israel was *without the true God*; for they worshipped false gods; it was a time of ignorance, for, though they had priests, they had no teaching priests; though they had elders, yet no law to any purpose, v. 3. These were sad times, when they were frequently oppressed by one enemy or other, and grievously harassed by Moabites, Midianites, Ammonites, and other nations; they were *vexed with all adversity*; (v. 6.) yet, when, in their perplexity, they turned to God, by repentance, prayer, and reformation, he raised up deliverers for them. Then was that maxim often verified, that God is with us while we are with him. Whatsoever things of this kind were written aforetime, were written for our admonition.

2. Others think it describes the state of the ten tribes, (who were now properly called *Israel*,) in the days of Asa. Now, since Jeroboam set up the calves, though he pretended to honour the God that brought them out of Egypt, yet his idolatry has brought them to downright infidelity, they are *without the true God*, and no marvel, when they are without teaching priests; Jeroboam's priests were not teachers, and thus they came to be without law: it is next to impossible that any thing of religion should be kept up without a preaching ministry. In those times there was no peace, v. 5. Their war with Judah gave them frequent alarms; so did the late insurrection of Baasha, and other occasions not mentioned. They provoked God with all iniquity, and then he *vexed them with all adversity*; yet, *when they turned to God*, he was entreated for them. Let Judah take notice of this, let their neighbours' harms be their warnings. Give no countenance to graven images, for you see what mischiefs they produce.

3. Others think the whole passage may be read in the future tense, and that it looks forward; hereafter, *Israel will be without the true God, and a teaching priest*, and they will be destroyed by one judgment after another, till they *return to God, and seek him.* See Hos. 3.4.

III. Upon this he grounded his exhortation, to prosecute the work of reformation with vigour; (v. 7.) *Be strong, for your work shall be rewarded.* Note, 1. God's work should be done with diligence and cheerfulness, but will not be done without resolution. 2. This should quicken us to the work of religion, that we shall be sure not to lose by it ultimately. It will not go unrewarded. How should it, when the work is its own reward?

8. And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that *was* before the porch of the LORD. 9. And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God *was* with him. 10. So they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. 11. And they offered unto the LORD the same time, of the spoil *which* they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand

sheep. 12. And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; 13. That whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. 14. And they swore unto the LORD with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. 15. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the LORD gave them rest round about. 16. And also concerning Maachab the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from *being* queen, because she had made an idol in a grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron. 17. But the high places were not taken away out of Israel: nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect all his days. 18. And he brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels. 19. And there was no more war unto the five and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa.

We are here told what good effect the foregoing sermon had upon Asa.

I. He grew more bold for God than he had been: his victory would inspire him with some new degrees of resolution, but this message from God with much more; now he took courage, he saw how necessary a further reformation was, and what assurance he had of God's presence with him in it; and this made him daring, and helped him over the difficulties which had before deterred him, and driven him off from the undertaking. Now he ventured to destroy all the abominable idols, (and all idolatries are abominable, 1 Pet. 1.3.) as far as ever his power went: Away with them all. He also renewed the altar of the Lord, which, it seems, was gone out of repair, though it was not above thirty-five years since Solomon's head was laid, who erected it. So soon did these ceremonial institutions begin to wax old, as things which, in the fulness of time, must *vanish away*, Heb. 8. 13.

II. He extended his influence further than before, v. 9. He summoned a solemn assembly, and particularly brought the strangers to it, who were come over to him from the ten tribes. 1. Their coming was a great encouragement to him; for the reason of their coming was, because *they saw that the Lord his God was with him*. It is good to be with those that have God with them, to come into relation to, and contract acquaintance and friendship with, those that live in the fear and favour of God; *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*, Zech. 8. 23. 2. The cognizance he took of them, and the invitation he gave them to the general assembly, were a great encouragement to them. All strangers are to be helped, but those that cast themselves upon God's good providence, purely to keep a good conscience, are worthy of double honour. Asa gave orders for the gathering of them together; (v. 9.) yet, it is said, (v. 10.) they *gathered themselves together*, made it their own act, so forward were they to obey the king's orders. This meeting was held in the third month, probably at the feast of Pentecost, which was in that month.

III. He and his people offered sacrifices to God, as his share of the spoil they had got, v. 11. Their offering here was nothing to Solomon's, (ch. 7. 5.) which was owing to the diminution, either of their zeal, or of their wealth, or of both. These sacrifices were intended by way of thanksgiving for the favours they had received,

and supplication for further favours. Prayers and praises are not our spiritual sacrifices. And, as he took care that the altar should have its gift, so he took care that the temple should have its gold; he *brought into the house of God all the dedicated things*, v. 18. It is honesty to render to God the things that are his. What has been long designed for him, and long laid by for him, as, it should seem, these dedicated things had been, should, at length, be laid out for him. Will a man rob God, or make slow payment to him, who is always ready to do us good?

IV. They entered into covenant with God, repenting that they had violated their engagements to him, and resolving to do better for the future. It is proper for penitents, for converts, to renew their covenants. It should seem, the motion came not from Asa, but from the people themselves: let every man be a volunteer that covenants with God. *Thy people shall be willing*, Ps. 110. 3. Observe,

1. What was the matter of this covenant. Nothing but what they were before obliged to; and, though no vow or promise of their's could lay any higher obligation upon them than they were already under from the divine precept, yet it would help to increase their sense of the obligation, to arm them against temptations, and would be a testimony to the equity and goodness of the precept. And, by joining all together in this covenant, they strengthened the hands one of another. Two things they engaged themselves to; (1.) That they would diligently seek God themselves, seek his precepts, seek his favour. What is religion, but seeking God, inquiring after him, applying to him, upon all occasions? We shall not enjoy him till we come to heaven; while we are here, we must continue seeking. That they would seek him, as the *God of their fathers*, in the way that their fathers sought him, and in dependence upon the promise made to their fathers; and that they would do it *with all their heart, and with all their soul*; for those only seek God acceptably, and successfully, that are inward with him, intent upon him, and entire for him, in their seeking of him. We make nothing of our religion, if we do not make heart-work of it; God will have all the heart, or none; and, when a jewel of such inestimable value as the divine favour is to be found, it is worth while to seek it *with all our soul*. (2.) That they would, to the utmost of their power, oblige others to seek him, v. 13. They agreed, that *whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel*, that is, would either worship other gods, or refuse to join with them in the worship of the true God, that was either an obstinate idolater, or an obstinate athiest, he should be put to death. This was no new law of their own making, but an order to put in execution that law of God to this purport, Deut. 17. 2, &c. If this law had been duly executed, there had not been so many abominable idols found in Judah and Benjamin, v. 8. Whether men may now, under the gospel, be compelled, by such methods as these, to seek the Lord, is justly questioned; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, and yet mighty.

2. In what manner they made this covenant. (1.) With great cheerfulness, and all possible expressions of joy, *They swore unto the Lord*; not secretly, as if they were either ashamed of what they did, or afraid of binding themselves too fast to him; but with a loud voice, to express their own zeal, and to animate one another; and they all rejoiced at the oath, v. 14, 15. They did not swear to God with reluctancy, (as the poor debtor confesses a judgment to his creditor,) but with all the pleasure and satisfaction imaginable, as the bridegroom plights his troth to the bride in the marriage-covenant. Every honest Israelite was pleased with his own engagements to God, and they were all pleased with one another's. They rejoiced in it, as a hopeful expedient to prevent their apostasy from God, and a happy indication of God's presence with them. Note, The times of renewing our covenant with God should be times of rejoicing. And national reformation cannot but give general satisfaction to all that are good. It is an honour and happiness to be in bonds to God. (2.) They did it with great sincerity, zeal, and resolution: *they swore to God with all their hearts, and sought him with their whole desire*. The Israelites were now in an extraordinarily good frame; Oh that there had always been

but such a heart in them! This comes in as the reason why they rejoiced so much in what they did, it was because they were hearty in it. Note, Those only experience the pleasure and comfort of religion that are sincere and upright in it. What is done in hypocrisy is a mere drudgery. But if God have the heart, we have the joy.

Lastly, We are told what was the effect of this their solemn covenanting with God.

1. God did well for them. He was *found of them, and gave them rest round about*, (v.15.) so that there was no war for a long time after; (v.19.) no open general war, though there were constant bickerings between Judah and Israel upon the frontiers, 1 Kings, 15.16. National piety procures national blessings.

2. They did, on the whole, well for him. They carried on the reformation so far, that this Maachah the queen-mother was deposed for idolatry, and her idol destroyed, v.16. This was bravely done of Asa, that he would not connive at idolatry in those that were nearest to him; like Levi, that *said to his father and mother, I have not seen him*, Deut.33.9. Asa knows he must honour God more than his grandmother, and dares not leave an idol in an apartment of his palace, while he is destroying idols in the cities of his kingdom. We may suppose this Maachah was so far convinced of her sin, that she was willing to subscribe the association mentioned, (v.12,13.) binding herself to seek the Lord, and therefore was not put to death, as those were that refused to sign it; *great* as well as *small, women* as well as *men*; perhaps they specified *women*, with an eye to her; but, because she had been an idolater, Asa thought fit to divest her of the dignity and authority she had, and, probably, he banished her the court, and confined her to privacy, lest she should influence and infect others. But the reformation was not complete, the high places were not all taken away, though many of them were, *ch.14.3,5*. Those in the cities were removed, but not those in the country villages; or those in the cities of Judah, but not those in the cities of Israel which were reduced to the house of David; or those that were used in the service of false gods, but not those that were used in the service of the God of Israel; those he connived at, and yet his heart was perfect. There may be defects in some particular duties, where yet the heart, in the main, is upright with God; sincerity is something less than sinless perfection.

CHAP. XVI.

This chapter concludes the history of the reign of Asa, but does not furnish so pleasing an idea of his latter end as of his beginning. I. Here is a foolish treaty with Ben-hadad king of Syria, v.1..6. II. The reproof which God sent him for it by a prophet, v.7..9. III. Asa's displeasure against the prophet for his faithfulness, v.10. IV. The sickness, death, and burial, of Asa, v.11..14.

1 **I**N the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. 2. Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the LORD, and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-hadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, 3. *There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold: go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me.* 4. And Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-maim, and all the store-cities of Naph-

tali. 5. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard *it*, that he left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease. 6. Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha was a building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah.

How to reconcile the date of this event with the history of the kings, I am quite at a loss: Baasha died in the 26th year of Asa, 1 Kings, 16.8. How then could this be done in his 36th year, when Baasha's family was quite cut off, and Omri was upon the throne? It is generally said to be meant of the 36th year of the kingdom of Asa, namely, that of Judah, beginning from the first of Rehoboam, and so it coincides with the 16th of Asa's reign. But then *ch.15.19.* must be so understood; and how could it be spoken of as a great thing that there was no more war till the 15th year of Asa, when that passage immediately before was in his 15th year, (*ch.15.10.*) and after this miscarriage of his, here recorded, he had wars, v.9. Josephus places it in his 26th year, and then we must suppose a mistake in the transcriber here, and *ch.15.19.* which if we admit, the computation is easy.

This passage we had before, 1 Kings, 15.17, &c. and Asa was several ways faulty in it. 1. He did not do well to make a league with Ben-hadad a heathen king, and to value himself so much upon it as he seems to do, v.3. Had he relied more upon his covenant, and his father's, with God, he would not have boasted so much of his league, and his father's, with the royal family of Syria. 2. If he had had a due regard to the honour of Israel in general, he would have found some other expedient to give Baasha a diversion, than by calling in a foreign force, and inviting into the country a common enemy, which, in process of time, might be a plague to Judah too. 3. It was, doubtless, a sin in Ben-hadad to break his league with Baasha, upon no provocation, but merely through the influence of a bribe; and, if so, certainly it was a sin in Asa to move him to it, especially to hire him to do it. The public faith of kings and kingdoms must not be made so cheap a thing. 4. To take silver and gold out of the house of the Lord, for this purpose, was a great aggravation of the sin, v.2. Must the temple be plundered, to serve his carnal policies? He had better have brought gifts and offerings, with prayers and supplications, to the house of the Lord, that he might have engaged God on his side, and made him his friend; then he had not needed to have been at this expence to make Ben-hadad his friend. 5. It was well if Asa had not to answer for all the mischief that the army of Ben-hadad did unjustly to the cities of Israel, all the blood they shed, and all the spoil they made, v.4. Perhaps Asa intended not they should carry the matter so far. But they that draw others to sin know not what they do, nor where it will end: the beginning of sin is as the letting forth of water.

However, the project succeeded. Ben-hadad gave Baasha a powerful diversion, obliged him to leave off building Ramah, and betake himself to the defence of his own country northward; which gave Asa an opportunity, not only to demolish his fortifications, but to seize the materials, and convert them to his own use.

7. And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. 8. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubins a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. 9. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose

heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars. 10. Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison-house; for *he was* in a rage with him because of this *thing*. And Asa oppressed *some* of the people the same time. 11. And, behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, lo, they *are* written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 12. And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease *was* exceeding *great*: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians. 13. And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign. 14. And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds *of spices* prepared by the apothecaries' art: and they made a very great burning for him.

Here is,

I. A plain and faithful reproof given to Asa by a prophet of the Lord, for making this league with Baasha. The reprover was Hanani the seer, the father of Jehu, another prophet, whom we read of, 1 Kings, 16. 1. 2 Chron. 19. 2. We observed several things amiss in Asa's treaty with Ben-hadad. But that which the prophet here charges upon him as the greatest fault he was guilty of in that matter, is, *his relying on the king of Syria, and not on the Lord his God, v. 7.* He thought, that, though God was on his side, this would not stand him in stead, unless he had Ben-hadad on his side; that God either could not, or would not, help him, but he must take this indirect course to help himself. Note, God is much displeased, when he is distrusted, and when an arm of flesh is relied on more than his power and goodness. By putting our confidence in God we give honour to him, and therefore he thinks himself affronted, if we give that honour to another. He plainly tells the king that therein he had done foolishly, v. 9. It is a foolish thing to lean on a broken reed, when we have the Rock of ages to rely upon. To convince him of his folly, he shews him,

1. That he acted against his experience, v. 8. He, of all men, had no reason to distrust God, who had found him such a present powerful Helper, by whom he had been made to triumph over a threatening enemy, as his father before him, *because he relied upon the Lord his God, ch. 13. 18.—14. 11.* "What!" said the prophet, "Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, enough to swallow up a kingdom? And yet, *because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand*; and was not he sufficient to help thee against Baasha?" Note, The many experiences we have had of the goodness of God to us, aggravate our distrust of him. Has he not helped us in six troubles? And have we any reason to suspect him in the seventh? But see how deceitful our hearts are! We trust in God, when we have nothing else to trust to, when need drives us to him; but, when we have other things to stay on, we are apt to stay too much on them, and to lean to our own understanding as long as that has any thing to offer; but a believing confidence will be in God only, when a smiling world courts it most.

2. That he acted against his knowledge of God and his providence, v. 9. Asa could not be ignorant that *the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the earth, strongly to hold with them* (so it may be read) *whose heart is perfect toward him*; that is, (1.) That God governs the world in infinite wisdom, and the creatures, and all their actions, are continually under his eye. The eye of Providence is quick-sighted, it runs; it is intent, it runs

to and fro; it reaches far, through the whole earth, no corner of which is from under it, not the most dark or distant; and his eye directs his hand, and the arm of his power; for he shews himself strong. Does Satan *walk to and fro in the earth*? Providence runs to and fro, is never out of the way, never to seek, never at a loss. (2.) That God governs the world for the good of his people, does all in pursuance of the counsels of his love concerning their salvation, all *for Jacob his servant's sake, and Israel his elect, Isa. 45. 4. Christ is Head over all things to his church, Eph. 1. 22.* (3.) That they whose hearts are upright with him may be sure of his protection, and have all the reason in the world to depend upon it. He is able to protect them in the way of their duty; for wisdom and might are his, and he actually intends their protection; a practical disbelief of this is at the bottom of all our departures from God, and double-dealing with him. Asa could not trust God, and therefore made court to Ben-hadad.

3. That he acted against his interest. (1.) He had lost an opportunity of checking the growing greatness of the king of Syria, v. 7. His *host is escaped out of thy hand*, which otherwise would have joined with Baasha's, and fallen with it. (2.) He had incurred God's displeasure, and henceforth must expect no peace, but the constant alarms of war, v. 9. They that cannot find in their hearts to trust God, forfeit his protection, and throw themselves out of it.

II. Asa's displeasure at this reproof. Though it came from God by one that was known to be his messenger, though the reproof was just, and the reasoning fair, and all intended for his good, yet *he was wroth with the seer*, for telling him of his folly; nay, *he was in a rage with him, v. 10.* Is this Asa? Is this he whose heart was perfect with the Lord his God all his days? Well, let him that thinketh he stands, take heed lest he fall. A wise man! and yet in a rage! An Israelite! and yet in a rage with a prophet! A good man! and yet impatient of reproof, and that cannot bear to be told of his faults! Lord, what is man, when God leaves him to himself? They that idolize their own conduct cannot bear contradiction; and they that indulge a peevish passionate temper, may be transported by it into impieties as well as into indecencies, and will, some time or other, fly in the face of God himself. See what gall and wormwood this root of bitterness bore. 1. In his rage, he committed the prophet to the jail; *put him in a prison-house*, as a malefactor; *in the stocks*, so some read it. God's prophets meet with many that cannot bear reproof, but take it much amiss, yet they must do their duty. 2. Having proceeded thus far, *he oppressed some of the people*, probably, such as owned the prophet in his sufferings, or were known to be his particular friends. He that abused his power for the persecuting of God's prophet, was left to himself, further to abuse it for the crushing of his own subjects, whereby he weakened himself and lost his interest. Most persecutors have been tyrants.

III. His sickness. Two years before he died, *he was diseased in his feet, (v. 12.)* afflicted with the gout in a high degree. He had put the prophet in the stocks, and now God put him in the stocks; so his punishment answered his sin. *His disease was exceeding great*; it came to the height, so some; it flew up to his head, so others; and then it was mortal. This was his affliction; but his sin was, that, in his disease, instead of seeking to the Lord for relief, he *sought to the physicians*. His making use of physicians was his duty; but trusting to them, and expecting that from them which was to be had from God only, were his sin and folly. The help of creatures must always be used with an eye to the Creator, and in dependence upon him, who makes every creature that to us which it is, and without whom the most skilful and faithful are physicians of no value. Some think that these physicians were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and were a sort of conjurors, to whom he applied himself, as if there were not a God in Israel.

IV. His death and burial. His funeral had something of extraordinary solemnity in it, (v. 14.) they made a very magnificent *burying for him*. I am loath to think (as some do) that he himself ordered this funeral pomp, and that it was an instance of his

vanity, that he would be buried like the Gentiles, and not after the way of the Jews. It is said indeed, *He digged the sepulchre for himself*, as one mindful of his grave; but I am willing to believe it was rather an expression of the great respect his people retained for him, notwithstanding the failings and infirmities of his latter days. It was agreed to do him honour at his death. Note, The eminent piety and usefulness of good men ought to be remembered to their praise, though they have had their blemishes. Let their faults be buried in their graves, while their services are remembered over their graves. He that said, *There is not a just man that doeth good and sinneth not*, yet said also, *The memory of the just is blessed*; and let it be so.

CHAP. XVII.

Here begin the life and reign of Jehoshaphat, who was one of the first three among the royal worthies, one of the best that ever swayed the sceptre of Judah, since David's head was laid. He was the good son of a good father, so that, at this time, grace ran in the blood, even in the blood-royal. Happy the son that had such a father, to lay a good foundation in him and for him! Happy the father that had such a son, to build so well upon the foundation he had laid! Happy the kingdom that was blessed with two such kings, two such reigns, together! In this chapter we have, I. His accession to, and establishment in, the throne, v. 1, 2, 5. II. His personal piety, v. 3, 4, 6. III. The course he took to promote religion in his kingdom, v. 7, 9. IV. The mighty sway he bore among the neighbours, v. 10, 11. V. The great strength of his kingdom, both in garrisons and standing forces, v. 12, 19. Thus was his prosperity the reward of his piety, and his piety the brightest grace and ornament of his prosperity.

1. **AND** Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel. 2. And he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken. 3. And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; 4. But sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. 5. Therefore the LORD stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance. 6. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah. 7. Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Ben-hail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. 8. And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama, and Jehoram, priests. 9. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.

Here we find concerning Jehoshaphat,

1. What a wise man he was. As soon as he came to the crown, he strengthened himself against Israel, v. 1. Ahab had now been three years upon the throne of Israel, an active warlike prince; the vigour of his beginning falling in with the decay of Asa's

conclusion, it is probable that the kingdom of Israel had, of late, got ground of the kingdom of Judah, and began to grow formidable to it; so that the first thing Jehoshaphat had to do, was, to make his part good on that side, and to check the growing greatness of the king of Israel, which he did so effectually, and without bloodshed, that Ahab soon courted his alliance, so far was he from giving him any disturbance, and proved more dangerous as a friend than he could have been as an enemy. Jehoshaphat strengthened himself, not to act offensively against Israel, or invade them, but only to maintain his own; which he did by fortifying the cities that were on his frontiers, and putting garrisons, stronger than had been, in the cities of Ephraim, which he was master of, v. 2. He did not strengthen himself, as his father did, by a league with the king of Syria, but by fair and regular methods, on which he might expect the blessing of God, and in which he trusted God.

II. What a good man he was. It is an excellent character that is here given him, and very observable;

1. That he walked in the ways of his father David. In the characters of the kings, David's ways are often made the standard, as 1 Kings, 15. 3, 11. 2 Kings, 14. 3.—16. 2.—18. 3. But the distinction is no where else so strongly marked, as here, between his first ways and his last ways; for the last were not so good as the first: his ways, before he fell so foully in the matter of Uriah, (which is mentioned long after as the bar in his escutcheon, 1 Kings, 15. 5.) were good ways, and though he happily recovered from that fall, yet perhaps he never, while he lived, fully retrieved the spiritual strength and comfort he lost by it. Jehoshaphat followed David, as far as he followed God, and no farther. St. Paul himself thus limits our imitation of him, (1 Cor. 11. t.) *Follow me, as I follow Christ*, and not otherwise. Many good people have had their first ways, which were their best ways; their first love, which was their strongest love. In every copy we propose to write after, as we must single out that only which is good, so that chiefly which is best. The words here will admit another reading; they run thus; *He walked in the ways of David his father, (Harethonim,) those first ways*; or, *those ancient ways*: he proposed to himself, for his example, the primitive times of the royal family, those purest times, before the corruptions of the late reigns came in. See Jer. 6. 16. The LXX. leave out David, and so refer it to Asa; *he walked in the first ways of his father*, and did not imitate him in what was amiss in him, toward the latter end of his time. It is good to be cautious in following the best men, lest we step aside after them.

2. That he sought not to Baalim, but sought to the Lord God of his father, v. 3, 4. The neighbouring nations had their Baalim, one had one Baal, and another had another; but he abhorred them all, had nothing to do with them: he worshipped the Lord God of his father, and him only; prayed to him only, and inquired of him only; both are included in seeking him.

3. That he walked in God's commandments, not only worshipped the true God, but worshipped him according to his own institution, and not after the doings of Israel, v. 4. Though the king of Israel was his neighbour and ally, yet he did not learn his way. Whatever dealings he had with him in civil matters, he would not have communion with him, nor comply with him in his religion: there he kept close to the rule.

4. That his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord, (v. 6.) or, he lifted up his heart. He brought his heart to his work, and lifted up his heart in it; that is, he had a sincere regard to God in it. *Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul*. His heart was enlarged in that which is good, Ps. 119. 32. He never thought he could do enough for God. He was lively and affectionate in his religion, *servent in spirit, serving the Lord*, cheerful and pleasant in it; he went on in his work with alacrity; as Jacob, who, after his vision of God at Bethel, *lifted up his feet*, Gen. 29. 1. margin. He was bold and resolute in the ways of God, and went on with courage; his heart was lifted up above the consideration of the difficulties that were in the way of his duty, he easily got over them all, and was not frightened with

winds and clouds, from sowing and reaping, Eccl. 11. 4. Let us walk in the same spirit.

III. What a useful man he was; not only a good *man*, but a good *king*; he not only was good himself, but did good in his generation, did a great deal of good.

1. He took away the *teachers of lies*, so images are called, Heb. 2. 18. the *high places* and the *groves*, v. 6. It is meant of those in which idols were worshipped; for those that were dedicated to the true God only were not taken away, ch. 20. 33. It was only idolatry that he abolished; nothing debauched the nation more than those idolatrous groves or images, which he took away.

2. He sent forth teachers of truth. When he inquired into the state of religion in his kingdom, he found his people generally very ignorant, they *knew not that they did evil*; even in the last good reign, there had been little care taken to instruct them in their duty; and therefore Jehoshaphat resolves to begin his work at the right end, deals with them as reasonable creatures, will not lead them blindfold, no, not into a reformation, but endeavours to have them well taught, knowing that that was the way to have them well cured; in this good work, he employed, (1.) His princes; those about him he sent forth, *to teach in the cities of Judah*, v. 7. He ordered them, in the administration of justice, not only to correct the people when they did ill, but to teach them how to do better, and to give a reason for what they did, that the people might be informed of the difference between good and evil. The princes or judges upon the bench have a great opportunity of teaching people their duty to God and man, and it is not out of their province, for the laws of God are to be looked upon as laws of the land. (2.) The *Levites and priests* went *with the princes*, and *taught in Judah, having the book of the law with them*, v. 8, 9. They were teachers by office, (Dent. 33. 10.) it was part of the work for which they had their maintenance; the priests and the Levites had little else to do. But, it seems, they had neglected it, pretended, perhaps, that they could not get the people to hear them. "Well," says Jehoshaphat, "you shall go along with the princes, and they with their authority shall oblige the people to come and hear you; and then, if they be not well instructed, it is your fault." What an abundance of good may be done, when Moses and Aaron thus go hand in hand in the doing of it, when princes with their power, and priests and Levites with their scripture-learning, agree to teach the people the good knowledge of God and their duty! These itinerant judges, and itinerant preachers, together, were instrumental to diffuse a blessed light throughout the cities of Judah. But it is said, *They had the book of the law of the Lord with them*, [1.] For their own direction, that from thence they might fetch all the instructions they gave to the people, and not *teach for doctrines the commandments of men*. [2.] For the conviction of the people, that they might see that they had a divine warrant for what they said, and delivered to them that only which they received from the Lord. Note, Ministers, when they go to teach the people, should have their Bibles with them.

IV. How happy he was in the favour of his God, who signally owned and blessed him. *The Lord was with him*, v. 3. *The word of the Lord was his helper*, so the Chaldee paraphrase. *The Lord established the kingdom in his hand*, v. 5. Those stand firm, that have the presence of God with them. If the *beauty of the Lord our God be upon us*, that will *establish the work of our hands*, and establish us in our integrity.

V. How happy he was, in the affections of his people; (v. 5.) *All Judah brought him presents*, in acknowledgment of his kindness in sending preachers among them. The more there is of true religion among a people, the more there will be of conscientious loyalty. A government, that answers the end of government, will be supported. The effect of the favour both of God, and his kingdom, was, that he had *riches and honour in abundance*. It is undoubtedly true, though few will believe it, that religion and piety are the best friends to outward prosperity. And observe, it follows immediately, *His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord*. Riches and honour in abundance prove to

many a clog and a hinderance in the ways of the Lord, an occasion of pride, security, and sensuality; but it had a quite contrary effect upon Jehoshaphat; his abundance was oil to the wheels of his obedience, and the more he had of the wealth of this world, the more was his heart *lifted up in the ways of the Lord*.

10. And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that *were* round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat. 11. Also *some* of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and tribute-silver; and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he-goats. 12. And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles, and cities of store. 13. And he had much business in the cities of Judah; and the men of war, mighty men of valour, *were* in Jerusalem. 14. And these *are* the numbers of them according to the house of their fathers: Of Judah, the captains of thousands; Adnah the chief, and with him mighty men of valour three hundred thousand. 15. And next to him *was* Jehobanan the captain, and with him two hundred and fourscore thousand. 16. And next him *was* Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself unto the Lord; and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valour. 17. And of Benjamin; Eliada a mighty man of valour, and with him armed men with bow and shield two hundred thousand. 18. And next him *was* Jehozabad, and with him an hundred and four-score thousand ready prepared for the war. 19. These waited on the king, beside *those* whom the king put in the fenced cities throughout all Judah.

We have here a further account of Jehoshaphat's great prosperity, and the flourishing state of his kingdom.

1. He had good interest in the neighbouring princes and nations. Though he was not perhaps so great a soldier as David, and therefore, on this account, their terror; nor so great a scholar as Solomon, and therefore, on this account, yet *the fear of the Lord fell so upon them*, that is, God so influenced and governed their spirits, that they had all a reverence for him, v. 10. And, (1.) *None of them made war against him*. God's good providence so ordered it, that, while the princes and priests were instructing and reforming the country, none of his neighbours gave him any molestation, to take him off from that good work. Thus, when Jacob and his sons were going to worship at Bethel, the terror of God was upon the neighbouring cities, that they *did not pursue after them*, Gen. 35. 5. and see Exod. 34. 24. (2.) Many of them brought presents to him, (v. 11.) to secure his friendship. Perhaps it was a tribute imposed upon them by Asa, who made himself master of the cities of the Philistines, and the tents of the Arabians, ch. 14. 14, 15. With the 7,700 rams, and the same number of he-goats, which the Arabians brought, there was, probably, a proportionable number of ewes and lambs, she-goats and kids.

2. He had very considerable stores laid up in the cities of Judah; he pulled down his barns, and built larger, (v. 12.) *castles and cities of store*, for arms and victuals. He was a man of business, and aimed at the public good in all his undertakings, either to preserve the peace, or prepare for war.

3. He had the militia in good order; it was never in better, since

David modelled it. Five *lord-lieutenants* (if I may so call them) are here named, with the numbers of those under their command, the serviceable men, that were fit for war in their respective districts; three in Judah, and two in Benjamin. It is said of one of these great commanders, *Amasiah*, that he *willingly offered himself unto the Lord*: (v. 16.) not only to the king, to serve him in this post, but to the Lord, to glorify him in it. He was the most eminent among them for religion; he accepted the place, not for the honour, or power, or profit, of it, but for conscience-sake toward God, that he might serve his country. It was usual for great generals then to offer of their spoils to the Lord, (1 Chron. 26. 26.) but this good man offered himself first to the Lord, and then his dedicated things.

The number of the soldiers, under these five generals, amounts to 1,160,000 men. A vast number for so small a compass of ground as Judah's and Benjamin's lot was, to furnish out and maintain. Abijah could bring into the field but 400,000, (ch. 13. 3.) Asa not 600,000, (ch. 14. 8.) yet Jehoshaphat has at command almost 1,200,000. But it must be considered, (1.) That God had promised to make the seed of Abraham like the sand of the sea for number. (2.) There had now been a long peace. (3.) We may suppose that the city of Jerusalem was very much enlarged. (4.) Many were come over to them from the kingdom of Israel, (ch. 15. 19.) which would increase the numbers of the people. (5.) Jehoshaphat was under a special blessing of God, which made his affairs to prosper greatly. The armies, we may suppose, were dispersed all the country over, and each man resided, for the most part, on his own estate; but they appeared often, to be mustered and trained, and were ready at call whenever there was occasion: the commanders waited on the king, (v. 19.) as officers of his court, privy-counsellors, and ministers of state.

But, *lastly*, observe; It was not this formidable army that struck a terror upon the neighbouring nations, that restrained them from attempting any thing against Israel, or obliged them to pay tribute, but the fear of God, which fell upon them when Jehoshaphat reformed his country, and set up a preaching ministry in it, v. 10. The ordinances of God are more the strength and safety of a kingdom, than its military force; its men of God, more than its men of war.

CHAP. XVIII.

The story of this chapter we had, just as it is here related, in the story of the reign of Ahab king of Israel, 1 Kings, 22. While it redounds to the credit of Ahab, more than any thing else recorded of him, that he was in league with so good a man as Jehoshaphat, it is a great blemish in the reign of Jehoshaphat, that he thus connected himself with so bad a man as Ahab. Here is, I. The alliance he contracted with Ahab, v. 1. II. His consent to join with him in his expedition for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead out of the hands of the Syrians, v. 2. 3. III. Their consulting with the prophets, false and true, before they went, v. 4. 27. IV. The success of their expedition. Jehoshaphat hardly escaped, (v. 28. 32.) and Ahab received his death's wound, v. 33, 31.

1. **N**OW Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab. 2. And after *certain* years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up *with him* to Ramoth-gilead. 3. And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-gilead? And he answered him, *I am as thou art*, and my people as thy people; and *we will be* with thee in the war.

Here is, 1. Jehoshaphat growing greater. It was said before, ch. 17. 5. he had *riches and honour in abundance*; and here it is said again: his wealth and honour increased upon him by piety and good management.

But, 2. Not growing wiser, else he would not have joined with Ahab, that degenerate Israelite, who had sold himself to work wickedness. What good could he get by a man that was so bad? What good could he do to a man that was so obstinately an idolater, a persecutor? With him he joined in affinity, that is, married his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter Athaliah, the worst match that ever was made by any of the house of David; I wonder what Jehoshaphat could promise himself by it: (1.) Perhaps pride made the match, as it does many a one, which speeds accordingly. His religion forbade him to marry his son to a daughter of any of the heathen princes that were about him, *Thou shalt not take their daughters to thy sons*: and, having riches and honour in abundance, he thought it a disparagement to marry him to a subject. A king's daughter it must be, and therefore Ahab's, little considering that Jezebel was her mother. (2.) Some think he did it in policy, hoping by this expedient to unite the kingdoms in his son, Ahab perhaps flattering him with hopes that he would make him his heir, when he intended no such thing.

This match drew Jehoshaphat, [1.] Into an intimate familiarity with Ahab; he made him a visit at Samaria. And Ahab, proud of the honour which Jehoshaphat did him, gave him a very splendid entertainment, according to the splendour of those times; he *killed sheep and oxen for him*, plain meat, *in abundance*, v. 2. In this Jehoshaphat did not walk so closely as he should have done in the ways of his father David, for he *hated the congregation of evil-doers, and would not sit with the wicked*, (Ps. 26. 5.) nor desired to *eat of their dainties*, Ps. 141. 4. [2.] Into a league with Ahab against the Syrians. Ahab persuaded him to join forces with him in an expedition for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead, a city in the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan. Did not Ahab know that that, and all the other cities of Israel, did, of right, belong to Jehoshaphat, as heir of the house of David? With what face then could he ask Jehoshaphat to assist him in recovering it for himself, whose title to the crown was usurped and precarious? Yet Jehoshaphat, an easy man, yields to go with him; *I am as thou art*, v. 3. Some men's kindnesses are dangerous, as well as their society infectious. The feast Ahab made for Jehoshaphat was designed only to wheedle him into this expedition. *The kisses of an enemy are deceitful*.

4. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, *Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to-day*. 5. Therefore the king of Israel gathered together of prophets four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for God will deliver *it* into the king's hand. 6. But Jehoshaphat said, *Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might inquire of him?* 7. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, *There is yet one man, by whom we may inquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he never prophesieth good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla*. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. 8. And the king of Israel called for one of *his* officers, and said, Fetch quickly Micaiah the son of Imla. 9. And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah sat either of them on his throne, clothed in *their* robes, and they sat in a void place at the entering in of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. 10. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made him horns of iron, and said, Thus saith the LORD. With these thou shalt push Syria until

they be consumed. 11. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver *it* into the hand of the king. 12. And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake to him, saying, Behold, the words of the prophets *declare good* to the king with one assent; let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of their's, and speak thou good. 13. And Micaiah said, *As* the LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak. 14. And when he was come to the king, the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And he said, Go ye up, and prosper, and they shall be delivered into your hand. 15. And the king said to him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the LORD? 16. Then he said, I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return *therefore*, every man to his house in peace. 17. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee *that* he would not prophesy good unto me, but evil? 18. Again he said, Therefore hear the word of the LORD; I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and *on* his left. 19. And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. 20. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? 21. And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And *the LORD* said, Thou shalt entice *him*, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do *even so*. 22. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil against thee. 23. Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near, and smote Micaiah upon the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee? 24. And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see on that day when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. 25. Then the king of Israel said, Take ye Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; 26. And say, Thus saith the king, Put this *fellow* in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace. 27. And Micaiah said, If thou certainly return in peace, *then* hath not the LORD spoken by me. And he said, Harken, all ye people.

This is almost word for word the same with what we had, 1 Kings, 22. We will not repeat what was there said, nor have we much to add, but may take occasion to think,

1. Of the great duty of acknowledging God in all our ways, *and inquiring at his word*, whatever we undertake. Jehoshaphat was not willing to proceed till he had done this, v. 4. By particular believing prayer, by an unbiassed consulting of the scripture and our own consciences, and by an observant regard to the hints of providence, we may make such inquiries, and very much to our satisfaction.

2. Of the great danger of bad company even to good men; those that have most wisdom, grace, and resolution, cannot be sure that they can converse familiarly with wicked people, and get no hurt by them. Jehoshaphat here, in complaisance to Ahab, sits in his robes, patiently hearing the false prophets speaking lies in the name of the Lord, (v. 9.) can scarcely find in his heart to give him a too mild and gentle reproof for hating a prophet of the Lord, (v. 7.) and dares not rebuke that false prophet who basely abused that faithful seer, nor oppose Ahab who committed him to prison. They who venture among the seats of the scornful, cannot come off without a great deal of the guilt attaching to, at least, the omission of their duty, unless they have such measures of wisdom and courage as few can pretend to.

3. Of the unhappiness of those who are surrounded with flatterers, especially flattering prophets, who cry *peace* to them, and prophesy nothing but smooth things. Thus was Ahab cheated into his ruin, and justly; for he hearkened to such, and preferred them that humoured him, before a good prophet that gave him fair warning of his danger. Those do best for themselves, that give their friends leave, and particularly their ministers, to deal plainly and faithfully with them, and take it not only patiently, but kindly. That counsel is not always best for us that is most pleasing to us.

4. Of the power of Satan, by the divine permission, *in the children of disobedience*. One lying spirit can make 400 lying prophets, and make use of them to deceive Ahab, v. 21. The Devil becomes a murderer by being a liar, and destroys men by deceiving them.

5. Of the justice of God in giving those up to strong delusions, to believe a lie, who will not receive the love of the truth, but rebel against it, v. 21. Let the *lying spirit prevail* to entice those to their ruin that will not be persuaded to their duty and happiness.

6. Of the hard case of faithful ministers, whose lot it has often been to be hated, and persecuted, and ill-treated, for being true to their God, and just and kind to the souls of men. Micaiah, for discharging a good conscience, was buffeted, imprisoned, and condemned to the bread and water of affliction. But he could with assurance appeal to the issue, as all those may do who are persecuted for their faithfulness, v. 27. The day will declare who is in the right, and who in the wrong, when Christ will appear, to the unspeakable consolation of his persecuted people, and the everlasting confusion of their persecutors, who will be made *to see in that day*, (v. 24.) what they will not now believe.

28. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. 29. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle; but put thou on thy robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself; and they went to the battle. 30. Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots that *were* with him, saying, Fight ye not with small or great, save only with the king of Israel. 31. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them *to depart*

from him. 32. For it came to pass, that, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back again from pursuing him. 33. And a *certain* man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: therefore he said to his chariot-man, Turn thine hand, that thou mayest carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. 34. And the battle increased that day: howbeit the king of Israel stayed *himself* up in *his* chariot against the Syrians until the even: and about the time of the sun going down he died.

We have here, 1. Good Jehoshaphat exposing himself in his robes; thereby endangered, and yet delivered. We have reason to think that Ahab, while he pretended friendship, really aimed at Jehoshaphat's life, to take him off, that he might have the management of his successor, who was his son-in-law, else he would never have advised him to enter into the battle with his robes on, which was but to make himself an easy mark to the enemy: and, if he really intended that, it was as unprincipled a piece of treachery as ever man was guilty of, and justly was he himself taken in the pit he digged for his friend. The enemy had soon an eye upon the robes, and vigorously attacked the unwary prince, who, now when it was too late, wished himself in the habit of the poorest soldier, rather than in his princely raiment. He cried out, either to his friends to relieve him; (but Ahab took no care of that:) or to his enemies, to rectify their mistake, and let them know that he was not the king of Israel; or to God, for succour and deliverance; to whom else should he cry? And he found it was not in vain, *The Lord helped him out of his distress, by moving the captains to depart from him, v. 31.* God has all men's hearts in his hand, and turns them as he pleases, contrary to their own first intentions, to serve his purposes. Many are moved unaccountably both to themselves and others, but an invisible power moves them. 2. Wicked Ahab disguising himself, arming himself; thereby, he thought, securing himself, and yet slain, v. 33. No art, no arms, can save those whom God has appointed to ruin. What can hurt those whom God will protect? and what can shelter those whom God will destroy? Jehoshaphat is safe in his robes, Ahab killed in his armour; for the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.

CHAP. XIX.

We have here a further account of the good reign of Jehoshaphat. I. His return in peace to Jerusalem, v. 1. II. The reproof given him for his league with Ahab, and his acting in conjunction with him, v. 2, 3. III. The great care he took, thereupon, to reform his kingdom, v. 4. IV. The instructions he gave to his judges, both those in the country-towns that kept the inferior courts, (v. 5, 6, 7.) and those in Jerusalem that sat in the supreme judicature of the kingdom, v. 8, 11.

1. **A**ND Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. 2. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. 3. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God. 4. And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again through the

people from Beer-sheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the LORD God of their fathers.

Here is,

1. The great favour God shewed to Jehoshaphat,

1. In bringing him back in safety from his dangerous expedition with Ahab, which had like to have cost him dear; (v. 1.) *He returned to his house in peace.* Notice is taken of this, to intimate, (1.) That he fared better than he had expected. He had been in imminent peril, and yet came home in peace. Whenever we return in peace to our houses, we ought to acknowledge God's providence in preserving our going out and our coming in. But, if we have been kept through more than ordinary dangers, we are, in a special manner, bound to be thankful. There was but a step perhaps between us and death, and yet we are alive. (2.) That he fared better than he deserved; he was out of the way of his duty, had been out upon an expedition which he could not well account for to God and his conscience, and yet he returned in peace; for God is not extreme to mark what we do amiss, nor does he withdraw his protection every time we forfeit it. (3.) That he fared better than Ahab king of Israel did, who was brought home slain: though Jehoshaphat had said to Ahab, *I am as thou art*, God distinguished him, for he knows and owes *the way of the righteous*, but *the way of the ungodly shall perish*. Distinguishing mercies lay under peculiarly strong obligations: two kings in the field together, *one taken and the other left*, one brought home in blood, the other in peace.

2. In sending him a reproof for his affinity with Ahab. It is a great mercy to be made sensible of our faults, and to be told, in time, wherein we have erred, that we may repent, and amend the error, before it be too late. The prophet by whom the reproof is sent, is Jehu the son of Hanani: the father was an eminent prophet in the last reign, as appeared by Asa's putting him in the stocks for his plain dealing; yet the son was not afraid to reprove another king. St. Paul would have his son Timothy not only not discouraged, but animated, by his sufferings, 2 Tim. 3. 11, 14.

(1.) He tells them plainly, that he had done very ill in joining with Ahab; "*Shouldest thou, a godly man, help the ungodly, give them a hand of fellowship, and lend them an assisting hand?*" Or, "*Shouldest thou love them that hate the Lord? wilt thou lay those in thy bosom whom God beholds afar off?*" It is the black character of wicked people, that they are *haters of God*, Rom. 1. 30. Idolaters are so reputed in the second commandment: and therefore it is not for those that love God to take delight in them, or contract an intimacy with them. *Do not I hate those*, says David, *that hate thee?* Ps. 139. 21, 22. Those whom the grace of God has dignified, ought not to debase themselves. Let God's people be of God's mind.

(2.) That God was displeased with him for doing this: "*There is wrath upon thee, from before the Lord, and thou must, by repentance, make thy peace with him, or it will be the worse for thee.*" He did so, and God's anger was turned away. Yet his trouble, as recorded in the next chapter, was a rebuke to him for meddling with strife that belonged not to him. If he be so fond of war, he shall have enough of it. And the great mischief which his seed after him fell into by the house of Ahab, was the just punishment of his affinity with that house.

(3.) Yet he takes notice of that which was praise-worthy, as it is proper for us to do when we give a reproof; (v. 3.) "*There are good things found in thee; and therefore, though God be displeased with thee, he does not, he will not, cast thee off.*" His abolishing idolatry with a heart fixed for God, and engaged to seek him, was a good thing, which God accepted of, and would have him go on with, notwithstanding.

II. The return of duty which Jehoshaphat made to God for this favour. He took the reproof well, was not wroth with the seer, as his father was, but submitted. *Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness.* See what effect the reproof had upon him.

1. He *dwelt at Jerusalem*; (v. 4.) minded his own business at home, and would not expose himself by making any more such visits to Ahab. *Rebuke a wise man, and he will be yet wiser*, and will take warning, Prov. 9. 8, 9. 2. To atone (as I may say) for the visit he made to Ahab, he made a pious profitable visitation of his own kingdom; he *went out through the people* in his own person, from Beer-sheba in the south to mount Ephraim in the north, and *brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers*, that is, did all he could towards it. (1.) By what the prophet said, he perceived that his former attempts for reformation were well-pleasing to God, and therefore he revived them, and did what was then left undone. It is good when commendations thus quicken us to our duty, and when the more we are praised for doing well, the more vigorous we are in well-doing. (2.) Perhaps he found that his late affinity with the idolatrous house of Ahab, and kingdom of Israel, had had a bad influence upon his own kingdom; many, we may suppose, were emboldened to revolt to idolatry, when they saw even their reforming king so intimate with idolaters; and therefore he thought himself doubly obliged to do all he could to restore them. If we truly repent of our sin, we shall do our utmost to repair the damage we have any way done by it to religion, or the souls of others. We are particularly concerned to recover those that have fallen into sin, or been hardened in it, by our example.

5. And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city, 6. And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. 7. Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for *there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts*. 8. Moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites, and of the priests, and of the chief of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the LORD, and for controversies, when they returned to Jerusalem. 9. And he charged them, saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of the LORD, faithfully, and with a perfect heart. 10. And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the LORD, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not trespass. 11. And, behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the LORD; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters: also the Levites shall be officers before you. Deal courageously, and the LORD shall be with the good.

Jehoshaphat having done what he could to make his people good, he is here providing, if possible, to keep them so by the influence of a settled magistracy. He had sent preachers among them, to instruct them, (ch. 17. 7. 9.) and that provision did well; but now he saw it further requisite to send judges among them, to see the laws put in execution, and to be a terror to evil doers. It is probable that there were judges up and down the country before, but either they neglected their business, or the people slighted them, so that the end of the institution was not answered; and therefore it was necessary it should be new modelled, new

men employed, and a new charge given them. That is it which is here done.

1. He erected inferior courts of justice in the several cities of the kingdom, v. 5. The judges of these courts were to keep the people in the worship of God, to punish the violations of the law, and to decide controversies between man and man. Here is the charge he gave them; (v. 6.) in which we have,

1. The means he prescribes to them for the keeping of them close to their duty; and these are two. (1.) Great caution and circumspection; *Take heed what ye do*, v. 6. And again, *Take heed and do it*; (v. 7.) mind your business; take heed of making any mistakes; be afraid of misunderstanding any point of law, or the matter of fact." Judges, of all men, have need to be cautious, because so much depends upon their taking a thing right. (2.) Great piety and religion: *Let the fear of God be upon you*; that will be a restraint upon you to keep you from doing wrong, (Nch. 5. 15. Gen. 42. 18.) and an engagement to you to be active in doing the duty of your place." Let destruction from God be a terror to them, as Job speaks, (Job, 31. 23.) and then they will be a terror to none but evil doers.

2. The motives he would have them consider, to engage them to faithfulness; there are three, all taken from God. (1.) That from him they had their commission; his ministers they were. The powers that be are ordained by him, and for him. *Ye judge not for man, but for the Lord*; your business is to glorify him, and serve the interests of his kingdom among men." (2.) That his eye was upon them; *He is with you in the judgment*, to take notice what you do, and call you to an account if you do amiss." (3.) That he is the great Example of justice to all magistrates: *There is no iniquity with him*, no bribery, nor respect of persons. Magistrates are called *gods*, and therefore must endeavour to resemble him.

II. He erected a supreme court at Jerusalem, which was advised with, and appealed to, in all the difficult causes that occurred in the inferior courts, and which gave judgment upon demurrers, (to speak in the language of our own law,) special verdicts, and writs of error. This court sat in Jerusalem, for *there was set the thrones of judgment*, there they would be under the inspection of the king himself. Observe,

1. The causes cognizable in this court; and they were of two kinds, as with us. (1.) Pleas of the crown, called here *the judgment of the Lord*, because the law of God was the law of the realm. All criminals were charged with the breach of some part of his law, and were said to offend against his peace, his crown, and dignity. (2.) Common pleas, between party and party, called here *controversies*, (v. 8.) and *causes of their brethren*, (v. 10.) differences *between blood and blood*. This refers to Deut. 17. 8. between the blood of the person slain and the blood of the manslayer. Since the revolt of the ten tribes, all the cities of refuge, except Hebron, belonged to the kingdom of Israel; and therefore, we may suppose, the courts of the temple, or the horns of the altar, were chiefly used as sanctuaries in that case, and hence the trial of homicides was reserved for the court at Jerusalem. If the inferior judges did not agree about the sense of any law or commandment, any statute or judgment, this court must determine the controversy.

2. The judges of this court were some of *the Levites and priests* that were most learned in the law, eminent for wisdom, and of approved integrity, and some of *the chief of the fathers of Israel*; *peers of the realm*, as I may call them, or persons of age and experience, that had been men of business, who would be the most competent judges of matters of fact, as the priests and Levites were of the sense of the law.

3. The two chiefs, or presidents, of this court. Amariah, the high priest, was to preside in ecclesiastical causes, to direct the court, and be the mouth of it, or perhaps to be last consulted in cases which the judges themselves doubted of. Zebadiah, the prime-minister of that state, was to preside in all civil causes, v. 11. Thus there are diversities of gifts and operations, but all from the same Spirit, and for the good of the body. Some understand

best the matters of the Lord, others the king's matters; neither can say to the other, *I have no need of thee*, for God's Israel has need of both; and as every one has received the gift, so let him minister the same. Blessed be God both for magistrates and ministers; scribes and statesmen; men of books, and men of business.

4. The inferior officers of the court; some of the Levites (such as had not abilities to qualify them for judges) *shall be officers before you*, v. 11. They were to bring causes into the court, and to see the sentence of the judges executed. And these hands and feet were as necessary in their places, as the eyes and heads, (the judges,) in their's.

5. The charge which the king gave them. (1.) They must see to it that they acted from a good principle; they must do all in the fear of the Lord, setting him always before them, and then they would act faithfully, conscientiously, and with a perfect upright heart, v. 9. (2.) They must make it their great and constant care to prevent sin, to warn the people that they trespass not against the Lord, inspire them with a dread of sin, not only as hurtful to themselves and the public peace, but as an offence to God, and that which would bring wrath upon the people if they committed it, and upon the magistrates if they did not punish it. *This do, and ye shall not trespass*; this implies that those who have power in their hands, contract the guilt of sin themselves, if they do not use their power for the preventing and restraining of sin in others. "You trespass if you do not keep them from trespassing." (3.) They must act with resolution. "Deal courageously, and fear not the face of man; be bold and daring in the discharge of your duty, and, whoever is against you, God will protect you, *The Lord shall be with the good*." Wherever he finds a good man, a good magistrate, he will be found a good God.

CHAP. XX.

We have here, I. The great danger and distress that Jehoshaphat and his kingdom were in from a foreign invasion, v. 1. 2. II. The pious course he took for their safety, by fasting, and praying, and seeking God, v. 3. 13. III. The assurance which God, by a prophet, immediately gave them of victory, v. 14. 17. IV. Their thankful believing reception of those assurances, v. 18. 21. V. The defeat which God gave to their enemies, thereupon, v. 22. 25. VI. A solemn thanksgiving which they kept for their victory, and for the happy consequences of it, v. 26. 30. VII. The conclusion of the reign of Jehoshaphat, not without some blemishes, v. 31. 37.

1. **I**T came to pass after this also, *that* the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them *other* beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. 2. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazon-tamar, which is En-gedi. 3. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 4. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. 5. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, 6. And said, O LORD God of our fathers, *art* not thou God in heaven? and rulest *not* thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand *is there not* power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? 7. *Art* not thou our God, *who* didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and

gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? 8. And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, 9. If, *when* evil cometh upon us, *as* the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. 10. And now, behold, the children of Ammon, and Moab, and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; 11. Behold, *I say*, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. 12. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee. 13. And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

We left Jehoshaphat, in the foregoing chapter, well-employed in reforming his kingdom, and providing for the due administration of justice, and support of religion, in it, and expected nothing but to hear of the peace and prosperity of his reign; but here we have him in distress, which distress, however, was followed by such a glorious deliverance as was an abundant recompence for his piety. If we meet with trouble in the way of duty, we may believe it is that God may have an opportunity of shewing us so much the more of his marvellous loving-kindness. We have here,

I. A formidable invasion of Jehoshaphat's kingdom by the Moabites and Ammonites, and their auxiliaries, v. 1. Jehoshaphat was surprised with the intelligence of it, when the enemy had already entered his country, v. 2. What pretence they had to quarrel with Jehoshaphat, does not appear; they are said to come from beyond the sea, meaning the dead sea, where Sodom had stood. It should seem, they marched through those of the ten tribes that lay beyond Jordan, and they gave them passage through their borders; so ungrateful were they to Jehoshaphat, who had lately put his hand to help them in recovering Ramoth-gilead. Several nations joined in this confederacy, but especially the children of Lot, whom the rest helped, Ps. 83. 6. 8. The neighbouring nations had feared Jehoshaphat, (ch. 17. 10.) but perhaps his affinity with Ahab had lessened him in their esteem, and they had some intimation that his God was displeased with him for it, which they fancied would give them an opportunity to make a prey of his kingdom.

II. The preparation Jehoshaphat made against the invaders. No mention is made of his mustering his forces, which yet it is most probable that he did, for God must be trusted in the use of means. But his great care was, to obtain the favour of God, and secure him on his side, which perhaps he was the more solicitous about, because he had been lately told that there was *wrath upon him from before the Lord*, ch. 19. 2. But he is of the mind of his father David, If we must be corrected, yet let us not fall into the hands of man. 1. He feared; consciousness of guilt made him fear; those that have least sin are most sensible of it: the surprise added to the fright. Holy fear is a spur to prayer and preparation, Heb. 11. 7. 2. He set himself to seek the Lord, and, in the first place, to make him his friend. They that would seek the Lord so as to find him, and to find favour with him, must set themselves to seek him, must do it with fixedness of thought, with sincerity of intention, and with the utmost

vigour and resolution to continue seeking him. 3. He *proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah*, appointed a day of humiliation and prayer, that they might join together in confessing their sins, and *asking help of the Lord*. Fasting from bodily refreshments, upon such extraordinary occasions, is a token of self-judging for the sins we have committed, (we own ourselves unworthy of the bread we eat, and that God might justly withhold it from us,) and of self-denial for the future; fasting for sin implies a resolution to fast from it, though it has been to us as a sweet morsel. Magistrates are to call the people to the duty of fasting and prayer upon such occasions, that it may be a national act, and so may obtain national mercies. 4. The people readily assembled out of all the cities of Judah in the court of the temple, to join in prayer, (v. 4.) and they *stood before the Lord*, as beggars at his door, with their wives and children; they and their families were in danger, and therefore they bring them with them to seek the Lord. "Lord, we are indeed a provoking people, that deserve to be abandoned to ruin; but here are little ones that are innocent, let not them perish in the storm." Nineveh was spared for the sake of the little ones, Jonah, 4. 2. The place they met in was the house of the Lord, before the new court, which was perhaps lately added to the former courts, that, as some think, which was called the court of the women; thus they came within reach of that gracious promise which God made, in answer to Solomon's prayer, (ch. 7. 15.) *Mine ears shall be attent to the prayer that is made in this place*. Jehoshaphat himself was the mouth of the congregation to God, and did not devolve the work upon his chaplains. Though the kings were forbidden to burn incense, they were allowed to pray and preach; as Solomon, and Jehoshaphat here.

The prayer Jehoshaphat prayed, upon this occasion, is here recorded, or part of it; and an excellent prayer it is.

(1.) He acknowledges the sovereign dominion of the Divine Providence; he gives to God the glory of it, and takes to himself the comfort of it, v. 6. "*Art not thou God in heaven?*" No doubt, thou art, which none of the gods of the heathen are; make it to appear then. Is not thy dominion supreme over kings themselves, and universal over all kingdoms, even those of the heathen that know thee not? Controut these heathen then; set bounds to their daring, threatening insults. Is there not in thy hand the power and might which none is able to withstand? Lord, exert it on our behalf. Glorify thine own omnipotence."

(2.) He lays hold on their covenant-relation to God, and interest in him. "Thou that art God in heaven art the God of our fathers, (v. 6.) and our God, v. 7. Whom should we seek to, whom should we trust to, for relief, but to the God we have chosen and served?"

(3.) He shews the title they had to this good land they were now in possession of; an indisputable title it was, *Thou gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend*. This is referred to, James, 2. 23. to shew the honour of Abraham, that *he was called the friend of God*; we are his seed; and hope to be beloved for the father's sake; Rom. 11. 28. Deut. 7. 8, 9. "We hold this land by grant from thee. Lord, maintain thine own grant, and warrant it against all unjust claims. Suffer us not to be cast out of thy possession, we are tenants, thou art our landlord, wilt thou not hold thine own?" v. 11. They that use what they have for God, may comfortably hope that he will secure it to them.

(4.) He makes mention of the sanctuary, the temple they had built for God's name, (v. 8.) not as if that merited anything at God's hand, for *of his own they gave him*, but it was such a token of God's favourable presence with them, that they had promised themselves he would hear and help them, when, in their distress, they cried to him before that house, v. 8, 9. "Lord, when it was built it was intended for the encouragement of our faith at such a time as this. Here thy name is, here we are; Lord, help us, for the glory of thy name."

(5.) He pleads the ingratitude and injustice of his enemies; "We are such as it will be thy glory to appear for; they are such as it will be thy glory to appear against; for," [1.] "They ill

requite our ancient kindnesses. Thou wouldest not let Israel invade them, nor give them any disturbance; (Deut. 2. 5, 9, 19.) Meddle not with the Edomites, distress not the Moabites, come not nigh the children of Ammon, no, not though they provoke you; yet now see how they invade us." We may comfortably appeal to God against those that render us evil for good. [2.] "They break in upon our ancient rights. They come to cast us out of our possessions, and seize our land for themselves; O our God, wilt thou not judge them? v. 12. Wilt thou not give sentence against them, and execute it upon them?" The justice of God is the refuge of those that are wronged.

(6.) He professes his entire dependence upon God for deliverance; though he had a great army on foot, and well disciplined, yet, he said, "*We have no might against this great company*, none without thee, none that we can expect any thing from, without thy special presence and blessing, none to boast of, none to trust to; but our eyes are upon thee, we rely upon thee, and from thee is all our expectation. The disease seems desperate, we know not what to do, we are quite at a loss, in a great strait; but this is a sovereign remedy, our eyes are upon thee, an eye of acknowledgment and humble submission, an eye of faith and entire dependence, an eye of desire and hearty prayer, an eye of hope and patient expectation. In thee, O God, do we put our trust; our souls wait on thee."

14. Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation; 15. And he said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid, nor dismayed, by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not your's, but God's. 16. To-morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. 17. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to-morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you. 19. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD. 19. And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korbites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

We have here God's gracious answer to Jehoshaphat's prayer; and it was a speedy answer; *While he was yet speaking, God heard*: before the congregation was dismissed, they had assurance given them that they should be victorious, for it is never in vain to seek God.

1. The spirit of prophecy came upon a Levite that was present, not in any place of eminency, but *in the midst of the congregation*, v. 14. The spirit, like the wind, *blows where, and on whom, he listeth*. He was of the sons of Asaph, and therefore one of the singers; on that office God would put an honour. Whether he was a prophet before this or no, is uncertain, most probably, he was, which would make him the more regarded. There needed no sign, the thing itself was to be performed the very next day, and that would be confirmation enough to his prophecy.

2. He encouraged them to trust in God, though the danger was

very threatening, v. 15. "*Be not afraid*; you have admitted fear enough to bring you to God, do not now admit that which will drive you from him again. *The battle is not yours*; it is not in your own strength, nor for your own cause, that you engage, *the battle is God's*, he does, and will, as you have desired, interest himself in the cause."

3. He gives them intelligence of the motions of the enemy, and orders them to march toward them, with particular directions where they should find them. *To-morrow*, (the day after the last,) *go ye down against them*, v. 16, 17. It is fit that he who commands the deliverance should command those for whom the deliverance is to be wrought, and give the necessary orders, both for time and place.

4. He assures them, that they should be, not the glorious instruments, but the joyful spectators, of the total defeat of the enemy. "You shall not need to strike a stroke, the work shall be done to your hands, only stand still and see it," v. 17. As Moses said to Israel at the Red sea, (Exod. 14. 13.) "*God is with you*, who is able to do his work himself, and will do it. If the battle be his, the victory shall be his too." Let but the Christian soldier go out against his spiritual enemies, and the God of peace will *tread them under his feet*, and make him *more than a conqueror*.

5. Jehoshaphat and his people received these assurances with faith, reverence, and thankfulness. (1.) They bowed their heads, Jehoshaphat first, and then all the people *fell before the Lord, and worshipped*; receiving with a holy awe and fear of God this token of his favour, and saying with faith, *Be it unto us according to thy word*. (2.) They lifted up their voices in praise to God, v. 19. An active faith can give thanks for a promise, though it be not yet performed, knowing that God's bonds are as good as ready money; *God hath spoken in his holiness, I will rejoice*, Ps. 60. 5.

20. And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. 21. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy *endureth* for ever. 22. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. 23. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy *them*: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. 24. And when Judah came toward the watch-tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they *were* dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped. 25. And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it

was so much. 26. And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day. 27. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the fore-front of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies. 28. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries, and harps, and trumpets, unto the house of the LORD. 29. And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of *those* countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel. 30. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about.

We have here the foregoing prayer answered, and the foregoing promise performed, in the total overthrow of the enemies' forces, and the triumph (for so it was rather than a victory) of Jehoshaphat's forces over them.

I. Never was army drawn out to the field of battle so as Jehoshaphat's army was. He had soldiers *ready prepared for war*, (ch. 17. 18.) but here is no notice taken of their military equipment, their swords or spears, their shields or bows. But Jehoshaphat took care, 1. That faith should be their armour; as they went forth, instead of calling them to handle their arms, and stand to them, to keep ranks, observe orders, and fight valiantly, he bids them *believe in the Lord God*, and give credit to his word in the mouth of his prophets, then they should *prosper and be established*, v. 20. That is true courage which faith inspires a man with; nor will any thing contribute more to the establishing of the heart, in shaking times, than a firm belief of the power, and mercy, and promise, of God. The heart is *fixed*, that thus *trusteth in the Lord*, and is kept in perfect peace. In our spiritual conflicts, this is the victory, this is the prosperity, even our faith. 2. That praise and thanksgiving should be their vanguard, v. 21. Jehoshaphat called a council of war, and it was resolved to appoint *singers to go out before the army*, to charge in the front, who had nothing else to do but to praise God, to praise his holiness, which is his beauty; to praise him as they did in the temple, that beauty of holiness, with that ancient and good doxology, which eternity itself will not wear thread-bare, *Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever*. By this strange advance toward the field of battle, Jehoshaphat intended to express his firm reliance upon the word of God, (which enabled him to triumph before the battle,) to animate his own soldiers, to confound the enemy, and to engage God on their side; for praise pleases God better than all *burnt-offering and sacrifice*.

II. Never was army so unaccountably destroyed as that of the enemy; not by thunder, or hail, or the sword of an angel, not by dint of sword, or strength of arm, or any surprising alarm, like that which Gideon gave the Midianites; but the Lord set ambushments against them, either hosts of angels, or, as Bishop Patrick thinks, their own ambushments, whom God struck with such confusion, that they fell upon their own friends as if they had been enemies, and *every one helped to destroy another*, so that *none escaped*. This God did, *when his people began to sing and to praise*, (v. 22.) for he delights to furnish those with *matter* for praise that have *hearts* for it. We read of his being *angry at the prayers of his people*, (Ps. 80. 4.) but never at their *praises*. When they did but begin the work of praise, God perfected the work of their deliverance. What ground there was for their jealousies one of another, does not appear, perhaps there was none; but so it was, that the Ammonites and the Moabites fell foul upon the Edomites, and cut them off, and then they fell out with one another, and cut

one another off, *v. 23*. Thus God often makes wicked people instruments of destruction to one another; and what alliances can be so firm as to keep those together whom God designs to dash in pieces one against another? See the mischievous consequences of divisions which neither of the contending parties can give any good account of the reason of. Those are wretchedly infatuated, to their ruin, that fall foul upon their friends as if they were enemies.

III. Never was spoil so cheerfully divided, for Jehoshaphat's army had nothing to do beside; the rest was done for them. When they came to the view of this vast army, instead of finding living men to fight with, they found them all dead men, and their carcases spread as dung upon the face of the earth, *v. 24*. See how rich God is in mercy to them that call upon him in truth, and how often he out-does the prayers and expectations of his people. Jehoshaphat and his people prayed to be delivered from being spoiled by the enemy; and God not only did that, but enriched them with the spoil of the enemy. The plunder of the field was very great, and very rich; they found precious jewels with the dead bodies, which yet could not save them from being loathsome carcases; the spoil *was more than they could carry away at once*, and they were *three days in gathering it*, *v. 25*. Now it appeared what was God's end in bringing this great army against Judah; it was to humble them and prove them, that he might *do them good in their latter end*. It seemed, at first, a disturbance to their reformation, but it proves a recompence of it.

IV. Never was victory celebrated with more solemn and enlarged thanksgivings. 1. They kept a day of praise in the camp, before they drew their forces out of the field. Many thanksgivings, no doubt, were offered up to God immediately; but on the fourth day they assembled in a valley, where they blessed God with so much zeal and fervency, that that day's work gave a name to the place, the valley of *Berachah*, that is, *of blessing*, *v. 26*. The remembrance of this work of wonder was hereby perpetuated for the encouragement of succeeding generations to trust in God. 2. Yet they did not think this enough, but came in solemn procession, all in a body, and Jehoshaphat at the head of them, to Jerusalem, that the country, as they passed along, might join with them in their praises, and that they might give thanks for the mercy there where they had by prayer obtained it, *in the house of the Lord*, *v. 27, 28*. Praising God must not be the work of a day only; but our praises, when we have received mercy, must be often repeated, as our prayers were, when we were in the pursuit of it. Every day we must bless God; as long as we live, and while we have any being, we must praise him, spending our time in that work in which we hope to spend our eternity. Public mercies call for public acknowledgments, *in the courts of the Lord's house*, *Ps. 115. 19*.

V. Never did victory turn to a better account than this; for, 1. Jehoshaphat's kingdom was hereby made to look very great and considerable, abroad, *v. 29*. When they heard that God fought thus for Israel, they could not but say, *There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun*, and, *Happy art thou, O Israel!* It begat in the neighbours a reverence of God, and a cautious fear of doing any injury to his people. It is dangerous fighting against those who have God with them. It was made very easy and quiet at home, *v. 30*. They were quiet among themselves. Those that were displeased at the destroying of the images and groves, were now satisfied, and obliged to own, that, since the God of Israel could deliver after this sort, he only is to be worshipped, and in that way only which himself has appointed. They were also quiet from the fear of insults from their neighbours, God having given them rest round about. And if he give rest, who can give disturbance?

31. And Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah: *he was thirty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the*

daughter of Shilli. 32. And he walked in the way of Asa his father, and departed not from it, doing *that which was right in the sight of the LORD*. 33. Howbeit the high places were not taken away; for as yet the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers. 34. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they *are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani, who is mentioned in the books of the kings of Israel*. 35. And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: 36. And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Ezion-geber. 37. Then Eliezer, the son of Dodavah of Mareshah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

We are now drawing toward the close of the history of Jehoshaphat's reign, for a further account of which, they who lived when this book was published were referred to an authentic history of it, written by Jehu the prophet, (*ch. 19. 2.*) which was then extant, *v. 34*. This was the general character of his reign, that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; kept close to the worship of God himself, and did what he could to keep his people close to it. But two things are here to be lamented.

1. The people still retained a partiality for the high places, *v. 33*. Those that were erected to the honour of strange gods were taken away, (*ch. 17. 6.*) but those where the true God was worshipped, being less culpable, were thought allowable, and Jehoshaphat was loath to disoblige the people so far as to take them away, for as yet they had not prepared their hearts to the God of their fathers. They complied with Jehoshaphat's reformation, because they could not, for shame, do otherwise, but they were not hearty in it, did not direct their hearts to God in it, did not act in it from any good principle, nor with any zeal or resolution: and the best magistrates cannot bring to pass what they would, in reformation, when the people are cool in it.

2. Jehoshaphat himself still retained a partiality for the house of Ahab, because he had married his son to a daughter of that family, though he had been plainly reproved for it, and had like to have smarted for it. He saw and knew that Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, did very wickedly, and therefore could not expect to prosper; yet he joined himself with him, not in war, as with his father, but in trade, became his partner in an East-India fleet bound for Ophir, *v. 35, 36*. There is an emphasis laid upon the time, *after this*, after God had done such great things for him, without any such scandalous and pernicious confederacies, given him not only victory, but wealth; yet, after this, to go and join himself with a wicked king, was very ungrateful. *After God had given him such a deliverance as this, should he again break God's commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations?* What could he expect but that *God should be angry with him?* Ezra, 9. 13, 14. Yet he sends to him, to shew him his error, and bring him to repentance, (1.) By a prophet, who foretold the blasting of his project, *v. 37*. And, (2.) By a storm, which brake the ships in the port before they set sail, by which he was warned to break off his alliance with Ahaziah, and, it seems, he took the warning; for when Ahaziah afterward pressed him to join with him, he *would not*, 1 Kings, 22. 49. See how pernicious a thing it is to join in friendship and society with evil-doers, it is a hard matter to break off from it. A man may much better keep himself from being taken in the snare, than recover himself out of it.

CHAP. XXI.

Never surely did any kingdom change its king so much for the worse as Judah did, when Jehoram, one of the vilest, succeeded Jehoshaphat, one of the best. Thus were they punished for not making a better use of Jehoshaphat's good government, and their disaffectedness (or coldness, at least) to his reformation, ch. 20. 33. They that knew not how to value a good king, are justly plagued with a bad one. Here is, I. Jehoram's elevation to the throne, v. 1. 3. II. The wicked course he took to establish himself in it, by the murder of his brethren, v. 4. III. The idolatries, and other wickedness, he was guilty of, v. 5, 6, 11. IV. The prophecy of Elijah against him, v. 12. 15. V. The judgments of God upon him, in the revolt of his subjects from him, (v. 8, 10.) and the success of his enemies against him, v. 16, 17. VI. His miserable sickness, and inglorious exit, v. 18. 20. VII. The preservation of the house of David notwithstanding, v. 7.

1. **N**OW Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. 2. And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these *were* the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. 3. And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he *was* the first-born. 4. Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and *divers* also of the princes of Israel. 5. Jehoram *was* thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 6. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought *that which was* evil in the eyes of the LORD. 7. Howbeit the LORD would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons for ever. 8. In his days, the Edomites revolted from under the dominion of Judah, and made themselves a king. 9. Then Jehoram went forth with his princes, and all his chariots with him: and he rose up by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him in, and the captains of the chariots. 10. So the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. The same time *also* did Libnah revolt from under his hand; because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers. 11. Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah *thereto*.

We find here,

I. That Jehoshaphat was a very careful indulgent father to Jehoram. He had many sons, who are here named, (v. 2.) and it is said (v. 13.) that they were better than Jehoram, had a great deal more wisdom and virtue, and lived up to their education, which he went counter to. They were very hopeful, and any of them more fit for the crown than he; and yet, because he was the

first-born, (v. 3.) his father secured the kingdom to him, and portioned his brethren, and disposed of them so as that they would be easy, and give him no disturbance; as Abraham, when he made Isaac his heir, dismissed his other children with gifts. Herein Jehoshaphat was very kind and fair to his son, which might have obliged him to be respectful to him, and tread in the steps of so good a father. But it is no new thing for the children that have been most indulged by their parents to be least dutiful to them. Whether, in doing this, he acted wisely and well for his people, and was just to them, I cannot say. His birth-right entitled him to a double portion of his father's estate, Deut. 21. 17. But if he appeared utterly unfit for government, (the end of which is the good of the people,) and likely to undo all that his father had done, it had been better perhaps to have set him aside, and taken the next that was hopeful, and not inclined, as he was, to idolatry. Power is a sacred thing, with which men may either do much good or much hurt; and therefore *Detur digniori—Let him that deserves it, have it. Salus populi suprema lex—The security of the people is the first consideration.*

II. That Jehoram was a most barbarous brother to his father's sons. As soon as he had settled himself in the throne, he slew all his brethren with the sword, either by false accusation, under colour of law, or rather by assassination; by some wicked hand or other he got them all murdered; pretending (it is likely) that he could not think himself safe in the government till they were taken out of the way. Those that mean ill themselves, are commonly, without cause, jealous of those about them. The wicked fear where no fear is, or pretend to do so, in order to conceal their malice. Jehoram, it is likely, hated his brethren, and slew them, for the same reason that Cain hated Abel, and slew him, because their piety condemned his impiety, and won them that esteem with the people, which he had lost. With them he slew divers of the princes of Israel, who adhered to them, or were likely to avenge their death. The princes of Judah, those who had taught the good knowledge of the Lord, (ch. 17. 7.) are here called *princes of Israel*, as before, *fathers of Israel*, (ch. 19. 8.) because they were Israelites indeed, men of integrity. The sword which the good father had put into their hands, this wicked son sheathed in their bowels. Woe unto him that thus *foundeth a kingdom in blood*; (Hab. 2. 12.) it will prove a foundation that will sink the superstructure.

III. That Jehoram was a most wicked king, who corrupted and debauched his kingdom, and ruined the reformation that his good father and grandfather had carried on; he *walked in the way of the house of Ahab*, (v. 6.) made high places, which the people were of themselves too forward to make, and did his utmost to set up idolatry again, v. 11. 1. As for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, where he kept his court, he easily drew them into his spiritual whoredom; he *caused them to commit fornication*, seducing them to *eat things sacrificed to idols*, Rev. 2. 20. 2. The country people seem to have been brought to it with more difficulty; but they that would not be corrupted by flatteries, were driven by force, to partake in his abominable idolatries; he *compelled Judah thereto*. He used that power for the destruction of the church, which was given him for the edification of it.

IV. That, when he forsook God and his worship, his subjects withdrew from their allegiance to him. 1. Some of the provinces abroad did so, that were tributaries to him. The Edomites revolted, (v. 8.) and though he chastised them, (v. 9.) yet he could not reduce them, v. 10. 2. One of the cities of his own kingdom did so: Libnah revolted, (v. 10.) and set up for a free state, as of old it had a king of its own, Josh. 12. 15. And the reason is here given, not only why God permitted it, but why they did it; they shook off his government, because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers, was become an idolater and a worshipper of false gods, and they could not continue subject to him, without some danger of being themselves also drawn away from God and their duty. While he adhered to God, they adhered to him; but when he cast God off, they cast him off. Whether this reason will justify them in their revolt or no, it will justify God's providence which ordered it so.

V. That yet God was tender of his covenant with the house of David, and therefore would not destroy the royal family, though it was so wretchedly corrupted and degenerated, v. 7. These things we had before, 2 Kings, 8. 19. 22. The tenor of the covenant was, that David's seed should be visited for their transgressions, but the covenant should never be broken, Ps. 89. 30, &c.

12. And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, 13. But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: 14. Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: 15. And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day. 16. Moreover the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians: 17. And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. 18. And after all this the LORD smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. 19. And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. 20. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.

Here we have,

I. A warning from God sent to Jehoram by a writing from Elijah the prophet. By this it appears that Jehoram came to the throne, and shewed himself what he was, before Elijah's translation. It is true, we find Elisha attending Jehoshaphat, and described as pouring water on the hands of Elijah, after the story of Elijah's translation; (2 Kings, 3. 11.) but that might be, and that description might be given of him, while Elijah was yet on earth: and it is certain that that history is put out of its proper place, for we read of Jehoshaphat's death, and Jehoram's coming to the crown, before we read of Elijah's translation, 1 Kings, 22. 50. We will suppose that the time of his departure was at hand, so that he could not go in person to Jehoram; but that, hearing of his great wickedness in murdering his brethren, he left this writing, it is probable, with Elisha, to be sent him by the first opportunity, that it might either be a means to reclaim him, or a witness against him, that he was fairly told what would be in the end hereof. The message is sent him in the name of the Lord God of David his father, (v. 12.) upbraiding him with his relation to David, as that which, though it was his honour, was an aggravation of his degeneracy.

1. His crimes are plainly charged upon him—His departure from the good ways of God, in which he had been educated, and which he had been directed and encouraged to walk in by the example of his good father and grandfather, who lived and died in peace and honour, v. 12—His conformity to the ways of the house of Ahab, that impious scandalous family—His setting up and enforcing idolatry in his kingdom—And his murdering his brethren because they were better than himself, v. 13. These are the heads of the indictment against him.

2. Judgment is given against him for these crimes; he is plainly told, that his sin should certainly be the ruin, (1.) Of his kingdom and family, v. 14. "With a heavy stroke, even that of war and captivity, will the Lord smite thy people and thy children," &c. Bad men bring God's judgments upon all about them. His people justly suffer, because they had complied with his idolatry, and his wives, because they had drawn him to it. (2.) Of his health and life; "Thou shalt have great sickness, very painful and tedious, and, at last, mortal," v. 15. This he is warned of before, that his blood might be upon his own head, the watchman having delivered his soul; and that when these things, so particularly foretold, came to pass, it might appear that they did not come by chance, but as the punishment of his sins, and were so intended. And now, if, as he had learned of Ahab to do wickedly, he had but learned even of Ahab to humble himself, upon the receipt of this threatening message from Elijah; if, like him, (1 Kings, 21. 27.) he had rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted, who knows but, like him, he might have obtained, at least, a reprieve? But it does not appear that he took any notice of it, he threw it by as waste-paper: Elijah seemed to him as one that mocked. But they that will not believe shall feel.

11. The threatened judgments brought upon him, because he slighted the warning. No marvel that hardened sinners are not frightened from sin, and to repentance, by the threatenings of misery in another world, which is future and out of sight, when the certain prospect of misery in this world, the sinking of their estates, and the ruin of their healths, will not restrain them from vicious courses.

1. See Jehoram here stripped of all his comforts. God stirred up the spirit of his neighbours against him, who had loved and feared Jehoshaphat, but hated and despised him, looking upon it as a scandalous thing for a nation to change their gods. Some occasion or other they took to quarrel with him, invaded his country, but, as it should seem, fought neither against small nor great, but the king's house only; they made directly to that, and carried away all the substance that was found in it. No mention is made of their carrying any away captive, but the king's wives, and his sons, v. 17. Thus God made it evident that the controversy was with him and his house. Here it is only said, They carried away his sons; but we find, ch. 22. 1. that they slew them all: blood for blood. He had slain all his brethren, to strengthen himself; and now, all his sons are slain, but one, and so he is weakened. If he had not been of the house of David, that one had not escaped; when Jeroboam's house, and Baasha's, and Ahab's, were destroyed, there was none left; but David's house must not be wholly extirpated, though sometimes wretchedly degenerated, because a blessing was in it; no less a blessing than that of the Messiah.

2. See him tormented with sore diseases, and of long continuance, such as were threatened in the law against those that would not fear the Lord their God, Deut. 28. 58, 59. His disease was very grievous, it lay in his bowels; with that there was a complication of other sore diseases: it was very tedious, two years he continued ill, and could get no relief; for the disease was incurable, though he was in the prime of life, not 40 years old. Asa, whose heart was perfect with God, though in some instances he stepped aside, was diseased only in his feet; but Jehoram, whose heart was wicked, was struck in his inwards; and he, that had no bowels of compassion toward his brethren, was so plagued in his bowels that they fell out. Even good men, and those who are very dear to God, may be afflicted with diseases of this kind; but to them they are fatherly chastisements, and by the support of divine consolation

the soul may dwell at ease even then when the body lies in pain. These sore diseases seized him just after his house was plundered, and his wives and children carried away. (1.) Perhaps his grief and anguish of mind for that calamity might occasion his sickness, or, at least, contribute to the heightening of it. (2.) By this sickness he was disabled to do any thing for the recovery of them, or the revenge of the injury done him. (3.) It added, no doubt, very much to his grief, in his sickness, that he wanted the society of his wives and children, and that all the substance of his house was carried away. To be sick and poor, sick and solitary, but especially to be sick and in sin, sick and under the curse of God, sick and destitute of grace to bear it with, no inward comfort to balance it with—is a most deplorable case.

3. See him buried in disgrace. He reigned but eight years, and then departed without being desired, v. 20. Nobody valued him while he lived, none lamented him when he died, but wished no greater loss might ever come to Jerusalem. To shew what little affection or respect they had for him, they would not bury him in the sepulchres of the kings, as thinking him unworthy to be numbered among them, who had governed so ill. The excluding of his body from the sepulchres of his fathers might be ordered by Providence, as an intimation of the everlasting separation of the souls of the wicked, after death, from the spirits of just men. This further disgrace they put upon him, that they made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers, v. 19. His memory was far from being sweet and precious to them, and therefore they did not honour it with any sweet odours or precious spices; though we may suppose that his dead body, after so long and loathsome a disease, needed something to perfume it. The generality of the people, though prone enough to idolatry, yet had no true kindness for their idolatrous kings. Wickedness and profaneness make men despicable, even in the eyes of those who have but little religion themselves, while natural conscience itself often gives honour to those who are truly pious. They that despise God shall be lightly esteemed, as Jehoram was.

CHAP. XXII.

We read, in the foregoing chapter, of the carrying away of Jehoram's sons and his wives; but here we find one of his sons, and one of his wives, left, his son Ahaziah, and his wife Athaliah, both reserved to be the shame and plague of his family. I. Ahaziah was the shame of it as a partaker, 1. In the sin, and, 2. In the destruction, of the house of Ahab, v. 1. 9. II. Athaliah was the plague of it, for she destroyed all the seed-royal, and usurped the throne, v. 10. 12.

1. **A**ND the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead: for the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the eldest. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned. 2. Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. 3. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. 4. Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab: for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction. 5. He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead: and the Syrians smote Joram. 6. And he returned to be healed in Jezreel, because of the wounds which were given him at Ramah, when he fought

with Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah, the son of Jehoram king of Judah, went down to see Jehoram, the son of Ahab, at Jezreel, because he was sick. 7. And the destruction of Ahaziah was of God by coming to Joram: for when he was come, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab. 8. And it came to pass, that, when Jehu was executing judgment upon the house of Ahab, and found the princes of Judah, and the sons of the brethren of Ahaziah, that ministered to Ahaziah, he slew them. 9. And he sought Ahaziah: and they caught him, (for he was hid in Samaria,) and brought him to Jehu: and when they had slain him, they buried him: Because, said they, he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the LORD with all his heart. So the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom.

We have here an account of the reign of Ahaziah, a short reign, (of one year only,) yet long enough, unless it had been better. He was called *Jeho-ahaz*, ch. 21. 17. here *Ahaz-iah*, which is the same name, and of the same signification, only the words of which it is compounded are transposed. He is here said to be 42 years old when he began to reign, (v. 2.) which could not be, for his father, his immediate predecessor, was but 40 when he died; and it is said, 2 Kings, 8. 26. that he was 22 years old when he began to reign. Some make this 42 to be the age of his mother Athaliah, for in the original it is, *he was the son of 42 years*, that is, the son of a mother that was of that age; and justly is her age put for his, in reproach to him, because she managed him, and did what she would; she, in effect, reigned, and he had little more than the title of king. Many good expositors are ready to allow that this, with some few more such difficulties, arises from the mistake of some transcriber, who put 42 for 22, and the copies by which the error should have been corrected might be lost. Many ancient translations read it here 22. Few books are now printed without some *errata*, yet the authors do not therefore disown them, nor are the errors of the press imputed to the author, but the candid reader amends them by the sense, or by comparing them with some other part of the work, as we may easily do this.

The history of Ahaziah's reign is briefly summed up in two clauses, v. 3, 4. That his mother and her relations were his counsellors to do wickedly, and it was to his destruction.

1. He did wickedly. Though by a special providence of God he was preserved alive, when all his brethren were slain, and reserved for the crown, notwithstanding he was the youngest of them; though the inhabitants of Jerusalem, when they had buried his father ingloriously, made him king, in hopes he would take warning by that not to tread in his steps, but would do better for himself and his kingdom; yet he was not influenced by the favours either of God or man, but walked in the way of the house of Ahab, did evil in the sight of the Lord, like them; (v. 3, 4.) that is, He worshipped the same false gods that they worshipped, Baalim and Ashtaroah, supposing, (as the learned Bishop Patrick thinks,) that by these dæmons, as mediators, they might have easier access to the supreme Numen, the God of Israel, or that these they might resort to at all times and for all matters, as being nearer at hand, and not of so high a dignity, but of a middle nature, between the immortal God and mortal men—deified heroes; so they worshipped them as the church of Rome does saints and angels. That was sufficiently bad; but I wish there was no reason to suspect worse; I am apprehensive that they

looked upon Jehovah, the God of their fathers, to be altogether such a one as these Baalim, and them to be as great and as good as he, nay, upon one account, more eligible, inasmuch as these Baalim encouraged all manner of lewdness and sensuality, which the God of Israel strictly forbade.

II. He was counselled by his mother, and her relations, to do so. *She was his counsellor, (v.3.) and so were they, after the death of his father, v.4.* While his father lived, he took care to keep him to idolatry; but when he was dead, the house of Abah feared let his father's miserable end should deter him from it, and therefore they were very industrious to keep him close to it, and to make him *seven times more a child of hell than themselves.* The counsel of the ungodly is the ruin of many young persons, when they are setting out in the world. This young prince might have had better advice, if he had pleased, from the princes and the judges, the priests, and Levites, that had been famous in his good grandfather's time for teaching the knowledge of God; but the house of Ahab humoured him, and *he walked after their counsel,* gave himself up to be led by them, and did just as they would have him. Thus do they debase and destroy themselves, that forsake the divine guidance.

III. He was counselled by them to his destruction. So it proved. Those that counsel us to do wickedly, counsel us to our destruction; while they fawn and flatter, and pretend friendship, they are really our worst enemies. They that debauch young men, destroy them. 1. It was bad enough that they exposed him to the sword of the Syrians, drawing him in to join with Joram king of Israel, in an expedition to Ramoth-gilead, where Joram was wounded; an expedition that was not for his honour. Those that give us bad counsel in the affairs of religion, if regarded by us, may justly be made of God our counsellors, to do foolishly in our own affairs. But that was not all. 2. By engaging him in an intimacy with Joram king of Israel, they involved him in the common ruin of the house of Ahab. He came on a visit to Joram, (v.6.) just at the time that Jehu was executing the judgment of God upon that idolatrous family, and so was cut off with them, v.7..9.

Here, (1.) See, and dread, the mischief of bad company, and of joining in with sinners. If not the infection, yet let the destruction, be feared; *Come out from Babylon,* that falling house, Rev.18.4. (2.) See, and acknowledge, the justice of God. His providence brought Ahaziah, just at this fatal juncture, to see Joram, that he might fall with him, and be taken as in a snare. This we had an account of before, 2Kings,9.27,28. It is here added, that he was decently buried, (not as Jehoram, whose dead body was cast into Naboth's vineyard, 2Kings,9.26.) and the reason given is, because he was the son, that is, the grandson, of good Jehoshaphat, *who sought the Lord with his heart.* Thus is he remembered with honour long after his death, and some respect shewed even to his degenerate unworthy seed for his sake. *The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot.*

10. But when Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah. 11. But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bed-chamber. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of king Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest, (for she was the sister of Ahaziah,) hid him from Athaliah, so that she slew him not. 12. And he was with them hid in the house of God six years: and Athaliah reigned over the land.

We have here what we had before, 2Kings,11.1, &c.

1. A wicked woman endeavouring to destroy the house of David, that she might set up a throne for herself upon the ruins of it. Athaliah barbarously cut off all the seed-royal, (v.10.) perhaps intending to transmit the crown of Judah after herself to some of her own relations, that, though her family was cut off in Israel by Jehu, it might be planted in Judah.

2. A good woman effectually preserving it from being wholly extirpated. One of the late king's sons, a child of a year old, was rescued from among the dead, and saved alive by the care of Jehoiada's wife, (v.11,12.) that a lamp might be ordained for God's anointed; for no word of God shall fall to the ground.

CHAP. XXIII.

Six years bloody Athaliah had tyrannised; in this chapter, we have her deposed and slain, and Joash, the rightful heir, enthroned. We had the account before, nearly as it is here related, 2Kings,11.4, &c. I. Jehoiada prepared the people for the king, acquainted them with his design, armed them, and appointed them their posts, v.1..10. II. He produced the king to the people, crowned and anointed him, v.11. III. He slew the usurper, v.12..15. IV. He reformed the kingdom, re-established religion, and restored the civil government, v.16..21.

1. **A**ND in the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took the captains of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, and Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, and Azariah the son of Obed, and Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, into covenant with him. 2. And they went about in Judah, and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. 3. And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he said unto them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the Lord hath said of the sons of David. 4. This is the thing that ye shall do; A third part of you entering on the sabbath, of the priest and of the Levites, shall be porters of the doors; 5. And a third part shall be at the king's house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation: and all the people shall be in the courts of the house of the LORD. 6. But let none come into the house of the LORD, save the priests, and they that minister of the Levites; they shall go in, for they are holy: but all the people shall keep the watch of the LORD. 7. And the Levites shall compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand; and whosoever else cometh into the house, he shall be put to death: but be ye with the king when he cometh in, and when he goeth out. 8. So the Levites and all Judah did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest had commanded, and took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that were to go out on the sabbath: for Jehoiada the priest dismissed not the courses. 9. Moreover Jehoiada the priest delivered to the captains of hundreds spears, and bucklers, and shields, that had been king David's, which were in the house of God

10. And he set all the people, every man having his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, along by the altar and the temple, by the king round about. 11. Then they brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown, and gave him the testimony, and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, God save the king.

We may well imagine the bad posture of affairs in Jerusalem, during Athaliah's six years' usurpation, and may wonder that God permitted it, and his people bore it, so long. But, after such a dark and tedious night, the returning day in this revolution was the brighter, and the more welcome; the continuance of David's seed and throne was what God had sworn by his holiness, (Ps. 89. 36.) and an interruption was no defeasance; the stream of government here runs again in the right channel. The instrument and chief manager of the restoration is Jehoiada.

1. He here appears to be a man of great conduct; that reserved the young prince for so many years, till he was fit to appear in public, and till the nation was grown weary of the usurper; prepared his work beforehand, and then effected it with admirable secrecy and expedition. When God has work to do, he will qualify and animate men for it.

2. A man of great interest. The captains joined with him, v. 1. The Levites, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, came, at his call, to Jerusalem, (v. 2.) and were there ready to receive his orders. See what a command wisdom and virtue will give men. *The Levites and all Judah did as Jehoiada commanded*, (v. 8.) and, which is strange, all that were intrusted with the secret kept their own counsel till it was executed. Thus *the words of the wise are heard in quiet*, Eccl. 9. 17.

3. A man of great faith. It was not only common equity, (much less his wife's relation to the royal family, that put him upon this undertaking,) but a regard to the word of God, and the divine entail of the crown, v. 3. *The king's son shall reign*, must reign, *as the Lord hath said*. His eye to the promise, and dependence upon that, added a great deal of glory to this undertaking.

4. A man of great religion. This matter was to be done in the temple, which might occasion some breach of rule, and the necessity of the case might be thought to excuse it; but he gave special order that none of the people should come into the house of the Lord, but the priests and Levites only, who were holy, upon pain of death, v. 6, 7. Never let sacred things be profaned, no not for the support of civil rights.

5. A man of great resolution. When he had undertaken this business, he went through with it, *brought out the king, crowned him, and gave him the testimony*, v. 11. He ventured his head, but it was in a good cause, and therefore he went on boldly. It is here said that his sons joined with him in anointing the young king, one of whom, it is likely, was that Zechariah whom Joash afterward put to death for reproving him, (ch. 24. 20.) which was so much the more ungrateful, because he bore a willing part in anointing him.

12. Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of the Lord: 13. And she looked, and, behold, the king stood at his pillar at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of music, and such as taught to sing praise. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, treason. 14. Then Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of

hundreds that were set over the host, and said unto them, Have her forth of the ranges: and whoso followeth her, let him be slain with the sword. For the priest said, Slay her not in the house of the Lord. 15. So they laid hands on her; and when she was come to the entering of the horse-gate by the king's house, they slew her there. 16. And Jehoiada made a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the Lord's people. 17. Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. 18. Also Jehoiada appointed the offices of the house of the Lord by the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had distributed in the house of the Lord, to offer the burnt-offerings of the Lord, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was ordained by David. 19. And he set the porters at the gates of the house of the Lord, that none which was unclean in any thing should enter in. 20. And he took the captains of hundreds, and the nobles, and the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and brought down the king from the house of the Lord: and they came through the high gate into the king's house, and set the king upon the throne of the kingdom. 21. And all the people of the land rejoiced: and the city was quiet, after that they had slain Athaliah with the sword.

Here is, 1. The people pleased, v. 12, 13. When the king stood at his pillar, whose right it was to stand there, *all the people of the land rejoiced to see a rod sprung out of the stem of Jesse*, Isa. 11. 1. When it seemed a withered root in a dry ground, to see what they despaired of ever seeing, a king of the house of David; what a pleasing surprise was it to them! They ran in transports of joy to see this sight, praised the king, and praised God, for they had with them such as *taught to sing praise*.

2. Athaliah slain. She ran herself upon the point of the sword of justice; for, imagining her interest much better than it was, she ventured *into the house of the Lord*, at that time, and cried, *Treason, treason!* But nob. cy seconded her, or sided with her: *the pride of her heart deceived her*; she thought all her own, whereas none were cordially so. Jehoiada, as protector in the king's minority, ordered her to be slain, (v. 14.) which was done immediately; (v. 15.) only care was taken that she should not be *slain in the house of the Lord*; that sacred place must not be so far disgraced, nor that wicked woman so far honoured.

3. The original contract agreed to, v. 16. In the Kings it was said, Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord, the people, and the king, 2 Kings, 11. 17. Here it is said to be between *himself*, the people, and the king; for he, as God's priest, was his representative in this transaction, or a sort of mediator, as Moses was. The indenture was tripartite, but the true intent of the whole was, that *they should be the Lord's people*. God covenanted, by Jehoiada, to take them for his people; the king and people covenanted with him to be his; and then the king covenanted with the people to govern them *as the people of God*, and the people with the king to be subject to him *as the Lord's people*, in his fear, and for his sake. Let us look upon ourselves and one another as *the Lord's people*, and it will have a powerful

influence upon us in the discharge of all our duty, both to God and man.

4. Baal destroyed, v. 17. They would not have done half their work, if they had destroyed the usurper of the king's right only, and not the usurper of God's right; if they had asserted the honour of the throne, and not that of the altar. The greatest grievance of Athaliah's reign was, the bringing in of the worship of Baal, and supporting of that; therefore that must be abolished in the first place. Down with Baal's houses, his altars, his images; down with them all, and let the blood of his priests be mingled with his sacrifices; for God had commanded that seducers to idolatry should be put to death, Deut. 13. 5, 6.

5. The temple service revived, v. 18, 19. This had been neglected in the last reigns, the priest and people wanting either power or zeal to keep it up, when they had princes that were disaffected to it. But Jehoiada put the offices of the house of the Lord into the proper course and proper hands again, which, in the late times, had been disturbed and invaded. (1.) He appointed the priests to their courses, for the due offering of sacrifices, according to the law of Moses. (2.) The singers to their's, according to the appointment of David. The sacrifices (it should seem) were offered with rejoicing and singing; and well they might be; we joy in God when we receive the atonement, Rom. 5. 11. (3.) The porters were put in their respective posts, as David ordered, (v. 19.) and their office was to take care that none who were, upon any account, ceremonially unclean, should be admitted into the courts of the temple.

6. The civil government re-established, v. 20. They brought the king in state to his own palace, and set him upon the throne of the kingdom, to give law, and give judgment, either in his own person, or by Jehoiada his tutor. Thus was this happy revolution perfected; the generality of the people rejoiced in it, the rest were quiet, and made no opposition, v. 21. When the Son of David is enthroned in the soul, all is quiet, and springs of joy are opened.

CHAP. XXIV.

We have here the history of the reign of Joash, the progress, and especially the period, of which was not of a piece with its beginning, nor shone with so much lustre. How wonderfully he was preserved for the throne, and placed in it, we read before; now here we are told how he began in the spirit, but ended in the flesh. I. In the beginning of his time, while Jehoiada lived, he did well; particularly, he took care to put the temple in good repair, v. 1. .14. II. In the latter end of his time, after Jehoiada's death, he apostatized from God, and his apostacy was his ruin. 1. He set up the worship of Baal again, (v. 15. .18.) though warned to the contrary, v. 19. 2. He put Zechariah the prophet to death, because he reproved him for it, v. 20. .22. 3. The judgments of God came upon him for it. The Syrians invaded him, v. 23. .24. He was struck with sore diseases; his own servants conspired against him, and slew him; and, as a mark of infamy upon him, he was not buried in the burying-place of the kings, v. 25. .27.

1. **JOASH** was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Zibeah of Beer-sheba. 2. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest. 3. And Jehoiada took for him two wives, and he begat sons and daughters. 4. And it came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the LORD. 5. And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not. 6. And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah

and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the LORD, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness? 7. For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim. 8. And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the LORD. 9. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring into the LORD the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness. 10. And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end. 11. Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance. 12. And the king and Jehoiada gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the LORD, and also such as wrought iron and brass to mend the house of the LORD. 13. So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it. 14. And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, whereof were made vessels for the house of the LORD, even vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt-offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada.

This account of Joash's good beginnings we had, as it stands here, 2 Kings, 12. 1, &c. though the latter part of this chapter, concerning his apostacy, we had little of there. What is good in men we should take all occasions to speak of, and often repeat it; what is evil we should make mention of but sparingly, and no more than is needful.

We shall here only observe,

1. That it is a happy thing for young people, when they are setting out in the world, to be under the direction of those that are wise and good, and faithful to them, as Joash was under the influence of Jehoiada, during whose time he did that which was right. Let those that are young reckon it a blessing to them, and not a burthen and cheek upon them, to have those with them that will caution them against that which is evil, and advise and quicken them to that which is good: and let them reckon it not a mark of weakness and subjection, but of wisdom and discretion, to hearken to such. He that will not be counselled, cannot be helped. It is especially prudent for young people to take advice in their marriages, as Joash did, who left it to his guardian to choose him his wives, because Jezebel and Athaliah had been such plagues, v. 3. That is a turn of life which often proves either the making or marring of young people, and therefore should be attended to with great care.

2. Men may go far in the external performances of religion, and keep long to them, merely by the power of their education, and the influence of their friends, who yet have no hearty affection for divine things, nor any inward relish of them. Foreign inducements may push men on to that which is good, who are not actuated by a living principle of grace in their hearts.

3. In the shows of devotion, it is possible that those who have only the form of godliness, may outstrip those who have the power of it. Joash is more solicitous and more zealous about the repair of the temple than Jehoiada himself, whom he reproves for his remissness in that matter, v. 6. It is easier to *build* temples than to *be* temples to God.

4. The repairing of churches is a good work, which all in their places should promote, for the decency and conveniency of religious assemblies. The learned tell us, that, in the Christian church, anciently, part of the tithes were applied that way.

5. Many a good work would be done that now lies undone, if there were but a few active men to stir in it and put it forward. When Joash found that money did not come in as he expected, one way, he tried another way, and that answered the intention. Many have honesty enough to follow, that have not zeal enough to lead, in that which is good. The throwing of money into a chest, through a hole in the lid of it, was a way that had not been used before, and perhaps the very novelty of the thing made it a successful expedient for the raising of money; a great deal was thrown in, and with a great deal of cheerfulness; they all rejoiced, v. 10. An invention to please people's humour may sometimes bring them to their duty. Wisdom herein is profitable to direct.

6. Faithfulness is the greatest praise, and will be the greatest comfort, of those that are intrusted with public treasure, or employed in public business. The king and Jehoiada faithfully paid the money to the workmen, who faithfully did the work, v. 12, 13.

15. But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old *was he* when he died. 16. And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house. 17. Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. 18. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. 19. Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear. 20. And the spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. 21. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD. 22. Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon *it*, and require *it*. 23. And it came to pass at the end of the year, *that* the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jeru-

salem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. 24. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash. 25. And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings. 26. And these are they that conspired against him; Zabad the son of Shimeath an Ammonitess, and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith a Moabitess. 27. Now *concerning* his sons, and the greatness of the burthens *laid* upon him, and the repairing of the house of God, behold, they *are* written in the story of the book of the kings. And Amaziah his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a sad account of the degeneracy and apostacy of Joash. God had done great things for him; he had done something for God; but he proved ungrateful to his God, and false to the engagements he had laid himself under to him. *How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!* Here we find,

1. The occasions of his apostacy: when he did that which was right, it was *not with a perfect heart*; he never was sincere, never acted from a principle, but in compliance to Jehoiada, who had helped him to the crown, and because he had been protected in the temple, and rose upon the ruins of idolatry. And therefore when the wind turned, he turned with it.

1. His good counsellor left him, and was by death removed from him. It was a mercy to him and his kingdom that Jehoiada lived so long; one hundred and thirty years, v. 15. By which it appears that he was born in Solomon's time, and had lived six entire reigns before this. It was an encouragement to him to go on in that good way which Jehoiada had trained him up in, to see what honour was done to Jehoiada at his death: they buried him among the kings, with this honourable encomium, perhaps it was part of the inscription on his grave-stone, *that he had done good in Israel*. Judah is called *Israel*, because, the other tribes having revolted from God, they only were Israelites indeed. Note, It is the greatest honour to do good in our generations; and those who do *that which is good, shall have praise of the same*. He had done good toward God; not that any man's goodness can extend unto him, but he had done good toward his house, in reviving the temple-service, ch. 23. 8. Note, Those do the greatest good to their country, that lay out themselves in their places to promote religion. Well, Jehoiada finished his course with honour; but the little religion that Joash had was all buried in his grave, and, after his death, both king and kingdom miserably degenerated. See how much one head may sustain, and what a great judgment to any prince or people, the death of godly, zealous, useful, men is. See how necessary it is that, as our Saviour speaks, we *have salt in ourselves*, that we act in religion from an inward principle, which will carry us on through all changes. Then the loss of a parent, a minister, a friend, will not be the losing of our religion.

2. Bad counsellors got about him, insinuated themselves into his affections, wheedled him, flattered him, *made obeisance to him*, and, instead of condoling, congratulated, him upon the death of his old tutor, as his release from the discipline he had been so long under, unworthy a man, a king. They tell him he must be priest-ridden no longer, *he is now discharged from grave lessons*

and restraints, he may do as he pleases: and (would you think it?) the princes of *Judah* were the men that were so industrious to debauch him, *v. 17*. His father and grandfather were corrupted by the house of *Ahab*, from whom no better could be expected. But that the princes of *Judah* should be seducers to their king, was very sad. But they that incline to the counsels of the ungodly will never want ungodly counsellors. They made obeisance to the king, flattered him into an opinion of his absolute power, promised to stand by him in making his royal will and pleasure pass for a law, any divine precept or institution to the contrary in any wise notwithstanding. And he hearkened to them: their discourse pleased him, and was more agreeable than Jehoiada's dictates used to be. Princes, and inferior people, have been many a time thus flattered into their ruin by those who have promised them liberty and dignity, but who have really brought them into the greatest servitude and disgrace.

II. The apostasy itself; (*v. 18*.) *They left the house of God, and served groves and idols*. The princes, it is likely, had a request to the king, which they tell him they durst not offer while Jehoiada lived; but now they hope it will give no offence; it is, that they may set up the groves and idols again, which were thrown down in the beginning of his reign, for they hate to be always confined to the dull old-fashioned service of the temple. And he not only gave them leave to do it themselves, but he joined with them. The king and princes, who, a while ago, were repairing the temple, now forsook the temple; who had pulled down groves and idols, now themselves served them. So inconstant a thing is man, and so little confidence to be put in him!

III. The aggravations of this apostasy, and the additions of guilt to it. God sent prophets to them, (*v. 19*.) to reprove them for their wickedness, and to tell them what would be in the end thereof, and so to bring them again unto the Lord. It is the work of ministers to bring people, not to themselves, but to God; to bring those again to him, who have gone a whoring from him. In the most degenerate times, God left not himself without witness; though they had dealt very disingenuously with God, yet he sent prophets to them, to convince and instruct them, and to assure them that they should find favour with him, if yet they would return: for he would rather sinners should turn and live than go on and die; and they that perish shall be left inexcusable. The prophets did their part, they testified against them; but few or none received their testimony.

1. They slighted all the prophets, they would not give ear; they were so strangely wedded to their idols, that no reproofs, warnings, threatenings, or any of the various methods which the prophets took to convince them, would reclaim them. Few would hear them, fewer would heed them, but fewest of all would believe them, or be governed by them.

2. They slew one of the most eminent; *Zechariah the son of Jehoiada*, and perhaps others. Concerning him, observe,

(1.) The message which he delivered to them in the name of God, *v. 20*. The people were assembled in the court of the temple, (for they had not quite left it,) on occasion, probably, of some solemn feast, when this *Zechariah*, being filled with the spirit of prophecy, and known (it is likely) to be a prophet, stood up in some of the desks that were in the court of the priests, and very plainly, but without any provoking language, told the people of their sin, and what would be the consequences of it. He does not impeach any particular persons, nor predict any particular judgments, as sometimes the prophets did, but, as inoffensively as possible, reminded them of what was written in the law. Let them but look into their Bibles, and there they would find, [1.] The precept they broke; "*Ye transgress the commandments of the Lord, you know you do so in serving groves and idols; and why will you so offend God, and wrong yourselves?*" [2.] The penalty they incurred; "*You know, if the word of God be true, you cannot prosper in this evil way; never expect to do ill, and fare well. Nay, you find already, that because you have forsaken the Lord, he hath forsaken you, as he told you he would,*" *Deut. 29. 25.—31. 16, 17*. This is the work of ministers, by the

word of God, as a lamp and a light, to discover the sin of men, and expound the providences of God.

(2.) The barbarous treatment they gave him for his kindness and faithfulness in delivering this message to them, *v. 21*. By the conspiracy of the princes, or some of their party, and by the commandment of the king, who thought himself affronted by this fair warning, they stoned him to death immediately; not, under colour of law, accusing him as a blasphemer, a traitor, or a false prophet, but in a popular tumult, in the court of the house of the Lord—as horrid a piece of wickedness as perhaps any we read of in all the history of the kings. The person was sacred, a priest; the place sacred, the court of the temple, the inner court, between the porch and the altar; the message yet more sacred, we have reason to think that they knew it came from the spirit of prophecy; the reproof was just, the warning fair, both backed with scripture, and the delivery very gentle and tender; and yet so impudently and daringly do they defy God himself, that nothing less than the blood of the prophet can satisfy their indignation at the prophecy. *Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and tremble, O earth*, that ever such a villany should be committed by men, by Israelites, in contempt and violation of every thing that is just, honourable, and sacred! That a king, a king in covenant with God, should command the murder of one whom it was his office to protect and countenance! The Jews say, There were seven transgressions in this; for they killed a priest, a prophet, a judge, they shed innocent blood, polluted the court of the temple, the sabbath, and the day of expiation; for, on that day, their tradition says, this happened.

(3.) The aggravation of this sin; that this *Zechariah*, who suffered martyrdom for his faithfulness to God and his country, was the son of *Jehoiada*, who had done so much good in Israel, and particularly had been as a father to *Joash*, *v. 22*. The affront done by it to God, and the contempt put on religion, are not so particularly taken notice of, as the ingratitude there was in it to the memory of *Jehoiada*. He remembered not the kindness of the father, but slew the son for doing his duty, and what the father would have done, if he had been there. Call a man ungrateful, and you can call him no worse.

(4.) The dying martyr's prophetic imprecation of vengeance upon his murderers; *The Lord look upon it, and require it!* This came not from a spirit of revenge, but a spirit of prophecy; *He will require it*. This would be the continual cry of the blood they shed, as *Abel's* blood cried against *Cain*: "Let the God to whom vengeance belongs demand blood for blood." He will do it, for he is righteous. This precious blood was reckoned for quickly in the judgments that came upon this apostate prince; it came into the account afterward, in the destruction of *Jerusalem* by the *Chaldeans*: their mis-using of the prophets was that which brought upon them ruin without remedy; (*ch. 36. 16*.) nay, our Saviour makes the persecutors of him and his gospel answerable for the blood of this *Zechariah*; so loud, so long, does the blood of the martyrs cry: (see *Matth. 23. 35*.) such as this is the cry of the souls under the altar; (*Rev. 6. 10*.) *How long ere thou avengest our blood?* For it shall not always go unrevenged.

Lastly, The judgments of God which came upon *Joash* for this aggravated wickedness of his.

1. A small army of *Syrians* made themselves masters of *Jerusalem*, destroyed the princes, plundered the city, and sent the spoil of it to *Damascus*, *v. 23, 24*. God's people, while they kept in with God, had often been conquerors, when the enemy had the advantage of the greater number; but now, on the contrary, an inconsiderable handful of *Syrians* routed a very great host of *Israelites*, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers; and then they were not only put upon the level with their enemies, but opposed them with the utmost disadvantage; for their God not only departed from them, but turned to be their enemy, and fought against them. The *Syrians* were employed as instruments in God's hand to execute judgments against *Joash*, though they little thought so, *Isa. 10. 6, 7*. and see *Deut. 32. 30*.

2. God smote him with great diseases, of body, or mind, or both; either like his grandfather, (*ch. 21. 18*.) or like *Saul*, an evil

spirit from God troubling him. While he was plagued with the Syrians, he thought, that, if he could but get clear of them, he should do well enough. But, before they departed from him, God smote him with diseases. If vengeance pursue men, the end of one trouble will but be the beginning of another.

3. His own servants conspired against him. Perhaps he began to hope his disease would be cured, he was but a middle-aged man, and might recover it; but *he that cometh up out of the pit, shall fall into the snare*; when he thought he should escape death by sickness, he met it by the sword; they slew him in his bed, for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada; by which it should seem that he did not only slay Zechariah, but others of the sons of Jehoiada for his sake. Perhaps, they that slew him *intended* to take vengeance for that blood; this, however, was what God intended, in permitting them to do it. Those that drink the blood of the saints shall have their own blood given them to drink, for they are worthy. The regicides are here named, (v. 26.) and it is observable that the mothers of them both were foreigners, one an Ammonitess, and the other a Moabitess. The idolatrous kings, it is likely, countenanced those marriages which the law prohibited for the prevention of idolatry; and see how they resulted in their own destruction.

4. His people would not bury him in the sepulchres of the kings, because he had stained his honour by his mal-administration. *Let him not be written with the righteous*, Ps. 69. 28. These judgments are called the *burthens laid upon him*, (v. 27.) for the wrath of God is a heavy burthen, too heavy for any man to bear. Or, it may be meant of threatenings denounced against him by the prophets, for those are called *burthens*; usually God sets some special marks of his displeasure upon apostates, in this life, for warning to all to remember Lot's wife.

CHAP. XXV.

Amaziah's reign is recorded in this chapter; none of the worst, and yet far from good. Most of the passages in this chapter we had before more briefly related, 2 Kings, 14. Here we find Amaziah, I. A just revenger of his father's death, v. 1. 4. II. An obedient observer of the command of God, v. 5. 10. III. A cruel conqueror of the Edomites, v. 11. 13. IV. A foolish worshipper of the gods of Edom, and impatient of reproof for it, v. 14. 16. V. Rashly challenging the king of Israel, and smarting for his rashness, v. 17. 24. And, lastly, ending his days ingloriously, v. 26. 28.

1. **A**MAZIAH was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 2. And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart. 3. Now it came it to pass, when the kingdom was established to him, that he slew his servants that had killed the king his father. 4. But he slew not their children, but *did as it is* written in the law in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin. 5. Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together, and made them captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, according to the houses of *their* fathers, throughout all Judah and Benjamin: and he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them three hundred thousand choice *men*, able to go forth to war, that could handle spear and shield. 6. He hired also an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for an hundred talents of

silver. 7. But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the LORD is not with Israel, *to wit, with all the children of Ephraim*. 8. But if thou wilt go, do *it*, be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for God hath power to help, and to cast down. 9. And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The LORD is able to give thee much more than this. 10. Then Amaziah separated them, *to wit*, the army that was come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again: wherefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in great anger. 11. And Amaziah strengthened himself, and led forth his people, and went to the valley of salt, and smote of the children of Seir ten thousand. 12. And *other* ten thousand left alive did the children of Judah carry away captive, and brought them unto the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, that they were broken all in pieces. 13. But the soldiers of the army which Amaziah sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell upon the cities of Judah, from Samaria, even unto Beth-horon, and smote three thousand of them, and took much spoil.

Here is,

I. The general character of Amaziah, *He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*, worshipped the true God, kept the temple-service a-going, and countenanced religion in his kingdom; but he did not do it *with a perfect heart*, (v. 2.) that is, he was not a man of serious piety or devotion himself, nor had he any zeal for the exercises of religion. He was no enemy to it, but a cool and indifferent friend. Such is the character of too many in this Laodicean age: they do that which is good, but not with the heart, not with a perfect heart.

II. A necessary piece of justice which he did upon the traitors that murdered his father; he put them to death, v. 3. Though we should suppose they intended to avenge on their king the death of the prophet, as was intimated, *ch. 24. 25.* yet that would by no means justify their wickedness; for *they* were not the avengers, but presumptuously took God's work out of his hands. And therefore Amaziah did what became him, in calling them to an account for it; but kept within the rule of that law which forbade the putting of the children to death for the parents' sin, v. 4.

III. An expedition of his against the Edomites, who, some time ago, had revolted from under the dominion of Judah, to which he attempted to reduce them. Observe,

1. The great preparation he made for this expedition. (1.) He mustered his own forces, and marshalled them, (v. 5.) and found Judah and Benjamin in all but 300,000 men, that were fit for war, whereas, in Jehoshaphat's time, 50 or 60 years before, they were four times as many; sin weakens a people, diminishes them, dispirits them, and lessens their number and figure. (2.) He hired auxiliary troops out of the kingdom of Israel, v. 6. Finding his own kingdom defective in men, he thought to make it up with his money, and therefore took into his pay 100,000 Israelites. If he had advised with any of his prophets before he did this, or had but considered how little any of his ancestors got by their alliances with Israel, he would not have this to undo again. But rashness makes work for repentance.

2. The command which God sent him, by a prophet, to dismiss out of his service the forces of Israel, v. 7, 8. He would not have him call in any assistance at all, it looked like distrust of God; if he made sure of his presence, the army he had of his own was sufficient; but, particularly, he must not take in *their* assistance, *for the Lord is not with the children of Ephraim, because they are not with him*, but worship the calves. This was a good reason why he should not make use of them, because he could not depend upon them to do him any service. What good could be expected from them that had not God with them, nor his blessing upon their undertakings? It is comfortable to employ those who, we have reason to hope, have an interest in heaven; and dangerous to associate with those from whom the Lord is departed. The prophet assured him, that, if he persisted in his resolution to take these idolatrous apostate Israelites with him, in hopes thereby to make himself strong for the battle, it was at his peril, they would prove a dead weight to his army, would sink and betray it; "*God shall make thee fall before the enemy*, and these Israelites will be the ruin of thy cause; for God has power to help thee without them, and to cast thee down, though thou hast them with thee."

3. The objection which Amaziah made against this command, and the satisfactory answer which the prophet gave to that objection, v. 9. The king had remitted 100 talents to the men of Israel for advance-money. "Now," says he, "if I send them back, I shall lose that; *but what shall we do for the hundred talents?*" This is an objection men often make against their duty, they are afraid of losing by it. "Regard not that," says the prophet, "*the Lord is able to give thee much more than this*; and, thou mayest depend upon it, he will not see thee lose by him. What is one hundred talents between thee and him? He has ways enough to make up the loss to thee: it is below thee to speak of it." Note, A firm belief of God's all-sufficiency to bear us out in our duty, and to make up all the loss and damage we sustain in his service abundantly to our advantage, will make his yoke very easy, and his burthen very light. What is it to trust in God, but to be willing to venture the loss of any thing for him, in confidence of the goodness of the security he gives us that we shall not lose by him, but that it shall be made up to us in kind or kindness. When we grudge to part with any thing for God and our religion, this should satisfy us, that God is able to give us much more than this. He is just, and he is good, and he is solvent. The king lost 100 talents by his obedience; and we find just that sum given to his grandson Jotham as a present: (ch. 27. 5.) then the principal was repaid; and, for interest, 10,000 measures of wheat, and as many of barley.

4. His obedience to the command of God, which is upon record, to his honour. He would rather lose his money, disoblige his allies, and dismiss a fourth part of his army just as they were going to take the field, than offend God. *He separated the army of Ephraim, to go home again*, v. 10. And they went home in great anger, taking it as a great affront thus to be made fools of, and to be cashiered as men not fit to be employed, and being, perhaps, disappointed of the advantages they promised themselves in spoil and plunder, by joining with Judah against Edom. Men are apt to resent that which touches them in their profit or reputation, though it frees them from trouble.

5. His triumphs over the Edomites, v. 11, 12. He left dead upon the spot, in the field of battle, 10,000 men; 10,000 more he took prisoners, and barbarously killed them all, by throwing them down some steep and craggy precipice. What provocation he had to exercise this cruelty toward them, we are not told; but it was certainly very severe.

6. The mischief which the disbanded soldiers of Israel did to the cities of Judah, either in their return or soon after, v. 13. They took it so ill to be sent home, that, if they might not go to share with Judah in the spoil of Edom, they would make a prey of Judah. Several cities that lay upon the borders they plundered, and killed 3000 men that made resistance. But why should God suffer this to be done? Was it not in obedience to him that they were sent home; and yet shall the country thus suffer by it?

Surely God's way is in the sea! Did not the prophet say that God was not with the children of Ephraim, and yet they are suffered to prevail against Judah? Doubtless, God intended hereby to chastise those cities of Judah for their idolatries, which were found most in those parts that lay next to Israel. The men of Israel had corrupted them, and now they were made a plague to them: Satan both tempts and torments.

14. Now it came to pass, after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them.

15. Wherefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Amaziah, and he sent unto him a prophet, which said unto him, Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thine hand? 16. And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbore, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel.

Here is, 1. The revolt of Amaziah from the God of Israel to the gods of the Edomites. Egregious folly! Ahaz worshipped the gods of those that had conquered him; he had some little colour for that, ch. 28. 23. But to worship the gods of those whom he had conquered, who could not protect their own worshippers, was the greatest absurdity that could be. What did he see in the gods of the children of Seir, that could tempt him to set them up for his gods, and bow down himself before them? v. 14. If he had cast the idols down from the rock, and broken them to pieces, instead of the prisoners, he had discovered more of the piety, as well as more of the pity, of an Israelite: but, perhaps, for that barbarous inhumanity he was given up to this ridiculous idolatry.

2. The reproof which God sent to him, by a prophet, for this sin. The anger of the Lord was kindled against him, and justly; yet before he sent to destroy him, he sent to convince and reclaim him, and so to prevent his destruction. The prophet reasoned with him very fairly, and very mildly; *Why hast thou sought the favour of those gods which could not deliver their own people?* v. 15. If men would but duly consider the inability of all those things to help them, which they have recourse to when they forsake God, they would not be such enemies to themselves.

3. The check he gave to the reprover, v. 16. He could say nothing in excuse of his own folly; the reproof was too just to be answered; but he fell into a passion with the reprover; (1.) He taunted him as saucy, and impertinent, and meddling with that which did not belong to him; *Art thou made of the king's counsel?* Could not a man speak reason to him, but he must be upbraided as usurping the place of a privy-counsellor? But, as a prophet, he really was made of the king's counsel by the King of kings, in duty to whom, the king was bound not only to hear, but to ask and take, his counsel. (2.) He silenced him: bade him forbear, and say not a word more to him. *He said to the seer, See not*, Isa. 30. 10. Men would gladly have their prophets thus under their girdles, as we say, to speak just when and what they would have them speak, and not otherwise. (3.) He threatened him, *"Why shouldest thou be smitten?"* It is at thy peril, if thou sayest a word more of this matter." He seems to remind him of Zechariah's fate in the last reign, who was put to death for making bold with the king; and bids him take warning by him. Thus he justifies the killing of that prophet by menacing this, and so, in effect, makes himself guilty of the blood of both. The prophet who

had ordered him to send back the army of Israel, though he contradicted his politics, and lost him 100 talents, yet he hearkened to, and was ruled by, v. 10. But this prophet, who dissuaded him from worshipping the gods of the Edomites, he ran upon with an unaccountable rage; which must be attributed to the witchcraft of idolatry. He was easily persuaded to part with his *talents* of silver, but by no means with his *gods* of silver.

4. The doom which the prophet passed upon him for this. He had more to say to him by way of instruction and advice; but, finding him obstinate in his iniquity, he forbore. He is *joined to idols; let him alone*, Hos. 4. 17. Miserable is the condition of that man with whom the blessed Spirit, by ministers and conscience, *forbears to strive*, Gen. 6. 3. And both the reprovers in the gate, and that in the bosom, if long brow-beaten and baffled, will, at length, forbear; so I *gave them up to their own hearts' lusts*. The secure sinner, perhaps, values himself upon it as a noble and happy achievement to have silenced his reprovers and monitors, and to get clear of them; but what comes of it? *I know that God has determined to destroy thee; it is a plain indication that thou art marked for ruin, that thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened to my counsel*. They that are deaf to reproof are ripening apace for destruction, Prov. 29. 1.

17. Then Amaziah king of Judah took advice, and sent to Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us see one another in the face. 18. And Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that *was* in Lebanon sent to the cedar that *was* in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that *was* in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle. 19. Thou sayest, Lo, thou hast smitten the Edomites; and thine heart lifteth thee up to boast: abide now at home; why shouldst thou meddle to *thine* hurt, that thou shouldst fall, *even* thou, and Judah with thee? 20. But Amaziah would not hear; for it *came* of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of *their enemies*, because they sought after the gods of Edom. 21. So Joash the king of Israel went up; and they saw one another in the face, *both* he and Amaziah king of Judah, at Beth-shemesh, which *belongeth* to Judah. 22. And Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to his tent. 23. And Joash the king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, at Beth-shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner-gate, four hundred cubits. 24. And *he took* all the gold and the silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of God with Obed-edom, and the treasures of the king's house, the hostages also, and returned to Samaria. 25. And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years. 26. Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, first and last, behold, *are* they not written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel? 27. Now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following

the LORD, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish: but they sent to Lachish after him, and slew him there. 28. And they brought him upon horses, and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.

We have here this degenerate prince mortified by his neighbour, and murdered by his own subjects.

1. Never was proud prince more thoroughly mortified than Amaziah was by Joash king of Israel. This part of the story was as fully related, 2 Kings, 14. 8, &c. as it is here—The foolish challenge which Amaziah sent to Joash, (v. 17.) his haughty scornful answer to it, (v. 18.) with the friendly advice he gave him to sit still and know when he was well off, (v. 19.) his wilful persisting in his challenge, (v. 20, 21.) the defeat that was given him, (v. 22.) and the calamity he brought upon himself and his city thereby, v. 23, 24. Now this story verifies two of Solomon's proverbs; (1.) That *a man's pride will bring him low*; (Prov. 29. 23.) it goes before his destruction, not only procures it meritoriously, but is often the immediate occasion of it. He that exalteth himself shall be abased. (2.) That he that *goes forth hastily to strive*, will, probably, *not know what to do in the end thereof, when his neighbour has put him to shame*, Prov. 25. 8. He that is fond of contention, may have enough of it, sooner than he thinks of.

But there are two passages in this story, which we had not before in the *Kings*. [1.] That *Amaziah took advice*, before he challenged the king of Israel, v. 17. But of whom? Not of the prophet, he was *not made of the king's counsel*; but of his statesmen that would flatter him, and bid him go up and prosper. It is good to take advice, but then it must be of those that are fit to advise us. Those that will not take advice from the word of God, which would guide them aright, will justly be left to the bad advice of those that will counsel them to their destruction. Let those be made fools, that will not be made wise. [2.] Amaziah's imprudence is here made the punishment of his impiety, v. 20. *It was of the Lord*; he left him to himself to act thus foolishly, that he and his people might be *delivered into the hands of their enemies*, because they had forsaken God, and *sought after the gods of Edom*. They that will not be persuaded to do well for their souls, will justly be given up to their own counsels, to do ill for themselves, even in their outward affairs.

2. Never was poor prince more violently pursued by his own subjects; *from the time* that he departed from the Lord, (so it may be read, v. 27.) the hearts of his subjects departed from him, and they began to form a design against him in Jerusalem. It is probable that they were exasperated against him more for his rash engaging in a war against Israel, than for his worshipping the gods of Edom. But, at length, the ferment grew so high, and he perceived the plot to be laid so deep, that he thought fit to quit his royal city, and flee to Lachish, either as a private place where he might be hid, or as a strong place where he might be guarded; but they sent after him thither, and slew him there. By this it seems to have been done deliberately, and to have been the act, not of a disgusted servant or two, but of a considerable body that durst avow it. How unrighteous soever they were herein, God was righteous.

CHAP. XXVI.

This chapter gives us an account of the reign of Uzziah, (Azariah he was called in the *Kings*,) more fully than we had it before; though it was long, and in some respects illustrious, yet it was very briefly related, 2 Kings, 14. 21.—15. 1, &c. Here is, I. His good character in general, v. 1..5. II. His great prosperity in his wars, his buildings, and all the affairs of his kingdom, v. 6..15. III. His presumption in invading the priests' office, for which he was struck with a leprosy, and confined by it, (v. 16..21.) even to his death, v. 22, 23.

1. **T**HEN all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him

king in the room of his father Amaziah. 2. He built Eloth, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers. 3. Sixteen years old *was* Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also *was* Jecoliah of Jerusalem. 4. And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did. 5. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper. 6. And he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about Ashdod, and among the Philistines. 7. And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-baal, and the Melunims. 8. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad *even* to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened *himself* exceedingly. 9. Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner-gate, and at the valley-gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them. 10. Also he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low-country and in the plains: husbandmen *also*, and vine-dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry. 11. Moreover Uzziah had an host of fighting men, that went out to war by bands, according to the number of their account by the hand of Jeiel the scribe, and Maaseiah the ruler under the hand of Hananiah, *one* of the king's captains. 12. The whole number of the chief of the fathers of the mighty men of valour *were* two thousand and six hundred. 13. And under their hand *was* an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. 14. And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and harbergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones. 15. And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.

We have here an account of two things concerning Uzziah:

I. His piety. In this he was not very eminent or zealous; yet he did *that which was right in the sight of the Lord*; he kept up the pure worship of the true God, as his father did, and herein better than his father—that we have no reason to think he ever worshipped idols as his father did, no not in his latter days, when *his heart was lifted up*. It is said, (v. 5.) *He sought God in the days of Zechariah*, who, some think, was the son of that Zechariah

whom his grandfather Joash slew. He was one that *had understanding in the visions of God*; either the visions which he himself was favoured with, or the visions of the preceding prophets. He was well-versed in prophecy, and conversed much with the upper world, was an intelligent, devout, good man; and, it seems, had great influence with Uzziah. Happy are the great men who have such about them, and are willing to be advised by them; but unhappy those who seek God only while they have such with them, and have not a principle in themselves to bear them out to the end.

II. His prosperity. In general, *as long as he sought the Lord, and minded religion, God made him to prosper*. Note, 1. Those only prosper whom God makes to prosper; for prosperity is his gift. 2. Religion and piety are friendly to outward prosperity. Many have found and owned this, that as long as they sought the Lord, and kept close to their duty, they prospered; but since they forsook God, every thing has gone cross.

Here are several particular instances of his prosperity.

(1.) His success in his wars. *God helped him*, (v. 7.) and then he triumphed over the Philistines, those old enemies of God's people, demolished the fortifications of their cities, and put garrisons of his own among them, v. 6. He obliged the Ammonites to pay him tribute, v. 8. He made all quiet about him, and kept them in awe.

(2.) The greatness of his fame and reputation. His name was celebrated throughout all the neighbouring countries, (v. 8.) and it was a good name, a name for good things with God and good people. This is true fame, and makes a man truly honourable.

(3.) His buildings. While he acted offensively abroad, he did not neglect the defence of his kingdom at home, but *built towers in Jerusalem, and fortified them*, v. 9. Much of the wall of Jerusalem was, in his father's time, broken down, particularly at the corner-gate; (ch. 25. 23.) probably his father had repaired it, but he, to prevent the like mischief for the future, fortified it, and *built a tower at the corner-gate*. But his best fortification of Jerusalem was his close adherence to the worship of God, which if his father had not forsaken, the wall of Jerusalem had not been broken down. While he fortified the city, he did not forget the country, but *built towers in the desert* too, (v. 10.) to protect the country people from the inroads of the plunderers, bands of which sometimes alarmed them and plundered them, as ch. 21. 16.

(4.) His husbandry. He dealt much in cattle and corn, employed many hands, and got much wealth by it, for he took a pleasure in it; he *loved husbandry*, (v. 10.) and, probably, did himself inspect his affairs in the country, which was no disparagement to him, but an advantage, as it encouraged industry among his subjects. It is an honour to the husbandman's calling, that one of the most illustrious princes of the house of David followed it and loved it. He was none of those that delight in war, nor did he addict himself to sport and pleasure, but delighted in the innocent and quiet employments of the husbandman.

(5.) His standing armies. He had, as it should seem, two military establishments. [1.] A host of fighting men that were to make excursions abroad, they *went out to war by bands*, v. 11. They fetched in spoil from the neighbouring countries by way of reprisal for the depredations they had so often made upon Judah. [2.] Another army for guards and garrisons, that were ready to defend the country in case it should be invaded, v. 12, 13. So great were their number and valour, that they *made war with mighty power*; no enemy durst face them, or, at least, could stand before them. Men unarmed can do little in war; Uzziah therefore furnished himself with a great armory, whence his soldiers were supplied with arms offensive and defensive, (v. 14.) spears, bows, and slings, shields, helmets, and harbergeons; swords are not mentioned, because it is probable that every man had a sword of his own, which he wore constantly. Engines were invented, in his time, for annoying besiegers with darts and stones shot from the towers and bulwarks, v. 15. What pity it is, that the wars and fighting which came from men's lusts have made it neces-

ary for cunning men to employ their skill in inventing instruments of death!

16. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to *his* destruction; for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense. 17. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, *that were* valiant men: 18. And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, *It appertaineth* not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither *shall it be* for thine honour from the LORD God. 19. Then Uzziah was wroth, and *had* a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. 20. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he *was* leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him. 21. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, *being* a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son *was* over the king's house, judging the people of the land. 22. Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write. 23. So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which *belonged* to the kings; for they said, *He is a leper*: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.

Here is the only blot we find on the name of king Uzziah, and it is such a one as lies not on any other of the kings. Whoredom, murder, oppression, persecution, and especially idolatry, gave characters to the bad kings, and some of them blemishes to the good ones, David himself not excepted, witness the matter of Uriah. But we find not Uzziah charged with any of these; and yet he *transgressed against the Lord his God*, and fell under the marks of his displeasure for it; not, as other kings, in vexatious wars or rebellions, but an incurable disease.

I. His sin was, invading the priest's office. The good way is one, by-paths are many; the transgression of his predecessors was, forsaking the temple of the Lord, and flying off from it, (*ch.* 24. 18.) and burning incense upon idolatrous altars, *ch.* 25. 14. *His transgression* was, intruding *into the temple of the Lord*, further than was allowed him, and attempting himself to *burn incense upon the altar* of God, for which, it is likely, he pretended an extraordinary zeal and affection. See how hard it is to avoid one extreme, and not run into another.

1. That which was at the bottom of his sin, was, pride of heart, a lust that ruins more than any other whatsoever. *When he was strong*, *v.* 16. (and he was marvellously helped by the good providence of God *till he was so*, *v.* 15.) when he was grown very great and considerable in wealth, interest, and power, instead of lifting

up the name of God in gratitude to him who had done so much for him, his *heart was lifted up to his destruction*. Thus the prosperity of fools, by puffing them up with pride, destroys them. Now that he had done so much business, and won so much honour, he began to think no business, no honour, too great or too good for him; no, not that of the priesthood. Men's pretending to forbidden knowledge, and exercising themselves in things too high for them, are owing to the pride of their heart, and the fleshly mind they are *vainly puffed up with*.

2. His sin was, *going into the temple of the Lord to burn incense*; probably on some solemn feast day, or when he himself had some special occasion for supplicating the divine favour. What should move him to this piece of presumption, or put it into his head, I cannot conjecture: none of all his predecessors, not the best, not the worst, attempted it: the law, he knew, was express against him, and there was no usage or precedent for him: he could not pretend any necessity, as there was for David's eating the shewbread. (1.) Perhaps he fancied the priests did not do their office so dexterously, decently, and devoutly, as the yought, and he could do it better. Or, (2.) He observed that the idolatrous kings did themselves burn incense at the altars of their gods; his father did so, and Jeroboam; (1 Kings, 13. 1.) an ambition of which honour was perhaps one thing that tempted them from the house of God, where it was not permitted them; and he, being resolved to cleave to God's altar, would try to break through this restraint, and come as near it as the idolatrous kings did to their altars. But it is called a *transgression against the Lord his God*. He was not content with the honours God had put upon him, but would usurp those that were forbidden him, like our first parents.

3. He was opposed in this attempt by the chief priest and other priests that attended and assisted him, *v.* 17, 18. They were ready to burn incense for the king, according to the duty of their place; but, if he offer to do it himself, they plainly let him know that he meddles with that which does not belong to him, and it is at his peril. They did not resist him by laying violent hands on him, though they were valiant men, but by reasoning with him, and shewing him, (1.) That it was not lawful for him to burn incense: "*It appertaineth not to thee, O Uzziah, but to the priests*, whose birth-right it is, as sons of Aaron, and who are consecrated to the service." Aaron and his sons were appointed by the law to burn incense, *Exod.* 30. 7. See *Deut.* 33. 10. *1 Chron.* 23. 13. David had blessed the people, Solomon and Jehoshaphat had prayed with them, and preached to them; Uzziah might have done this, and it would have been to his praise; but for burning incense, that service was to be performed by the priests only. The kingly and priestly offices were separated by the law of Moses, not to be united again, but in the person of the Messiah. If Uzziah did intend to honour God, and gain acceptance with him, in what he did, he was quite out in his aim; for, being a service purely of divine institution, he could not expect it should be accepted, unless it were done in the way, and by the hands, that God had appointed. (2.) That it was not safe. It shall not be *for thine honour from the Lord God*; more is implied; "It will be thy disgrace, and it is at thy peril." The law runs express against all strangers that came nigh, (*Numb.* 3. 10.—18. 7.) that is, all that were not priests. Korah and his accomplices, though Levites, paid dear for offering to burn incense, which was the work of the priests only, *Numb.* 16. 35. The incense of our prayers must be, by faith, put into the hands of our Lord Jesus the great High Priest of our profession, else we cannot expect it should be accepted by God, *Rev.* 8. 3.

4. He fell into a passion with the priests that reproved him, and would push forward to do what he intended notwithstanding; (*v.* 19.) *Uzziah was wroth*, and would not part with the censer out of his hand: he took it ill to be checked, and would not bear it. *Nititur in vetitum—We are prone to do what is forbidden*.

II. His punishment was an incurable leprosy, which rose up in his forehead while he was contending with the priests. If he had submitted to the priests' admonition, acknowledged his error and gone back, all had been well; but *when he was wroth with the*

priests, and fell foul upon them, then God was wroth with him, and smote him with a plague of leprosy. Josephus says that he threatened the priests with death if they opposed him, and that then the earth shook, the roof of the temple opened, and through the cleft a beam of the sun darted directly upon the king's face, wherein immediately the leprosy appeared. And some conjecture, that that was the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, which we read of, Amos, 1. 1. and Zech. 14. 5.

Now this sudden stroke,

1. Ended the controversy between him and the priests; for, when the leprosy appeared, they were emboldened to thrust him out of the temple; nay, he himself *hasted to go out, because the Lord had smitten him* with a disease which was, in a particular manner, a token of his displeasure, and which he knew secluded him from common converse with men, much more from the altar of God. He would not be convinced by what the priests said, but God took an effectual course to convince him. If presumptuous men will not be made to see their error by the judgments of God's mouth, they shall be made to see it by the judgments of his hand. It evidenced some religious fear of God in the heart of this king, even in the midst of his transgression, that, as soon as he found God was angry with him, he not only let fall his attempt, but retired with the utmost precipitation. Though he strove with the priests, he would not strive with his Maker.

2. It remained a lasting punishment of his transgression; for he continued a leper to the day of his death, shut up in confinement, and shut out from society, and forced to leave it to his son to manage all his business, *v. 21.* Thus God gave an instance of his resisting the proud, and of his jealousy for the purity and honour of his own institutions: thus he gave fair warning even to great and good men to know and keep their distance, and not to intrude into those things which they have not seen: thus he gave Uzziah a loud and constant call to repentance, and a long space to repent, which we have reason to hope he made a good improvement of. He had been a man of much business in the world, but, being taken off from that, and confined to a *several house*, he had leisure to think of another world, and prepare for it. By this judgment upon the king, God intended to possess the people with a great veneration for the temple, the priesthood, and other sacred things, which they had been apt to think meanly of. While the king was a leper, he was as good as dead, dead while he lived, and buried alive; and so the law was, in effect, answered, that the stranger which cometh nigh shall be put to death. The disgrace survived him; for, when he was dead, they would not bury him in the *sepulchre of the kings*, because he was a leper, which stained all his other glory.

3. It was a punishment that answered the sin, as face does to face in a glass. (1.) Pride was at the bottom of his transgression, and thus God humbled him, and put dishonour upon him. (2.) He invaded the office of the priests in contempt of them, and God struck him with a disease, which, in a particular manner, made him subject to the inspection and sentence of the priests; for to them pertained the *judgment of the leprosy*, Deut. 24. 8. (3.) He thrust himself into the temple of God, whither the priests only had admission, and for that was thrust out of the very courts of the temple, into which the meanest of his subjects, that was ceremonially clean, had free access. (4.) He confronted the priests that faced him and opposed his presumption, and for that the leprosy *rose in his forehead*, which, in Miriam's case, is compared to her father's *spitting in her face*, Numb. 12. 14. (5.) He invaded the dignity of the priesthood, which he had no right to, and is for that deprived even of his royal dignity, which he had a right to. They that covet forbidden honours, forfeit allowed ones. Adam, by catching at the tree of knowledge, which he might not eat of, debarred himself from the tree of life, which he might have eaten of. Let all that read it say, *The Lord is righteous.*

CHAP. XXVII.

Here is a very short account of the reign of Jotham, a pious prosperous prince, whom one would wish to have known more of; but we may better dispense with

*the brevity of his story, because that which lengthened the history of the three last kings, was, their degeneracy in their latter end, which we have had a faithful account of: but there was no occasion for such a melancholy conclusion of the history of his reign, which is only an account, I. Of the date and continuance of his reign, *v. 1, 8.* II. The general good character of it, *v. 2, 6.* III. The prosperity of it, *v. 3, 5.* IV. The period of it, *v. 7, 9.**

1. **JOTHAM** was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jernsbah, the daughter of Zadok. 2. And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the Lord. And the people did yet corruptly. 3. He built the high gate of the house of the Lord, and on the wall of Ophel he built much. 4. Moreover he built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers. 5. He fought also with the king of the Ammonites, and prevailed against them. And the children of Ammon gave him the same year an hundred talents of silver, and ten thousand measures of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. So much did the children of Ammon pay unto him, both the second year, and the third. 6. So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God. 7. Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars, and his ways, lo, they *are* written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. 8. He was five and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. 9. And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

There is not much more related here concerning Jotham, than we had before, 2 Kings, 15. 32, &c.

1. That he reigned well: he *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*; the course of his reign was good, and pleasing to God, whose favour he made his end, and his word his rule, and (which shews that he acted from a good principle) he *prepared his ways before the Lord his God*; (*v. 6.*) that is, He walked circumspectly and with much caution, contrived how to shun that which was evil, and compass that which was good: he looked before him, and cast his affairs into such a posture and method as made the regular management of them the more easy. Or, he established or fixed his ways before the Lord, that is, he walked steadily and constantly in the way of his duty, was uniform and resolute in it; not like some of those that went before him, who, though they had some good in them, lost their credit by their inconstancy, and inconsistency with themselves. They had run well, but something hindered them. It was not so with Jotham.

Two things are observed here in his character:

(1.) What was amiss in his father he amended in himself, *v. 2.* He did *according to all that his father did* well and wisely; howbeit, he would not imitate him in what he did amiss; for he *entered not into the temple of the Lord*, to burn incense, as his father did; but took warning by his fate not to dare so presumptuous a thing. Note, We must not imitate the best men, and those we have the greatest veneration for, any further than they did well; but, on the contrary, their falls, and the injurious consequences, must be warnings to us to walk the more circumspectly, that we stumble not at the same stone that they stumbled at.

(2.) What was amiss in his people he could not prevail to amend. *The people did yet corruptly.* Perhaps it reflects some blame upon him, that he was wanting in his part toward the reformation of the land. Men may be very good themselves, and yet not have courage and zeal to do what they might do toward the reforming of others. However, it certainly reflects a great deal of blame upon the people, that they did not do what they might have done to improve the advantages of so good a reign: they had good instructions given them, and a good example set before them, but they would not be reformed; so that, even in the reign of their good kings, as well as the bad ones, they were *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*; for they still did corruptly, and the Founder melted in vain.

2. That he prospered, and became truly reputable.

(1.) He built. He began with *the gate of the house of the Lord*, which he repaired, beautified, and raised. He then *fortified the wall of Ophel, and built cities in the mountains of Judah*; (v. 3, 4.) took all possible care for the fortifying of his country, and the replenishing of it.

(2.) He conquered. He prevailed against the Ammonites, who had invaded Judah in Jehoshaphat's time, (ch. 20. 1.) triumphed over them, and exacted great contributions from them, v. 5.

(3.) He became mighty (v. 6.) in wealth and power, and influence upon the neighbouring nations, who courted his friendship, and feared his displeasure; and this he got by *preparing his ways before the Lord his God*. The more steadfast we are in religion, the more mighty we are both for the resistance of that which is evil, and for the performance of that which is good.

3. That he finished his course too soon, but finished it with honour; he had the unhappiness to die in the midst of his days; but, to balance that, the happiness not to out-live his reputation, as his three last predecessors did. He died when he was but 41 years of age, (v. 8.) but *his wars and his ways*, his wars abroad and his ways at home, were so glorious, that they were recorded in the book of the kings of Israel, as well as of the kings of Judah, v. 7. The last words of the chapter convey the painful intelligence, that *Ahaz his son reigned in his stead*, whose character, in all respects, was the reverse of his. When the wealth and power which wise men have done good with, devolve upon fools that will do hurt with them, it is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

CHAP. XXVIII.

This chapter is the history of the reign of Ahaz the son of Jotham; a bad reign it was, and which helped to augment the fierce anger of the Lord. We have here, I. His great wickedness, v. 1.. 4. II. The trouble he brought himself into by it, v. 5.. 8. III. The reproof which God sent by a prophet to the army of Israel for trampling upon their brethren of Judah, and the obedient ear they gave to that reproof, v. 9.. 15. IV. The many calamities that followed after to Ahaz and his people, v. 16.. 21. V. The continuance of his idolatry notwithstanding, (v. 22.. 25;) and so his story ends, v. 26, 27.

1. **A**HAZ was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not *that which was right* in the sight of the LORD, like David his father: 2. For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. 3. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. 4. He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. 5. Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them

captives, and brought *them* to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter.

Never surely had a man greater opportunity of doing well than Ahaz had, finding things in a good posture, the kingdom rich and strong, and religion established; and yet here we have him, in these few verses,

1. Wretchedly corrupted and debauched. He had had a good education given him, and a good example set him; but parents cannot give grace to their children: all the instructions he had were lost upon him, *he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord*; (v. 1.) nay, he did a great deal that was wrong, a wrong to God, to his own soul, and to his people; he walked in the way of the revolted Israelites, and the devoted Canaanites, made molten images, and worshipped them, contrary to the second commandment; nay, he made them for Baalim, contrary to the first commandment. He forsook the temple of the Lord, and sacrificed and burnt incense on the hills, as if those would place him nearer heaven; and under every green tree, as if those would signify the protection and influence of heaven by their shade and dropping. To complete his wickedness, as one perfectly divested of all natural affection as well as religion, and perfectly devoted to the service and interest of the great enemy of mankind, he *burnt his children in the fire to Moloch*, (v. 3.) not thinking it enough to dedicate them to that infernal fiend by causing them to pass through the fire. See what an absolute sway the prince of the power of the air bears among the children of disobedience.

2. Wretchedly spoiled and made a prey of. When he forsook God, and, at a vast expence, put himself under the protection of false gods, God, who, of right, was his God, delivered him into the hands of his enemies, v. 5. (1.) The Syrians insulted him, and triumphed over him, beat him in the field, and carried away a great many of his people into captivity. (2.) The king of Israel, though an idolater too, was made a scourge to him, and *smote him with a great slaughter*. The people suffered by these judgments, their blood was shed, their country wasted, their families ruined; for when they had a good king, though *they did corruptly*, (ch. 27. 2.) yet then his goodness sheltered him; but now, that they had a bad one, all their defence was departed from them, and an inundation of judgments broke in upon them. They that knew not their happiness in the foregoing reign, were taught to value it by the miseries of this reign.

6. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, *which were* all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. 7. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah *that was* next to the king. 8. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. 9. But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage *that reacheth up unto* heaven. 10. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bond-men and bond-women unto you: *but are there not with*

you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God? 11. Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you. 12. Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war,

3. And said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for whereas we have offended against the LORD *already*, ye intend to add *more* to our sins and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and *there is* fierce wrath against Israel. 14. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation. 15. And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.

We have here,

I. Treacherous Judah under the rebukes of God's providence, and they are very severe. Never was such bloody work made among them, since they were a kingdom, and by Israelites too. Ahaz walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and the king of Israel was the instrument God made use of for his punishment. It is just with God to make those our plagues whom we make our patterns, or make ourselves partners with in sin. A war broke out between Judah and Israel, in which Judah was worsted. For, 1. There was a great slaughter of men in the field of battle: vast numbers: 120,000 men, and valiant men too at other times, were slain, (v. 6.) and some of the first rank; the king's son for one. He had sacrificed some of his sons to Moloch, justly therefore is this sacrificed to the divine vengeance. Here is another that was *next the king*, his friend, the prime-minister of state, or perhaps next him in the battle, so that the king himself had a narrow escape, v. 7. The kingdom of Israel was not strong at this time, and yet strong enough to bring this great destruction upon Judah. But certainly so many men, great men, stout men, could not have been cut off in one day, if they had not been strangely dispirited, both by the consciousness of their own guilt, and by the righteous hand of God upon them. Even valiant men were numbered *as sheep for the slaughter*, and became an easy prey to the enemy, *because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers*, and he had therefore forsaken them. 2. There was a great captivity of *women and children*, v. 8. When the army in the field was routed, the cities, and towns, and country villages, were all easily stripped, the inhabitants taken for slaves, and their wealth for a prey.

II. Even victorious Israel under the rebukes of God's word, for the bad principle they had gone upon in making war with Judah, and the bad use they made of their success; and the good effect of this rebuke. Here is,

1. The message which God sent them by a prophet, who went out to meet them, not to applaud their valour, or congratulate them on their victory, though they returned laden with spoils and triumphs, but in God's name to tell them of their faults, and warn them of the judgments of God.

(1.) He tells them how they came by this victory, of which they were so proud; it was not because God favoured them, or that

they had merited it at his hand, but *because he was wroth with Judah*, and made them the rod of his indignation. *Not for your righteousness*, be it known to you, but *for their wickedness*, (Deut. 9. 5.) *they are broken off*; therefore *be not ye high-minded, but fear*, lest God also spare not you, Rom. 11. 20, 21.

(2.) He charges them with the abuse of the power God had given them over their brethren. They understand not what victory is, who think it gives them authority to do what they will, and that the longest sword is the clearest claim to lives and estates; (*Jusque datum sceleri—Might is right*;) no, as it is impolitic not to use a victory, so it is impious to abuse it. The conquerors are here reproved, [1.] For the cruelty of the slaughter they had made in the field. They had indeed *shed the blood of war, in war*; we suppose that to be lawful, but it turned into sin to them, because they did it from a bad principle of enmity to their brethren, and after a bad manner, with a barbarous fury, *a rage reaching up to heaven*, that is, that cries to God for vengeance against such bloody men, that delighted in military execution. They that serve God's justice, if they do it with rage and a spirit of revenge, make themselves obnoxious to it, and forfeit the honour of acting for him: *for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*. [2.] For the imperious treatment they gave their prisoners. "*Ye now purpose to keep them under, to use them or sell them as slaves, though they are your brethren and free-born Israelites*." God takes notice of what men purpose, as well as of what they say and do.

(3.) He reminds them of their own sins, by which they also were obnoxious to the wrath of God. *Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?* He appeals to their own consciences, and to the notorious evidence of the thing. "*Though you are now made the instruments of correcting Judah for sin, yet do not think that you are therefore innocent yourselves; no, you also are guilty before God*." This is intended as a check, [1.] To their triumph in their success; "*You are sinners, and it ill becomes sinners to be proud; you have carried the day now, but be not secure, the wheel may ere long return upon yourselves, for if judgment begin thus with those that have the house of God among them, what shall be the end of such as worship the calves?*" [2.] To their severity toward their brethren; "*You have now got them under, but you ought to shew mercy to them, for yourselves are undone if you do not find mercy with God. It ill becomes sinners to be cruel. You have transgressions enough to answer for already, and need not add this to the rest*."

(4.) He commands them to release the prisoners, and to send them home again carefully; (v. 11.) for, "*You having sinned, the fierce wrath of God is upon you, and there is no other way of escaping it than by shewing mercy*."

2. The resolution of the princes thereupon, not to detain the prisoners. They *stood up against them that came from the war*, though flushed with victory, and told them plainly, that they should not bring their captives into Samaria, v. 12, 13. They had sin enough already to answer for, and would have nothing done to add to their trespass. In this they discovered an obedient regard to the word of God by his prophet, and a tender compassion toward their brethren, which was wrought in them by the tender mercy of God; for he regarded the affliction of this poor people, and heard their cry, and *made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captive*, Ps. 106. 44, 46.

3. The compliance of the soldiers with the resolution of the princes in this matter, and the dismissal of the captives thereupon. (1.) The armed men, though, being armed, they might by force have maintained their title to what they got by the sword, acquiesced, and left their captives and the spoil to the disposal of the *princes*, (v. 14.) and herein they shewed a more true heroic bravery than they did in taking them. It is a great honour for any man to yield to the authority of reason and religion, against his interest. (2.) The princes very generously sent home the *poor captives*, well accommodated, v. 15. Those that hope to find mercy with God, must learn hence with what tenderness to carry themselves toward those that lie at their mercy. It is strange that these

princes, who, in this instance, discovered such a deference to the word of God, and such an influence upon the people, had not so much grace, as, in obedience to the calls of God by so many prophets, to root idolatry out of their kingdom, which, soon after this, was the ruin of it.

16. At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him. 17. For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives. 18. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low-country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shochu with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Ginoza also and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there. 19. For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel: for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD. 20. And Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not. 21. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the LORD, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not. 22. And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz. 23. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. 24. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 25. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers. 26. Now the rest of his acts, and of all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 27. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem: but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

Here is,

1. The great distress which the kingdom of Ahaz was reduced to for his sin. In general, 1. *The Lord brought Judah low, v. 19.* They had lately been very high in wealth and power; but God found means to take them down, and make them as despicable as they had been formidable. They that will not humble themselves under the word of God, will justly be humbled by his judgments. *Iniquity brings men low, Ps. 106. 43.* 2. Ahaz made Judah naked. As his sin debased them, so it exposed them. It made them naked to their *shame*; for it exposed them to contempt, a man unclothed. It made them naked to their *danger*; for exposed them to assaults, as a man unarmed, *Exod. 32. 25.* strips men. In particular, the Edomites, to be revenged for Aziah's cruel treatment of them, (*ch. 25. 12.*) smote Judah, and

carried off many captives, *v. 17.* The Philistines also insulted them, took and kept possession of several cities and villages that lay near them, (*v. 18.*) and so they were revenged for the incursions which Uzziah had made upon them, *ch. 26. 6.* And, to shew that it was purely the sin of Ahaz that brought the Philistines upon his country, in the very year that he died, the prophet Isaiah foretold the destruction of the Philistines, by his son, *Isa. 14. 28, 29.*

II. The addition which Ahaz made both to the national distress and the national guilt.

1. He added to the distress, by making court to strange kings, in hopes they would relieve him. When the Edomites and Philistines were vexations to him, *he sent to the kings of Assyria to help him, (v. 16.)* for he found his own kingdom weakened and made naked, and he could not put any confidence in God, and therefore was at a vast expence to get an interest in the king of Assyria. He pillaged the house of God, and the king's house, and squeezed the princes for money to hire these foreign forces into his service, *v. 21.* Though he had conformed to the idolatry of the heathen nations, his neighbours, they did not value him for that, nor love him the better, nor did his compliance, by which he lost God, gain them, nor could he make any interest in them but with his money. It is often found that wicked men themselves have no real affection for those that revolt to them, nor do they care to do them a kindness. A degenerate branch is looked upon, on all sides, as an *abominable branch, Isa. 14. 19.* But what did Ahaz get by the king of Assyria? Why, *he came to him, but he distressed him, and strengthened him not, (v. 20.) helped him not, v. 21.* The forces of the Assyrian quartered upon his country, and so impoverished and weakened it; they grew insolent and imperious, and created him a great deal of vexation, like a broken reed, which not only fails, but pierces the hand.

2. He added to the guilt, by making court to strange gods, in hopes they would relieve him. In this distress, instead of repenting of his idolatry, which he had reason enough to see the folly of, *he trespassed yet more, (v. 22.)* was more mad than ever upon his idols; a brand of infamy is here set upon him for it. *This is that king Ahaz, that wretched man, who was the scandal of the house of David, and the curse and plague of his generation.* Note, Those are wicked and vile indeed, that are made worse by their afflictions, instead of being made better by them; who, in their distress, *trespass yet more,* have their corruptions exasperated by that which should mollify them, and their hearts more *fully set in them to do evil.* Let us see what his trespass was. (1.) He abused the house of God; for he *cut in pieces the vessels of it,* that the priests might not perform the service of the temple, or not as it should be, for want of vessels; and, at length, *shut up the doors,* that the people might not attend it, *v. 24.* This was worse than the worst of the kings before him had done. (2.) He confronted the altar of God, for he *made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem;* so that, as the prophet speaks, they were like *heaps in the furrows of the field, Hos. 19. 11.* And in the cities of Judah, either by his power, or by his purse, or by both, he erected high places for the people to burn incense to what idol they pleased, as if on purpose to *provoke the God of his fathers, v. 25.* (3.) He cast off God himself; for he *sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, (v. 23.)* not because he loved them, for he thought they smote him; but because he feared them, thinking that they helped his enemies, and that, if he could bring them into his interest, they would help him. Foolish man! It was his own God that smote him, and strengthened the Syrians against him, not the gods of Damascus; had he sacrificed to him, and to him only, he would have helped him. But no marvel that men's affections and devotions are misplaced, when they mistake the author of their trouble and their help. And what comes of it? The gods of Syria befriended Ahaz no more than the kings of Assyria did; they were the *ruin of him, and of all Israel.* This sin provoked God to bring judgments upon them, to cut him off in the midst of his days, when he was but 36 years old; and it debauched the people so, that the reformation of the next reign could not prevail to cure them of

their inclination to idolatry, but they retained that root of bitterness till the captivity in Babylon plucked it up.

The chapter concludes with the conclusion of the reign of Ahaz, v. 26, 27. For aught that appears, he died impenitent, and therefore died inglorious; for he was not buried in the sepulchres of the kings. Justly was he thought unworthy to be laid among them, who was so unlike them; to be buried with kings, who had used his kingly power for the destruction of the church, and not for its protection or edification.

CHAP. XXIX.

We are here entering upon a pleasant scene, the good and glorious reign of Hezekiah; in which we shall find more of God and religion, than, perhaps, in any of the good reigns we have yet met with; for he was a very zealous, devout, good man, none like him. In this chapter we have an account of the work of reformation, which he set about with rigour, immediately after his accession to the crown. Here is, I. His exhortation to the priests and Levites, when he put them in possession of the house of God again, v. 1. .11. II. The care and pains which the Levites took to cleanse the temple, and put things into order there, v. 12. .19. III. A solemn revival of God's ordinances that had been neglected, in which atonement was made for the sins of the last reign, and the wheels set a-going again, to the great satisfaction of king and people, v. 20. .36.

1. **H**ZEKIAH began to reign when he was five and twenty years old, and he reigned nine and twenty years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. 2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. 3. He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them. 4. And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the east-street, 5. And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place. 6. For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs. 7. Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense, nor offered burnt-offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel. 8. Wherefore the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes. 9. For, lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. 10. Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us. 11. My sons, be not now negligent: for the LORD hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense.

Here is,

t. Hezekiah's age when he came to the crown; he was 25 years old. Joash, who came to the crown after two bad reigns, was

but seven years old; Josiah, who came after two bad reigns, was but eight; which occasioned the delay of the reformation. But Hezekiah was come to years, and so applied himself immediately to it. We may well think with what a sorrowful heart he beheld his father's idolatry and profaneness, how it troubled him to see the doors of the temple shut up, though while his father lived he durst not open them. His soul, no doubt, wept in secret for it, and he vowed, that, when he should receive the congregation, he would redress these grievances, which made him do it with more readiness and resolution.

II. His general character. He did that which was right, like David, v. 2. Of several of his predecessors it had been said, that they did that which was right, but not like David, not with David's integrity and zeal. But here was one that had as hearty an affection for the ark and law of God as ever David had.

III. His speedy application to the great work of restoring religion. The first thing he did, was, to open the doors of the house of the Lord, v. 3. We are willing to hope his father had not quite suppressed the temple service; for then the holy fire on the altar must have gone out, which we do not read of the re-kindling of; but he had hindered the people from attending it, and the priests, except such of them as were of his own party, 2 Kings, 16. 15. But Hezekiah immediately threw the church doors open, and brought in the priests and Levites. He found Judah low and naked, yet did not make it his first business to revive the civil interests of his kingdom, but to restore religion to its good posture again. Those that begin with God, begin at the right end of their work, and it will prosper accordingly.

IV. His speech to the priests and Levites. It was well known, no doubt, that he had a real kindness for religion, and was disaffected to the corruptions of the last reign; yet we do not find the priests and Levites addressing themselves to him for the restoration of the temple service, but he calls upon them; which, I doubt, bespeaks their coldness as much as his zeal: and perhaps, if they had done their part with vigour, things had not been brought into so very bad a posture as Hezekiah found them in.

Hezekiah's exhortation to the Levites is very pathetic.

1. He lays before them the desolations of religion, and the deplorable state to which it was brought among them; (v. 6, 7.) *Our fathers have trespassed.* He said not, *my* father, because it became him, as a son, to be as tender as might be of his father's name, and because his father would not have done all this, if their fathers had not neglected their duty. Urijah the priest had joined with Ahaz in setting up an idolatrous altar. He complains, (1.) That the house of God had been deserted; *They have forsaken God, and turned their backs upon his habitation.* Note, Those that turn their backs upon God's ordinances may truly be said to forsake God himself. (2.) That the instituted worship of God there had been let fall; the lamps were not lighted, incense was not burnt; there are still such neglects as these, and they are no less culpable, if the word be not duly read and opened, for that was signified by the *lighting of the lamps*, and if prayers and praises be not duly offered up, for that was signified by the *burning of incense*.

2. He shews the sad consequences of the neglect and decay of religion among them, v. 8, 9. This was the cause of all the calamities they had lain under; God had, in anger, delivered them to trouble, to the sword, and to captivity. When we are under the rebukes of God's providence, it is good for us to inquire whether we have not neglected God's ordinances, and whether that be not the controversy he has with us.

3. He declares his own full purpose and resolution to revive religion, and make it his business to promote it, v. 10. *It is in my heart*, that is, "I am fully resolved to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel," that is, "to worship him only, and in that way which he has appointed; for I am sure that, otherwise, his fierce anger will not turn away from us." This covenant he would not only make himself, but bring his people into the bond of.

4. He engages and excites the Levites and priests to do their duty on this occasion. This he begins with, (v. 5.) this he ends with.

(v. 11.) calls them *Levites*, to remind them of their obligation to God; calls them his *sons*, to remind them of their relation to himself, that he expected that, *as a son with the father, they should serve with him* in the reformation of the land. (1.) He tells them what was their duty; to sanctify *themselves* first, by repenting of their neglects, reforming their own hearts and lives, and renewing their covenants with God, to do their duty better for the time to come; and then to *sanctify the house of God*, as his servants, to make it clean from every thing that was disagreeable, either through the disuse or the profanation of it, and to set it up for the purposes for which it was made. (2.) He stirs them up to it, (v. 11.) "*Be not now negligent, or remiss, in your duty. Let not this good work be retarded through your carelessness. Be not deceived*, so the margin. They that, by their negligence in the service of God, think to mock God, and put a cheat upon him, do but deceive themselves, and put a damning cheat upon their own souls. *Be not secure*, so some, as if there were no urgent call to do it, or no danger in not doing it. Men's negligence in religion is owing to their carnal security. The consideration he quickens them with, is, their office. God had herein put honour upon them; he has *chosen you to stand before him*. God expected work from them; they were not chosen to be idle, to enjoy the dignity, and leave the duty to be done by others, but to serve him, and to minister to him. They must therefore be ashamed of their late remissness, and now, that the doors of the temple were opened again, set about their work with double diligence.

12. Then the Levites arose, Mahath the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites: and of the sons of Merari; Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehalelel: and of the Gershonites; Joah the son of Zimmah, and Eden the son of Joah: 13. And of the sons of Elizaphan; Shimri, and Jeiel: and of the sons of Asaph; Zechariah, and Mattaniah: 14. And of the sons of Heman; Jehiel, and Shimei: and of the sons of Jeduthun; Shemaiah, and Uzziel. 15. And they gathered their brethren, and sanctified themselves, and came, according to the commandment of the king, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. 16. And the priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron. 17. Now they began on the first *day* of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of the LORD: so they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days; and in the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end. 18. Then they went in to Hezekiah the king, and said, We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, and the altar of burnt-offering, with all the vessels thereof, and the shew-bread table, with all the vessels thereof. 19. Moreover all the vessels which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his transgression, have we prepared and sanctified, and, behold, they *are* before the altar of the LORD.

We have here busy work, good work, and needful work, the cleansing of the house of the Lord.

1. The persons employed in this work were the priests and Levites, who should have *kept* it clean, but, not having done that, were concerned to *make* it clean. Several of the Levites are here named; two of each of the three principal houses, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari, v. 12. And two of each of the three families of singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, v. 13. We cannot think these are named merely because they were chief in place, for then surely the high priest, or some of the heads of the courses of the priests, would have been mentioned; but because they were more zealous and active than the rest. When God has work to do, he will raise up leading men to preside in it. And it is not always that the first in place and rank are most fit for service, or most forward to it. These Levites not only bestirred themselves, but *gathered their brethren*, and quickened them to do according to the commandment of the king by the words of the Lord. Observe, They did according to the king's command, but with an eye to God's word; the king commanded them what was already their duty by the word of God, and, in doing it, they regarded God's word as a rule to them, and the king's commandment as a spur to them.

2. The work was *cleansing the house of God*, (1.) From the common dirt it had contracted while it was shut up, dust and cobwebs, and the rust of the vessels. (2.) From the idols and idolatrous altars that were set up in it, which, though kept ever so neat, were a greater pollution to it than if it had been made the common-sewer of the city. The priests were none of them mentioned as leading men in this work, yet none but they durst go *into the inner part of the house, no not to cleanse it*, which they did, and, perhaps, the high priest into the holy of holies, to cleanse that. And though the Levites had the honour to be the leaders in the work, they did not disdain to be servitors to the priests according to their office; for what filth the priests brought into the court, the Levites carried to the brook Kidron. Let not men's usefulness, be it ever so eminent, make them forget their place.

3. The expedition with which they did this work was very remarkable. They began on the first day of the first month, a happy beginning of the new year, and that promised a good year; thus should every year begin with the reformation of what is amiss, and the purging away, by repentance, of all the defilements contracted the foregoing year. In eight days they cleared and cleansed the temple, and in eight days more the *courts* of the temple, v. 17. Let those that do good work, learn to rid work and get it done. Let what is amiss be amended quickly.

4. The report they made of it to Hezekiah was very agreeable, v. 18, 19. They gave him an account of what they had done, because it was he that set them on work; they boasted not of their own care and pains, nor did they come to him to be paid, but to let him know that all the things that had been profaned were now sanctified according to law, and were ready to be used again whenever he pleased. They knew the good king had set his heart upon God's altar, and longed to be attending that, and therefore they insisted most upon the readiness they had put that into; that the vessels of the altar were scoured and brightened; those which Ahaz, in his *transgression, had cast away*, as vessels in which there was no pleasure, those they gathered together, sanctified them, and laid them in their place *before the altar*. Though the vessels of the sanctuary may be profaned for a while, God will find a time and way to sanctify them. Neither his ordinances, nor his people, shall be suffered to fail for ever.

20. Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the LORD. 21. And they brought seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and seven he-goats, for a sin-offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah. And he

commanded the priests the sons of Aaron to offer *them* on the altar of the LORD. 22. So they killed the bullocks, and the priests received the blood, and sprinkled *it* on the altar: likewise, when they had killed the rams, they sprinkled the blood upon the altar: they killed also the lambs, and they sprinkled the blood upon the altar. 23. And they brought forth the he-goats *for* the sin-offering before the king and the congregation; and they laid their hands upon them. 24. And the priests killed them, and they made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel: for the king commanded *that* the burnt-offering and the sin-offering *should be made* for all Israel. 25. And he set the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for *so was* the commandment of the LORD by his prophets. 26. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. 27. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt-offering upon the altar. And when the burnt-offering began, the song of the LORD began *also* with the trumpets, and with the instruments *ordained* by David king of Israel. 28. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: *and all this continued* until the burnt-offering was finished. 29. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped. 30. Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped. 31. Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank-offerings into the house of the LORD. And the congregation brought in sacrifices and thank-offerings; and as many as were of a free heart burnt-offerings. 32. And the number of the burnt-offerings, which the congregation brought, was threescore and ten bullocks, an hundred rams, *and* two hundred lambs: all these *were* for a burnt-offering to the LORD. 33. And the consecrated things *were* six hundred oxen and three thousand sheep. 34. But the priests were too few, so that they could not flay all the burnt-offerings: wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them, till the work was ended, and until the *other* priests had sanctified themselves: for the Levites *were* more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests. 35. And also the burnt-offerings *were* in abundance, with the fat of the peace-offerings, and

the drink-offerings for *every* burnt-offering. So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order. 36. And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was *done* suddenly.

The temple being cleansed, we have here an account of the good use that was immediately made of it. A solemn assembly was called to meet the king at the temple the very next day; (v. 20.) and very glad, no doubt, all the good people in Jerusalem were, when it was said, *Let us go up to the house of the Lord*, Ps. 122. 1. As soon as Hezekiah heard that the temple was ready for him, he lost no time, but made it appear that he was ready for it. He rose early to go up to the house of the Lord, earlier on that day than on other days, to shew that his heart was upon his work there.

Now this day's work was to look two ways;

I. Atonement must be made for the sins of the last reign. They thought it not enough to lament and forsake those sins, but they brought a sin-offering. Even our repentance and reformation will not obtain pardon but in and through Christ, who was made *sin*, that is, *a sin-offering*, for us. No peace but through his blood, no not for penitents. Observe,

1. The sin-offering was *for the kingdom, the sanctuary, and for Judah*; (v. 21.) that is, to make atonement for the sins of princes, priests, and people, for they had all corrupted their way. The law of Moses appointed sacrifices to make atonement for the sins of the whole congregation, (Lev. 4. 13, 14. Numb. 15. 24, 25.) that the national judgments, which their national sins deserved, might be turned away; for this, we must now have an eye to Christ the great Propitiation, as well as for the remission and salvation of particular persons.

2. The law appointed only one goat for a sin-offering, as on the day of atonement, (Lev. 16. 15.) and on such extraordinary occasions as this, Numb. 15. 24. But they here offered seven, (v. 21.) because the sins of the congregation had been very great, and long continued in. Seven is a number of perfection: our great Sin-offering is but one, yet that one *perfects* for ever *them that are sanctified*.

3. The king and the congregation (that is, the representatives of the congregation) *laid their hands on the heads of the goats* that were for the sin-offering, (v. 23.) thereby owning themselves guilty before God, and expressing their desire that the guilt of the sinner might be transferred upon the sacrifice. By faith we lay our hands on the Lord Jesus, and so *receive the atonement*, Rom. 5. 11.

4. Burnt-offerings were offered with the sin-offerings, *seven bullocks, seven rams, and seven lambs*. The intention of the burnt-offerings was to give glory to the God of Israel, whom they own as the only true God, which it was proper to do at the same time that they were by the sin-offering making atonement for their offences. The blood of those, as well as of the sin-offering, was *sprinkled upon the altar*, (v. 22.) to make reconciliation *for all Israel*, (v. 24.) and not for Judah only; Christ is a Propitiation not for the sins of Israel only, but of *the whole world*, 1 John. 2. 1, 2.

5. While the offerings were burning upon the altar, the Levites sang *the song of the Lord*, (v. 27.) the psalms composed by David and Asaph, (v. 30.) with the musical instruments which God by his prophets had commanded the use of, (v. 25.) and which had been long neglected. Even sorrow for sin must not put us out of tune for praising God. By faith we must rejoice in Christ Jesus as our righteousness; and our prayers and praises must ascend with his offering, to be accepted only in the virtue of it.

6. The king and all the congregation testified their consent to, and concurrence in, all that was done, by *bowing their heads and worshipping*; expressing an awful veneration of the Divine Majesty, by postures of adoration. This is taken notice of, v. 28. . . 30. It is not enough for us to be where God is worshipped, if we do not ourselves worship him, and that, not with bodily exercise only, which profits little, but with the heart.

II. The solemnities of this day did likewise look forward; the temple service was to be set up again, that it might be continually kept up; and this Hezekiah calls them to, v. 31. "Now that ye have *consecrated yourselves to the Lord*, have both made an atonement and made a covenant by sacrifice, are solemnly reconciled and engaged to him; now *come near, and bring sacrifices.*" Note, Our covenant with God must be pursued and improved in communion with him. Having consecrated ourselves, in the first place, to the Lord, we must bring the sacrifices of prayer, and praise, and alms, to his house. Now, in this work, it was found,

1. That the people were free. Being called to it by the king, they brought in their offerings, though not in such abundance as in the glorious days of Solomon, (for Judah was now diminished, impoverished, and brought low,) but according to what they had, and as much as one could expect, considering their poverty and the great decay of piety among them. (1.) Some were so generous as to bring burnt-offerings, which were wholly consumed to the honour of God, and of which the offerer had no part; of this sort there were 70 bullocks, 100 rams, and 200 lambs, v. 32. (2.) Others brought peace-offerings and thank-offerings, the fat of which was burnt upon the altar, and the flesh divided between the priests and the offerers; (v. 35.) of this sort there were 600 oxen and 3000 sheep, v. 33. Perhaps the remembrance of their sin, in sacrificing on the high places, made them more willing to bring their sacrifices now to God's altar.

2. That the *priests were few*, too few for the service, v. 34. Many of them, it is likely, were suspended and laid aside as polluted and uncanonical, for having sacrificed to idols in the last reign, and the rest had not the zeal that one might have expected upon such an occasion; they thought that the king needed not to be so forward, that there was no such necessity for haste in opening the doors of the temple, and therefore they took no care to sanctify themselves, and, being unsanctified, and so unqualified, they made that their excuse for being absent from the service; as if their offence would be their defence. It is recorded here, to the perpetual shame of the priests, that though they were so well provided for out of the offerings of the Lord made by fire, yet they did not mind their business; here was work to do, and there wanted proper hands to do it.

3. That the Levites were forward. They had been *more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests*, (v. 34.) were better affected to the work, and better prepared and qualified for it; this was their praise, and, in recompence for it, they had the honour to be employed in that which was the priests' work; they *helped them to flay the offerings*. This was not according to the law, (Lev. 1. 5, 6.) but the irregularity was dispensed with in cases of necessity, and thus encouragement was given to the faithful zealous Levites, and a just disgrace was put upon the careless priests. What the Levites wanted, in the ceremonial advantages of their birth and consecration, was abundantly made up in their eminent qualifications of skill and will to do the work.

4. That all were pleased. The king and all the people rejoiced in this blessed turn of affairs, and the new face of religion which the kingdom had put on, v. 36. Two things in this matter pleased them; (1.) That it was soon brought about; *the thing was done suddenly*, in a little time, with a great deal of ease, and without any opposition. Those that go about the work of God in faith, and with resolution, will find that there is not that difficulty in it which they sometimes imagine, but it will be a pleasing surprise to them to see how soon it is done. (2.) That the hand of God was plainly in it; *God had prepared the people* by the secret influences of his grace, so that many of those who had in the last reign doted on the idolatrous altars, were now as much in love with God's altar. This change, which God wrought on their minds, did very much expedite and facilitate the work. Let magistrates and ministers do *their part* toward the reforming of a land, and then let them trust God to do *his*, and ascribe to him the glory of what is done, especially when it is done suddenly, and is a pleasing surprise. *This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous.*

CHAP. XXX.

In this chapter, we have an account of the solemn passover which Hezekiah kept in the first year of his reign. I. The consultation about it, and the resolution he and his people came to for the observance of it, v. 2..5. II. The invitation he sent to Judah and Israel to come and keep it, v. 1, 6..12. III. The joyful celebration of it, v. 13..27. By this, the reformation, set on foot in the foregoing chapter, was greatly advanced and established, and that wait in God's holy place clenched.

1. **A**ND Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel. 2. For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. 3. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. 4. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation. 5. So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done *it* of a long time *in such sort* as it was written. 6. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. 7. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, *who* therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. 8. Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers *were*, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. 9. For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children *shall find* compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God *is* gracious and merciful, and will not turn away *his* face from you, if ye return unto him. 10. So the posts passed from city to city, through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. 11. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. 12. Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD.

Here is,

I. A passover resolved upon. The annual feast was instituted as a memorial of the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt; it happened that the reviving of the temple-service fell within the appointed days of that feast, the 17th day of the 1st month; this brought that forgotten solemnity to mind; "What shall we do," says Hezekiah, "about the passover? It is a very comfortable ordinance, and has been long neglected; how shall we revive that? The time is lapsed, for this year; we cannot go about it immediately, the congregation is thin, the people have not notice, the priests are not prepared, v. 3. Must we defer it till another year?" Many, it is likely, were for deferring it; but Hezekiah considered that by that time twelve-month, the good affections of the people would cool, and it would be too long to wait the benefit of the ordinance; and therefore, finding a proviso in the law of Moses, that particular persons who were unclean in the first month, might keep the passover the fourteenth day of the second month, and be accepted, (Numb. 9. 11.) he doubted not but that it might be extended to the congregation. Whereupon, they resolved to keep the passover in the second month. Let the circumstances give way to the substance, and let not the thing itself be lost upon a nicety about the time. It is good striking while the iron is hot, and taking people when they are in a good mind. Delays are dangerous.

II. A proclamation issued out to give notice of this passover, and to summon the people to it.

1. An invitation was sent to the ten revolted tribes to stir them up to come, and attend this solemnity. Letters were written to Ephraim and Manasseh to invite them to Jerusalem to keep this passover, (v. 1.) not with any politic design to bring them back to the house of David, but with a pious design to bring them back to the Lord God of Israel; "Let them take whom they will for their king," says Hezekiah, "so they will but take him for their God." The matters in difference between Judah and Israel, either upon a civil or sacred account, shall not hinder, but that, if the people of Israel will sincerely return to the Lord their God, Hezekiah will bid them as welcome to the passover as any of his own subjects. Expresses are sent post throughout all the tribes of Israel, with memorials, earnestly pressing the people to take this opportunity of returning to the God from whom they had revolted. Now here we have,

(1.) The contents of the circular letters that were dispatched away upon this occasion, in which Hezekiah discovers a great concern both for the honour of God and for the welfare of the neighbouring kingdom, the prosperity of which he seems passionately desirous of, though he not only received no toll, tribute, or custom, from it, but it had often, and not long since, been vexatious to his kingdom. This is rendering good for evil.

Observe, [1.] What it is which he presses them to; (v. 8.) "*Yield yourselves unto the Lord.*" Before you can come into communion with him, you must come into covenant with him. "*Give the hand to the Lord;*" so the word is; that is, "Consent to take him for your God;" a bargain is confirmed by giving the hand; "Strike this bargain. Join yourselves to him in an everlasting covenant. *Subscribe with the hand* to be his, Isa. 44. 5. Give him your hand, in token of giving him your heart; lay your hand to his plough; devote yourselves to his service, to work for him. *Yield to him,*" that is, "Come up to his terms; come under his government; stand it not out any longer against him. *Yield to him,* to be absolutely and universally at his command, at his disposal; to be, and do, and have, and suffer, whatever he pleases. In order to this, be not *stiff-necked as your fathers were*; let not your corrupt and wicked wills rise up in rebellion against the will of God. Say not that you will do what you please, but resolve to do what he pleases." We perceive in the carnal mind a stiffness and obstinacy, an unaptness to comply with God; we have it from our fathers, it is bred in the bone with us; this must be conquered; and the will that had in it a spirit of contradiction must be melted into the will of God; and to his yoke the neck that was an iron sinew must be bowed and fitted. In pursuance of this resignation to God, he presses them to enter into his

sanctuary, that is, to attend upon him in that place which he had chosen to put his name there, and serve him in the ordinances which he had appointed. "The doors of the sanctuary are now opened, and you have liberty to enter; the temple service is now revived, and you are welcome to join in it." The king says, *Come*; the princes and priests say, *Come, whoever will, let him come.* This he calls, (v. 6.) *turning to the Lord God*; for they had forsaken him, and worshipped other gods; *Repent now, and be converted.* Thus they who through grace have turned to God themselves, should do all they can to bring others to him.

[2.] What arguments he uses to persuade them to do this. *First*, "You are children of Israel, and therefore stand related, stand obliged, to the God of Israel, from whom you are revolted." *Secondly*, "The God you are called to return to, is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a God in covenant with your first fathers, who served him and yielded themselves to him; and it was their honour and happiness." *Thirdly*, "Your late fathers, that forsook him and trespassed against him, have been given up to desolation; their apostasy and idolatry have been their ruin, as you see; (v. 7.) let their harms be your warnings." *Fourthly*, "You yourselves are but a remnant narrowly escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria, (v. 6.) and therefore are concerned to put yourselves under the protection of the God of your fathers, that you be not quite swallowed up." *Fifthly*, "This is the only way of turning away the fierceness of God's anger from you, (v. 8.) which will certainly consume you, if you continue stiff-necked." *Lastly*, "If you return to God in a way of duty, he will return to you in a way of mercy." This he begins with, (v. 6.) and concludes with, v. 9. In general, "You will find him *gracious and merciful*, and one that *will not turn away his face from you*, if you seek him, notwithstanding the provocations you have given him." Particularly, "You may hope that he will turn again the captivity of your brethren that are carried away, and bring them back to their own land." Could anything be expressed more pathetically, more movingly? Could there be a better cause, and better pleaded?

(2.) The entertainment which Hezekiah's messengers and message met with. It does not appear that Hoshea, who was now king of Israel, took any umbrage from, or gave any opposition to, the dispersing of these proclamations through his kingdom, nor that he forbade his subjects to accept the invitation; he seems to have left them entirely to their liberty, they might go to Jerusalem to worship, if they pleased; for though he did evil, yet *not like the kings of Israel that were before him*, 2 Kings, 17. 2. He saw ruin coming upon his kingdom, and if any of his subjects would try this expedient to prevent it, they had his full permission. But, for the people,

[1.] The generality of them slighted the call, and turned a deaf ear to it. The messengers went from city to city, some to one, and some to another, and used pressing entreaties with the people to come up to Jerusalem to keep the passover; but they were so far from complying with the message, that they abused them that brought it, *laughed them to scorn, and mocked them*, (v. 10.) not only refused, but refused with disdain. Tell them of the God of Abraham, they knew him not, they had other gods to serve, Baal and Ashtaroth; tell them of the sanctuary, their high places were as good; of God's mercy and wrath, they neither dreaded the one, nor desired the other. No marvel that the king's messengers were thus spitefully used by this apostate race, when God's messengers were so, his servants the prophets, who produced credentials from him. The destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes was now at hand; it was but two or three years after this, that the king of Assyria laid siege to Samaria, which ended in the captivity of those tribes: just before this, they had not only a king of their own that permitted them to return to God's sanctuary, but a king of Judah that earnestly invited them to do it; had they generally accepted this invitation, it might have prevented their ruin; but their contempt of it hastened and aggravated it, and left them inexcusable.

[2.] Yet there were some few that accepted the invitation. The message, though to some it was a *savour of death unto death*, was to others a *savour of life unto life*, v. 11. In the worst of times, God has had a remnant; so he had here, divers of Asher, Manasseh,

and Zebulun, (here is no mention of any out of Ephraim*), *humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem*, that is, were sorry for their sins, and submitted to God. Pride keeps men from yielding themselves to the Lord; when that is brought down, the work is done.

2. A command was given to the men of Judah to attend this solemnity, and they universally obeyed it, v. 12. They did it with one heart, were all of a mind in it, and *the hand of God gave them that one heart*; for it is in the day of power that Christ's subjects are made willing. It is God that works both *to will* and *to do*. When people, at any time, discover an unexpected forwardness to that which is good, we must acknowledge the hand of God in it.

13. And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation.

14. And they arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast *them* into the brook Kidron. 15. Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth *day* of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt-offerings into the house of the LORD. 16. And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, *which they received* of the hand of the Levites. 17. For *there were many in the congregation* that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers for every one *that was* not clean, to sanctify *them* unto the LORD. 18. For a multitude of the people, *even* many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written: but Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, the good LORD pardon every one. 19. *That* prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though *he be* not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. 20. And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.

The time appointed for the passover is now come, and a very great congregation came together upon this occasion, v. 13. Now here we have,

I. The preparation they made for the passover; it was good preparation: they took away all the idolatrous altars that were found, not only in the temple, but in Jerusalem, v. 14. Before they kept the feast, they cast out this old leaven. The best preparation we can make for the gospel-passover, is, to cast away our iniquities, our spiritual idolatries.

II. Their celebration of the passover; in this the people were so forward and zealous, that the priests and Levites blushed to see themselves out-done by the commonalty, to see them more ready to bring sacrifices than they were to offer them. This put them upon sanctifying themselves, (v. 15.) that the work might not stand still for want of hands to carry it on. The notice we take of the zeal of others should make us ashamed of our own coldness, and quicken us, not only to do our duty, but to do it *well*, and to sanctify ourselves to it. They did according to the

duty of their place, (v. 16.) sprinkling *the blood upon the altar*, which was a type of Christ, our Passover, sacrificed for us.

III. The irregularities they were guilty of in this solemnity. The substance was well managed, and with a great deal of devotion; but, beside being a month out of time, 1. The *Levites killed the passover*, which should have been done by the priests only, v. 17. They also assisted, more than the law ordinarily allowed, in offering the other sacrifices, particularly those that were for the purifying of the unclean, many of which there was now occasion for. Some think that it was the offerers' work, not the priests', that the Levites had here the charge of. Ordinarily, every man killed his lamb, but now, for those that were under any ceremonial pollution, the Levites did it. 2. Many were permitted to eat the passover who were not purified according to the strictness of the law, v. 18. This was the second month, and there was no warrant to put them off further to the third month, as, if it had been the first month, the law had permitted them to eat it the second. And they were loath to forbid them communicating at all, lest they should discourage new converts, and send them away complaining, whom they desired to send away rejoicing. Grotius observes, from this, that ritual institutions must give way, not only to a public necessity, but to a public benefit and advantage.

IV. Hezekiah's prayer to God, for the forgiveness of this irregularity. It was his zeal that had called them together in such haste, and he would not that any should fare the worse for being straitened of time in their preparation: he therefore thought himself concerned to be an intercessor for those that *ate the passover otherwise than it was written*, that there might not be wrath upon them from the Lord. His prayer was,

1. A short prayer, but to the purpose. *The good Lord pardon every one* in the congregation that has fixed, engaged, or *prepared, his heart* to those services, though the ceremonial preparation be wanting. Note, (1.) The great thing required in our attendance upon God, in solemn ordinances, is, that we *prepare our hearts to seek him*; that we be sincere and upright in all we do, that the inward man be engaged and employed in it, and that we make heart-work of it; it is all nothing without this. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward part*. Hezekiah does not pray that this might be dispensed with, nor that the want of other things might be pardoned, where there was not this; for *this* is the *one thing needful*, that we *seek God*, his favour, his honour, and that we set our hearts to do it. (2.) Where this sincerity and fixedness of heart are, yet there may be many defects and infirmities, both the frame of the spirit, and the performance of the service, short of the *purification of the sanctuary*. Corruptions may not be so fully conquered, thoughts not so closely fixed, affections not so lively, faith not so operative, as they should be; here is a defect in sanctuary purification. There is nothing perfect under the sun, nor a *just man that doeth good, and sinneth not*. (3.) These defects need pardoning, healing, grace; for omissions *in* duty are sins, as well as omissions *of* duty. If God should deal with us, in strict justice, according to the best of our performances, we were undone. (4.) The way to obtain pardon for our deficiencies in duty, and all the iniquities of our holy things, is, to seek it of God by prayer; it is not so a pardon of course, but that it must be obtained, by petition, through the blood of Christ. (5.) In this prayer, we must take encouragement from the goodness of God. *The good Lord pardon*; for, when he proclaimed his goodness, he insisted most upon this branch of it, *forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin*. (6.) It is the duty of those that have the charge of others, not only to look to themselves, but to those also that are under their charge, to see wherein they are wanting, and to pray for them, as Hezekiah here. See Job, 1. 5.

2. A successful prayer. *The Lord hearkened to Hezekiah*, was well-pleased with his pious concern for the congregation, and, in answer to his prayer, *healed the people*; (v. 20.) not only did not lay their sin to their charge, but graciously accepted their

services notwithstanding; for healing denotes not only forgiveness, (Isa. 6. 10. Ps. 103. 3.) but comfort and peace, Isa. 57. 19. Mal. 4. 2.

21. And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, *singing* with loud instruments unto the LORD. 22. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the LORD: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace-offerings, and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers. 23. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept *other* seven days with gladness. 24. For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the congregation a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep: and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. 25. And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. 26. So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel *there was not the like* in Jerusalem. 27. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling-place, *even* unto heaven.

After the passover followed the feast of unleavened bread, which continued seven days. How that was observed, we are here told, and every thing in this account looks pleasant and lively.

I. Abundance of sacrifices were offered to God in peace-offerings, by which they both acknowledged and implored the favour of God, and on part of which the offerers feasted with their friends during these seven days, (v. 22.) in token of their communion with God, and the comfort they took in his favour, and their reconciliation to him. To keep up this part of the service, that God's altar might be abundantly regaled with the fat and blood, and his priests and people with the flesh, of the peace-offerings, Hezekiah gave, out of his own stock, 1,000 bullocks, and 7,000 sheep; and the princes, excited by his pious example, gave the same number of bullocks, and a greater number of sheep, and all for peace-offerings, v. 24. By this God was honoured, the joy of the festival was kept up, and the strangers were encouraged to come again to Jerusalem. It was generously done of the king and the princes, thus plentifully to entertain the whole congregation: but what is a great estate good for, but that it puts men into a capacity of doing so much the more good? Christ feasted those that followed him. I believe neither Hezekiah nor his princes were the poorer at the year's end for this their pious liberality.

II. Many good prayers were put up to God with the peace-offerings, v. 22. They made confession to the Lord God of their fathers, in which the intent and meaning of the peace-offerings were directed and explained. When the priests sprinkled the blood, and burnt the fat, they made confession; so did the people, when they feasted, on their part. They made a religious confession of their relation to God, and dependence upon him; a penitent confession of their sins and infirmities; a thankful confession of God's mercies to them; and a supplicatory con-

fession of their wants and desires; and, in all these, they had an eye to God, as *the God of their fathers*, a God in covenant with them.

III. There was an abundance of good preaching. The Levites (whose office it was, Deut. 33. 10.) taught the people the good knowledge of the Lord, read and opened the scriptures, and instructed the congregation concerning God, and their duty to him; there was great need of it, after so long a famine of the word as had been in the last reign. Hezekiah did not himself preach, but he *spake comfortably to the Levites* that did, attended their preaching, commended their diligence, and assured them of his protection and countenance; hereby he encouraged them to study hard, and take pains, and put a reputation upon them, that the people might respect and regard them the more. Princes and magistrates, by owning and encouraging faithful and laborious preachers, greatly serve the interest of God's kingdom among men.

IV. They sang psalms every day, v. 21. *The Levites and priests praised the Lord day by day*, both with songs and musical instruments; thus expressing their own, and exciting one another's, joy in God, and thankfulness to him. Praising God should be much of our work in our religious assemblies.

V. Having kept the seven days of the feast in this religious manner, they had so much comfort in it, that they kept *other seven days*, v. 23. They did not institute any new modes of worship, but repeated and continued the old. The case was extraordinary, they had been long without the ordinance, guilt had been contracted by the neglect of it. They had now got a very great congregation together, and were in a devout serious frame; they knew not when they might have such another opportunity, and therefore could not now find in their hearts to part till they had doubled the time. Many of them were a great way from home, and had business in the country to look after, for, this being the second month, they were in the midst of their harvest; yet they were in no haste to return, the zeal of God's house made them forget themselves and their secular affairs. How unlike those who snuffed at God's service, and said, *What a weariness is it!* or those who asked, *When will the sabbath be gone?* The servants of God should abound in his work.

VI. All this they did *with gladness*; (v. 23.) they all rejoiced, and particularly *the strangers*, v. 25. *So there was great joy in Jerusalem*, v. 26. Never was the like since the dedication of the temple, in Solomon's time. Note, Holy duties should be performed with holy gladness; we should be forward to them, and take pleasure in them, relish the sweetness of communion with God, and look upon it as matter of unspeakable joy and comfort that we are thus favoured, and have such earnest of everlasting joy.

VII. The congregation was, at length, dismissed, with a solemn blessing, v. 27. 1. The priests pronounced it; for it was part of their office to *bless the people*, (Numb. 6. 22, 23.) in which they were both the people's mouth to God, by way of prayer, and God's mouth to the people, by way of promise; for their blessing included both. In it they testified both their desire of the people's welfare, and their dependence upon God, and that word of his grace, to which they commended them. What a comfort is it to a congregation to be sent home thus crowned! 2. God said *Amen* to it. The voice of the priests, when they *blessed the people*, was heard in heaven, and came up to the *habitation of God's holiness*. When they pronounced the blessing, God commanded it, and perhaps gave some sensible token of the ratification of it. The prayer that comes up to heaven in a cloud of incense, will come down again to this earth in showers of blessings.

CHAP. XXXI.

We have here a further account of that blessed reformation, of which Hezekiah was a glorious instrument, and of the happy advances he made in it. I. All the remnants of idolatry were destroyed, and abolished, v. 1. II. The priests and Levites were set to work again, every man in his place, v. 2. III. Care was taken for their maintenance. 1. The royal bounty to the clergy, and for the support of the temple service, was duly paid, v. 3. 2. Orders were given for the raising of the people's quota, v. 4. 3. The people, thereupon, brought in their dues abundantly, v. 5-10. 4. Commissioners were ap-

pointed for the due distribution of what was brought in, v. 11. 19. Lastly, Here is the general praise of Hezekiah's sincerity in all his undertakings, v. 20, 21.

1. **N**OW when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned every man to his possession, into their own cities. 2. And Hezekiah appointed the courses of the priests and the Levites after their courses, every man according to his service, the priests and Levites for burnt-offerings and for peace-offerings, to minister, and to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the tents of the LORD. 3. He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt-offerings, *to wit*, for the morning and evening burnt-offerings, and the burnt-offerings for the sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as *it is* written in the law of the LORD. 4. Moreover he commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the LORD. 5. And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the first-fruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all *things* brought they in abundantly. 6. And concerning the children of Israel and Judah, that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of holy things which were consecrated unto the LORD their God, and laid *them* by heaps. 7. In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished *them* in the seventh month. 8. And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD, and his people Israel. 9. Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. 10. And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since *the people* began to bring the offerings into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the LORD hath blessed his people; and that which is left *is* this great store.

We have here an account of what was done after the passover: what was wanting in the solemnities of preparation for it, before, was made up in that which is better, a due improvement of it, after. When the religious exercises of a Lord's day or a communion are finished, we must not think that then the work is done. No, then the hardest part of our work begins, which is to exemplify the impressions of the ordinance upon our minds in all the instances of a holy conversation. So it was here; when all this was finished, there was more to be done.

I. They applied themselves with vigour to destroy all the monuments of idolatry. The king had done what he could of this kind, (2 Kings, 18. 4.) but the people could discover those profane relics which escaped the eye of the king's officers, and therefore they went out to see what they could do, v. 1. This was done immediately after the passover. Note, The comfort of communion with God should kindle in us a holy zeal and indignation against sin, against every thing that is offensive to God. If our hearts have been made to burn within us at an ordinance, that spirit of burning will consume the dross of corruption: *What have I now to do any more with idols?* Their zeal here in destroying the *images and groves, the high places and altars*, appeared, 1. In that they did this, not only in the cities of Judah and Benjamin, but in those of Ephraim and Manasseh; some think that those cities are meant, which were come under the protection and the jurisdiction of the kings of Judah; others think, that, Hoshea king of Israel not forbidding it, their zeal carried them out to the destruction of idolatry, even in many parts of his kingdom. At least, those that came out of Ephraim and Manasseh to keep the passover, (as many did, *ch.* 30. 18.) destroyed all their own images and groves, and did the like for as many more as they had influence upon, or could make interest in for leave to do it: we should not only reform ourselves, but do all we can to reform others too. 2. They destroyed all, they utterly destroyed all, they spared none for favour or affection either to the images or to their worshippers; though ever so ancient, ever so costly, ever so beautiful, and ever so well patronised, yet they must all be destroyed. Those that sincerely set themselves against sin, will set themselves against all sin. 3. They would not return to their houses, though they had been long absent, till this was done: they could not be easy, nor think themselves safe, in their cities, as long as the images and groves, those betrayers and destroyers of their country, were left standing. Perhaps the prophet Isaiah pointed to this, when, a little before, he spake of a day in which men should cast away the very idols that themselves had made. So surprising was this blessed change, *Isa.* 2. 20.—31. 6, 7.

II. Hezekiah revived and restored the courses of the priests and Levites, which David had appointed, and which had of late been put out of course, v. 2. The temple service was put into method again, to run in the old channel. Every man was made to know his work, his place, his time, and what was expected from him. Good order contributes much to the carrying on of a good work. The priests were appointed in their courses for *burnt-offerings and peace-offerings*, the Levites in their courses were some to minister to the priests, others to *give thanks and praise*. See 1 Chron. 23. 4, 5. And all this in the *gates or courts of the tents of the Lord*. The temple is here called a *tent*, because the temple privileges are moveable things, and this temple was shortly to be removed.

III. He appropriated a branch of the revenue of his crown to the maintenance and support of the altar. Though the people were to be at the charge of the daily offerings, and those on the sabbaths, new moons, and feasts, yet, rather than they should be burthened with the expence, he allowed out of his own estate, or out of his exchequer, for all those offerings, v. 3. It was a generous act of piety, wherein he consulted both God's honour and his people's ease, as a faithful servant to him, and a tender father to them. Let princes and great men reckon that well bestowed, and set out to the best interest, which they give for the support and encouragement of religion in their country.

IV. He issued out an order to the inhabitants of Jerusalem first, v. 4. (that they who were nearest the temple, and both saved and got by being so, might give a good example to others,) but which was afterwards extended to, or, at least, admitted by, the *cities of Judah*, that they should carefully pay in their dues, according to the law, to the priests and Levites. This had been long neglected, which made the work to be neglected: for a scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry. But Hezekiah, having himself been liberal, may with a good grace require his subjects to be *just, to the temple service*. And observe the end he aims at in

reception, for he took care that he should find no water in it, (and then his army must perish for thirst,) or, at least, that there should be a scarcity of water, by which his army would be weakened, and unfitted for service. A powerful army, if it want water but a few days, will be but a heap of dry dust. All hands were set immediately to work, to *stop up the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of that land*, turning that (it is probable) into the city by pipes under ground. Such as this is the policy commonly practised now-a-days of destroying the forage before an invading army. 2. That the city should give him a *warm* reception: in order to this, he repaired the wall, raised towers, and made darts, or, as it is in the margin, *swords or weapons*, and shields, in abundance, (v. 5.) and appointed captains, v. 6. Note, Those that trust God with their safety, must yet use proper means for their safety, else they tempt him, and do not trust him. *God will provide*, but so must we also.

III. The encouragement which he gave to his people to depend upon God in this distress. He gathered them together in a broad open street, and *spake comfortably to them*, v. 6. He had a good heart on it himself, and was confident it would issue well; he was not like his father, who had much guilt to terrify him, and no faith to encourage him; so that, in a time of public danger, *his heart was moved, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind*, and then no marvel that *the heart of his people was so too*, Isa. 7. 2. With what he said, he put life into his people, his captains especially, and *spake to their heart*, as the word is. 1. He endeavours to keep down their fears. "*Be strong and courageous*, do not think of surrendering the city or capitulating, but resolve to hold it out to the last man: do not think of losing the city, or of falling into the enemy's hand; there is no danger. Let the soldiers be bold and brave, make good their posts, stand to their arms, and fight manfully, and let the citizens encourage them to do so. *Be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria*." The prophet had thus encouraged them from God, (Isa. 10. 24.) *Be not afraid of the Assyrians*; and here the king from him. Now it was that *the sinners in Zion were afraid*. (Isa. 33. 14.) but the righteous *dwelt on high*, (v. 15, 16.) and *meditated terror* so as to conquer it, (v. 18.) which refers to what is recorded here. 2. He endeavours to keep up their faith, in order to the silencing and suppressing of their fears. "*He has a multitude with him*, and yet there be *more with us than with him*; for we have God with us, and how many do you reckon for him? With him is an arm of flesh, which he trusts to; but *with us is the Lord*, whose power is irresistible; our God, whose promise is inviolable; a God in covenant with us, *to help us, and to fight our battles*, not only to help us to fight them, but to fight them for us, if he pleases:" and so he did here. Note, A believing confidence in God will raise us above the prevailing fear of man. He that *searcheth the fury of the oppressor, forgetteth the Lord his Maker*, Isa. 51. 12, 13. It is probable that Hezekiah said more to this purport, and that the people rested themselves upon what he said, not merely upon his word, but on the things he said concerning the presence of God with them, and his power to relieve them. The belief of this made them easy. Let the good subjects and soldiers of Jesus Christ rest themselves thus upon his word, and boldly say, *Since God is for us, who can be against us?*

9. After this did Sennacherib king of Assyria send his servants to Jerusalem, (but he *himself laid siege* against Lachish, and all his power with him,) unto Hezekiah king of Judah, and unto all Judah that *were* at Jerusalem, saying, 10. Thus saith Sennacherib king of Assyria, Whereon do ye trust, that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem? 11. Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst, saying, The LORD

our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 12. Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall worship before one altar, and burn incense upon it? 13. Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of *other* lands? were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver the lands out of mine hand? 14. Who *was there* among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand? 15. Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him: for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand? 16. And his servants spake yet *more* against the LORD God, and against his servant Hezekiah. 17. He wrote also letters to rail on the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, As the gods of the nations of *other* lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of mine hand. 18. Then they cried with a loud voice in the Jew's speech unto the people of Jerusalem that *were* on the wall, to affright them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city. 19. And they spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, *which were* the work of the hands of man. 20. And for this *cause* Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven. 21. And the LORD sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword. 22. Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all *other*, and guided them on every side. 23. And many brought gifts unto the LORD to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth.

This story of the rage and blasphemy of Sennacherib, Hezekiah's prayer, and the deliverance of Jerusalem by the destruction of the Assyrian army, we had more at large in the book of Kings, 2 Kings, 18, 19. It is contracted here, yet large enough to shew these three things:

I. The impiety and malice of the church's enemies. Sennacherib has his hands full in besieging Lachish, (v. 9.) but hears that

Hezekiah is fortifying Jerusalem, and encouraging his people to stand it out; and therefore, before he came in person to besiege it, he sends messengers to make speeches, and he himself writes letters to frighten Hezekiah and his people into a surrender of the city. See, 1. His great malice against the king of Judah, in endeavouring to withdraw his subjects from their allegiance to him. He does not treat with Hezekiah as a man of honour would have done, nor propose fair terms to him, but uses mean and base artifices, unbecoming a crowned head, to terrify the common people, and persuade them to desert him. He represents Hezekiah as one who designed to deceive his subjects into their ruin, and betray them to *famine and thirst*; (v. 11.) as one who had done them great wrong, and exposed them already to the divine displeasure by taking away the high places and altars; (v. 12.) and who, against the common interest of his people, held out against a force that would certainly be their ruin, v. 15. 2. His great impiety against the God of Israel; *the God of Jerusalem* he is called, (v. 19.) because that was the place he had chosen to put his name there, and because that was the place which was now threatened by the enemy, and which the Divine Providence had under its special protection. This proud blasphemer compares the great Jehovah, the Maker of heaven and earth, with the dunghill-gods of the nations, the work of men's hands, and thinks him no more able to deliver his worshippers, than they were to deliver their's, v. 19. As if an infinite and eternal Spirit had no more wisdom and power than a stone or the stock of a tree. He boasts of his triumphs over the gods of the nations, that they could none of them protect their people, (v. 13. 15.) and thence infers, not only, *How shall your God deliver you?* (v. 14.) but, as if he were inferior to them all, *How much less shall your God deliver you?* As if he were less able to help than any of them. Thus did they rail; rail in writing, (which, being more deliberate, is so much the worse,) *on the Lord God of Israel*, as if he were a cipher and an empty name, like all the rest, v. 17. Sennacherib, in the instructions he gave, said more than enough; but, as if his blasphemies had been too little, his servants, who learned insolence from their master, spake yet more than he bade them *against the Lord God and his servant Hezekiah*, v. 16. And God resents, and will reckon for, what is said against his servants, as well as what is said against himself. All this was intended to frighten the people from their hope in God; which David's enemies sought to take him off from, (Ps. 11. 1.—42. 10.) saying, *There is no help for him in God*, Ps. 3. 2.—71. 11. Thus they hoped to take the city by weakening the hands of those that should defend it. Satan, in his temptations, aims to destroy our faith in God's all-sufficiency; knowing that he gains his point, if he can do that; as we keep our ground, if our *faith fail not*, Luke, 22. 32.

II. The duty and interest of the church's friends; and that is, in the day of distress to pray and cry to Heaven. So Hezekiah did, and the prophet Isaiah, v. 20. It was a happy time, when the king and the prophet joined thus in prayer. Is any troubled? Is any terrified? Let them pray. So we engage God for us, so we encourage ourselves in him. Praying to God is here called *crying to Heaven*, because we are, in prayer, to eye him as our Father in heaven, whence he beholds the children of men, and where he has prepared his throne.

III. The power and goodness of the church's God. He is able both to controul his enemies, be they ever so high, and to relieve his friends, be they ever so low. As the blasphemies of his enemies engage him against them, (Deut. 32. 27.) so the prayers of his people engage him for them; they did so here: 1. The army of the Assyrians was cut off by the sword of an angel, which triumphed particularly in the slaughter of the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains, who defied the sword of any man. God delights to abase the proud and secure. The Targum says, The word of the Lord (the Eternal Word) sent Gabriel to do this execution, and that it was done with lightning, and in the passover-night; that was the night in which the angel destroyed the first-born of Egypt. But that was not all; 2. The king of the Assyrians, having received this disgrace, was cut off by the sword

of his own sons. They that *came forth of his own bowels slew him*, v. 21. Thus was he mortified first, and then murdered; shamed first, and then slain. Evil pursues sinners; and when they escape one mischief, they run upon another unseen.

Now, by this work of wonder, (1.) God was glorified, as the Protector of his people. Thus he saved Jerusalem, not only from the hand of Sennacherib, but from the hand of *all other*; for such a deliverance as this was an earnest of much mercy in store; and he guided them, that is, he guarded them, on every side. God defends his people by directing them, shews them what they should do, and so saves them from what is designed or done against them. For this, *many brought gifts unto the Lord*, when they saw the great power of God in the defence of his people. Strangers were thereby induced to supplicate his favour, and enemies to deprecate his wrath, and both brought gifts to his temple, in token of their care and desire. (2.) Hezekiah was magnified as the favourite and particular care of Heaven; *many brought presents to him*, (v. 22, 23.) in token of the honour they had for him, and to make an interest in him. By the favour of God, enemies are lost, and friends gained.

24. In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the LORD: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign. 25. But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit *done* unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. 26. Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, *both* he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah. 27. And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; 28. Store-houses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. 29. Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much. 30. This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works. 31. Howbeit in *the business of* the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was *done* in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all *that was* in his heart. 32. Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold they *are* written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 33. And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

Here we conclude the story of Hezekiah, with an account of **three things** concerning him:

I. His sickness, and his recovery from it, v. 24. It is but briefly mentioned here; we had a large narrative of it, 2 Kings, 20. His disease seemed likely to be mortal. In the extremity of it, he prayed, God answered him, and gave him a sign that he should recover; the going back of the sun ten degrees.

II. His sin, and his repentance for that; this was also more largely related, 2 Kings, 20. 12, &c. yet several things are here observed concerning it, which we had not there.

1. The occasion of it was the king of Babylon's sending an honourable embassy to him, to congratulate him on his recovery. But here it is added that they came to inquire of *the wonder that was done in the land*, (v. 31.) either the destruction of the Assyrian army, or the going back of the sun. The Assyrians were their enemies, they came to inquire concerning their fall, that they might triumph in it. The sun was their god, they came to inquire concerning the favour he had shewn to Hezekiah, that they might honour him whom their god honoured, v. 31. These miracles were wrought to alarm and awaken a stupid careless world, and turn them from dumb and lame idols to the living God; and men were startled by them, but not converted till a greater wonder was done in that land, in the appearing of Jesus Christ, Matth. 2. 1, 2.

2. God left him to himself in it, to try him, v. 31. God, by the power of his almighty grace, could have prevented the sin; but he permitted it for wise and holy ends, that, by this trial and his weakness in it, he might know, that is, it might be known, (an usual Hebraism,) what was in his heart; that he was not so perfect in grace as he thought he was, but had his follies and infirmities as other men. God left him to himself, to be proud of his wealth, to keep him from being proud of his holiness. It is good for us to know ourselves, and our own weakness and sinfulness, that we may not be conceited, or self-confident, but may always think meanly of ourselves, and live in a dependence upon divine grace. We know not the corruption of our own hearts, nor what we shall do if God leave us to ourselves. *Lord, lead us not into temptation.*

3. His sin was, that *his heart was lifted up*, v. 25. He was proud of the honour God had put upon him in so many instances; the honour his neighbours did him in bringing him presents; and, now, that the king of Babylon should send an embassy to him to caress and court him, this exalted him above measure. When Hezekiah had destroyed other idolatries, he began to idolize himself. Oh what need have great men, and good men, and useful men, to study their own infirmities and follies, and their obligations to free grace, that they may never think highly of themselves, and to beg earnestly of God, that he will hide pride from them, and always keep them humble!

4. The aggravation of his sin was, that he made so bad a return to God for his favours to him, making even those favours the food and fuel of his pride, v. 25. *He rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him.* Note, It is justly expected that they who have received mercy from God, should study to make some suitable returns for the mercies they have received; and if they do not, their ingratitude will certainly be charged upon them. Though we cannot render an equivalent, or the payment of a debt, we must render the acknowledgment of a favour; *What shall I render, that may be so accepted?* Ps. 116. 12.

5. The divine displeasure he was under for this sin; though it was but a heart-sin, and the overt-act seemed not only innocent, but civil, (the shewing of his treasures to a friend,) yet wrath rane upon him and his kingdom for it, v. 25. Note, Pride is a sin that God hates as much as any other, and particularly in his own people. They that exalt themselves must expect to be abased, and put under humbling providences. Wrath came on David for his pride in numbering the people.

6. His repentance for this sin. *He humbled himself for the pride of his heart.* Note, (1.) Though God may, for wise and holy ends, suffer his people to fall into sin, yet he will not suffer them to lie still in it; they shall not be utterly cast down. (2.) Heart-sins are to be repented of, though they go no further. (3.) Self-

humiliation is a necessary branch of repentance. (4.) Pride of heart, by which we have lifted up ourselves, is a sin, for which we ought, in a special manner, to humble ourselves. (5.) People ought to mourn for the sins of their rulers. The inhabitants of Jerusalem humbled themselves with Hezekiah; either because they knew they also had been guilty of the same sin, or, at least, feared they might share in the punishment. When David, in his pride, numbered the people, they all smarted for it.

7. The reprieve granted thereupon. The wrath came not in his days; while he lived, there were peace and truth; so much does repentance avail to put by, or, at least, to put off, the tokens of God's anger.

III. Here is the honour done to Hezekiah: 1. By the providence of God while he lived. He had *exceeding much riches and honour*, (v. 27.) replenished his stores, victualled his camps, fortified his city, and did all he wished to do; for God *had given him substance very much*, v. 29. Among his great performances, his turning the water-course of Gihon is mentioned, (v. 30.) which was done upon occasion of Sennacherib's invasion, v. 3, 4. The water had come into that which is called the *old pool*, (Isa. 22. 11.) and the *upper pool*, (Isa. 7. 3.) but he gathered the waters into a new place, for the greater convenience of the city, called the *lower pool*, (Isa. 22. 9.) And, in general, he *prospered in all his works*, for they were good works. 2. By the respect paid to his memory when he was dead. (1.) The prophet Isaiah wrote his life and reign, (v. 32.) his acts, and his goodness, or piety, part of the honour of which is to be recorded and remembered, for example to others. (2.) The people *did him honour at his death*, (v. 33.) buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres, made as great burning for him as for Asa; or, which is a much greater honour, made great lamentation for him, as for Josiah. See how the honour of serious godliness is manifested in the consciences of men. Though it is to be feared that the generality of the people did not heartily comply with the reforming kings, yet they could not but praise their endeavours for reformation, and the memory of those kings was blessed among them. It is a debt we owe to those who have been eminently useful in their day, to do them honour at their death, when they are out of the reach of flattery, and we have seen the end of their conversation. The due payment of this debt will be an encouragement to others to do likewise.

CHAP. XXXIII.

In this chapter, we have the history of the reign, I. Of Manasseh, who reigned long. 1. His wretched apostacy from God, and revolt to idolatry, and all wickedness, (v. 1. 10.) 2. His happy return to God in his affliction; his repentance, (v. 11. 13.) his reformation, (v. 15. 17.) and prosperity, (v. 14.) with the conclusion of his reign, v. 18. 20. II. Of Amon, who reigned very wickedly, (v. 21. 23.) and soon ended his days unhappily, v. 24, 25.

1. **M**ANASSEH was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: 2. But did *that which was evil* in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. 3. For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. 4. Also he built altars in the house of the Lord, whereof the Lord had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever. 4. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. 6. And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed

times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. 7. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: 8. Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers; so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses. 9. So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, *and* to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel. 10. And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

We have here an account of the great wickedness of Manasseh; it is the same almost word for word with that which we had, 2 Kings, 21. 1. .9. and took a melancholy view of; it is no such pleasing subject, that we should delight to dwell upon it again. This foolish young prince, in contradiction to the good example and good education his father gave him, abandoned himself to all impiety; transcribed the abominations of the heathen, (v. 2.) ruined the established religion, and unravelled his father's glorious reformation, (v. 3.) profaned the house of God with his idolatry, (v. 4, 5.) dedicated his children to Moloch, and made the Devil's lying oracles his guides and his counsellors, v. 6. In contempt of the choice God had made of Zion to be his rest for ever, and Israel to be his covenant-people, (v. 8.) and the fair terms he stood upon with him, he embraced other gods, profaned God's chosen temple, and debauched his chosen people; he *made them to err, and do worse than the heathen*, (v. 9.) for if the unclean spirit return, he brings with him *seven other spirits more wicked than himself*. That which aggravated the sin of Manasseh, was, that God *spake to him and his people*, by the prophets, *but they would not hearken*, v. 10. We may here admire the grace of God in speaking to them, and their obstinacy in turning a deaf ear to him; that either their badness did not quite turn away his goodness, but still he waited to be gracious, or that his goodness did not turn them from their badness, but still they hated to be reformed.

Now from this let us learn, 1. That it is no new thing, but a very sad thing, for the children of godly parents to turn aside from that good way of God in which they have been trained up. Parents may give many good things to their children, but they cannot give them grace. 2. Corruptions in worship are such diseases of the church, as, even then when they seem to be cured, it is very apt to relapse into again. 3. The God of this world has strangely blinded men's minds, and has a wonderful power over those that are led captive by him; else he could not draw them from God their best Friend, to depend upon their sworn enemy.

11. Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. 12. And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, 13. And prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplica-

tion, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD *was* God. 14. Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish-gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah. 15. And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast *them* out of the city. 16. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel. 17. Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, *yet* unto the LORD their God only. 18. Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, *they are written* in the book of the kings of Israel. 19. His prayer also, and *how God* was entreated of him, and all his sins, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images, before he was humbled; behold, *they are written* among the sayings of the seers. 20. So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead.

We have seen Manasseh by his wickedness undoing the good that his father had done; here we have him by repentance undoing the evil that he himself had done. It is strange that this was not so much as mentioned in the book of Kings, nor does any thing appear there to the contrary, but that he persisted and perished in his sin. But, perhaps, the reason was, because the design of that history was to shew the wickedness of the nation which brought destruction upon them; and this repentance of Manasseh, and the benefit of it, being personal only, and not national, it is overlooked there; yet here it is fully related, and a memorable instance it is of the riches of God's pardoning mercy, and the power of his renewing grace. Here is,

1. The occasion of Manasseh's repentance; and that was his afflictions. In his distress, he did not (like that king Ahaz) *trespass yet more against God*, but humbled himself, and returned to God. Sanctified afflictions often prove happy means of conversion. What his distress was, we are here told, v. 11. God brought a foreign enemy upon him; the king of Babylon, that courted his father who faithfully served God, invaded him, now that he was treacherously departed from God. He is here called *king of Assyria*, because he had made himself master of Assyria, which he would the more easily do, for the defeat of Sennacherib's army, and its destruction, before Jerusalem. He aimed at the treasures which the ambassadors had seen, and all those precious things; but God sent him to chastise a sinful people, and reduce a straying prince. The captains took *Manasseh among the thorns*, in some bush or other, perhaps in his garden, where he had hid himself. Or, it is spoken figuratively; he was perplexed in his counsels, and embarrassed in his affairs. He was, as we say, in the briers, and knew not which way to extricate himself, and so became an easy prey to the Assyrian captains; who, no doubt, plundered his house, and took

away what they pleased, as Isaiah had foretold, 2 Kings, 20. 17, 18. What was Hezekiah's pride, was their prey. They bound Manasseh, who had been held before with the cords of his own iniquity, and carried him prisoner to Babylon. About what time of his reign this was, we are not told; the Jews say it was in his twenty-second year.

II. The expressions of his repentance; (v. 12, 13.) *when he was in affliction*, he had time to belink himself, and reason enough too. He saw what he had brought himself to by his sin; he found the gods he had served unable to help him. He knew that repentance was the only way of restoring his affairs, and therefore to him he returned from whom he had revolted. 1. He was convinced that Jehovah is the one only living and true God. *Then he knew*, that is, he believed and considered, that the Lord he was God; he might have known it at a less expence, if he would have given due attendance and credit to the word written and preached: but it was better to pay thus dear for the knowledge of God, than to perish in ignorance and unbelief. Had he been a prince in the palace of Babylon, it is probable he had been confirmed in his idolatry; but, being a captive in the prisons of Babylon, he was convinced of it, and reclaimed from it. 2. He applied himself to him as his God now, renouncing all others, and resolving to cleave to him only; the God of his fathers, and a God in covenant with him. 3. He humbled himself greatly before him; was truly sorry for his sins, ashamed of them, and afraid of the wrath of God. It becomes sinners to humble themselves before the face of that God whom they have offended. It becomes sufferers to humble themselves under the hand of that God who corrects them, and to accept the punishment of their iniquity. Our hearts should be humble under humbling providences; then we accommodate ourselves to them, and answer God's end in them. 4. He prayed to him for the pardon of sin, and the return of his favour. Prayer is the relief of penitents, the relief of the afflicted. That is a good prayer, and very pertinent in this case, which we find among the apocryphal books, entitled, *The prayer of Manasses, king of Judah, when he was holden captive in Babylon*; whether it was his or no, is uncertain; if it was, in it he gives glory to God, as the God of their fathers and their righteous seed; as the Creator of the world, a God whose anger is insupportable, and yet his merciful promise unmeasurable. He pleads that God has promised repentance and forgiveness to them that have sinned, and has appointed repentance unto sinners, that they may be saved; not unto the just, as to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but to me, (says he,) that am a sinner; for I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea: so he confesses his sin largely, and aggravates it. *Forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not*; he pleads, *Thou art the God of them that repent, &c.* and concludes, *Therefore I will praise thee for ever, &c.*

III. God's gracious acceptance of his repentance. *God was entreated of him, and heard his supplication*. Though affliction drives us to God, he will not therefore reject us, if in sincerity we seek him, for afflictions are sent on purpose to bring us to him. As a token of God's favour to him, he made a way for his escape; afflictions are continued no longer than till they have done their work; when Manasseh is brought back to his God and to his duty, he shall soon be brought back to his kingdom. See how ready God is to accept and welcome returning sinners, and how swift to shew mercy. Let not great sinners despair, when Manasseh himself, upon his repentance, found favour with God; in him God shewed forth a pattern of long-suffering, as 1 Tim. 1. 16. Isa. 1. 18.

IV. The fruits meet for repentance which he brought forth after his return to his own land, v. 15, 16. 1. He turned from his sins. He took away the strange gods, the images of them, and that idol (whatever it was) which he had set up with so much solemnity in the house of the Lord, as if it had been master of that house; he cast out all the idolatrous altars that were in the mount of the house and in Jerusalem, as detestable things; now (we hope) he loathed them as much as ever he had loved them, and said to them, *Get ye hence*, Isa. 30. 22. "What have I to do any more with idols? I have had enough of them." 2. He returned to his duty; for he

repaired the altar of the Lord, which had either been abused and broken down by some of the idolatrous priests, or, at least, neglected and gone out of repair. He sacrificed thereon peace-offerings to implore God's favour, and thank-offerings to praise him for his deliverance. Nay, he now used his power to reform his people, as before he had abused it to corrupt them, *He commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel*. Note, Those that truly repent of their sins will not only return to God themselves, but will do all they can to reduce those that have by their example been seduced and drawn away from God; else they do not thoroughly (as they ought) undo what they have done amiss, nor make the plaster as wide as the wound. We find that he prevailed to bring them off from their false gods, but not from their high places, v. 17. They still sacrificed in them, yet to the Lord their God only; Manasseh could not carry the reformation so far as he had carried the corruption. It is an easy thing to debauch men's manners, but not so easy to reform them again.

V. His prosperity, in some measure, after his repentance. He might plainly see it was sin that ruined him; for, when he returned to God in a way of duty, God returned to him in a way of mercy; and then he built a wall about the city of David, (v. 14.) for by sin he had unwall'd it, and exposed it to the enemy. He also put captains of war in the fenced cities, for the security of his country. Josephus says, that, all the rest of his time, he was so changed for the better, that he was looked upon as a very happy man.

Lastly, Here is the conclusion of his history. The heads of those things, for a full narrative of which we are referred to the other writings that were then extant, are more than of any of the kings, v. 18, 19. A particular account, it seems, was kept, 1. Of all his sin, and his trespass, the high places he built, the groves and images he set up, before he was humbled. Probably, this was taken from his own confession which he made of his sin, when God gave him repentance, and which he left upon record, and was inserted in a book, entitled, *The words of the seers*. To those seers that spake to him, (v. 18.) to reprove him for his sin, he sent his confession, when he repented, to be inserted in their memoirs, as a token of his gratitude to them for their kindness in reproving him. Thus it becomes penitents to take shame to themselves, to give thanks to their reprovers, and warning to others. 2. Of the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the Lord, (v. 10.) the reproofs they gave him for his sin, and their exhortations to repentance. Note, Sinners ought to consider, that, how little notice soever they take of them, an account is kept of the words of the seers that speak to them from God, to admonish them of their sins, warn them of their danger, and call them to their duty, which will be produced against them in the great day. 3. Of his prayer to God, (that is twice mentioned as a remarkable thing,) and how God was entreated of him. This was written for the generations to come, that the people that should be created might praise the Lord, for his readiness to receive returning prodigals.

Notice is taken of the place of his burial, not in the sepulchres of the kings, but in his own house; he was buried privately, and nothing of that honour was done him, at his death, that was done to his father. Penitents may recover their comfort sooner than their credit.

21. Amon was two and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned two years in Jerusalem. 29. But he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; 23. And humbled not himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more. 24. And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his

own house. 25. But the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.

We have little recorded concerning Amon, but enough, unless it were better. Here is,

1. His great wickedness. He did as *Manasseh had done* in the days of his apostasy, v.22. They who think this an evidence that Manasseh did not truly repent, forget how many good kings had wicked sons. Only, it should seem that Manasseh was in *this* defective, that when he *cast out the images*, he did not utterly deface and destroy them, according to the law which required them to *burn the images with fire*, Deut.7.5. How necessary that law was, this instance shews; for the *carved images* being only thrown by, and not burnt, Amon knew where to find them, soon set them up, and sacrificed to them. It is added, to represent him exceeding sinful, and to justify God in cutting him off so soon, (1.) That he out-did his father in sinning; *he trespassed more and more*, v.23. His father did ill, but he did worse. They that were joined to idols, grew more and more mad upon them. (2.) That he came short of his father in repenting; he *humbled not himself before the Lord, as his father had humbled himself*. He fell like him, but did not get up again like him. It is not so much sin, as impenitence in sin, that ruins men; not so much that they offend, as that they do not humble themselves for their offences; not the disease, but the neglect of the remedy.

2. His speedy destruction. He reigned but two years, and then his servants conspired against him, and slew him, v.24. Perhaps when Amon sinned, as his father did, in the beginning of his days, he promised himself that he should repent, as his father did, in the latter end of his days. But his case shews what a madness it is to presume upon that; if he hoped to repent when he was old, he was wretchedly disappointed; for he was cut off when he was young. He rebelled against God, and his own servants rebelled against him. Herein God was righteous, but they were wicked, and justly did the *people of the land* put them to death as traiters. The lives of kings are particularly under the protection of Providence, and the laws both of God and man.

CHAP. XXXIV.

Before we see Judah and Jerusalem ruined, we shall yet see some glorious years, while good Josiah sits at the helm. By his pious endeavours for reformation, God tried them yet once more; if they had known in this their day, the day of their visitation, the things that belonged to their peace, and improved them, their ruin might have been prevented. But, after this reign, they were hid from their eyes, and the next reigns brought an utter desolation upon them. In this chapter we have, I. A general account of Josiah's character, v.1,2. II. His zeal to root out idolatry, v.3..7. III. His care to repair the temple, v.8..13. IV. The finding of the book of the law, and the good use made of it, v.14..28. V. The public reading of the law to the people, and their renewing their covenant with God thereupon, v.29..33. Much of this we had, 2 Kings, 22.

1. **JOSIAH** was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. 2. And he did *that which was right* in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined *neither* to the right hand, nor to the left. 3. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. 4. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his

presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. 5. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. 6. And so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. 7. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.

Concerning Josiah we are told,

1. That he came to the crown when he was very young, but eight years old; yet his infancy did not debar him from his right, and he reigned 31 years, (v.1.) a considerable time. I fear, however, that, in the beginning of his reign, things went much as they had done in his father's time, because, being a child, he must have left the management of them to others; so that it was not till his 12th year, which goes far in the number of his years, that the reformation began, v.3. He could not, as Hezekiah did, fall about it immediately.

2. That he reigned well, (v.2.) approved himself to God, trod in the steps of David, and did not decline either to the right hand or to the left; for there are errors on both hands.

3. That while he was young, about 16 years old, he *began to seek after God*, v.3. We have reason to think that he had not so good an education as Manasseh had; it is well if those about him did not endeavour to corrupt and debauch him; yet he thus sought God when he was young. It is the duty and interest of young people, and will particularly be the honour of young gentlemen, as soon as they come to years of understanding, to *begin to seek God*; for they that seek him early shall find him.

4. That in his 12th year, when, it is probable, he took the administration of the government entirely into his own hands, he *began to purge his kingdom from the remains of idolatry*; he destroyed the high places, groves, images, altars, all the utensils of idolatry, v.3,4. He not only cast them out, as Manasseh did, but brake them to pieces, and made dust of them. This destruction of idolatry is here said to be in his 12th year, but it was said, 2 Kings, 23.23. to be in his 18th year; something was done towards it now in his 12th year; then he began to purge out idolatry, but, probably, that good work met with opposition, so that it was not thoroughly done till they had found the book of the law six years after; but here the whole work is laid together briefly, which was much more largely and particularly related in the Kings. His zeal carried him out to do this, not only in Judah and Jerusalem, but in the cities of Israel too, as far as he had any influence upon them.

8. Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God. 9. And when they came to Hilkiah the high priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites that kept the doors had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin; and they

returned to Jerusalem. 10. And they put *it* in the hand of the workmen that had the oversight of the house of the LORD, and they gave it to the workmen that wrought in the house of the LORD, to repair and mend the house: 11. Even to the artificers and builders gave they *it*, to buy hewn stone, and timber for couplings, and to floor the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed. 12. And the men did the work faithfully: and the overseers of them *were* Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to set *it* forward; and *other* of the Levites, all that could skill of instruments of music. 13. Also *they were* over the bearers of burthens, and *were* overseers of all that wrought the work in any manner of service: and of the Levites *there were* scribes, and officers, and porters.

Here, 1. Orders are given by the king for the repair of the temple, v. 8. When he had purged the house of the corruptions of it, he began to fit it up for the services that were to be performed in it. Thus we must do by the spiritual temple of the heart; get it cleansed from the pollutions of sin, and then renewed, so as to be transformed into the image of God. Josiah, in this order, calls God *the Lord his God*; they that truly love God, will *love the habitation of his house*.

2. Care is taken about it, effectual care; the Levites went about the country, and gathered money towards it, which was returned to the three trustees mentioned, v. 8. They brought it to Hilkiah the high priest, (v. 9.) and he and they put it into the hands of workmen, both overseers and labourers, who undertook to do it by the great, as we say, *or in the gross*, v. 10, 11. It is observed that the workmen were industrious and honest, *they did the work faithfully*; (v. 12.) and workmen are not completely faithful if they are not both careful and diligent, for a confidence is reposed in them that they will be so. It is also intimated that the overseers were ingenious; for it is said that all those were employed to inspect this work, who *could skill of instruments of music*; not that their skill in music could be of any use in architecture, but it was an evidence that they were men of sense and ingenuity, and particularly that their genius lay toward the mathematics, which qualified them very much for this trust. Witty men are then wise men, when they employ their wit in doing good, in helping their friends, and, as they have opportunity, in serving the public. Observe, in this work, how God dispenses his gifts variously; here were some that were *bearers of burthens*, cut out for bodily labour, and fit to work. Here were others (*made meliori luto—of finer materials*) that had skill in music, and they were *overseers of them that laboured*, and scribes and officers; the former were the hands, these were the heads; they had need of one another, and the work needed both. Let not the overseers of the work despise the bearers of burthens, nor let them that work in the service, grudge at those whose office is to direct; but let each esteem and serve the other in love, and God have the glory, and the church the benefit, of the different gifts and dispositions of both.

14. And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses. 15. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. 16. And Shaphan

carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do *it*. 17. And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen. 18. Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. 19. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. 20. And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying, 21. Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book. 22. And Hilkiah, and *they* that the king *had appointed*, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they spake to her to that *effect*. 23. And she answered them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me, 24. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, *even* all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah: 25. Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched. 26. And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel *concerning* the words which thou hast heard; 27. Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard *thee* also, saith the LORD. 28. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again

This whole paragraph we had just as it is here related, 2 Kings, 22. 8..20. and have nothing to add here to what was there observed.

But, 1. We may hence take occasion to bless God that we have plenty of Bibles, and that they are, or may be, in all hands; that

the book of the law and gospel is not lost, is not scarce; that, in this sense, the *word of the Lord* is not *precious*. Bibles are jewels, but, thanks be to God, they are not rarities. The fountain of the waters of life is not a spring shut up, or a fountain sealed, but the streams of it, in all places, *make glad the city of our God: Usus communis aquarum—These waters flow for general use.* What a great deal shall we have to answer for, if the great things of God's law, being thus made common, should be accounted by us as strange things!

2. We may hence learn, whenever we read or hear the word of God, to affect our hearts with it, and to get them possessed with a holy fear of that wrath of God which is there revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, as Josiah's tender heart was. When he heard the words of the law, he *rent his clothes; v. 19.* and God was well pleased with his doing so, *v. 27.* Were the things contained in the scripture new to us, as they were here to Josiah, surely they would make deeper impressions upon us than commonly they do; but they are never the less weighty, and therefore should not be the less considered by us, for there being well known. Rend the heart therefore, not the garments.

3. We are here directed, when we are under convictions of sin, and apprehensions of divine wrath, to inquire of the Lord; so Josiah did, *v. 21.* It concerns us to ask, as they did, *Acts, 2. 37. Men and brethren, what shall we do?* And more particularly, as the jailor, saying, *What must I do to be saved?* *Acts, 16. 30. If ye will thus inquire, inquire ye;* (*Isa. 21. 12.*) and, blessed be God, we have the lively Oracles to which to apply ourselves with these inquiries.

4. We are here warned of the ruin that sin brings upon nations and kingdoms. They that forsake God bring evil upon themselves, (*v. 24, 25.*) and kindle a fire which shall not be quenched; such will the fire of God's wrath be, when the decree is gone forth against those that obstinately and impenitently persist in their wicked ways.

5. We are here encouraged to humble ourselves before God, and seek unto him, as Josiah did: if we cannot prevail thereby to turn away God's wrath from our land, yet we shall deliver our own souls, *v. 27, 28.* And good people are here taught to be so far from fearing death, as to welcome it, rather, when it takes them away from the evil to come. See how the property of it is altered, by making it the matter of a promise: *Thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace;* housed in that ark, as Noah, when a deluge is coming.

29. Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the LORD. 31. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. 32. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. 33. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, *even to serve the LORD*

their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers.

We have here an account of the further advances which Josiah made toward the reformation of his kingdom, upon the hearing of the law read, and the receipt of the message God sent him by the prophetess. Happy the people that had such a king: for here we find,

1. That they were well taught. He did not go about to force them to their duty, till he had first instructed them in it. He called all the people together, great and small, young and old, rich and poor, high and low; *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear* the words of the book of the covenant; for they are all concerned in those words. To put an honour upon the service, and to engage attention the more, though there were priests and Levites present, the king himself read the book to the people, (*v. 30.*) and he read it, no doubt, in such a manner as to shew that he was himself affected with it, which would be a means of affecting the hearers.

2. That they were well fixed. The articles of agreement between God and Israel being read, that they might intelligently covenant with God, both king and people here, with great solemnity, do as it were subscribe the articles. The king in his place covenanted to keep God's commandments with all his heart and soul, according to what was written in the book, (*v. 31.*) and urged the people to declare their consent likewise to this covenant, and solemnly to promise that they would faithfully perform, fulfil, and keep, all and every thing that was on their part to be done, according to this covenant: this they did; they could not for shame do otherwise. He caused all that were present to stand to it, (*v. 32.*) and made them all to serve, even to serve the Lord their God, (*v. 33.*) to do it, and to make a business of it; he did all he could to bring them to it; to serve, even to serve; the repetition denotes that that was the only thing his heart was set on; he aimed at nothing else in what he did, but to engage them to God and their duty.

3. That they were well tended; were honest with good looking to. All his days, they departed not from following the Lord; he kept them, with much ado, from running into idolatry again. All his days were days of restraint upon them; but this intimated that there was in them a bent to backslide, a strong inclination to idolatry; many of them wanted nothing but to have him out of the way, and then they would have their high places and their images up again. And therefore we find, that, in the days of Josiah, (*Jer. 3. 6.*) God charged it upon treacherous Judah, that she had not returned to him with all her heart, but feignedly, (*v. 10.*) nay, had played the harlot, (*v. 8.*) and thereby had even justified backsliding Israel, *v. 11.* and in the 23d year of this reign, four or five years after this, that they had gone on to provoke God to anger with the works of their hands, *Jer. 25. 3. .7.* And, which is very observable, it is from the beginning of Josiah's reformation, his 12th or 13th year, that the iniquity of the house of Judah, which brought ruin upon them, and which the prophet was to bear lying on his right side, was dated, *Ezek. 4. 6.* For from thence to the destruction of Jerusalem was just forty years. Josiah was sincere in what he did, but the generality of the people were averse to it, and hankered after their idols still; so that the reformation, though well designed, and well prosecuted, by the prince, had little or no effect upon the people. It was with reluctance that they parted with their idols; still they were in heart joined to them, and wished for them again. This, God saw, and therefore, from that time, when one would have thought the foundations had been laid for a perpetual security and peace, from that very time, did the decree go forth for their destruction. Nothing hastens the ruin of a people, nor ripens them for it more, than the baffling of hopeful attempts for reformation, and an hypocritical return to God. Be not deceived, God is not mocked.

CHAP. XXXV.

We are here to attend Josiah, 1. To the temple, where we see his religious care for the due observance of the ordinance of the passover, according to the law

v. 1. . 19. *II. To the field of battle, where we see his rashness, in engaging with the king of Egypt, and how dear it cost him, v. 20. . 23. III. To the grave, where we see him bitterly lamented, v. 24. . 27. And so we must take our leave of Josiah.*

1. **M**OREOVER Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 2. And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD. 3. And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; *it shall not be a burthen upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel.* 4. And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son. 5. And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and *after* the division of the families of the Levites. 6. So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that *they* may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses. 7. And Josiah gave to the people, of the flock, lambs and kids, all for the passover-offerings, for all that were present, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bullocks: these *were* of the king's substance. 8. And his princes gave willingly unto the people, to the priests, and to the Levites: Hilkiah, and Zechariah, and Jehiel, rulers of the house of God, gave unto the priests for the passover-offerings two thousand and six hundred *small cattle*, and three hundred oxen. 9. Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethaneel, his brethren, and Hashabiah, and Jeiel, and Jozabad, chief of the Levites, gave unto the Levites for passover-offerings five thousand *small cattle*, and five hundred oxen. 10. So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king's commandment. 11. And they killed the passover, and the priests sprinkled *the blood* from their hands, and the Levites flayed *them*. 12. And they removed the burnt-offerings, that they might give according to the divisions of the families of the people, to offer unto the LORD, as *it is* written in the book of Moses. And so *did they* with the oxen. 13. And they roasted the passover with fire according to the ordinance: but the *other* holy offerings sod they in pots, and in caldrons, and in pans, and divided *them* speedily among all the people. 14. And afterward they made ready for themselves, and for the priests: because the priests the sons of Aaron *were busied* in offering of burnt-offerings and the fat until night; therefore the

Levites prepared for themselves, and for the priests the sons of Aaron. 15. And the singers the sons of Asaph *were* in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the porters *waited* at every gate; they might not depart from their service; for their brethren the Levites prepared for them. 16. So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt-offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah. 17. And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. 18. And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 19. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept.

The destruction which Josiah made of the idols and idolatry, was more largely related in the Kings, and but just mentioned here in the foregoing chapter, v. 33. But his solemnizing of the passover, which was but touched upon there, 2 Kings, 23. 21. is very particularly related here. Many were the feasts of the Lord, appointed by the ceremonial law, but the passover was the chief; *it began them all* in the night wherein Israel came out of Egypt. *It concluded them all* in the night wherein Christ was betrayed; and in the celebration of it, Hezekiah and Josiah, those two great reformers, revived religion in their day. The ordinance of the Lord's supper resembles the passover more than it does any of the Jewish festivals; and the due observance of that ordinance, according to the rule, is an instance and means both of the growing purity and beauty of churches, and of the growing piety and devotion of particular Christians. Religion cannot flourish where that passover is either wholly neglected, or not duly observed; return to that, revive that, make a solemn business of that affecting binding ordinance, and then, it is to be hoped, there will be a reformation in other instances also.

In the account we had of Hezekiah's passover, the great zeal of the people was observable, and the transport of devout affection that they were in; but little of that appears here. It was more in compliance with the king that they all kept the passover, (v. 17, 18.) than from any great inclination they had to it themselves. Some pride they took in this form of godliness, but little pleasure in the power of it. But, whatever defect there was among the people in the inside of the duty, both the magistrates and the ministers did their part, and took care that the external part of the service should be performed with due solemnity.

I. The king exhorted and directed, quickened and encouraged, the priests and Levites to do their office in this solemnity. Perhaps he saw them remiss and indifferent, unwilling to go out of their road, or mend their pace; if ministers are so, it is not amiss for any, but most proper for magistrates, to stir them up to their business. Say to Archippus, *Take heed to thy ministry*, Col. 4. 17. Let us see how this good king managed his clergy upon this occasion.

1. He reduced them to the office they were appointed to by the law of Moses, (v. 6.) and the order they were put into by David and Solomon, v. 4. He *set them in their charge*, v. 2. He did not cut them out new work, nor put them into any new method, but called them back to their institution. Their courses were settled

in writing; let them have recourse to that writing, and marshal themselves according to the *divisions of their families*, v. 5. Our rule is settled in the written word; let magistrates take care that ministers walk according to that rule, and they do their duty.

2. He ordered the ark to be put in its place, which, it should seem, had of late been displaced, either by the wicked kings, to make room for their idols in the most holy place, or by Hezekiah, to make room for the workmen that repaired the temple. However it was, Josiah bids the *Levites put the holy ark in the house*, (v. 3.) and not carry it about from place to place, as perhaps of late they had done, justifying themselves therein by the practice before the temple was built. Now that the priests were discharged from this burthen of the ark, they must be careful in other services about it.

3. He charged them to *serve God and his people Israel*, v. 3. Ministers must look upon themselves as servants, both to Christ, and to his church, for his sake, 2 Cor. 4. 5. They must take care, and take pains, and lay out themselves to the utmost, (1.) For the glory and honour of God, and to advance the interests of his kingdom among men. Paul, *a servant of God*, Tit. 1. 1. (2.) For the welfare and benefit of his people, not as having dominion over their faith, but as servants of their holiness and joy; and there will be no difficulty, in the strength of God, honestly to serve these two masters.

4. He charged them to *sanctify themselves, and prepare their brethren*, v. 6. Ministers' work must begin at home, and they must sanctify themselves in the first place, purify themselves from sin, sequester themselves from the world, and devote themselves to God; but it must not end there, they must do what they can to *prepare their brethren*, by admonishing, instructing, exhorting, quickening, and comforting them. *The preparation of the heart* is indeed *from the Lord*; but ministers must be instruments in his hand.

5. He *encouraged them to the service*, v. 2. He spake comfortably to them, as Hezekiah did, ch. 30. 22. He promised them his countenance. Note, Those whom we charge we should encourage. Most people love to be accosted kindly, and will be wrought upon by encouragements more than by threats.

II. The king and the princes, influenced by his example, gave liberally for the bearing of the charges of this passover. The ceremonial services were expensive, which perhaps was one reason why they had been neglected. People had not zeal enough to be at the charge of them, nor were they now very fond of them, for that reason. And therefore,

1. Josiah, at his own proper cost, furnished the congregation with paschal lambs, and other sacrifices, to be offered during the seven days of the feast. He allowed out of his own estate 30,000 lambs for *passover-offerings*, which the offerers were to feast upon, and 3,000 bullocks, (v. 7.) to be offered during the following seven days. Note, Those who are serious in religion, when they persuade others to that which is good, should make it as cheap and easy to them as may be. And, where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap accordingly; it is to be feared that the congregation, generally, had not come provided; so that, if Josiah had not furnished them, the work of God must have stood still.

2. The chief of the priests, that were men of great estates, contributed toward the priests' charges, as Josiah toward the people's. *The princes*, (v. 8.) that is, the chief of the priests, the princes of the holy tribe, *rulers of the house of God*, bore the priests' charges. And some of the rich and great men of the Levites furnished them also with cattle, both great and small, for offerings, v. 9. For those that sincerely desire to be found in the way of their duty, Providence sometimes raises up friends to bear them out in it, beyond what they could have expected.

III. The priests and Levites performed their office very readily, v. 10. They killed the paschal lambs in the court of the temple, the priests sprinkled the blood upon the altar, the Levites flayed them, and then gave the flesh to the people, according to their families, (v. 11, 12.) not fewer than ten, nor more than twenty, to a lamb; they took it to their several apartments, roasted it, and ate it, according to the ordinance, v. 13. As for the other sacrifices

that were eucharistical, the flesh of them was boiled, according to the law of the peace-offerings, and was *divided speedily among the people*, that they might feast upon it, as a token of their joy in the atonement made, and their reconciliation to God thereby. And, *lastly*, The priests and Levites took care to honour God, by *eating of the passover themselves*, v. 14. Let not ministers think that the care they take for the souls of others will excuse their neglect of their own; or, that being employed so much in public worship will supersede the religious exercises of their closets and families. The Levites here *made ready for themselves and for the priests*, because the priests were wholly taken up all day in the service of the altar; therefore, that they might not have their lamb to dress when they should eat it, the Levites got it ready for them against supper-time. Let ministers learn hence to help one another, and to forward one another's work, as brethren, and fellow-servants of the same Master.

IV. The singers and porters attended in their places, and did their office, v. 15. The singers, with their sacred songs and music, expressed and excited the joy of the congregation, and made the service very pleasant to them; and the porters at the gates took care that there should be no breaking in of any thing, to defile or disquiet the assembly, nor going out of any from it, that none should steal away till the service was done. While they were thus employed, their brethren, the Levites, prepared paschal lambs for them.

V. The whole solemnity was performed with great exactness, according to the law, (v. 16, 17.) and, upon that account, there was none like it since Samuel's time, (v. 18.) for in Hezekiah's passover there were several irregularities. And Bishop Patrick observes, that in this also it exceeded the other passovers which the preceding kings had kept, that, though Josiah was by no means so rich as David, and Solomon, and Jehoshaphat, yet he furnished the whole congregation with beasts for sacrifice, both paschal and eucharistical, at his own proper cost and charge, which was more than any king ever did before him.

20. After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him. 21. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? *I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not.* 22. Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. 23. And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. 24. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in *one of the sepulchres of his fathers*. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. 25. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing-men and the singing-women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they *are written in the lamentations*. 26. Now the rest of the

acts of Josiah, and his goodness, according to *that which was written in the law of the LORD*, 27. And his deeds, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

It was thirteen years from Josiah's famous passover to his death; during which time, we may hope, things went well in his kingdom; that he prospered, and religion flourished; yet we are not entertained with the pleasing account of those years, but they are passed over in silence, because the people, for all this, were not turned from the love of their sins, nor God from the fierceness of his anger. The next news, therefore, we hear of Josiah, is, that he is cut off in the midst of his days and usefulness, before he is full forty years old. We had this sad story, 2 Kings, 23. 29, 30. here it is somewhat more largely related. That appears here, more than did there, which reflects such blame on Josiah, and such praise on the people, as one would not have expected.

I. Josiah was a very good prince; yet he is much to be blamed for his rashness and presumption, in going out to war against the king of Egypt, without cause or call. It was bad enough, as it appeared in the Kings, that he meddled with strife which belonged not to him. But here it looks worse; for, it seems, the king of Egypt sent ambassadors to him, to warn him against this enterprise, v. 21. He argues, 1. From principles of justice. The king of Egypt professes he had no design to do him any hurt, and therefore it was unfair, against common equity and the law of nations, for Josiah to take up arms against him. If even a *righteous man* engage in an *unrighteous cause*, let him not expect to prosper; *God is no Respector of persons*. See Prov. 3. 30.—25. 8. 2. From principles of religion. "*God is with me*; nay, *He commanded me to make haste*, and therefore, if thou retard my motions, thou *meddlest with God*." It cannot be that the king of Egypt only pretended this, (as Sennacherib did in a like case, 2 Kings, 18. 25.) hoping thereby to make Josiah desist, because he knew he had a veneration for the work of God, for it is said here, (v. 22.) that the words of Necho were *from the mouth of God*; we must therefore suppose, that, either by a dream, or by a strong impulse upon his spirit, which he had reason to think was from God, or by Jeremiah, or some other prophet, he had ordered him to make war upon the king of Assyria. 3. From principles of policy. "*That he destroy thee not*; it is at thy peril if thou engage against one that has both a better army, and a better cause, and God on his side."

It was not in wrath to Josiah, whose heart was upright with the Lord his God, but in wrath to a hypocritical nation, who were unworthy of so good a king, that he was so far infatuated as not to hearken to those fair reasonings, and desist from his enterprise. He *would not turn his face from him*, but went in person, and fought the Egyptian army in the *valley of Megiddo*, v. 22. If, perhaps, he could not believe that the king of Egypt had a command from God, to do what he did, yet, upon his pleading such a command, he ought to have consulted the oracles of God, before he had gone out against him. It is not doing that was his great fault, and of fatal consequence. In this matter, he walked not in the ways of David his father; for, had it been his case, he would have inquired of the Lord, *Shall I go up? Wilt thou deliver them into my hands?* How can we think to prosper in our ways, if we do not acknowledge God in them?

II. The people were a wicked people; yet they are much to be praised for lamenting the death of Josiah as they did. That Jeremiah lamented him, I do not wonder; he was the weeping prophet, and plainly foresaw the utter ruin of his country following upon the death of this good king. But it is strange to find that all Judah and Jerusalem, that stupid senseless people, *mourned for him*, (v. 24.) contrived how to have their mourning *excited* by singing-men and singing-women; how to have it spread through the kingdom: they made an ordinance in Israel, that the mournful ditties, penned on this sad occasion, should be learned and sung by all sorts of people. They contrived also how to

have the remembrance of it perpetuated; these elegies were inserted in the collections of state poems; they are written in the Lamentations. Hereby it appeared, 1. That they had some respect to their good prince, and that, though they did not cordially comply with him in all his good designs, yet they could not but greatly honour him. Pious useful men will be manifested in the consciences even of those that will not be influenced by their example, and many that will not submit to the rules of serious godliness themselves, yet cannot but give it their good word, and esteem it in others. Perhaps those lamented Josiah when he was dead, that were not thankful to God for him while he lived. The Israelites murmured at Moses and Aaron while they were with them, and spoke sometimes of stoning them, and yet, when they died, they mourned for them many days. We are often taught to value mercies by the loss of them, which, when we enjoyed them, we did not prize as we ought. 2. That they had some sense of their own danger, now that he was gone. Jeremiah told them, it is likely, of the evil they might now expect to come upon them, from which he was taken away; and so far they credited what he said, that they lamented the death of him that was their defence. Note, Many will more easily be persuaded to lament the miseries that are coming upon them, than to take the proper way, by universal reformation, to prevent them; will shed tears for their troubles, but will not be prevailed upon to part with their sins. But godly sorrow worketh repentance, and that repentance will be to salvation.

CHAP. XXXVI

We have here, I. A short, but sad, account of the utter ruin of Judah and Jerusalem, within a few years after Josiah's death. 1. The history of it, in the unhappy reigns of Jehoahaz, for three months; (v. 1. 4.) Jehoiakim, (v. 5. 8.) for eleven years; Jehoiachin, three months; (v. 9, 10.) and Zedekiah, eleven years, v. 11. Additions were made to the national guilt, and advances toward the national destruction, in each of those reigns. The destruction was, at length, completed, in the slaughter of multitudes, (v. 17.) the plundering and burning of the temple and all the palaces, the desolation of the city, (v. 18, 19.) and the captivity of the people that remained, v. 20. 2. Some remarks upon it; that herein sin was punished. Zedekiah's wickedness, (v. 12, 13.) the idolatry the people were guilty of, (v. 14.) and their abuse of God's prophets, v. 15, 16. The word of God was herein fulfilled, v. 21. II. The dawning of the day of their deliverance in Cyrus's proclamation, v. 22, 23.

1. **T**HEN the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's stead in Jerusalem. 2. Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. 3. And the king of Egypt put him down at Jerusalem, and condemned the land in an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. 4. And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim. And Necho took Jehoahaz his brother, and carried him to Egypt. 5. Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD his God. 6. Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. 7. Nebuchadnezzar also carried off the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon. 8. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of

Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. 9. Jehoiachin *was* eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD. 10. And when the year was expired, king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem.

The destruction of Judah and Jerusalem is here coming on by degrees. God so ordered it, to shew that he has no pleasure in the ruin of sinners, but had rather they would turn and live, and therefore gives them both time and inducement to repent, and waits to be gracious. The history of these reigns was more largely recorded in the three last chapters of the second of Kings.

1. Jehoahaz was set up by the people, (v. 1.) but in a quarter of a year was deposed by Pharaoh-necho, and carried a prisoner to Egypt, and the land fined for setting him up, v. 2. 4. Of this young prince we hear no more; had he trodden in the steps of his father's piety he might have reigned long, and prospered; but we are told in the Kings, that *he did evil in the sight of the Lord*, and therefore his triumphing was short, and his joy but for a moment.

2. Jehoiakim was set up by the king of Egypt, and reigned eleven years. How low was Judah brought, when the king of Egypt, an old enemy to their land, gave what king he pleased to the kingdom, and what name he pleased to the king! v. 4. He made Eliakim king, and called him *Jehoiakim*, in token of his authority over him. He *did that which was evil*, (v. 5.) nay, we read of the *abominations which he did*, (v. 8.) he was very wild and wicked; idolatries generally go under the name of abominations. We hear no more of the king of Egypt, but the king of Babylon came up against him, (v. 6.) seized him, and bound him, with a design to carry him to Babylon; but, it seems, he either changed his mind, and suffered him to reign as his vassal, or death released the prisoner before he was carried away. However, the best and most valuable vessels of the temple were now carried away, and made use of in Nebuchadnezzar's temple in Babylon; (v. 7.) for, we may suppose, no temple in the world was so richly furnished as that of Jerusalem. The sin of Judah was, that they had brought the idols of the heathen into God's temple; and now their punishment was, that the vessels of the temple were carried away unto the service of the gods of the nations. If men will profane God's institutions by their sins, it is just with God to suffer them to be profaned by their enemies. These were the vessels which the false prophets flattered the people with hopes of the return of, Jer. 27. 16. But Jeremiah told them that the rest should go after them, (v. 22.) and they did so. But, as the carrying away of these vessels to Babylon began the calamity of Jerusalem, so Belshazzar's daring profanation of them there filled the measure of the iniquity of Babylon; for when he drank wine in them to the honour of his gods, the hand-writing on the wall presented him with his doom, Dan. 5. 3, &c. In the reference to the book of the Kings, concerning this Jehoiakim, mention is made of *that which was found in him*, (v. 8.) which seems to be meant of the treachery that was found in him toward the king of Babylon; but some of the Jewish writers understand it of certain private marks or signatures found in his dead body in honour of his idol; such cuttings as God had forbidden, Lev. 19. 28.

3. Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, attempted to reign in his stead, and reigned long enough to shew his evil inclination; but, after three months and ten days, the king of Babylon sent and fetched him away captive, with more of the goodly vessels of the temple. He is here said to be eight years old, but in Kings he is said to be eighteen when he began to reign, so that this seems to be a mistake of the transcriber, unless we suppose that his father took him at eight years old to join with him in the government, as some think.

11. Zedekiah *was* one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD his God, *and* humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, *speaking* from the mouth of the LORD. 13. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. 14. Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. 15. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: 16. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till *there was* no remedy. 17. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave *them* all into his hand. 18. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all *these* he brought to Babylon. 19. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. 20. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 21. To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: *for* as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

We have here an account of the destruction of the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. Abraham, God's friend, was called out of that country, from Ur of the Chaldees, when God took him into covenant and communion with himself; and now his degenerate seed were carried into that country again, to signify that they had forfeited all that kindness wherewith they had been loved for the father's sake; and the benefit of that covenant into which he was called; all was now undone again. Here we have,

1. The sins that brought this desolation.

1. Zedekiah, the king, in whose days it came, brought it upon himself by his own folly. For he conducted himself very ill both toward God and toward the king of Babylon. (1.) If he had but made God his Friend, that would have prevented the ruin. Jeremiah brought him messages from God, which, if he had given due regard to them, might have secured a lengthening of his tranquillity; but it is here charged upon him, that he *humbled not himself before Jeremiah*, v. 12. It was expected that this mighty prince, high as he was, should humble himself before a poor

prophet, when he spake from the mouth of the Lord; should submit to his admonitions, and be amended by them, to his counsels, and be ruled by them; should lay himself under the commanding power of the word of God in his mouth: because he would not thus make himself a servant to God, he is made a slave to his enemies. God will find some way or other to humble them that will not humble themselves. Jeremiah, as a prophet, was set over the nations, and kingdoms, (Jer. 1. 10.) and, as mean a figure as he made, whoever would not humble themselves before him, found that it was at their peril. (2.) If he had but been true to his covenant with the king of Babylon, that would have prevented his ruin; but he rebelled against him, though he had sworn to be his faithful tributary, and perfidiously violated his engagements to him, v. 13. This was it that provoked the king of Babylon to deal so severely with him as he did. All nations looked upon an oath as a sacred thing, and on those that durst break through the obligations of it as the worst of men, abandoned of God, and to be abhorred by all mankind; if therefore Zedekiah falsify his oath, when, lo, he has given his hand, he shall not escape, Ezek. 17. 18. Though Nebuchadnezzar was a heathen, an enemy, yet if, having sworn to him, he be false to him, he shall know there is a God to whom vengeance belongs. The thing that ruined Zedekiah, was, not only that he turned not to the Lord God of Israel, but that he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart, from turning to him, that is, he was obstinately resolved not to return to him, would not lay his neck under God's yoke, nor his heart under the impressions of his word, and so, in effect, he would not be healed, he would not live.

2. The great sin that brought this destruction, was, idolatry; the priests and people went after the abominations of the heathen, forsook the pure worship of God for the lewd and filthy rites of the Pagan superstition, and so polluted the house of the Lord, v. 14. The priests, the chief of the priests, who should have opposed idolatry, were ring-leaders in it. That place is not far from ruin, in which religion is already ruined.

3. The great aggravation of their sin, and that which filled the measure of it, was, the abuse they gave to God's prophets who were sent to call them to repentance, v. 15, 16. Where we have,

(1.) God's tender compassion toward them in sending prophets to them. Because he was the God of their fathers, in covenant with them, and whom they worshipped, (though this degenerate race forsook him,) therefore he sent to them by his messengers, to convince them of their sin, and warn them of the ruin they would bring upon themselves by it; rising up betimes, and sending, which denotes not only that he did it with the greatest care and concern imaginable, as men rise betimes to set their servants to work, when their heart is upon their business; but that, upon their first deviation from God to idols, if they took but one step that way, God immediately sent to them by his messengers to reprove them for it: he gave them early, timely, notice both of their duty and danger. Let this quicken us to seek God early, that he rises betimes to send to us. The prophets that were sent, rose betimes to speak to them, were diligent and faithful in their office, lost no time, slipped no opportunity of dealing with them; and therefore God is said to rise betimes. The more pains ministers take in their work, the more will the people have to answer for, if it be all in vain. The reason given why God by his prophets did thus strive with them, is, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place, and would by these means have prevented their ruin. Note, The methods God takes to reclaim sinners by his word, by ministers, by conscience, by providences, are all instances of his compassion toward them, and his unwillingness that any should perish.

(2.) Their base and disingenuous carriage toward God; (v. 16.) They mocked the messengers of God, (which was a high affront to him that sent them,) despised his word in their mouths; and not only so, but misused the prophets, treating them as their enemies. The ill-usage they gave Jeremiah, who lived at this time, and which we read much of in the book of his prophecy, is an instance of this. This was an evidence of an implacable enmity to God,

and an invincible resolution to go on in their sins. This brought wrath upon them without remedy, for it was sinning against the remedy. Nothing is more provoking to God, than abuses given to his faithful ministers; for what is done against them he takes as done against himself; *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Persecution was the sin that brought upon Jerusalem its final destruction by the Romans. See Matth. 23. 34. 37. Those that mock at God's faithful ministers, and do all they can to render them despicable or odious, that vex and misuse them, to discourage them, and to keep others from hearkening to them, should be reminded that a wrong done to an ambassador is construed as done to the prince that sends him, and that the day is coming when they will find it had been better for them, if they had been thrown into the sea with a mill-stone about their necks; for hell is deeper, and more dreadful.

II. The desolation itself, and some few of the particulars of it, which we had more largely, 2 Kings, 25.

1. Multitudes were put to the sword, even in the house of their sanctuary, (v. 17.) whither they fled for refuge, hoping that the holiness of the place would be their protection; but how could they expect to find it so, when they themselves had polluted it with their abominations? v. 14. Those that cast off the dominion of their religion, forfeit all the benefit and comfort of it. The Chaldeans not only paid no reverence to the sanctuary, but shewed no natural pity either to the tender sex, or to venerable age. They forsook God, who had compassion on them, (v. 15.) and would have none of him; justly therefore are they given up into the hands of cruel men, that had no compassion on young man or maiden.

2. All the remaining vessels of the temple, great and small, and all the treasures, sacred and secular, the treasures of God's house, and of the king and his princes, were seized, and brought to Babylon, v. 18.

3. The temple was burnt, the walls of Jerusalem demolished, the houses (called here the palaces, as Ps. 48. 3. so stately, rich, and sumptuous, were they) laid in ashes, and all the furniture, called here the goodly vessels thereof, destroyed, v. 19. Let us see here what woeful havoc sin makes, and, as we tender the comfort and continuance of our estates, keep that worm from the root of them.

4. The remainder of the people, that escaped the sword, were carried captives to Babylon, (v. 20.) impoverished, enslaved, insulted, and exposed to all the miseries, not only of a strange and barbarous land, but of an enemy's land, where those that hated them bare rule over them. They were servants to those monarchs, and, no doubt, were ruled with rigour so long as that monarchy lasted. Now they sat down by the rivers of Babylon, with the streams of which they mingled their tears, Ps. 137. 1. And though there, it should seem, they were cured of idolatry, yet, as appears by the prophet Ezekiel, they were not cured of mocking the prophets.

5. The land lay desolate while they were captives in Babylon, v. 21. That fruitful land, the glory of all lands, was now turned into a desert, not tilled nor husbanded. The pastures were not clothed as they used to be with flocks, nor the valleys with corn, but all lay neglected. Now this may be considered, (1.) As the just punishment of their former abuse of it. They had served Baal with its fruits, cursed therefore is the ground for their sakes. Now the land enjoyed her sabbaths, (v. 21.) as God had threatened by Moses, (Lev. 26. 34.) and the reason there given, (v. 35.) is, "Because it did not rest on your sabbaths, you profaned the sabbath-day, did not observe the sabbatical year." They many a time ploughed and sowed their land in the seventh year, when it should have rested, and now it lay unploughed and unsown for ten times seven years. Note, God will be no loser in his glory at last, by the disobedience of men: if the tribute be not paid, he will distraint and recover it, as he speaks, Hos. 2. 9. If they would not let the land rest, God would make it rest, whether they would or no. Some think they had neglected the observance of 70 sabbatical years in all, and just so many, by way of reprisal, the land now enjoyed; or if those that had been neglected were fewer, it was fit that the

law should be satisfied, with interest. We find that one of the quarrels God had with them at this time, was, for not observing another law which related to the seventh year, and that was the release of servants; see Jer. 34. 13, &c. (2.) Yet we may consider it as giving some encouragement to their hopes, that they should, in due time, return to it again. Had others come and taken possession of it, they might have despaired of ever recovering it; but, while it lay desolate, it did, as it were, lie waiting for them again, and refuse to acknowledge any other owners.

22. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD *spoken* by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, 23. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah: who *is there*

among you of all his people? The LORD his God *be* with him, and let him go up.

These two last verses of this book have a double aspect.

1. They look back to the prophecy of Jeremiah, and shew how that was accomplished, v. 22. God had, by him, promised the restoring of the captives, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, at the end of seventy years; and that time to favour Zion, that set time, came at last. After a long and dark night, the day-spring from on high visited them. God will be found true to every word he has spoken.

2. They look forward to the history of Ezra, which begins with the repetition of these two last verses. They are there the introduction to a pleasant story, here they are the conclusion of a very melancholy one; and so we learn from them, that, though God's church be cast down, it is not cast off; though his people be corrected, they are not abandoned; though thrown into the furnace, yet not lost there, nor left there any longer than till the dross be separated. Though God contend long, he will not contend always. The Israel of God shall be fetched out of Babylon in due time, and even the dry bones made to live. It may be long first; but the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak and not lie; therefore, though it tarry, wait for it.

AN

E X P O S I T I O N.

WITH

Practical Observations.

OF THE BOOK OF

E Z R A.

THE Jewish church puts on quite another face, in this book, from what it *had* appeared with; its state much better, and more pleasant, than it was of late in Babylon, and yet far inferior to what it had been formerly. The dry bones here live again, but *in the form of a servant*; the yoke of their captivity is taken off, but the marks of it in their galled necks remain. Kings we hear no more of, *the crown is fallen from their heads*. Prophets they are blessed with, to *direct* them in their re-establishment, but, after a while, prophecy ceases among them, till the great Prophet appears, and his fore-runner. The history of this book is the accomplishment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the return of the Jews out of Babylon, at the end of seventy years, and a type of the accomplishment of the prophecies of the Apocalypse, concerning the deliverance of the gospel-church out of the New-Testament Babylon. Ezra preserved the records of that great revolution,

EZRA, I.

and transmitted them to the church in this book. His name signifies a *helper*; and so he was to that people. A particular account concerning him we shall meet with, *ch. 7.* where he himself enters upon the stage of action. The book gives us an account,

I. Of the Jews' return out of their captivity, *ch. 1, 2.*

II. Of the building of the temple, the opposition it met with, and yet the perfecting of it at last, *ch. 3..6.*

III. Of Ezra's coming to Jerusalem, *ch. 7, 8.*

IV. Of the good service he did there, in obliging those that had married strange wives to put them away, *ch. 9, 10.* This beginning again of the Jewish nation was small, yet its latter end greatly increased.

Before Christ 536.

The Proclamation of Cyrus.

CHAP. I.

In this chapter, we have, I. The proclamation which Cyrus, king of Persia, issued out for the release of all the Jews that he found captives in Babylon, and the building of their temple in Jerusalem, v. 1..4. II. The return of many, thereupon, v. 5, 6. III. Orders given for the restoring of the vessels of the temple, v. 7..11. And this is the dawning of the day of their deliverance.

1. **N**OW in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, 2. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. 3. Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem. 4. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill-offering for the house of God that *is* in Jerusalem.

It will be proper for us here to consider,

1. What was the state of the captive Jews in Babylon. It was upon many accounts very deplorable; they were under the power of those that hated them, had nothing they could call their own; they had no temple, no altar. If they sang psalms, their enemies ridiculed them; and yet they had prophets among them. Ezekiel and Daniel were kept distinct from the heathen: some of them were preferred at court, others had comfortable settlements in the country, and they were all borne up with hope, that, in due time, they should return to their own land again, in expectation of which, they preserved among them the distinction of their families, the knowledge of their religion, and an aversion to idolatry.

2. What was the state of the government, under which they were. Nebuchadnezzar carried many of them into captivity, in the first year of his reign, which was the fourth of Jehoiakim; he reigned forty-five years, his son Evil-merodach twenty-three, and his grandson Belshazzar three years, which make up the seventy years. So Dr. Lightfoot. It is charged upon Nebuchadnezzar, that he *opened not the house of his prisoners*, Isa. 14. 17. And if he had shewed mercy to the poor Jews, Daniel told him it would have been the *lengthening of his tranquillity*, Dan. 4. 27. But the measure of the sins of Babylon was, at length, full, and then destruction was brought upon them by Darius the Mede and

Cyrus the Persian, which we read of, Dan. 5. Darius, being old, left the government to Cyrus, and he was employed as the instrument of the Jews' deliverance, which he gave orders for, as soon as ever he was master of the kingdom of Babylon, either in contradiction to Nebuchadnezzar, whose family he had cut off, and because he took a pleasure in undoing what he had done; or in policy, to recommend his newly-acquired dominion as merciful and gentle; or, as some think, in a pious regard to the prophecy of Isaiah, which had been published, and well known, above 150 years before, where he was expressly named, as the man that should do this for God, and for whom God would do great things, (Isa. 44. 28.—45. 1. &c.) and which perhaps was shewed him by those about him. His name, some say, in the Persian language, signifies the *sun*, for he brought light and healing to the church of God, and was an eminent type of Christ the *Sun of righteousness*. Some say that his name signifies a *father*, and Christ is the everlasting Father.

Now, here we are told,

I. Whence this proclamation took its rise. *The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus.* Note, The hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord, and, like the rivulets of water, he turneth them which way soever he will. It is said of Cyrus, that he knew not God, nor how to serve him; but God knew him, and how to serve himself by him, Isa. 45. 4. God governs the world by his influence on the spirits of men, and, whatever good is done at any time, it is God that stirs up the spirit to do it, puts thoughts into the mind, gives to the understanding to form a right judgment, and directs the will which way he pleases. Whatever good offices therefore are, at any time, done for the church of God, he must have the glory of them.

II. The reference it had to the prophecy of Jeremiah, by whom God had not only promised that they should return, but had fixed the time, which set time to favour Zion was now come. Seventy years were determined; (Jer. 25. 12.—29. 10.) and he that kept the promise made concerning Israel's deliverance out of *Egypt to a day*, (Exod. 12. 41.) was, doubtless, as punctual to this. What Cyrus now did, was long since said to be the *confirming of the word of God's servants*, Isa. 44. 26. Jeremiah, while he lived, was hated and despised; yet thus did Providence honour him long after, that a mighty monarch shall act in pursuance of the word of the Lord by his mouth.

III. The date of this proclamation. It was in his first year, not the first of his reign over Persia, the kingdom he was born to, but the first of his reign over Babylon, the kingdom he had conquered. Those are much honoured whose spirits are stirred up to begin with God, and to serve him in their first years.

IV. The publication of it; this was made by word of mouth, he *caused a voice to pass throughout all his kingdom*, like a jubilee-trumpet, (a joyful sabbatical year after many melancholy ones,) proclaiming liberty to the captives; the publication was made also by writing, that it might be the more satisfactory, and might be sent to those distant provinces where the ten tribes were scattered, in Assyria and Media, 2 Kings, 17. 6.

V. The purport of this proclamation of liberty.

1. The preamble shews the causes and considerations him

thereunto moving, v.2. It should seem, his mind was enlightened with the knowledge of *Jehovah*, for so he calls him, the God of Israel, as the only *living and true God*, the *God of heaven*, who is the sovereign Lord and Disposer of all the *kingdoms of the earth*; of him he says, (v.3.) *He is the God*, God alone, God above all; though he had not known God by education, God made him so far to know him now, as that he did this service with an eye to him. He professes that he does it, (1.) In gratitude to God, for the favours he had bestowed upon him. *The God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth*. This sounds a little vain-glorious, for there were *many kingdoms of the earth* which he had nothing to do with; but he means, that God had given him all that was given to Nebuchadnezzar, whose dominion, Daniel says, was *to the end of the earth*, Dan.4.22.—5.19. Note, God is the Fountain of power; the kingdoms of the earth are at his disposal: whatever share any have of them, they have it from him: and those whom God has intrusted with great power and large possessions, should look upon themselves as obliged thereby to do much for him. (2.) In obedience to God. He hath *charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem*; probably, by a dream or vision of the night, confirmed by comparing it with the prophecy of Isaiah, where his doing it was foretold. Israel's disobedience to God's charge, which they were often told of, is aggravated by the obedience of this heathen king.

2. He gives free leave to all the Jews that were in his dominions to go up to Jerusalem, and to *build the temple of the Lord* there, v.3. His regard to God made him overlook, (1.) The secular interest of his government. It had been his policy to keep so great a number of serviceable men in his dominions, and seemed impolitic to let them go and take root again in their own land; but piety is the best policy. (2.) The honour of the religion of his country. Why did he not order them to build a temple to the gods of Babylon or Persia? He believes the God of Israel to be the *God of heaven*, and therefore obliges his Israel to worship him only; let them *walk in the name of the Lord their God*.

3. He subjoins a brief for a collection to bear the charges of such as were poor, and not able to bear their own, v.4. "Who-soever remaineth, because he has not wherewithal to bear his charges to Jerusalem, *let the men of his place help him*:" some take it as an order to the king's officers to supply them out of his revenue, as ch.6.8. But it may mean a warrant to the captives, to ask and receive the alms and charitable contributions of all the king's loving subjects. And we may suppose the Jews had conducted themselves so well among their neighbours, that they would be as forward to accommodate them, because they loved them, as the Egyptians were, because they were weary of them. At least, many would be kind to them, because they saw the government would take it well. Cyrus not only gave his good wishes with them that went, (*Their God be with them*, v.3.) but took care also to furnish them with such things as they needed. He took it for granted that those among them who were of ability would offer their *free-will offering for the house of God*, to promote the rebuilding of it. But, beside that, he would have them supplied out of his kingdom. Well-wishers to the temple should be well-doers for it.

5. Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. 6. And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all *that* was willingly offered. 7. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put

them in the house of his gods; 8. Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. 9. And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silvers, nine and twenty knives, 10. Thirty basins of gold, silver basins of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. 11. All the vessels of gold and of silver *were* five thousand and four hundred. All *these* did Sheshbazzar bring up with *them* of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

We are here told,

1. How Cyrus's proclamation succeeded with others.

1. He having given leave to the Jews to go up to Jerusalem, many of them went up accordingly, v.5. The leaders herein were the *chief of the fathers* of Judah and Benjamin, eminent and experienced men, from whom it might justly be expected, that, as they were above their brethren in dignity, so they should go before them in duty. The priests and Levites were (as became them) with the first that set their faces again toward Zion. If any good work is to be done, let ministers lead in it. They that accompanied them, were such as God had inclined to go up. The same God that had raised up the spirit of Cyrus to proclaim this liberty, raised up their spirits to take the benefit of it; for it was done, *not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, Zech.4.6. The temptation, perhaps, was strong, to some of them, to stay in Babylon; they had convenient settlements there, had contracted an agreeable acquaintance with the neighbours, and were ready to say, *It is good to be here*: the discouragements of their return were many and great, the journey long, their wives and children unfit for travelling, their own land was to them a strange land, the road to it an unknown road. Go up to Jerusalem? And what should they do there? It was all in ruins, and in the midst of enemies, to whom they would be an easy prey. Many were wrought upon by these considerations to stay in Babylon, at least, not to go with the first: but there were some that got over these difficulties, that ventured to break the ice, and feared not the lion in the way, the lion in the streets; and they were those whose spirits God raised. He, by his Spirit and grace, filled them with a generous ambition of liberty, a gracious affection to their own land, and a desire of the free and public exercise of their religion. Had God left them to themselves, and to the counsels of flesh and blood, they had staid in Babylon; but he put into their hearts to set their faces Zionward, and, as strangers, to ask the way thither; (Jer.50.5.) for they, being a new generation, went out, like their father Abraham, from this land of the Chaldees, not knowing whither they went, Heb.11.8. Note, Whatever good we do, it is owing purely to the grace of God, and he raises up our spirits to the doing of it, *works in us both to will and to do*. Our spirits naturally incline to this earth and to the things of it; if they move upward, in any good affections or good actions, it is God that raises them.

The call and offer of the gospel are like Cyrus's proclamation; *deliverance is preached to the captives*, Luke, 4.18. Those that are bound under the unrighteous dominion of sin, and bound over to the righteous judgment of God, may be made free by Jesus Christ. Whoever will, by repentance and faith, return to God, his duty to God, his happiness in God, Jesus Christ has opened the way for him, and lets him go up out of the slavery of sin into the *glorious liberty of the children of God*. The offer is general to all; Christ makes it, in pursuance of the grant which the Father has made him of *all power both in heaven and in earth*, (a much greater dominion than that given to Cyrus, v.2.) and of the

charge given him to *build God a house*, to set him up a church in the world, a kingdom among men. Many that hear this joyful sound choose to sit still in Babylon, are in love with their sins, and will not venture upon the difficulties of a holy life; but some there are that break through the discouragements, and resolve to *build the house of God*, to make heaven of their religion, whatever it cost them; they are those *whose spirit God has raised* above the world and the flesh, and whom he has made *willing in the day of his power*, Ps. 110.3. Thus will the heavenly Canaan be replenished, though many perish in Babylon; and the gospel-offer will not be made in vain.

2. Cyrus having given order that their neighbours should help them, they did so, v.6. All they that were about them furnished them with plate and goods, to bear the charges of their journey, and to help them in building and furnishing both their own houses and God's. As the tabernacle was made of the spoils of Egypt, and the first temple built by the labours of the strangers, so the second by the contributions of the Chaldeans; all intimating the admission of the Gentiles into the church, in due time. God can, where he pleases, incline the hearts of strangers to be kind to his people, and make those to strengthen their hands, that have weakened them; *the earth helped the woman*. *Beside what was willingly offered* by the Jews themselves, who staid behind from a principle of love to God and his house, much was offered, as one may say, unwillingly by the Babylonians, who were influenced to do it by a divine power on their minds, which they themselves could give no account of.

II. How this proclamation was seconded by Cyrus himself. To give proof of the sincerity of his affection to the house of God, he not only released the people of God, but restored the vessels of the temple, v.7,8. Observe here, 1. How careful Providence was of the vessels of the temple, that they were not lost, melted down, or so mixed with other vessels, that they could not be known, but that they were all now forthcoming: such care God has of the living *vessels of mercy, vessels of honour*, of whom it is said, (2Tim.2.19,20.) *The Lord knows them that are his*, and they shall *none of them perish*. 2. Though they had been put into an idol's temple, and, probably, used in the service of idols, yet they were given back, to be used for God. God will recover his own; and the spoil of the strong man armed shall be converted to the use of the conqueror. 3. Judah had a prince, even in captivity. Sheshbazzar, supposed to be the same with Zerubbabel, is here called *prince of Judah*; the Chaldeans called him *Sheshbazzar*, which signifies *joy in tribulation*; but among his own people he went by the name of *Zerubbabel, a stranger in Babylon*; so he looked upon himself, and that Jerusalem was his home, though, as Josephus says, he was captain of the life-guard to the king of Babylon. He took care of the affairs of the Jews, and had some authority over them, probably, since the death of Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, who made him his heir, he being of the house of David. 4. To him the sacred vessels were numbered out, (v.8.) and he took care for their safe conveyance to Jerusalem, v.11. It would encourage them to build the temple, that they had so much rich furniture ready to put in it when it was built. Though God's ordinances, like the vessels of the sanctuary, may be corrupted and profaned by the New-Testament Babylon, they shall, in due time, be restored to their primitive use and intention, for not one jot or tittle of divine institution shall fall to the ground.

CHAP. II.

That many returned out of Babylon upon Cyrus's proclamation, we were told in the foregoing chapter; we have here a catalogue of the several families that returned, v.1. I. The leaders, v.2. II. The people, v.3..35. III. The priests, Levites, and retainers to the temple, v.36..63. IV. The sum total, with an account of their retinue, v.61..67. V. Their offerings to the service of the temple, v.68..70.

I. **N**OW these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchad-

nezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city; 2. Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: 3. The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. 4. The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 5. The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. 6. The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. 7. The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 8. The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. 9. The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. 10. The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. 11. The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. 12. The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. 13. The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six. 14. The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. 15. The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. 16. The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 17. The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. 18. The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve. 19. The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three. 20. The children of Gibbar, ninety and five. 21. The children of Beth-lehem, an hundred twenty and three. 22. The men of Netophah, fifty and six. 23. The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. 24. The children of Azmaveth, forty and two. 25. The children of Kirjath-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three. 26. The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 27. The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two. 28. The men of Beth-el and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. 29. The children of Nebo, fifty and two. 30. The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six. 31. The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 32. The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 33. The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. 34. The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. 35. The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.

We may observe here,

1. That an account was kept in writing of the families that came up out of captivity, and the numbers of each family, (1.) For their honour, as part of their recompence for their faith and courage, their confidence in God, and their affection to their own land, and to stir up others to follow their good example. Those that honour God, he will thus honour. The names of all those

Israelites indeed, that accept the offer of deliverance by Christ, shall be found, to their honour, in a more sacred record than this, even in the *Lamb's book of life*. (2.) For the benefit of posterity, that they might know from whom they descended, and to whom they were allied.

2. That they are called *children of the promise*. Judah, that had been an illustrious kingdom, to which other kingdoms had been made provinces, subject to it, and dependent on it, was now itself made a province, to receive laws and commissions from the king of Persia, and to be accountable to him. See how sin diminishes and debases a nation, which righteousness would exalt. But by thus being made servants, (as the patriarchs by being sojourners in a country which was their's by promise,) they were reminded of the *better country, that is the heavenly*, (Heb. 11. 16.) *a kingdom which cannot be moved*, or changed into a province.

3. That they are said to come *every one to his city*, that is, the city appointed them, in which appointment an eye, no doubt, was had to their former settlement by Joshua; and to that, as near as might be, they returned, for it does not appear that any others, at least any that were able to oppose them, had possessed them in their absence.

5. That the leaders are first mentioned; (v. 2.) Zerubbabel and Jeshua were their Moses and Aaron, the former their chief prince, the latter their chief priest. Nehemiah and Mordecai are mentioned here; some think, not the same with the famous men we afterward meet with of those names: probably, they were the same; but afterward returned to court, for the service of their country.

5. Some of these several families are named from the persons that were their ancestors, others from the places in which they had formerly resided; as with us many surnames are the proper names of persons, others of places.

6. Some little difference there is between the numbers of some of the families here, and in Neh. 7. where this catalogue is repeated; which might arise from this, that some, who had given in their names at first to come, afterward drew back—said, *I go, Sir, but went not*, which would lessen the number of the families they belonged to; others, that declined at first, *afterward repented, and went*, and so increased the number.

7. Here are two families that are called *the children of Elam*, one v. 7. another v. 31. and, which is strange, the number of both is the same, 1254.

8. The children of Adonikam, which signifies *a high lord*, were 666, just the *number of the beast*, (Rev. 13. 18.) which is there said to be *the number of a man*, which Mr. Hugh Broughton thinks has reference to this man.

9. The children of Bethlehem (v. 21.) were but 123, though it was David's city: for Bethlehem was *little among the thousands of Judah*, yet there must the Messiah arise, Mic. 5. 2.

10. Anathoth had been a famous place in the tribe of Benjamin, and yet here it numbered but 128, (v. 23.) which is to be imputed to the divine curse which the men of Anathoth brought upon themselves by persecuting Jeremiah, who was of their city, Jer. 21. 23. *There shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth*. And see Isa. 10. 30. *O poor Anathoth! Nothing brings ruin on a people sooner than persecution*.

36. The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three.

37. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two.

38. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven.

39. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.

40. The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four.

41. The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight.

42. The children of the porters: the

children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, *in all an hundred thirty and nine*. 43. The Nethinims: the children of Ziba, the children of Hashupha, the children of Tabbaoth, 44. The children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon, 45. The children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub, 46. The children of Hagab, the children of Shalmai, the children of Hanan, 47. The children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah, 48. The children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam, 49. The children of Uzza, the children of of Paseah, the children of Besai, 50. The children of Asnah, the children of Mehunim, the children of Nephusim, 51. The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, 52. The children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, 53. The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Thamah, 54. The children of Nezhiah, the children of Hatipha. 55. The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Peruda, 56. The children of Jaalab, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, 57. The children of Sephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Ami. 58. All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, *were three hundred ninety and two*. 59. And these *were* they which went up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsa, Cherub, Addan, *and* Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, and their seed, whether they *were* of Israel: 60. The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two. 61. And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name: 62. These sought their register *among* those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore *were* they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. 63. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummin.

Here is,

I. An account of the priests that returned, and they were a considerable number; about a tenth part of the whole company: for the whole were above forty-two thousand, (v. 64.) and four families of priests made up above forty-two hundred, (v. 36, 39.) thus was the tenth, God's part, a blessed decimation. Three of the fathers of the priests here named were heads of courses, 1 Chron. 24. 7, 8, 14. The fourth was Pashur, v. 38. If these were of the posterity of that Pashur that abused Jeremiah, (Jer. 20. 1.) it is strange that so bad a man should have so good a seed, and so numerous.

II. Of the Levites; I cannot but wonder at the small number of them, for, taking in both the singers and the porters, (40. 42.) they did not make 350. Time was, when the Levites were more forward to their duty than the priests, (2 Chron. 29. 34.) but they were not so now. If one place, one family, has the reputation for pious zeal now, another may have it another time. *The wind blows where it listeth*, and shifts its points.

III. Of the Nethinims, who, it is supposed, were the Gibeonites, given (so their name signifies) by Joshua first, (Josh. 9. 27.) and again by David, (Ezra, 8. 20.) when Saul had expelled them, to be employed by the Levites in the work of God's house as hewers of wood and drawers of water; and with them, of the children of Solomon's servants, whom he gave for the like use, (whether they were Jews or Gentiles, does not appear,) and who are here taken notice of among the retainers of the temple, and numbered with the Nethinims, v. 55. 58. Note, It is an honour to belong to God's house, though in the meanest office there.

IV. Of some that were looked upon as Israelites by birth, and others as priests, and yet could not make out a clear title to the honour.

1. There were some that could not prove themselves Israelites, (v. 59, 60.) a considerable number, who presumed they were of the seed of Jacob, but could not produce their pedigrees, and yet would go up to Jerusalem, having an affection to the house and people of God; these shamed those who were true-born Israelites, and yet were not called Israelites indeed; *came out of the waters of Judah*, (Isa. 48. 1.) but had lost the relish of those waters.

2. There were others that could not prove themselves priests, and yet were supposed to be of the seed of Aaron. What is not preserved in black and white, will, in all likelihood, be forgotten in a little time. Now we are here told, (1.) How they lost their evidence. One of their ancestors married a daughter of Barzillai, that great man whom we read of in David's time; he gloried in an alliance to that honourable family, and, preferring that before the dignity of his priesthood, would have his children called after Barzillai's family, and their pedigree preserved in the registers of that house, not of the house of Aaron, and so they lost it. In Babylon, there was nothing to be got by the priesthood, and therefore they cared not for being akin to it. Those who think their ministry, or their relation to ministers, a diminution or disparagement to them, forget who it was that said, *I magnify my office*. (2.) What they lost with it. It should not be taken for granted that they were priests, when they could not produce their proofs, but they were, *as polluted, put from the priesthood*. Now that the priests had recovered their rights, and had the altar to live upon again, they would gladly be looked upon as priests. But they had sold their birth-right for the honour of being gentlemen, and therefore were justly degraded, and forbidden to *eat of the most holy things*. Note, Christ will be ashamed of those that are ashamed of him and his service.

It was the Tirshatha, or governor, that put them under this sequestration, which some understand of Zerubbabel the present governor, others of Nehemiah, who is so called, (Neh. 8. 9.—10. 1.) and gave this order when he came some years after. But the prohibition was not absolute, it was only a suspension, till there should be a high priest *with Urim and Thummim*, by whom they might know God's mind in this matter. This, it seems, was expected and desired, but it does not appear that ever they were blessed with it under the second temple. They had the canon of the Old Testament complete, which was better than Urim; and, by the want of that oracle, were taught to expect the Messiah the great Oracle, which the Urim and Thummim was but a type of. Nor does it appear that the second temple had the ark in it, either the old one or a new one; those shadows, by degrees, vanished, as the substance approached; and God, by the prophet, intimates to his people, that they should sustain no damage by the want of the ark, Jer. 3. 16. *In those days, when they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord, neither shall it come to mind, for they shall do well without it.*

64. The whole congregation together *was* forty and two thousand three hundred *and* threescore. 65. Beside their servants and their maids, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and *there were* among them two hundred singing-men and singing-women. 66. Their horses *were* seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; 67. Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; *their* asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty. 68. And *some* of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which *is* at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: 69. They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments. 70. So the priests, and the Levites, and *some* of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

Here is,

I. The sum total of the company that returned now out of Babylon. The particular sums before mentioned amount not quite to 30,000, (29,813,) so that there were above 12,000 that come not into any of those accounts, who, it is probable, were of the rest of the tribes of Israel, beside Judah and Benjamin, that could not tell of what particular family or city they were, but that they were Israelites, and of what tribe. Now, 1. This was more than double the number that were carried captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, so that, as in Egypt, the time of their affliction was the time of their increase. 2. These were but few to begin a nation with, and yet, by virtue of his old promise made to their fathers, they multiplied so, as before their last destruction by the Romans, about 500 years after, to be a very populous country. When God says, "Increase and multiply," *a little one shall become a thousand*.

II. Their retinue. They were themselves little better than servants, and therefore no wonder that their servants were comparatively but few, (v. 65.) and their beasts of burthen about as many, v. 66, 67. It was not with them now as in days past. But notice is taken of 200 *singing-men and women* whom they had among them, who, we will suppose, intended, as those, 2 Chron. 35. 25. to excite *their mourning*, for it was foretold, they should, upon this occasion, *go weeping*, (Jer. 50. 4.) with ditties of lamentation.

III. Their oblations. It is said, (v. 68, 69.) 1. That they *came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem*; and yet that house, that holy and beautiful house, was now in ruins, a heap of rubbish; but, like their father Abraham, when the altar was gone, they came with devotion to *the place of the altar*; (Gen. 13. 4.) and it is the character of the genuine sons of Zion, that they favour even *the dust thereof*, Ps. 102. 14. 2. That they offered freely toward the *setting of it up in its place*. That, it seems, was the first house they talked of setting up; and though they came off a journey, and were beginning the world, (two chargeable things,) yet they offered, and offered freely, toward the building of the temple. Let none complain of the necessary expences of their religion, but believe, that, when they come to balance the account, they will find that it clears the cost. Their offering was nothing in comparison with the offerings of the princes in David's time; then they offered by talents, (1 Chron. 29. 7.) now by drams, yet these drams, being after their ability, were as acceptable to God as those talents, like the widow's two mites. The 61,000 drams of gold amount, by Cumberland's calculation, to so many pounds of our money, and so many groats. Every maneh, or pound of silver, he reckons

to be 60 shekels, namely, 30 ounces, which we may reckon 7 pounds 10 shillings of our money, so that this 5,000 pounds of silver will be above 37,000 thousand of our money. It seems, God had blessed them with the increase of their wealth, as well as of their numbers, in Babylon; and, as God had prospered them, they gave cheerfully to the service of his house. 3. That they *dwelt in their cities*, v. 70. Though their cities were out of repair, yet, because they were their cities, such as God had assigned them, they were content to dwell in them; and were thankful for liberty and property, though they had little of pomp, plenty, or power. Their poverty was a bad cause, but their unity and unanimity were a good effect of it. Here was room enough for them all, and all their substance, so that there was no strife among them, but perfect harmony, a blessed presage of their settlement, as their discords, in the latter times of that state, were of their ruin.

CHAP. III.

In the close of the foregoing chapter, we left Israel in their cities, but we may well imagine what a bad posture their affairs were in, the ground untilld, the cities in ruins, all out of order; but here we have an account of the early care they took about the re-establishment of religion among them. Thus did they lay the foundation well, and begin their work at the right end. 1. They set up an altar, and offered sacrifices upon it, kept the feasts, and contributed toward the rebuilding of the temple, v. 1-7. 11. They laid the foundation of the temple with a mixture of joy and sorrow, v. 8-13. This was the day of small things, which was not to be despised, Zechariah 4. 10.

1. **AND** when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. 2. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, as *it is* written in the law of Moses the man of God. 3. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear *was* upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt-offerings thereon unto the LORD, *even* burnt-offerings morning and evening. 4. They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as *it is* written, and *offered* the daily burnt-offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; 5. And afterward *offered* the continual burnt-offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a free will-offering unto the LORD. 6. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt-offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not *yet* laid. 7. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar-trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

Here is,

I. A general assembly of the returned Israelites at Jerusalem, in the *seventh month*, v. 1. We may suppose that they came from Babylon in the spring, and must allow at least four months for the journey, for, so long, Ezra and his company were in coming, *ch* 7. 9.

The seventh month therefore soon came, in which many of the feasts of the Lord were to be solemnized; and then they gathered themselves together, by agreement among themselves, rather than by the command of authority, to Jerusalem. Though they were newly come to their cities, and had their hands full of business there, to provide necessities for themselves and their families, which might have excused them from attending on God's altar till the hurry was a little over, as many foolishly put off their coming to the communion till they are settled in the world, yet such was their zeal for religion, now that they were newly come from under correction for their irreligion, that they left all their business in the country to attend God's altar; and (which is strange) in this pious zeal they were all of a mind, they came *as one man*. Let worldly business be postponed to the business of religion, and it will prosper the better.

II. The care which their leading men took to have an altar ready for them to attend upon. Jeshua and his brethren the priests, Zerubbabel and his brethren the princes, built *the altar of the God of Israel*, (v. 2.) in the same place (it is likely) where it had stood, upon the same bases, v. 3. Bishop Patrick, observing that before the temple was built, there seems to have been a tabernacle pitched for the divine service, as was in David's time, not on mount Moriah, but mount Zion, (1 Chron. 9. 11, 13, 23.) supposes that this altar was erected there, to be used while the temple was in building. Let us learn hence, 1. *To begin with God*. The more difficult and necessitous our case is, the more concerned we are to take him along with us in all our ways. If we expect to be directed by his oracles, let him be honoured by our offerings. 2. *To do what we can* in the worship of God, when *we cannot do what we would*. They could not immediately have a temple, but they would not be without an altar. Abraham, wherever he came, *built an altar*; and, wherever we come, though we may, perhaps, want the benefit of the candlestick of preaching, and the shewbread of the eucharist, yet, if we bring not the sacrifices of prayer and praise, we are wanting in our duty, for we have an altar that sanctifies the gift, ever ready.

Observe the reason here given why they hastened to set up the altar, *Fear was upon them, because of the people of the land*; they were in the midst of enemies, that bore ill will to them and their religion, for whom they were an unequal match. And, (1.) *Though* they were so, yet they built the altar, so some read it; they would not be frightened from their religion by the opposition they were likely to meet with in it. Never let the fear of man bring us into this snare. (2.) *Because* they were so, therefore they set up the altar. Apprehension of danger should stir us up to our duty. Have we many enemies? Then it is good to have God our Friend, and to keep up our correspondence with him. This good use we should make of our fears, we should be driven by them to our knees. Even Saul would think himself undone, if the enemy should come upon him before he had made his supplication to God, 1 Sam. 12. 13.

III. The sacrifices they offered upon the altar. The altar was reared to be used, and they used it accordingly. Let not those that have an altar, starve it.

1. They began *on the first day of the seventh month*, v. 6. It does not appear that they had any fire from heaven to begin with, as Moses and Solomon had, but common fire served them, as it did the patriarchs.

2. Having begun, they kept up the *continual burnt-offering*, (v. 5.) *morning and evening*, v. 3. They had known by sad experience what it was to want the comfort of the daily sacrifice, to plead in their daily prayers, and now, that it was revived, they resolved not to let it fall again. The daily lamb typified the Lamb of God, whose righteousness must be our confidence in all our prayers.

3. They observed all the *set feasts of the Lord*, and offered the sacrifices appointed for each, and particularly *the feast of tabernacles*, v. 4, 5. Now that they had received such great mercy from God, that joyful feast was, in a special manner, seasonable. And now that they were beginning to settle in their cities, it might serve well to remind them of their fathers' dwelling in tents in the

wilderness. That feast also, which had a peculiar reference to gospel-times, (as appears, Zech. 14. 18.) was brought, in a special manner, into reputation, now that those times drew on. Of the services of this feast, which continued seven days, and had peculiar sacrifices appointed, it is said that they did *as the duty of every day required*. See Numb. 29. 13, 17, &c. So it is in the original, *Verbum diei in die suo*—*The word, or matter, of the day in its day*; a phrase that has become proverbial with those that have used themselves to scripture-language. If the feast of tabernacles was a figure of a gospel-conversation, in respect of continual weanedness from the world, and joy in God, we may infer that it concerns us all to do the *work of the day in its day, according as the duty of the day requires*, that is, (1.) We must improve time, by finding some business to do every day, that will turn to a good account. (2.) We must improve opportunity, by accommodating ourselves to that which is the proper business of the present day. Every thing is beautiful in its season. The tenth day of this month was the day of atonement, a solemn day, and very seasonable now: it is very probable that they observed it, yet it is not mentioned, nor indeed in all the Old Testament do I remember the least mention of the observance of that day; as if it were enough that we have the law of it, (Lev. 16.) and the gospel of it, which was the chief intention of it, in the New Testament.

4. They offered *every man's free-will offering*, v. 5. The law required much, but they brought more; for, though they had little wealth to support the expence of their sacrifices, they had much zeal, and, we may suppose, spared at their own tables, that they might plentifully supply God's altar. Happy they that bring with them out of the furnace of affliction such a holy heat as this!

IV. The preparation they made for the building of the temple, v. 7. This they applied themselves immediately to; for, while we do what we can, we must still be aiming to do more and better. Tyre and Sidon must now, as of old, furnish them with workmen, and Lebanon with timber, orders for both which they had from Cyrus; what God calls us to, we may depend upon his providence to furnish us with.

8 Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem: and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD. 9. Then stood Jeshua *with* his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites. 10. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. 11. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is good*, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. 12. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen

the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: 13. So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

There was no dispute among the returned Jews, whether they should build the temple or no, that was immediately resolved on, and that it should be done with all speed; what comfort could they take in their own land, if they had not that token of God's presence with them, and the record of his name among them? We have here therefore an account of the beginning of that good work. Observe,

I. When it was begun; in the second month of the second year, as soon as ever the season of the year would permit, (v. 8.) and when they had ended the solemnities of the passover. They took little more than half a year for making preparation of the ground and materials; so much were their hearts upon it. Note, When any good work is to be done, it will be our wisdom to set about it quickly, and not to lose time; yea, though we foresee difficulty and opposition in it. Thus we engage ourselves to it, and engage God for us. Well begun, (we say,) is half ended.

II. Who began it; Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and their brethren. Then the work of God is likely to go on well, when magistrates, ministers, and people, are hearty for it, and agree in their places to promote it. It was God that gave them one heart for this service, and it boded well.

III. Who were employed to further it; they appointed the *Levites to set forward the work*, (v. 8.) and they did it by *setting forward the workmen*, (v. 9.) and strengthening their hands with good and comfortable words. Note, They that do not work themselves, may yet do good service, by quickening and encouraging those that do work.

IV. How God was praised at the laying of the foundation of the temple; (v. 10, 11.) the priests with the trumpets, appointed by Moses, and the Levites with the cymbals, appointed by David, made up a concert of music, not to please the ear, but to assist the singing of that everlasting hymn which will never be out of date, and to which our tongues should never be *out of tune*; *God is good, and his mercy endureth for ever*: the burthen of Ps. 136. Let all the streams of mercy be traced up to the fountain. Whatever our condition is, how many soever our griefs and fears, let it be owned that God is good; and, whatever fails, that his mercy fails not. Let this be sung with application, as here; not only his mercy endures for ever, but it endures for ever towards Israel; Israel, when captives in a strange land, and strangers in their own land. However it be, yet *God is good to Israel*, (Ps. 73. 1.) good to us. Let the receiving of the church's interests, when they seemed dead, be ascribed to the continuance of God's mercy for ever, for therefore the church continues.

V. How differently the people were affected. A remarkable mixture of various affections there was upon this occasion. Different sentiments there were among the people of God, and each expressed himself according to his sentiments, and yet there was no disagreement among them, their minds were not alienated from each other, nor the common concern retarded by it.

1. Those that only knew the misery of having no temple at all, when they saw but the foundation of one laid, praised the Lord with shouts of joy, v. 11. To them even this foundation seemed great, and was as life from the dead; to their hungry souls even this was sweet. They shouted, so that *the noise was heard afar off*. Note, We ought to be thankful for the beginnings of mercy, though it be not yet come to perfection; and the foundations of a temple, after long desolations, cannot but be fountains of joy to every faithful Israelite.

2. Those that remembered the glory of the first temple, which

Solomon built, and considered how far this was likely to be inferior to that, perhaps in dimensions, certainly in magnificence and sumptuousness, *except with a loud voice*, v. 12. If we date the captivity with the first, from the fourth of Jehoiakim, it was but fifty-two years since the temple was burnt; if from Jeconiah's captivity, it was but fifty-nine. So that many now alive might remember it standing; and a great mercy it was to the captives, that they had the lives of so many of their priests and Levites lengthened out, who could tell them what they themselves remembered of the glory of Jerusalem, to quicken them in their return. These lamented the disproportion between this temple and the former. And, (1.) There was some reason for it; and if they turned their tears into the right channel, and bewailed the sin that was the cause of this melancholy change, they did well. Sin sullies the glory of any church or people, and, when they find themselves diminished and brought low, that must bear the blame. (2.) Yet it was their infirmity to mingle those tears with the common joys, and so to cast a damp upon them. They *despised the day of small things*; and were unthankful for the good they enjoyed, because it was not so much as their ancestors had, though it was much more than they deserved. In the harmony of public joys, let not us be jarring strings. It was an aggravation of the discouragements they hereby gave to the people, that they were priests and Levites, who should have known and taught others how to be duly affected under various providences, and not to let the remembrance of former afflictions drown the sense of present mercies.

This mixture of sorrow and joy, here, is a representation of this world; some are bathing in rivers of joy, while others are drowned in floods of tears. In heaven all are singing, and none sighing; in hell all are weeping and wailing, and none rejoicing; but here on earth we can scarcely discern the shouts of joy from the noise of the weeping. Let us learn to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep; and ourselves to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and weep as though we wept not.

CHAP. IV.

The good work of rebuilding the temple was no sooner begun, than it met with opposition from those that bare ill will to it; the Samaritans were enemies to the Jews and their religion, and they set themselves to obstruct it. I. They offered to be partners in the building of it, that they might have it in their power to retard it; but they were refused, v. 1..3. II. They discouraged them in it, and dissuaded them from it, v. 4. 5. III. They basely misrepresented the undertaking, and the undertakers, to the king of Persia, by a memorial they sent him, v. 6..16. IV. They obtained from him an order to stop the building, (v. 17..22.) which they immediately put in execution, v. 23, 24.

1. **N**OW when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; 2. Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. 3. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. 4. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, 5. And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

We have here an instance of the old enmity that was put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. God's temple cannot be built, but Satan will rage, and the *gates of hell will fight against it*. The gospel kingdom was, in like manner, to be set up with much struggle and contention. In this respect, the glory of the latter house was greater than the glory of the former, and it was more a figure of the temple of Christ's church, in that Solomon built his temple when *there was no adversary, nor evil occurrent*, 1 Kings, 5. 4. But this second temple was built notwithstanding great opposition, in the removing and conquering of which, and the bringing of the work to perfection at last, in despite of it, the wisdom, power, and goodness, of God, were much glorified, and the church encouraged to trust in him.

I. The undertakers are here called *the children of the captivity*, (v. 1.) which makes them look very little. They were newly come out of captivity, were born in captivity, had still the marks of their captivity upon them; though they were not now captives, they were under the controul of those whose captives they had lately been. Israel was God's son, his first-born, but by their iniquity they sold and enslaved themselves, and so became children of the captivity; but, it should seem, the thought of their being so, quickened them to this work, for it was by their neglect of the temple that they lost their freedom.

II. The opposers of the undertaking are here said to be *the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin*, not the Chaldeans or Persians, they gave them no disturbance, ("Let them build and welcome,") but the relies of the ten tribes, and the foreigners that had joined themselves to them, and patched up that mongrel religion we had an account of, 2 Kings, 17. 33. *They feared the Lord, and served their own gods too*. They are called *the people of the land*, v. 4. The worst enemies Judah and Benjamin had, were these that *said they were Jews, and were not*, Rev. 3. 9.

III. The opposition they gave, had in it much of the subtlety of the old serpent. When they heard that the temple was in building, they were immediately aware that it would be a fatal blow to their superstition, and set themselves to oppose it. They had not power to do it forcibly, but they tried all the ways they could, to do it effectually.

1. They offered their service to build with them, only that thereby they might get an opportunity to retard the work, while they pretended to further it.

Now, (1.) Their offer was plausible enough, and looked kind; "*We will build with you, will help you to contrive, and will contribute toward the expence: for we seek your God as you do,*" v. 2. This was false, for, though they sought the same God, they did not seek him only, nor seek him in the way he appointed, and therefore did not seek him as they did. Herein they designed, if it were possible, to hinder the building of it, at least, to hinder their comfortable enjoyment of it; as good almost not have it, as not have it to themselves, for the pure worship of the true God, and him only. Thus are the *kisses of an enemy deceitful*; his words *smoother than butter, when war is in his heart*.

But, (2.) Their refusal of their proffered service was very just, v. 3. *The chief of the fathers of Israel* were soon aware that they meant them no kindness, whatever they pretended, but really designed to do them a mischief, and therefore (though they had need enough of help, if it had been such as they could confide in) told them plainly, "*You have nothing to do with us, have no part nor lot in this matter, are not true-born Israelites, nor faithful worshippers of God, you worship you know not what*, John, 4. 22. You are none of those with whom we dare hold communion, and therefore *we ourselves will build*:" they plead not to them the law of their God, which forbade them to mingle themselves with strangers, (though that especially they had an eye to,) but that which they would take more notice of, the king's commission, which was directed to them only, "*The king of Persia has commanded us to build this house, and we shall distrust and affront him, if we call in a foreign aid*." Note, In doing good, there is need of the *wisdom of the serpent*, as well as the *innocency of the dove*, and we have need, as it follows there, to *beware of men*.

Matth. 10. 16, 17. We should carefully consider with whom we are associated, and on whose hand we lean. While we trust God with a pious confidence, we must trust men with a prudent jealousy and caution.

2. When this plot failed, they did what they could to divert them from the work, and discourage them in it; they weakened their hands, by telling them it was in vain to attempt it, calling them *foolish builders*, who began what they were not able to finish, and by their insinuations troubled them, and made them drive heavily in it: all were not alike zealous in it; those that were cool and indifferent, were by these artifices drawn off from the work which wanted their help, v. 4. And, because what they themselves said, the Jews would suspect to be ill-meant, and not be influenced by, they, under-hand, *hired counsellors against them*, who, pretending to advise them for the best, should dissuade them from proceeding, and so *frustrate their purpose*; (v. 5.) or dissuade the men of Tyre and Sidon from furnishing them with the timber they had bargained for; (ch. 3. 7.) or, whatever business they had at the Persian court, to solicit for any particular grants or favours, pursuant to the general edict for their liberty, there were those that were hired, and lay ready, to appear of counsel against them. Wonder not at the restlessness of the church's enemies in their attempts against the building of God's temple: he whom they serve, and whose work they are doing, is *unceasing in walking to and fro through the earth* to do mischief. And let those who discourage a good work, and weaken the hands of them that are employed in it, see whose pattern they follow.

6. And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they *unto him* an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. 7. And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithridath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter *was* written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue. 8. Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort: 9. Then *wrote* Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites, 10. And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest *that are* on this side the river, and at such a time. 11. *This is* the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, *even* unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants, the men on this side the river, and at such a time. 12. Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls *thereof*, and joined the foundations. 13. Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up *again*, *then* will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and *so* thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings. 14. Now because we have maintenance from *the king's* palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we

sent and certified the king; 15. That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city *is* a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. 16. We certify the king that, if this city be builded *again*, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

Cyrus steadfastly adhered to the Jews' interest, and supported his own grant: it was to no purpose to offer any thing to him in prejudice of it, what he did, was from a good principle of the fear of God, and therefore he adhered to it; but though his reign, in all, was thirty years, yet, after the conquest of Babylon, and his decree for the release of the Jews, some think that he reigned but three years, others seven, and then either died, or gave up the part of his government, in which his successor was Ahasuerus, (v. 6.) called also *Artaxerxes*, (v. 7.) supposed to be the same that in heathen authors is called *Cambyzes*, who had never taken that cognizance of the despised Jews, as to concern himself for them, nor had he that knowledge of the God of Israel that his predecessor had; to him these Samaritans applied themselves by letter, for an order to stop the building of the temple; and they did it in the beginning of his reign, being resolved to lose no time, when they thought they had a king for their purpose. See how watchful the church's enemies are to take the first opportunity of doing it a mischief; let not its friends be less careful to do it a kindness. Here is,

I. The general purport of the letter which they sent to the king, to inform him of this matter. It is called, (v. 6.) *an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem*. The Devil is the *accuser of the brethren*, Rev. 12. 10. And he carries on his malicious designs against them, not only accusing them himself before our God, as he did Job, but by acting as a lying spirit in the mouths of his instruments, whom he employs to accuse them before magistrates and kings, and to make them odious to the many, and obnoxious to the mighty. Marvel not, if the same arts be still used to run down serious godliness.

II. The persons concerned in writing this letter. The contrivers are named, (v. 7.) that plotted the thing; the writers, (v. 8.) that put it into form, and the subscribers, (v. 9.) that concurred in it, and joined with them in this representation, this *misrepresentation* I should call it. Now see here, 1. How the *rulers take counsel together against the Lord* and his temple, with their companions: the building of the temple would do them no harm, yet they appear against it with the utmost concern and virulence, perhaps because the prophets of the God of Israel had foretold the *famishing* and *perishing* of all the *gods of the heathen*, Zeph. 2. 11. Jer. 10. 11. 2. How the people concurred with them in imagining this vain thing. They followed the cry, though ignorant of the merits of the cause: all the several colonies of that plantation, (nine are here mentioned,) who had their denomination from the cities or countries of Assyria, Chaldea, Persia, &c. whence they came, set their hands, by their representatives, to this letter. Perhaps they were incensed against these returned Jews, because many of the ten tribes were among them, whose estates they were got into the possession of, and of whom they were therefore jealous, lest they should attempt the recovery of them hereafter.

III. A copy of the letter itself, which Ezra inserts here out of the records of the kingdom of Persia, into which it had been entered; and it is well we have it, that we may see whence the like methods, still taken to expose good people, and baffle good designs, are copied.

1. They represent themselves as very loyal to the government, and mightily concerned for the honour and interest of it; and would have it thought that the king had no such loving faithful

subjects in all his dominions as they were, none so sensible of their obligations to him, *v. 14. Because we are salted with the salt of the palace*, so it is in the margin; "We have our salary from the court, and could no more live without it, than flesh could be preserved without salt;" or, as some think, their pay or pension was sent them in salt; or, "Because we had our education in the palace, and were brought up at the king's table," as we find, *Dan. 1. 5.* These were they whom he intended to prefer; they did *eat their portion of the king's meat*. Now, in consideration of this, *it is not meet for us to see the king's dishonour*; and therefore they urge him to stop the building of the temple, which would certainly be the king's dishonour more than any thing else. Note, A secret enmity to Christ, and his gospel, is often gilded over with a pretended affection to Cæsar and his power. The Jews hated the Roman government, and yet, to serve a turn, could cry, *We have no king but Cæsar*. But, (to allude to this,) if they that lived upon the crown thought themselves bound in gratitude thus to support the interest of it, much more reason have we thus to argue ourselves into a pious concern for God's honour; *we have our maintenance from the God of heaven*, and are *salted with his salt*, live upon his bounty, and are the care of his providence; and therefore it is not *meet for us to see his dishonour*, without resenting it, and doing what we can to prevent it.

2. They represent the Jews as disloyal, and dangerous to the government; that Jerusalem was *the rebellions and bad city*, (*v. 12.*) *hurtful to kings and provinces*, *v. 15.* See how Jerusalem, *the joy of the whole earth*, (*Ps. 48. 2.*) is here reproached as the scandal of the whole earth. The enemies of the church could not do the bad things they design against it, if they did not first give it a bad name. Jerusalem had been a loyal city to its rightful princes, and its present inhabitants were as well affected to the king and his government, as any of his provinces whatsoever. Daniel, who was a Jew, had lately approved himself so faithful to his prince, that his worst enemies could find no fault in his management, *Dan. 6. 4.* But thus was Elijah most unjustly charged with troubling Israel, the apostles with *turning the world upside down*, and Christ himself with *perverting the nation*, and *forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar*; and we must not think it strange, if the same game be still played. Now here,

(1.) The history of what was past is invidious; that, *within this city, sedition had been moved of old time*, and, for that cause, *it was destroyed*, *v. 15.* It cannot be denied but that there was some colour given for this suggestion, by the attempts of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah to shake off the yoke of the king of Babylon, which, if they had kept close to their religion and the temple they were now rebuilding, they had never come under; but it must be considered, [1.] That they were themselves, and their ancestors, sovereign princes, and their efforts to recover their rights, if there had not been in them the violation of an oath, for aught I know, had been justifiable, and successful too, had they taken the right method, and made their peace with God first. [2.] Though these Jews, and their princes, had been guilty of rebellion, yet it was unjust therefore to fasten this as an indelible brand upon this city, as if that must, for ever after, go under the name of *the rebellious and bad city*. The Jews, in their captivity, had given such specimens of good behaviour, as were sufficient, with any reasonable men, to roll away that one reproach; for they were instructed (and we have reason to hope that they observed their instructions) to *seek the peace of the cities where they were captives, and pray to the Lord for it*, *Jer. 29. 7.* It was therefore very unfair, yet not uncommon, for them to impute the iniquity of the fathers to the children.

(2.) Their information concerning what they were now doing was grossly false, in matter of fact. Very careful they are to inform the king that they had *set up the walls of this city*, nay, had *finished* them, so it is in the margin, and *joined the foundations*, (*v. 12.*) when it was far from being the case. They had only begun to build the temple, which Cyrus commanded them to do, but as for the walls, there was nothing done, nor designed, toward the repair of them, as appears by the condition they were

in, many years after, (*Neh. 1. 3.*) all in ruins. *What shall be given, and what done, to these false tongues*; these false pens, *sharp arrows*, doubtless, *of the mighty*, and *coals of juniper*? *Ps. 120. 3, 4.* If they had not been perfectly lost to all virtue and honour, they would not, and if they had not been very secure of the king's countenance, they durst not, have written that to the king which all their neighbours knew to be a notorious lie. See *Prov. 29. 12.*

(3.) Their prognostics of the consequences were altogether groundless and absurd. They are very confident, and would have the king believe it upon their word, that, if this city be built, not only the Jews would *pay no toll, tribute, or custom*, (*v. 13.*) but (since a great lie is as soon spoken as a little one) that the king would have no portion at all on this side the river, (*v. 16.*) that all the countries on this side Euphrates would instantly revolt, drawn to it by their example; and if the prince in possession should connive at this, he would wrong, not only himself, but his successors, *Thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings*. See how every line in this letter breathes both the subtlety and malice of the old serpent.

17. Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time. 18. The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. 19. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. 20. There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them. 21. Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. 22. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? 23. Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. 24. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Here we have,

1. The orders which the king of Persia gave, in answer to the information sent him by the Samaritans against the Jews. He suffered himself to be imposed upon by their fraud and falsehood, took no care to examine the allegations of their petition concerning that which the Jews were now doing, but took it for granted that the charge was true, and was very willing to gratify them with an order of council to stay proceedings.

1. He consulted the records concerning Jerusalem, and found that it had indeed rebelled against the king of Babylon, and therefore that it was, as they called it, a *bad city*, *v. 19.* And withal, that, in times past, kings had reigned there, to whom all the countries on that side the river had been tributaries, (*v. 20.*) and that therefore there was danger, that, if ever they were able, (which they were never likely to be,) they would claim them again. Thus he says as they said, and pretends to give a reason for it.

See the hard fate of princes, who must see and hear with other men's eyes and ears, and give judgment upon things as they are represented to them, which things are often represented falsely. Therefore God's judgment is always just, because he sees things as they are, and it is according to truth.

2. He appointed these Samaritans to stop the building of the city immediately, till further order should be given about it, v. 21, 22. Neither they, in their letter, nor he, in his order, make any mention of the temple, and the building of that, because both they and he knew that they had not only a permission, but a command, from Cyrus to rebuild that, which even these Samaritans had not the confidence to move for the repeal of; they spake only of the city, "Let not that be built," that is, "as a city with walls and gates; whatever you do, prevent that, lest damage grow to the hurt of the kings:" he would not that the crown should lose by his wearing it.

II. The use which the enemies of the Jews made of these orders, so fraudulently obtained; upon the receipt of them, they went up in haste to Jerusalem, v. 23. *Their feet ran to evil*, Prov. 1. 16. They were impatient till the builders were served with this prohibition, which they produced as their warrant to *make them cease by force and power*. As they abused the king in obtaining this order by their mis-informations, so they abused him in the execution of it: for the order was only to prevent the walling of the city; but, having force and power on their side, they construed it as relating to the temple, for that was it which they had an ill will to, and which they only wanted some colour to hinder the building of. There was indeed a general clause in the order, to *cause these men to cease*, which had reference to their complaint about building the walls; but they applied it to the building of the temple. See what need we have to pray, not only for kings, but for all in authority under them, and *the governors sent by them*, because the *quietness and peaceableness* of our lives, in all *godliness and honesty*, depend very much upon the integrity and wisdom of inferior magistrates, as well as the supreme.

The consequence was, that *the work of the house of God ceased* for a time, through the power and insolence of its enemies; and so, through the coldness and indifferency of its friends, it stood still till the second year of Darius Hystaspes, for to me it seems clear by the thread of this sacred history, that it was that Darius, v. 24. Though now a stop was put to it by the violence of the Samaritans, yet that, soon after, they might have gone on by connivance, if they had had a due affection to the work, appears by this, that, before they had that express warrant from the king for doing it, (ch. 6.) they were reproved by the prophets for not doing it; ch. 5. 1. compared with Hag. 1. 1, &c. If they had taken due care to inform Cambyses of the truth of this case, perhaps he had recalled his order; but, for aught I know, some of the builders were almost as willing it should cease as the adversaries themselves were. At some periods, the church has suffered more by the coldness of its friends than by the heat of its enemies; but both together commonly make church work slow work.

CHAP. V.

We left the temple work at a full stop; but, being God's work, it shall be revived, and here we have an account of the reviving of it. It was hindered by might and power, but it was set a-going again by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. Now here we are told how that blessed Spirit, I. Warmed its cool-hearted friends, and excited them to build, v. 1, 2. II. Cooled its hot-headed enemies, and brought them to better tempers; for though they secretly disliked the work, as much as those in the foregoing chapter, yet, 1. They were more mild toward the builders, v. 3. 5. 2. They were more fair in their representation of the matter to the king, which here we have an account of, v. 6. 17.

1. **THEN** the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, *even unto them*. 2. Then rose up Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build

the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

Some reckon that the building of the temple was suspended for only nine years; I am willing to believe that fifteen years were the utmost; during which time they had an altar and a tabernacle, which, no doubt, they made use of. When we cannot do what we would, we must do what we can, in the service of God, and be sorry we can do no better. But the counsellors that were hired to hinder the work, (ch. 4. 5.) told them, and perhaps with a pretence to inspiration, that the time was not come for the building of the temple, Hag. 1. 2. They might urge that it was long ere the time came for the building of Solomon's temple; and thus the people were made easy in their own *ceiled houses*, while *God's house lay waste*. Now here we are told how life was put into that good cause which seemed to lie dead,

1. They had two good ministers, who, in God's name, earnestly persuaded them to put the wheel of business in motion again; these were Haggai and Zechariah, who both began to prophesy in the second year of Darius, as appears, Hag. 1. 1. Zech. 1. 1. Observe, (1.) The temple of God among men is to be built by prophecy, not by secular force, (that often hinders it, but seldom furthers it,) but by *the word of God*; as the *weapons of our warfare*, so the instruments of our building are *not carnal*, but *spiritual*, and they are the ministers of the gospel, that are the master-builders. (2.) It is the business of God's prophets to stir up God's people to that which is good, and to help them in it, to strengthen their hands, and, by suitable considerations fetched from the word of God, to quicken them to their duty, and encourage them in it. (3.) It is a sign that God has mercy in store for a people, when he raises up prophets among them to be their helpers in the way and work of God, their guides, overseers, and rulers.

Further observe, [1.] To whom these prophets were sent. They prophesied unto the *Jews*, (for, as to them pertained the giving of the law, so also the gift of prophecy, and therefore they are called *the children of the prophets*, (Acts, 3. 25.) because they were educated under their tuition and instruction,) *even unto them, upon them, even upon them*, so it is in the original, as Ezekiel prophesied *upon the dry bones*, that they might live, Ezek. 37. 4. They prophesied *against* them, so Bishop Patrick, for they reproved them because they did not build the temple. The word of God, if it be not received now as a testimony to us, will be received another day as a testimony against us, and will judge us. [2.] Who sent them. They prophesied in the name, or, as some read it, *in the cause*, or, for the sake, *of the God of Israel*; they spake by commission from him, and argued from his authority over them, his interest in them, and the concern of his glory among them.

2. They had two good magistrates, who were forward and active in this work; Zerubbabel their chief prince, and Jeshua their chief priest, v. 2. They that are in places of dignity and power ought with their dignity to put honour upon, and with their power to put life into, every good work: thus it becomes them that precede, and them that preside, with an exemplary care and zeal, to *fulfil all righteousness*, and to *go before in a good work*. These great men thought it no disparagement to them, but a happiness, to be taught and prescribed to by the prophets of the Lord; and were glad of their help in reviving this good work. Read the first chapter of the prophecy of Haggai here, (for that is the best comment on these two verses,) and see what great things God does by his word, which he magnifies above all his name, and by his Spirit working with it.

3. At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? 4. Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men

that made this building? 5. But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this *matter*. 6. The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which *were* on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king: 7. They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace. 8. Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands. 9. Then asked we those elders, *and* said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? 10. We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that *were* the chief of them. 11. And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up. 12. But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon. 13. But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon, *the same* king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. 14. And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that *was* in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto *one*, whose name *was* Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; 15. And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that *is* in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place. 16. Then came the same Sheshbazzar, *and* laid the foundation of the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and *yet* it is not finished. 17. Now therefore, if *it seem* good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure-house, which *is* there at Babylon, whether it be *so*, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

We have here,

I. The cognizance which their neighbours soon took of the reviving of this good work; a jealous eye, it seems, they had upon them, and no sooner did the Spirit of God stir up the friends of the temple to appear for it, than the evil spirit stirred up its

enemies to appear against it. While the people built and ceiled their own houses, their enemies gave them no molestation, (Hag. 1.4.) though the king's order was to put a stop to the building of the city, *ch.* 4.21. But, when they fell to work again at the temple, then the alarm is taken, and all heads are at work to hinder it, *v.* 3, 4. The adversaries are here named, *Tatnai* and *Shethar-boznai*; the governors we read of, (*ch.* 4.) were, it is probable, displaced at the beginning of this reign, as is usual; it is the policy of princes often to change their deputies, proconsuls, and rulers of provinces. These, though real enemies to the building of the temple, were men of better temper than the other, and that made some conscience of telling truth; if *all men have not faith*, (2 Thess. 3.2.) it is well some have, and a sense of honour. The church's enemies are not all alike wicked and unreasonable. The historian begins to relate what passed between the builders and those inquisitors, (*v.* 3, 4.) but breaks off his account, referring himself to the ensuing copy of the letter they sent to the king, where the same appears more fully, and at large, which he began to abridge, (*v.* 4.) or make an extract out of, though, upon second thoughts, he inserted the whole.

II. The care which the Divine Providence took of this good work, *v.* 5. *The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews*, who were active in the work, so that their enemies could not cause them to cease, as they would have done, till the matter came to Darius. They desired they would only cease, till they had instructions from the king about it. But they would not so much as yield them that, for *the eye of God was upon them*, even their God. And, 1. That baffled their enemies, infatuated and enfeebled them, and protected the builders from their malicious designs. While we are employed in God's work, we are taken under his special protection; his eye is upon us for good, seven eyes upon one stone in his temple: see Zech. 3.9.—4.10. 2. That quickened them; the elders of the Jews saw *the eye of God upon them*, to observe what they did, and own them in what they did well, and then they had courage enough to face their enemies, and to go on vigorously with their work, notwithstanding all the opposition they met with. Our eye upon God, observing his eye upon us, will keep us to our duty, and encourage us in it, when the difficulties are ever so discouraging.

III. The account they sent to the king of this matter; in which we may observe,

1. How fully the elders of the Jews gave the Samaritans an account of their proceedings. They, finding them both busy and prosperous, that all hands were at work to run up this building, and that it went fast on, put these questions to them: "By what authority do you these things, and who gave you that authority? Who set you to work? Have you that which will bear you out?" To this they answered, that they had sufficient warrant to do what they did; for, (1.) "*We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth*: the God we worship is not a local deity, and therefore we cannot be charged with making a faction, or setting up a sect, in building this temple to his honour; but we pay our homage to a God on whom the whole creation depends, and therefore ought to be protected and assisted by all, and hindered by none." It is the wisdom, as well as duty, of kings, to countenance the servants of the *God of heaven*. (2.) "We have a prescription to this house; it was built, for the honour of our God, by Solomon, many ages ago. It is no novel invention of our own; we are but *raising the foundations of many generations*," Isa. 5.8, 12. (3.) "It was to punish us for our sins that we were, for a time, put out of the possession of this house; not because the gods of the nations had prevailed against our God, but because we had provoked him, (*v.* 12.) for which he delivered us and our temple into the hands of the king of Babylon, but never intended thereby to put a final period to our religion. We were only suspended for a time, not deprived for ever." (4.) "We have the royal decree of Cyrus to justify us, and bear us out, in what we do. He not only permitted and allowed us, but charged and commanded us, to build this house, (*v.* 13.) and to build it in its place, (*v.* 15.) the same place where it had stood before." He ordered this, not only in compassion to the Jews, but in veneration of their God, saying, *He is*

the God. He also delivered the vessels of the temple to one whom he intrusted to see them restored to their ancient place and use, v.14. And they had these to shew, in confirmation of what they alleged. (5.) "The building was begun, according to this order, as soon as ever we were returned, so that we have not forfeited the benefit of the order, for want of pursuing it in time; still it has been in building, but, because we have met with opposition, it is not finished." But observe, they mention not the falsehood and malice of the former governors, nor make any complaint of that, though they had cause enough; to teach us not to render bitterness for bitterness, nor the most just reproach for that which is most unjust, but to think it enough if we can obtain fair treatment for the future, without an invidious repetition of former injuries, v.16. This is the account they give of their proceedings; not asking what authority they had to examine them, or upbraiding them with their idolatry, and superstitions, and medley religion. Let us learn hence, with meekness and fear, to *give a reason of the hope that is in us*, (1 Pet. 3.15.) rightly to understand, and then readily to declare, what we do in God's service, and why we do it.

2. How fairly the Samaritans represented this to the king. (1.) They call the temple at Jerusalem, the *house of the great God*; (v.8.) for, though the Samaritans, as it should seem, had yet gods many, and lords many, they owned the God of Israel to be the *great God*, that is above all gods; "It is the house of the *great God*, and therefore we dare not oppose the building of it, without orders from thee." (2.) They tell him truly what was done, not as their predecessors did, that they were fortifying the city, as if they intended war, but only rearing the temple, as those that intended worship, v.8. (3.) They fully represent their plea, tell him what they had to say for themselves, and are willing that the cause should be set in a true light. *Lastly*, They leave it to the king to consult the records, whether Cyrus had indeed made such a decree, and then to give directions as he should think fit, v.17. We have reason to think, that, if Artaxerxes, in the foregoing chapter, had had the Jews' cause as fairly represented to him as it was here to Darius, he would not have ordered the work to be hindered. God's people could not be persecuted, if they were not belied; could not be baited, if they were not dressed up in bears' skins. Let but the cause of God and truth be fairly stated, and fairly heard, and it will keep its ground.

CHAP. VI.

How solemnly the foundation of the temple was laid, we read, ch.3. How slowly the building went on, and with how much difficulty, we found, ch.4. and 5. But, how gloriously the top-stone was, at length, brought forth with shoutings, we find in this chapter: and even we, at this distance of time, when we read of it, may cry, Grace, grace to it. As for God, his work is perfect; it may be slow work, but it will be sure work. We have here, I. A recital of the decree of Cyrus, for the building of the temple, v.1..5. II. The enforcing of that decree, by a new order from Darius, for the perfecting of that work, v.6..12. III. The finishing of it thereupon, v.13..15. IV. The solemn dedication of it, when it was built, v.16..18. And the handsetting of it (as I may say) with the celebration of the passover, v.19..22. And now we may say, that, in Judah and Jerusalem, things went well, very well.

1. **T**HEN Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. 2. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written: 3. In the first year of Cyrus the king, the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the founda-

tions thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; 4. With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expences be given out of the king's house: 5. And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God. 6. Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: 7. Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. 8. Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expences be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. 9. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt-offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: 10. That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons. 11. Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. 12. And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.

We have here,

I. The decree of Cyrus, for the building of the temple, repeated. To this the Samaritans referred themselves, because the Jews pleaded it, and perhaps hoped it would not be found, and then their plea would be over-ruled, and a stop put to their work. Search was ordered to be made for it among the records, for, it seems, the tribes had not taken care to provide themselves with an authentic copy of it, which might have stood them in good stead, but they must appeal to the original. It was looked for in Babylon, (v.1.) where Cyrus was when he signed it. But, when it was not found there, Darius did not make that a pretence to conclude that therefore there was no such decree, and thereupon to give judgment against the Jews; but, it is probable, having himself heard that such a decree was certainly made, he ordered the rolls in other places to be searched, and, at length, it was found at Achmetha, in the province of the Medes, v.2. Perhaps some, that durst not destroy it, yet hid it there, out of ill-will to the Jews, that they might lose the benefit of it. But Providence so ordered, that it came to light; and it is here inserted, v.3..5. 1. Here is a warrant for the building of the temple, *Let the house of God*

at Jerusalem, yea, let that house, be builded; so it may be read, within such and such dimensions, and with such and such materials. 2. A warrant for the taking of the expences of the building out of the king's revenue, v.4. We do not find that they had received what was here ordered them, the face of things at court being soon changed. 3. A warrant for the restoring of the vessels and utensils of the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away, (v.5.) with an order that the priests, the Lord's ministers, should return them each to their place in the house of God.

II. The confirmation of it by a decree of Darius, grounded upon it, and in pursuance of it. By which,

1. He forbids his officers to do any thing in opposition to the building of the temple. The manner of expression intimates that he knew they had a mind to hinder it; *Be ye far from thence; (v.6.) Let the work of this house of God alone, v.7.* Thus was the wrath of the enemy made to praise God, and the remainder thereof did he restrain.

2. He orders them, out of his own revenue, to assist the builders with money. (1.) For carrying on the building, v.8. Herein he pursues the example of Cyrus, v.4. (2.) For maintaining the sacrifices there, when it was built, v.9. He orders that they should be supplied with every thing they wanted, both for burnt-offerings and meat-offerings. He was content it should be a rent-charge upon his revenue, and orders it to be paid every day, and this without fail, that they may offer sacrifices, and prayers with them, (for the patriarchs, when they offered sacrifices, called on the name of the Lord, so did Samuel, Elijah, and others,) for the life, that is, the happiness and prosperity, of the king and his sons, v.10. See here how he gives honour, [1.] To Israel's God, whom he calls once and again the *God of heaven*. [2.] To his ministers, in ordering his commissioners to give out supplies for the temple service, at the appointment of the priests; they that thought to have controuled them, now must be, in this matter, at their command. It was a new thing for God's priests to have such an interest in the public money. [3.] To prayer, *That they may pray for the life of the king*. He knew they were a praying people, and had heard that God was nigh to them in all that which they called upon him for. He was sensible he needed their prayers, and might receive benefit by them; and was therefore kind to them, that he might have an interest in their prayers. It is the duty of God's people to pray for those that are in authority over them, not only for the good and gentle, but also for the froward; but they are particularly bound, in gratitude, to pray for their protectors and benefactors; and it is the wisdom of princes to desire their prayers, and to engage them. Let not the greatest princes despise the prayers of the meanest saints; it is desirable to have them for us, and dreadful to have them against us.

3. He enforces his decree with a penalty; (v.11.) "Let none either oppose the work and service of the temple, or withhold the supports granted to it by the crown, upon pain of death. If any alter this decree, let him be" (*hanged before his own door, as we say*) "hanged upon a beam of his own house, and, as an execrable man, let his house be made a dunghill."

4. He entails a divine curse upon all those kings and people that should ever have any hand in the destruction of this house, v.12. What he could not do himself for the protection of the temple, he desires that God, to whom vengeance belongs, would do. This bespeaks him zealous in the cause; and though this temple was, at length, most justly destroyed by the righteous hand of God, yet perhaps the Romans, who were the instruments of that destruction, felt the effects of this curse, for that empire sensibly declined ever after.

Now from all this we learn, (1.) That the heart of kings is in the hand of God, and he turns it which way soever he pleases; what they are, he makes them to be, for he is *King of kings*. (2.) That when God's time is come for the accomplishing of his gracious purposes concerning his church, he will raise up instruments to do it, from whom such good service was not expected. *The earth sometimes helpeth the woman*, (Rev. 12.16.) and those are made use of, for the defence of religion, that have little religion

themselves. (3.) That what is intended for the prejudice of the church, has often, by the over-ruling providence of God, been made serviceable to it, Philip. 1.12. The enemies of the Jews, in appealing to Darius, hoped to get an order to suppress them, but, instead of that, they got an order to supply them. Thus *out of the eater comes forth meat*. The apocryphal Esdras, (or Ezra,) book 1. ch. 3. and 4. gives another account of this decree in favour of the Jews, that Darius had vowed, that, if ever he came to the kingdom, he would build the temple at Jerusalem, and that Zerubbabel, who was one of his attendants, (whereas it is plain here, that he was now at Jerusalem,) for making an ingenious discourse before him, on that subject, (*Great is the truth, and will prevail,*) was bid to ask what recompence he would, and asked only for this order, in pursuance of the king's vow.

13. Then Tatuai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily. 14. And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo; and they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. 16. And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, 17. And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin-offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. 19. And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. 20. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. 21. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, 22. And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Here we have,

1. The Jews' enemies made their friends. When they received this order from the king, they came with as much haste to encourage and assist the work, as their predecessors had to put a stop to it, ch. 4.23. What the king ordered, they did, and, because they would not be thought to do it with reluctancy, they *did it*

speedily, v. 13. The king's moderation made them, contrary to their own inclination, moderate too.

II. The building of the temple carried on, and finished, in a little time, v. 14, 15. Now the *elders of the Jews builded* with cheerfulness. For aught I know, the elders themselves laboured at it *with their own hands*; and, if they did, it was no disparagement to their eldership, but an encouragement to the other workmen. 1. They found themselves bound to it *by the commandment of the God of Israel*, who had given them power, that they might use it in his service. 2. They found themselves shamed into it by the commandment of the heathen kings, Cyrus formerly, Darius now, and Artaxerxes some time after. Can the elders of the Jews be remiss in this good work, when these foreign princes appear so warm in it? Shall native Israelites grudge their pains and care about this building, when strangers grudge not to be at the expence of it? 3. They found themselves encouraged in it by the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, who, it is likely, represented to them (as Bishop Patrick suggests) the wonderful goodness of God in inclining the heart of the king of Persia to favour them thus. And now the work went on so prosperously, that, in four years' time, it was brought to perfection. *As for God, his work is perfect.* The gospel church, that spiritual temple, is long in the building, but it will be finished at last, when the mystical body is completed. Every believer is a *living temple, building up himself in his most holy faith*; much opposition is given to this work by Satan and our own corruptions; we trifle, and proceed in it with many stops and pauses; but he that has *begun the good work* will see it performed, and will *bring forth judgment unto victory. Spirits of just men will be made perfect.*

III. The dedication of the temple. When it was built, being designed only for sacred uses, now *they shewed by an example how it should be used*, which (says Bishop Patrick) is the proper sense of the word *dedicate*. They entered upon it with solemnity, and, probably, with a public declaration of the separating of it from common uses, and the surrender of it to the honour of God, to be employed in his worship. 1. The persons employed in this service were not only the *priests and Levites*, who officiated, but the *children of Israel*, some of each of the *twelve tribes*, though Judah and Benjamin were the chief, and *the rest of the children of the captivity or transportation*; which intimates that there were many beside the children of Israel, of other nations, who transported themselves with them, and became proselytes to their religion; unless we read it, *even the remnant of the children of the captivity*, and then, we may suppose, notice is ~~here~~ taken of their mean and afflicted condition, because the consideration of that helped to make them devout and serious in this and other religious exercises. A sad change! The *children of Israel* are become *children of the captivity*, and there appears but a remnant of them, according to that prediction, (Isa. 7. 3.) *Shear-jashub, The remnant shall return.* The sacrifices that were offered upon this occasion, were, *bullocks, rams, and lambs*, (v. 17.) for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings; not to be compared, in number, with what had been offered at the dedication of Solomon's temple, but, being according to their present ability, it was accepted, for, *after a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded to the riches of their liberality*, 2 Cor. 8. 2. These hundreds were more to them than Solomon's thousands were to him. But, beside these, they offered twelve he-goats for sin-offerings, one for every tribe, to make atonement for their sins, which they looked upon as necessary, in order to the acceptance of their services. Thus, by getting iniquity taken away, they would free themselves from that which had been the sting of their late troubles, and which, if not removed, would be a worm at the root of their present comforts. 3. This service was performed with joy; they were all glad to see the temple built, and the concerns of it in so good a posture. Let us learn to welcome holy ordinances with joy, and attend on them with pleasure; let us serve the Lord with gladness. Whatever we dedicate to God, let it be done with joy, that he will please to accept of it. When

they dedicated the house, they settled the household; small comfort could they have in the temple, without the temple service, and therefore they *set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses*, v. 18. Having set up the worship of God in this dedication, they took care to keep it up, and made *the book of Moses* their rule, to which they had an eye in this establishment. Though the temple service could not now be performed with so much pomp and plenty as formerly, because of their poverty, yet, perhaps, it was performed with as much purity, and close adherence to the divine institution, as ever, which was the true glory of it. No beauty like the beauty of holiness.

IV. The celebration of the passover in the newly-erected temple. Now that they were newly delivered out of their bondage in Babylon, it was seasonable to commemorate their deliverance out of their bondage in Egypt. Fresh mercies should put us in mind of former mercies. We may suppose that they had kept the passover, after a sort, every year since their return, for they had an altar and a tabernacle. But they were liable to frequent disturbances from their enemies, were straitened for room, and had not conveniences about them, so that they could not do it with due solemnity till the temple was built; and now they made a joyful festival of it, it falling out in the next month after the temple was finished and dedicated, v. 19.

Notice is here taken, 1. Of the purity of the priests and Levites that *killed the passover*, v. 20. In Hezekiah's time, they were many of them under blame for not purifying themselves. But now it is observed, to their praise, that *they were purified together, as one man*, so the word is; they were unanimous both in their resolutions, and in their endeavours, to make and keep themselves ceremonially clean for this solemnity; they joined together in their preparations, that they might help one another, so that all of them were pure, to a man. The purity of ministers adds much to the beauty of their ministration: so does their unity. 2. Of the proselytes, that communicated with them in this ordinance. *All such as had separated themselves unto them*, had left their country and the superstitions of it, and cast in their lot with the Israel of God, and had *turned from the filthiness of the heathen of the land*, both their idolatries and their immoralities, *to seek the Lord God of Israel* as their God, did eat the passover. See how the proselytes, the converts, are described; they separate themselves from the filthiness of sin, and fellowship with sinners, join themselves to the Israel of God, in conformity and communion, and set themselves to seek the God of Israel; and those that do so in sincerity, though strangers and foreigners, are welcome to eat of the gospel-feast, as *fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*. 3. Of the great pleasure and satisfaction wherewith they *kept the feast of unleavened bread*, v. 22. *The Lord had made them joyful*, had given them both cause to rejoice, and hearts to rejoice. It was now about twenty years since the foundation of this temple was laid, and we may suppose the old men, that then wept at the remembrance of the first temple, were most of them dead by this time, so that now there were no tears mingled with their joys. Those that are, upon good grounds, joyful, have *therefore* reason to be thankful, because it is God that *makes them to rejoice*. He is the Fountain whence all the streams of our joy flow. God has promised, to all those who take hold of his covenant, that *he will make them joyful in his house of prayer*. The particular occasion they had for joy at this time, was, that God had *turned the heart* of the emperor to them, to *strengthen their hands*. If those that have been, or, we feared, would have been, against us, prove to be for us, we may rejoice in it as a token for good, that *our ways please the Lord*, (Prov. 16. 7.) and he must have the glory of it.

CHAP. VII.

Ezra's precious name saluted us, at first, in the title of the book, but in the history we have not met with it, till this chapter introduces him into public action in another reign, that of Artaxerxes. Zerubbabel and Jeshua we will suppose, by this time, to be grown old, if not gone off; nor do we hear any more of Haggai and Zechariah; they have finished their testimony

What shall become of the cause of God and Israel, when these useful instruments are laid aside? Trust God, who has the residue of the Spirit, to raise up others in their room. Ezra here, and Nehemiah in the next book, are as serviceable in their days, as those were in their's. Here is, I. An account, in general, of Ezra himself, and of his expedition to Jerusalem for the public good, v. 1. .10. II. A copy of the commission which Artaxerxes gave him, v. 11. .26. III. His thankfulness to God for it, v. 27, 28. The next chapter will give us a more particular narrative of his associates, his journey, and his arrival at Jerusalem.

1. **N**OW after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2. The son Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3. The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4. The son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5. The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest: 6. This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he *was* a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him. 7. And there went up *some* of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. 8. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which *was* in the seventh year of the king. 9. For upon the first *day* of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first *day* of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

Here is,

I. Ezra's pedigree. He was one of the sons of Aaron, a priest; him God chose to be an instrument of good to Israel, that he might put honour upon the priesthood, the glory of which had been much eclipsed by the captivity. He is said to be *the son of Seraiah*, that Seraiah, as is supposed, whom the king of Babylon put to death, when he sacked Jerusalem, 2 Kings, 25. 18, 21. If we take the shortest computation, it was seventy-five years since Saraiah died; many reckon it much longer, and, because they suppose Ezra called out, in the prime of his time, to public service, do therefore think that Seraiah was not his immediate parent, but his grandfather, or great-grandfather; but that he was the first eminent person that occurred in his genealogy upward, which is carried up here as high as Aaron, yet leaving out many, for brevity-sake, which may be supplied from 1 Chron. 6. 4, &c. He was a younger brother, or his father was Jozadak, the father of Jeshua, so that he was not high priest, but nearly allied to the high priest.

II. His character; though of the younger house, his personal qualifications made him very eminent.

1. He was a man of great learning. A scribe, a *ready scribe in the law of Moses*, v. 6. He was very much conversant with the scriptures, especially the writings of Moses, had the words ready, and was well acquainted with the sense and meaning of them. It is to be feared that learning ran low among the Jews in Babylon; but Ezra was instrumental to revive it. The Jews say that he collected and collated all the copies of the law he could find out, and published an accurate edition of it, with all the prophetic books,

historical and poetical, that were given by divine inspiration, and so made up the canon of the Old Testament, with the addition of the prophecies and histories of his own time; if he was raised up of God, and qualified and inclined to do this, all generations have reason to call him *blessed*, and to bless God for him. God sent to the Jews *prophets and scribes*, Matth. 23. 34. Ezra went under the latter denomination; now that prophecy was about to cease, it was time to promote scripture-knowledge, pursuant to the counsel of God, by the last of the prophets, Mal. 4. 4. *Remember the law of Moses.* Gospel-ministers are called *scribes instructed to the kingdom of heaven*, (Matth. 13. 52.) New-Testament scribes. It was pity that such a worthy name as this should be worn as it was, in the degenerate ages of the Jewish church, by men who were professed enemies to Christ and his gospel, (*Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees,*) who were learned in the letter of the law, but strangers to the spirit of it.

2. He was a man of great piety and holy zeal, v. 10. *He had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, &c.* (1.) That which he chose for his study, was *the law of the Lord*. The Chaldeans, among whom he was born and bred, were famed for literature, especially the study of the stars, to which, being a studious man, we may suppose that Ezra was tempted to apply himself; but he got over the temptation, the law of his God was more to him than all the writings of their magicians and astrologers, which he knew enough of with good reason to despise them. (2.) *He sought the law of the Lord*, that is, he made it his business to inquire into it; searched the scriptures, and sought the knowledge of God, and his mind and will, in the scriptures, which is to be found there, but not without seeking. (3.) He made conscience of doing according to it; he set it before him as his rule, formed his sentiments and temper by it, and managed himself in his whole conversation according to it. This use we must make of our knowledge of the scriptures; for happy are we, if we do what we know of the will of God. (4.) He set himself to teach Israel the statutes and judgments of that law. What he knew, he was willing to communicate for the good of others; for *the ministration of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal*. But observe the method; he first learned, and then taught; sought the law of the Lord, and so laid up a good treasure, and then instructed others, and laid out what he had laid up. He also first did, and then taught, practised the commandments himself, and then directed others in the practice of them; thus his example confirmed his doctrine. (5.) He prepared his heart to do all this; or, he fixed his heart. He took pains in his studies, and thoroughly furnished himself for what he designed, and then put on resolution to proceed and persevere in them, and thus he became a ready scribe. Moses in Egypt, Ezra in Babylon, and both in captivity, were wonderfully fitted for eminent services to the church.

III. His expedition to Jerusalem, for the good of his country. He *went up from Babylon*, (v. 6.) and, in four months' time, came to Jerusalem, v. 8. It was strange that such a man as he staid so long in Babylon, after his brethren were gone up; but God sent him not thither, till he had work for him to do there; and none went, but those *whose spirits God raised* to go up. Some think that this Artaxerxes was the same with that Darius whose decree we had, (ch. 6.) and that Ezra came the very year after the temple was finished; that was the sixth year, this the seventh, v. 8. So Dr. Lightfoot. My worthy and learned friend, lately deceased, Mr. Tallents, in his chronological tables, places it about fifty-seven years after the finishing of the temple; others further on. I have only to observe, 1. How kind the king was to him; he *granted him all his request*, whatever he desired, to put him into a capacity to serve his country. 2. How kind his people were to him; when he went, many more went with him, because they desired not to stay in Babylon when he was gone thence, and because they would venture to dwell in Jerusalem when he was gone thither. 3. How kind his God was to him; he obtained this favour from his king and country, by *the good hand of the Lord that was upon him*, v. 6, 9. Note, Every creature is that to us that God makes it to be, and from him our judgment proceeds. As we must see the events

that *shall* occur, in the hand of God, so we must see the hand of God in the events that *do* occur, and acknowledge him with thankfulness, when we have reason to call it his *good hand*.

which may judge all the people that *are* beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know *them* not. 26. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether *it be* unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

We have here the commission which the Persian emperor granted to Ezra, giving him authority to act for the good of the Jews; and it is very ample and full, and beyond what could have been expected. The commission runs, we suppose, in the usual form. Artaxerxes, *king of kings*; that is too high a title for any mortal man to assume; he was indeed king of some kings, but to speak as if he were king of all kings, is to usurp *his* prerogative who hath *all power both in heaven and in earth*. He sends greeting to his trusty and well-beloved Ezra, whom he calls a *scribe of the law of the God of heaven*, (v. 12.) a title which (it seems by this) Ezra valued himself by, and desired no other, no not when he was advanced to the proconsular dignity. He reckoned it more his honour to be a *scribe of God's law*, than to be a peer or prince of the empire. Let us observe the articles of this commission;

I. He gives Ezra leave to go up to Jerusalem, and as many of his countrymen as pleased to go up with him, v. 13. He and they were captives, and therefore they would not quit his dominions without his royal license.

II. He gives him authority to inquire into the affairs of Judah and Jerusalem, v. 14. The rule of his inquiry was to be *the law of his God, which was in his hand*; Whether the Jews, in their religion, had, and did, according to that law? whether the temple was built, the priesthood settled, and the sacrifices offered, conformably to the divine appointment? If, upon inquiry, he found any thing amiss, he must see to get it amended, and, like Titus in Crete, must *set in order the things that were wanting*, Tit. 1. 5. Thus is God's law magnified and made honourable, and thus are the Jews restored to their ancient privilege of governing themselves by that law, and are no longer under the *statutes that were not good*, the statutes of their oppressors, Ezek. 20. 25.

III. He intrusts him with the money that was freely given by the king himself and his counsellors, and collected among his subjects, for the service of the house of God, v. 15, 16. Let this be taken notice of, 1. To the honour of God, as the one only living and true God; for even those that worshipped other gods were so convinced of the sovereignty of the God of Israel, that they were willing to incur expences, in order to recommend themselves to his favour. See Ps. 45. 12.—68. 29. 2. To the praise of this heathen king; that he honoured the God of Israel, though his worshippers were a despicable handful of poor men, that were not able to bear the charges of their own religion, and were now his vassals; and that though he was not wrought upon to quit his own superstitions, yet he protected and encouraged the Jews in their religion, and did not only say, *Be ye warmed, and be ye filled*, but gave them such things as they needed. 3. To the reproach of the memory of the wicked kings of Judah; they that had been trained up in the knowledge and worship of the *God of Israel*, and had his law and his prophets often, plundered and impoverished the temple; but here a heathen prince enriches it. Thus, afterward, the gospel was rejected by the Jews, but welcomed by the Gentiles. See Rom. 11. 11. *Through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles*, Acts, 13. 46.

Ezra is intrusted, (1.) To receive this money, and to carry it to Jerusalem; for he was a man of known integrity, whom they could confide in, that he would not convert to his own use the least part of that which was given to the public. We find St. Paul going to Jerusalem upon such an errand, *to bring olms to his nation, and offerings*, Acts, 24. 17. (2.) To lay out this money in the best manner; in sacrifices to be offered upon the altar of God, (v. 17.) and in whatever else he or his brethren thought fit, (v. 18.) with this

11. Now this *is* the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, *even* a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel. 12. Artaxerxes, king of kings, Unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect *peace*, and at such a time. 13. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. 14. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which *is* in thine hand; 15. And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation *is* in Jerusalem, 16. And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the free-will offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which *is* in Jerusalem: 17. That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat-offerings and their drink-offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which *is* in Jerusalem. 18. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and gold, that do after the will of your God. 19. The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, *those* deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. 20. And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow *it* out of the king's treasure-house. 21. And I, *even* I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which *are* beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily. 22. Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing *how much*. 23. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? 24. Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them. 25. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that *is* in thine hand, set magistrates and judges,

limitation only, that it be *after the will of your God*, which they were better acquainted with than he was. Let the *will of our God* be always our rule in our expences, and particularly in what we lay out for his service. God's work must always be done according to his will. Beside money, he had vessels also given him for the service of the temple, v. 19. Cyrus restored what of right belonged to the temple; but these were given over and above: thus it receiveth its own with usury; these he must deliver before the God of Jerusalem, as intended for his honour, there where he had put his name.

IV. He draws him a bill, or warrant rather, upon the *treasurers on that side the river*, requiring them to furnish him with what he had occasion for, out of the king's revenues, and place it to the king's account, v. 20.. 22. This was considerably done; for Ezra, being yet to inquire into the state of things, knew not what he should have occasion for, and was modest in his demands; it was also kindly done, and evidenced a very great affection to the temple, and a great confidence in Ezra. It is the interest of princes and great men to use their wealth and power for the support and encouragement of religion. What else are great revenues good for, but that they enable men to do much good of this kind, if they have but hearts to do it?

V. He charges him that nothing should be wanting, that was requisite to be done in or about the temple, for the honour of the God of Israel. Observe, in this charge, (v. 23.) 1. How honourably he speaks of God; he had called him before the *God of Jerusalem*, but here, lest it should be thought that he looked upon him as a local deity, he calls him twice, with great veneration, the *God of heaven*. 2. How strictly he eyes the word and law of God, which, it is likely, he had read and admired; "Whatsoever is commanded by your God," (whose institutions, though he wrote himself *King of kings*, he would not presume, in the least iota or tittle, to alter or add too,) "let it be done, let it be diligently done, with care and speed." And, 3. How solicitously he deprecates the wrath of God; *Why should there be wrath against the realm?* The neglect and contempt of religion bring the judgments of God upon kings and kingdoms; and the likeliest expedient to turn away his wrath, when it is ready to break out against a people, is, to support and encourage religion. Would we secure our peace and prosperity? Let us take care that the cause of God be not starved.

VI. He discharges all the ministers of the temple from paying taxes to the government; from the greatest of the priests to the least of the Nethinims, it shall not be lawful for the king's officers to impose that toll, tribute, or custom, upon them, which the rest of the king's subjects paid, v. 24. This put a great honour upon them, as free denizens of the empire, and would gain them respect as favourites of the crown; and it gives them liberty to attend their ministry with more cheerfulness and freedom. We suppose it was only what they needed for themselves, and their families, and the maintenance of their ministry, that was hereby allowed to come to them custom-free: if any of them should take occasion, from this privilege, to meddle in trade and merchandise, they justly lost the benefit of it.

VII. He impowers Ezra to nominate and appoint judges and magistrates for all the Jews on that side the river, v. 25, 26. It was a great favour to the Jews, to have such nobles of themselves, and especially to have them of Ezra's nomination. 1. All that knew the laws of Ezra's God, that is, all that professed the Jewish religion, were to be under the jurisdiction of these judges, which intimates that they were exempted from the jurisdiction of the heathen magistrates. 2. These judges were allowed, and encouraged, to make proselytes; Let them *teach the laws of God to those that do not know them*. Though he would not turn Jew himself, he cared not how many of his subjects did. 3. They are authorized to enforce the judgments they gave, and the orders they made, conformable to the law of God, (which was hereby made the law of the king,) with severe penalties—imprisonment, banishment, fine, or death, according as their law directed. They are not allowed to make new laws, but must see the laws of God duly executed; and therefore they are intrusted with the sword, that they

may be a terror to evil doers. What could Jehoshaphat, or Hezekiah, or David himself, as king, have done more for the honour of God, and the furtherance of religion?

27. Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem: 28. And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

Ezra cannot proceed in his story, without inserting this thankful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to him and his people, in this matter. As soon as he has concluded the king's commission, instead of subjoining, *God save the king*, (though that had been proper enough,) he adds, *Blessed be the Lord*; for we must, in every thing, give thanks, and, whatever occurrences please us, we must own God's hand in them, and praise his name. Two things Ezra blessed God for,

1. For his commission. We suppose he kissed the king's hand for it, but that was not all; *Blessed be God* (says he) *that put such a thing as this into the king's heart*. God can put things into men's hearts, which would not arise there of themselves, and into their heads too, both by his providence and by his grace, in things pertaining both to life and godliness. If any good appear to be in our own hearts, or in the hearts of others, we must own it was God that put it there, and bless him for it; for it is he that *worketh in us both to will and to do* that which is good. When princes and magistrates act for the suppression of vice, and the encouragement of religion, we must thank God that *put it into their hearts* to do so, as much as if they had granted us some particular favour. When God's house was built, Ezra rejoiced in what was done to beautify it. We read not of any orders given to paint or gild it, or garnish it with precious stones, but to be sure that the ordinances of God were administered there constantly, and carefully, and exactly according to the institution; and that was indeed the beautifying of the temple.

2. For the encouragement he had to act in pursuance of his commission, v. 28. He has *extended mercy to me*. The king, in the honour he did him, we may suppose, had an eye to his merits, and preferred him because he looked upon him to be a very sensible ingenious man; but he himself ascribes it purely to God's mercy, that was it that recommended him to the favour of his prince. Ezra himself was a man of courage, yet he attributed his encouragement, not to his own heart, but to God's hand; "I was strengthened to undertake the services, *as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me*, to direct and support me." If God gives us his hand, we are bold and cheerful; if he withdraw it, we are weak as water. Whatever service we are enabled to do for God and our generation, God must have all the glory of it. Strength for it is derived from him, and therefore the praise of it must be given to him.

CHAP. VIII.

This chapter gives us a more particular narrative of Ezra's journey to Jerusalem, which we had a general account of in the foregoing chapter. I. The company that went up with him, v. 1.. 20. II. The solemn fast which he kept with his company, to implore God's presence with them in this journey, v. 21.. 23. III. The care he took of the treasure he had with him, and the charge he gave the priests concerning it, to whose custody he committed it, v. 24.. 30. IV. The care God took of him and his company in the way, v. 31. V. Their safe arrival at Jerusalem, where they delivered their treasure to the priests; (v. 33, 34.) their commissions to the king's lieutenants; (v. 36.) offered sacrifices to God, (v. 35.) and then applied themselves to their business.

2. **THESE** are now the chief of their fathers, and *this is* the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king. 2. Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush. 3. Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males an hundred and fifty. 4. Of the sons of Pahath-moah; Elihoenai the son of Zerabiah, and with him two hundred males. 5. Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jabaziel, and with him three hundred males. 6. Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. 7. And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. 8. And of the sons of Shephatiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males. 9. Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males. 10. And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males. 11. And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males. 12. And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males. 13. And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names *are* these, Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males. 14. Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males. 15. And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. 16. Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. 17. And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo, the chief, at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, *and* to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God. 18. And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; 19. And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; 20. Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

for volunteers, as it were, sets up an ensign to assemble the outcasts of Israel, and the dispersed of Judah, Isa. 11. 12. "Whoever of the sons of Zion, that *dwell with the daughters of Babylon*, is disposed to go to Jerusalem, now that the temple there is finished, and the temple-service set a-going, now is their time." Now, one would think, that, under such a leader, with such encouragements, all the Jews should, at length, have *shaken themselves from their dust*, and *loosed the bands of their neck*, according to that call, Isa. 52. 1, 2, &c. I wonder how any of them could read that chapter, and yet stay behind. But multitudes did, who loved their ease better than their religion, thought themselves well off where they were, and either believed not that Jerusalem would better their condition, or durst not go thither through any difficulties. But here we are told,

I. That some offered themselves willingly to go with Ezra. The heads of the several families are here named, for their honour, and the numbers of the males that each brought in, amounting in all to 1,496. Two priests are here named, (v. 2.) and one of the sons of David; but, it should seem, they came without their families, probably intending to see how they liked Jerusalem, and then either to send for their families, or return to them, as they saw cause. Several of their families, or clans, here named, we had before, ch. 2. Some went up from them at that time, more went up now, as God inclined their hearts; some were called into the vineyard at the third hour, others not till the eleventh, yet even those were not rejected. But here we read of *the last sons of Adonikam*, (v. 13.) which some understand to their dispraise, that they were the last that enlisted themselves under Ezra; I rather understand it to their honour, that now all the sons of that family returned, and none staid behind.

II. That the Levites, who went in this company, were, in a manner, pressed into the service. Ezra appointed a general rendezvous of all his company, at a certain place, upon a New-year's day, the first day of the first month; (ch. 7. 9.) then and there he took a view of them, and mustered them, and (which was strange) *found there none of the sons of Levi*, v. 15. Some priests there were, but none that were Levites. Where was the spirit of that sacred tribe? Ezra, a priest, like Moses, proclaims, *Who is on the Lord's side?* They, unlike to Levi, shrink, and desire to *abide among the sheep-folds, to hear the bleatings of the flock*; synagogues we suppose they had in Babylon, in which they prayed, and preached, and kept sabbaths; (and when they could not have better, they had reason to be thankful for them;) but now, that the temple at Jerusalem was opened, to the service of which they were ordained, they ought to have preferred the gates of Zion before all those synagogues; it is upon record here, to their reproach, but *tell it not in Gath*. Ezra, when he observed that he had no Levites in his retinue, was much at a loss; he had money enough for the service of the temple, but wanted them. The king and princes had more than done their part, but the sons of Levi had not half done theirs. Eleven men, chief men, and men of understanding, he chooses out of his company, to be employed for the filling up of this lamentable vacancy. And here we are informed,

1. Of their being sent; Ezra sent them to a *proper place*, where there was a college of Levites, *the place Casiphia*, probably a street or square, in Babylon, allowed for that purpose; (*Silver-street*, one may call it, for *Ceseph* signifies *silver*;) he sent them to a *proper person*, Iddo, the chief president of the college, not to urge him to come himself, (we will suppose him to be old, and unfit for such a remove,) but to send to some of the juniors, *ministers for the house of our God*, v. 17. The furnishing of God's house with good ministers is a good work, which will redound to the comfort and credit of all that have a hand in it.

2. We are informed of their success; they did not return without their errand, but, though their warning was short, they brought about 40 Levites to attend Ezra; Sherebiah, noted as a very intelligent man, and 18 with him; (v. 18.) Hashabiah, and Jeshaiiah, and 20 with them, v. 19. By this it appears that they were not averse to go, but were slothful and inattentive, and only wanted to be called upon, and excited to go. What a pity is it that good men

Ezra having received his commission from the king, beats up

should omit a good work, merely for want of being spoken to; What a pity that they should need it! and, if they do, what a pity that they should want it! Of the Nethinims, the servitors of the sacred college, the *species infima*—the lowest order of the temple ministers, more appeared forward to go than of the Levites themselves; of them 220, upon this hasty summons, enlisted themselves, and had the honour to be expressed by name in Ezra's muster-roll, v. 20. "Thus" (says Ezra) "were we furnished with Levites, by the good hand of our God upon us." If, where ministers have been wanting, the vacancies are well-supplied, let God have the glory, and his good hand be acknowledged as qualifying them for the service, inclining them to it, and then opening a door of opportunity for them.

21. Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Abava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. 23. So we fasted and besought our God for this; and he was entreated of us.

Ezra has procured Levites to go along with him; but what will that avail, unless he have God with him? That is therefore his chief care; in all our ways, we must acknowledge God, and in those particularly wherein we are endeavouring to serve the interest of his kingdom among men; Ezra does so here. Observe,

1. The steadfast confidence he had in God, and in his gracious protection; he told the king (v. 22.) what principles he went upon, that those who seek God are safe under the shadow of his wings, even in their greatest dangers; but that those who forsake him are continually exposed, even then when they are most secure. God's servants have his power engaged for them, his enemies have it engaged against them. This, Ezra believed with his heart, and with his mouth made confession of it before the king; and therefore he was ashamed to ask of the king a convoy, lest thereby he should give occasion to the king, and those about him, to suspect either God's power to help his people, or Ezra's confidence in that power. They that trust in God, and triumph in him, will be ashamed of seeking to the creature for protection, especially of using any sorry shifts for their own safety, because thereby they contradict themselves and their own confidence. Not but that those who depend upon God must use proper means for their preservation, and they need not be ashamed to do it; but, when the honour of God is concerned, one would rather expose one's-self than do any thing to the prejudice of that which ought to be dearer to us than our lives.

2. The solemn application he made to God in that confidence; he proclaimed a fast, v. 21. No doubt, he had himself begged of God direction in this affair, from the first time he had it in his thoughts; but for public mercies public prayers must be made, that all who are to share in the comfort of it, may join in the request for it. Their fasting was, (1.) To express their humiliation; this he declares to be the intent and meaning of it, *that we might afflict ourselves before our God* for our sins, and so be qualified for the pardon of them. When we are entering upon any new condition of life, our care should be to bring none of the guilt of the sins of our former condition into it. When we are in any imminent peril, let us be sure to make our peace with God, and then we are safe, nothing can do us any real hurt. (2.) To excite their supplications; prayer was always joined with religious fasting: their errand to the throne of grace was, *to seek of God the right way*, that is, to commit themselves to the guidance of the

Divine Providence, to put themselves under the divine protection, and to beg of God to guide and keep them in their journey, and bring them safely to their journey's end. They were strangers in the road, were to march through their enemies' countries, and had not a pillar of cloud and fire to lead them, as their fathers had; but they believed that the power and favour of God, and the ministration of his angels, would be to them instead of that, and hoped by prayer to engage this for them. Note, All our concerns about ourselves, our families, and our estates, it is our wisdom and duty by prayer to commit to God, and leave the care of with him, Philip. 4. 6.

3. The good success of their doing so, v. 23. *we besought our God by joint-prayer, and he was entreated of us*; they had some comfortable assurance in their own minds that their prayers were answered, and the event declared it; for never any that sought God in earnest, sought him in vain.

24. Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, 26. And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, *even* the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel *there* present, had offered: 26. I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, *and* of gold an hundred talents; 27. Also twenty basins of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. 28. And I said unto them, *Ye are holy unto the Lord*; the vessels *are* holy also; and the silver and the gold *are* a free-will offering unto the Lord God of your fathers. 29. Watch ye, and keep *them*, until ye weigh *them* before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord. 30. So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring *them* to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

We have here an account of the particular care which Ezra took of the treasure he had with him, that belonged to God's sanctuary. Observe, 1. Having committed the keeping of it to God, he committed the keeping of it to proper men, whose business it was to watch it; though, without God, they would have waked in vain. Note, Our prayers must always be seconded with our endeavours; the care of Christ's gospel, his church, and ordinances, must not be so left with him, but that it must also be *committed to faithful men*, 2 Tim. 2. 2. 2. Having prayed to God to preserve all the substance they had with them, he shews himself especially solicitous for that part of it which belonged to the house of God, and was an offering to him. Do we expect that God should, by his providence, keep that which belongs to us? Let us, by his grace, keep that which belongs to him: let God's honour and interest be our care; and then we may expect that our lives and comforts will be his.

Observe, (1.) The persons to whom he delivered the offerings of the house of God. Twelve chief priests, and as many Levites, he appointed to this trust, (v. 24, 30.) who were bound by their office to take care of the things of God, and were, in a particular manner, to have the benefit of these sacred treasures. Ezra tells them why he put those things into their hands; (v. 28.) *Ye are holy unto the Lord, the vessels are holy also*; and who so fit to take care of holy things as holy persons? Those that have the dignity and honour of the priesthood, must take along with it the trust and duty of it. The prophet is foretelling the return of God's people and ministers

out of Babylon, when he gives the solemn charge, (Isa. 62. 11.) *Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.*

(2.) The great exactness with which he lodged this trust in their hands; he *weighed to them the silver, the gold, and the vessels*, (v. 25.) because he expected to have it from them again by weight. In all trusts, but especially sacred ones, we ought to be punctual, and preserve a right understanding on both sides. In Zerubbabel's time, the vessels were delivered by number, here, by weight, that all might be forthcoming, and it might easily appear if any were missing; to intimate that such as are intrusted with holy things, (as all the stewards of the mysteries of God are,) are concerned to remember, both in receiving their trust, and in discharging it, that they must shortly give a very particular account of it, that they may be faithful to it, and so give up their account with joy.

(3.) The charge he gave them with these treasures; (v. 29.) *"Watch ye, and keep them, that they be not lost, or embezzled, or mingled with the other articles; keep them together, keep them by themselves, keep them safe, till you weigh them in the temple, before the great men there;"* hereby intimating how much it was their concern to be careful and faithful, and how much it would be their honour to be found so. Thus when St. Paul charges Timothy with the gospel-treasure, he bids him keep it *until the appearing of Jesus Christ*, and his appearing before him to give account of his trust, when his fidelity would be his crown.

31. Then we departed from the river of Ahava, on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. 32. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days. 33. Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him *was* Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them *was* Jozabad the son of Jeshna, and Noadiah the son of Binmi, Levites; 34. By number *and* by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time. 35. *Also* the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt-offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he-goats for a sin-offering, all *this was* a burnt-offering unto the Lord. 36. And they delivered the king's commission unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river, and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

We are now to attend Ezra to Jerusalem, a journey of about four months in all; but his multitude made his marches slow, and his stages short: now here we are told,

1. That his God was good, and he owns it; *The hand of our God was upon us*, to animate us for our undertaking: to him they owed it, (1.) That they were preserved in their journey, and not all cut off; for there were enemies that *laid wait for them by the way*, to do them a mischief, and, at least, like Amalek, to *smite the hindmost of them*, but God protected them, v. 31. Even the common perils of journeys are such as oblige us to sanctify our going out with prayer, and our returns in peace with praise and thanksgiving; much more ought God to be thus eyed in such a dangerous expedition as this was. (2.) That they were brought in safely to their journey's end, v. 32. Let them that have steadfastly set

their faces toward the new Jerusalem proceed and persevere to the end, *till they appear before God in Zion*, and they shall find that he *who has begun the good work will perform it*.

2. That his treasurers were faithful; when they were come to Jerusalem, they were impatient to be discharged of their trust, and therefore applied themselves to the great men of the temple, who received it from them, and gave them an acquittance in full, v. 33, 34. It is a great ease to one's mind, to be discharged from a trust; and a great honour to one's name, to be able to make it appear that it has been faithfully discharged.

3. That his companions were devout; as soon as they came to be near the altar, they thought themselves obliged to offer sacrifice, whatever they had done in Babylon, v. 35. That will be dispensed with when we want opportunity, which, when the door is opened again, will be expected from us. It is observable, (1.) That among their sacrifices they had a sin-offering; for it is the atonement that sweetens and secures every mercy to us, which will not be truly comfortable, unless *iniquity be taken away*, and our peace made with God. (2.) That the number of their offerings related to the number of the tribes, twelve bullocks, twelve he-goats, and ninety-six rams, that is, eight times twelve. Thus the union of the two kingdoms was intimated, according to what was foretold, Ezek. 37. 22. They did not any longer go two tribes one way, and ten another, but all the twelve met by their representatives at the same altar.

4. That even the enemies of the Jews became their friends, vailed to Ezra's commission, and, instead of hindering the people of God, furthered them, (v. 36.) purely in complaisance to the king; when he appeared moderate, they all coveted to appear so *then had the churches rest*.

CHAP. IX.

The affairs of the church were in a very good posture: we may well suppose, now that Ezra presided in them. Look without; the government was kind to them: we hear no complaints of persecution and oppression, their enemies had either their hearts turned, or, at least, their hands tied; their neighbours were civil, and we hear of no wars, or rumours of wars; there were none to make them afraid; all was as well as could be, considering that they were few and poor, and subjects to a foreign prince. Look at home; we hear nothing of Baal, or Ashtaroath, or Moloch, no images, or groves, or golden calves, no nor so much as high-places, (not only no idolatrous altars, but no separate ones,) but the temple was duly respected, and the temple-service carefully kept up; yet there was some mixture of evil; the purest ages of the church have had some corruptions, and it will never be presented without spot or wrinkle, till it is a glorious church, a church triumphant, Eph. 5. 27. We have here, I. A complaint brought to Ezra of the many marriages that had been made with strange wives, v. 1, 2. II. The great trouble which he, and others influenced by his example, were in, upon this information, v. 3, 4. III. The solemn confession which he made of this sin to God, with godly sorrow and shame, v. 5. . . 15.

1. **N**OW when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, *doing* according to their abominations, *even* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass. 3. And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. 4. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the

transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

Ezra, like Barnabas, when he came to Jerusalem, and saw the grace of God to his brethren there, no doubt, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord, Acts, 11. 23. He saw nothing amiss; many corruptions lurk out of the view of the most vigilant rulers; but here is a damp upon his joys, information is brought him that many of the people, yea and some of the rulers, had married wives out of heathen families, and joined themselves in affinity with strangers. Observe,

I. What the sin was that they were guilty of; it was *mingling themselves with the people of those lands*, (v. 2.) associating with them both in trade and in conversation, making themselves familiar with them, and, to complete the affinity, taking their daughters in marriages to their sons. We are willing to hope that they did not worship their gods, but that their captivity had cured them of their idolatry: it is said indeed that they *did according to their abominations*; but that (says Bishop Patrick) signifies here only the imitation of the heathen in promiscuous marriages with any nation whatsoever; which, by degrees, would lead them to idolatry again. Herein, 1. They disobeyed the express command of God, which forbade all intimacy with the heathen, and particularly in matrimonial contracts; Deut. 7. 3. 2. They profaned the crown of their peculiarity, and set themselves upon a level with those above whom God had, by singular marks of his favour, of late, as well as formerly, dignified them. 3. They distrusted the power of God to protect and advance them, and were led by carnal policy, hoping to strengthen themselves, and make an interest among their neighbours, by these alliances. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency is at the bottom of all the sorry shifts we make to help ourselves. 4. They exposed themselves, and much more their children, to the peril of idolatry, the very sin, and introduced by this very way, that had once been the ruin of their church and nation.

II. Who were the persons that were guilty of this sin; not only some of the unthinking people of Israel, that knew no better, but many of the priests and Levites, whose office it was to teach the law, and this law among the rest, and in whom, by reason of their elevation above common Israelites, it was a greater crime. It was a diminution to the sons of that tribe, to match into any other tribe, and they seldom did, except into the royal tribe; but for them to match with heathen, with Canaanites, and Hittites, and I know not whom, was such a disparagement, as, if they had had any sense, though not of duty, yet of honour, one would think, they would never have been guilty of; yet this was not the worst; *The hand of the princes and rulers*, who by their power should have prevented, or reformed, this high misdemeanor, *was chief in this trespass*. If princes be in a trespass, they will be charged as chief in it, because of the influence their example will have upon others; *many will follow their pernicious ways*. But miserable is the case of that people whose leaders debauch them, and cause them to err.

III. The information that was given of this to Ezra; it was given by the persons that were most proper to complain, the princes, those of them that had kept their integrity, and with it their dignity; they could not have accused others, if they themselves had not been free from blame. It was given to the person who had power to mend the matter, who, as a ready scribe in the law of God, could argue with them, and, as king's commissioner, could awe him. It is probable that these princes had often endeavoured to redress this grievance, and could not; but now they apply themselves to Ezra, hoping that his wisdom, authority, and interest, would prevail to do it. Those that cannot of themselves reform public abuses, may yet do good service by giving information to those that can.

IV. The impression this made upon Ezra; (v. 3.) *He rent his clothes, plucked off his hair, and sat down astonished*. Thus he expressed the deep sense he had, 1. Of the dishonour hereby done to God. It grieved him to the heart, to think that a people called

by his name should so grossly violate his law, should be so little benefited by his correction, and make such bad returns for his favours. 2. Of the mischief the people had hereby done to themselves, and the danger they were in of the wrath of God breaking out against them. Note, (1.) The sins of others should be our sorrow, and the injury done by them to God's honour, and the souls of men, is what we should lay to heart. (2.) Sorrow for sin must be great sorrow, such Ezra's was, *as for an only son or a first-born*. (3.) The scandalous sins of professors are what we have reason to be astonished at. We may stand amazed to see men contradict, disparage, prejudice, ruin, themselves. Strange that men should act so inconsiderately, and so inconsistently with themselves! *Upright men are astonished at it*.

V. The influence which Ezra's grief for this had upon others; we may suppose that he *went up to the house of the Lord*, there to humble himself, because he had an eye to God in his grief, and that was the proper place for deprecating his displeasure: public notice was soon taken of it, and all the devout serious people that were at hand assembled themselves to him, it should seem, of their own accord, for nothing is said of their being sent to, v. 4. Note, 1. It is the character of good people, that they *tremble at God's word*; they stand in awe of the authority of its precepts, and the severity and justice of its threatenings, and to them that do so *will God look*, Isa. 66. 2. 2. They that tremble at the word of God, cannot but tremble at the sins of men, by which the law of God is broken, and his wrath and curse incurred. 3. The pious zeal of one against sin, may perhaps provoke very many to the like, as the apostle speaks in another case, 2 Cor. 9. 2. Many will follow, who have not consideration, conduct, and courage, enough to lead in a good work. 4. All good people ought to own those that appear and act in the cause of God, against vice and profaneness, to stand by them, and do what they can to strengthen their hands.

5. And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, 6. And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. 7. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. 8. And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. 9. For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. 10. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, 11. Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations,

which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. 12. Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever. 13. And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and hast given us *such* deliverance as this; 14. Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that *there should be no remnant nor escaping*? 15. O LORD God of Israel, thou *art* righteous; for we remain yet escaped, as *it is* this day: behold, we *are* before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

What the meditations of Ezra's heart were, while, for some hours, he sat down astonished, we may guess by the words of his mouth, when, at length, he *spoke with his tongue*; and a most pathetic address he here makes to Heaven upon this occasion. Observe,

I. The time when he made this address; *at the evening sacrifice*, v. 5. Then (it is likely) devout people used to come into the courts of the temple, to grace the solemnity of the sacrifice, and to offer up their own prayers to God in concurrence with it. In their hearing, Ezra chose to make this confession, that they might be made duly sensible of the sins of their people, which, hitherto, they had either not taken notice of, or had made light of. Prayer may preach. The sacrifice, and especially the evening sacrifice, was a type of the great Propitiation, that *blessed Lamb of God*, who, in the evening of the world, was to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself, to which we may suppose that Ezra had an eye of faith in this penitential address to God; he makes confession with his hand, as it were, upon the head of that great Sacrifice, through which *we receive the atonement*. Certainly Ezra was no stranger to the message which the angel Gabriel had, some years ago, delivered to Daniel, at the time of the evening sacrifice, and, as it were, in explication of it, concerning Messiah the Prince; (Dan. 9. 24.) perhaps he had regard to that in choosing this time.

II. His preparation for this address. 1. He *rose up from his heaviness*, and so far shook off the burthen of his grief as was necessary to the lifting up of his heart to God. He recovered himself from his astonishment, got the tumult of his troubled spirits somewhat stilled, and his spirit composed for communion with God. 2. He *fell upon his knees*, put himself into the posture of a penitent humbling himself, and a petitioner suing for mercy; in both, representing the people for whom he was now an intercessor. 3. He *spread out his hands*, as one affected with what he was going to say, offering it up unto God, waiting, and reaching out, as it were, with an earnest expectation, to receive a gracious answer: in this he had an eye to God, as the Lord, and his God, a God of power, but a God of grace.

III. The address itself. It is not properly to be called a prayer, for there is not a word of petition in it; but, if we give prayer its full latitude, it is the offering up of pious and devout affections to God, and very devout, very pious, are the affections which Ezra here expresses. His address is a penitent confession of sin, not his own, (from a conscience burthened with its own guilt, and apprehensive of his own danger,) but the sin of his people, from a gracious concern for the honour of God, and the welfare of Israel.

Here is a lively picture of ingenuous repentance. Observe in this address,

1. The confession he makes of the sin, and the aggravations of it, which he insists upon, to affect his own heart, and their's that joined with him, with holy sorrow and shame and fear, in the consideration of it, that they might be deeply humbled for it. And it is observable, that though he himself was wholly clear from this guilt, yet he puts himself into the number of the sinners, because he was a member of the same community, *our sins and our trespass*. Perhaps he now remembered it against himself, as his fault, that he had staid so long after his brethren in Babylon, and had not separated himself, so soon as he might have done, from the people of those lands. When we are lamenting the wickedness of the wicked, it may be, if we duly reflect upon ourselves, and give our own hearts leave to deal faithfully with us, we may find something of the same nature, though in a lower degree, that we also have been guilty of. However, he speaks that which was, or should have been, the general complaint.

(1.) He owns their sins to have been very great; "*Our iniquities are increased over our heads*, (v. 6.) we are ready to perish in them, as in deep waters;" so general was the prevalency of them, so violent the power of them, and so threatening were they of the most pernicious consequences. "*Iniquity is grown up to that height among us, that it reaches to the heavens*, so very impudent, that it dares heaven, so very provoking, that, like the sin of Sodom, it cries to heaven for vengeance." But let this be the comfort of true penitents, that, though their sins reach to the heavens, God's mercy is *in the heavens*, Ps. 36. 5. *Where sin abounds, grace will much more abound*.

(2.) Their sin had been long persisted in; (v. 7.) *Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass*. The example of those that were gone before them, he thought so far from excusing their fault, that it aggravated it; we should take warning not to stumble at the same stone. The corruption is so much the worse, that it has taken deep root, and begins to plead prescription, but by *this* means we have reason to fear that the measure of the iniquity was nearly full.

(3.) The great and sore judgments which God had brought upon them for their sins, did very much aggravate them. *For our iniquities we have been delivered to the sword and to captivity*, (v. 7.) and yet not reformed, yet not reclaimed; brayed in the mortar, and yet the *folly not gone*; (Prov. 27. 22.) corrected, but not reclaimed.

(4.) The late mercies God had bestowed upon them, did likewise very much aggravate their sins. This he insists largely upon, v. 8, 9. Observe, [1.] The time of mercy; *Now for a little space*, that is, "*It is but a little while since we had our liberty*, and it is not likely to continue long." This greatly aggravated their sin, that they were so lately in the furnace, and that they knew not how soon they might return to it again; and could they yet be secure? [2.] The fountain of mercy; *Grace has been shewed us from the Lord*. The kings of Persia were the instruments of their enlargement; but he ascribes it to God, and to his grace, his free grace, without any merit of their's. [3.] The streams of mercy; they were *not forsaken in their bondage*, but even in Babylon had the tokens of God's presence, inasmuch as they were a remnant of Israelites left, a few out of many, and those narrowly escaped out of the hands of their enemies, by the favour of the kings of Persia. But Ezra was more especially struck with the consideration that they had *a nail in his holy place*, that is, (as it is explained, v. 9.) that they had set up the *house of God*. They had their religion settled, and the service of the temple in a constant method. We are to reckon it a great comfort and advantage, to have stated opportunities of worshipping God. *Blessed are they that dwell in God's house*, like Anna that departed not from the temple. *This is my rest for ever*, says the gracious soul. [4.] The effects of all this; it enlightened their eyes, and it revived their hearts; that is, it was very comfortable to them, and the more sensibly so, because it was in their bondage, it was life from the dead to them: though but a little reviving, it was a great favour, considering that

they deserved none, and the day of small things was an earnest of greater. "Now," (says Ezra,) "how ungrateful are we, to offend a God that has been so kind to us! how disingenuous, to mingle ourselves in sin with those nations from whom we have been, in wonderful mercy, delivered! how unwise, to expose ourselves to God's displeasure, when we are tried with the returns of his favour, and are upon our good behaviour for the continuance of it!"

(5.) It was a great aggravation of the sin, that it was against an express command. *We have forsaken thy commandments, v. 10.* It seems to have been an ancient law of the house of Jacob, not to match with the families of the uncircumcised, Gen. 34. 14. But, beside that, God had strictly forbidden it. He recites the command, v. 11, 12. For then sin appears sin, appears exceeding sinful, when we compare it with the law which is broken by it: nothing could be more express, *Give not your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons.* The reason given, is, because, if they mingled with those nations, they would pollute themselves; it was an unclean land, and they were a holy people; but if they kept themselves distinct from them, it would be their honour and safety, and the perpetuating of their prosperity. Now, to violate a command so express, backed with such reasons, and a fundamental law of their constitution, was very provoking to the God of heaven.

(6.) That, in the judgments by which they had already smarted for their sins, God had *punished them less than their iniquities deserved*, so that he looked upon them to be still in debt upon the old account. "What! And yet shall we run up a new score? Has God dealt so gently with us in correcting us, and shall we thus abuse his favour, and turn his grace into wantonness?" God, in his grace and mercy, had said concerning Zion's captivity, *She hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins; (Isa. 40. 2.)* but Ezra, in a penitential sense of the great malignity that was in their sin, though the punishment was very great, owns it *less than they deserved*.

2. The devout affections that were working in him, in making this confession. Speaking of sin,

(1.) He speaks as one much ashamed. With this he begins, (v. 6.) *O my God, I am ashamed and blush, O my God,* (so the words are placed,) *to lift up my face unto thee.* Note, [1.] Sin is a shameful thing; as soon as ever our first parents had eaten forbidden fruit, they were ashamed of themselves. [2.] Holy shame is as necessary an ingredient in true and ingenuous repentance as holy sorrow. [3.] The sins of others should be our shame, and we should blush for those who do not blush for themselves. We may well be ashamed that we are any thing related to those who are so ungrateful to God, and unwise for themselves. This is *clearing ourselves*, 2 Cor. 7. 11. [4.] Penitent sinners never see so much reason to blush and be ashamed, as when they come to *lift up their faces before God*. A natural sense of our own honour, which we have injured, will make us ashamed, when we have done a wrong thing, to look *men* in the face; but a gracious concern for God's honour will make us much more ashamed, to look *him* in the face. The publican, when he went into the temple to pray, hung down his head more than ever, as one ashamed, Luke 18. 13. [5.] An eye to God, as our God, will be of great use to us in the exercise of repentance. Ezra begins, *O my God;* and again, in the same breath, *My God.* The consideration of our covenant-relation to God, as our's, will help to humble us, and break our hearts for sin, that we should violate both his precepts to us, and our promises to him; it will also encourage us to hope for pardon, upon repentance. He is my God, notwithstanding this, and every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of covenant.

(2.) He speaks as one much amazed, (v. 10.) "*What shall we say after this?*" For my part, I know not what to say: if God do not help us, we are undone." The discoveries of guilt excite amazement; the more we think of sin, the worse it looks; the difficulty of the ease excites amazement. How shall we recover ourselves? Which way shall we make our peace with God? [1.] True penitents are at a loss what to say: Shall we say, *We have not sinned, or, God will not require it?* If we do, we deceive

ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Shall we say, *Have patience with us, and we will pay thee all, with thousands of rams, or our first-born, for our transgression?* God will not thus be mocked, he knows we are insolvent. Shall we say, *There is no hope, and let come on us what will?* That is but to make bad worse. [2.] True penitents will consider what to say, and should, as Ezra, beg of God to teach them; What shall we say? Say, "*I have sinned, I have done foolishly; God be merciful to me a sinner;*" and the like. See Hos. 14. 2.

(3.) He speaks as one much afraid, v. 13, 14. "After all the judgments that are come upon us, to reclaim us from sin, and all the deliverances that have been wrought for us, to engage us to God and duty, if we should again break God's commandments, by joining in affinity with the children of disobedience, and learning their ways, what else could we expect, but that God should be *angry with us till he had consumed us*, and there should not be so much as a remnant left, nor any to escape the destruction?" There is not a surer or sadder presage of ruin to any people, than revolting to sin, to the same sins again, after great judgments, and great deliverances. They that will be wrought upon neither by the one nor by the other, are fit to be rejected, as reprobate silver, for the *founder melteth in vain*.

(4.) He speaks as one much assured of the righteousness of God, and resolved to acquiesce in that, and to leave the matter with him, whose judgment is *according to truth*, (v. 15.) "*Thou art righteous, wise, just, and good; thou wilt neither do us wrong, nor be hard upon us, and therefore, behold, we are before thee, we lie at thy feet, waiting our doom; we cannot stand before thee, insisting upon any righteousness of our own, having no plea to support us or bring us off, and therefore we fall down before thee, in our trespass, and cast ourselves on thy mercy; do unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee,* Judg. 10. 15. We have nothing to say, nothing to do, but to *make supplication to our Judge,*" Job. 9. 15. Thus does this good man lay his grief before God, and then leave it with him.

CHAP. X.

In this chapter, we have that grievance redressed, which was complained of, and lamented, in the foregoing chapter. Observe, I. How the people's hearts were prepared for the redress of it, by the deep humiliation for the sin, v. 1. II. How it was proposed to Ezra by Shechaniah, v. 2. A. III. How the proposal was put in execution. 1. The great men were sworn to stand to it, v. 5. 2. Ezra appeared first in it, v. 6. 3. A general assembly was called, v. 7. 4. They all, in compliance with Ezra's exhortation, agreed to the reformation, v. 10. 14. 5. Commissioners were appointed to sit, de die in diem—day after day, to inquire who had married strange wives, and to oblige them to put them away, which is done accordingly, (v. 14. 17.) and a list of the names of those that were found guilty given in, v. 18. 44.

1. **N**OW when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore. 2. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. 3. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4. Arise; for *this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.* 5. Then arose Ezra,

and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

We are told,

I. What good impressions were made upon the people by Ezra's humiliation and confession of sin. No sooner was it noised in the city, that their new governor, whom they rejoiced in, was himself in grief, and to so great a degree, for them and their sin, than presently there assembled to him a very great congregation, to see what the matter was, and to mingle their tears with his, v. 1. Our weeping for other people's sins may perhaps set those a weeping for them themselves, who otherwise, would have continued senseless and remorseless. See what a happy influence the good examples of great ones may have upon their inferiors. When Ezra, a scribe, a scholar, a man in authority under the king, so deeply lamented the public corruptions, they concluded that they were indeed very grievous, else he would not thus have grieved for them; and this drew tears from every eye: *men, women, and children, wept very sore, when he wept thus.*

II. What a good motion Shechaniah made, upon this occasion. The place was *Bochim*, a place of *weepers*; but, for aught that appears, there was a profound silence among them, as among Job's friends, who *spoke not a word to him, because they saw that his grief was very great*, till Shechaniah (one of Ezra's companions from Babylon, *ch. 8. 3. 5.*) stood up, and made a speech addressed to Ezra, in which,

1. He owns the national guilt, sums up all Ezra's confession in one word, and sets to his seal, that it was true, "*We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives*; (v. 2.) the matter is too plain to be denied, and too bad to be excused." It does not appear that Shechaniah was himself culpable in this matter, (if he had had the beam in his own eye, he could not have seen so clearly to pluck it out of his brother's eye,) but his father was guilty, and divers of his father's house, as appears, v. 26. and therefore he reckons himself among the trespassers; nor does he seek to excuse or palliate the sin, though some of his own relations were guilty of it, but, in the cause of God, *says to his father, I have not known him*, as Levi, Deut. 33. 9. Perhaps the strange wife that his father had married had been an unjust unkind step-mother to him, and had made mischief in the family, and he supposed that others had done the like, which made him the more forward to appear against this corruption; if so, it was not the only time that private resentments have been over-ruled, by the providence of God, to serve the public good.

2. He encourages himself, and others, to hope, that, though the matter was bad, it might be amended; *Yet now there is hope in Israel*, (where else should there be hope, but in Israel? They that are strangers to that commonwealth, are said to have *no hope*, Eph. 2. 12.) even *concerning this thing*. The case is sad, but it is not desperate; the disease threatening, but not incurable. There is hope that the people may be reformed, the guilty reclaimed, a stop put to the spreading of the contagion; and so the judgments which the sin deserves may be prevented, and all will be well. *Now there is hope*; now that the disease is discovered, it is half cured. Now that the alarm is taken, the people begin to be sensible of the mischief, and to lament it, a spirit of repentance seems to be poured out upon them, and they are all thus humbling themselves before God for it, *now there is hope* that God will forgive, and have mercy. The *valley of Achor*, that is, of trouble, is the *door of hope*; (Hos. 2. 15.) for the sin that truly troubles us shall not ruin us. There is hope, now that Israel has such a prudent, pious, zealous, governor as Ezra, to manage this affair. Note, (1.) In melancholy times, we must see and observe what makes for us, as well as what makes against us. (2.) There may be good hopes through grace, even then when there is the sense of great guilt before God. (3.) Where sin is seen and lamented, and good steps taken towards a reformation, even sinners ought to be encouraged. (4.) Even great saints must thankfully receive seasonable counsel

and comfort from those that are much their inferiors, as Ezra from Shechaniah.

3. He advises that a speedy and effectual course should be taken for the divorcing of the strange wives. The case is plain; what has been done amiss must be undone again, as far as possible; nothing less than that is true repentance. Let us *put away all the wives*, and *such as are born of them*, v. 3. Ezra, though he knew this was the only way of redressing the grievance, yet perhaps did not think it feasible, and despaired of ever bringing the people to it, which put him into that confusion that we left him in, in the foregoing chapter; but Shechaniah, who conversed more with the people than he did, assured him the thing was practicable, if they went wisely to work. As to us, now, it is certain that sin must be put away, a bill of divorce must be given it, with a resolution never to have any thing more to do with it, though it be dear as the wife of thy bosom, nay, as a right eye, or a right hand, otherwise there is no pardon, no peace. What has been unjustly got, cannot be justly kept, but must be restored; but as to the case of being *unequally yoked with unbelievers*, Shechaniah's counsel, which he was then so clear in, will not hold now; such marriages, it is certain, are sinful, and ought not to be made, but they are not null. Our rule, under the gospel, is, *Quod fieri non debuit, factum valet*—That which ought not to have been done, must, when done, abide. If a brother has a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away, 1 Cor. 7. 12, 13.

4. He puts them into a good method for the effecting of this reformation, and shews them not only that it must be done, but how. (1.) "Let Ezra, and all those that were present in this assembly, agree in a resolution that this must be done; pass a vote immediately to this effect, it will now pass *nemine contradicente*—*unanimously*, that it may be said to be done *according to the counsel of my lord*, the president of the assembly, with the unanimous concurrence of those that *tremble at the commandment of our God*, which is the description of those that were gathered to him, *ch. 9.* 4. Declare it to be the sense of all the sober serious people among us, which cannot but have a great sway among Israelites." (2.) "Let the command of God in this matter, which Ezra had recited in his prayer, be laid before the people, and let them see that it is *done according to the law*; we have that to warrant us, nay, that binds us, to what we do; it is not an addition of our own to the divine law, but the necessary execution of it. (3.) "While we are in a good mind, let us bind ourselves, by a solemn vow and covenant, that we will do it, lest, when the present impressions are worn off, the thing be left undone. Let us covenant, not only that, if we have strange wives ourselves, we will put them away, but that, if we have not, we will do what we can in our places, to oblige others to put away theirs." (4.) "Let Ezra himself preside in this matter, who is authorized by the king's commission, to inquire whether the law of God was duly observed in Judah and Jerusalem, (*ch. 7. 14.*) and let us all resolve to stand by him in it, (v. 4.) *Arise, be of good courage*. Weeping, in this case, is good, but reforming is better." See what God said to Joshua in a like case, Josh. 7. 10, 11.

III. What a good resolution they came to, upon this good motion, v. 5. They not only agreed that it should be done, but bound themselves with an oath that they would do according to this word. Fast bind, fast find.

6. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and *when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water*: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. 7. And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; 8. And that

soever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away. 9. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, and the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of *this* matter, and for the great rain. 10. And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. 11. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. 12. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do. 13. But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is *this* a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. 14. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.

We have here an account of the proceedings upon the resolutions lately taken up concerning the strange wives; no time was lost; they struck when the iron was hot, and soon set the wheels of reformation a-going.

I. Ezra went to the council-chamber, where, it is probable, the priests used to meet upon public business. And till he came thither, (so Bishop Patrick thinks it should be read,) till he saw something done, and more likely to be done, for the redress of this grievance, he did neither eat nor drink, but continued mourning. Sorrow for sin should be abiding sorrow; be sure to let it continue till the sin be put away.

II. He sent orders to all the children of the captivity to attend him at Jerusalem within three days; (v. 7, 8.) and, being authorized by the king to enforce his orders, with penalties annexed, (ch. 7. 26.) he threatened, that whosoever refused to obey the summons should forfeit his estate, and be out-lawed. The doom of him that would not attend on this religious occasion, should be, that his substance should, in his stead, be ever after appropriated to the service of their religion, and he himself, for his contempt, should, for ever after, be excluded from the honours and privileges of their religion; he should be excommunicated.

III. Within the time limited, the generality of the people met at Jerusalem, and made their appearance in the street of the house of God, v. 9. They that had no zeal for the work they were called to, nay, perhaps had a dislike to it, being themselves delinquents, yet paid such a deference to Ezra's authority, and were so awed by the penalty, that they durst not stay away.

IV. God gave them a token of his displeasure, in the great rain that happened at that time, (v. 9.) and again, (v. 13.) which perhaps kept some away; it was, however, grievous to them, that met in the open street: yet the circumstance of the heavens weeping, when they wept, might signify, that though God was angry with them for their sin, yet he was well pleased with their repentance, and (as it is said, Judg. 10. 16.) his soul was grieved

for the misery of Israel; it was also an indication of the good fruits of their repentance, for the rain makes the earth fruitful.

V. Ezra gave the charge at this great assize; he told them that he called them together now, because he found, that, since their return out of captivity, they had increased the trespass of Israel by marrying strange wives, that they had added to their former sins this new transgression, which would certainly be a means of introducing idolatry again, the very sin they had smarted for, and which, he hoped, they had been cured of, in their captivity. He informed them, too, that he called them together that they might confess their sin to God, and, having done that, might declare themselves ready and willing to do his pleasure, as it should be made known to them, (which all those will do that truly repent of what they have done to incur his displeasure,) and particularly, that they might separate themselves from all idolaters, especially idolatrous wives, v. 10, 11. On these heads, we may suppose, he enlarged, and, probably, made such another confession of the sin now, as he had made ch. 9. which he required them to say Amen to.

VI. The people submitted themselves, not only to Ezra's jurisdiction in general, but to his inquisition and determination in this matter; "As thou hast said, so must we do, v. 12. We have sinned in mingling ourselves with the heathen, and have thereby been in danger, not only of being corrupted by them, for we are frail, but of being lost among them, for we are few; we are, therefore, convinced that there is an absolute necessity of our separating from them again." There is then hope concerning people, when they are convinced, not only that it is good to part with their sins, but that it is indispensably necessary; we must do it, or we are undone.

VII. It was agreed that this affair should be carried on, not in a popular assembly, nor that they should think to go through with it all on a sudden, but that a court of delegates should be appointed to receive complaints, and to hear and determine upon them. It could not be done at this time, for it was not put into a method, nor could the people stand out, because of the rain; the delinquents were many, and it would require time to discover and examine them. Nice cases would arise, which could not be adjudged without debate and deliberation, v. 13. "And therefore let the crowd be dismissed, and the rulers stand to receive informations; let them proceed city by city, and let the offenders be convicted before them in the presence of the judges and elders of their own city; and let them be intrusted to see the orders executed; thus take time, and we shall have done the sooner; whereas, if we do it in a hurry, we shall do it by halves, v. 14. If, in this method, a thorough reformation be made, the fierce wrath of God will be turned from us, which, we are sensible, is ready to break forth against us for this transgression."

Ezra was willing that his zeal should be guided by the people's prudence, and put the matter into this method; he is not ashamed to own that the advice came from them, any more than he was to comply with it.

15. Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them. 16. And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17. And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month. 18. And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: namely, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah.

19. And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and *being* guilty, *they offered* a ram of the flock for their trespass. 20. And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah. 21. And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah. 22. And of the sons of Pashur; Elieonai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Netaneel, Jozabad, and Elasah. 23. Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same is Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. 24. Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri. 25. Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah. 26. And of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah. 27. And of the sons of Zattu; Elieonai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza. 28. Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. 29. And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth. 30. And of the sons of Pahath-moab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh. 31. And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon. 32. Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. 33. Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. 34. Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel. 35. Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh, 36. Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 37. Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasan, 38. And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei, 39. And Shelamiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah, 40. Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, 41. Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah, 42. Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. 43. Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattathiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah. 44. All these had taken strange wives: and *some* of them had wives by whom they had children.

The method of proceeding in this matter being concluded on, and the congregation dismissed, that each in his respective place might gain and give intelligence, to facilitate the matter; we are here told,

I. Who were the persons that undertook to manage the matter,

and bring the causes regularly before the commissioners; *Jonathan* and *Jahaziah*, two active men, whether of the priests or of the people, does not appear; probably they were the men that made that proposal, v.13, 14. and were, therefore, the fittest to see it pursued; two honest Levites were joined with them, and *helped them*, v.15. Dr. Lightfoot gives a contrary sense of this; *Only* (or *nevertheless*) *Jonathan and Jahaziah stood against this matter*, (which reading the original will very well bear,) and these two *Levites helped them*, in opposing it, either the thing itself, or this method of proceeding. It was strange, if a work of this kind was carried on, and met with no opposition.

II. Who were the commissioners that sat upon this matter; Ezra was president, and with him *certain chief of the fathers* who were qualified with wisdom and zeal, above others, for this service, v.16. It was happy for them that they had such a man as Ezra to head them; they could not have done it well without his direction, yet he would not do it without their concurrence.

III. How long they were about it; they began, *the first day of the tenth month, to examine the matter*, (v.16.) which was but ten days after this method was proposed, (v.9.) and they finished in three months, v.17. They sat close, and minded their business, otherwise they could not have despatched so many causes as they had before them, in so little time; for we may suppose that all who were impeached, were fairly asked what cause they could shew why they should not be parted. If we may judge by other cases, provided the wife were proselyted to the Jewish religion, she was not to be put away; the trial of which would require great care.

IV. Who the persons were, that were found guilty of this crime; their names are here recorded to their perpetual reproach; many of the priests, nay, of the family of Joshua, the high priest, were found guilty, (v.18.) though the law had particularly provided for the preserving of their honour in their marriages, that, being holy themselves, they should not marry such as were profane, Lev. 21. 7. They that should have taught others the law, brake it themselves, and by their example imboldened others to do likewise. But, having lost their innocency in this matter, they did well to recant, and give an example of repentance; for, 1. They promised *under their hand* to put away their strange wives; some think that they swore it with their *hands lifted up*. 2. They took the appointed way of obtaining pardon, bringing the ram which was appointed by the law *for a trespass-offering*, (Lev. 6.6.) so owning their guilt, and the desert of it, and humbly suing for forgiveness.

About 113 in all are here named, who had married strange wives, and some of them, it is said, (v.44.) had children by them, which implies that not many of them had, God not crowning those marriages with the blessing of increase. Whether the children were turned off with the mothers, as Shechaniah proposed, does not appear; it should seem not: it is, however, probable that the wives which were put away were well provided for, according to their rank. One would think this grievance was now thoroughly redressed, yet we meet with it again, Neh. 13. 22. and Mal. 2. 11. for such corruptions are easily and insensibly brought in, but not without great difficulty purged out again. The best reformers can but do their endeavour, but when the Redeemer himself shall *come to Zion*, he shall effectually *turn away ungodliness from Jacob*.

AN
E X P O S I T I O N,
WITH
Practical Observations,
OF THE BOOK OF
N E H E M I A H.

This book continues the history of the *children of the captivity*; the poor Jews that were lately returned out of Babylon to their own land. At this time, not only the Persian monarchy flourished in great pomp and power, but Greece and Rome began to be very great, and make a figure. Of the affairs of those high and mighty states, we have authentic accounts extant; but the sacred and inspired history takes cognizance only of the state of the Jews, and makes no mention of other nations, but as the Israel of God had dealings with them; for the Lord's portion is his people, they are his peculiar treasure, and, in comparison with them, the rest of the world is but as lumber. In my esteem, Ezra the scribe, and Nehemiah the Tirshatha, though neither of them ever wore a crown, commanded an army, conquered any country, or were famed for philosophy or oratory, yet both of them, being pious praying men, and very serviceable in their day to the church of God and the interests of religion, were really greater men, and more honourable, not only than any of the Roman consuls or dictators, but than Xenophon, or Demosthenes, or Plato himself, who lived at the same time, the bright ornaments of Greece. Nehemiah's agency for the advancing of the settlement of Israel we have a full account of in this book of his own commentaries or memoirs, wherein he records not only the works of his hands, but the workings of his heart, in the management of public affairs; inserting in the story many devout reflections and ejaculations, which discover in his mind a very deep tincture of serious piety, and are peculiar to his writing. Twelve years he was governor of Judea, under Artaxerxes king of Persia, from his twentieth year, (*ch. 1.1.*) to his thirty-second year, *ch. 13.6.* Dr. Lightfoot supposes this to be the Artaxerxes from whom Ezra had his commission. This book relates,

- I. Nehemiah's concern for Jerusalem, and the commission he had obtained from the king to go thither, *ch. 1, 2.*
- II. His building of the wall of Jerusalem, notwithstanding the opposition he met with, *ch. 3, 4.*
- III. His redressing the grievances of the people, *ch. 5.*
- IV. His finishing the wall, *ch. 6.*
- V. The account he took of the people, *ch. 7.*
- VI. The religious solemnities of reading the law, fasting and praying, and renewing their covenants, which he called the people to, *ch. 8. .10.*
- VII. The care he took for the replenishing of the holy city, and the settling of the holy tribe, *ch. 11, 12.*
- VIII. His zeal in reforming divers abuses, *ch. 13.* Some call this *the second book of Ezra*, not because he was the penman of it, but because it is a continuation of the history of the foregoing book, with which it is connected, *v. 1.* This was the last *historical* book that was written, as Malachi the last *prophetical* book, of the Old Testament.

Before Christ 446.

NEHEMIAH, I.

Nehemiah's Distress.

CHAP. I.

Here we first meet with Nehemiah at the Persian court, where we find him,
I. Inquisitive concerning the state of the Jews and Jerusalem, *v. 1, 2.*
II. Informed of their deplorable state, *v. 3.* III. Fasting and praying, thereupon, (*v. 4.*) with a particular account of his prayer, *v. 5. .11.* Such is the rise of this great man, by piety, not by policy.

I. **T**HE words of Nehemiah the son of Hachabiah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan

the palace, 2. That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are

burned with fire. 4. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

What tribe Nehemiah was of, does no where appear; but if it be true, (which we are told by the author of the Maccabees, *Book 2. ch. 1. 18.*) that he offered sacrifice, we must conclude him to be a priest. We are here told that he was in Shushan, the palace, or royal city, of the king of Persia, where the court was ordinarily kept, (*v. 1.*) that he was the king's cup-bearer. Kings and great men probably looked upon it as a piece of state to be attended by those of other nations. By this place at court, 1. He would be the better qualified for the service of his country, in that post for which God had designed him; as Moses was the fitter to govern, for being bred up in Pharaoh's court, and David in Saul's. 2. He would have the fairer opportunity of serving his country by his interest in the king and those about him. Observe, He is not forward to tell us what great preferment he had at court; it is not till the end of the chapter, that he tells us he was *the king's cup-bearer*, (a place of great trust, as well as of honour and profit,) when he could not avoid the mentioning of it, because of the following story; but, at first, he only says, *I was in Shushan the palace*; whence we may learn to be humble and modest, and slow to speak of our own advancements. But, in the providences of God concerning him, we may observe, to our comfort, (1.) That when God has work to do, he will never want instruments to do it with. (2.) That those whom God designs to employ in his service, he will find out proper ways both to fit for it, and to call to it. (3.) That God has his remnant in all places; we read of Obadiah in the house of Ahab, saints in Cæsar's household, and a devout Nehemiah in Shushan the palace. (4.) That God can make the courts of princes sometimes nurseries, and sometimes sanctuaries, to the friends and patrons of the church's cause.

Now here we have,

I. Nehemiah's tender and compassionate inquiry concerning the state of the Jews in their own land, *v. 2.* It happened that a friend and relation of his came to the court with some other company, by whom he had an opportunity of informing himself fully how it went with the children of the captivity, and what posture Jerusalem, the beloved city, was in. Nehemiah lived at ease, in honour and fulness, himself, but cannot forget that he is an Israelite, nor shake off the thoughts of his brethren in distress, but, in spirit, (like Moses, *Acts, 7. 23.*) *visits them, and looks upon their burthens.* As distance of place did not alienate his affections from them, (though they were out of sight, yet not out of mind,) so neither did, 1. The dignity to which he was advanced. Though he was a great man, and probably rising higher, yet he did not think it below him to take cognizance of his brethren that were low and despised, nor was he ashamed to own his relation to them, and concern for them. 2. The diversity of their sentiments from his, and the difference of their practice accordingly. Though he did not go to settle at Jerusalem himself, (as we think he ought to have done, now that liberty was proclaimed,) but conformed to the court, and staid there, yet he did not therefore judge or despise them that were returned, or upbraid them as impolitic, but kindly concerned himself for them, was ready to do them all the good offices he could, and, that he might know which way to do them a kindness, *asked concerning them.* Note, It is lawful and good to inquire, "*What news?*" We should inquire especially concerning the state of the church and religion, and how it fares with the people of God; and the design of our inquiry must be, not that, like the Athenians, we may have something to talk of, but that we may know how to direct our prayers and praises.

II. The melancholy account which is here given him of the present state of the Jews and Jerusalem, *v. 3.* Hanani, the person he inquired of, has this character given of him, (*ch. 7. 2.*) that he *feared God above many*, and therefore would not only speak truly, but, when he spake of the desolations of Jerusalem, speak tenderly. It is probable that his errand to court, at this time, was, to solicit

for some favour, some relief or other, that they stood in need of. Now the account he gives is, 1. That the holy seed was miserably trampled on and abused; in great affliction and reproach; insulted upon all occasions by their neighbours, and *filled with the scorning of them that were at ease.* 2. That the holy city was exposed, and in ruins. The wall of Jerusalem was still broken down, and the gates, as the Chaldeans left them, in ruins. This made the condition of the inhabitants both very despicable under the abiding marks of poverty and slavery, and very dangerous for their enemies might, when they pleased, make an easy prey of them. The temple was built, the government settled, and a work of reformation brought to some head, but here was one good work yet undone; this was still wanting. Every Jerusalem, on this side the heavenly one, will have some defect or other in it, for the making up of which it will require the help and service of its friends.

III. The great affliction this gave to Nehemiah, and the deep concern it put him into, *v. 4.* 1. He *wept and mourned.* It was not only just when he heard the news, that he fell into a passion of weeping, but his sorrow continued *certain* days. Note, The desolations and distresses of the church ought to be the matter of our grief, how much soever we live at ease. 2. He *fasted and prayed*; not in public, he had no opportunity of doing that, but *before the God of heaven, who sees in secret, and will reward openly.* By his fasting and praying, (1.) He consecrated his sorrows, and directed his tears aright; sorrowed *after a godly sort*, with an eye to God, because his name was reproached in the contempt cast on his people, whose cause therefore he thus commits to him. (2.) He eased his sorrows, and unburthened his spirit, by pouring out his complaint before God, and leaving it with him. (3.) He took the right method of fetching in relief for his people, and direction for himself in what way to serve them. Let those who are forming any good designs for the service of the public, take God along with them from the first conception of them, and utter all their projects before him; that is the way to prosper in them.

5. And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: 6. Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. 7. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. 8. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, *If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:* 9. But *if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.* 10. Now these *are* thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. 11. O LORD, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee.

thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cup-bearer.

We have here Nehemiah's prayer; a prayer that has reference to all the prayers which he had, for some time before, been putting up to God day and night, while he continued his sorrows for the desolations of Jerusalem; and withal to the petition he was now intending to present to the king his master for his favour to Jerusalem.

We may observe in this prayer,

I. His humble and reverent address to God, in which he prostrates himself before him, and gives unto him the glory due unto his name, v. 5. It is much the same with that of Daniel, *ch.* 9. 4. It teaches us to draw near to God, 1. With a holy awe of his majesty and glory; remembering that he is the God of heaven, infinitely above us, and sovereign Lord over us, and that he is *the great and terrible God*, infinitely excelling all the principalities and powers, and of the upper and of the lower world, angels and kings; and he is a God to be worshipped with fear by all his people, and whose powerful wrath all his enemies have reason to be afraid of. Even the terrors of the Lord are improvable, for the comfort and encouragement of those that trust in him. 2. With a holy confidence in his grace and truth, for he *keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him*; not only the mercy that is promised, but even more than he promised: nothing shall be thought too much to be done for them that *love him, and keep his commandments*.

II. His general request for the audience and acceptance of all the prayers and confessions he now made to God, v. 6. *Let thine ear be attentive to the prayer*, not which I say, (bare saying prayer will not serve,) but which I pray before thee; (then we are like to speed in praying, when we pray in praying;) and let *thine eyes be open upon the heart* from which the prayer comes, and the ease which is in prayer laid before thee. God *formed the eye*, and *planted the ear*; and, therefore, shall he not see clearly? shall not he hear attentively?

III. His penitent confession of sin; not only Israel has sinned, (it was no great mortification to him to own that,) but, *I and my father's house have sinned*, v. 6. Thus does he humble himself, and take shame to himself, in this confession; *We have* (I and my family among the rest) *dealt very corruptly against thee*, v. 7. In the confession of sin, let these two things be owned as the malignity of it, that it is a corruption of ourselves, and an affront to God; it is *dealing corruptly against God*, setting up the corruptions of our own hearts in opposition to the commands of God.

IV. The pleas he urges for mercy for his people Israel.

1. He pleads what God had of old said to them, the rule he had settled of his proceedings toward them, which might be the rule of their expectations from him, v. 8, 9. He had said indeed, that, if they brake covenant with him, he would *scatter them among the nations*, and that threatening was fulfilled in their captivity: never was people so widely dispersed as Israel was at this time, though at first so closely incorporated; but, he had said withal, that if they *turned to him*, (as now they began to do, having renounced idolatry and kept to the temple service,) he would *gather them again*. This he quotes from Deut. 30. 1..5. and begs leave to put God in mind of it, (though the Eternal Mind needs no remembrancer,) as that which he guided his desires by, and grounded his faith and hope upon, in praying this prayer, *Remember, I beseech thee, that word*; for thou hast said, *Put me in remembrance*. He had owned, (v. 7.) *We have not kept the judgments which thou commandedst thy servant Moses*; yet he begs, (v. 8.) *Lord, remember the word which thou commandedst thy servant Moses*; for the covenant is often said to be commanded. If God were not more mindful of his promises than we are of his precepts, we were undone. Our best pleas, therefore, in prayer, are those that are taken from the promise of God, the word on which he has caused us to hope, Ps. 119. 49.

2. He pleads the relation wherein of old they stood to God,

"These are *thy servants and thy people*, (v. 10.) whom thou hast set apart for thyself, and taken into covenant with thee: wilt thou suffer thy sworn enemies to trample upon and oppress thy sworn servants? If thou wilt not appear for thy people, whom wilt thou appear for?" See Isa. 63. 19. As an evidence of their being God's servants, he gives them this character, (v. 11.) "*They desire to fear thy name*; they are not only called by thy name, but really have a reverence for thy name; they now worship thee, and thee only, according to thy will, and have an awe of all the discoveries thou art pleased to make of thyself; this they have a desire to do;" which denotes, (1.) Their good will to it; "It is their constant care and endeavour to be found in the way of their duty, and they aim at it, though in many instances they come short." (2.) Their complacency in it; "They take pleasure to fear thy name," so it may be read; "They not only do their duty, but do it with delight." Those shall graciously be accepted of God that truly desire to fear his name; for those desires are his own work.

3. He pleads the great things God had formerly done for them, (v. 10.) "*Whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power*, in the days of old; thy power is still the same, wilt thou not therefore still redeem them, and perfect their redemption? Let not them be overpowered by the enemy, that have a God of infinite power on their side."

Lastly, He concludes with a particular petition, that God would prosper him in his undertaking, and give him favour with the king: *This man*, he calls him, for the greatest of men are but men before God; they must know themselves to be so, (Ps. 9. 20.) and others must know them to be so; *Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man?* *Mercy in the sight of this man*, is what he prays for, meaning not the king's mercy, but mercy from God, in his address to the king. Favour with men is then comfortable, when we can see it springing from the mercy of God.

CHAP. II.

How Nehemiah wrestled with God, and prevailed, we read in the foregoing chapter; now here we are told, how, like Jacob, he prevailed with men also, and so found that his prayers were heard and answered. I. He prevailed with the king to send him to Jerusalem with a commission to build a wall about it, and grant him what was necessary for it, v. 1..8. II. He prevailed against the enemies that would have obstructed him in his journey, (v. 9..11.) and laughed him out of his undertaking, v. 19, 20. III. He prevailed upon his own people to join with him in this good work; viewing the desolations of the wall, (v. 12..16.) and then gaining them to lend every one a hand toward the rebuilding of them, v. 17, 18. Thus did God own him in the work to which he called him.

1. **A**ND it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him; and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. 2. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, 3. And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? 4. Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. 6. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long

shall thy journey be? And when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. 7. Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; 8. And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which *appertained* to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

When Nehemiah had prayed for the relief of his countrymen, and perhaps in David's words, (Ps. 51. 18.) *Build thou the walls of Jerusalem*, he did not sit still, and say, "Let God now do his own work, for I have no more to do;" but set himself to forecast what he could do towards it. Our prayers must be seconded with our serious endeavours, else we mock God. Near four months passed from Chisleu to Nisan, (from November to March,) before Nehemiah made his application to the king for leave to go to Jerusalem; either because the winter was not a proper time for such a journey, and he would not make the motion till he could pursue it, or because it was so long before his month of waiting came, and there was no coming into the king's presence uncalled, Esth. 4. 11. Now that he attended the king's table, he hoped to have his ear: we are not thus limited to certain moments in our addresses to the King of kings, but have liberty of access to him at all times; to the throne of grace we never come unseasonably. Now here is,

I. The occasion which he gave the king to inquire into his cares and griefs, by appearing sad in his presence. Those that speak to such great men, must not fall abruptly upon their business, but fetch a compass. Nehemiah would try whether he was in a good humour before he ventured to tell him his errand, and this method he took to try him. He took up the wine and gave it to the king when he called for it, expecting that then he would look him in the face. He had not used to be sad in the king's presence, but conformed to the rules of the court, (as courtiers must do,) which would admit no sorrows, Esth. 4. 2. Though he was a stranger, a captive, he was easy and pleasant. Good men should do what they can by their cheerfulness to convince the world of the pleasantness of religious ways, and to roll away the reproach cast upon them as melancholy; but there is a time for all things, Eccl. 3. 4. Nehemiah now saw cause both to be sad, and to appear so. The miseries of Jerusalem gave him cause to be sad, and his shewing it will give occasion to the king to inquire into the cause: he did not dissemble sadness, for he was really in grief for the afflictions of Joseph, and was not like the hypocrites who *disfigure their faces*; yet he could have concealed his grief if it had been necessary, (the heart knows its own bitterness, and in the midst of laughter is often sad,) but it would now serve his purpose to discover his sadness. Though he had wine before him, and, probably, according to the office of the cup-bearer, did himself drink of it before he gave it the king, yet it would not make his heart glad, while God's Israel was in distress.

II. The kind notice which the king took of his sadness, and the inquiry he made into the cause of it; (v. 2.) *Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?* Note, 1. We ought, from a principle of Christian sympathy, to concern ourselves in the sorrows and sadnesses of others, even of our inferiors, and not say, *What is it to us?* Let not masters despise their servants' griefs, but desire to make them easy. The great God is not pleased with the dejections and disquietments of his people, but would have them both *serve him with gladness*, and *eat their bread with joy*. 2. It is not strange, if those that are sick have sad countenances, because of what is felt, and what is feared; sickness will make those grave that were most airy and gay; yet

a good man, even in sickness, may be of good cheer, if he know that his sins are forgiven. 3. Freedom from sickness is so great a mercy, that, while we have that, we ought not to be inordinately dejected under any outward burthen; yet, sorrow for our own sins, the sins of others, and the calamities of God's church, may well sadden the countenance without sickness.

III. The account which Nehemiah gave the king of the cause of his sadness, which he gives with meekness and fear. 1. With fear; he owns that now (though it appears by the following story that he was a man of courage) *he was sore afraid*, perhaps of the king's wrath, (for those eastern monarchs assumed an absolute power of life and death, Dan. 2. 12, 13.—5. 19.) or of misplacing a word, and losing his request by the mismanagement of it: though he was a wise man, he was jealous of himself, lest he should say any thing imprudently; it becomes us to be so. A good assurance is indeed a good accomplishment, yet a humble self-diffidence is no man's dispraise. 2. With meekness; without reflection upon any man, and with all the respect, deference, and good-will, imaginable, to the king his master, he says, "*Let the king live for ever*;" he is wise and good, and the fittest man in the world to rule." He modestly asked, "*Why should not my countenance be sad as it is, when (though I myself am well, and at ease) the city,*" (the king knew what city he meant,) "*the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste?*" Many are melancholy and sad, but can give no good reason for it, cannot tell why or wherefore; such should chide themselves for, and chide themselves out of, their unjust and unreasonable griefs and fears: but Nehemiah could give so good a reason for his sadness, as to appeal to the king himself concerning it. Observe, (1.) He calls Jerusalem the *place of his fathers' sepulchres*, the place where his ancestors were buried: it is good for us to think often of our fathers' sepulchres; we are apt to dwell in our thoughts upon their honours and titles, their houses and estates, but let us think also of their sepulchres, and consider that they who have gone before us in the world, have also gone before us out of the world, and their monuments are mementos to us; there is a great respect owing to the memory of our fathers, that that be not injured. All nations, even those that have had no expectation of the resurrection of the dead, have looked upon the sepulchres of their ancestors as in some degree sacred, and not to be violated. (2.) He justifies himself in his grief: "I do well to be sad. Why should I not be so?" There is a time even for pious and prosperous men to be sad, and to shew it. The best men must not think to antedate heaven, by banishing all sorrowful thoughts; it is a vale of tears we pass through, and we must submit to the temper of the climate. (3.) He assigns the ruins of Jerusalem as the true cause of his grief. Note, All the grievances of the church, but especially its desolations, are, and ought to be, matter of grief and sadness to all good people, to all that have a concern for God's honour, and that are living members of Christ's mystical body, and are of a public spirit; they favour even Zion's dust, Ps. 102. 14.

IV. The encouragement which the king gave him to tell his mind, and the application he, thereupon, made in his heart to God, v. 4. The king had an affection for him, and was not pleased to see him melancholy; it is also probable that he had a kindness for the Jews' religion; he had discovered it before in the commission he gave to Ezra, who was a church-man, and now again in the power he put Nehemiah into, who was a statesman: wanting therefore only to know how he might be serviceable to Jerusalem, he asks this its anxious friend, "*For what dost thou make request?*" Something thou wouldst have; what is it?" He was afraid to speak, (v. 2.) but this gave him boldness; much more may the invitation Christ has given us to pray, and the promise that we shall speed, enable us to come boldly to the throne of grace. Nehemiah immediately *prayed to the God of heaven*, that he would give him wisdom to ask properly, and incline the king's heart to grant him his request. They that would find favour with kings, must secure the favour of the King of kings. He prayed to the God of heaven, as infinitely above even this mighty monarch. It was not a solemn prayer, (he had not opportunity for that,) but a secret sudden ejaculation; he lifted up his heart to

that God who understands the language of the heart, *Lord, give me a mouth and wisdom; Lord, give me favour in the sight of this man.* Note, It is good to be much in pious ejaculations, especially upon particular occasions: wherever we are, we have a way open heaven-ward; this will hinder no business, but further it rather, therefore let no business hinder this, but give rise to it rather. Nehemiah had prayed very solemnly with reference to this very occasion; (*ch. 1. 11.*) yet when it comes to the push, he prays again. Ejaculations and solemn prayers must not jumble out one another, but each have its place.

V. His humble petition to the king; when he had this encouragement, he presents it very modestly, and with submission to the king's wisdom, *v. 5.* But he is very particular; he asks for a commission to go as governor to Judah, to build the wall of Jerusalem, and to stay there for a certain time, so many months, we may suppose; and then either he had his commission renewed, or he went back, and was sent again, so that he presided there twelve years at least, *ch. 5. 14.* He also asked for a convoy, (*v. 7.*) and an order upon the governors, not only to permit and suffer him to pass through their respective provinces, but to supply him with what he had occasion for; with another order upon the keeper of the forest of Lebanon, to give him timber for the work that he designed.

VI. The king's great favour to him, in asking him *when he would return*, *v. 6.* He intimated that he would not lose him, nor could be long without him; yet that, in order to gratify him, and do a real office of kindness to his people, he would spare him a while, and let him have what clauses he pleased, inserted in his commission, *v. 8.* Here was an immediate answer to his prayer, for the seed of Jacob never sought the God of Jacob in vain. In the account he gives of the success of his petition, he takes notice, 1. Of the presence of the queen; she sat by, (*v. 6.*) which (they say) was not usual in the Persian court, *Esth. 1. 11.* Whether the queen was his adversary, that would have hindered him, and he observes it, to the praise of God's powerful providence, that though she was by, yet he succeeded, or whether she was his true friend, and it is observed, to the praise of God's kind providence, that she was present to help forward his request, is not certain. 2. Of the power and grace of God; he gained his point, not according to his merit, his interest in the king, or his good management, but *according to the good hand of his God upon him.* Gracious souls take notice of God's hand, his good hand, in all events which turn in favour of them; *This is the Lord's doing*, and therefore doubly acceptable.

9. Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. 10. When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. 11. So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. 12. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I *any* man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither *was there any* beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. 13. And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon-well, and to the dung-port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. 14. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but *there was* no place for the beast *that was* under me to pass. 15. Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall,

and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned. 16. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told *it* to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. 17. Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. 18. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this good work.* 19. But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard *it*, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What *is* this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? 20. Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

We are told,

1. How Nehemiah was dismissed by the court he was sent from; the king appointed *captains of the army and horsemen* to go *with him*, (*v. 9.*) both for his guard, and to shew that he was a man whom *the king did delight to honour*, that all the king's servants might respect him accordingly. Whom the King of kings sends, he thus protects, he thus dignifies, with an host of angels to attend them.

11. How he was received by the country he was sent to.

1. By the Jews and their friends at Jerusalem; we are told,

(1.) That while he concealed his errand, they took little notice of him; he was at *Jerusalem three days*, (*v. 11.*) and it does not appear that any of the great men of the city waited on him to congratulate him on his arrival, but he remained unknown; the king sent horsemen to attend him, but the Jews sent none to meet him, he had no beast with him, but that which he himself rode on, *v. 12.* Wise men, and those who are worthy of double honour, yet covet not to come with observation, to make a shew, or make a noise, no not when they come with the greatest blessings. They that shortly are to have the *dominion in the morning*, the world now knows not, but they lie hid, *1 John, 3. 1.*

(2.) That, though they took little notice of him, he took great notice of them and their state. He rose in the night, and viewed the ruins of the walls, probably by moonlight, (*v. 13.*) that he might see what was to be done, and in what method they must go about it, whether the old foundation would serve, and what there was of the old materials that would be of use. Note, [1.] Good work is then like to be well done, when it is first well considered. [2.] It is the wisdom of those who are engaged in public business, as much as may be, to *see with their own eyes*, and not to proceed altogether upon the reports and representations of others, and yet to do this without noise, and, if possible, unobserved. [3.] They that would build up the church's walls, must first take notice of the ruins of those walls. They that would know how to amend, must inquire what is amiss; what needs reformation, and what may serve as it is.

(3.) That when he discovered his design to the rulers and people, they cheerfully concurred with him in it. He did not tell them, at first, what he came about, (*v. 16.*) because he would *not* seem to do it for ostentation, and that, if he found it impracticable.

he might retreat the more honourably: upright humble men will not sound a trumpet before their alms, or any other of their good offices. But when he had viewed and considered the thing, and probably felt the pulse of the rulers and people, he told them *what God had put into his heart*, (v. 12.) even to *build up the wall of Jerusalem*, v. 17. Observe, [1.] How fairly he proposed it to them; "*Ye see the distrss we are in, how we lie exposed to the enemies that are round about us, how justly they reproach us as foolish and despicable, how easily they may make a prey of us whenever they have a mind. Come, therefore, and let us build up the wall.*" He does not undertake to do it without them; (it could not be the work of one man;) nor does he charge or command imperiously, though he had the king's commission, but, in a friendly brotherly way, exhorts and excites them to join with him in this work. To encourage them hereto, he speaks of the design; *First*, As that which owed its original to the special grace of God. He takes not the praise of it to himself, as a good thought of his own, but acknowledges that God *put it into his heart*, and therefore they all ought to countenance it, (whatever is of God must be promoted,) and might hope to prosper in it, for what God puts men upon, he will own them in. *Secondly*, As that which owed its progress hitherto to the special providence of God. He produced the king's commission, told them how readily it was granted, and how forward the king was to favour his design, in which he saw the hand of his God *good upon him*. It would encourage both him and them to proceed in an undertaking which God had so remarkably smiled upon. Thus he proposed it to them; and, [2.] They presently came to a resolution, one and all, to concur with him; *Let us rise up and build*. They are ashamed that they have sat still so long without so much as attempting this needful work, and now resolve to rise up out of their slothfulness, to bestir themselves, and to stir up one another. "*Let us rise up*," that is, "Let us do it with vigour, and diligence, and resolution, as those that are determined to go through with it." *So they strengthened their hands*, their own and one another's, *for this good work*. Note, *First*, Many a good work would find hands enough to be laid to it, if there were but *one good hand to lead in it*. They all saw the desolations of Jerusalem, yet none proposed the repair of them. But when Nehemiah proposed it, they all consented to it. It is pity that a good motion should be lost, purely for want of one to move it, and to break the ice in it. *Secondly*, By *stirring up ourselves and one another* to that which is good, we *strengthen ourselves and one another* for it; for, the great reason why we are weak in our duty, because we are cold to it, indifferent and unresolved.

2. Let us now see how Nehemiah was *received by those* that wished ill to the Jews; whom God and his Israel blessed, they cursed.

(1.) When he did but shew his face, it vexed them, v. 10. Sanballat and Tobiah, two of the Samaritans, but, by birth, the former a Moabite, the latter an Ammonite, when they saw one come armed with a commission from the king to do service to Israel, *were grieved exceedingly*, that all their little paltry arts to weaken Israel were thus baffled and frustrated by a fair, and noble, and generous, project to strengthen them. Nothing is a greater vexation to the enemies of good people, who have misrepresented them to princes as turbulent, and factious, and not fit to live, than to see them stand right in the opinion of their rulers, their innocency cleared, and their reproach rolled away, and that they are thought not only fit to live, but fit to be trusted. When they saw a man come in that manner, who professedly *sought the welfare of the children of Israel*, it vexed them to the heart; *The wicked shall see it, and be grieved*.

(2.) When he began to act, they set themselves to hinder him; but in vain, v. 19, 20. [1.] See here with what little reason the enemies discouraged them. They represented the undertaking as a silly thing; they *laughed us to scorn*, and *despised us* as foolish builders, that could not finish what we began. They represented the undertaking also as a wicked thing, no better than treason; *Will ye rebel against the king?* Because this was the old invidious charge, though now they had a commission from the king, and were taken under his protection, yet still they must be called *rebels*.

[2.] See also with what good reason they slighted these discouragements. They bear up themselves with this, that they were the *servants of the God of heaven*, the only true and living God, that they were acting for him in what they did, and that therefore he would bear them out, and prosper them, though the heathen raged, Ps. 2. 1. They consider also that the reason why these enemies did so malign them, was, because they had no right in Jerusalem, but envied them their right in it. Thus may the impotent menaces of the church's enemies be easily despised by the church's friends.

CHAP. III.

Saying and doing are often two things: many are ready to say, Let us rise up and build, who sit still and do nothing; like that fair-spoken son who said, I go, Sir, but went not; the undertakers here were none of those. As soon as they had resolved to build the wall about Jerusalem, they lost no time, but set about it presently, as we find in this chapter. Let it never be said that we left that good work to be done to-morrow, which we might as well have done to day. This chapter gives an account of two things, I. The names of the builders, which are recorded here to their honour, for they were such as herein discovered a great zeal for God and their country; both a pious and a public spirit; a great degree both of industry and courage: and what they did was fit to be thus largely registered, both for their praise, and for the encouragement of others to follow their example. II. The order of the building, they took it before them, and ended where they began. They repaired, 1. From the sheep-gate to the fish-gate, v. 1, 2. 2. Thence to the old-gate, v. 3. 5. 3. Thence to the valley-gate, v. 6. 12. 4. Thence to the dung-gate, v. 13. 5. Thence to the gate of the fountain, v. 14. 6. Thence to the water-gate, v. 15. 26. 7. Thence by the horse-gate to the sheep-gate again, where they began; (v. 27. 32.) and so they brought their work quite round the city.

1. **T**HEN Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep-gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel. 2. And next unto him builded the men of Jericho. And next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri. 3. But the fish-gate did the sons of Hassenaah build, who *also* laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. 4. And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz. And next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabeel. And next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana. 5. And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord. 6. Moreover the old-gate repaired Jehoiada the son of Paseah, and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah; they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. 7. And next unto them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon, and of Mizpah, unto the throne of the governor on this side the river. 8. Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths. Next unto him also repaired Hananiah the son of *one of* the apothecaries, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall. 9. And next unto them repaired Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem. 10. And next unto them repaired Jedaiah the son of Harumaph, even over against his house. And next unto him repaired Hattush the son of Hashabniah. 11. Malchijah

the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahath-moab, repaired the other piece, and the tower of the furnaces. 12. And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters. 13. The valley-gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah; they built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and a thousand cubits on the wall unto the dung-gate. 14. But the dung-gate repaired Malchiah the son of Rechab, the ruler of part of Beth-haccerem; he built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. 15. But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah, by the king's garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David. 16. After him repaired Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of the half part of Beth-zur, unto *the place* over against the sepulchres of David, and to the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty. 17. After him repaired the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani. Next unto him repaired Hashabiah, the ruler of the half part of Keilah, in his part. 18. After him repaired their brethren, Bavai the son of Henadad, the ruler of the half part of Keilah. 19. And next to him repaired Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, another piece over against the going up to the armoury at the turning *of the wall*. 20. After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning *of the wall*, unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21. After him repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah the son of Koz another piece, from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house of Eliashib. 22. And after him repaired the priests, the men of the plain. 23. After him repaired Benjamin and Hashub over against their house. After him repaired Azariah the son of Maaseiah the son of Ananiah by his house. 24. After him repaired Binnui the son of Henadad another piece, from the house of Azariah unto the turning *of the wall*, even unto the corner. 25. Palal the son of Uzai, over against the turning *of the wall*, and the tower which lieth out from the king's high house, that *was* by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh. 26. Moreover the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, unto *the place* over against the water-gate toward the east, and the tower that lieth out. 27. After them the Tekoites repaired another piece, over against the great tower that lieth out, even unto the wall of Ophel. 28. From above the horse-gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house. 29. After them repaired Zadok the son of

Immer over against his house. After him repaired also Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east-gate. 30. After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece. After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah over against his chamber. 31. After him repaired Malchiah the goldsmith's son unto the place of the Nethinims, and of the merchants, over against the gate Miphkad, and to the going up of the corner. 32. And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep-gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants.

The best way to know how to divide this chapter, is, to observe how the work was divided among the undertakers, that every one might know what he had to do, and mind it accordingly, with a holy emulation, and desire to excel, yet without any contention, animosity, or separate interest. No strife appears among them, but which should do most for the public good.

Several things are observable in the account here given of the building of the wall about Jerusalem.

1. That Eliashib the high priest, with his brethren the priests, led the van in this troop of builders, v.1. Ministers should be first and foremost in every good work, for their office obliges them to teach and quicken by their example, as well as by their doctrine. If there be labour in it, who so fit as they to work? If danger, who so fit as they to venture? The dignity of the high priest was very great, and obliged him to signalize himself in this service. The priests repaired the *sheep-gate*, so called, because through it the sheep were brought that were to be sacrificed in the temple, and therefore the priests undertook the repair of it, whose *inheritance the offerings of the Lord made by fire were*. And of this gate *only* it is said that *they sanctified it* with the word and prayer, and perhaps with sacrifices; either, (1.) Because it led to the temple; or, (2.) Because with this the building of the wall began, and it is probable (though they were at work in all parts of the wall at the same time) that this was first finished, and therefore at this gate they solemnly committed their city, and the walls of it, to the divine protection; or, (3.) Because the priests were the builders of it, and it becomes ministers, above others, being themselves, in a peculiar manner, sanctified to God, to sanctify to him all their performances, and to do even their common actions *after a godly sort*.

2. That the undertakers were very many, who each took their share, some more and some less, in this work, according as their ability was. Note, What is to be done for the public good, every one should assist in, and further, to the utmost of his place and power. United force will conquer that which no individual dares venture on. Many hands will make light work.

3. That many were active in this work, who were not themselves inhabitants of Jerusalem, and therefore consulted purely the public welfare, and not any private interest or advantage of their own. Here are the men of Jericho with the first, (v.2.) the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, (v.7.) and Zanoah, v.13. Every Israelite should lend a hand toward the building up of Jerusalem.

4. That several rulers, both of Jerusalem and of other cities, were active in this work, thinking themselves bound, in honour, to do the utmost that their wealth and power enabled them to do, for the furtherance of this good work. But it is observable that they are called rulers of *part*, or the *half part*, of their respective cities. One was ruler of the *half part of Jerusalem*, v.12. Another of part of Beth-haccerem, v.14. Another of part of Mizpah, v.15. Another of the *half part of Beth-zur*, v.16. One was ruler of *one half part*, and another of the *other half part, of Keilah*, v.17,18. Perhaps the Persian government would not intrust any one with a strong city, but appointed two to be a watch upon each other. Rome had two consuls.

5. Here is a just reproach fastened upon the nobles of Tekoa

that they put not their necks to the work of their Lord, (v. 5.) that is, they would not come under the yoke of an obligation to this service; as if the dignity and liberty of their peerage were their discharge from serving God, and doing good, which are indeed the highest honour and the truest freedom. Let not nobles think any thing below them by which they may advance the interests of their country; for what else is their nobility good for, but that it puts them in a higher and larger sphere of usefulness than that in which inferior persons move?

6. Two persons joined in repairing the old gate, (v. 6.) and so were co-founders, and shared the honour of it between them. The good work which we cannot compass ourselves, we must be thankful to those that will go partners with us in. Some think that this is called the old gate, because it belonged to the ancient Salem, which was said to be first built by Melchizedek.

7. Several good honest tradesmen, as well as priests and rulers, were active in this work, goldsmiths, apothecaries, merchants, v. 8, 32. They did not think their callings excused them, nor plead that they could not leave their shops to attend the public business, knowing that what they lost would certainly be made up to them, by the blessing of God upon their callings.

8. Some ladies are spoken of as helping forward this work, *Shallum and his daughters*, (v. 12.) who, though not capable of personal service, yet, having their portions in their own hands, or being rich widows, contributed money for buying materials and paying workmen. St. Paul speaks of some good women that laboured with him in the gospel, Philip. 4. 3.

9. Of some it is said, that they repaired over against their houses, (v. 10, 23, 28, 29.) and of one who, it is likely, was only a lodger, that he repaired over against his chamber, v. 30. When a general good work is to be done, each should apply himself to that part of it that falls nearest him, and is within his reach. If every one will sweep before his own door, the street will be clean; if every one will mend one, we shall be all mended. If he that has but a chamber will repair before that, he does his part.

10. Of one it is said, that he earnestly repaired that which fell to his share, (v. 20.) he did it with an inflamed zeal; not that others were cold or indifferent, but he was the most vigorous of any of them, and made himself remarkable for it. It is good to be thus zealously affected in a good thing; and it is probable that this good man's zeal provoked very many to take the more pains, and make the more haste.

11. Of one of these builders it is observed, that he was the sixth son of his father, v. 30. His five elder brethren, it seems, laid not their hand to this work, but he did. In doing that which is good, we need not stay to see our elders go before us; if they decline it, it does not therefore follow that we must. Thus the young brother, if he be the better man, and does God and his generation better service, is indeed the better gentleman; those are most honourable that are most useful.

12. Some of them, that had first done, helped their fellows, and undertook another share, where they saw there was most need. Meremoth repaired, (v. 4.) and again, v. 21. And the Tekoites, beside the piece they repaired, (v. 5.) undertook another piece, (v. 27.) which is the more remarkable, because their nobles set them a bad example, by withdrawing from the service, which, instead of serving them for an excuse to sit still, perhaps made them the more forward to do double work, that, by their zeal, they might either shame, or atone for, the covetousness and carelessness of their nobles.

Lastly, there is no mention of any particular share that Nehemiah himself had in this work. A name-sake of his is mentioned, v. 16. But, did he do nothing? Yes; though he undertook not any particular piece of the wall, yet he did more than any of them, for he had the oversight of them all; half of his servants worked where there was most need, and the other half stood sentinel, as we find after, (ch. 4. 16.) while he himself, in his own person, walked the rounds, directed and encouraged the builders, set his hand to the work where he saw occasion, and kept a watchful eye upon the motions of the enemy, as we shall find in the next chapter. The pilot needs not hale at a rope, it is enough for him to steer.

CHAP. IV.

We left all hands at work for the building of the wall about Jerusalem. But such good work is not wont to be carried on without opposition; now here we are told what opposition was given to it, and what methods Nehemiah took to forward the work, notwithstanding that opposition. 1. Their enemies reproached and ridiculed their undertaking; but their scoffs they answered with prayers, they heeded them not, but went on with their work notwithstanding, v. 1. 6. II. They formed a bloody design against them, to hinder them by force of arms, v. 7, 8, 10. 12. To guard against this, Nehemiah prayed, (v. 9.) set guards, (v. 13.) and encouraged them to fight, (v. 14.) by which the design was broken, (v. 15.) and so the work was carried on with all needful precaution against a surprise, v. 16. 23. In all this, Nehemiah approved himself a man of great conduct and courage, as well as great piety.

1. **B**UT it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. 2. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burnt? 3. Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. 4. Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: 5. And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders. 6. So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

Here is,

1. The spiteful scornful reflection which Sanballat and Tobiah cast upon the Jews, for their attempt to build the wall about Jerusalem. The country rang of it presently; intelligence was brought of it to Samaria, that nest of enemies to the Jews and their prosperity; and here we are told how they received the tidings. 1. In heart; they were very angry at the undertaking, and had great indignation, v. 1. It vexed them that Nehemiah came to seek the welfare of the children of Israel; (ch. 2. 10.) but, when they heard of this great undertaking, for their good, they were out of all patience. They had hitherto pleased themselves with the thought, that, while Jerusalem was unwall'd, they could swallow it up, and make themselves masters of it when they pleased; but, if it be walled, it will not only be fenced against them, but, by degrees, become formidable to them. The strength and safety of the church are the grief and vexation of its enemies. 2. In word; they despised it, and made it the subject of their ridicule, in which they did sufficiently display their venom; but good was brought out of it; for, looking upon it as a foolish undertaking, that would sink under its own weight, they did not go about to obstruct it, till it was too late. Let us see with what pride and malice they set themselves publicly to banter it. (1.) Sanballat speaks with scorn of the workmen, "*These feeble Jews*," (v. 2.) "what will they do for materials? Will they revive the stones out of the rubbish? And what mean they by being so hasty? Do they think to make the walling of a city but one day's work? and to keep the feast of dedication with sacrifice the next day? Poor silly people! see how ridiculous they make themselves!" (2.) Tobiah speaks with no less scorn of the work itself. He has his jest too, and must shew his wit, v. 3. Profane scoffers sharpen one another. "Sorry work," says he, "they are like to make of it; they themselves will be ashamed of it; if a fox go up, not with his subtlety, but with his weight

ke will break down their stone-wall." Many a good work has been thus looked upon with contempt by the *proud and haughty scorers*.

II. Nehemiah's humble and devout address to God, when he heard of these reflections. He had notice brought him of what they said; it is probable that they themselves sent him a message to this purport, to discourage him, hoping to jeer him out of his attempt; but he did not answer these fools according to their folly; he did not upbraid them with their weakness, but looked up to God by prayer. 1. He begs of God to take notice of the indignities that were done them, (v. 4.) and in this we are to imitate him; *Hear, O our God, for we are despised*. Note, (1.) God's people have often been a despised people, and loaded with contempt. (2.) God does, and will, hear all the slights that are put upon his people, and it is their comfort that he does so, and a good reason why they should be as though they were deaf, Ps. 33. 13, 15. "Thou art our God, to whom we appeal; our cause needs no more than a fair hearing." 2. He begs of God to avenge their cause, and turn the reproach upon the enemies themselves; (v. 4, 5.) and this was spoken rather by a spirit of prophecy than by a spirit of prayer, and is not to be imitated by us, who are taught of Christ to *pray* for them that *despitefully use and persecute us*; Christ himself *prayed* for those that reproached him, *Father, forgive them*. Nehemiah here prays, *Cover not their iniquity*. Note, (1.) They that cast contempt on God's people, do but prepare everlasting shame for themselves. (2.) It is a sin from which sinners are seldom recovered. Doubtless, Nehemiah had reason to think the hearts of those sinners were desperately hardened, so that they would never repent of it, else he would not have prayed that it might *never be blotted out*. The reason he gives, is, not, *They have abused us*, but, *They have provoked thee*, and that *before the builders*, to whom, it is likely, they sent a spiteful message. Note, *Therefore* we should be angry at the malice of persecutors, not because it is abusive to us, but because it is offensive to God; and on that we may ground an expectation that God will appear against it, Ps. 74. 18, 22.

III. The vigour of the builders, notwithstanding these reflections, v. 6. They made such good speed, that in a little time they had run up the wall to half its height, for *the people had a mind to work*, their hearts were upon it, and they would have it forwarded. Note, 1. Then good work goes on well, when people have a mind to it. 2. The reproaches of enemies should rather quicken us to our duty, than drive us from it.

7. But it came to pass, *that* when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, *and* that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, 8. And conspired all of them together to come *and* to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. 9. Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. 10. And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burthens is decayed, and *there is* much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. 11. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. 12. And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us *they will be upon you*. 13. Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, *and* on the higher places, I even set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14. And I looked, and rose

up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them; remember the LORD, *which is* great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. 15. And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.

We have here,

I. The conspiracy which the Jews' enemies formed against them, to stay the building by slaying the builders. The conspirators were not only Sanballat and Tobiah, but other neighbouring people whom they had drawn into the plot. They flattered themselves with a fancy that the work would soon stand still of itself; but, when they heard that it went on and prospered, they were angry at the Jews for being so hasty to push the work forward, and angry at themselves for being so slow in opposing it, (v. 7.) *they were very wroth*. *Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel*. Nothing would serve but they would *fight against Jerusalem*, v. 8. Why, what quarrel had they with the Jews? Had they done them any wrong? Or did they design them any? No, they lived peaceably by them; but it was merely out of envy and malice; they hated the Jews' piety, and were therefore vexed at their prosperity, and sought their ruin. Observe, 1. How unanimous they were; *They conspired all of them together*, though of different interests among themselves, yet one in their opposition to the work of God. 2. How close they were; they said, "*They shall not know, neither see, till we have them at our mercy*." Thus they took crafty counsel, and digged deep, to hide it from the Lord, and promised themselves security and success from the secrecy of their management. 3. How cruel they were; *We will come and slay them*. If nothing less than the murder of the workmen will put a stop to the work, they will not stick at that; nay, it is their blood they thirst for, and they are glad of any pretence to glut themselves with it. 4. What the design was, and how confident they were of success; it was to *cause the work to cease*, (v. 11.) and this they were confident that they should effect. The hindering of good work is that which bad men aim at and promise themselves; but good work is God's work, and it shall prosper.

II. The discouragements which the builders themselves laboured under. At the very time when the adversaries said, Let us *cause the work to cease*; Judah said, "Let us even let it fall, for we are not able to go forward with it," v. 10. They represent the labourers as tired, and the remaining difficulties, even of that first part of their work, the removing of the rubbish, as insuperable, and therefore they think it advisable to desist for the present. Can Judah, that warlike valiant tribe, sneak thus? Active leading men have many times as much ado to grapple with the fears of their friends, as with the terrors of their enemies.

III. The information that was brought to Nehemiah of the enemies' designs, v. 12. There were *Jews that dwelt by them*, in the country, who, though they had not zeal enough to bring them to Jerusalem to help their brethren in building the wall, yet, having by their situation opportunity to discover the enemies' motions, had so much honesty and affection to the cause, as to give intelligence of it; nay, that it might be the more credited, they came themselves to give notice of it; and they said it ten times, repeating it as men in earnest, and under a concern, and the report was confirmed by many witnesses: the intelligence they gave is expressed abruptly, and finds work for the critics to make out the sense of it; which perhaps is designed to intimate that they gave this intelligence as men out of breath and in confusion, whose very looks would make up the deficiencies of their words. I think it may be read, without supplying any thing, "*Whatever place ye turn to, they are against us*," so that you have need to be upon your guard on all sides." Note, God has many ways of

bringing to light, and so bringing to nought, the devices and designs of his and his church's enemies. Even the cold and feeble Jews, that contentedly dwell by them, shall be made to serve as spies upon them; nay, rather than fail, *a bird of the air shall carry their voice.*

IV. The pious and prudent methods which Nehemiah, hereupon, took to baffle the design, and to secure his work and workmen; it is said, (v. 14.) he *looked*. 1. He looked up, engaged God for him, and put himself and his cause under the divine protection, (v. 9.) *We made our prayer unto our God.* That was the way of this good man, and should be our way; all his cares, all his griefs, all his fears, he spread before God, and thereby made himself easy. This was the first thing he did; before he used any means, he made his prayer to God, for with him we must always begin. 2. He looked about him. Having prayed, he *set a watch against them.* The instructions Christ has given us, in our spiritual warfare, agree with this example, Matth. 26. 41. *Watch and pray.* If we think to secure ourselves by prayer only, without watchfulness, we are slothful, and tempt God. If by watchfulness, without prayer, we are proud, and slight God; and, either way, we forfeit his protection.

Observe, (1.) How he posted the guards, v. 13. In the lower places, he set them behind the wall, that they might annoy the enemy over it, as a breast-work; but in the higher places, where the wall was raised to its full height, he set them upon it, that from the top of it they might throw down stones or darts upon the heads of the assailants: he set them after their families, that mutual relation might engage them to mutual assistance. (2.) How he animated and encouraged them, v. 14. He observed even the nobles and rulers themselves, as well as the rest of the people, to be in a great consternation upon the intelligence that was brought them, and ready to conclude that they were all undone, by which their hands were weakened both for work and war, and therefore he endeavours to silence their fears; "Come," says he, "*be not afraid of them, but behave yourselves valiantly, considering,*" [1.] Whom you fight under; you cannot have a better Captain; *remember the Lord, who is great and terrible; you think your enemies great and terrible, but what are they in comparison with God, especially in opposition to him? He is great above them to controul them, and will be terrible to them when he comes to reckon with them.*" Those that with an eye of faith see the church's God to be great and terrible, will see the church's enemies to be mean and despicable. The reigning fear of God is the best antidote against the insinuating fear of man. He that is afraid of *a man that shall die, forgets the Lord his Maker,* Isa. 51. 12, 13. [2.] "Whom you fight for; you cannot have a better cause, you fight for *your brethren, (Ps. 122. 8.) your sons, and your daughters.* All that is dear to you in this world lies at stake, therefore *behave yourselves valiantly.*"

V. The happy disappointment which this gave to the enemy, v. 15. When they found that their design was discovered, and that the Jews were upon their guard, they concluded that it was to no purpose to attempt any thing, but that *God had brought their counsel to nought.* They knew they could not gain their point but by surprise, and if their plot was known, it was quashed. The Jews, hereupon, *returned every one to his work,* with so much the more cheerfulness, because they saw plainly that God owned it, and owned them in the doing of it. Note, God's care of our safety should engage and encourage us to go on with rigour in our duty. As soon as ever a danger is over, let us *return to our work,* and trust God another time.

16. And it came to pass from that time forth, *that* the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the harbergeons; and the rulers *were* behind all the house of Judah. 17. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burthens, with those that laded, *every one*

with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other *hand* held a weapon. 18. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and *so* builded. And he that sounded the trumpet *was* by me. 19. And I said unto the nobles and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, *The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.* 20. In what place *therefore* ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us. 21. So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. 22. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. 23. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, *saving that every one put them off for washing.*

When the builders had so far reason to think the design of the enemies broken, *as to return to their work,* yet they were not so secure as to lay down their arms, knowing how restless and unwearied they were in their attempts, and that, if one design failed, they would be hatching another. Thus must we watch always against our spiritual enemies, and not expect that our welfare will be accomplished till our work is. See what course Nehemiah took, that the people might hold themselves in a readiness, in case there should be an attack.

1. While one half was at work, the other half was under their arms, holding *spears, and shields, and bows,* not only for themselves, but for the labourers too, who would immediately quit their work, and betake themselves to their weapons, upon the first alarm, v. 16. It is probable, that they changed services at such and such hours, which would relieve the fatigue of both, and particularly would be an ease to the *bearers of burthens,* whose *strength was decayed;* (v. 10.) while they held the weapons, they were eased and yet not idle. They, thus dividing their time between the trowels and the spears, are said to *work with one hand,* and hold their weapons *with the other,* (v. 17.) which cannot be understood literally, for the work would require both hands, but it intimates that they were equally employed in both. Thus must we work out our salvation with the *weapons of our warfare* in our hand; for in every duty we must expect to meet with opposition from our spiritual enemies, against whom we must still be *fighting the good fight of faith.*

2. Every builder had a sword by his side, (v. 18.) which he could carry without hindering his labour. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit, which we ought to have always at hand, and never to seek, both in our labours, and in our conflicts, as Christians.

3. Care was taken both to get, and give, early notice of the approach of the enemy, in case they should endeavour to surprise them. Nehemiah kept a trumpeter always by him to sound an alarm upon the first intimation of danger. The work was large, and the builders were dispersed; for in all parts of the wall they were labouring at the same time. Nehemiah continually walked round to oversee the work, and encourage the workmen, and so would have speedy intelligence if the enemy made an attack, or which, by sound of trumpet, he would soon give notice to all, and they must immediately repair to him, with a full assurance that their *God would fight for them,* v. 18..20. When they acted as workmen, it was requisite they should be dispersed wherever there was work to do; but when as soldiers, it was requisite they should come into close order, and be found in a body. Thus should the labourers in Christ's building be ready to unite against a common foe.

4. The inhabitants of the villages were ordered to lodge within Jerusalem, with their servants, not only that they might be the nearer to their work in the morning, but that they might be ready to help in case of an attack in the night, v. 22. The strength of a city lies more in its hands than in its walls; secure them, and God's blessing upon them, and be secure.

5. Nehemiah himself, and all his men, kept close to their business. The spears were held up, with the sight of them to terrify the enemy, not only from sun to sun, but from twilight to twilight, every day, v. 21. Thus ought we to be always upon our guard against our spiritual enemies, not only (as here) while *it is light*, but when *it is dark*, for they are the *rulers of the darkness of this world*. Nay, so very intent was Nehemiah upon his work, and so fast did he hold his servants to it, that, while the heat of the business lasted, neither he himself, nor his attendants, went into bed, but every night lay and slept in their clothes, (v. 23.) except that they shifted them now and then, either for cleanliness, or in a case of ceremonial pollution. It was a sign that their heart was upon their work, when they could not find time to dress and undress, but resolved they would be at all times ready for service. Then good work is likely to go on successfully, when those that labour in it thus make a business of it.

CHAP. V.

How bravely Nehemiah, as a wise and faithful governor, stood upon his guard against the attacks of enemies abroad, we read in the foregoing chapter. Here we have him no less bold and active to redress grievances at home, and, having kept them from being destroyed by their enemies, to keep them from destroying one another. Here is, I. The complaint which the poor made to him, of the great hardships which the rich (of whom they were forced to borrow money) put upon them, v. 1. 5. II. The effectual course which Nehemiah took both to reform the oppressors, and to relieve the oppressed, v. 6. 13. III. The good example which he himself, as governor, set them of compassion and tenderness, v. 14. 19.

I. **AND** there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews. 2. For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, *are many*: therefore we take up corn *for them*, that we may eat, and live. 3. *Some* also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. 4. There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, *and that upon* our lands and vineyards. 5. Yet now our flesh *is* as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and *some* of our daughters are brought unto bondage *already*, neither *is it* in our power *to redeem them*; for other men have our lands and vineyards.

We have here the tears of the oppressed, which Solomon considered, Eccl. 4. 1. Let us consider them as here they are dropped before Nehemiah, whose office it was, as governor, to *deliver the poor and needy, and rid them out of the hand of the wicked oppressors*, Ps. 82. 4. Hard times and hard hearts made the poor miserable.

I. The times they lived in were hard. There was a dearth of corn, (v. 3.) probably, for want of rain, with which God had chastised their neglect of his house, (Hag. 1. 9. 11.) and the non-payment of their church-dues, Mal. 3. 9, 10. Thus foolish sinful men bring God's judgments upon themselves, and then fret and complain of them. When the markets are high, and provisions scarce and dear, the poor soon feel from it, and are pinched by it. Blessed be God for the mercy, and God deliver us from the sin, of *frugality of bread*, Ezek. 16. 49. That which made the scarcity here complained of the more grievous, was, that their *sons and their daughters were many*, v. 2. The families that were most ne-

cessitous were most numerous; here were the mouths, but where was the meat? Some have estates, and no children to inherit them, others have children, and no estates to leave them; those who have both have reason to be thankful, those who have neither may the more easily be content. Those who have great families, and little substance, must learn to live by faith in God's providence and promise; and those who have little families, and great substance, must *make their abundance a supply for the wants of others*. But this was not all; as corn was dear, so the taxes were high; the king's tribute must be paid, v. 4. This mark of their captivity still remained upon them. Perhaps it was a poll-money that was required, and then, their sons and their daughters being many, it rose the higher. The more they had to maintain, (a hard case!) the more they had to pay. Now, it seems, they had not wherewithal of their own to buy corn and pay taxes, but were necessitated to borrow. Their families came poor out of Babylon, they had been at great expence in building them houses, and had not yet got up their strength when these new burthens came upon them. The straits of poor housekeepers, who make hard shift to get an honest livelihood, and sometimes want what is fitting for them and their families, are well worthy the compassionate consideration of those who, either with their wealth or with their power, are in a capacity to help them.

II. The persons they dealt with were hard. Money must be had, but it must be borrowed, and they that lent them money, taking advantage of their necessity, were very hard upon them, and made a prey of them. 1. They exacted interest from them at twelve per cent. the hundredth part every month, v. 11. If men borrow large sums, to trade with, to increase their stocks, or to purchase land, there is no reason but the lender should share with the borrower in his profit; or if to spend upon their lusts, or repair what they have so spent, why should they not pay for their extravagancies? But if the poor borrow to maintain their families, and we be able to help them, it is certain we ought either to lend freely what they have occasion for, or (if they be not likely to repay it) to give freely something towards it. Nay, 2. They forced them to mortgage to them their lands and houses for the securing of the money, (v. 3.) and not only so, but took the profits of them for interest, (v. 5. compare v. 11.) that by degrees they might make themselves masters of all they had. Yet this was not the worst. 3. They took their children for bond-servants, to be enslaved or sold at pleasure, v. 5. This they complain of most sensibly, as that which touched them in a tender part, and they aggravate it with this, "*Our children are as their children*, as dear to us as their's are to them; not only of the same human nature, and entitled to the honours and liberties of that, (Mal. 2. 10. Job. 31. 15.) but of the same holy nation, free-born Israelites, and dignified with the same privileges. Our flesh carries in it the sacred seal of the covenant of circumcision, as well as the *flesh of our brethren*; yet our heirs must be their slaves, and *it is not in our power to redeem them*." This they make a humble remonstrance of to Nehemiah, not only because they saw he was a great man that *could* relieve them, but a good man that *would*. Whither should the injured poor flee for succour but *to the shields of the earth*? Whither but to the chancery, to the charity, in the royal breast, and those deputed by it for relief against the *sumum jus*—the extremity of the law?

We will leave Nehemiah hearing the complaint, and inquiring into the truth of the complainants' allegations, (for the clamours of the poor are not always just,) while we sit down, and look, (1.) With a gracious compassion upon the oppressed, and lament the hardships which many in the world are groaning under, putting our souls into their souls' stead, and remembering in our prayers and succours them that are burthened, as burthened with them. (2.) With a gracious indignation at the oppressors, and abhorrence of their pride and cruelty, who drink the tears, the blood, of those they have under their feet. But let those who shew no mercy expect *judgment without mercy*. It was an aggravation of the sin of these oppressing Jews, that they were themselves so lately delivered out of the house of bondage, which obliged them in gratitude to *undo the heavy burthen*, Isa. 58. 6.

6. And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. 7. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. 8. And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer. 9. Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? 10. I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury. 11. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive-yards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. 12. Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. 13. Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise.

It should seem, the foregoing complaint was made to Nehemiah, at the time when he had his head and hands as full as possible of the public business about building the wall; yet, perceiving it to be just, he did not reject it because it was unseasonable; he did not chide the petitioners, nor fall into a passion with them, for disturbing him, when they saw how much he had to do; a fault which men of business are too often guilty of; nor did he so much as adjourn the hearing of the causes or proceedings upon it till he had more leisure. The case called for speedy interposition, and therefore he applied himself immediately to the consideration of it, knowing that, let him build Jerusalem's walls ever so high, so thick, so strong, the city could not be safe while such abuses as these were tolerated.

Now observe what method he took for the redress of this grievance, which was so threatening to the public.

I. He was very angry; (v. 6.) he expressed a great displeasure at it, as a very bad thing. Note, It well becomes rulers to shew themselves angry at sin, that by the anger itself they may be excited to their duty, and by the expressions of it others may be deterred from evil.

II. He consulted with himself, v. 7. By this it appears that his anger was not excessive, but kept within bounds, that, though his spirit was provoked, he did not say or do any thing unadvisedly. Before he rebuked the nobles, he consulted with himself what to say, and when, and how. Note, Reproofs must be given with great consideration, that what is well-meant may not come short of its end, for want of being well-managed. It is the *reproof of instruction that giveth life*. Even wise men lose the benefit of their wisdom, sometimes, for want of consulting with themselves, and taking time to deliberate.

III. He rebuked the nobles and rulers, who were the monied men, and whose power perhaps made them the more bold to oppress. Note, Even nobles and rulers, if they do that which is

evil, ought to be told of it by proper persons. Let no man imagine that his dignity sets him above reproof.

IV. He set a great assembly against them; he called the people together, to be witnesses of what he said, and to hear their testimony (which the people will generally be forward to do) against the oppressions and extortions their rulers were guilty of. Ezra and Nehemiah were both of them very wise, good, useful, men, yet, in cases not unlike, there was a great deal of difference between their management: when Ezra was told of the sin of the rulers in marrying strange wives, he rent his clothes, and wept, and prayed, and was hardly persuaded to attempt a reformation, fearing it to be impracticable, for he was a man of a mild tender spirit; when Nehemiah was told of as bad a thing, he kindled immediately, reproached the delinquents, incensed the people against them, and never rested, till, by all the rough methods he could use, he forced them to reform; for he was a man of a hot and eager spirit. Note, 1. Very holy men may differ much from each other in their natural temper, and in other things that result from it. 2. God's work may be done, well done, and successfully, and yet different methods taken in the doing of it; which is a good reason why we should neither arraign the management of others, nor make our own a standard. There are diversities of operation, but the same Spirit.

V. He fairly reasoned the case with them, and shewed them the evil of what they did: the regular way of reforming men's lives, is, to endeavour, in the first place, to convince their consciences. Several things he offered to their consideration, which are so pertinent and just, that it appeared he had consulted with himself. He lays it before them, 1. That those whom they oppressed were their brethren; *Ye exact every one of his brother*; it was bad enough to oppress strangers, but much worse to oppress their poor brethren, from whom the divine law did not allow them to take any usury, Dent. 23. 19, 20. 2. That they were but lately redeemed out of the hand of the heathen; the body of the people was so by the wonderful providence of God, some particular persons among them were so, who, beside their share in the general captivity, were in servitude to heathen masters, and ransomed at the charge of Nehemiah and other pious and well-disposed persons. "Now," says he, "have we taken all this pains to get their liberty out of the hands of the heathen, and shall their own rulers enslave them? What an absurd thing is this! Must we be at the same trouble and expence to redeem them from you, as we were to redeem them from Babylon?" v. 8. Those whom God by his grace has made free, ought not to be again brought under a yoke of bondage, Gal. 5. 1. 1 Cor. 7. 23. 3. That it was a great sin thus to oppress the poor; (v. 9.) *"It is not good that ye do; though you get money by it, you contract guilt by it, and ought ye not to walk in the fear of God?"* Certainly you ought, for you profess religion, and relation to him; and if you do walk in the fear of God, you will not be either covetous of worldly gain, or cruel toward your brethren." They that walk in the fear of God will not dare to do a wicked thing, Job. 31. 13, 14, 23. 4. That it was a great scandal, and a reproach to their profession; *"Consider the reproach of the heathen our enemies, enemies to us, to our God, and to our holy religion.* They will be glad of any occasion to speak against us, and this will give them great occasion; they will say, These Jews, that profess so much devotion to God, see how barbarous they are one to another." Note, (1.) All that profess religion should be very careful that they do nothing to expose themselves to the reproach of them that are without, lest religion be wounded through their sides. (2.) Nothing exposes religion more to the reproach of its enemies, than the worldliness and hard-heartedness of the professors of it. 5. That he himself had set them a better example, (v. 10.) which he enlarges upon afterward, v. 14, &c. They that rigorously insist upon their right themselves, will, with a very ill grace, persuade others to recede from their's.

VI. He earnestly pressed them not only not to make their poor neighbours any more such hard bargains, but to restore that which they had got into their hands, v. 11. See how familiarly he speaks to them; *Let us leave off this usury*, putting himself in, as becomes reprovers, though far from being any way guilty of the

crime. See how earnestly, and yet humbly, he persuades them; *I pray you leave off*; and, *I pray you restore*; though he had authority to command, yet, *for love's sake*, he rather beseeches. See how particularly he presses them to be kind to the poor; to give them up their mortgages, put them again in possession of their estates, remit the interest, and give them time to pay in the principal. He urged them to their loss, yet, urging them to their duty, it would be, at length, to their advantage. What we charitably forgive will be remembered and recompensed, as well as what we charitably give.

VI. He laid them under all the obligations possible to do what he pressed them to. 1. He got a promise from them; (v. 12.) *We will restore them*. 2. He sent for the priests to give them their oath, that they would perform this promise; now that their convictions were strong, and they seemed resolved, he would keep them to it. 3. He bound them by a solemn curse or execration, hoping that would strike some awe upon them; *So let God shake out every man that performeth not this promise*, v. 13. This was a threatening that he would certainly do so, to which the people said, *Amen*, as to those curses at mount Ebal, (Deut. 27.) that their throats might be cut with their own tongues, if they should falsify their engagement, and that by the dread of that they might be kept to their promise: with this *Amen* the people praised the Lord; so far were they from promising with regret, that they promised with all possible expressions of joy and thankfulness. Thus David, when he took God's vows upon him, *sang and gave praise*, Ps. 56. 12. This was well, but that which follows was better; they *did according to this promise*, and adhered to what they had done, not as their ancestors in a like case, who re-enslaved those whom, a little before, they had released, Jer. 34. 10, 11, 18. Good promises are good things, but good performances are all in all.

14. Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that is*, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. 15. But the former governors that *had been* before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God. 16. Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants *were* gathered thither unto the work. 17. Moreover *there were* at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that *are* about us. 18. Now *that* which was prepared *for me* daily *was* one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. 19. Think upon me, my God, for good, *according* to all that I have done for this people.

Nehemiah had mentioned his own practice, as an inducement to the nobles not to burthen the poor, no not with just demands; here he relates more particularly what his practice was, not in pride or vain-glory, or to pass a compliment upon himself, but as an inducement, both to his successors and to the inferior magistrates, to be as tender as might be of the people's ease.

1. He intimates what had been the way of his predecessors, v. 13. He does not name them, because what he had to say of them was not to their honour, and, in such a case, it is good to spare

names; but the people knew how chargeable they had been, and how dear the country paid for all the benefit of their government. The government allows them forty shekels of silver, which was near five pounds, (so much a day, it is probable,) but, beside that, they obliged the people to furnish them with bread and wine, insisting upon it as perquisites of their office, and not only so, but they suffered their servants to squeeze the people, and to get all they could out of them. Note, 1. It is no new thing, for those who are in public places, to seek themselves more than the public welfare, nay, and to serve themselves by the public loss. 2. Masters must be accountable for all the acts of fraud and injustice, violence and oppression, which they conceive at in their servants.

II. He tells us what had been his way. In general, he had not done as the former governors did; he would not, he durst not, *because of the fear of God*. He had an awe of God's majesty, and dread of his wrath. And, 1. That restrained him from oppressing the people; those that truly fear God will not dare to do any thing cruel or unjust. 2. It was purely that which restrained him; he was thus generous, not that he might have praise of men, or serve a turn by his interest in the people, but purely for conscience-sake, because of the fear of God; that will not only be a powerful, but an acceptable, principle both of justice and charity. What a good hand his predecessors made of their place, appeared by the estates they raised; but Nehemiah, for his part, got nothing, except the satisfaction of doing good; *Neither bought we any land*, v. 16. Say not then that he was a bad husband, but that he was a good governor, who aimed not to feather his own nest.

Let us remember the words of the Lord, how he said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*, Acts, 20. 35. And observe here, (1.) How little Nehemiah received of what he might have required; he did the work of the governor, but he did not *eat the bread of the governor*, (v. 14.) did not require it, v. 18. So far was he from extorting more than his due, that he never demanded that, but lived upon what he had got in the king of Persia's court, and his his own estate in Judea: the reason he gives for this piece of self-denial, is, *Because the bondage was heavy upon the people*. He might have used the common excuse for rigour in such cases, that it would be a wrong to his successors not to demand his dues; but, let them look to themselves; he considers the present state of the Jews, and, while they groaned under so much hardship, he could not find in his heart to add to their burthen, but would rather lessen his own estate than ruin them. Note, In our demands, we must consider not only the justice of them, but the ability of those on whom we make them; where there is nothing to be had, we know who loses his right. (2.) How much he gave, which he might have withheld. [1.] *His servants' work*, v. 16. The servants of princes think themselves excused from labour; but Nehemiah's servants, by his order, no doubt, were *all gathered to the work*. Those that have many servants should contrive how they may do good with them, and keep them well employed. [2.] *His own meat*, v. 17, 18. He kept a very good table, not on certain days, but constantly; he had many honourable guests, at least 150 of his own countrymen, persons of the first rank, beside strangers that came to him upon business; and he had plentiful provisions for his guests, beef, and mutton, and fowl, and all sorts of wine. Let those in public places remember that they were preferred, to do good, not to enrich themselves; and let lesser people learn to use hospitality one to another without grudging, 1 Pet. 4. 9.

Lastly, He concludes with a prayer; (v. 19.) *Think upon me, my God, for good*. 1. Nehemiah here mentions what he had done for this people, not in pride, as boasting of himself, nor in passion, as upbraiding them, nor does it appear that he had occasion to do it in his own vindication, as Paul had to relate his like self-denying tenderness toward the Corinthians, but to shame the rulers out of their oppressions; let them learn of him to be neither greedy in their demands, nor paltry in their expences, and then they would have the credit and comfort of it, as he had. 2. He mentions it to God, in prayer, not as if he thought he had hereby merited any favour from God, as a debt, but to shew that he looked not for any recompence of his generosity from men, but

depended upon God only to make up to him what he had lost, and laid out for his honour; and he reckoned the favour of God reward enough; "If God do but *think upon me for good*, I have enough." His thoughts to us-ward are our happiness, Ps. 40. 5. He refers himself to God, to recompense him in such a manner as he pleased; "If men forget me, let my God think on me, and I desire no more."

CHAP. VI.

The cries of oppressed poverty being stilled, we are now to inquire how the building of the wall goes forward, and, in this chapter, we find it carried on with vigour, and finished with joy, notwithstanding the restless attempts of the gates of hell to hinder it. How the Jews' enemies were baffled in their design to put a stop to it by force, we read before, ch. 4. Here we find how their endeavours to drive Nehemiah off from it, were frustrated. I. When they courted him to an interview, with a design to do him a mischief, he would not stir, v. 1..4. II. When they would have made him believe his undertaking was represented as seditious and treasonable, he regarded not the insinuation, v. 5..9. III. When they hired pretended prophets to advise him to retire into the temple for his own safety, still he kept his ground, v. 10..14. IV. Notwithstanding the secret correspondence that was kept up between them and some false and treacherous Jews, the work was finished in a short time, v. 15..19. Such as these were the struggles between the church and its enemies; but great is God's cause, and will be prosperous and victorious.

1. **N**OW it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and *that* there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) 2. That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in *some one of* the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. 3. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? 4. Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner. 5. Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; 6. Wherein *was* written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith *it*, *that* thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. 7. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, *There is* a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together. 8. Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. 9. For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, *O God*, strengthen my hands.

Two plots upon Nehemiah we have here an account of; how cunningly they were laid by his enemies, and how happily frustrated by God's good providence, and his prudence.

I. A plot to trepan him into a snare. The enemies had an account of the good forwardness the work was in, that all the breaches of the wall were made up, so that they looked upon it as good as done; though at that time the *doors of the gates* were off the hinges, v. 1. They must therefore, now or never, by one bold stroke, take off Nehemiah; they heard how well guarded

he was, so that there was no attacking him upon the spot; they will therefore try, by all the arts of wheedling, to get him among them. Observe, 1. With what hellish subtlety they courted him to meet them, not in any city, lest that should have given cause to suspect that they intended to secure him, but in a village in the lot of Benjamin, "*Come, let us meet together to consult about the common interests of our provinces;*" or they would have him think that they coveted his friendship, and would be glad to be better acquainted with him, in order to a good understanding between them, and the settling of a good correspondence. But they thought to do him a mischief; it is probable that he had some secret intelligence given him, that they designed to imprison or murder him; or he knew them so well, that, without breach of charity, he concluded they aimed at his life, and therefore, when they *spoke fair*, he believed them not. 2. See with what heavenly wisdom he declined the motion. His *God did instruct him* to give them that prudent answer by messengers of his own, "*I am doing a great work*, am very busy, and am loath to let the work stand still, while I leave it, to *come down to you*," v. 3. His care, was, that the work might not cease; he knew it would if he left it ever so little; and *why should it cease, while I come down to you?* He says nothing of his jealousies, nor reproaches them for their treacherous design, but gives them a good reason, and one of the true reasons, why he would not come. Compliment must always give way to business. Let those that are tempted to idle merry meetings by their vain companions, thus answer the temptation, "*We have work to do, and must not neglect it.*" Four times they attacked him with the same solicitation, and he as often returned the same answer, which, we may suppose, was very vexatious to them; for really it was the ceasing of the work that they aimed at, and it would make them despair of breaking the undertaking, to see the undertaker so intent upon it. *I answered them* (says he) *after the same manner*; v. 4. Note, We must never suffer ourselves to be overcome, by the greatest importunity, to do any thing sinful or imprudent; but, when we are attacked with the same temptation, must still resist it with the same reason and resolution.

II. A plot to terrify him from his work. Could they but drive him off, the work would cease of course. This therefore Sanballat attempts, but in vain. 1. He endeavours to possess Nehemiah with an apprehension that his undertaking to build the walls of Jerusalem was generally represented as factious and seditious, and would be resented accordingly at court, v. 5..7. The best men, even in their most innocent and excellent performances, have lain under this imputation. This is written to him in an open letter, as a thing generally known and talked of, that it was reported among the nations, and Gashmu will aver it for truth, that Nehemiah was aiming to make himself king, and to shake off the Persian yoke. Note, It is common for that which is the sense only of the malicious, to be falsely represented by them as the sense of the many. Now Sanballat pretends to inform Nehemiah of this as a friend, that he might hasten to court to clear himself, or stay his proceedings, for fear they should be thus misconstrued; at least, upon this surmise, he urges him to give him the meeting, "*Let us take counsel together*, how to quell the report;" hoping by this means either to take him off, or, at least, to take him off from his business. Thus were his words *softer than oil*, and yet *war was in his heart*, and he hoped, like Judas, to kiss and kill. But surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird; Nehemiah was soon aware what they aimed at, to *weaken their hands from the work*, (v. 9.) and therefore not only denied that such things were true, but that they were reported; he was better known than to be thus suspected. 2. Thus he escaped the snare, and kept his ground, nor would he be frightened by winds and clouds from sowing and reaping. Suppose it was thus reported, we must never omit known duty merely for fear it should be misconstrued, but, while we keep a good conscience, let us trust *God with our good name*. But indeed it was not thus reported. God's people, though sufficiently loaded with reproach, yet are not really fallen so low in reputation as *seem* would have them thought to be.

In the midst of his complaint of their malice, in endeavouring to frighten him, and so weaken his hands, he lifts up his heart to Heaven, in this short prayer, *Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.* It is the great support and relief of good people, that, in all their straits and difficulties, they have a good God to go to, from whom, by faith and prayer, they may fetch in grace to silence their fears, and *strengthen their hands*, when their enemies are endeavouring to fill them with fears, and weaken their hands. When, in our Christian work and warfare, we are entering upon any particular services or conflicts, this is a good prayer for us to put up, "I have such a duty to do, such a temptation to grapple with; *now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.*" Some read it, not as a prayer, but as a holy resolution, (for *O God* is supplied in our translation,) *Now therefore I will strengthen my hands.* Note, Christian fortitude will be sharpened by opposition. Every temptation to draw us from our duty should quicken us so much the more to duty.

10. Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who *was* shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. 11. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who *is there*, that, *being as I am*, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. 12. And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13. Therefore *was* he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and *that* they might have *matter* for an evil report, that they might reproach me. 14. My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

The Jews' enemies leave no stone unturned, no way untried, to take Nehemiah off from building the wall about Jerusalem; in order to this, they had tried to fetch him into the country to them, but in vain; now they try to drive him into the temple, for his own safety; let him be any where but at his work. Observing him to be a cautious man, they will endeavour to gain their point by making him cowardly. Observe,

I. How basely the enemies managed this temptation.

1. That which they designed, was, to bring Nehemiah to do a foolish thing, that they might laugh at him, and insult over him for doing it, and so lessen his interest and influence; (v. 13.) *that I should be afraid*, and so they might have *matter for an evil report*, and *might reproach me*. This was indeed doing the Devil's work, who is men's tempter, that he may be their accuser, draws men to sin, that he may glory in their shame. The greatest mischief our enemies can do us, is, to frighten us from our duty, and bring us to do what is sinful.

2. The tools they made use of, were, a pretended prophet and prophetess, whom they hired to persuade Nehemiah to quit his work, and retire for his own safety. The pretended prophet was Shemaiah, of whom it is said that he was shut up in his own house, either under pretence of retirement for meditation, and to consult the mind of God, or to give Nehemiah a sign, in like manner, to make himself a recluse. It should seem Nehemiah had a value for him, for he went to his house to consult with him, v. 10. Other prophets there were, and one prophetess, Noadiah, (v. 14.) that were in the interest of the Jews' enemies, pensioners to them, and traitors to their country. Whether they pretended

to inspiration, does not appear; they do not say, *Thus saith the Lord*, as the false prophets of old did; if not so, yet they would be thought to excel in divine knowledge, and human prudence, and to have uncommon measures of insight and foresight, and were therefore consulted in difficult cases, as prophets had been. These the enemies feed to be of counsel for them. Let us hence take occasion to lament, (1.) The wickedness of such bad men as these prophets; that ever any should be so perfidious as to betray the cause of God and their country, even under the pretence of communion with God, and concern for their country. (2.) The unhappiness of such good men as Nehemiah, who are in danger of being imposed upon by such cheats, and to whom no temptation comes with more force than that which comes under a colour of religion, of revelation, and devotion, and is brought by the hand of prophets.

3. The pretence was plausible. These prophets suggested to Nehemiah, that the enemies would come and slay him, in the night they would slay him, which he had reason enough to believe was true; they would, if they could, if they durst. They pretended to be much concerned for his safety; they were all undone, if any harm should come to him; and therefore they very gravely advised him to hide himself in the temple, till the danger was over; that was a strong and sacred place, where he would be under the special protection of Heaven, Ps. 27. 5. If Nehemiah had been prevailed with to do this, immediately the people would both have left off their work, and thrown down their arms, and every one would have shifted for his own safety; and then the enemies might easily, and without opposition, have demolished the works, broken down the wall again, and so gained their point. Though self-preservation is a fundamental principle of the law of nature, yet that is not always the best and wisest counsel which pretends to go upon that principle.

II. See how bravely Nehemiah vanquished this temptation, and came off a conqueror.

1. He immediately resolved not to yield to it, v. 11. See here, (1.) What his reasonings are: "*Should such a man as I flee?* Shall I desert God's work, or discourage my own workmen, whom I have employed and encouraged? Shall I be over-credulous of report, and over-solicitous about my own life? I, that am the governor, on whom so many eyes are, both of friends and foes? Another might flee, but not I. *Who is there, that, being, as I am*, in my post of honour, and power, and trust, would go into the temple, and lurk there, when business is to be done, yea, though it were to save his life?" Note, When we are tempted to sin, we should remember who, and what, we are, that we may not do any thing unbecoming us, and the profession we make. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel*, Prov. 31. 4. (2.) What was the result of his reasonings: he is at a point, "I will not go in, I will rather die at my work than live in an inglorious retreat from it." Note, Holy courage and magnanimity will engage us, whatever it cost us, never to *decline a good work*, nor ever to *do a bad one*.

2. He was immediately aware of what was the rise of it; (v. 12.) "*I perceived that God had not sent him*, that he gave this advice, not by any divine direction, ordinary or extraordinary, but with a design against me." The wickedness of such mercenary wretches will, sooner or later, be brought to light. Two things Nehemiah says he dreaded in that which he was advised to. (1.) Offending God; *that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin.* Note, Sin is that which, above any thing, we should dread; and a good preservative it is against sin, to be afraid of nothing but sin. (2.) Shaming himself; *that they might reproach me.* Note, Next to the sinfulness of sin, we should dread the scandalousness of it.

3. He humbly begs of God to reckon with them for their base designs upon him; (v. 14.) *My God, think thou upon Tobiah*, and the rest of them, *according to their works*. As, when he had mentioned his own good services, he did not covetously or ambitiously prescribe to God what reward he should give him, but modestly prayed, *Think upon me, my God*; (ch. 5. 19.) so, here, he does not revengefully imprecate any particular judgment upon his enemies, but refers the matter to God; "Thou knowest their hearts, and art the Avenger of falsehood and wrong; take

cognizance of this cause, judge between me and them, and take what way and time thou pleasest to call them to an account for it." Note, Whatever injuries are done us, we must not avenge ourselves, but commit our cause to him that judgeth righteously.

15. So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. 16. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard *thereof*, and all the heathen that *were* about us saw *these things*, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God. 17. Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and *the letters* of Tobiah came unto them. 18. For *there were* many in Judah sworn unto him, because he *was* the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. 19. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. *And* Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

Nehemiah is here finishing the wall of Jerusalem, and yet still has trouble created him by his enemies.

1. Tobiah, and the other adversaries of the Jews, had the mortification to see the wall built up, notwithstanding all their attempts to hinder it. The wall was begun and finished in fifty-two days, and yet, we have reason to believe, they rested on the sabbaths, *v. 15*. Many were employed, and there was room for them; what they did they did cheerfully, and minded their business, because they loved it. The threats of their enemies, which were intended to weaken them, it is likely, quickened them to go on with their work the more vigorously, that they might get it done before the enemy came. Thus, *out of the eater came forth meat*. See what a great deal of work may be done in a little time, if we would set about it in earnest, and keep close to it.

When the enemies heard that the wall was finished, before they thought it was well begun, and when they doubted not but to have put a stop to it, they were *much cast down in their own eyes*, *v. 16*. (1.) They were ashamed of their own confidence, that they should *cause the work to cease*; they were crest-fallen upon the disappointment. (2.) They envied the prosperity and success of the Jews, grieved to see the walls of Jerusalem built, while, it may be, the kings of Persia had not permitted them thus to fortify the cities of Samaria. When Cain envied his brother, his *countenance fell*, Gen. 4. 5. (3.) They despaired of ever doing them the mischief they designed them, of bringing them down, and making a prey of them; and well they might, for they perceived, by the wonderful success, *that the work was wrought of God*. Even these heathens had so much sense, as, [1.] To see a special providence of God conversant about the affairs of the church, when they did remarkably prosper. They *said among the heathen*, *The Lord has done great things for them*, it is his doing, Ps. 126. 2. God fighteth for Israel, and worketh with them. [2.] To believe that God's work would be perfect; when they perceived that the *work was of God*, they expected no other than that it would go on and prosper. [3.] To conclude, that, if it were of God, it was to no purpose to think of opposing it, it would certainly prevail, and be victorious.

2. Nehemiah had the vexation, notwithstanding this, to see some of his own people treacherously corresponding with Tobiah, and serving his interest; and a great grief and discouragement, no doubt, it was to him. (1.) Even of the nobles of Judah, there were those who had so little sense of honour, and their country's good, as to communicate with Tobiah by letter, *v. 17*. They wrote with all the freedom and familiarity of friends to him, and welcomed his letters to them. Could nobles do a thing so mean? nobles of Judah, so wicked a thing? It seems, great men are not

always wise, not always honest. (2.) Many in Judah were in a strict, but secret, confederacy with him, to advance the interest of his country, though it would certainly be the ruin of their own. They were sworn unto him, not as their prince, but as their friend and ally, because both he and his son had married daughters of Israel, *v. 18*. See the mischief of marrying with strangers; for one heathen that was converted by it, ten Jews were perverted. When once they became akin to Tobiah, they soon became sworn to him. A sinful love leads to a sinful league. (3.) They had the impudence to court Nehemiah himself into a friendship with him; "*They reported his good deeds before me*; represented him as an ingenuous person, and well worthy my acquaintance; as an honest person, and one that I might confide in." We are bid, indeed, to *speak ill of no man*, but never to speak well of bad men; *they that forsake the law praise the wicked*, Prov. 28. 4. (4.) They were so false as to betray Nehemiah's counsels to him; they uttered Nehemiah's words to him, perverting them, no doubt, and putting false constructions upon them, which furnished Tobiah with matter for letters to put him in fear, and so drive him from his work, and discourage him in it. Thus were all their thoughts against him for evil, yet God thought upon him for good.

CHAP. VII.

The success of one good design, for God and our generation, should encourage us to proceed, and form some other: Nehemiah did so; having fortified Jerusalem with gates and walls, his next care is, 1. To see the city well kept, v. 1. 4. 11. To see it well peopled; in order whereunto, he here reviews, and calls over, the register of the children of the captivity, the families that returned at first, and records it, v. 5. 73. It is the same, in effect, with that which we had, Ezra, 2. What use he made of it, we shall find afterward, when he brought one of ten to live in Jerusalem, ch. 11. 1.

1. **N**OW it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed, 2. That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he *was* a faithful man, and feared God above many. 3. And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened, until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar *them*: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one *to be over* against his house. 4. Now the city *was* large and great; but the people *were* few therein, and the houses *were* not builded.

God saith, concerning his church, (Isa. 62. 6.) *I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem*; that is Nehemiah's care here; for dead walls, without living watchmen, are but a poor defence to a city.

1. He appointed the porters, singers, and Levites, in their places, to their work; it is meant of their work in general, which was to attend the temple service, that had been neglected in some degree, but now was revived. God's worship is the defence of a place, and his ministers, when they mind their duty, are watchmen on the walls. Or, in particular, he ordered them to be ready against the wall was to be dedicated, that they might perform that service in an orderly and solemn manner; and the dedication of it was its strength. That is likely to be beneficial to us which is devoted to God.

2. He appointed two governors, or consuls, to whom he committed the care of the city, and gave them in charge to provide for the public peace and safety. Hanani, his brother, who came to him with the tidings of the desolations of Jerusalem, was one, a man of approved integrity, and affection to his country; the other was Hananiah, that had been ruler of the palace, for he that has approved himself faithful in less shall be intrusted with more.

Of this Hananiah it is said, that he was a *faithful man, and one that feared God above many*, v. 2. Note, (1.) Among those who fear God truly, there are some who fear him greatly, and excel others in the expressions and instances of that fear; and they are worthy a double portion of that honour which is due to them that *fear the Lord*, Ps. 15. 4. There were many in Jerusalem that feared God, but this good man was more eminent for religion and serious godliness than any. (2.) Those that fear God, must evidence it by their being faithful to all men, and universally conscientious. (3.) God's Jerusalem is then likely to flourish, when those rule in it, and have charge of it, who excel in virtue, and are eminent both for godliness and honesty. It is supposed, by some, that Nehemiah was now about to return to the Persian court, to have his commission renewed, and that he left these two worthy men in charge with the affairs of the city in his absence. Good governors, when and where they cannot act themselves, must be very careful whom they depute.

3. He gave orders about the shutting of the gates, and the guarding of the walls, v. 3, 4. See here, (1.) What the present state of Jerusalem was. The city, in compass, was large and great, the walls inclosed the same ground as formerly, but much of it lay waste, for the houses were not built, few, at least, in comparison with what had been; so that Nehemiah walled the city in faith, and with an eye to that promise of the replenishing of it, which God had lately made by the prophet, Zech. 8. 3, &c. Though the people were now few, he believed they would be multiplied, and therefore built the walls so as to make room for them; had he not depended upon this, he might have thought walls without a city as great a reproach as a city without walls. (2.) What was the care of Nehemiah for it; he ordered the rulers of the city themselves, [1.] To stand by, and see the city-gates shut up and barred every night; for in vain had they a wall, if they were careless of their gates. [2.] To take care that they should not be opened in the morning, till they could see that all was clear and quiet. [3.] To set sentinels upon the walls, or elsewhere, at convenient distances, who should, in case of the approach of the enemy, give timely notice to the city of the danger; and, as it came to their turn to watch, they must post themselves *over against their own houses*, because of them, it might be presumed, they would be in a particular manner careful. The public safety depends upon every one's particular care to guard himself and his own family against sin, that common enemy. It is every one's interest to watch, but many understand not their own interest; it is therefore incumbent upon magistrates to appoint watches. And as this people had lately found God with them in their building, (else they had built in vain,) so, now that the wall was built, no doubt, they were made sensible that *except the Lord kept the city, the watchman waked but in vain*, Ps. 127. 1, 2.

5. And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein, 6. These *are* the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city; 7. Who came with Zerubbabel; Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nabamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number, *I say*, of the men of the people of Israel *was this*; 8. The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. 9. The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 10. The children of Arah, six hundred fifty

and two. 11. The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand and eight hundred *and* eighteen. 12. The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 13. The children of Zattu, eight hundred forty and five. 14. The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. 15. The children of Binnui, six hundred forty and eight. 16. The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and eight. 17. The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty and two. 18. The children of Adonikam, six hundred threescore and seven. 19. The children of Bigvai, two thousand threescore and seven. 20. The children of Adin, six hundred fifty and five. 21. The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 22. The children of Hashum, three hundred twenty and eight. 23. The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and four. 24. The children of Hariph, an hundred and twelve. 25. The children of Gibeon, ninety and five. 26. The men of Beth-lehem and Netophah, an hundred fourscore and eight. 27. The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. 28. The men of Beth-azmaveth, forty and two. 29. The men of Kirjath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty and three. 30. The men of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 31. The men of Michmas, an hundred and twenty and two. 32. The men of Bethel and Ai, an hundred twenty and three. 33. The men of the other Nebo, fifty and two. 34. The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 35. The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 36. The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. 37. The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and one. 38. The children of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty. 39. The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. 40. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. 41. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. 42. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen. 43. The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, *and* of the children of Hodevah, seventy and four. 44. The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred forty and eight. 45. The porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, an hundred thirty and eight. 46. The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hashupha, the children of Tabbaoth, 47. The children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon, 48. The children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Shalmai, 49. The children of

Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar. 50. The children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, 51. The children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Phaseah, 52. The children of Besai, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephishesim, 53. The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, 54. The children of Bazlith, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, 55. The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Tamah, 56. The children of Nezhiah, the children of Hatipha. 57. The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida, 58. The children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, 59. The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Amon. 60. All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, *were* three hundred ninety and two. 61. And these *were* they which went up *also* from Tel-melah, Tel-haresha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, nor their seed, whether they *were* of Israel. 62. The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred forty and two. 63. And of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, which took *one* of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite to wife, and was called after their name. 64. These sought their register *among* those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. 65. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim. 66. The whole congregation together *was* forty and two thousand three hundred and three-score, 67. Beside their man-servants and their maid-servants, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and they had two hundred forty and five singing-men and singing-women. 68. Their horses, seven hundred thirty and six: their mules, two hundred forty and five: 69. *Their* camels, four hundred thirty and five: six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses. 70. And some of the chief of the fathers gave unto the work. The Tirshatha gave to the treasure a thousand drams of gold, fifty basins, five hundred and thirty priests' garments. 71. And *some* of the chief of the fathers gave to the treasure of the work twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pound of silver. 72. And *that* which the rest of the people gave *was* twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand pound of silver, and threescore and seven priests' garments. 73. So the priests, and the Levites, and the

porters, and the singers, and *some* of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel *were* in their cities.

We have here another good project of Nehemiah's; for wise and zealous men will be always contriving something or other for the glory of God and the edification of his church. He knew very well that the safety of a city, under God, depends more upon the number and valour of the inhabitants, than upon the height or strength of its walls; and therefore, observing that the people were few that dwelt in it, he thought fit to take an account of the people, that he might find what families had formerly had their settlement in Jerusalem, but were now removed into the country, that he might bring them back; and what families could any other way be influenced by their religion, or by their business, to come and rebuild the houses in Jerusalem, and dwell in them. So little reason have we to wish that we may be placed alone in the earth, or in Jerusalem itself, that much of our safety and comfort depend upon our neighbours and friends; the more the stronger, the more the merrier. It is wisdom of the governors of a nation, to keep the balance even between city and country; that the metropolis be not so extravagantly large as to drain and impoverish the country, nor yet so weak as not to be able to protect it. Now observe,

I. Whence this good design of Nehemiah's came; he owns, (v.5.) *My God put it into my heart.* Note, Whatever good motion is in our minds, either prudent or pious, we must acknowledge it to come from God. It was he that *put it into our hearts*; for every good gift and every good work are from above; he gives knowledge, he gives grace; all is of him, and therefore all must be to him. What is done by human prudence, must be ascribed to the direction of Divine Providence; he that teaches the husbandman his discretion. (Isa. 28. 26.) teaches the statesman his.

II. What method he took in prosecution of it.

1. He called the rulers together, and the people, that he might have an account of the present state of their families, their number, and strength, and where they were settled; which, it is likely, when he summoned them to come together, he ordered them to bring along with them out of their several districts. And I doubt there were not so many but that it might be soon done.

2. He reviewed the old register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and compared the present accounts with that; and here we have the repetition of that out of Ezra, 2. The title is the same here, (v. 6, 7.) as there, (v. 1, 2.) *These are the children of the promise, &c.* Two things are here repeated and recorded a second time from thence; (1.) The names and numbers of their several families; and, (2.) Their oblations to the service of the temple. The repetition of these accounts may intimate to us the delight which the great God is pleased to take in the persons, families, and services, of his spiritual Israel, and the particular notice he takes of them. He knows them that are his, knows them all, knows them by name, has his eye on the register of those children of the captivity, and does all according to the ancient counsel of his will concerning them.

[1.] Here is an account of the heads of the several families that first came up, v. 6. . 69. As to this, *First*, Though it seem of little use to us now, yet then it was of great use, to compare what they had been with what they now were. We may suppose they were much increased by this time; but it would do well for them to remember their small beginnings, that they might acknowledge God in multiplying their families, and building them up. By this means, likewise, their genealogies would be preserved, and the distinction of their families kept up, till the Messiah should come, and then an end be put to all their genealogies, which were preserved for his sake, but afterward were endless. But, *Secondly*, There are many differences in the numbers between this catalogue and that in Ezra. Most of them indeed are exactly the same, and some others within a very few under or over; (one or two perhaps;) and therefore I cannot think, as some do, that that was the number

of these families at their first coming, this as they were now, which was at least forty years after, (some make it much more,) for we cannot suppose so many families to be not at all, or but little, altered in their numbers in all that time; therefore what differences there are, we may suppose to arise either from the mistakes of transcribers, which easily happen in numbers, or from the diversity of the copies from which they were taken; or perhaps one was the account of them when they set out from Babylon with Zerubbabel, the other when they came to Jerusalem. The sums total are all just the same there and here, except of the singing men and singing women, which there are 200, here 245. Those were not of such importance, as that they should keep any strict account of them.

[2.] Here is an account of the offerings which were given toward the work of God, v. 70, &c. This differs much from that, Ezra, 2. 68, 69. and it may be questioned whether it refers to the same contribution; here, the Tirshatha, or chief governor, begins the offering, who there was not mentioned. And the single sum mentioned there exceeds all those here put together; yet it is probable that it was the same, but that followed one copy of the lists, this another; for the last verse is the same here that it was Ezra, 2. 70. adding *ch. 3. 1.* Blessed be God that our faith and hope are not built upon the niceties of names and numbers, genealogy and chronology, but on the great things of the law and gospel. Whatever is given to the work of God, he is not unrighteous to forget it; nor shall even a cup of cold water, wherewith he is honoured, go without its reward.

CHAP. VIII.

Ezra came up out of Babylon thirteen years before Nehemiah came, yet we have here a piece of good work which he did, that might have been done before, but was not, till Nehemiah came, who, though he was not such a scholar, nor such a divine, as Ezra, nor such a scribe in the law of his God, yet was a man of a more lively active spirit. His zeal set Ezra's learning on work, and then great things were done; as we find here, where we have, I. The public and solemn reading and expounding of the law, v. 1. . 8. II. The joy which the people were ordered to express upon that occasion, v. 9. . 12. III. The solemn keeping of the feast of tabernacles according to the law, v. 13. . 18.

1. **A**ND all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water-gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. 2. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. 3. And he read therein before the street that *was* before the water-gate from the morning until mid-day, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law. 4. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Maltithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pelaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. 5. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: 6. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed

their heads, and worshipped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground. 7. Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiab, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people *stood* in their place. 8. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading.

We have here an account of a solemn religious assembly, and the good work that was done in that assembly, to the honour of God, and the edification of the church.

I. The time of it was the *first day of the seventh month, v. 2.* That was the day of the *feast of trumpets*, which is called a *sabbath*, and on which they were to have a *holy convocation*, Lev. 23. 24. Numb. 29. 1. But that was not all; it was on that day that the altar was set up, and they began to offer their burnt-offerings after their return out of captivity, a late mercy in the memory of many then living; in a thankful remembrance of that, it is likely, they had kept this feast, ever since, with more than ordinary solemnity. Divine favours, which are fresh in mind, and which we ourselves have been witnesses of, should be, and usually are, most affecting.

II. The place was in the *street that was before the water-gate, (v. 1.)* a spacious broad street, able to contain so great a multitude, which the court of the temple was not, for, probably, it was not now built near so large as it had been in Solomon's time. Sacrifices were to be offered only at the door of the temple, but praying and praising, and preaching, were, and are, services of religion as acceptably performed in one place as in another. When this congregation was thus met in the street of the city, no doubt, God was with them.

III. The persons that met, were, all the people, who were not compelled to come, but voluntarily gathered themselves together by common agreement, as one man: not only men came, but women and children, even as many as were capable of understanding what they heard. Masters of families should bring their families with them to the public worship of God. Women and children have souls to save, and are therefore concerned to acquaint themselves with the word of God, and attend on the means of knowledge and grace. Little ones, as they come to the exercise of reason, must be trained up in the exercises of religion.

IV. The master of this assembly was Ezra the priest, he presided in this service. None so fit as he to expound and preach, who was such a ready scribe in the law of his God. 1. His call to the service was very clear; for, being in office as a priest, and qualified as a scribe, the *people spake to him to bring the book of the law*, and read it to them, v. 1. God gave him ability and authority, and then the people gave him opportunity and invitation. Knowledge is spiritual alms, which they that are able should give to every one that needs, to every one that asks. 2. His post was very convenient; he stood in a pulpit or tower of wood, *which they had made for the word*; so it is in the original; *for the preaching of the word*, that what he said might be the more gracefully delivered, and the better heard, and that the eyes of the hearers might be upon him, which would engage their attention; as Luke, 4. 20. 3. He had several assistants, some that stood with him; (v. 4.) six on his right hand, and seven on his left: either his pulpit was so contrived as to hold them all in a row, as in a gallery, (but then it would scarcely have been called a *tower*;) or they had desks a degree lower. Some think that he appointed them to read when he was weary; at least, his taking them as assessors with him, put an honour upon them before the people, in order to their being employed in the same service another time. Others who are mentioned, (v. 7.) seem to have been employed at the same time in other places near at hand, to read and expound to those who could not come within hearing of Ezra. **OF**

those also there were thirteen priests, whose lips were to keep knowledge, Mal. 2. 7. It is a great mercy to a people thus to be furnished with ministers that are apt to teach; happy was Ezra in having such assistants as these, and happy those in having such a guide as Ezra.

V. The religious exercises performed in this assembly were not ceremonial, but moral, praying and preaching. Ezra, as president of the assembly, was, 1. *The people's mouth to God*, and they affectionately *joined with him*, v. 6. He blessed the Lord as the great God, gave honour to him, by praising his perfections, and praying for his favour; and the people, in token of their concurrence with him, both in prayers and praises, said, *Amen, Amen*, and lifted up their hands, in token of their desire being toward God, and all their expectation from him; they also bowed their heads, in token of their reverence of him and subjection to him. Thus must we adore God, and address ourselves to him, when we are going to read and hear the word of God, as those that see God, in his word, very great and very good. 2. *God's mouth to the people*, and they attentively hearkened to him. This was the chief business of the solemnity, and observe,

(1.) *Ezra brought the law before the congregation*, v. 2. He had taken care to provide himself with the best and most correct copies of the law; and what he had laid up for his own use and satisfaction, he here brought forth, as a good householder, out of his treasury, for the benefit of the church. Observe, [1.] The book of the law is not to be confined to the scribes' studies, but to be *brought before the congregation*, and read to them in their own language. [2.] Ministers, when they go to the pulpit, should take their Bibles with them; Ezra did so; thence they must fetch their knowledge, and according to that rule they must speak, and must shew that they do so. See 2 Chron. 17. 9.

(2.) He opened the book with great reverence and solemnity, *in the sight of all the people*, v. 5. He brought it forth with a sense of the great mercy of God to them in giving them that book; he opened it with a sense of his mercy to them in giving them leave to read it, that it was not a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed. The *taking of a book*, and the *opening of the seals*, we find celebrated with joy and praise, Rev. 5. 9. Let us learn to address ourselves to the services of religion with solemn stops and pauses, and not to go about them rashly; let us consider what we are doing, when we take God's book into our hands, and open it, and so also when we bow our knees in prayer; and what we do, let us do it deliberately, Eccl. 5. 1.

(3.) He and others read in the book of the law, *from morning till noon*, (v. 3.) and they read distinctly, v. 3. Reading the scriptures in religious assemblies is an ordinance of God, whereby he is honoured, and his church edified. And, upon special occasions, we must be willing to attend for many hours together on the reading and expounding of the word of God: they here were thus employed six hours. Let those that read and preach the word, learn also to deliver themselves distinctly; as those who understand what they say, and are affected with it themselves, and who desire that those they speak to may understand it, retain it, and be affected with it likewise. *It is a snare for a man to devour that which is holy*.

(4.) What they read they expounded, shewed the intent and meaning of it, and what use was to be made of it; they gave the sense in other words, that they might *cause the people to understand the reading*, v. 7, 8. Note, [1.] It is requisite that those who hear the word should understand it, else it is to them but an empty sound of words, Matth. 24. 15. [2.] It is therefore required of those who are teachers by office, that they explain the word, and give the sense of it. *Understandest thou what thou readest?* and, *Have ye understood all these things?* are good questions to be put to the hearers; but, *How should we, except some one guide us?* is as proper a question for them to put to their teachers, Acts, 8. 30, 31. Reading is good, and preaching good, but expounding brings the reading and the preaching together, which makes the reading the more intelligible, and the preaching the more convincing.

(5.) The people conducted themselves very properly, when the word was read and opened to them.

[1.] With great reverence. When Ezra opened the book, *all the people stood up*, (v. 5.) thereby shewing respect both to Ezra and to the word he was about to read. It becomes servants to stand when their master speaks to them; in honour to their master, and to shew a readiness to do as they are bidden.

[2.] With great fixedness and composedness they *stood in their place*; (v. 7.) several ministers were reading and expounding at some distance from each other, and each of the people kept his post, did not go to hear first one and then another, to make remarks upon them, but stood in his place, that he might neither give disturbance to another, nor receive any disturbance himself.

[3.] With great attention and close application of mind; *the ears of all the people were unto the book of the law*, (v. 3.) were even chained to it, they heard readily, and minded every word. The word of God commands attention, and deserves it. If through carelessness we let much slip in hearing, there is danger that through forgetfulness we shall let all slip after hearing.

9. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. 10. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for *this day is holy unto our Lord*: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. 11. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. 12. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

We may observe here,

I. How the people were wounded with the words of the law that were read to them. The law works death, and speaks terror, shews men their sins, and their misery and danger because of sin, and thunders a curse against every one that continues not in every part of his duty. Therefore, when they heard it, they *all wept*; (v. 9.) it was a good sign that their hearts were tender, like Josiah's, when he heard the words of the law. They wept to think how they had offended God, and exposed themselves, by their many violations of the law; when some wept, all wept, for they all saw themselves guilty before God.

II. How they were healed and comforted with the words of peace that were spoken to them. It was well that they were so much affected with the word of God, and received the impressions of it; but they must not exceed in their mourning; especially not at this time, because the day was holy to the Lord, it was one of the solemn feasts, on which it was their duty to rejoice. And even sorrow for sin must not hinder our joy in God, but rather lead to it, and prepare us for it.

1. The masters of the assembly endeavoured to pacify them, and encourage them. Now Nehemiah is brought in, and not before, in this chapter; he took notice of the people's weeping. Ezra was pleased to see them so affected with the word, but Nehemiah observed to him, and Ezra concurred in the thought, that it was now unseasonable; this day was holy, it is called a *sabbath*, (Lev. 23. 24.) and therefore was to be celebrated with joy and praise, not as if it were a day to afflict the souls. (1.) They forbade the people to *mourn and weep*; (v. 9.) *Be not sorry*; (v. 10.) *Hold your peace, neither be ye grieved*, v. 11. Every thing is beautiful in its season; as we must not be merry when God calls

to mourning, so we must not frighten and afflict ourselves when God has given us occasion to rejoice. Even sorrow for sin must not grow so excessive, as to hinder our joy in God, and our cheerfulness in his service. (2.) They commanded them to testify their joy, to put on the garments of praise, instead of the spirit of heaviness. They allowed them, in token of their joy, to feast themselves, to eat and drink better than on other days, to eat the fat, and drink the sweet: but then it must be, [1.] With charity to the poor; "Send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared, that your abundance may supply their want; that they may rejoice with you, and their loins may bless you." Christ directs those that make feasts to invite their poor neighbours, Luke, 14. 13. But it is especially the duty of a religious feast, as well as of a religious fast, to draw out the soul to the hungry, Isa. 58. 7, 10. God's bounty should make us bountiful. Many will eat the fat, and drink the sweet, themselves, even to excess, that will never allow portions, nor scarcely crumbs, to the poor, who may read their own doom in the parable of the rich man, Luke, 16. 19, &c. But such know not, or consider not, what God gave them their estates for. Observe, We must not only give to those that offer themselves, but send to those that are out of sight. *The liberal devises liberal things*, and seeks objects of charity. [2.] It must be with piety and devotion; the joy of the Lord is your strength. Let it not be a carnal sensual joy, but holy and spiritual, the joy of the Lord, joy in the goodness of God, under the conduct and government of the grace of God; joy arising from our interest in the love and favour of God, and the tokens of his favour. This joy will be your strength, therefore encourage it; it will be your strength, First, For the performance of the other duties of the feast; the more cheerful we are in our religious exercises, the more we shall abound in them. Secondly, For all that which you have to do, in conformity to the law of God which has been read to you. Holy joy will be oil to the wheels of our obedience. Thirdly, For the resisting of your enemies that are plotting against you. The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies, and put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks.

2. The assembly complied with the directions that were given them. Their weeping was stilled, (v. 11.) and they made great mirth, v. 12. Note, We ought always to have such a command of every passion, as that, however it may break out, it may soon be restrained and called in again, when we are convinced that it is either unreasonable or unseasonable. *He that hath such a rule as this over his own spirit, is better than the mighty.* Observe, (1.) After they had wept, they rejoiced; holy mourning makes way for holy mirth; they that sow in tears, shall reap in joy; they that tremble at the convictions of the word, may triumph in the consolations of it. (2.) The ground of their joy was very good; they made mirth, not because they had the fat to eat, and the sweet to drink, and a deal of good company, but because they had understood the words that were declared to them. Note, [1.] To have the holy scriptures with us, and helps to understand them, is a very great mercy, which we have abundant reason to rejoice in. Bibles and ministers are the joy of God's Israel. [2.] The better we understand the word of God, the more comfort we shall find in it; for the darkness of trouble arises from the darkness of ignorance and mistake. When the words were first declared to them, they wept; but, when they understood them, they rejoiced; finding, at length, precious promises made to those who repented and reformed, and that therefore there was hope in Israel.

13. And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. 14. And he found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh

month: 15. And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive-branches, and pine-branches, and myrtle-branches, and palm-branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. 16. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water-gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. 17. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. 18. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

We have here,

1. The people's renewed attendance upon the word. They had spent the greatest part of one day in praying and hearing, and yet were so far from being weary of that new moon and sabbath, that, the next day after, though it was no festival, the chief of them came together again to hear Ezra expound, (v. 13.) which they found more delightful and gainful than any worldly pleasure or profit whatsoever. Note, The more we converse with the word of God, if we rightly understand it, and be affected with it, the more we shall covet to converse with it, and to increase in our acquaintance with it, saying, *How sweet are thy words unto my mouth!* They that understand the scriptures well, will still be desirous to understand them better. Now the priests and the Levites themselves came with the chief of the people to Ezra, that prince of expositors, to understand the words of the law, or, as it is in the margin, *that they might instruct in the words of the law*; they came to be taught themselves, that they might be qualified to teach others. Observe, 1. Though, on the first day, Ezra's humility had set them on his right hand, and on his left, as teachers with him, (v. 4, 7.) yet now, they being by trial made more sensible than ever of their own deficiencies, and his excellencies, on the second day, their humility set them at Ezra's feet, as learners of him. 2. Those that would teach others, must themselves receive instruction. Priests and Levites must be taught first, and then teach.

II. The people's ready obedience to the word, in one particular instance, as soon as they were made sensible of their duty therein. It is probable that Ezra, after the wisdom of his God that was in his hand, (Ezra, 7. 25.) when they applied themselves to him for instruction out of the law on the second day of the seventh month, read to them those laws which concerned the feasts of that month, and, among the rest, that of the feast of tabernacles, Lev. 23. 34. Deut. 16. 13. Ministers should preach not only that which is true and good, but that which is seasonable, directing to the work of the day in its day.

Here is, 1. The divine appointment of the feast of tabernacles reviewed, v. 14, 15. They found written in the law a commandment concerning it. They that diligently search the scriptures, will find those things written there which they had forgotten, or not duly considered. This feast of tabernacles was a memorial of their dwelling in tents in the wilderness, a representation of our tabernacle-state in this world, and a type of the holy joy of the gospel-church. The conversion of the nations to the faith of Christ is foretold under the figure of this feast; (Zech. 14. 16.) they shall come to keep the feast of tabernacles, as having here

no continuing city. This feast was to be proclaimed in all their cities. The people were themselves to fetch boughs of trees, (they of Jerusalem fetched them from the mount of Olives,) and to make booths, or arbours, of them, in which they were to lodge, (as much as the weather would permit,) and to make merry during the feast.

2. This appointment religiously observed, v. 16, 17. Then we read and hear the word acceptably and profitably, when we do according to what is written therein; when what appears to be our duty, after it has been neglected, is revived.

(1.) They observed the ceremony; they sat in booths, which the priests and Levites set up in the courts of the temple: those that had houses of their own, set up booths on the roofs of them, or in their courts; and those that had not such conveniences, set them up in the streets. This feast had usually been observed, (2 Chron. 5. 3. Ezra, 3. 4.) but never with such solemnity as now, since Joshua's time, when they were newly settled, as they were now newly re-settled in Canaan. That man loves his house too well, that cannot find in his heart to quit it, a while, in compliance either with an ordinance or with a providence of God.

(2.) They minded the substance; else the ceremony, how significant soever, had been insignificant. [1.] They did it with gladness; with very great gladness, rejoicing in God, and his goodness to them. All their holy feasts, but this especially, were to be celebrated with joy, which would be much for the honour of God, and their own encouragement in his service. [2.] They attended the reading and expounding of the word of God, during all the days of the feast, v. 18. They improved their leisure for this good work: spare hours cannot be better spent than in studying the scriptures, and conversing with them. At this feast of tabernacles, God appointed the law to be read, once in seven years; whether this was that year of release in which that service was to be performed, (Deut. 31. 10, 11.) does not appear; however, they spent all the days of the feast in that good work, and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, as God had appointed, in which they finished the solemnity the 22d day of the month, yet did not scatter, for the 24th day was appointed to be spent in fasting and prayer. Holy joy must not indispose us for godly sorrow, any more than godly sorrow for holy joy.

CHAP. IX.

The tenth day of the seventh month, between the feast of trumpets, (ch. 8. 2.) and the feast of tabernacles, (v. 14.) was appointed to be the day of atonement; we have no reason to think but that it was religiously observed, though it is not mentioned. But here we have an account of an occasional fast that was kept a fortnight after that, with reference to the present posture of their affairs, and it was, as that, a day of humiliation. There is a time to weep as well as a time to laugh. We have here an account, I. How this fast was observed, v. 1. 3. II. What were the heads of the prayer that was made to God on that occasion, wherein they made a thankful acknowledgment of God's mercies, a penitent confession of sin, and a humble submission to the righteous hand of God in the judgments that were brought upon them, concluding with a solemn resolution of new obedience, v. 4. 38.

1. **N**OW in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. 2. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. 3. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

We have here a general account of a public fast which the children of Israel kept, probably by order from Nehemiah, by and with the advice and consent of the chief of the fathers. It was a fast that men appointed, but such a fast as God had chosen; for,

1. It was a day to afflict the soul, Isa. 58. 5. Probably, they assembled in the courts of the temple, and they there appeared in sackcloth, and in the posture of mourners, with earth on their heads, v. 1. By those outward expressions of sorrow and humiliation they gave glory to God, took shame to themselves, and stirred up one another to repentance. They were restrained from weeping, ch. 8. 9. but now they were directed to weep. The joy of our holy feasts must give way to the sorrow of our solemn fasts, when they come. Every thing is beautiful in its season.

2. It was a day to loose the bands of wickedness, and that is the fast that God has chosen, Isa. 58. 6. Without this, spreading sackcloth and ashes under us is but a jest. The seed of Israel, because they were a holy seed, appropriated to God, and more excellent than their neighbours, separated themselves from all strangers, with whom they had mingled themselves, and joined in affinity, v. 2. Ezra had separated them from their strange wives some years before, but they had relapsed into the same sin, and had either made marriages, or, at least, made friendships, with them, and contracted such an intimacy as was a snare to them. But now they separated themselves from the strange children, as well as from the strange wives. They that intend by prayers and covenants to join themselves to God, must separate themselves from sin and sinners; for *what communion hath light with darkness?*

3. It was a day of communion with God; they fasted to him, even to him; (Zech. 7. 5.) for, (1.) They spake to him in prayer, offered their pious and devout affections to him, in the confession of sin, and the adoration of him as the Lord and their God. Fasting without prayer, is a body without a soul, a worthless carcase. (2.) They heard him speaking to them by his word, for they read in the book of the law, which is very proper on fasting days, that, in the glass of the law, we may see our deformities and defilements, and know what to acknowledge, and what to amend. The word will direct and quicken prayer, for by it the Spirit helps our praying infirmities. Observe how the time was equally divided between these two. Three hours (for that is the fourth part of a day) they spent in reading, expounding, and applying the scriptures; and three hours in confessing sin, and praying; so that they stayed together six hours, and spent all the time in the solemn acts of religion, without saying, *Behold what a weariness is it!* The varying of the exercises made it the less tedious, and, as the word they read would furnish them with matter for prayer, so prayer would make the word the more profitable. Bishop Patrick thinks that they spent the whole twelve hours of the day in devotion, that from six o'clock in the morning till nine they read, and then from nine to twelve they prayed; from twelve to three they read again, and from three till six at night they prayed again. The work of a fast day is good work, and therefore we should endeavour to make a day's work, a good day's work, of it.

4. Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God. 5. Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabnah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethabiah, said, Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. 6. Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee. 7. Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; 8. And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and

madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give *it*, *I say*, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou *art* righteous: 9. And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; 10. And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as *it is* this day. 11. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters. 12. Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. 13. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: 14. And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant: 15. And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them. 16. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, 17. And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou *art* a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. 18. Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This *is* thy god that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; 19. Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness; the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. 20. Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. 21. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, *so that* they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. 22. Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. 23. Their children also mul-

tipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess *it*. 24. So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. 25. And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and olive-yards, and fruit-trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. 26. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind they backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations. 27. Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies. 28. But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore ledest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies; 29. And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear. 30. Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands. 31. Nevertheless, for thy great mercies' sake, thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou *art* a gracious and merciful God. 32. Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. 33. Howbeit thou *art* just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: 34. Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith

thou didst testify against them. 35. For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works. 36. Behold, we *are* servants this day, and *for* the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof, and the good thereof, behold, we *are* servants in it: 37. And it yielded much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we *are* in great distress. 38. And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.

We have here an account how the work of this fast-day was carried on.

I. The names of the ministers that were employed. They are twice named, (v. 4, 6.) only with some variation of the names. Either they prayed successively, according to that rule which the apostle gives, (1 Cor. 14. 31.) *Ye may all prophesy one by one*; or, as some think, there were eight several congregations, at some distance from each other, and each had a Levite to preside in it.

II. The work itself they employed themselves in; 1. They prayed to God, cried to him with a loud voice, (v. 4.) for the pardon of the sins of Israel, and God's favour to them. They cried aloud, not that God might the better hear them, as Baal's worshippers, but that the people might, and to excite their fervency. 2. They praised God; for the work of praise is not unseasonable on a fast-day: in all acts of devotion, we must aim at this, *to give unto God the glory due to his name*.

The summary of their prayers we have here upon record; whether drawn up before, as a directory to the Levites what to enlarge on, or recollected after, as the heads of what they had in prayer enlarged upon, is uncertain. Much more, no doubt, was said than is here recorded; else confessing and worshipping God had not taken up a fourth part of the day, much less two fourths.

In this solemn address to God, we have,

(1.) An awful adoration of God, as a perfect and glorious Being, and the Fountain of all beings, v. 5, 6. The congregation is called upon to signify their concurrence herewith, by standing up; and so the minister directs himself to God, *Blessed be thy glorious name*. God is here adored, [1.] As the one only living and true God; *Thou art Jehovah alone*, self-existent and independent; there is no God beside thee. [2.] As the Creator of all things; *Thou hast made heaven, earth, and seas*, and all that is in them. The first article of our creed is fully made the first article of our praises. [3.] As the great Protector of the whole creation; "Thou preservest in being all creatures thou hast given being to." God's providence extends itself to the highest beings, for they need it, and to the meanest, for they are not slighted by it. What God has made, he will preserve; what he does, is firm, Eccl. 3. 14. [4.] As the Object of the creatures' praises; *The host of heaven*, the world of holy angels, *worshippeth thee*, v. 6. But *thy name is exalted above all blessing and praise*; it needs not the praises of the creatures, nor is any addition made to its glory by those praises. The best performances in the praising of God's name, even those of the angels themselves, fall infinitely short of what it deserves. It is not only exalted above *our* blessing, but above *all* blessing. Put all the praises of heaven and earth together, and the thousandth part is not said of what might, and should, be said of the glory of God. *Our goodness extendeth not to him*.

(2.) A thankful acknowledgment of God's favours to Israel, many of which are here reckoned up in order before him, and very much to the purpose, for, [1.] We must take all occasions to mention the loving-kindness of the Lord, and in every prayer give

thanks. [2.] When we are confessing our sins, it is good to take notice of the mercies of God, as the aggravations of our sins, that we may be the more humbled and ashamed, and call ourselves by the scandalous name of *ungrateful*. [3.] When we are seeking to God for mercy and relief in the time of distress, it is an encouragement to our faith and hope, to look back upon our own and our fathers' experiences; "Lord, thou hast done well for us formerly, shall it be all undone again? Art not thou the same God still?"

Let us briefly observe the particular instances of God's goodness to Israel here recounted.

First, The call of Abraham, v. 7. God's favour to him was distinguishing; Thou didst choose him; his grace in him was powerful to bring him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and, in giving him the name of Abraham, he put honour upon him as his own, and assured him that he should be the *father of many nations*. *Look unto Abraham your father*, (Isa. 51. 2.) and see free grace glorified in him.

Secondly, The covenant God made with him, to give the land of Canaan to him and his seed, a type of the better country, v. 8. And this covenant was sure, for God found Abraham's heart faithful before God, and *therefore* found it so, because he made it so, (for faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God,) and therefore performed his words; *for with the upright he will shew himself upright*, and wherever he finds a faithful heart, he will be found a faithful God.

Thirdly, The deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, v. 9. 11. It was seasonable to remember this, now that they were interceding for the perfecting of their deliverance out of Babylon. They were then delivered, in compassion to their affliction, in answer to their cry, and in resistance of the pride and insolence of their persecutors; wherein they dealt proudly, God shewed himself *above them*, (Exod. 18. 11.) and so *gave him a name*; for he said, *I will get me honour upon Pharaoh*; even to this day, the name of God is glorified for that wonderful work. It was done miraculously: signs and wonders were shewed for the effecting of it; their deliverance was the destruction of their enemies; they were *thrown into the deeps*, as irrecoverably as a stone into the mighty waters.

Fourthly, The conducting of them through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud and fire, which shewed them which way they should go, when they should remove, and when and where they should rest; directed all their stages, and all their steps, v. 12. It was also a visible token of God's presence with them, to guide and guard them. They mention this again, (v. 19.) observing that though they had by their sins provoked God to withdraw from them, and leave them to wander and perish in the by-paths of the wilderness, yet in his manifold mercy he continued to lead them, and took not away the *pillar of cloud and fire*, v. 19. When mercies, though forfeited, are continued, we are bound to be doubly thankful.

Fifthly, The plentiful provision made for them in the wilderness, that they might not perish for hunger; Thou *gavest them bread from heaven*, and *water out of the rock*, (v. 15.) and, to hold up their hearts, a promise that they should go in and possess the land of Canaan. They had meat and drink, food convenient in the way, and the good land at their journey's end; what would they more? This also is repeated, (v. 20, 21.) as that which was continued, notwithstanding their provocations; *Forty years didst thou sustain them*. Never was people so long nursed, and so tenderly; they were wonderfully provided for, and, in so long a time, *their clothes waxed not old*, and, though their way was rough and tedious, *their feet swelled not*, for they were *carried as upon eagles' wings*.

Sixthly, The giving of the law upon mount Sinai. This was the greatest favour of all that was done them, and the greatest honour that was put upon them. The Lawgiver was very glorious, v. 13. "Thou didst not send only, but camest down thyself, and *spakest with them*," Deut. 4. 33. The law given was very good; no nation under the sun had such *right judgments, true laws, and good statutes*, Deut. 4. 8. The moral and judicial precepts true and right, founded upon natural equity, and the eternal reasons of good and evil; and even the ceremonial institutions good, tokens of God's goodness to them, and types of gospel grace. Particular notice is taken of the law of the fourth commandment as a great favour

to them; *Thou madest known unto them thy holy sabbath*, which was a token of God's particular favour to them, distinguishing them from the nations who had revolted from God, and quite lost that ancient part of revealed religion; and was likewise a means of keeping up their communion with him. And with *the law and the sabbath*, he gave his good Spirit to instruct them, v. 20. Beside the law given on mount Sinai, the five books of Moses, which he wrote *as he was moved by the Holy Ghost*, were constant instructions to them, particularly the book of Deuteronomy, in which God's Spirit by Moses instructed them fully. Bezaleel was filled with the Spirit of God; (Exod. 31. 3.) so was Joshua; (Numb. 27. 18.) and Caleb had another spirit.

Seventhly, The putting of them in possession of Canaan, that good land, *kingdoms and nations*, v. 22. They were made so numerous as to replenish it, (v. 23.) and so victorious as to be masters of it; (v. 24.) the natives were given into their hands, *that they might do with them as they would*, set their feet, if they pleased, on the necks of their kings. Thus they gained a happy settlement, v. 25. Look upon their cities, and you see them strong and well fortified. Look into their houses, and you find them fine and well furnished, filled with all sorts of rich goods. Take a view of the country, and you will say that you never saw such a fat land, so well stored with *vine-yards and olive-yards*. All these they found made ready to their hands; so they delighted themselves in the gifts of God's great goodness. They could not wish to be more easy or happy than they were, or might have been, in Canaan, had it not been their own fault.

Eighthly, God's great readiness to pardon their sins, and work deliverance for them, when they had, by their provocations, brought his judgments upon themselves. When they were in the wilderness, they found him a *God ready to pardon*, (v. 17.) a *God of pardons*, so the margin reads it, who had proclaimed his name there, *forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin*; who has power to forgive sin, is willing to forgive, and glories in it. Though they forsook him, he did not forsake them, as justly he might have done, but continued his care of them, and favour to them. Afterward, when they were settled in Canaan, and sold themselves by their sins into the hands of their enemies, upon their submission and humble request, he gave them *saviours*, (v. 27.) the judges, by whom God wrought many a great deliverance for them, when they were on the brink of ruin. This he did, not for any merit of their's, for they deserved nothing but ill, but according to his mercies, his manifold mercies.

Ninthly, The admonitions and fair warnings he gave them by his servants the prophets. When he delivered them from their troubles, he testified against their sins, (v. 28, 29.) that they might not misconstrue their deliverances as connivances at their wickedness. That which was designed in all the testimonies which the prophets bore against them, was, to bring them again to God's law, to lay their necks under its yoke, and walk by its rule. The end of our ministry, is, to bring people to God, by bringing them to his law, not to bring them to ourselves, by bringing them under any law of our's. This we have again, v. 30. *Thou testifiedst against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets*. The testimony of the prophets was the testimony of the Spirit in the prophets, and it was the Spirit of Christ in them. 1 Pet. 1. 10, 11. They *spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*, and what they said is to be received accordingly. God gave them his Spirit to instruct them, (v. 20.) but they not receiving that instruction, he did by his Spirit testify against them; if we will not suffer God's word to teach and rule us, it will accuse and judge us. God sends prophets, in compassion to his people, (2 Chron. 36. 15.) that he may not send judgments.

Tenthly, The lengthening out of his patience, and the moderating of his rebukes. *Many years did he forbear them*, (v. 30.) as loath to punish them, and waiting to see if they would repent; and, when he did punish them, he did not utterly consume them nor forsake them, v. 31. Had he forsaken them, they had been utterly consumed; but he did not stir up all his wrath, for he designed their reformation, not their destruction.

Thus do they multiply, thus do they magnify, the instances of

God's goodness to Israel, and we should do in like manner, that the goodness of God, duly considered by us may lead us to repentance, and overcome our badness; the more thankful we are for God's mercies, the more humbled we shall be for our own sins.

(3.) Here is a penitent confession of sin, their own sins, and the sins of their fathers. The mention of these is interwoven with the memorials of God's favours, that God's goodness, notwithstanding their provocations, might appear the more illustrious, and their sins, notwithstanding his favours, might appear the more heinous. Many passages in this acknowledgment of sins and mercies are taken from Ezek. 20. 5. . . 26. as will appear by comparing those verses with these; for the word of God is of use to direct us in prayer, and, by what he says to us, we may learn what to say to him.

[1.] They begin with the sins of Israel in the wilderness; *they, even our fathers*, (so it might better be read,) *dealt proudly*, (though, considering what they were, and how lately they were come out of slavery, they had no reason to be proud,) *and hardened their necks*, v. 16. Pride is at the bottom of men's obstinacy and disobedience; they think it below them to bow their necks to God's yoke, and a piece of state to set up their own will in opposition to the will of God himself. There were two things which they did not duly give heed to, else they had not done as they did. The word of God they heard, but they did not hearken to God's commandments. And the works of God they saw, but they were not mindful of his wonders: had they duly considered them as miracles, they would have obeyed from a principle of faith and holy fear; had they duly considered them as mercies, they would have obeyed from a principle of gratitude and holy love. But when men make no right use either of God's ordinances, or of his providences, what can be expected from them? Two great sins are here specified, which they were guilty of in the wilderness; meditating a return, *First*, To Egyptian slavery, which, for the sake of the garlick and onions, they preferred before the glorious liberty of the Israel of God, attended with some difficulty and inconvenience. *In their rebellion, they appointed a captain to return to their bondage*, in distrust of God's power, and contempt of his good promise, v. 17. *Secondly*, To Egyptian idolatry; *they made a molten calf*, and were so sottish as to say, *This is thy God*.

[2.] They next bewail the provocations of their fathers after they were put in possession of Canaan. Though there they delighted themselves in God's great goodness, yet that would not prevail to keep them close to him; for, *nevertheless, they were disobedient*, (v. 26.) *and wrought great provocations*. For, *First*, They abused God's prophets, *slew them* because they testified against them, to turn them to God; (v. 26.) so returning the greatest injury for the greatest kindness. *Secondly*, They abused his favours; *after they had rest, they did evil again*, (v. 28.) not wrought upon, either by their troubles, or their deliverances out of trouble. Neither fear nor love would hold them to their duty.

[3.] They, at length, come nearer to their own day, and lament the sins which had brought those judgments upon them, which they had long been groaning under, and were now but in part delivered from: *We have done wickedly*; (v. 33.) *our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers*, have all been guilty, and we in them, v. 34. Two things they charge upon themselves and their fathers, as the cause of their troubles; *First*, A contempt of the good law God had given them. They sinned against thy judgments, the dictates of divine wisdom, and the demands of divine sovereignty: though they were told how much it would be for their own advantage to govern themselves by them, for *if a man do them, he shall live in them*, (v. 29.) yet they would not do them, and so, in effect, said, that they would not live; they forsook their own mercies. This abridgment of the covenant, *Do this, and live*, is taken from Ezek. 20. 13. and is quoted, Gal. 3. 12. to prove that *the law is not of faith*; it was not then as it is now, *Believe and live*, yet they gave a withdrawing shoulder, so it is in the margin. They pretended to lay their shoulders under the burthen of God's law, and put their shoulders to the work, but they proved withdrawing shoulders, they soon flew off, would not keep to it, would not abide by it; when it came, as we say, to the setting to, they shrunk back, and would not hear; they had a backsliding

heart. And though God by his prophets called them to return, *they would not give ear; (v. 30.) he stretched out his hands, but no man regarded. Secondly, A contempt of the good land God had given them, (v. 35.) "Our kings have not served thee in their kingdom, not used their power for the support of religion; our people have not served thee in the use of the gifts of thy great goodness, and in that large and fat land which thou not only gavest them by thy grant, but gavest before them by the expulsion of the natives, and the complete victories they obtained over them." They that would not serve God in their own land were made to serve their enemies in a strange land, as was threatened, Deut. 28. 47, 48. It is pity that a good land should have had inhabitants, but so it was with Sodom; fatness and fulness often make men proud and sensual.*

(4.) Here is a humble representation of the judgments of God, which they had been, and were now, under.

[1.] Former judgments are remembered as aggravations of their sins, that they had not taken warning. In the days of the judges, *their enemies vexed them; (v. 27.)* and when they did evil again, *God did again leave them in the hand of their enemies*, who could not have touched them, if God had not given them up; but when God left them, they got and kept dominion over them.

[2.] Their present calamitous state is laid before the Lord; *(v. 36, 37.) We are servants this day.* Free-born Israelites are enslaved, and the land which they had long held by a much more honourable tenure than grand sergentry itself, even by immediate grant from the crown of Heaven to them as a peculiar people above all people of the earth, they now held by as base a tenure as villanage itself, by, from, and under, the kings of Persia, whose vassals they were. A sad change! But see what work sin makes! They were bound to personal service; they have *dominion over our bodies*; they held all they had precariously, were tenants at will, and the land-tax that they paid was so great, that it amounted even to a rack-rent; so that all the rents, issues, and profits, of their land, did, in effect, accrue to the king, and it was as much as they could do, to get a bare subsistence for themselves and their families out of it: this, they honestly own, was for their sins; poverty and slavery are the fruits of sin; it is sin that brings us into all our distresses.

(5.) Here is their address to God under these calamities.

[1.] By way of request, that their trouble might not seem little, *v. 32.* It is the only petition in all this prayer. The trouble was universal; it was come on their kings, princes, priests, prophets, fathers, and all their people; they had all shared in the sin, *(v. 32.)* and now all shared in the judgment. It was of long continuance, from the time of the kings of Assyria, who carried the ten tribes captive, unto this day; "Lord, let it not all seem little, and not worthy to be regarded, or not needing to be relieved." They do not prescribe to God what he shall do for them, but leave it to him, only desiring he would please to take cognizance of it, remembering, that, when he saw the affliction of his people in Egypt to be great, he came down to deliver them, *Exod. 3. 7, 8.* In this request, they have an eye to God, as one that is to be feared, for he is the great, the mighty, and the terrible, God; and as one that is to be trusted, for he is our God in covenant, and a God that keeps covenant and mercy.

[2.] By way of acknowledgment notwithstanding, that really it was less than they deserved, *v. 33.* They own the justice of God in all their troubles, that he had done them no wrong; "We have done wickedly in breaking thy laws, and therefore thou hast done right in bringing all these miseries upon us." Note, It becomes us, when we are under the rebukes of Divine Providence, though ever so sharp, and ever so long, to justify God, and to judge ourselves; for he will be clear when he judgeth, *Ps. 51. 4.*

(6.) Here is the result and conclusion of this whole matter; after this long presentation of their case, they came, at last, to this resolution, that they would return to God and to their duty, and oblige themselves never to forsake God, but always to continue in their duty. "Because of all this, we make a sure covenant with God; in consideration of our frequent departures from God, we will now more firmly than ever bind ourselves to him. Because

we have smarted so much for sin, we will now steadfastly resolve against it, that we may not any more withdraw the shoulder." Observe, [1.] This covenant was made with serious consideration; it is the result of a chain of suitable thoughts, and so is a reasonable service. [2.] With great solemnity; it was written, *in perpetuum rei memoriam—that it might remain a memorial for all ages*; it was sealed to, and left upon record, that it might be a witness against them, if they dealt deceitfully. [3.] With joint-consent: "We make it, we are all agreed in it, and do it unanimously, that we may strengthen the hands one of another." [4.] With fixed resolution; "It is a sure covenant, without reserving a power of revocation. It is what we will live and die by, and never go back from." A certain number of the princes, priests, and Levites, were chosen as the representatives of the congregation, to subscribe and seal it, for and in the name of the rest. Now was fulfilled that promise concerning the Jews, that, when they were returned out of captivity, they should *join themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, (Jer. 50. 5.)* and *(Isa. 44. 5.)* that they should *subscribe with their hand unto the Lord*; he that bears an honest mind, will not startle at assurances; nor will those that know the deceitfulness of their own hearts, think them needless.

CHAP. X.

We have, in this chapter, a particular account of the covenant which, in the close of the foregoing chapter, was resolved upon: they struck while the iron was hot, and immediately put that good resolve in execution, when they were in a good frame, lest, if it had been delayed, it had been dropped. Here we have, I. The names of those that set their hands and seals to it, v. 1. .27. II. An account of those who signified their consent and concurrence, v. 28, 29. III. The covenant itself, and the articles of it in general, that they would keep God's commandments; (v. 29.) in particular, that they would not marry with the heathen, (v. 30.) nor profane the sabbath, nor be rigorous with their debtors; (v. 31.) and that they would carefully pay their church duties, for the maintenance of the temple service, which they promise faithfully to adhere to, v. 32. .39.

1. **N**OW those that sealed were, Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah, 2. Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3. Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah, 4. Hattush, Shebaniah, Maluch, 5. Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6. Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7. Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 8. Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these were the priests. 9. And the Levites: both Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; 10. And their brethren, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 11. Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah. 12. Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 13. Hodijah, Bani, Beninu. 14. The chief of the people; Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15. Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, 16. Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, 17. Ater, Hizkijah, Azzur, 18. Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai, 19. Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, 20. Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, 21. Meshezabeel, Zadok, Jaddua, 22. Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, 23. Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashub, 24. Hallohesh, Pileha, Shobek, 25. Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, 26. And Abijah, Hanan, Anan, 27. Malluch, Harim, Baanah. 28. And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; 29. They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a

curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes; 30. And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons: And *if* the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath-day to sell, *that* we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy-day: and *that* we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

When Israel was first brought into covenant with God, it was done by sacrifice, and the sprinkling of blood, Exod. 24. But here it was done by the more natural and common way of sealing and subscribing the written articles of the covenant, which bound them to no more than was already their duty.

Now here we have,

I. The names of those public persons who, as the representatives and heads of the congregation, set their hands and seals to this covenant, because it would have been an endless piece of work for every particular person to have done it. And if these leading men did their part in pursuance of this covenant, it would have a good influence upon all the people.

Now observe, 1. Nehemiah, who was the governor, signed first, to shew his forwardness in this work, and to set others a good example, v. 1. Those that are above others in dignity and power, should go before them in the way of God. 2. Next to him subscribed twenty-two priests, among whom I wonder we do not find Ezra, who was an active man in the solemnity, (ch. 8. 2.) which was but the first day of the same month, and therefore we cannot think he was absent; but he, having before done his part as a scribe, now left it to others to do their's. 3. Next to the priests, seventeen Levites subscribed this covenant, among whom we find all or most of those who were the mouth of the congregation in prayer, ch. 9. 2, 5. This shewed that they themselves were affected with what they had said, and would not bind those burthens on others which they themselves declined to touch. They that lead in prayer should lead in every other good work. 4. Next to the Levites, forty-four of the chief of the people gave it under their hands, for themselves and all the rest, chiefly those whom they had influence upon, that they would keep God's commandments. Their names are left upon record here, to their honour, as men that were forward and active in reviving, and endeavouring to perpetuate, religion in their country: the memory of such shall be blessed. It is observable, that most of those who were mentioned, ch. 7. 8, &c. as heads of houses or clans, are here mentioned among the first of the chief of the people that subscribed; whoever was the present head bearing the name of him that was head when they came out of Babylon, and these were fittest to subscribe for all those of their father's house. Here are Harosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, (v. 14.) Azgad, Bebai, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hushum, Bezai, Harip, Anathoth, and some others in the following verses, that are all found in that catalogue. They that have interest must use it for God.

II. The concurrence of the rest of the people with them, and the rest of the priests and Levites, who signified their consent to what their chiefs did. With them joined, 1. Their wives and children, for they had transgressed, and they must reform; every one that had knowledge and understanding, must covenant with God. As soon as young people grow up to be capable of distinguishing between good and evil, and of acting intelligently, they ought to make it their own act and deed, to *join themselves to the Lord*. 2. The proselytes of other nations, all that had separated themselves from the people of the lands, their gods and their worship, under the law of God, and the observance of that law. See what conversion is; it is separating ourselves from the course and custom of this world, and devoting ourselves to the conduct of the

word of God. And as there is one law, so there is one covenant, one baptism for the stranger, and for him that is born in the land.

Observe how the concurrence of the people is expressed, v. 29 (1.) They cleave to their brethren; one and all. Here, whom the court blessed, the country blessed too! The commonalty agreed with their nobles in this good work. Great men never look so great, as when they encourage religion, and are examples of it; and they would by that, as much as any thing, secure an interest in the most valuable of their inferiors. Let but the nobles cordially espouse religious causes, and perhaps they will find people cleave to them therein closer than they can imagine. Observe, Their nobles are called their *brethren*, for, in the things of God, rich and poor, high and low, *meet together*. (2.) They entered *into a curse and an oath*. As the nobles confirmed the covenant with their hands and seals, so the people with a *curse and an oath*; solemnly appealing to God concerning their sincerity, and imprecating his just revenge if they dealt deceitfully. Every oath has in it a conditional curse upon the soul, which makes it a strong bond upon the soul; for our own tongues, if false and lying tongues, will fall, and fall heavy, upon ourselves.

III. The general purport of this covenant. They laid upon themselves no other burthen than this necessary thing, which they were already obliged to by all other engagements of duty, interest, and gratitude—to *walk in God's law, and to do all his commandments*, v. 29. Thus David swore that he would *keep God's righteous judgments*, Ps. 119. 106. Our own covenant binds us to this, if not more strongly, yet more sensibly, than we were before bound, and therefore we must not think it needless thus to bind ourselves. Observe, When we bind ourselves to do the commandments of God, we bind ourselves to do *all* his commandments, and therein to have an eye to him as the Lord, and our Lord.

IV. Some of the particular articles of this covenant; such as were adapted to their present temptations.

1. That they would not intermarry with the heathen, v. 30. Many of them had been guilty of this, Ezra. 9. 1. In our covenants with God, we should engage particularly against those sins that we have been most frequently overtaken in, and damaged by. They that resolve to *keep the commandments of God, must say to evil doers, Depart*, Ps. 119. 115.

2. That they would keep no markets on the sabbath-day, or any other day of which the law had said, *Ye shall do no work therein*. They would not only not sell goods themselves for gain on that day, but they would not encourage the heathen to sell on that day, by buying of them, nor not victuals, under pretence of necessity; but would buy in their provisions for their families the day before, v. 31. Note, Those that covenant to keep all God's commandments, must particularly covenant to keep sabbaths well; for the profanation of them is an inlet to other instances of profaneness. The sabbath is a market-day for our souls, but not for our bodies.

3. That they would not be severe in exacting their debts, but would observe the seventh year as a year of release, according to the law, v. 31. In this matter they had been faulty, (ch. 5.) and here therefore they promise to reform. This was the acceptable fast, to *undo the heavy burthen*, and to *let the oppressed go free*, Isa. 58. 6. It was in the close of the day of expiation, that the jubilee-trumpet sounded. It was for the neglect of observing the seventh year as a year of rest for the land, that God had made it enjoy its sabbaths seventy years; (Lev. 26. 35.) and therefore they covenanted to observe that law. Those are stubborn children indeed, that will not amend the fault which they had been particularly corrected for.

32. Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God; 33. For the shew-bread, and for the continual meat-offering, and for the continual burnt-offering, of the sabbaths, of the new-moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin-offerings to make

an atonement for Israel, and *for* all the work of the house of our God. 34. And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood-offering, to bring *it* into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as *it is* written in the law: 35. And to bring the first-fruits of our ground, and the first-fruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD: 36. Also the first-born of our sons, and of our cattle, as *it is* written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God: 37. And *that* we should bring the first-fruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. 38. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure-house. 39. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where *are* the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

Having covenanted against the sins they had been guilty of, they proceed in obliging themselves to receive and observe the duties they had neglected. We must not only *cease to do evil*, but *learn to do well*.

I. It was resolved in general, that the temple service should be carefully kept up, that the work of the house of their God should be done in its season, according to the law, *v. 33*. Let not any people expect the blessing of God, unless they make conscience of observing his ordinances, and keeping up public worship. Then it is likely to go well with our houses, when care is taken that the work of God's house go on well. It was likewise resolved, that they would never *forsake the house of their God*, (*v. 39*.) as they and their fathers had done; nor forsake it for the house of any other god, or for the high places, as idolaters did; nor forsake it for their farms and merchandises, as those did that were atheistical and profane. They that forsake the worship of God forsake God.

II. It was resolved, in pursuance of this, that they would *liberally* maintain the temple service, and not starve it. The priests were ready to do their part in all the work of God's house, if the people would do their's, which was, to find them with materials to work upon. Now here it was agreed and concluded,

1. That a stock should be raised for the furnishing of God's table and altar plentifully. Formerly, there were treasures in the house of the Lord for this purpose, but those were gone, and there was no settled fund to supply the want of them. It was a constant charge to provide shew-bread for the table, two lambs for the daily offerings, four for the sabbaths, and more, and more costly, sacrifices for other festivals, occasional sin-offerings, and meat-offerings, and drink-offerings for them all. They had no rich king to provide these, as Hezekiah did; the priests could not afford it, their maintenance was so small; the people therefore agreed to contribute yearly, each of them, the third part of a shekel, about ten

pence apiece, for the bearing of this expence. When every one will act, and every one will give, though but little, toward a good work, the whole amount will be considerable. The Tirshatha did not impose this tax, but the people made it an ordinance for themselves, and charged themselves with it, *v. 32, 33*.

2. That particular care should be taken to provide wood for the altar, to keep the fire always burning upon it, and wherewith to boil the peace-offerings. Each of them, priests and Levites as well as people, agreed to bring in his quota, and cast lots in what order he should bring it in, which family first, and which next, that there might be a constant supply, and not a scarcity at one time, and an overplus at another, *v. 34*. Thus they provided the fire and the wood, as well as the lambs for the burnt-offerings.

3. That all those things which the divine law had appointed for the maintenance of the priests and Levites, should be duly paid in, for their encouragement to mind their business, and that they might not be under any temptation to neglect it for the making of necessary provision for their families. Then the work of the house of God is likely to go on, when those that serve at the altar live, and live comfortably, upon the altar. First-fruits and tenths were then the principal branches of the ministers' revenues; and they here resolve, (1.) To bring in their first-fruits justly, of their ground and trees, *Exod. 23. 19. Lev. 19. 24*. The first-born of their children, even the money wherewith they were to be redeemed; and of their cattle, *Exod. 13. 2, 11, 12*. This was given to the priests, *Numb. 18. 15, 16*. Also the first-fruits of their dough, (*Numb. 15. 21*.) concerning which there is a particular order given in the prophecy concerning the second temple, *Ezek. 44. 30*. (2.) To bring in their tenths likewise, which were due to the Levites, (*v. 37*.) and a tenth out of those tenths to the priest, *v. 38*. This was the law; (*Numb. 18. 21. . 28*.) but these dues had been withheld, for which God, by the prophet, charges them with *robbing him*, (*Mal. 3. 8, 9*.) at the same time encouraging them to be more just to him and his receivers, with a promise, that, if they brought the *tithes into the store-house*, he would *pour out blessings upon them*, *v. 10*. This therefore they resolve to do, that there might be meat in God's house, and plenty in the store-chambers of the temple, where the vessels of the sanctuary were, *v. 39*. We will do it (say they) *in all the cities of our tillage*, *v. 37*. *In all the cities of our servitude*, so the LXX, for they were servants in their own land, *ch. 9. 36*. But (as Mr. Poole well observes) though they paid great taxes to the kings of Persia, and had much hardship put upon them, they would not make that an excuse for not paying their tithes, but would render to God the things that were his, as well as to Cæsar the things that were his. We *must* do what we can in works of piety and charity, notwithstanding the taxes we pay to the government; and cheerfully perform our duty to God in our servitude, which will be the surest way to ease and liberty in God's due time.

CHAP. XI.

Jerusalem was walled round, but it was not as yet fully inhabited, and therefore was weak and despicable. Nehemiah's next care is to bring people into it; of that we have here an account. I. The method taken to replenish it, v. 1, 2. II. The principal persons that resided there, of Judah and Benjamin, v. 3. . 9. Of the priests and Levites, v. 10. . 19. III. The several cities and villages of Judah and Benjamin, that were peopled by the rest of their families, v. 20. . 36.

1. **A**ND the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities. 2. And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. 3. Now these *are* the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the

children of Solomon's servants. 4. And at Jerusalem dwelt *certain* of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah; Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalaleel, of the children of Perez; 5. And Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. 6. All the sons of Perez that dwelt at Jerusalem *were* four hundred threescore and eight valiant men. 7. And these *are* the sons of Benjamin; Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jesaiah. 8. And after him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred twenty and eight. 9. And Joel the son of Zichri *was* their overseer: and Judah the son of Sennah *was* second over the city. 10. Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin. 11. Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, *was* the ruler of the house of God. 12. And their brethren that did the work of the house *were* eight hundred twenty and two: and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashur, the son of Malchiah, 13. And his brethren, chief of the fathers, two hundred forty and two: and Amashai the son of Azareel, the son of Ahasai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, 14. And their brethren, mighty men of valour, an hundred twenty and eight: and their overseer *was* Zabdiel, the son of *one of* the great men. 15. Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hashub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; 16. And Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chief of the Levites, *had* the oversight of the outward business of the house of God. 17. And Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, *was* the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer: and Bakbukiah the second among his brethren, and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galai, the son of Jeduthun. 18. All the Levites in the holy city *were* two hundred fourscore and four. 19. Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren that kept the gates, *were* an hundred seventy and two.

Jerusalem is called here the *holy city*, (v. 1.) because there the temple was, and that was the place God had chosen to put his name there; upon this account, one would think, the holy seed shall have all chosen to dwell there, and have striven for a habitation there; but, on the contrary, it seems, they declined dwelling there; either, 1. Because a greater strictness of conversation was expected from the inhabitants of Jerusalem than from others, which they were not willing to come up to: those who care not for being holy themselves, are shy of dwelling in a holy city; they would not dwell in the *New Jerusalem* itself for that reason, but

would wish to have a continuing city here upon earth. Or, 2. Because Jerusalem, of all places, was most hated by the heathen their neighbours, and against it their malicious designs were levelled, which made that the post of danger, (as the post of honour usually is,) and therefore they were not willing to expose themselves there. Fear of persecution and reproach, and running themselves into trouble, keeps many out of the holy city, and makes them backward to appear for God and religion, not considering, that, as Jerusalem is with a special malice threatened and insulted by its enemies, so it is with a special care protected by its God, and made a *quiet habitation*, Ps. 46. 4, 5. Or, 3. Because it was more for their worldly advantage to dwell in the country. Jerusalem was no trading city, and therefore there was no money to be got there by merchandises, as there was in the country by corn and cattle. Note, All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's, Phil. 2. 21. It is a general and just complaint, that most people *prefer* their own wealth, credit, pleasure, ease, and safety, before the glory of God and the public good.

People being thus backward to dwell at Jerusalem, now that it was poor, we are here told,

I. By what means it was replenished. 1. The rulers dwelt there, v. 1. That was the proper place for them to reside in, because *there were set the thrones of judgment*, (Ps. 122. 5.) and thither, in all difficult matters, the people resorted with their last appeals. And if it were an instance of eminent affection to the house of God, zeal for the public good, and of faith, and holy courage, and self-denial, to dwell there at this time, the rulers would be examples of these to their inferiors. Their dwelling there would invite and encourage others to dwell there too; *Maguates, Magnetes—The mighty are magnetic*. When great men choose the holy city for their habitation, it brings holiness into reputation, and their zeal will provoke very many. 2. There were some that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem, bravely postponing their own secular interest to the public welfare, v. 2. It is upon record, to their honour, that when others were shy of venturing upon difficulty, loss, and danger, they *sought the good of Jerusalem, because of the house of the Lord their God. They shall prosper that thus love Zion*, Ps. 122. 6, 9. It is said, *The people blessed them*. They praised them, they prayed for them, they praised God for them. Many that do not appear forward themselves for the public good, will yet give a good word to those that do. God and man will bless those that are public blessings, which should encourage us to be zealous in doing good. 3. They, finding that *yet there was room*, concluded, upon a review of their whole body, to bring in one in ten to dwell in Jerusalem; who they should be was determined by lot, the disposal whereof, *all knew*, was of the Lord. This would prevent strife, and would be a great satisfaction to those on whom the lot fell to dwell at Jerusalem, that they plainly saw God appointing the bounds of their habitation. They observed the proportion of one in ten, as we may suppose, to bring the balance between the city and country to a just and equal poise; so it seems to refer to the ancient rule of giving the tenth to God; and what is given to the holy city he reckons given to himself.

II. By what persons it was replenished. A general account is here given of the *inhabitants* of Jerusalem, because the *governors of Judah* looked upon them as *their strength in the Lord of hosts their God*, and valued them accordingly, Zech. 12. 5.

1. Many of the children of Judah and Benjamin dwelt there; for, originally, part of the city lay in the lot of one of those tribes, and part in that of the other; but the greater part was in the lot of Benjamin, and therefore here we find of the children of Judah only 468 families in Jerusalem, (v. 6.) but of Benjamin, 928, v. 7, 8. Thus small were its beginnings, but, afterward, before our Saviour's time, it grew much more populous. Those of Judah all descended from Perez, or Pharez, that son of Judah of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. And though the Benjamites were more in number, yet of the men of Judah it is said, (v. 6.) that they were valiant men, fit for service, and able to defend the city in case of an attack. Judah has not lost its ancient character of a lion's whelp, bold and daring. Of the Benjamites that dwelt in Jerusalem, we are here told who was overseer, and who *was*

second, v. 9. For it is as necessary for a people to have good order kept up among themselves, as to be fortified against the attacks of their enemies from abroad; to have good magistrates, as to have good soldiers.

2. The priests and Levites did many of them settle at Jerusalem; where else should men that were holy to God dwell, but in the holy city?

(1.) Most of the priests, we may suppose, dwelt there, for their business lay where the temple was. Of them that did the work of the house in their courses, here were 822 of one family, 242 of another, and 128 of another, v. 12. 14. It was well that those labourers were not few. It is said of some of them, that they were *mighty men of valour*; (v. 14.) it was necessary that they should be, for the priesthood was not only a work which required might, but a warfare, which required valour, especially now. Of one of these priests it is said, that he was *the son of one of the great men*. It was no disparagement to the greatest man they had, to have his son in the priesthood; he might magnify his office, for his office did not in the least diminish him.

(2.) Some of the Levites also came and dwelt at Jerusalem, yet but few in comparison, 284 in all, (v. 18.) with 172 porters, v. 19. For, much of their work was to *teach the good knowledge of God*, up and down the country, for which purpose they were to be scattered in Israel: as many as there was occasion for attended at Jerusalem, the rest were doing good elsewhere. [1.] It is said of one of the Levites, that he had *the oversight of the outward business of the house of God*, v. 16. The priests were chief managers of the business within the temple-gates; but this Levite was intrusted with the secular concerns of God's house, that were *in ordine ad spiritualia*—*subservient to its spiritual concerns*, the collecting of the contributions, the providing of materials for the temple-service, and the like, which it was necessary to oversee, else the inward business would have been starved, and have stood still. Those who take care of the *ῥὰ ἔξω*—*the outward concerns* of the church, the serving of its tables, are as necessary in their place as those who take care of its *ῥὰ ἔσω*—*its inward concerns*, who give themselves to the word and prayer. [2.] It is said of another, that he was *the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer*. Probably, he had a good ear and a good voice, and was a scientific singer, and therefore was chosen to lead the psalm. He was precentor in the temple. Observe, Thanksgiving is necessary in prayer; they should go together; giving thanks for former mercies is a becoming way of begging further mercies. And care should be taken, in public service, that every thing be done in the best manner, *decently and in good order*; in prayer, that one speak, and the rest join; in singing, that one begin, and the rest follow.

20. And the residue of Israel, of the priests, and the Levites, *were* in all the cities of Judah, every one in his inheritance. 21. But the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel: and Ziha and Gispa *were* over the Nethinims. 22. The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem *was* Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha. Of the sons of Asaph, the singers *were* over the business of the house of God. 23. For *it was* the king's commandment concerning them, that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day. 24. And Pethahiah the son of Meshezabeel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, *was* at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people. 25. And for the villages with their fields, *some* of the children of Judah dwelt at Kirjath-arba, and in the villages thereof, and at Dibon, and *in* the villages thereof, and at Jekabzeel, and *in* the villages thereof, 26. And at Jeshua, and

at Mokdash, and at Beth-pheret, 27. And at Hazar-shual, and at Beer-sheba, and *in* the villages thereof, 28. And at Ziklag, and at Mekonah, and *in* the villages thereof, 29. And at En-rimmon, and at Zareah, and at Jarmuth, 30. Zanoah, Adullam, and *in* their villages, at Lachish, and the fields thereof, at Azekah, and *in* the villages thereof. And they dwelt from Beer-sheba unto the valley of Hinnom. 31. The children also of Benjamin from Geba *dwelt* at Michmash, and Aija, and Beth-el, and *in* their villages, 32. And at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, 33. Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, 34. Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, 35. Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen. 36. And of the Levites *were* divisions *in* Judah, and *in* Benjamin.

Having given an account of the principal persons that dwelt in Jerusalem, (a larger account of whom we had before, 1 Chron. 9. 2, &c.) Nehemiah, in these verses, gives us some account of the other cities, in which dwelt the residue of Israel, v. 20. It was requisite that Jerusalem should be replenished, yet not so as to drain the country; *the king himself is served of the field*, which will do little service, if there be not hands to manage it: let there therefore be no strife, no envy, no contempt, no ill will, between the inhabitants of the cities and those of the villages; both are needful, both useful, and neither can be spared.

1. The Nethinims, the posterity of the Gibeonites, dwelt in Ophel, which was upon the wall of Jerusalem, (ch. 3. 26.) because they were to do the servile work of the temple, which therefore they must be posted near to, that they might be ready to attend, v. 21.

2. Though the Levites were dispersed through the cities of Judah, yet they had an overseer who resided in Jerusalem, superior of their order, and their provincial, to whom they applied themselves for direction, who took care of their affairs, and took cognizance of their conduct, whether they did their duty, v. 22.

3. Some of the singers were appointed to look after the necessary repairs of the temple, being ingenious men, and having leisure betwixt their hours of service: they were *over the business of the house of God*, v. 22. And, it seems, the king of Persia had such a kindness for their office, that he allotted a particular maintenance for them, beside what belonged to them as Levites, v. 23.

4. Here is one that was the king's commissioner at Jerusalem: he was of the posterity of Zerah, v. 24. For of *that* family of Judah there were some now settled in Jerusalem, and not all of Pharez, as appears by that other catalogue, 1 Chron. 9. 6. He is said to be *at the king's hand*, or, *on the king's part*, in all matters concerning the people, to determine controversies that arose between the king's officers and his subjects; to see that what was due to the king from the people was duly paid in, and that what was allowed by the king for the temple-service was duly paid out: it was happy for the Jews, that one of themselves was in this post.

5. Here is an account of the villages, or country-towns, which were inhabited by the residue of Israel. The towns in which the children of Judah dwelt, v. 25. 30. Those that were inhabited by the children of Benjamin, v. 31. 35. And divisions for the Levites among both, v. 36. We will now suppose them safe and easy, though few and poor. Indeed, by the blessing of God, they were likely to increase in wealth and power; and they would have been more likely, if there had not been that general profaneness among them, and lukewarmness in religion, which the prophet Malachi charges them with, (in God's name,) who, it is supposed, prophesied about this time, and in whom prophecy ceased for some ages, till it revived in the Great Prophet and his forerunner.

CHAP. XII.

In this chapter, are preserved upon record, I. The names of the chief of the priests and the Levites that came up with Zerubbabel, v. 1. 9. II. The succession of the high priests, v. 10, 11. III. The names of the next generation

of the other chief priests, v. 12. 21. IV. The eminent Levites that were in Nehemiah's time, v. 22. 26. V. The solemnity of dedicating the wall of Jerusalem, v. 27. 43. VI. The settling of the offices of the priests and Levites in the temple, v. 44. 47.

1. **N**OW these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, 2. Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, 3. Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4. Iddo, Ginnetho, Abijah, 5. Miamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, 6. Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah, 7. Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These were the chief of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua. 8. Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, which was over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren. 9. Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brethren, were over against them in the watches. 10. And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada, 11. And Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan begat Jaddua. 12. And in the days of Joiakim were priests, the chief of the fathers: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hannaniah; 13. Of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; 14. Of Melicu, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; 15. Of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; 16. Of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; 17. Of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin; of Moadiah, Piltai; 18. Of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; 19. And of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; 20. Of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; 21. Of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethaneel. 22. The Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, were recorded chief of the fathers; also the priests, to the reign of Darius the Persian. 23. The sons of Levi, the chief of the fathers, were written in the book of the chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. 24. And the chief of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward. 25. Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gates. 25. These were in the days of Joiakim, the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.

We have here the names, and little more than the names, of a great many priests and Levites, that were eminent in their day, among the returned Jews. Why this register should be here inserted by Nehemiah, does not appear; perhaps to keep in remembrance those good men, that posterity might know to whom they were beholden, under God, for the happy revival and re-establishment of their religion among them. Thus must we contribute toward the performance of that promise, (Ps. 112. 6.) that the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. Let the

memory of the just be blessed, be perpetuated. It is a debt we still owe to faithful ministers, to remember our guides, who have spoken to us the word of God, Heb. 13. 7. Perhaps it is intended to stir up their posterity, who succeeded them in the priests' office, and inherited their dignities and preferments, to imitate their courage and fidelity. It is good to know what our godly ancestors and predecessors were, that we may learn thereby what we should be. We have here,

1. The names of the priests and Levites that came up with the first out of Babylon, when Jeshua was high priest. Jeremiah and Ezra, though both of them were priests, are mentioned with the first, (v. 1.) but, it is supposed, not Jeremiah the prophet, or Ezra the scribe; the fame of the one was diffused long before, and the other, some time after. Of one of the Levites it is said, (v. 8.) that he was over the thanksgiving, that is, he was intrusted to see that the psalms, the thanksgiving psalms, were constantly sung in the temple in due time and manner. The Levites kept their turns in their watches, relieving one another as becomes brethren, fellow-labourers, and fellow-soldiers.

2. The succession of high priests during the Persian monarchy, from Jeshua (or Jesus) who was high priest at the time of the restoration, to Jaddua (or Jaddus) who was high priest when Alexander the Great, after the conquest of Tyre, came to Jerusalem, and paid great respect to this Jaddus, who met him in his pontifical habit, and shewed him the prophecy of Daniel, which foretold his conquests.

3. The next generation of priests, who were chief men, and active in the days of Joiakim, sons of the first set. Note, We have reason to acknowledge God's favour to his church, and care of it, in that, as one generation of ministers passes away, another comes. All these who are mentioned, (v. 1, &c.) as eminent in their generation, are again mentioned, though with some variation in several of the names, (v. 12, &c.) except two, as having sons that were likewise eminent in their generation; a rare instance that twenty good fathers should leave behind them twenty good sons, (for so many here are,) that filled up their places.

4. The next generation of Levites, or rather, a later generation; for those priests flourished in the days of Joiakim the high priest, these Levites in the days of Eliashib, v. 22. Perhaps then the forementioned families of the priests began to degenerate, and the third generation of them came short of the two first; but the work of God shall never fail for want of instruments. Then a generation of Levites was raised up, that were recorded chief of the fathers, (v. 22.) and were eminently serviceable to the interests of the church, and their service not the less acceptable either to God or to his people, for their being Levites only of the lower rank of ministers. Eliashib the high priest being allied to Tobiah, (ch. 13. 4.) the other priests grew remiss; but then the Levites appeared the more zealous, as appears by this, that those who were now employed in expounding, (ch. 8. 7.) and in praying, (ch. 9. 4, 5.) were all Levites, not priests, regard being had to their personal qualifications more than to their order. These Levites were some of them singers, (v. 24.) to praise and give thanks, others of them porters, (v. 25.) keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gate; and both according to the command of David.

27. And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps. 28. And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi; 29. Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem. 30. And the priests and the Levites purified them-

selves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall. 31. Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great *companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one* went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung-gate: 32. And after them went Hoshaiiah, and half of the princes of Judah, 33. And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, 34. Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, 35. And *certain* of the priests' sons with trumpets; *namely*, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michai-ah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph: 36. And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them. 37. And at the fountain-gate, which was over-against them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water-gate east-ward. 38. And the other *company of them that gave thanks*, went over against *them*, and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall. 39. And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate, and above the fish-gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the sheep-gate: and they stood still in the prison-gate. 40. So stood the two *companies of them that gave thanks* in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me: 41. And the priests; Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets: 42. And Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. 43. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced; so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

We have read of the building of the wall of Jerusalem with a great deal of fear and trembling; we have here an account of the dedicating of it with a great deal of joy and triumph. They that *sow in tears shall thus reap*.

1. We must inquire what was the meaning of this dedication of the wall; we will suppose it to include the dedication of the city too, (*continens pro contento—the thing containing for the thing contained*;) and therefore it was not done till the city was pretty well replenished, *ch. 11*. 1. It was a solemn thanksgiving to God for his great mercy to them, in the perfecting of this undertaking, which they were the more sensible of, because of the difficulty and opposition they had met with in it. 2. They hereby devoted the city in a peculiar manner to God and to his honour, and took possession of it for him, and in his name. All our cities, all our houses, must have holiness to the Lord written upon them, but the city was (so as never any other was) a *holy city*, the *city of the great King*; (Ps. 48. 2. and Math. 5. 35.) it had been so ever since God chose it to put his name there, and, as such, it being now refitted, it was afresh dedicated to God by

the builders and inhabitants, in token of their acknowledgment that they were his tenants, and their desire that it might still be his, and that the property of it might never be altered. Whatever is done for their safety, ease, and comfort, must be designed for God's honour and glory. 3. They hereby put the city and its walls under the divine protection, owning that *unless the Lord kept the city*, the walls were *built in vain*. When this city was in possession of the Jebusites, they committed the guardianship of it to their gods, though they were blind and lame ones, 2 Sam. 5. 4. With much more reason do the people of God commit it to his keeping, who is All-wise and Almighty. The superstitious founders of cities had an eye to the lucky position of the heavens; (see Mr. Gregory's Works, p. 29, &c.) but these pious founders had an eye to God only, to his providence, not to fortune.

II. We must observe with what solemnity it was performed, under the direction of Nehemiah.

1. The Levites from all parts of the country were summoned to attend. The city must be dedicated to God, and therefore his ministers must be employed in the doing of it, and the surrender must pass through their hands. When those solemn feasts were over, (*ch. 8. and 9.*) they were gone home to their respective posts, to mind their cures in the country, but now their presence and assistance were again called for.

2. Pursuant to this summons, there was a general rendezvous of all the Levites, *v. 28, 29*. Observe in what method they proceeded.

(1.) They *purified themselves*, *v. 30*. We are concerned to *cleanse our hands*, and *purify our hearts*, when any work of God is to pass through them. They purified themselves, and then the people: they that would be instrumental to sanctify others, must sanctify themselves, and set themselves apart for God, with purity of mind and sincerity of intention. Then they purified the *gates and the wall*. Then may we expect comfort, when we are prepared to receive it. *To the pure all things are pure*; (Tit. 1. 15.) and to them who are sanctified, house and tables, and all their creature-comforts and enjoyments, are sanctified, 1 Tim. 4. 4, 5. This purification was performed, it is probable, by sprinkling the *water of purifying*, or of *separation*, (as it is called, Numb. 19. 9.) on *themselves*, and the *people*, the walls and the gates; a type of the blood of Christ, with which our consciences being *purged from dead works*, we became fit to *serve the living God*, (Heb. 9. 14.) and to be his care.

(2.) The princes, priests, and Levites, walked round upon the wall in two companies, with musical instruments, to signify the dedication of it all to God, the whole circuit of it, *v. 36*. So that, it is likely, they sung psalms as they went along, to the praise and glory of God. This procession is here largely described. They had a rendezvous at one certain place, where they divided themselves into two companies. Half of the princes, with several priests and Levites, went on the right hand, Ezra leading their van, *v. 37*. The other half of the princes and priests, who gave thanks likewise, went to the left hand, Nehemiah bringing up the rear, *v. 38*. At length both companies met in the temple, where they joined their thanksgivings, *v. 40*. The crowd of people, it is likely, walked on the ground, some within the wall, and others without; one end of this ceremony being to affect them with the mercy they were giving thanks for, and to perpetuate the remembrance of it among them—processions, for such purposes, have their use.

(3.) The people *greatly rejoiced*, *v. 43*. While the princes, priests, and Levites, testify their joy and thankfulness by *great sacrifices, sound of trumpet, musical instrument*, and *songs of praise*, the common people testified theirs by loud shouts, which were heard afar off, farther than the more harmonious sound of their songs and music; and these shouts, coming from a sincere and hearty joy, are here taken notice of; for God overlooks not, but graciously accepts, the honest, zealous services of mean people, though there is in them little of art, and they are far from being fine. It is observed, then the women and children rejoiced; and their hosannas were not despised, but recorded to their praise.

All that share in public mercies ought to join in public thanksgivings. The reason given, is, that *God had made them rejoice with great joy*; he had given them both matter for joy, and hearts to rejoice; his providence had made them safe and easy, and then his grace made them cheerful and thankful. The baffled opposition of their enemies, no doubt, added to their joy, and mixed triumph with it. Great mercies call for the most solemn returns of praise, *in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.*

44. And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the first-fruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited. 45. And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. 46. For in the days of David and Asaph of old *there were* chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. 47. And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters, every day his portion: and they sanctified *holy things* unto the Levites; and the Levites sanctified *them* unto the children of Aaron.

We have here an account of the remaining good effects of the universal joy that was at the dedication of the wall. When the solemnities of a thanksgiving-day leave such impressions on ministers and people, as that both are more careful and cheerful in doing their duty afterward, then they are indeed acceptable to God, and turn to a good account. So it was here.

1. The ministers were more careful than they had been of their work; the respect the people paid them upon this occasion encouraged them to diligence and watchfulness, *v. 45. The singers kept the ward of their God*, attending, in due time, to the duty of their office; the porters, too, they *kept the ward of their purification*, that is, they took care to preserve the purity of the temple, by denying admission to those that were ceremonially unclean. When the joy of the Lord thus engages us to our duty, and enlarges us in it, it is then an earnest of that joy which, in concurrence with the perfection of holiness, will be our everlasting bliss.

2. The people were more careful than they had been of the maintenance of their ministers. The people, at the dedication of the wall, among other things which they made matter of their joy, rejoiced *for the priests, and for the Levites that waited, v. 44.* They had a great deal of comfort in their ministers, and were glad of them; when they observed how diligently they waited, and what pains they took in their work, they rejoiced in them. Note, The surer way for ministers to recommend themselves to their people, and gain an interest in their affections, is, *to wait on their ministry*, (Rom. 12. 7.) to be humble and industrious, and to mind their business; when these did so, the people thought nothing too much to do for them, to encourage them. The law had provided them *their portions*; (*v. 44.*) but, what the better were they for that provision, if what the law appointed them, either was not duly collected, or not justly paid them?

Now, (1.) Care is here taken for the collecting of their dues; they were modest, and would rather lose their right than call for it themselves; the people were many of them careless, and would not bring it, unless they were called upon; and therefore *some were appointed*, whose office it should be to gather into the treasures, out of the fields of the cities, the portions of the law for the priests and Levites, (*v. 44.*) that their portion might not be

lost for want of being demanded. This is a piece of good service, both to ministers and people, that the one may not come short of their maintenance, nor the other of their duty.

(2.) Care is taken, that, being *gathered in*, it might be duly *paid out, v. 47.* They gave the singers and porters their daily portion, over and above what was due to them as Levites; for we may suppose, that, when David and Solomon appointed them their work, (*v. 45, 46.*) above what was required from them as Levites, they settled a fund for their further encouragement. Let those that labour more abundantly in the word and doctrine be counted worthy of this double honour. As for the other Levites, the tithes, here called *the holy things*, were duly set apart for them, out of which they paid the priests their tithe, according to the law. Both are said to be *sanctified*; when what is contributed, either voluntarily or by law, for the support of religion, and the maintenance of the ministry, is given with an eye to God, and his honour, it is sanctified, and shall be accepted of him accordingly, and it will cause the *blessing to rest on the house*, and all that is in it, Ezek. 44. 30.

CHAP. XIII.

Nehemiah, having finished what he undertook, for the fencing and filling of the holy city, returned to the king his master, who could not long be without him, as appears, v. 6. But, after some time, he obtained leave to come back again to Jerusalem, to redress grievances, and to purge out some corruptions which had crept in in his absence; and very active he was in reforming several abuses, which here we have an account of. I. He turned out from Israel the mixed multitude, the Moabites and Ammonites especially, v. 1. 3. With a particular indignation, he expelled Tobiah out of the lodgings he had got in the court of the temple, v. 4. 9. II. He secured the maintenance of the priests and Levites to them more firmly than it had been, v. 10. 14. III. He restrained the profanation of the sabbath day, and provided for the due sanctification of it, v. 15. 22. IV. He checked the growing mischief of marrying strange wives, v. 23. 31.

1. **O**N that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever; 2. Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3. Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude. 4. And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, *was allied unto Tobiah*: 5. And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat-offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the offerings of the priests. 6. But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king: 7. And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. 8. And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. 9. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I

again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat-offering and the frankincense.

It was the honour of Israel, and the greatest preservation of their holiness, that they were a peculiar people, and were so to keep themselves, and not to mingle with the nations, nor suffer any of them to incorporate with them.

Now, here we have,

I. The law to this purport, which happened to be read *on that day, in the audience of the people*, (v. 1.) on the day of the dedication of the wall, as it should seem, for with their prayers and praises they joined the reading of the word; and, though it was long after that the other grievances, here mentioned, were redressed by Nehemiah's power, yet this of the mixed multitude might be redressed then, by the people's own act, for so it seems to be, v. 3. Or, perhaps, it was on the anniversary commemoration of that day, some years after, and therefore said to be *on that day*. They found a law, that the Ammonites and Moabites should not be naturalized, should not settle among them, nor unite with them, v. 1. The reason given, is, because they had been injurious and ill-natured to the Israel of God, (v. 2.) had not shewed them common civility, but sought their ruin, though they not only did them no harm, but were expressly forbidden to do them any. This law we have, with this reason, Dent. 23. 3. . 5.

II. The people's ready compliance with this law, v. 3. See the benefit of the public reading of the word of God; when it is duly attended to, it discovers to us sin and duty, good and evil, and shews us wherein we have erred. Then we profit by the discovery when by it we are wrought upon to separate ourselves from all that evil to which we had addicted ourselves. They *separated from Israel all the mixed multitude*, which had of old been a snare to them, for the *mixed multitude fell a lusting*, Numb. 11. 4. These inmates they expelled, as usurpers, and dangerous.

III. The particular case of Tobiah, who was an Ammonite, and to whom, it is likely, the historian had an eye, in the recital of that law, (v. 1.) and the reason of it, v. 2. For he had the same enmity to Israel that his ancestors had, the spirit of an Ammonite; witness his indignation at Nehemiah, (ch. 2. 10.) and the opposition he had given to his undertakings, ch. 4. 7. Observe,

1. How basely Eliashib the chief priest took this Tobiah in to be a lodger, even in the courts of the temple. (1.) He was allied to Tobiah, (v. 4.) by marriage first, and then by friendship: his grandson had married Sanballat's daughter, v. 28. Probably some other of his family had married Tobiah's, and (would you think it?) the high priest thought the alliance an honour to his family, and was proud of it, though really it was his greatest disgrace, and what he had reason to be ashamed of. It was expressly provided by the law, that the high priest should marry *one of his own people*, else he *profanes his seed among his people*, Lev. 21. 14. And for Eliashib to contract an alliance with an Ammonite, a *servant*, (for so he is called,) and to value himself upon it, probably because he was a wit, and a bean, and cried up for a fine gentleman, (ch. 6. 19.) was such a contempt of the crown of his consecration, as one would not wish should be told in Gath, or published in the streets of Askelon. (2.) Being allied to him, he must be acquainted with him. Tobiah, being a man of business, has often occasion to be at Jerusalem, I doubt, upon no good design. Eliashib is fond of his new kinsman, pleased with his company, and must have him as near him as he can; he has not a room stately enough for him in his own apartment, in the courts of the temple; therefore, out of several little chambers, which had been used for store-chambers, by taking down the partitions, he contrived to make one great chamber, a state-room, for Tobiah, v. 5. A wretched thing it was, [1.] That Tobiah the Ammonite should be entertained with respect in Israel, and have a magnificent reception. [2.] That the high priest, who should have taught the people the law, and set them a good example, should, contrary to the law, give him entertainment, and make use of the power he had, as overseer of the chambers of the temple, for that purpose. [3.] That he should lodge him in the courts of God's house, as if to confront God himself; this

was next to setting up an idol there, as the wicked kings of old had done. An Ammonite must not *come into the congregation*; and shall one of the worst and vilest of the Ammonites be courted into the temple itself, and caressed there? [4.] That he should throw out the stores of the temple, to make room for him, and so expose them to be lost, wasted, and embezzled, though they were the *portions of the priests*, merely to gratify Tobiah. Thus did he *corrupt the covenant of Levi*, as Malachi complained at this time, ch. 2. 8. Well might Nehemiah add, (v. 6.) *But all this time was not I at Jerusalem*. If he had been there, the high priest durst not have done such a thing. The envious one, who sows tares in God's field, knows how to take an opportunity to do it when the *servants sleep*, or are absent, Matth. 13. 25. The golden calf was made when Moses was in the mount.

2. How bravely Nehemiah, the chief governor, threw him out, and all that belonged to him, and restored the chambers to their proper use. When he came to Jerusalem, and was informed by the good people, who were troubled at it, what an intimacy was grown between their chief priest and their chief enemy, it *grieved him sore* (v. 7, 8.) that God's house should be so profaned, his enemies so caressed and trusted, and his cause betrayed by him that should be its protector and patron. Nothing grieves a good man, a good magistrate, more, than to see the ministers of God's house do any wicked thing. Nehemiah has power, and he will use it for God. (1.) Tobiah shall be expelled; he fears not disobliging him, fears not his resentments, or Eliashib's, nor excuses himself from interposing in an affair that lay within the jurisdiction of the high priest, but, like one zealously affected in a good thing, expelled the intruder, by casting forth all his household stuff: he did not seize it for his own use, but cast it out, that Tobiah, who, it is probable, was now absent, when he came again, might have no conveniencies for his reception there. Our Saviour thus *cleansed the temple*, that the *house of prayer* might not be a *den of thieves*. And thus they that would expel sin out of their hearts, those living temples, must throw out its household stuff, and all the provision made for it, strip it, starve it, and take away all those things that are the food and fuel of lust; this is, in effect, to mortify it. (2.) The temple stores shall be brought in again, and the *vessels of the house of God put in their places*; but the chambers must first be sprinkled with the water of purification, and so cleansed, because they had been profaned. Thus, when sin is cast out of the heart, by repentance, let the blood of Christ be applied to it by faith, and then let it be furnished with the graces of God's Spirit for every good work.

10. And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given *them*: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. 11. Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. 12. Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries. 13. And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiab: and next to them *was* Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were counted faithful, and their office *was* to distribute unto their brethren. 14. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.

Here is another grievance redressed by Nehemiah.

1. The Levites had been wronged; that was the grievance, their *portions had not been given them*, v. 10. Perhaps Tobiah, when he took possession of the store-chambers, seized the stores too, and, by the connivance of Eliashib, converted them to his own use. The complaint is not that they were not collected from the people, but that they were not given to the Levites, and the Levites were so modest as not to sue for them; *for the Levites and singers were fled every one to his field*. This comes in as a reason, either, (1.) Why their payments were withheld; the Levites were non-residents: when they should have been doing their work about the temple, they were at their farms in the country, and therefore the people were little inclined to give them their maintenance. If ministers have not the encouragement they should have, let them consider whether they themselves be not accessory to the contempt they are under, by the neglect of their business. Or rather, (2.) It is the reason why Nehemiah soon perceived that their dues had been denied them, because he missed them from their posts. "Where are the singers?" (said Nehemiah;) "Why do not they attend according to their office, to praise God?" Why, truly they were gone, every one to his country-seat, to get a livelihood for themselves and their families out of their grounds, for their profession would not maintain them. A scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry. The work is neglected, because the workmen are. It was not long since the payment of the salaries appointed for the singers was put into a very good method; (*ch. 12. 47.*) and yet how soon did it fail, for want of being looked after!

Nehemiah laid the fault upon the rulers, who should have taken care that the Levites minded their business, and had all due encouragement therein. This is required from Christian magistrates, that they use their power to oblige ministers to do their duty, and people to do their's. Nehemiah began with the rulers, and called them to an account, "*Why is the house of God forsaken?*" (v. 11.) Why are the Levites starved out of it? Why did not you take notice of this, and prevent it?" The people *forsook the Levites*, which was expressly forbidden; (*Deut. 12. 19.—14. 27.*) and then the Levites forsook their post in the house of God. Both ministers and people, who forsake religion and the services of it, and magistrates too, who do not what they can to keep them to it, will have a great deal to answer for.

3. He delayed not to bring the dispersed Levites to *their places* again, and set them in *their stations*, as the word is, v. 11. A Levite in his field (*clericus in foro—a minister in a market*) is out of his station; God's house is his place, and there let him be found. Many that are careless would do much better than they do, if they were but called upon. *Say to Archippus, Take heed to thy ministry.*

4. He obliged the people to bring in their tithes, v. 12. His zeal provoked their's; and when they saw the Levites at their work, they could not, for shame, withhold their wages any longer, but honestly and cheerfully brought them in. The better church-work is done, the better will church-dues be paid.

5. He provided that just and prompt payment should be made of the Levites' stipends; commissioners were appointed to see to this, (v. 13.) and they were such as *were accounted faithful*, that is, had approved themselves so in other trusts committed to them, and so had *purchased to themselves this good degree*, 1 Tim. 3. 13. Let men be tried first, and then trusted; tried in the less, and then trusted with more. Their office was to receive and pay, to distribute to their brethren in due season and due proportions.

6. Having no recompence (it is a question whether he had thanks) from those for whom he did these good services, he looks up to God as his Pay-Master, (v. 14.) *Remember me, O my God, concerning this*. Nehemiah was a man much in pious ejaculations; on every occasion, he looked up to God, and committed himself and his affairs to him. (1.) He here reflects with comfort and much satisfaction upon what he had done for the house of God and the offices thereof; it pleased him to think that he had been any way instrumental to revive and support religion in his country, and to reform what was amiss. What kindness any shew to God's ministers, thus shall it be returned into their own bosoms, in the secret joy they shall have there, not only in having done well, but in having done good, good to many, good to souls. (2.) He here

refers himself to God to consider him for it, not in pride, or as boasting of what he had done, much less depending upon it as his righteousness, or as if he thought he had made God a debtor to him, but in a humble appeal to him concerning his integrity and honest intention in what he had done, and a believing expectation, that he would not be unrighteous to *forget his work and labour of love*, Heb. 6. 10. Observe how modest he is in his requests; he only prays, *Remember me*, not, *Reward me*; *Wipe not out my good deeds*, not, *Publish them*, *Record them*. Yet he was rewarded, and his good deeds recorded; for God does more than we are able to ask. Note, Deeds done *for the house of God and the offices of it*, for the support of religion, and the encouragement of it, are good deeds; there is both righteousness and godliness in them, and God will certainly remember them, and not wipe them out; they *shall in no wise* lose their reward.

15. In those days *saw I in Judah some* treading wine-presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all *manner of burthens*, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath-day: and I testified *against them* in the day wherein they sold victuals. 16. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 17. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath-day? 18. Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath. 19. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and *some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burthen be brought in on the sabbath-day*. 20. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged *without Jerusalem* once or twice. 21. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do *so* again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they *no more* on the sabbath. 22. And I commanded the Levites, that they should cleanse themselves, and *that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath-day*. Remember me, O my God, *concerning this also*, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

Here is another instance of that blessed reformation in which Nehemiah was so active; he revived sabbath-sanctification, and maintained the authority of the fourth commandment; a very good deed this was for the house of God and the offices thereof; for where holy time is overlooked and made nothing of, it is not strange if all holy duties be neglected. Here is,

I. A remonstrance of the abuse. The law of the sabbath was very strict, and much insisted on; and with good reason, for religion is never in the throne, while sabbaths are trodden under foot. But Nehemiah discovered even in Judah, among those to whom sabbaths were given for a sign, this law wretchedly violated. His own eyes were his informers; magistrates, who are in care to discharge their duty aright, will, as much as may be, see *with their own eyes*, and

accomplish a diligent search to find out that which is evil. To his great grief, it appeared that there was a general profanation of the sabbath, that holy day, even in Jerusalem, that holy city, which was so lately dedicated to God. 1. The husbandmen trod their wine-presses, and brought home their corn, on that day, (v. 15.) though there was an express command, that, *in earing time, and in harvest time, they should rest on the sabbaths*, (Exod. 34. 21.) because then they might be tempted to take a greater liberty, and to fancy that God would indulge them in it. 2. The carriers loaded their asses with all manner of burthens, and make no scruple of it, though there was a particular proviso in the law for the cattle resting, (Deut. 5. 14.) and that they should bear no burthen on the sabbath-day, Jer. 17. 21. 3. The hawkers, and pedlars, and petty rhaps, that were men of Tyre, that famous trading city, sold all manner of ware on the sabbath-day; (v. 16.) and the children of Judah and Jerusalem had so little grace as to buy of them, and so encourage them, making our Father's day a day of merchandise, contrary to the law of the fourth commandment, which forbids the doing any manner of work. No wonder there was a general decay of religion, and corruption of manners, among this people, when they forsook the sanctuary, and profaned the sabbath.

II. The reformation of it. They that are jealous for the honour of God, cannot bear to see his sabbath profaned. Observe in what method this good man proceedeth in his zeal for the sabbath.

1. He testified against them who profaned it, (v. 15.) and again, v. 21. He not only expressed his own dislike of it, but endeavoured to convince them that it was a great sin, and shewed them the testimony of the work of God against it. He would not punish it, till he had laid open the evil of it.

2. He reasoned with the rulers concerning it, took the nobles of Judah to task, and contended with them, v. 17. The greatest of men are not too high to be told of their faults by those whose proper office it is; nay, great men should be, as here, contended with in the first place, because of the influence they have upon others. (1.) He charged them with it, *Ye do it*. They did not carry corn, nor sell fish, but, [1.] They connived at them that did, and did not use their power to restrain them, and so made themselves guilty, as those magistrates do who bear the sword in vain. [2.] They set a bad example in other things; if the nobles allowed themselves in sports and recreations, in idle visits, and idle talk, on the sabbath-day, the men of business, both in city and country, would profane it by their worldly employments, as more justifiable. We must be responsible for the sins which others are led to commit by our example. (2.) He charges it upon them as an evil thing, for so it is, proceeding from a great contempt of God and our own souls. (3.) He reasons the case with them, (v. 18.) and shews them that sabbath-breaking was one of the sins for which God had brought judgments upon them, and that if they did not take warning, but return to the same sins again, they had reason to expect further judgments; *Ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath*. Thus Ezra concluded, *If we again break thy commandments, wilt not thou be angry with us till thou hast consumed us?* Ezra, 9. 14.

3. He took care to prevent the profanation of the sabbath, as one that aimed only at reformation; if he could reform them, he would not punish them, and if he should punish them, it was but that he might reform them. This is an example to magistrates to be heirs of restraint, and prudently to use the bit and bridle, that there may be no occasion for the lash.

(1.) He ordered the gates of Jerusalem to be kept shut from the evening before the sabbath to the morning after, and set his own servants (whose care, courage, and honesty, he could confide in) to watch them, that no burthens should be brought in on the sabbath-day, nor late the night before, nor early in the morning after, lest sabbath-time should be trenched upon, v. 19. Those that came in to worship in the courts of the temple, were, no doubt, admitted to pass and repass, but none that came to sell goods, they were forced to lodge without the city, (v. 20.) where, no doubt, they wished the sabbath were gone, that they might sell corn.

(2.) He threatened those who came with goods to the gates, who pressed hard for entrance, telling them, that, if they came

again, he would certainly lay hands on them, v. 21. This deterred them from coming any more. Note, If reformers will but put on resolution, more may be done toward the breaking of bad customs than they can imagine. Vice connived at, is indeed a daring thing, and will bid defiance to counsel and reproof; but it may be made cowardly, and will be so, when magistrates make themselves a terror to it. *The king that sits on the throne of judgment, scatters away all evil with his eyes*.

(3.) He charged the Levites to take care about the due sanctifying of the sabbath, that they should cleanse themselves in the first place, and so give a good example to the people, and that they should some of them come and keep the gates, v. 22. Because he and his servants must shortly return to court, he would leave this charge with some that might abide by it, that, not only when he was present, but in his absence, the sabbath might be sanctified. Then, there is likely to be a reformation in this and other instances, when magistrates and ministers join their forces. The courage, zeal, and prudence of Nehemiah in this matter, are here recorded for our imitation; and we have reason to think that the cure he wrought was lasting; for, in our Saviour's time, we find the Jews in the other extreme, over-scrupulous in the ceremonial part of sabbath-sanctification.

4. He concludes this passage with a prayer, v. 22. In which, observe, (1.) The petitions; *Remember me*, (as the thief on the cross,) *Lord, remember me*, that is enough; God's thoughts to usward are very precious, Ps. 40. 5. He adds, *Spare me*; so far is he from thinking that what he had done did properly merit a reward in strict justice, that he cries earnestly to God to spare him, as Jeremiah, (ch. 15. 15.) *Take me not away in thy long-suffering*, (ch. 10. 24.) *Correct me not in anger*, and, (ch. 17. 17.) *Be not a terror to me*. Note, The best saints, even when they do the best actions, stand in need of sparing mercy, for there is not a just man that doeth good, and sinneth not. (2.) The plea; *According to the greatness* (or multitude) *of thy mercies*. Note, God's mercy is what we must depend upon, and not any merit of our own, when we appear before God.

23. In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: 24. And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. 25. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. 26. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. 27. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? 28. And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. 29. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. 30. Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; 31. And for the wood-offering, at times appointed, and for the first-fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

We have here one instance more of Nehemiah's pious zeal for the purifying of his countrymen, a peculiar people to God; that was the thing he aimed at in the use of his power, not the enriching of himself.

1. See here how they had corrupted themselves by marrying strange wives. This was complained of in Ezra's time, and much done towards a reformation, Ezra, 9, and 10. But when the unclean spirit is cast out, if a watchful eye be not kept upon him, he will re-enter, so he did here; though, in Ezra's time, they that had married strange wives were forced to put them away, which could not but occasion trouble and confusion in families, yet others would not take warning; *Nitimur in vetitum—We still lean toward what is forbidden.* Nehemiah, like a good governor, inquired into the state of the families of those that were under his charge, that he might reform what was amiss in them, and so *heal the streams, by healing the springs.*

1. He inquired whence they had their wives, and found that many of the Jews had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab; (v. 23.) either because they were fond of what was far-fetched, or because they hoped by these alliances to strengthen and enrich themselves. See how God by the prophet reproves this, (Mal. 2. 11.) *Judah has dealt treacherously, and broken covenant with God, the covenant made in Ezra's time, with reference to this very thing; he has profaned the holiness of the Lord, by marrying the daughter, that is, the worshipper, of a strange god.*

He talked with the children, and found they were children of strangers, for their speech betrayed them. The children were bred up with their mothers, and learned of them and their nurses and servants to speak, so that they could not speak the Jews' language, either not at all, or not readily, or not purely, but half in the speech of Ashdod, or Ammon, or Moab, according as the country was, which the mother was a native of. Observe, (1.) Children, in their childhood, learn much of their mothers. *Partus sequitur ventrem—They are prone to imitate their mothers.* (2.) If either side be bad, the corrupt nature will incline the children to take after that, which is a good reason why Christians should not be unequally yoked. (3.) In the education of children, great care should be taken about the government of their tongues; that they learn not the language of Ashdod, any impious or impure talk, any corrupt communication.

II. See what course Nehemiah took to purge out this corruption, when he discovered how much it had prevailed.

1. He shewed them the evil of it, and the obligation he lay under to witness against it. He did not seek an occasion against them, but this was an iniquity to be punished by the judge, and which he must by no means connive at; (v. 27.) "*Shall we hearken to you, who endeavour to palliate and excuse it? No, it is an evil, a great evil, it is a transgression against our God, to marry strange wives, and we must do our utmost to put a stop to it; you beg that they may not be divorced from you, but we cannot hearken to you, for there is no other remedy to clear us from the guilt, and prevent the infection.*" (1.) He quotes a precept, to prove that it was in itself a great sin; and makes them swear to that precept, *Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, &c.* which is taken from Deut. 7. 3. When we would reclaim people from sin, we must shew them the sinfulness of it in the glass of the commandment. (2.) He quotes a precedent, to shew the pernicious consequences of it, which made it necessary to be animadverted upon by the government; (v. 26.) *Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? The falls of great and good men are therefore recorded, that we may take warning by them, to shun the temptations which they were overcome by.* Solomon was famous for wisdom, there was no king like him for it; yet, when he married strange wives, his wisdom could not secure him from the snares, nay, it departed from him, and he did very foolishly. He was beloved of God, but that threw him out of God's favour, and went near utterly to extinguish the holy fire of grace in his soul: he was king over all Israel, but that lost him ten of his twelve tribes. You plead that you can marry strange wives, and yet retain the purity of Israelites; but Solomon himself could not;

even *him did outlandish women cause to sin.* Therefore let him that *thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall*, when he runs upon such a precipice.

2. He shewed himself highly displeased at it, that he might awaken them to a due sense of the evil of it. He *contended with them*; (v. 25.) they offered to justify themselves in what they did, but he shewed them how frivolous their excuses were, and argued it warmly with them. When he had silenced them, he *curst them*, that is, he denounced the judgments of God against them, and shewed them what their sin deserved. He then picked out some of them that were more obstinate than the rest, and fit to be made examples, and *smote them*, that is, ordered them to be beaten by the proper officers, according to the law, Deut. 25. 2, 3. To which he added this further mark of infamy, he *plucked off their hair*, or cut or shaved it off; for it may so be understood. Perhaps they had prided themselves in their hair, and therefore he took it off, to deform and humble them, and put them to shame; it was, in effect, to stigmatize them, at least, for a time. Ezra, in this case, had plucked off his own hair, in holy sorrow for the sin; Nehemiah plucked off their hair, in a holy indignation at the sinners. See the different tempers of wise, and good, and useful, men, and the divers graces, as well as divers gifts, of the same Spirit.

3. He obliged them not to take any more such wives, and separated those whom they had taken. He *cleansed them from all strangers*, both men and women, (v. 30.) and made them promise with an oath that they would never do so again, v. 25. Thus did he try all ways and means to put a stop to this mischief, and to prevent another relapse into this disease.

4. He took particular care of the priests' families, that they might not lie under this stain, this guilt. He found, upon inquiry, that a branch of the high priest's own family, one of his grandsons, had married a daughter of Sanballat, that notorious enemy of the Jews, (ch. 2. 10.—4. 1.) and so had, in effect, twisted interests with the Samaritans, v. 28. How little love had that man, either to God or his country, who could make himself, in duty and interest, a friend to him that was a sworn enemy to both. It seems, this young priest would not put away his wife, and therefore Nehemiah *chased him from him*, deprived him, degraded him, and made him for ever incapable of the priesthood. Josephus says that this expelled priest was Manasseh, and that when Nehemiah drove him away, he went to his father-in-law Sanballat, who built him a temple upon mount Gerizzim, like that at Jerusalem, and promised him he should be high priest in it, and that then was laid the foundation of the Samaritan's pretensions, which continued warm to our Saviour's time; (John, 4. 20.) *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.* When Nehemiah had thus expelled one that had forfeited the honour of the priesthood, he again posted the *priests and Levites, every one in his business*, v. 30. It was no loss to them to part with one that was the scandal of their coat; the work would be done better without him. When Judas was gone out, Christ said, *Now is the Son of man glorified*, John, 13. 30, 31.

Lastly, Here are Nehemiah's prayers on this occasion.

(1.) He prays, *Remember them, O my God*, v. 29. "Lord, convince and convert them, put them in mind of what they should be and do, that they may come to themselves." Or, "Remember them to reckon with them for it; remember it against them." If we take it so, this prayer is a prophecy, that God would remember it against them. They that defile the priesthood, despise God, and shall be lightly esteemed. Perhaps they were too many and too great for him to deal with; "Lord," (says he,) "deal thou with them, take the work into thine own hands."

(2.) He prays, *Remember me, O my God*, v. 31. The best services done to the public have sometimes been forgotten by those for whom they were done; (Eccl. 9. 15.) therefore Nehemiah refers himself to God, to recompense him, takes him for his Pay-Master, and then doubts not but he shall be well paid. This may well be the summary of our petitions, we need no more to make us happy than this; *Remember me, O my God, for good.*

EXPOSITION

WITH

Practical Observations,

OF THE BOOK OF

ESTHER.

How the providence of God watched over the Jews that were returned out of captivity to their own land, and what great and kind things were done for them, we read in the two foregoing books; but there were many who stayed behind, having not zeal enough for God's house, and the holy land and city, to carry them through the difficulties of a removal thither: these, one would think, should have been excluded the special protection of Providence, as unworthy the name of Israelites; but our God deals not with us according to our folly and weakness. We find in this book, that even those Jews who were scattered in the provinces of the heathen, were taken care of, as well as those who were gathered in the land of Judea, and were wonderfully preserved, when doomed to destruction, and appointed as sheep for the slaughter. Who drew up this story is uncertain; Mordecai was as able as any man to relate, on his own knowledge, the several passages of it, *quorum pars magna fuit—for he bore a conspicuous part in it*; and that he wrote such an account of them as was necessary to inform his people of the grounds of their observing the feast of Purim, we are told, *ch. 9. 20. Mordecai wrote these things*, and sent them inclosed in letters to all the Jews; and therefore we have reason to think he was the penman of the whole book. It is the narrative of a plot laid against the Jews, to cut them all off, and wonderfully disappointed by a concurrence of providences. The most compendious exposition of it, will be, to read it deliberately all together at one time, for the latter events expound the former, and shew what Providence intended in them. The name of God is not found in this book; but the apocryphal addition to it (which is not in the Hebrew, nor was ever received by the Jews into the canon, containing six chapters) begins thus, *Then Mordecai said, God has done these things*. But though the name of God be not in it, the finger of God is, directing many minute events for the bringing about of his people's deliverance. The particulars are not only surprising and very entertaining, but edifying and very encouraging to the faith and hope of God's people, in the most difficult and dangerous times: we cannot now expect such miracles to be wrought for us, as were for Israel when they were brought out of Egypt, but we may expect, that, in such ways as God here took to defeat Haman's plot, he will still protect his people. We are told,

- I. How Esther came to be queen, and Mordecai to be great at court, who were to be the instruments of the intended deliverance, *ch. 1, 2.*
- II. Upon what provocation, and by what arts, Haman the Amalekite obtained an order for the destruction of all the Jews, *ch. 3.*
- III. The great distress the Jews, and their patriots especially, were in, thereupon, *ch. 4.*
- IV. The defeating of Haman's particular plot against Mordecai's life, *ch. 5, 6, 7.*
- V. The defeating of his general plot against the Jews, *ch. 8.*
- VI. The care that was taken to perpetuate the remembrance of this, *ch. 9, 10.* The whole story confirms the psalmist's observation, *Ps. 37. 12, 13. The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him, he sees that his day is coming.*

CHAP. I.

Several things in this chapter itself are very instructive, and of great use; but the design of recording the story of it, is, to shew how way was made for Esther to the crown, in order to her being instrumental to defeat Haman's plot, and this, long before the plot was laid, that we may observe and admire the foresight and vast reaches of Providence. Known unto God are all his works before-hand. 1. Ahasuerus the king feasts all his great men, v. 1. 9. 11. In his heat, he divorces his queen, because she would not come to him when he sent for her, v. 10. 22. This shews how God serves his own purposes, even by the sins and follies of men, which he would not permit, if he knew not how to bring good out of them.

1. **N**OW it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces,) 2. That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, 3. In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him: 4. When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days. 5. And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace; 6. Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble. 7. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. 8. And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure. 9. Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.

Which of the kings of Persia this Ahasuerus was, the learned are not agreed. Mordecai is said to have been one of those that were carried captive from Jerusalem, (ch. 2. 6.) whence, it should seem, it was one of the first kings of that empire. Dr. Lightfoot thinks it was that Artaxerxes who hindered the building of the temple, who is called also Ahasuerus, (Ezra, 4. 6, 7.) after his great-grandfather of the Medes, Dan. 9. 1. We have here an account,

I. Of the vast extent of his dominion. In the time of Darius and Cyrus, there were but 120 provinces, Dan. 6. 1. Now, there were 127, from India to Ethiopia; (v. 1.) an overgrown kingdom, which, in time, would sink with its own weight, and, as usual, would lose its provinces as fast as it got them. If such vast power be put into a bad hand, it is able to do so much the more mischief; but if into a good hand, it is able to do so much the more good; Christ's kingdom is, or shall be, far larger than this, when the kingdoms of the world shall all become his; and it shall be everlasting.

II. Of the great pomp and magnificence of his court. When he found himself fixed in his throne, the pride of his heart rising with the grandeur of his kingdom, he made a most extravagant feast, wherein he put himself to vast expence and trouble, only to shew the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty, v. 4. This was vain glory, an affectation of pomp to

purpose at all; for none questioned the riches of his kingdom, nor offered to vie with him for honour. If he had shewed the riches of his kingdom, and the honour of his majesty, as some of his successors did, in contributing largely toward the building of the temple, and the maintaining of the temple service, (Ezra, 6. 8.—7. 22.) it would have turned to a much better account. Two feasts Ahasuerus made: 1. One for his nobles and princes, which lasted 180 days, v. 3, 4. Not that he feasted the same persons, every day, for all that time, but perhaps the nobles and princes of one province one day, of another province another day, while thus he and his constant attendants fared sumptuously every day. The Chaldeeparaphrast (who is very bold in his additions to the story of this book) says, that there had been a rebellion among his subjects, and that this feast was kept for joy of the quashing of it. 2. Another was made for all the people, both great and small, which lasted seven days; some one day, and some another; and, because no house would hold them, they were entertained in the court of the garden, v. 5. The hangings with which the several apartments were divided, or the tents which were there pitched for the company, were very fine and rich; so were the beds or benches on which they sat, and the pavement under their feet, v. 6. Better is a dinner of herbs with quietness, and the enjoyment of one's self and a friend, than this banquet of wine, with all the noise and tumult that must needs attend it.

III. Of the good order which, in some respects, was kept there notwithstanding. We do not find this like Belshazzar's feast, in which dunghill-gods were praised, and the vessels of the sanctuary profaned, Dan. 5. 3, 4. Yet the Chaldean-paraphrase says, that the vessels of the sanctuary were used in this feast, to the great grief of the pious Jews. It was not like Herod's feast, which reserved a prophet's head for the last dish.

Two things we may gather from the account here given of this feast, which are laudable.

1. That there was no forcing of healths, nor urging of them. The drinking was according to the law, probably, some law lately made; none did compel, no not by a continual proposing of it; (as Josephus explains it;) they did not send the glass about, but every man drank as he pleased, (v. 8.) so that, if there were any that drank to excess, it was their own fault, a fault which few would commit, when the king's order put an honour upon sobriety. This caution of a heathen prince, even then when he would shew his generosity, may shame many who are called Christians, who think they do not sufficiently shew their good housekeeping, nor bid their friends welcome, unless they make them drunk, and, under pretence of sending the health round, send the sin round, and death with it. There is a woe to them that do so; let them read it, and tremble, Hab. 2. 15, 16. It is robbing men of their reason, their richest jewel, and making them fools, the greatest wrong that can be.

2. That there was no mixed dancing; for the gentlemen and ladies were entertained asunder, not as in Belshazzar's feast, whose wives and concubines drank with him, (Dan. 5. 2.) or Herod's, whose daughter danced before him. Vashti feasted the women in her own apartment; not openly in the court of the garden, but in the royal house, v. 9. Thus, while the king shewed the honour of his majesty, she and her ladies shewed the honour of their modesty, which is truly the majesty of the fair sex.

10. On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, 11. To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. 12. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was

the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. 13. Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so *was* the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment: 14. And the next unto him *was* Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;) 15. What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains? 16. And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that *are* in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. 17. For *this* deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. 18. *Likewise* shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus *shall there arise* too much contempt and wrath. 19. If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. 20. And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small. 21. And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan: 22. For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that *it* should be published according to the language of every people.

We have here a damp to all the mirth of Ahasuerus's feast; it cooled in heaviness, not, as Job's children's feast, by a wind from the wilderness, not, as Belshazzar's, by a hand-writing on the wall, but by his own folly. An unhappy falling out there was, at the end of the feast, between the king and queen, which broke off the feast abruptly, and sent the guests away silent and ashamed.

I. It was certainly the king's weakness, to send for Vashti into his presence, when he was drunk, and in company with abundance of gentlemen, many of whom, it is likely, were in the same condition. When *his heart was merry with wine*, nothing would serve him, but Vashti must come, well dressed as she was, with the crown on her head, that the princes and people might see what a handsome woman she was, v. 10, 11. Hereby, 1. He dishonoured himself as a husband, who ought to protect, but by no means to expose, the modesty of his wife, who ought to be to her a covering of the eyes, (Gen. 20. 16.) not to uncover them. 2. He diminished himself as a king, in commanding that from his wife which

she might refuse, much to the honour of her virtue. It was against the custom of the Persians for the women to appear in public, and he put a great hardship upon her, when he did not court, but command, her to do so uncouth a thing, and make her a shew. If he had not been put out of the possession of himself by drinking to excess, he would not have done such a thing, but have been angry at any one that should have mentioned it. When the wine is in, the wit is out, and men's reason departs from them.

II. However, perhaps it was not her wisdom to deny him: (v. 12.) *she refused to come*; though he sent his command by seven honourable messengers, and publicly, and Josephus says, sent again and again, yet she persisted in her denial. Had she come, while it was evident that she did it in pure obedience, it would have been no reflection upon her modesty, nor a bad example. The thing was not in itself sinful, and therefore to obey had been more her honour than to be so precise. Perhaps she refused in a haughty manner, and then it was certainly evil; she scorned to come at the king's commandment. What a mortification was this to him! While he was shewing the glory of his kingdom, he shewed the reproach of his family, that he had a wife that would do as she pleased. Strifes between yoke-fellows are bad enough at any time, but before company they are very scandalous, and occasion blushing and uneasiness.

III. The king, thereupon, grew outrageous. He that had rule over 127 provinces, had no rule over his own spirit, but his anger burned in him, v. 12. He had consulted his own comfort and credit more, if he had stifled his resentments, had passed by the affront his wife gave him, and turned it off with a jest.

IV. Though he was very angry, he would not do any thing in this matter, till he advised with his privy-counsellors; as he had seven chamberlains to execute his orders, who are named, (v. 10.) so he had seven counsellors to direct his orders. The greater power a man has, the greater need he has of advice, that he may not abuse his power. Of these counsellors it is said, that they were learned men, for they *knew law and judgment*; that they were wise men, for they *knew the times*; and that the king put great confidence in them, and honour upon them, for they *saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom*, v. 13, 14. In the multitude of such counsellors there is safety. Now here is,

1. The question proposed to this cabinet-council; (v. 15.) *What shall we do to the queen Vashti, according to law?* Observe, (1.) Though it was the queen that was guilty, the law must have its course. (2.) Though the king was very angry, yet he would do nothing but what he was advised was according to law.

2. The proposal which Memucan made, that Vashti should be divorced for her disobedience. Some suggest that he gave this severe advice, and the rest agreed to it, because they knew it would please the king, would gratify both his passion now, and his appetite afterward. But Josephus says, that, on the contrary, he had a strong affection for Vashti, and would not have put her away for this offence, if he could legally have passed it by. And then we must suppose Memucan, in his advice, to have had a sincere regard to justice and the public good.

(1.) He shews what would be the bad consequences of the queen's disobedience to her husband, if it were passed by and not animated upon; that it would imbolden other wives both to disobey their husbands, and to domineer over them. Had this unhappy falling out between the king and his wife, wherein she was conqueror, been private, the error had remained with themselves, and the quarrel might have been composed privately among themselves; but it happening to be public, and perhaps the ladies, that were now feasting with the queen, having shewed themselves pleased with her refusal, her bad example would be likely to have had a bad influence upon all the families of the kingdom; if the queen must have her humour, and the king must submit to it, (since the houses of private persons commonly take their measures from the courts of princes,) the wives would be haughty and imperious, and would scorn to obey their husbands, and the poor despised husbands might fret at it, but could not help themselves, for the *contentions of a wife are a continual dropping*; Prov. 19. 13.—27. 15. and see Prov. 21. 9.—25. 24. When wives *despise their hus-*

bands, whom they ought to reverence, (Eph. 5. 33.) and contend for *dominion* over those to whom they ought to be in *subjection*, (1 Pet. 3. 1.) there cannot but be continual guilt and grief, confusion, and every evil work. And great ones must take heed of setting copies of this kind, v. 16. . 18.

(2.) He shews what would be the good consequence of a decree against Vashti, that she should be divorced. We may suppose, before they proceeded to this extremity, they sent to Vashti to know if she would yet submit, cry, *Peccavi—I have done wrong*, and ask the king's pardon, which if she had done, the mischief of her example would have been effectually prevented, and process would have been staid; but, it is likely, she continued obstinate, and insisted upon it as her prerogative to do as she pleased, whether it pleased the king or no; and therefore they gave this judgment against her, that *she come no more before the king*, and this judgment so ratified as never to be reversed, v. 19. The consequence of this, it was hoped, would be, that the *wives would give to their husbands honour*, even the wives of the *great*, notwithstanding their own greatness, and the wives of the *small*, notwithstanding the husband's meanness, v. 20. And thus every man would bear rule in his own house, as he ought to do, and, the wives being subject, the children and servants would be so too. It is the interest of states and kingdoms, to provide that good order be kept in private families.

3. The edict that passed, according to this proposal, signifying that the queen was divorced for contumacy, according to the law, and that if other wives were, in like manner, undutiful to their husbands, they must expect to be in like manner disgraced; (v. 21, 22.) were they better than the queen? Whether it was the passion, or the policy, of the king, that was served by this edict, God's providence served its own purpose by it, which was, to make way for Esther to the crown.

CHAP. II.

Two things are here recorded in this chapter, which were working toward the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's conspiracy. I. The advance of Esther to be queen instead of Vashti. Many others were candidates for the honour; (v. 1. . 4.) but Esther, an orphan, a captive Jew, (v. 5. . 7.) recommended herself to the king's chamberlain first, (v. 8. . 11.) and then to the king, (v. 12. . 17.) who made her queen, v. 18. . 20. II. The good service that Mordecai did to the king, in discovering a plot against his life, v. 21. . 23.

1. **A**FTER these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. 2. Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king: 3. And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given *them*: 4. And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so. 5. *Now* in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name *was* Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; 6. Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. 7. And he brought up Hadassah, that *is* Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had

neither father nor mother, and the maid *was* fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter. 8. So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. 9. And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, *which were* meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best *place* of the house of the women. 10. Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew *it*. 11. And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her. 12. Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, *to wit*, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with *other* things for the purifying of the women;) 13. Then thus came *every* maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house. 14. In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name. 15. Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her. 16. So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which *is* the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. 17. And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18. Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, *even* Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king. 19. And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate. 20. Esther had not *yet* shewed her kindred

nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.

How God put down one that was high and mighty, from her seat, we read in the chapter before, and are now to be told how he exalted one of low degree, as the virgin Mary observes in her song, (Luke, 1. 52.) and Hannah before her, 1 Sam. 2. 4. 8. Vashti being humbled for her height, Esther is advanced for her humility. Observe,

I. The extravagant course that was taken to please the king with another wife instead of Vashti. Josephus says, that, when his anger was over, he was exceedingly grieved that the matter was carried so far, and would have been reconciled to Vashti, but that, by the constitution of the government, the judgment was irrevocable; that, therefore, to make him forget her, they contrived how to entertain him first with a great variety of concubines, and then to fix him to the most agreeable of them all for a wife instead of Vashti. The marriages of princes are commonly made by policy and interest, for the enlarging of their dominions, and the strengthening of their alliances; but this must be made partly by the agreeableness of the person to the king's fancy, whether she were rich or poor, noble or ignoble. What pains were taken to humour the king! As if his power and wealth were given him for no other end, than that he might have all the delights of sense wound up to the height of pleasurable, and exquisitely refined, though, at the best, they are but dross and dregs in comparison with divine and spiritual pleasures. 1. All the provinces of his kingdom must be searched, for fair young virgins, and officers appointed to choose them, v. 3. 2. A house (a seraglio) was prepared on purpose for them, and a person appointed to have the charge of them, to see that they were well provided for. 3. No less than twelve months was allowed them for their purification, some of them, at least, who were brought out of the country, that they might be very clean, and perfumed, v. 12. Even those who were the master-pieces of nature must yet have all this help from art, to recommend them to a vain and carnal mind. 4. After the king had once taken them to his bed, they were made recluses ever after, except the king pleased at any time to send for them; (v. 14.) they were looked upon as secondary wives, were maintained by the king accordingly, and might not marry. We may see, by this instance, to what absurd practices those came, who were destitute of divine revelation, and who, as a punishment for their idolatry, were given up to vile affections; having broken through that law of creation, which resulted from God's making man, they brake through another law, which was founded upon his making one man and one woman. See what need there was of the gospel of Christ to purify men from the lusts of the flesh, and to reduce them to the original institution. Those that have *learned Christ* will think it a shame even to speak of such things as these which were done of them, not only in secret, but avowedly, Eph. 5. 12.

II. The over-ruling providence of God, thus bringing Esther to be queen. Had she been first recommended to Ahasuerus for a wife, he would have rejected the motion with disdain. But when she comes in her turn, after several others, and it was found that though many of them were ingenious and discreet, graceful and agreeable, yet Esther excelled them all, way was made for her, even by her rivals, into the king's affections, and the honours consequent thereupon. It is certain, as Bishop Patrick says, that those who suggest that she committed a great sin, to come at this dignity, do not consider the custom of those times and countries. Every one that the king took to his bed was married to him, and was his wife of a lower rank, as Hagar was Abraham's; so that if Esther had not been made queen, the sons of Jacob need not say that he *dealt with their sisters as with a harlot*. Concerning Esther, we must observe,

1. Her original and character. (1.) She was one of the *children of the captivity*; a Jewess, and a sharer with her people in their bondage. Daniel and his fellows were advanced in the land where they were captives; for they were of those whom God sent thither

for their good, Jer. 24. 5. (2.) She was an orphan, her father and mother were both dead; (v. 7.) but when they had forsaken her, then the Lord took her up, Ps. 27. 10. When those whose unhappiness it is to be thus deprived of their parents in their childhood, yet afterward come to be eminently pious and prosperous, we ought to take notice of it to the glory of that God, and his grace and providence, who has taken it among the titles of his honour, to be a *Father of the fatherless*. (3.) She was a beauty, *fair of form, good of countenance*, so it is in the margin, v. 7. Her wisdom and virtue were her greatest beauty, but it is an advantage to a diamond to be well set. (4.) Mordecai, her cousin-german, was her guardian, *brought her up, and took her for his own daughter*. The LXX say that he designed to make her his wife; if that were so, he was to be praised that he opposed not her better preferment. (5.) Let God be acknowledged in raising up friends for the fatherless and motherless; let it be an encouragement to that pious instance of charity, that many who have taken care of the education of orphans have lived to see the good fruit of their care and pains, abundantly to their comfort. Dr. Lightfoot thinks that this Mordecai is the same with that mentioned, Ezra, 2. 2. who went up to Jerusalem with the first, and helped forward the settlement of his people, until the building of the temple was stopped, and then went back to the Persian court, to see what service he could do them there.

Mordecai being Esther's guardian or pro-parent, we are told, [1.] How tender he was of her, as if she had been his own child; (v. 11.) he walked before her door, every day, to know how she did, and what interest she had. Let those whose relations are thus cast upon them by Divine Providence, be thus kindly affectioned to them, and solicitous for them. [2.] How respectful she was to him, though in relation she was his equal, yet in age and dependence being his inferior, she honoured him as her father, *did his commandment*, v. 20. This is an example to orphans; if they fall into the hands of those who love them and take care of them, let them make suitable returns of duty and affection. The less obliged their guardians were, in duty, to provide for them, the more obliged they are, in gratitude, to honour and obey their guardians. Here is an instance of Esther's obsequiousness to Mordecai, that she did not *shew her people or her kindred*, because Mordecai had charged her that she should not, v. 10. He did not bid her deny her country, nor tell a lie to conceal her parentage; if he had, she must not have done it; but he bid her not proclaim it: all truths are not to be spoken at all times, though an untruth is not to be spoken at any time. She being born in Shushan, and her parents being dead, all took her to be of Persian extraction, and she was not bound to undeceive them.

2. Her preferment. Who would have thought that a Jew, a captive, an orphan, was born to be a queen, an empress? Yet so it proved. Providence sometimes *raiseth up the poor out of the dust, to set them among princes*, 1 Sam. 2. 8. (1.) The king's chamberlain honoured her, (v. 9.) and was ready to serve her; wisdom and virtue will gain respect. They that make sure God's favour, shall find favour with man too, as far as it is good for them. All that looked upon Esther admired her, (v. 15.) and concluded that she was the lady that would win the prize: and she did win it. (2.) The king himself fell in love with her. She was not solicitous, as the rest of the maidens were, to set herself off with artificial beauty; she *required nothing* but just what was *appointed* her; (v. 15.) and yet she was most acceptable. The more natural beauty is, the more agreeable. The king loved Esther above *all the women*, v. 17. Now he needed not to make any further trials, or take time to deliberate; he is soon determined to *set the royal crown upon her head, and make her queen*, v. 17. This was done in his seventh year; (v. 16.) Vashti was divorced in his third year; (ch. 1. 3.) so that he was four years without a queen.

Notice is taken, [1.] Of the honours the king put upon Esther. He graced the solemnity of her coronation with a *royal feast*, (v. 18.) at which perhaps Esther, in compliance with the king, made a public appearance, which Vashti had refused to do; that she might have the praise of obedience in the same instance in which the other incurred the blot of disobedience. He also granted a *re-*

lease to the provinces, either a remittance of the taxes in arrear, or an act of grace for criminals: as Pilate, at the feast, released a prisoner. This was to add to the joy. [2.] Of the deference Esther continued to pay to her former guardian; she still *did the commandment of Mordecai, as when she was brought up with him*, v. 20. Mordecai sat in the king's gate, that was the height of his preferment, he was one of the porters, or door-keepers, of the court; whether he had this place before, or Esther obtained it for him, we are not told; but there he sat contentedly, and aimed no higher; and yet Esther, who was advanced to the throne, was observant of him. This was an evidence of an humble and grateful disposition; that she had a sense of his former kindnesses, and his continued wisdom; it is a great ornament to those that are advanced, and much their praise, to remember their benefactors, to retain the impressions of their good education, to be diffident of themselves, willing to take advice, and thankful for it.

21. In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. 22. And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king *thereof* in Mordecai's name. 23. And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

This good service which Mordecai did to the government, in discovering a plot against the life of the king, is here recorded, because the mention of it will again occur to his advantage. No step is yet taken toward Haman's design of the Jews' destruction, but several steps are taken toward God's design of their deliverance, and this for one. God now gives Mordecai an opportunity of doing the king a good turn, that he might have the fairer opportunity afterward of doing the Jews a good turn.

1. A design was laid against the king by two of his own servants, who sought to lay hand on him, not only to make him a prisoner, but to take away his life, v. 21. Probably, they resented some affront which they thought he had given them, or some injury which he had done them. Who would be great, to be so much the object of envy? Who would be arbitrary, to be so much the object of ill-will? Princes, above any mortals, have their souls continually in their hands, and often go down *slain to the pit*, especially those who caused terror in the land of the living.

2. Mordecai got notice of their treason, and, by Esther's means, discovered it to the king, hereby confirming her in, and recommending himself to, the king's favour. How he came to the knowledge of it does not appear; whether he overheard their discourse, or they offered to draw him in with them, so it was, that the thing was known to him: this ought to be a warning against all traitors and seditious practices; though they presume upon secrecy, *a bird of the air shall carry the voice*. Mordecai, as soon as he knew it, caused it to be made known to the king; which ought to be an instruction and example to all that would be found good subjects, not to conceal any bad design they know of against the prince or the public peace, for it is making a confederacy with public enemies.

3. The traitors were hanged, as they deserved, but not till it was, upon search, fully proved against them, (v. 23.) and the whole matter was recorded in the king's journals, with a particular remark, that Mordecai was the man who discovered the treason. He was not rewarded presently, but a book of remembrance was written. Thus, with respect to those who serve Christ, though their recompence is adjourned till the resurrection of the just, yet an account is kept of their *work of faith and labour of love*, which God is not *unrighteous to forget*, Heb. 6. 10.

CHAP. III.

A very black and mournful scene here opens, and which threatens the ruin of all the people of God. Were there not some such dark nights, the light of the morning would not be so welcome. I. Haman is made the king's favourite, v. 1. II. Mordecai refuses to give him the honour he demanded, v. 2. 4. III. Haman, for his sake, vows to be revenged upon all the Jews, v. 5, 6. IV. He, upon a malicious suggestion, obtains an order from the king to have them all massacred upon a certain day, v. 7. 13. V. This order is dispersed through the kingdom, v. 14, 15.

1. AFTER these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. 2. And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence. 3. Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment? 4. Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. 5. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. 6. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

Here we have,

I. Haman advanced by the prince, and adored, thereupon, by the people. The prince had lately laid Esther in his bosom, but she had no such interest in him, as to get her friends preferred, or to prevent the preferring of one who, she knew, was an enemy to her people. When those that are good become great, they still find that they cannot do good, nor prevent mischief, as they would. This Haman was an Agagite, an Amalekite, says Josephus, probably of the descendants of Agag, a common name of the princes of Amalek, as appears, Numb. 24. 7. Some think that he was, by birth, a prince, as Jehoiakim was, whose seat was set above the rest of the captive kings, (2 Kings, 25. 28.) as Haman's here was, v. 1. The king took a fancy to him, (princes are not bound to give reasons for their favours,) made him his favourite, his confidant, his prime minister of state. Such a commanding influence the court then had, that (contrary to the proverb) whom it blessed, the country blessed too; for all men adored this rising sun, and the king's servants were particularly commanded to bow before him, and to do him reverence, (v. 2.) and they did so. I wonder what the king saw in Haman that was commendable or meritorious; it is plain that he was not a man of honour or justice, of any true courage, or steady conduct, but proud, and passionate, and revengeful; yet was he promoted, and caressed, and there was none so great as he. Princes' darlings are not always worthies.

II. Mordecai adhering to his principles with a bold and daring resolution, and therefore refusing to reverence Haman, as the rest of the king's servants did, v. 2. He was urged to it by his friends, who reminded him of the king's commandment, and consequently of the danger he incurred, if he refused to comply with it; it was as much as his life was worth, especially considering Haman's insolence, v. 3. They spake daily to him, to persuade him to conform; but all in vain, he hearkened not to them, but told them plainly that he was a Jew, and could not in conscience do it; doubtless, his refusal, when it came to be taken notice of, and

made the subject of discourse, was commonly attributed to pride and envy, that he would not pay respect to Haman, because, on the score of his alliance to Esther, he was not himself as much promoted; or to a factious seditious spirit, and a disaffection to the king and his government; those that would make the best of it, looked upon it as his weakness, or his want of breeding, called it a humour, and a piece of affected singularity: it does not appear that any one scrupled it, except Mordecai; and yet his refusal was pious, conscientious, and pleasing to God, for the religion of a Jew forbade him, 1. To give such extravagant honours as were required, to any mortal man, especially so wicked a man as Haman was. In the apocryphal chapters of this book, (ch. 13. 12. . 14.) Mordecai is brought in, thus appealing to God in this matter; *Thou knowest, Lord, that it was neither in contempt nor pride, nor for any desire of glory, that I did not bow down to proud Haman, for I could have been content, with good-will, for the salvation of Israel, to kiss the soles of his feet; but I did this, that I might not prefer the glory of man above the glory of God, neither will I worship any but thee.* 2. He especially thought it a piece of injustice to his nation, to give such honour to an Amalekite, one of that devoted nation with which God had sworn that he would have perpetual war, (Exod. 17. 16.) and concerning which he had given that solemn charge, (Deut. 25. 17.) *Remember what Amalek did.* Though religion does by no means destroy good manners, but teaches us to render honour to whom honour is due, yet it is the character of a citizen of Zion, that not only in his heart, but in his eyes, such a vile person as Haman was is contemned, Ps. 15. 4. Let those who are governed by principles of conscience be steady and resolute, however censured or threatened, as Mordecai was.

III. Haman meditating revenge. Some, that hoped thereby to curry favour with Haman, took notice to him of Mordecai's rudeness, waiting to see whether he would bend or break, v. 4. Haman then observed it himself, and was full of wrath, v. 5. A meek and humble man would have slighted the affront, and have said, "Let him have his humour; what am I the worse for it?" But it makes Haman's proud spirit rage, and fret, and boil, within him, so that he becomes uneasy to himself and all about him. It is soon resolved that Mordecai must die. The head must off that will not bow to Haman; if he cannot have his honours, he will have his blood. It is as penal, in this court, not to worship Haman, as it was, in Nebuchadnezzar's, not to worship the golden image which he had set up. Mordecai is a person of quality, in a post of honour, and own cousin to the queen; and yet Haman thinks his life nothing towards a satisfaction for the affront, thousands of innocent and valuable lives must be sacrificed to his indignation; and therefore he vows the destruction of all the people of Mordecai, for his sake, because his being a Jew was the reason he gave why he did not reverence Haman. Herein appears Haman's intolerable pride, insatiable cruelty, and the ancient antipathy of an Amalekite to the Israel of God. Saul the son of Kish, a Benjamite, spared Agag, but Mordecai the son of Kish, a Benjamite, (ch. 2. 5.) shall find no mercy with this Agagite, whose design is, to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, (v. 6.) which, I suppose, would include those that were returned to their own land, for that was now a province of his kingdom. Come and let us cut them off from being a nation, Ps. 83. 4. Nero's barbarous wish is his, that they had all but one neck.

7. In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman, from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar. 8. And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to

suffer them. 9. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasures. 10. And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. 11. And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. 12. Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring. 13. And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. 14. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day. 15. The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.

Haman values himself upon that bold and daring thought, which, he fancied, well became his great spirit, of destroying all the Jews; an undertaking worthy of its author, and which, he promised himself, would perpetuate his memory. He doubts not but to find desperate and bloody hands enough to cut all their throats, if the king will but give him leave; how he obtained leave, and commission to do it, we are here told. He had the king's ear, let him alone to manage him.

I. He makes a false and malicious representation of the Jews, and their character, to the king, v. 8. The enemies of God's people could not give them such bad treatment as they do, if they did not first give them a bad name. He would have the king believe, 1. That the Jews were a despicable people, and that it was not for his credit to harbour them. *A certain people there is, without name, as if nobody knew whence they came, and what they were; "They are not incorporated, but scattered abroad and dispersed in all the provinces as fugitives and vagabonds on the earth, and inmates in all countries, the burthen and scandal of the places where they live."* 2. That they were a dangerous people, and that it was not safe to harbour them. *"They have laws and usages of their own, and conform not to the statutes of the kingdom, and the customs of the country; and therefore may be looked upon as disaffected to the government, and likely to infect others with their singularities, which may end in a rebellion."* It is no new thing for the best of men to have such invidious characters as these given of them; if it be no sin to kill them, it is no sin to belie them.

II. He bids high for leave to destroy them all, v. 9. He knew there were many that hated the Jews, and would willingly fall upon them, if they might but have a commission; *"Let it be written, therefore, that they may be destroyed; give but orders for a general massacre of all the Jews, and Haman will undertake it shall be*

easily done:" if the king will gratify him in this matter, he will make him a present of *ten thousand talents*, which shall be *paid into the king's treasuries*. This, he thought, would be a powerful inducement to the king to consent, and would obviate the strongest objection against him, which was, that the government must needs sustain loss in its revenues, by the destruction of so many of its subjects; so great a sum, he hoped, would be equivalent for that. Proud and malicious men will not mind the expences of their revenge, nor spare any cost to gratify it; yet, no doubt, Haman knew how to reimburse himself out of the spoil of the Jews, which his janizaries were to seize for him, (v. 13.) and so to make them bear the charges of their own ruin; while he himself hoped to be not only a saver, but a gainer, by the bargain.

III. He obtains what he desired, a full commission to do what he would with the Jews, v. 10, 11. The king was so inattentive to business, and so bewitched with Haman, that he took no time to examine the truth of his allegations; but was as willing as Haman could wish, to believe the worst concerning the Jews, and therefore he gave them up into his hands, as lambs to the lion; *The people are thine, do with them as it seemeth good unto thee*; he does not say, "Kill them, slay them," (hoping Haman's own cooler thoughts would abate the rigour of that sentence, and induce him to sell them for slaves,) but, "Do what thou wilt with them." And so little did he consider how much he should lose in his tribute, and how much Haman would gain in the spoil, that he gave him withal the ten thousand talents; *The silver is thine*. Such an implicit confidence likewise he had in Haman, and so perfectly had he abandoned all care of his kingdom, that he gave Haman his ring, his privy-seal, or sign-manual, wherewith to confirm whatever edict he pleased to draw up to this purpose. Miserable is the kingdom that is at the disposal of such a head as this, which has one ear only, and a nose to be led by, but neither eyes nor brains, nor scarcely a tongue, of its own.

IV. He then consults with his soothsayers to find out a lucky day for the designed massacre, v. 7. The resolve was taken up in the first month, in the twelfth year of the king, when Esther had been his wife about five years; some day or other in that year must be pitched upon; and, as if he doubted not but that Heaven would favour his design, and further it, he refers it to the lot, that is, to the Divine Providence, to choose the day for him; but that, in the decision, proved a better friend to the Jews than to him; for the lot fell upon the twelfth month, so that Mordecai and Esther had eleven months to turn them in, for the defeating of the design; or, if they could not, space would be left for the Jews to make their escape, and shift for their safety. Haman, though eager to have the Jews cut off, yet will submit to the laws of his superstition, and not anticipate the supposed fortunate day, no, not to gratify his impatient revenge. Probably, he was in some fear lest the Jews should prove too hard for their enemies; and therefore durst not venture on such a hazardous enterprise, but under the smiles of a good omen. This may shame us, who often acquiesce not in the directions and disposals of Providence, when they cross our desires and intentions. He that believeth the lot, much more that believeth the promise, will not make haste. But see how God's wisdom serves its own purposes by men's folly: Haman has appealed to the lot, and to the lot he shall go, which, by adjourning the execution, gives judgment against him, and breaks the neck of the plot.

V. The bloody edict is, hereupon, drawn up, signed, and published, giving orders to the militia of every province to be ready against the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, and, on that day, to murder all the Jews, men, women, and children, and seize their effects, v. 12, 14. Had the decree been to banish all the Jews, and expel them out of the king's dominions, it had been severe enough; but surely never any act of cruelty appeared so barefaced as this, to *destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all the Jews*; appointing them as *sheep for the slaughter*, without shewing any cause. No crime is laid to their charge; it is not pretended that they were obnoxious to the public justice, nor is any condition offered, upon performance of which they might have their lives spared, but die they must, without mercy. Thus have the church's enemies thirsted after blood, the *blood of the saints and the*

martyrs of Jesus, and drunk of it till they have been perfectly intoxicated, (Rev. 17. 6.) yet still, like the *horse-leech*, they cry, *Give, give*. This cruel offer is ratified with the king's seal, directed to the king's lieutenants, and drawn up in the king's name, and yet the king knows not what he does. Posts are sent out, with all expedition, to carry copies of the decree to the respective provinces, v. 15. See how restless the malice of the church's enemies is; it will spare no pains, it will lose no time.

VI. The different temper of the court and city, hereupon. 1. The court was very merry upon it; the *king and Haman sat down to drink*, perhaps to drink confusion to all the Jews. Haman was afraid lest the king's conscience should smite him for what he had done, and he should begin to wish it undone again; to prevent which, he ingrossed him to himself, and kept him drinking: this cursed method many take to drown their convictions, and harden their own hearts, and the hearts of others, in sin. 2. The city was very sad upon it, (and the other cities of the kingdom, no doubt, when they had notice of it,) *the city Shushan was perplexed*; not only the Jews themselves, but all their neighbours that had any principles of justice and compassion. It grieved them to see their king so abused, to see *wickedness in the place of judgment*, (Eccl. 3. 16.) to see men that lived peaceably, treated so barbarously; and what would be the consequence of it to themselves, they knew not. But the king and Haman cared for none of these things. Note, It is an absurd and impious thing to indulge ourselves in mirth and pleasure, when the church is in distress, and the public perplexed.

CHAP. IV.

We left God's Isaac bound upon the altar, and ready to be sacrificed, and the enemies triumphing in the prospect of it; but things here begin to work towards a deliverance, and they begin at the right end. I. The Jews' friends lay to heart the danger, and lament it, v. 1, 4. II. Matters are concerted between Mordecai and Esther for the preventing of it. 1. Esther inquires into this case, and receives a particular account of it, v. 5, 7. 2. Mordecai urges her to intercede with the king for a revocation of the edict, v. 8, 9. III. Esther objected the danger of addressing the king uncalled, v. 10, 12. IV. Mordecai pressed her to venture, v. 13, 14. V. Esther, after a religious fast of three days, promised to do so; (v. 15, 17.) and we shall find that it sped well.

1. **W**HEN Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; 2. And came even before the king's gate: for none *might* enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. 3. And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, *there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing*; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. 4. So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told *it* her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received *it* not.

Here we have an account of the general sorrow that was among the Jews, upon the publishing of Haman's bloody edict against them. It was a sad time with the church.

1. Mordecai cried bitterly, *rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth*, v. 1, 2. He not only thus vented his grief, but proclaimed it, that all might take notice of it that he was not ashamed to own himself a friend to the Jews, and a fellow-sufferer with them, their *brother and companion in tribulation*, how despicable and how odious soever they were now represented by Haman's faction. It was bravely done, thus publicly to espouse what he knew to be a righteous cause, and the cause of God, even then when it seemed a desperate and a sinking cause. Mordecai laid the danger to heart *more* than any, because he knew that Haman's spite was against

him primarily, and that it was for his sake that the rest of the Jews were struck at; and therefore, though he did not repent of what some would call *his obstinacy*, for he persisted in it, (*ch. 5. 9.*) yet it troubled him greatly, that his people should suffer for his scruples, which perhaps occasioned some of them to reflect upon him as too precise. But, being able to appeal to God, that what he did he did from a principle of conscience, he could with comfort *commit his own cause*, and that of his people, *to him that judgeth righteously*. God will keep those that are exposed by the tenderness of their consciences. Notice is here taken of a law, that *none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth*; though the arbitrary power of their kings often, as now, set many a mourning, yet none must come near the king in a mourning dress, because he was not willing to hear the complaints of such. Nothing, but what was gay and pleasant, must appear at court, and every thing that was melancholy, must be banished thence; all in king's palaces *wear soft clothing*, (*Matth. 11. 8.*) not sackcloth. But thus to keep out the badges of sorrow, unless they could withal have kept out the causes of sorrow, to forbid sackcloth to enter, unless they could have forbidden sickness, and trouble, and death, to enter, was a jest. However, this obliged Mordecai to keep his distance, and only to come before the gate, not to take his place in the gate.

2. All the Jews in every province laid it much to heart, *v. 3.* They denied themselves the comfort of their tables, (for they fasted and mingled tears with their meat and drink,) and the comfort of their beds at night, for *they lay in sackcloth and ashes*. They who, for want of confidence in God, and affection to their own land, had staid in the land of their captivity, when Cyrus gave them liberty to be gone, now perhaps repented of their folly, and wished, when it was too late, that they had complied with the call of God.

Esther the queen, upon a general intimation of the trouble Mordecai was in, *was exceedingly grieved*, *v. 4.* Mordecai's grief was her's, such a respect did she still retain for him; and the Jews' danger was her distress; for, though a queen, she forgot not her relation to them. Let not the greatest think it below them to *grieve for the affliction of Joseph*, though they themselves be *anointed with the chief ointments*, *Amos, 6. 6.* Esther sent change of raiment to Mordecai, the *oil of joy for mourning*, and the *garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness*; but, because he would make her sensible of the greatness of his grief, and consequently of the cause of it, *he received it not*, but was as one that refused to be comforted.

5. Then called Esther for Hatach, *one* of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it *was*, and why it *was*. 6. So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which *was* before the king's gate. 7. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. 8. Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. 9. And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. 10. Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; 11. All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman,

shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, *there is one law* of his to put *him* to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. 12. And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. 13. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. 14. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this? 15. Then Esther bade *them* return Mordecai *this answer*; 16. Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. 17. So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

So strictly did the laws of Persia confine the wives, especially the king's wives, that it was not possible for Mordecai to have a conference with Esther about this important affair, but divers messages are here carried between them, by Hatach, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and, it seems, he was one she could confide in.

I. She sent to Mordecai to know more particularly and fully what the trouble was which he was now lamenting, (*v. 5.*) and why it was that he would not put off his sackcloth. To inquire thus after news, that we may know the better how to direct our griefs and joys, our prayers and praises, well becomes all that love Zion. If we must weep with them that weep, we must know why they weep.

II. Mordecai sent her an authentic account of the whole matter, with a charge to her to intercede with the king in this matter. *Mordecai told him all that had happened unto him*, (*v. 7.*) what a pique Haman had against him for not bowing to him, and by what arts he had procured this edict; he sent her also a true copy of the edict, that she might see what imminent danger she and her people were in; and charged her, if she had any respect for him, or any kindness for the Jewish nation, that she should appear now on their behalf, rectify the mis-informations with which the king was imposed upon, and set the matter in a true light, not doubting but that then he would vacate the decree.

III. She sent her case to Mordecai, that she could not, without peril of her life, address the king, and that therefore he put a great hardship upon her, in urging her to it; gladly would she wait, gladly would she stoop to do the Jews a kindness, but, if she must run the hazard of being put to death as a malefactor, she might well say, *I pray thee, have me excused*, and find out some other intercessor.

1. The law was express, all knew it; that whosoever came to the king uncalled, should be put to death, unless he was pleased to *hold out the golden sceptre to them*, and it was extremely doubtful whether she should find him in so good a humour, *v. 11.* This law was made, not so much in prudence, for the greater safety of the king's person, as in pride, that, being seldom seen, and not without great difficulty, he might be adored as a little god. A foolish law it was, for, (1.) It made the kings themselves unhappy, confining them to their retirements, lest they should be seen. This

made the royal palace little better than a royal prison, and the kings themselves could not but become morose, and perhaps melancholy, and so a terror to others, and a burthen to themselves. Many have their lives made miserable by their own haughtiness and ill-nature. (2.) It was bad for their subjects; for what good had they of a king that they might never have liberty to apply to for the redress of grievances, and appeal to from the inferior judges? It is not thus in the court of the King of kings; to the footstool of his throne of grace we may, at any time, *come boldly*, and may be sure of an answer of peace to the prayer of faith. We are welcome not only into the inner court, but even into the holiest, through the blood of Jesus. (3.) It was particularly very uncomfortable for their wives, that there was not a proviso in the law to except them, who were *bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh*. But perhaps it was wickedly intended as much against them as any other, that the kings might the more freely enjoy their concubines, and Esther knew it. Miserable was the kingdom when the princes framed the laws to serve their lusts.

2. Her case was, at present, very discouraging: Providence so ordered it, that, just at this juncture, she was under a cloud, and the king's affections cooled toward her, for she had been *kept from his presence thirty days*; that her faith and courage might be the more tried, and that God's goodness, in the favour she now found with the king notwithstanding, might shine the brighter. It is probable that Haman endeavoured by women, as well as wine, to divert the king from thinking of what he had done, and then Esther was neglected, from whom, no doubt, he did what he could to alienate the king, knowing her to be averse to him.

IV. Mordecai still insisted upon it, that, whatever hazard she might run, she must apply herself to the king in this great affair, r. 13, 14. No excuse will serve, but she must appear an advocate in this cause; he suggests to her,

1. That it was her own cause, for that the decree, to *destroy all the Jews*, did not except her: "*Think not* therefore that *thou shalt escape in the king's house, that the palace will be thy protection, and the crown save thy head: no, thou art a Jew, and if the rest be cut off, thou wilt be cut off too.*" It was certainly her wisdom rather to expose herself to a conditional death from her husband, than to a certain death from her enemy.

2. That it was a cause which, one way or other, would certainly be carried, and which therefore she might safely venture in. "*If thou shouldst decline the service, enlargement and deliverance will arise to the Jews from another place.*" This was the language of a strong faith, which *staggered not at the promise* when the danger was most threatening, but *against hope believed in hope*. Instruments may fail, but God's covenant will not.

3. That if she deserted her friends now, through cowardice and unbelief, she would have reason to fear that some judgment from heaven would be the ruin of her and her family; "*Thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed*, when the rest of the families of the Jews shall be preserved." He that by sinful shifts will save his life, and cannot find in his heart to trust God with it in the way of duty, shall lose it in the way of sin.

4. That Divine Providence had an eye to this, in bringing her to be queen; "*Who knows whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?* And therefore," (1.) "Thou art bound in gratitude to do this service for God and his church, else thou dost not answer the end of thine elevation." (2.) "Thou needest not fear miscarriage in the enterprise; if God designed thee for it, he will bear thee out, and give thee success." Now, [1.] It appeared, by the event, that she did come to the kingdom that she might be an instrument of the Jews' deliverance, so that Mordecai was right in the conjecture. *Because the Lord loved his people*, therefore he made Esther queen. There is a wise counsel and design in all the providences of God, which is unknown to us till it is accomplished, but it will prove in the issue, that they are all intended for, and centre in, the good of the church. [2.] The probability of this was a good reason why she should now bestir herself, and do her utmost for her people. We should every one of us consider for what end God has put us in the place where we are, and study to answer that end; and when any particular

opportunity of serving God and our generation offers itself, we must take care that we do not let it slip; for we were intrusted with it that we might improve it.

These things Mordecai urges to Esther, and some of the Jewish writers, who are fruitful in invention, add another thing which had *happened to him*, (v. 7.) which he desired she might be told; "that, going home, the night before, in great heaviness, upon the notice of Haman's plot, he met three Jewish children coming from school, of whom he inquired what they had learned that day; one of them told him his lesson was, (Prov. 3. 25, 26.) *Be not afraid of sudden fear*; the second told him his was, (Isa. 8. 10.) *Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought*; the third told him his was, (Isa. 46. 4.) *I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry and will deliver you.* "Oh the goodness of God," says Mordecai, "who out of the mouth of babes and sucklings ordains strength!"

V. Esther, hereupon, resolves, whatever it cost her, to apply herself to the king, but not till she and her friends had first applied themselves to God. Let them first by fasting and prayer obtain God's favour, and then she should hope to find favour with the king, v. 15, 16. She speaks here,

1. With the piety and devotion that became an Israelite; she had her eye up unto God, in whose hand the hearts of kings are, and on whom she depended to incline this king's heart toward her. She went in peril of her life, but would think herself safe, as would be easy, when she had committed the keeping of her soul to God, and had put herself under his protection. She believed that God's favour was to be obtained by prayer, that his people are a praying people, and he a prayer-hearing God. She knew it was the practice of good people, in extraordinary cases, to join fasting with prayer, and many of them to join together in both. She therefore,

(1.) Desired that Mordecai would direct the Jews that were in Shushan to *sanctify a fast, and call a solemn assembly*, to meet in the respective synagogues to which they belonged, and to pray for her, and to keep a solemn fast, abstaining from all set means and all pleasant food, for three days, and, as much as possible, from all food, in token of their humiliation for sin, and in a sense of their unworthiness of God's mercy. Those know not how to value the divine favours, who grudge thus much labour and self-denial in the pursuit of it.

(2.) She promised that she and her family would sanctify this fast in her apartment of the palace, for she might not come to their assemblies; her maids were either Jews, or so far proselytes, that they joined with her in her fasting and praying. Here is a good example of a mistress praying with her maids, and it is worthy to be imitated. Observe also, Those who are confined to privacy, may join their prayers with those of the solemn assemblies of God's people; they that are absent in body may be present in spirit. Those who desire, and have, the prayers of others for them, must not think that that will excuse them from praying for themselves.

2. With the courage and resolution that became a queen; "When we have sought God in this matter, *I will go in unto the king* to intercede for my people; *I know it is not according to the king's law*, but it is according to God's law; and therefore, whatever comes of it, I will venture, and not count my life dear to me, so that I may serve God and his church, and *if I perish, I perish*, I cannot lose my life in a better cause. Better do my duty, and die for my people, than shrink from my duty, and die with them:" she reasons as the lepers, (2 Kings, 7. 4.) "*If I sit still, I die*; If I venture, I may live, and be the life of my people; if the worst come to the worst," as we say, "*I shall but die.*" Nothing venture, nothing win. She said not this in despair, or passion, but in a holy resolution to do her duty, and trust God with the issue; welcome his holy will. In the apocryphal part of this book, (ch. 13. and 14.) we have Mordecai's prayer and Esther's, upon this occasion, and both of them very particular and pertinent. In the sequel of the story, we shall find that God said not to this seed of Jacob, *Seek ye me, in vain*.

CHAP. V.

The last news we had of Haman left him in his cups, ch. 3. 15. Our last news of queen Esther left her in tears, fasting and praying. Now this chapter brings in, I. Esther in her joys; smiled upon by the king, and honoured with his company at her banquet of wine, v. 1. 8. II. Haman upon the fret, because he had not Mordecai's reverent salutation, and with great indignation setting up a gallows for him, v. 9. 14. Thus they that sow in tears shall reap in joy, but the triumphing of the wicked is short.

1. **N**OW it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on *her royal apparel*, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. 2. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, *that she obtained favour in his sight*: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that *was* in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. 3. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what *is* thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom. 4. And Esther answered, If *it seem* good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. 5. Then the King said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. 6. And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What *is* thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what *is* thy request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed. 7. Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request *is*; 8. If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said.

Here is,

I. Esther's bold approach to the king, v. 1. When the time appointed for their fast was finished, she lost no time, but, on the third day, when the impressions of her devotions were fresh upon her spirit, she addressed the king. When the heart is enlarged in communion with God, it will be emboldened in doing and suffering for him. Some think that the three days' fast was only one whole day, and two whole nights, in all which time they did not take any food at all, and that this is called *three days*, as Christ's lying in the grave so long is. This exposition is favoured by the consideration, that on the third day the queen made her appearance at court. Resolutions, which have difficulties and dangers to break through, should be pursued without delay, lest they cool and slacken: *What thou doest*, which must be done boldly, *do it quickly*. Now she put on *her royal apparel*, that she might the better recommend herself to the king, and laid aside her fast-day clothes. She put on her fine clothes, not to please herself, but her husband; in her prayer, as we find it in the Apocrypha, (Esther, 14. 16.) she thus appeals to God, *Thou knowest, Lord, I abhor the sign of my high estate, which is upon my head, in the days wherein I shew myself*, &c. Let those whose rank obliges them to wear rich clothes, learn hence to be dead to them, and not make them their adorning. She stood *in the inner court over against the king*, expecting her doom, between hope and fear.

II. The favourable reception which the king gave her. When he saw her, she *obtained favour in his sight*. The apocryphal author and Josephus say that she took too many maids with her, on one of whom she leaned, while the other bore up her train; that her countenance was cheerful and very amiable, but her heart was in anguish; that the king, lifting up his countenance that shone with majesty, at first looked very fiercely upon her; whereupon she grew pale, and fainted, and bowed herself on the head of the maid that went by her; but that then God changed the spirit of the king, and, in a fear, he leaped from his throne, took her in his arms till she came to herself, and comforted her with loving words; here we are only told,

1. That he protected her from the law, and assured her of safety, by *holding out to her the golden sceptre*, (v. 2.) which she thankfully *touched the top of*, thereby presenting herself to him as a humble petitioner. Thus having had power with God, and prevailed, like Jacob, she had power with men too. *He that will lose his life for God, shall save it, or find it in a better life*.

2. That he encouraged her address; (v. 3.) *What wilt thou, queen Esther, and what is thy request?* So far was he from counting her an offender, that he seemed glad to see her, and desirous to oblige her. He that had divorced one wife for not coming when she was sent for, would not be severe to another for coming when she was not sent for. God can turn the hearts of men, of great men, of those that act most arbitrarily, which way he pleases, towards us. Esther feared that she should perish, but is promised that she shall have what she asks for, though it were *the half of the kingdom*. Note, God in his providence often prevents the fears, and outdoes the hopes, of his people, especially when they venture in his cause. Let us from this story infer, as our Saviour does from the parable of the unjust judge, an encouragement to *pray always* to our God, and *not faint*, Luke, 18. 6. 8. Hear what this haughty king says, (*What is thy petition, and what is thy request? It shall be granted thee*,) and say, *shall not God hear and answer the prayers of his own elect, that cry day and night to him?* Esther came to a proud imperious man, we come to the God of love and grace; she was not called, we are; the Spirit says, *Come*, and the bride says, *Come*. She had a law against her, we have a promise, many a promise, in favour of us, *Ask, and it shall be given you*. She had no friend to introduce her, or intercede for her, on the contrary, he that was then the king's favourite was her enemy; but we have an Advocate with the Father, in whom he is well-pleased. *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace*.

3. That all the request she had to make to him, at this time, was, that he would please to come to a banquet which she had prepared for him, and bring Haman along with him, v. 4. 5. Hereby, (1.) She would intimate to him how much she valued his favour and company. Whatever she had to ask, that she desired above any thing, and would purchase at any rate. (2.) She would try how he stood affected to her; for, if he should refuse this, it would be to no purpose, as yet, to present her other request. (3.) She would endeavour to bring him into a pleasant humour, and soften his spirit, that he might with the more tenderness receive the impressions of the complaint she had to make to him. (4.) She would please him, by making court to Haman his favourite, and inviting him to come, whose company she knew he loved, and whom she desired to have present when she made her complaint, for she would say nothing of him, but what she durst say to his face. (5.) She hoped, at the banquet of wine, to have a fairer and more favourable opportunity of presenting her petition. Wisdom is profitable to direct how to manage some men that are hard to deal with.

4. That he readily came, and ordered Haman to come along with him, (v. 5.) which was an indication of the kindness he still retained for her; if he really designed the destruction of her and her people, he would not have accepted of her banquet. There he renewed his kind inquiry, (*What is thy petition?*) and his generous promise, that it should be granted, *even to the half of the kingdom*, (v. 6.) a proverbial expression, by which he assured her, that he would deny her nothing in reason. Herod used it, Mark, 6. 23.

5. That then Esther thought fit to ask no more than a promise that he would please to accept of another treat, the next day, in her apartment, and Haman with him, (v. 7, 8.) intimating to him, that then she would let him know what her business was. This adjourning of the main petition may be attributed, (1.) To Esther's prudence; thus she hoped yet further to win upon him, and ingratiate herself with him. Perhaps her heart failed her now, when she was going to make her request, and she desired to take some further time for prayer, that God would give her *a mouth and wisdom*. The putting it off thus, it is likely, she knew would be well taken as an expression of the great reverence she had for the king, and her unwillingness to be too pressing upon him. What is hastily asked, is often as hastily denied; but what is asked with a pause, deserves to be considered. (2.) To God's providence, putting it into Esther's heart to delay her petition a day longer, she knew not why, but God did, that what was to happen in the night betwixt this and to-morrow, might further her design, and make way for her success; that Haman might arrive at the highest pitch of malice against Mordecai, and might begin to *fall before him*. The Jews perhaps blamed Esther as dilatory, and some of them began to suspect her sincerity, or, at least, her zeal; but the event disproved their jealousy, and all was for the best.

9. Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. 10. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. 11. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all *the things* wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. 12. Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. 13. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. 14. Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman: and he caused the gallows to be made.

This account, here given of Haman, is a comment upon that of Solomon, (Prov. 21. 24.) *Proud and haughty scorner is his name, that deals in proud wrath*; never did any man more answer that name than Haman here, in whom pride and wrath have so much the ascendant. See him,

I. Puffed up with the honour of being invited to Esther's feast. He was *joyful and glad of heart* at it, v. 9. Observe with what a high gust he speaks of it, (v. 12.) how he values himself upon it, and how near he thinks it brings him to the perfection of felicity, that Esther the queen did let no man come with the king to the banquet, but his mighty self, and he thought it was because she was exceedingly charmed with his conversation, that the next day she had invited him also to come with the king; none so fit as he to bear the king company. Note, Self-admirers and self-flatterers are really self-deceivers. Haman pleased himself with the fancy, that the queen, by this repeated invitation, designed to honour him, whereas really she designed to accuse him, and, in calling him

to the banquet, did but call him to the bar. What magnifying glasses do proud men look at their faces in! And how does the *pride of their heart deceive them!* Obad. 3.

II. Vexing and fretting at the slight that Mordecai put upon him, and thereby made uneasy to himself, and to all about him. 1. Mordecai was as determined as ever; *he stood not up, nor moved for him*, v. 9. What he did was from a principle of conscience, and therefore he persevered in it, and would not cringe to Haman, no not when he had reason to fear him, and Esther herself complimented him. He knew God could and would deliver him and his people from the rage of Haman, without any such mean and sneaking expedients to mollify him. They that walk in holy sincerity, may walk in holy security, and go on in their work, not fearing what man can do unto them. *He that walks uprightly, walks surely*. 2. Haman can as ill bear it as ever; nay, the higher he is lifted up, the more impatient he is of contempt, and the more enraged at it. (1.) It made his own spirit restless, and put him into a grievous agitation; he was *full of indignation*, (v. 9.) and yet *refrained himself*, v. 10. Gladly would he have drawn his sword, and run Mordecai through for affronting him thus, but he hoped shortly to see him fall with all the Jews; and, therefore, with much ado, prevailed with himself to forbear stabbing him. What a struggle had he in his own bosom between his anger, which required Mordecai's death immediately, (*Oh that I had of his flesh; I cannot be satisfied!* Job, 31. 31.) and his malice, which had determined to wait for the general massacre! Thus *thorns and snares are in the way of the froward*. (2.) It made all his enjoyments sapless. This little affront, which he received from Mordecai, was the dead fly which spoiled all his pot of precious ointment; he owned it himself in the presence of his wife and friends, to the everlasting reproach of a proud and discontented mind, that he had no comfort in his estate, preferment, and family, as long as Mordecai lived, and had a place *in the king's gate*, v. 10. 13. He took notice of his own riches and honours, the numerousness of his family, and the high posts to which he was advanced, that he was the darling of the prince, and the idol of the court; and yet *all this avails him nothing*, as long as Mordecai is unchanged. Those that are disposed to be uneasy, will never want something or other to be uneasy at. Such are proud men, that though they have much to their mind, if they have not *all* to their mind, it is as nothing to them. The thousandth part of what Haman had would serve to make a humble modest man as much of a happiness as he expects from this world; and yet Haman complains as passionately as if he had been sunk into the lowest degree of poverty and disgrace.

III. Meditating revenge, and assisted therein by his wife and his friends, v. 14. They saw how gladly he would dispense with his own resolution, of deferring the slaughter till the time determined by the lot, and therefore advise him to take an earnest and foretaste of the satisfaction he then expected, in the speedy execution of Mordecai; let him have that to please him at the moment: and, having, as he thought, made sure the destruction of all the Jews, at the time appointed, he will not think scorn, for the present, to lay hands on Mordecai alone. 1. For the pleasing of his fancy, they advise him to get a *gallows ready*, and have it set up before his own door; that, as soon as ever he could get the warrant signed, there might be no delay of the execution, he would not need so much as to stay the making of the gallows. This is very agreeable to Haman, who has the gallows made, and fixed immediately; it must be fifty cubits high, or as near that as might be, for the greater disgrace of Mordecai, and to make him a spectacle to every one that passed by; and it must be before Haman's door, that all men might take notice it was to the idol of his revenge that Mordecai was sacrificed, and that he might feed his eyes with the sight. 2. For the gaining of his point, they advise him to go early in the morning to the king and get an order from him for the hanging of Mordecai, which, they doubted not, would be readily granted to one who was so much the king's favourite, and who had so easily obtained an edict for the destruction of the whole nation of the Jews; there needed no feigned suggestion, it was enough if he let the king know that Mordecai, in contempt of the king's command, refused to reverence him.

And now we leave Haman to go to bed, pleased with the thoughts of seeing Mordecai hanged the next day, and then going merrily to the banquet, and not dreaming of handselling his own gallows.

CHAP. VI.

It is a very surprising scene that opens in this chapter. Haman, when he hoped to be Mordecai's judge, was made his page, to his great confusion and mortification; and thus way was made for the defeat of Haman's plot, and the deliverance of the Jews. I. The providence of God recommends Mordecai in the night to the king's favour, v. 1..3. II. Haman, who came to incense the king against him, is employed as an instrument of the king's favour to him, v. 4..11. III. From this his friends read him his doom, which is executed in the next chapter, v. 12..14. And now it appears that Esther's intercession for her people was happily adjourned, De die in diem—From day to day.

1. **O**N that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. 2. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. 3. And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.

How Satan put it into the heart of Haman to contrive Mordecai's death, we read in the foregoing chapter; how God put it into the heart of the king to contrive Mordecai's honour, we are here told. Now, if the king's word will prevail above Haman's, (for though Haman be a great man, the king in the throne must be above him,) much more will the counsel of God stand, whatever devices there are in men's hearts; it is to no purpose therefore for Haman to oppose it, when both God and the king will have Mordecai honoured, and in this juncture too, when his preferment, and Haman's disappointment, would help to ripen the great affair of the Jewish deliverance, for the effort that Esther was to make towards it the next day. Sometimes delay may prove to have been good conduct. Stay a while, and we may have done the sooner: *Cunctando restituit rem—He conquered by delay.* Let us trace the steps which Providence took toward the advancement of Mordecai.

1. *On that night could not the king sleep.* His sleep fled away, so the word is; and perhaps, like a shadow, the more carefully he pursued it, the further it went from him. Sometimes we cannot sleep, because we fain would sleep. Even after a banquet of wine, he could not sleep, when Providence had a design to serve in keeping him waking. We read of no bodily indisposition he was under that might break his sleep, but God, *whose gift sleep is*, withheld it from him. Those that are ever so much resolved to cast away care, cannot always do it; they find it in their pillows, when they neither expect nor welcome it. He that commanded 127 provinces, could not command one hour's sleep. Perhaps the charms of Esther's conversation, the day before, gave occasion to his heart to reproach him for neglecting her, and banishing her his presence, though she was the wife of his bosom, for above thirty days; and that might keep him waking. An offended conscience can find a time to speak, when it will be heard.

II. When he could not sleep, he called to have the book of records, the journals of his reign, read to him, v. 1. Surely he did not design that that should lull him asleep, it would rather fill his head with cares, and drive away sleep; but God put it into his heart to call for them, rather than for music or songs, which the Persian kings used to be attended with, (Dan. 6. 18.) and which would have been more likely to compose him to rest. When men do that which is unaccountable, we know not what God intends by it. Perhaps he would have this book of business read to him, that he might improve time, and be forming some useful projects. Had it been king David's case, he would have found some other entertainment for his thoughts; when he could not sleep, he would have

remembered God, and meditated upon him; (Ps. 63. 6.) and if he would have had any book read to him, it would have been his Bible; for *in that law did he meditate day and night.*

III. The servant, that read to him, either lighted first on that article which concerned Mordecai, or, reading long, came to it at length. Among other things, it was found written, that Mordecai had discovered a plot against the life of the king, which prevented the execution of it, v. 2. Mordecai was not in such favour at court, that the reader should designedly pitch upon that place, but Providence directed him to it; nay, if we may believe the Jews' tradition, (as Bishop Patrick relates it,) opening the book at this place, he turned over the leaves, and would have read another part of the book, but the leaves flew back again to the same place where he opened it; so that he was forced to read that paragraph. How Mordecai's good service was recorded, we read, *ch. 2. 23.* and here it is found upon record.

IV. The king inquired *what honour and dignity had been done to Mordecai* for this; suspecting that this good service had gone unrewarded, and, like Pharaoh's butler, remembering it as *his fault this day*, Gen. 41. 9. Note, The law of gratitude is a law of nature. We ought particularly to be grateful to our inferiors, and not to think all their services such debts to us, but that they make us indebted to them. Two rules of gratitude may be gathered from the king's inquiry here. 1. *Better honour than nothing*; if we cannot, or need not, make a recompence to those who have been kind to us, yet let us do them honour, by acknowledging their kindnesses, and owning our obligations to them. 2. *Better late than never.* If we have long neglected to make grateful returns for good offices done us, let us, at length, bethink ourselves of our debts.

V. The servants informed him, that nothing had been done to Mordecai for that eminent service; in the king's gate he sat before, and there he still sat. Note, 1. It is common for great men to take little notice of their inferiors. The king knew not whether Mordecai was preferred or no, till his servants informed him. High spirits take a pride in being careless and unconcerned about those that are below them, and ignorant of their state. The great God takes cognizance of the meanest of his servants, knows what dignity is done them, and what disgrace. 2. Humility, modesty, and self-denial, though, in God's account of great price, yet commonly hinder men's preferment in the world. Mordecai rises no higher than the king's gate, while proud ambitious Haman gets the king's ear and heart; but though the aspiring rise fast, the humble stand fast. Honour makes proud men giddy, but *upholds the humble in spirit*, Prov. 29. 23. 3. Honour and dignity are rated high in the king's books. He does not ask, What reward has been given Mordecai? What money? What estate? But only, What honour? A poor thing, and which, if he had not wherewith to support it, would be but a burthen. 4. The greatest merits, and the best services, are often overlooked, and go unrewarded among men: little honour is done to those who best deserve it, are fittest for it, and would do most good with it. See Eccl. 9. 14..16. The acquisition of wealth and honour is usually a perfect lottery, in which they that venture least commonly carry off the best prize. Nay, 5. Good services are sometimes so far from being a man's preferment, that they will not be his protection: Mordecai is, at this time, by the king's edict, doomed to destruction, with all the Jews, though it is owned that he deserved dignity. Those that faithfully serve God, need not fear being thus ill-paid.

4. And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. 5. And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. 6. So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?

Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? 7. And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, 8. Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: 9. And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man *withal* whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour. 10. Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, *and* take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken. 11. Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

It is now morning, and people begin to stir.

I. Haman is so impatient to get Mordecai hanged, that he comes early to court, to be ready at the king's levee, before any other business was brought before him, to get a warrant for his execution, (v. 4.) which he makes sure that he shall have at the first word. The king would gratify him in a greater thing than that; and he could tell the king, that he was so confident of the justice of his request, and the king's favour to him in it, that he had got the gallows ready; one word from the king would complete his satisfaction.

II. The king is so impatient to have Mordecai honoured, that he sends to know who was in the court, that was fit to be employed in it. Word is brought him, that Haman is in the court, (v. 5.) *Let him come in*, says the king; the fittest man to be made use of, both in directing and in dispensing the king's favour; and the king knew nothing of any quarrel he had with Mordecai. Haman is brought in immediately, proud of the honour done him, in being admitted into the king's bed-chamber, as it should seem, *before he was up*; for let the king but give orders for the dignifying of Mordecai, and he will be easy in his mind, and try to sleep. Now Haman thinks he has the fairest opportunity he could wish for, to solicit against Mordecai; but the king's heart is as full as his, and it is fit he should speak first.

III. The king asks Haman, how he should express his favour to one whom he had marked for a favourite. *What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?* v. 6. Note, It is a good property in kings, and other superiors, to delight in bestowing rewards, and not to delight in punishing. Parents and masters should take a pleasure in commending and encouraging that which is good in those under their charge.

IV. Haman concludes that he himself was the favourite intended, and therefore prescribes the highest expressions of honour that could, for once, be bestowed upon a subject. His proud heart presently suggested, *To whom will the king delight to do honour more than to myself?* "No one deserves it so well as I," thinks Haman, "nor stands so fair for it." See how men's pride deceives them. I. Haman had a better opinion of his merits than there was cause for. He thought none so worthy of honour as himself; it is a foolish thing for us thus to think ourselves the only deserving persons, or more deserving than any other. The deceitfulness of our own hearts appears in nothing so much as in the good conceit we have of ourselves and our own performances, against which we should therefore

constantly watch and pray. 2. He had a better opinion of his interest than there was reason for. He thought the king loved and valued no one but himself, but he was deceived. We should suspect that the esteem which others profess for us is not so great as it seems to be, or as we are sometimes willing to believe it is, that we may not think too well of ourselves, nor place too much confidence in others.

How Haman thinks he is carving out honour for himself, and therefore does it very liberally, v. 8, 9. Nay, he does it presumptuously, prescribing honours too great to be conferred upon any subject; That he must be dressed in the royal robes, wear the royal crown, and ride the king's own horse: in short, he must appear in all the pomp and grandeur of the king himself, only he must not carry the sceptre, the emblem of power. He must be attended by one of the *king's most noble princes*, who must be his laquey, and all the people must be made to take notice of him, and do him reverence; for he must ride in state through the streets, and it must be *proclaimed before him*, for his honour, and the encouragement of all to seek the ruler's favour, *Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour*, which had the same intention with that which was proclaimed before Joseph, *Bow the knee*; for every good subject will honour those whom the king delights to honour. And shall not every good Christian then honour those whom the King of kings delights to honour, and call the *saints which are on the earth, the excellent ones*?

V. The king confounds him with a positive order, that he should immediately go himself, and put all this honour upon Mordecai the Jew, v. 10. If the king had but said, as Haman expected, *Thou art the man*, what a fair opportunity would he have had to do the errand he came on, and to have desired, that, to grace the solemnity of his triumphs, Mordecai, his sworn enemy, might be hanged at the same time! But how is he thunder-struck, when the king bids him not order all this to be done, but to do it himself to Mordecai the Jew, the very man he hated above all men, and whose ruin he was now designing! Now, it is to no purpose to think of moving anything to the king against Mordecai, when he is *the man whom the king delights to honour*. Solomon says, *The heart of the king is unsearchable*, (Prov. 25. 3.) but it is not unchangeable.

VI. Haman dares not dispute, nor so much as seem to dislike, the king's order, but, with the greatest regret and reluctancy imaginable, brings it to Mordecai, who, I suppose, did no more cringe to Haman now than he had done, valuing his counterfeit respect no more than he had valued his concealed malice. The apparel is brought, Mordecai is dressed up, and rides in state through the city, recognized as the king's favourite, v. 11. It is hard to say which of the two put a greater force upon himself; proud Haman, in putting this honour upon Mordecai, or humble Mordecai, in accepting it: the king would have it so, and both must submit. Upon *this* account, it was agreeable to Mordecai, as it was an indication of the king's favour, and gave hope that Esther would prevail for the reversing of the edict against the Jews.

12. And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hasted to his house, mourning, and having his head covered. 13. And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every *thing* that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai *be* of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him. 14. And while they *were* yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

We may here observe,

I. How little Mordecai was puffed up with his advancement. He *came again to the king's gate*; (v. 12.) he returned to his place, and the duty of it immediately, and minded his business as close

as he had done before. Honour is well bestowed on those that are not made proud and idle by it, and will not think themselves above their business.

II. How much Haman was cast down with his disappointment. He could not bear it; to wait upon any man, especially Mordecai, and at this time, when he hoped to have seen him hanged, was enough to break such a proud heart as he had. He *hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered*, as one that looked upon himself sunk, and in a manner condemned. What harm had it done him to stoop thus to Mordecai? Was he ever the worse for it? Was it not what he himself proposed to be done by *one of the king's most noble princes*? Why then should he grudge to do it himself? But that will break a proud man's heart, which would not break a humble man's sleep.

III. How his doom was, out of this event, read him by his wife and his friends; "If Mordecai be, as they say he is, *of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall*, though but in a point of honour, never expect to *prevail against him*, for *thou shalt surely fall before him*," v. 13. Miserable comforters are they all; they did not advise him to repent, and ask Mordecai's pardon for his bad design against him, but foretell his destiny as fatal and unavoidable. Two things they foresee, 1. That Haman would be disappointed in his enterprize against the Jews: "*Thou shalt not prevail*, to root out that people; Heaven plainly fights against thee." 2. That he himself would be destroyed: *Thou shalt surely fall before him*. The contest between Michael and the dragon will not be a drawn battle, no, Haman must fall before Mordecai. Two things they ground their prognostications upon. (1.) This Mordecai is *of the seed of the Jews*; *feeble Jews*, their enemies sometimes called them, but formidable Jews they sometimes found them. They are a holy seed, a praying seed, in covenant with God, and a seed that the Lord hath all along blessed, and therefore let not their enemies expect to triumph over them. (2.) Haman had begun to fall, and therefore he is certainly a gone man. It has been observed of great court-favourites, that when once they have been frowned upon, they have fallen utterly, as fast as they rose; it is true of the church's enemies, that when God begins with them, he will make an end. As for God, his work is perfect.

IV. How seasonably he was now sent for to the banquet that Esther had prepared, v. 14. He thought it seasonable, in hopes it would revive his drooping spirits, and save his sinking honour. But, really, it was seasonable, because his spirits being broken by this sore disappointment, he might the more easily be run down by Esther's complaints against him. The wisdom of God is seen in timing the means of his church's deliverance, so as to manifest his own glory.

CHAP. VII.

We are now to attend the second banquet to which the king and Haman were invited: and there, I. Esther presents her petition to the king for her life, and the life of her people, v. 1-4. II. She plainly tells the king that Haman was the man who designed her ruin, and the ruin of all her friends, v. 5, 6. III. The king, thereupon, gave orders for the hanging of Haman upon the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai, which was done accordingly, v. 7-10. And thus, by the destruction of the plotter, a good step was taken toward the defeating of the plot.

1. **SO** the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. 2. And the king said again unto Esther, on the second day, at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? And it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? And it shall be performed *even* to the half of the kingdom. 3. Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. 4. For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish: but if we

had been sold for bond-men and bond-women, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage. 5. Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he? And where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? 6. And Esther said, The adversary and enemy, is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

The king in humour, and Haman out of humour, meet at Esther's table. Now here,

I. The king urges Esther, a third time, to tell him what her request was, for he longed to know, and repeats his promise, that it should be granted, v. 2. If the king had now forgotten that Esther had an errand to him, and had not again asked what it was, she could scarcely have known how to renew it herself; but he was mindful of it, and now was bound with the threefold cord of a promise thrice made to favour her.

II. Esther, at length, surprises the king with a petition, not for wealth or honour, or the preferment of some of her friends to some high post, which the king expected, but for the preservation of herself and her countrymen from death and destruction, v. 3, 4. Even a stranger, a criminal, shall be permitted to petition for his life: but that a friend, a wife, should have occasion to present such a petition, was very affecting; *Let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request*. Two things bespeak lives to be very precious, and fit to be saved, if innocent, at any expense. 1. *Majesty*. If it be a crowned head that is struck at, it is time to stir: Esther's was such: "*Let my life be given me*. If thou hast any affection for the wife of thy bosom, now is the time to show it, for that is the life that lies at stake." 2. *Multitude*. If they be many lives, very many, and those no way forfeited, that are aimed at, no time should be lost, nor pains spared, to prevent the mischief. "It is not a friend or two, but my people, a whole nation, and a nation dear to me, for the saving of which I now intercede."

To move the king the more, she suggests, (1.) That she and her people were bought and sold. They had not sold themselves by any offence against the government, but were sold to gratify the pride and revenge of one man. (2.) That it was not their liberty only, but their lives, that were sold. "Had we been sold" (says she) "into slavery, I would not have complained, for, in time, we might have recovered our liberty, though the king would have made but a bad bargain of it, and *not have increased his wealth by our price*. Whatever had been paid for us, the loss of so many industrious hands out of his kingdom, would have been more damage to the treasury than the price would countervail." To persecute good people is as impolitic as it is impious, and a manifest wrong to the interests of princes and states; they are weakened and impoverished by it. But this was not the case. *We are sold* (says she) *to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish*; and then it is time to speak. She refers to the words of the decree, (ch. 3. 13.) which aimed at nothing short of their destruction; this would touch in a tender part, if there were any such in the king's heart, and would bring him to relent.

III. The king stands amazed at the remonstrance, and asks, (v. 5.) "*Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?*" What! contrive the murder of the queen and all her friends? Is there such a man, such a monster rather, in nature? *Who is he, and where is he, whose heart has filled him to do so?*" Or, Who hath filled his heart; he wonders, 1. That any one should be so *bad* as to think such a thing; Satan certainly filled his heart. 2. That any one should be so *bold* as to do such a thing; should have his heart so fully set in him to do wickedly; should be so very daring? Note, (1.) It is hard to imagine that there should be such horrid wickedness committed in the world as really there is. Who, where is he, that dares, presumes to question the being of God and his providence, to banter his oracles, profane his name, persecute his people, and yet bid defi

ance to his wrath? Such there are, to think of whom is enough to make *horror take hold of us*, Ps. 119. 53. (2.) We sometimes startle at the mention of that evil which yet we ourselves are chargeable with. Ahasuerus is amazed at that wickedness which he himself was guilty of; for he consented to that bloody edict against the Jews. *Thou art the man*, might Esther too truly have said.

IV. Esther plainly charges Haman with it before his face: "Here he is, let him speak for himself, for therefore he is invited. *The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman*; (v. 6.) it is he that has designed our murder, and, which is worse, has basely drawn the king in to be *particeps criminis*—a partaker of his crime, ignorantly agreeing to it.

V. Haman is soon apprehensive of his danger: *he was afraid before the king and queen*; and it was time for him to fear, when the queen was his prosecutor, the king his judge, and his own conscience a witness against him; and the surprising operations of Providence against him, that same morning, could not but increase his fear. Now he has little joy of his being invited to the banquet of wine, but finds himself in straits, when he thought himself in the fulness of his sufficiency. *He is cast into a net by his own feet*.

7. And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath *went* into the palace-garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen: for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. 8. Then the king returned out of the palace garden, into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther *was*. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. 9. And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. 10. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

Here,

I. The king retires in anger. He rose from table in a great passion, and *went into the palace garden* to cool himself, and to consider what was to be done, v. 7. He sent not for his *seven wise counsellors who knew the times*, being ashamed to consult with them about the undoing of that which he had rashly done without their knowledge or advice; but he went to walk in the garden a while, to compare in his thoughts what Esther had now informed him of, with what had formerly passed between him and Haman. And we may suppose him, 1. Vexed at himself, that he should be such a fool, as to doom a guiltless nation to destruction, and his own queen among the rest, upon the base suggestions of a self-seeking man, without examining the truth of his allegations. They that do things with self-will, reflect upon them afterward with self-reproach. 2. Vexed at Haman, who he had laid in his bosom, that he should be such a villain as to abuse his interest in him, to draw him to consent to so wicked a measure. When he saw himself betrayed by one he had caressed, he was full of indignation at him; yet he would say nothing, till he had taken time for second thoughts, to see whether they would make the matter better or worse than it first appeared, that he might proceed accordingly. When we are angry, we should pause a while, before we come to any resolution, as those that have a *rule over our own spirits*, and are governed by reason.

II. Haman becomes a humble petitioner to the queen for his life. He might easily perceive, by the king's hasty flying out of the room, that *there was evil determined against him*. For the *wrath of a king*, such a king, is as the *roaring of a lion*, and as *messengers of death*; and now see, 1. How mean Haman looks, when he stands up first, and then falls down at Esther's feet, to beg she would save his life, and take all he had. They that are most haughty, insolent, and imperious, when they are in power and prosperity, are commonly the most abject and poor spirited, when the wheel turns upon them. Cowards, they say, are most cruel, and then consciousness of their cruelty makes them the more cowardly. 2. How great Esther looks, who of late had been neglected, and doomed to the slaughter, *tangam ovis*—as a sheep: now her sworn enemy owns that he lies at her mercy, and begs his life at her hand. Thus did God *regard the low estate of his handmaiden*, and scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts, Luke, 1. 48, 51. Compare with this that promise made to the Philadelphian church, (Rev. 3. 9.) *I will make them of the synagogue of Satan to come and to worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee*. The day is coming when those that hate and persecute God's chosen ones would gladly be beholden to them: *Give us of your oil; Father Abraham, send Lazarus; The upright shall have dominion in the morning*.

III. The king returns yet more exasperated against Haman. The more he thinks of him, the worse he thinks of him, and of what he had done. It was but lately, that every thing Haman said and did, even that which was most criminal, was taken well, and construed to his advantage; now, on the contrary, what Haman did, that was not only innocent, but a sign of repentance, is ill taken, and, without colour of reason, construed to his disadvantage. He lay in terror at Esther's feet, to beg for his life; What! (says the king,) *will he force the queen also before me in the house*? Not that he thought he had any such intention, but, having been musing on Haman's design to slay the queen, and finding him in this posture, he takes occasion from it thus to vent his passion against Haman, as a man that would not scruple at the greatest and most impudent piece of wickedness. "He designed to slay the queen, and to slay her *with me in the house*; will he in like manner force her? What! ravish her first, and then murder her? He that had a design upon her life, may well be suspected to have a design upon her chastity."

IV. Those about him were ready to be the instruments of his wrath. The courtiers, that adored Haman when he was the rising sun, set themselves as much against him now that he is a falling star, and are even glad of an occasion to run him down; so little sure can proud men be of the interest they think they have. 1. As soon as the king spake an angry word, they covered Haman's face as a condemned man, not worthy any more either to see the king, or to be seen by him; they marked him for execution. Those that are hanged, commonly have their faces covered. See how ready the servants were to take the first hint of the king's mind in this matter. *Turba Romæ sequitur fortunam, ut semper et odit danatos*—The Roman populace change as the aspects of fortune do, and always oppress the fallen. If Haman be going down, they all cry, "Down with him." 2. One of them, that had been lately sent to Haman's house, to fetch him to the banquet, informed the king of the gallows which Haman had prepared for Mordecai, v. 9. Now that Mordecai is the favourite, the chamberlain applauds him; he *spoke good for the king*, and, Haman being in disgrace, every thing is taken notice of that might make against him, incense the king against him, and fill up the measure of his iniquity.

V. The king gives orders that he should be hanged upon his own gallows, which was done accordingly, nor was he so much as asked what he had to say why this judgment should not be passed upon him, and execution awarded. The sentence is short. *Hang him thereon*; and the execution speedy, *So they hanged Haman on the gallows*, v. 10. See here, 1. Pride brought down. He that expected every one to do him reverence is now made an ignominious spectacle to the world, and himself sacrificed to justice, who disdained that less than a whole nation should be

sacrificed to his revenge. God resists the proud: and those whom he resists will find him irresistible. 2. Persecution punished. Haman was, upon many accounts, a wicked man, but his enmity to God's church was his most provoking crime; for *that* the God to whom vengeance belongs here reckons with him, and, though his plot was defeated, gives him *according to the wickedness of his endeavours*, Ps. 28. 4. 3. Mischief returned upon the person himself that contrived it; the *wicked snared in the work of his own hands*, Ps. 7. 15, 16.—9. 15, 16. Haman is justly hanged on the very gallows he had unjustly prepared for Mordecai. If he had not set up that gallows, perhaps the king would not have thought of ordering him to be hanged; but if he rear a gallows for *the man whom the king delights to honour*, the thought is very natural, that he should be ordered to try it himself, and see how it fits him, see how he likes it. The enemies of God's church have often been thus taken in their own craftiness. In the morning, Haman was designing himself for the robes, and Mordecai for the gallows; but the tables are turned; Mordecai has the crown, Haman the cross. *The Lord is known by such judgments*. See Prov. 11. 8.—21. 18.

Lastly, The satisfaction which the king had in this execution. *Then was the king's wrath pacified*, and not till then. He was as well pleased in ordering Haman to be hanged, as in ordering Mordecai to be honoured. Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to take vengeance on. God saith of wicked men, (Ezek. 5. 13.) *I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted*.

CHAP. VIII.

We left the plotter hanging, and are now to see what becomes of his plot. I. His plot was to raise an estate for himself; and all his estate, being confiscated for treason, is given to Esther and Mordecai, v. 1, 2. II. His plot was to ruin the Jews; and as to that, 1. Esther earnestly intercedes for the reversing of the edict against them, v. 3. 6. 2. It is, in effect, done by another edict here published, empowering the Jews to stand up in their own defence against their enemies, v. 7. 14. III. This occasions great joy to the Jews, and all their friends, v. 15. 17.

1. **O**N that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman, the Jews' enemy, unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he *was* unto her. 2. And the king took off his ring which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

It was but lately that we had Esther and Mordecai in tears and in fears, but fasting and praying; now let us see how to them there arose light in darkness.

1. Here is Esther enriched. Haman was hanged as a traitor, therefore his estate was forfeited to the crown, and the king gave it all to Esther, in recompence for the fright that wicked man had put her into, and the vexation he had created her, v. 1. His houses and lands, goods and chattels, and all the money he had heaped up, while he was prime-minister of state, (which, we may suppose, was no little,) are given to Esther, they are all her own, added to the allowance she already had. Thus is *the wealth of the sinner laid up for the just*; and the *innocent divides the silver*, Prov. 13. 22. Job, 27. 17, 18. What Haman would have done mischief with, Esther will do good with; and estates are to be valued as they are used.

2. Mordecai advanced. His pompous procession, this morning, through the streets of the city, was but a sudden flash or blaze of honour: but here we have more durable and gainful preferments to which he was raised, which yet the other happily made way for.

(1.) He is now owned as the queen's cousin, which, till now, though Esther had been four years queen, for aught that appears, the king did not know. So humble, so modest, a man was Mordecai, and so far from being ambitious of a place at court, that he concealed his relation to the queen, and her obligations to

him as her guardian, and never made use of her interest for any advantage of his own. Who but Mordecai could have taken so little notice of so great an honour? But now he was brought before the king, introduced, as we say, to kiss his hand; for now, at length, *Esther had told what he was to her*, not only near akin to her, but the best friend she had in the world, who took care of her when she was an orphan, and one whom she still respected as a father. Now the king finds himself, for his wife's sake, more obliged than he thought he had been, to delight in doing honour to Mordecai. How great were the merits of that man, to whom both king and queen did, in effect, owe their lives! Being brought before the king, to him, no doubt, he bowed, and did reverence, though he would not to Haman an Amalekite.

(2.) The king makes him lord privy-seal in the room of Haman; all the trust he had reposed in him, and all the power he had given him, are here transferred to Mordecai; for the ring which he had taken from Haman, he gave to Mordecai, and made this trusty humble man as much his favourite, his confidant, and his agent, as ever that proud perfidious wretch was; a happy change he made of his bosom friend, and so, no doubt, he and his people soon found it.

(3.) The queen makes him her steward, for the management of Haman's estate, and for getting and keeping possession of it. *She set Mordecai over the house of Haman*. See the vanity of laying up treasure upon earth; he that *heapeth up riches knoweth not who shall gather them*, (Ps. 39. 6.) not only whether he shall be a wise man or a fool, (Eccl. 2. 19.) but whether he shall be a friend or an enemy. With what little pleasure, nay, with what constant vexation, would Haman have looked upon his estate, if he could have foreseen that Mordecai, the man he hated above all men in the world, should have rule over all that wherein he had laboured, and thought that he shewed himself wise! *It is our interest*, therefore, to make sure those riches which will not be left behind, but will go with us to another world.

3. And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.

4. Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king, 5. And said, if it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: 6. For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred? 7. Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews. 8. Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse. 9. Then were the king's scribes called at that time in the third month, that is, the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded

unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which *are* from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language. 10. And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus's name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, *and* riders on mules, camels, *and* young dromedaries: 11. Wherein the king granted the Jews which *were* in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, *both* little ones and women, and *to take* the spoil of them for a prey, 12. Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, *namely*, upon the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. 13. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province *was* published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. 14. *So* the posts that rode upon mules *and* camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace.

Haman, the chief enemy of the Jews, was hanged, Mordecai and Esther, their chief friends, were sufficiently protected; but many others there were, in the king's dominions, that hated the Jews and desired their ruin, and to their rage and malice all the rest of that people lay exposed; for the edict against them was still in force, in pursuance of which, their enemies would, on the day appointed, fall upon them, and they would be deemed as rebels against the king and his government, if they should offer to resist, and take up arms in their own defence. For the preventing of this,

I. The queen here makes intercession with much affection and importunity. She came, a second time, uncalled, into the king's presence, (v. 3.) and was, as before, encouraged to present her petition, by the king's holding out the golden sceptre to her, v. 4. Her petition is, that the king, having put away Haman, would put away the mischief of Haman, and his device against the Jews, that that might not take place, now that he was taken off. Many a man's mischief survives him, and the wickedness he devised operates when he is gone. What men project and write, may, after their death, be either very profitable or very pernicious: it was therefore requisite, in this case, that, for the defeating of Haman's plot, they should apply themselves to the king for a further act of grace; that, by another edict, he would reverse the letters devised by Haman, and which he wrote, (she does not say which the king *consented to*, and *confirmed with his own seal*, she leaves it to his own conscience to say that,) by which he took an effectual course to *destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces*, v. 5. If the king were, indeed, as he seemed to be, troubled that such a decree was made, he could not do less than revoke it. For what is repentance, but undoing, to the utmost of our power, that we have done amiss?

1. This petition Esther presents with much affection. She *fell down at the king's feet, and besought him with tears*; (v. 3.) every tear as precious as any of the pearls with which she was adorned. It was time to be earnest, when the church of God lay at stake. Let none be so great as to be unwilling to stoop, none so merry as to be unwilling to weep when thereby they may do any service to

God's church and people. Esther, though safe herself, fell down, and begged with tears for the deliverance of her people.

2. She expresses it with great submission, and a profound deference to the king, and his wisdom and will, (v. 5.) *If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight*; and again, "If the thing itself seem right and reasonable before the king, and if I, that ask it, be *pleasing in his eyes*, let the decree be reversed:" even then when we have the utmost reason and justice on our side, and have the clearest cause to plead, yet it becomes us to speak to our superiors with humility and modesty, and all possible expressions of respect, and not to talk like demandants, when we are supplicants. There is nothing lost by decency and good breeding. *As soft answers turn away wrath, so soft askings obtain favour.*

3. She enforces her petition with a pathetic plea, "*For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come upon my people?*" Little comfort can I have of my own life, if I cannot prevail for their's: as good share in the evil myself as see it come upon them; *for how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred*, that are dear to me?" Esther, a queen, owns her poor kindred, and speaks of them with a very tender concern. Now it was, that she mingled her tears with her words, that *she wept and made supplication*; we read of no tears when she begged for her own life, but now, that she was sure of that, she wept for her people. Tears of pity and tenderness are the most Christ-like. They that are truly concerned for the public, would rather die in the last ditch, than live to see the desolations of the church of God, and the ruin of their country. Tender spirits cannot bear to think of the destruction of their people and kindred, and therefore dare not omit any opportunity of giving them relief.

II. The king here takes a course for the preventing of the mischief that Haman had designed.

1. The king knew, and informed the queen, that, according to the constitution of the Persian government, the former edict could not be revoked, v. 8. What is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may not, under any pretence whatsoever, be reversed. This was a fundamental article of their *magna charta*, that no law or decree, when once it had passed the royal assent, could be repealed or recalled, no judgment vacated, no attainder reversed; (Dan. 6. 15.) this is so far from bespeaking the wisdom and honour of the Medes and Persians, that really it bespeaks their pride and folly, and, consequently, their shame. It is ridiculous in itself for any man, or company of men, to pretend to such an infallibility of wisdom, as to foresee all the consequences of what they decree; and therefore it is unjust, and injurious to mankind, to claim such a supremacy of power, as to make their decrees irrevocable, whether the consequences prove good or bad. This savours of that old presumption which ruined us all, *We will be as gods*. Much more prudent is that proviso of our constitution, that no law can, by any words or sanctions whatsoever, be made unrepeatable, any more than any estate unalienable. *Cujus est instruere, ejus est destruere*—*The right to enact implies the right to repeal*. It is God's prerogative not to repent, and to say what can never be altered or unsaid.

2. Yet he found an expedient to undo the devices of Haman, and defeat his design, by signing and publishing another decree, to authorise the Jews to stand upon their defence, *vim vi repellere, et invasorem occidere*—*to oppose force to force, and destroy the assailant*. This would be their effectual security. The king shews them that he had done enough already to convince them that he had a concern for the Jewish nation, for he had ordered his favourite to be hanged, *because he laid his hand upon the Jews*, v. 7. He would therefore do the utmost he could to protect them; and leaves it as fully with Esther and Mordecai to use his name and power for their deliverance, as, before, he had left it with Haman to use his name and power for their destruction; "*Write for the Jews as it liketh you*, (v. 8.) saving only the honour of our constitution. Let the mischief be put away as effectually as may be, without reversing the letters."

The secretaries of state were ordered to attend, to draw up this edict, on the twenty-third day of the third month, (v. 9.) about two months after the promulgation of the former, but nine months

before the time set for its execution: it was to be drawn up and published in the respective languages of all the provinces. Shall the subjects of an earthly prince have his decrees in a language they understand? And shall God's oracles and laws be locked up from his servants in an unknown tongue? It was to be directed to the proper officers of every province, both to the justices of peace and to the deputy-lieutenants. It was to be carefully dispersed throughout all the king's dominions, and true copies sent by expresses to all the provinces.

The purport of this decree was, to commission the Jews, upon the day which was appointed for their destruction, to draw together in a body for their own defence. And, (1.) To stand for their life, that, whoever assaulted them, it might be at their peril. (2.) They might not only act defensively, but might *destroy and slay, and cause to perish, all the power of the people that would assault them, men, women, and children*; (v. 11.) and thus to *avenge themselves on their enemies*, (v. 13.) and, if they pleased, to enrich themselves by their enemies, for they were empowered to take the spoil of them for a prey. Now, [1.] This shewed his kindness to the Jews, and sufficiently provided for their safety; for the latter decree would be looked upon as an implicit revocation of the former, though not in expression. But, [2.] It shews the absurdity of that branch of their constitution, that none of the king's edicts might be repealed; for it laid the king here under a necessity of enacting a civil war, in his own dominions, between the Jews and their enemies, so that both sides took up arms by his authority, and yet *against* his authority. No better could come of men's pretending to be wise above what is given them. Great expedition was used in dispersing this decree; the king himself being in pain, lest it should come too late, and any mischief should be done to the Jews by virtue of the former decree, before the notice of this arrived. It was therefore by the king's commandment, as well as Mordecai's, that the messengers were hastened and pressed on, (v. 14.) and had swift beasts provided them, v. 10. It was not a time to trifle, when so many lives were in danger.

15. And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. 16. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. 17. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

It was but a few days ago, that we had Mordecai in sackcloth, and all the Jews in sorrow; but here is a blessed change, Mordecai in purple, and all the Jews in joy. See Ps. 30. 5, 11, 12.

1. Mordecai in purple, v. 15. Having obtained an order for the relief of all the Jews, he was easy, he parted with his mourning weeds, and put on the royal apparel which either belonged to his place, or which the king appointed him as a favourite. His robes were rich, blue and white, of fine linen and purple; so was his coronet, it was of gold. These are things not worth taking notice of, but as they were marks of the king's favour, and *that* the fruit of God's favour to his church. It is well with a land, when the ensigns of dignity are made the ornaments of serious piety. The city Shushan was sensible of its advantage in the preferment of Mordecai, and therefore *rejoiced and was glad*, not only pleased, in general, with the advancement of virtue, but promising itself, in particular, better times, now that so good a man was intrusted with power. Haman was hanged; and *when the wicked perish, there is shouting*: (Prov. 11. 10.) Mordecai was preferred; and *when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice*.

2. The Jews in joy, v. 16, 17. The Jews, who, a while ago, were under a dark cloud, dejected and disgraced, now had *light*

and gladness, joy and honour, a feast and a good day; if they had not been threatened and in distress, they had not had occasion for this extraordinary joy. Therefore are God's people sometimes made to *sow in tears*, that they may *reap in* so much the more joy. The suddenness and strangeness of the turn of affairs, in their favour, added much to their joy; they were *like them that dream*; then *was their mouth filled with laughter*, Ps. 126. 1, 2.

One good effect of this deliverance, was, that *many of the people of the land*, that were considerate, sober, and well-inclined, *became Jews*, were proselyted to the Jewish religion, renounced idolatry, and worshipped the true God only. Haman thought to extirpate the Jews, but it proves, in the issue, that their numbers are greatly increased, and many added to the church. Observe, When *the Jews had joy and gladness*, then *many of the people of the land became Jews*; the holy cheerfulness of those that profess religion is a great ornament to their profession, and will invite and encourage others to be religious. The reason here given why so many became Jews at this time, is, because *the fear of the Jews fell upon them*. When they observed how wonderfully Divine Providence had owned them, and wrought for them in this critical juncture, (1.) They thought them great, and those happy that were among them; and therefore they came over to them, as was foretold, (Zech. 8. 23.) *We will go with you, for we have heard, we have seen, that God is with you, the Shield of your help, and the Sword of your excellency*, Deut. 33. 29. When the church prospers and is smiled upon, many will come in to it, that will be shy of it when it is in trouble. (2.) They thought them formidable, and those miserable that were against them. They plainly saw, in Haman's fate, that if any offered injury to the Jews, it was at their peril; and therefore, for their own security, they joined themselves to them. It is folly to think of contending with the God of Israel, and therefore it is wisdom to think of submitting to him.

CHAP. IX.

We left two royal edicts in force, both given at the court of Shushan, one bearing date the 13th day of the 1st month, appointing, that, on the 13th day of the 12th month the next ensuing, all the Jews should be killed; another, bearing date the 23d day of the 3d month, empowering the Jews, on the day appointed for their slaughter, to draw the sword in their own defence, and make their part good against their enemies as well as they could. Great expectation there was, no doubt, of this day, and the issue of it. The Jews' cause was to be tried by battle, and the day fixed for the combat by authority. Their enemies resolved not to lose the advantages given them by the first edict, in hope to overpower them by numbers; the Jews relied on the goodness of their God, and justice of their cause, and resolved to make their utmost efforts against their enemies. The day comes, at length; and here we are told, I. What a glorious day it was, that year, to the Jews, and the two days following; a day of victory and triumph, both in the city of Shushan, and in all the rest of the king's provinces, v. 1. .19. II. What a memorable day it was made to posterity, by an annual feast, in commemoration of this great deliverance, called the feast of Purim, v. 20. .32.

1. **N**OW in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;) 2. The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Abasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt; and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. 3. And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. 4. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces:

for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. 5. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them. 6. And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men. 7. And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, 8. And Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, 9. And Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, 10. The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they; but on the spoil laid they not their hand. 11. On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king. 12. And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done. 13. Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan, to do to-morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows. 14. And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons. 15. For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hand. 16. But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey. 17. On the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth day of the same, rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 18. But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 19. Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwell in the unwall'd towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.

We have here a decisive battle fought between the Jews and their enemies, in which the Jews were victorious. Neither side was surprised, for both had notice of it long enough before, so that it was a fair trial of skill between them. Nor could either be called the other *rebels*, for they were both supported by the royal authority.

1. The enemies of the Jews were the aggressors. They hoped, notwithstanding the latter edict, to have power over them, by virtue of the former, (v. 1.) and made assaults upon them accordingly;

they formed themselves into bodies, and joined in confederacy against them, to seek their hurt, v. 2. The Chaldee paraphrase says, that none appeared against the Jews but Amalekites only, who were infatuated, and had their hearts hardened, as Pharaoh's against Israel, to take up arms to their own destruction. Some had such an inveterate implacable malice against the Jews, that Haman's fall, and Mordecai's advancement, instead of convincing them, did but exasperate them, and make them more outrageous and resolute, to cut all their throats. The sons of Haman, particularly, vowed to avenge their father's death, and pursue his designs, which they call *noble and brave*, whatever hazards they run; and a strong party they had formed, both in Shushan and in the provinces, in order hereunto. Fight they would, though they plainly saw Providence fight against them; and thus they were infatuated to their own destruction. If they would have sitten still, and attempted nothing against the people of God, not a hair of their head had fallen to the ground; but they cannot persuade themselves to do that, they must be meddling, though it prove to their own ruin; and roll a burthensome stone, which will return upon them.

11. But the Jews were the conquerors. That very day, when the king's decree for their destruction was to be put in execution, and which the enemies thought would have been *their day*, proved *God's day*; (Ps. 37. 13.) it was turned to the contrary of what was expected, and the Jews had rule over them that hated them. We are here told,

1. What the Jews did for themselves; (v. 2.) *they gathered themselves together in their cities*, embodied, and stood upon their defence, offering violence to none, but bidding defiance to all. If they had not had an edict to warrant them, they durst not have done it; but, being so supported, they strove lawfully. Had they acted separately, each family apart, they had been an easy prey to their enemies; but, acting in concert, and gathering together in their cities, they strengthened one another, and durst face their enemies. *Vis unita fortior*—Forces act most powerfully when combined. Those that write of the state of the Jews at this day, give this as the reason why, though they are very numerous in many parts, and rich, they are yet so despicable, because they are generally so selfish, that they cannot incorporate; indeed, being under the curse of dispersion, they cannot unite, nor (as here) *gather together*; for, if they could, they might, with their numbers and wealth, threaten the most potent states.

2. What the rulers of the provinces did for them, under the influence of Mordecai. All the officers of the king, who, by the bloody edict, were ordered to help forward their destruction, (ch. 3. 12, 13.) conformed themselves to the latter edict, (which, being an estoppel against an estoppel,* had set the matter at large, and left them at liberty to observe which they pleased,) and helped the Jews, which turned the scale on their side, v. 3. The provinces would generally do as the rulers of the provinces inclined, and therefore their favouring of the Jews would greatly further them. But, why did they help them? Not because they had any kindness for them, but because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them, he having manifestly the countenance both of God and the king. They all saw it their interest to help Mordecai's friends, because he was not only great in the king's house, and caressed by the courtiers, (as many are who have no intrinsic worth to support their reputation,) but his fame for wisdom and virtue went out from thence throughout all the provinces, in all places he was spoken of as a great man; he was looked upon, also, as a thriving man, and one that waxed greater and greater; (v. 4.) and therefore, for fear of him, all the king's officers helped the Jews. Great men may, by their influence, do a great deal of good, many that fear not God will stand in awe of them.

3. What God did for them; he struck all people with a fear of them, (v. 2.) as the Canaanites were made afraid of Israel, (Josh. 2. 9.—5. 1.) so that, though they had so much hardness as to assault them, yet they had not courage to prosecute the

assault. Their hearts failed them when they came to engage, and *none of the men of might could find their hands.*

4. What execution they did hereupon; *no man could withstand them*, (v.2.) but *they did what they would to those that hated them*, v.5. So strangely were the Jews strengthened and animated, and their enemies weakened and dispirited, that none of those who had marked themselves for their destruction escaped, but they *smote them with the stroke of the sword.* Particularly,

(1.) On the 13th day of the month Adar, they slew in the city Shushan 500 men, (v.6.) and the ten sons of Haman, v.10. The Jews, when, on the feast of Purim, they read this book of Esther, oblige themselves to read the names of Haman's ten sons all in one breath, without any pause, because they say that they were all killed together, and all gave up the ghost just in the same moment, *Buxt. Synag. Jud.* c.24. The Chaldee paraphrase says, that, when these ten were slain, Zeresh, with seventy more of his children, escaped, and afterward begged their bread from door to door.

(2.) On the 14th day they slew in Shushan 300 more, who had escaped the sword on the former day of execution, v.15. This Esther obtained leave of the king for them to do, for the greater terror of their enemies, and the utter crushing of that malignant party of men. The king had taken account of the numbers that were put to the sword the first day, (v.11.) and told Esther, (v.12.) and asked her what more she desired. "Nothing," says she, "but commission to do such another day's work." Esther, surely, was none of the blood-thirsty, none of those that delight in slaughter, but she had some very good reasons that moved her to make this request. She also desired that the dead bodies of Haman's ten sons might be hanged up on the gallows on which their father was hanged, for the greater disgrace of the family, and terror of the party; (v.13.) and it was done accordingly; (v.14.) it is supposed that they were hanged in chains, and left hanging for some time.

(3.) The Jews in the country kept to their orders, and slew no more of their enemies than what were slain the 13th day, which were in all, among all the provinces, 75,000, v.16. If all these were Amalekites, (as the Jews say,) surely now it was that the remembrance of Amalek was utterly put out, *Exod.* 17.14. However, that which justifies them in the execution of so many, is, that they did it in their own just and necessary defence; they *stood for their lives*, authorized to do so by the law of self-preservation, as well as by the king's decree.

(4.) In these several executions, it is taken notice of, that on the prey they laid not their hand, v.10,15,16. The king's commission had warranted them to *take the spoil* of their enemies for a prey, (ch.8.11.) and a fair opportunity they had of enriching themselves with it; if Haman's party had prevailed, no doubt they would have made use of their authority to seize the goods and estates of the Jews, ch.3.13. But the Jews would not do so by them, [1.] That they might, to the honour of their religion, evidence a bold and generous contempt of worldly wealth, in imitation of their father Abraham, who scorned to enrich himself with the spoils of Sodom. [2.] That they might make it appear that they aimed at nothing but their own preservation, and used their interest at court for the saving of their lives, not for the raising of their estates. [3.] Their commission empowered them to destroy the families of their enemies, even the *little ones* and the *women*, ch.8.11. But their humanity forbade them to do that, though that was designed against them; they slew none but those they found in arms; and therefore they did not take the spoil, but left it to the women and little ones, whom they spared, for their subsistence; otherwise, as good slay them as starve them, take away their lives as take away their livelihoods. Herein they acted with a consideration and compassion well worthy imitation.

5. What a satisfaction they had in their deliverance; the Jews in the country cleared themselves of their enemies on the 13th day of the month, and they rested on the 14th day, (v.17.) and made that a thanksgiving-day, v.19. The Jews in Shushan, the royal city, took two days for their military execution, so that they rested on the 15th day, and made that their thanksgiving-day,

v.18. Both of them celebrated their festival the very day after they had finished their work, and gained their point. When we have received signal mercies from God, we ought to be quick and speedy in making our thankful returns to him, while the mercy is fresh, and the impressions of it are most sensible.

20. And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that *were* in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, *both nigh and far*, 21. To stablish *this* among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly: 22. As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. 23. And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; 24. Because Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; 25. But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. 26. Wherefore they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of *that* which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, 27. The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their *appointed* time every year; 28. And *that* these days *should be* remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and *that* these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. 29. Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim. 30. And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, *with* words of peace and truth, 31. To confirm these days of Purim in their times *appointed*, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry. 32. And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.

We may well imagine how much affected Mordecai and Esther were with the triumphs of the Jews over their enemies, and how

they saw the issue of that decisive day, with a satisfaction proportionable to the care and concern with which they expected it. How were their hearts enlarged with joy in God and his salvation, and what new songs of praise were put into their mouths! But here we are told what course they took to spread the knowledge of it among their people, and to perpetuate the remembrance of it to posterity, for the honour of God, and the encouragement of his people to trust in him at all times.

1. The history was written, and copies of it were dispersed among all the Jews in all the provinces of the empire, *both nigh and far*, v. 20. They all knew something of the story, being nearly concerned in it—were by the first edict made sensible of their danger, and by the second of their deliverance; but how this amazing turn was given, they could not tell, Mordecai therefore *wrote these things*. And if this book be the same that he wrote, as many think it is, I cannot but observe what a difference there is between Mordecai's style and Nehemiah's; Nehemiah, at every turn, takes notice of Divine Providence, and the *good hand of his God* upon him, which is very proper to stir up devout affections in the minds of his readers; but Mordecai never so much as mentions the name of God in the whole story. Nehemiah wrote his book at Jerusalem, where religion was in fashion, and an air of it appeared in men's common conversation; Mordecai wrote his at Shushan the palace, where policy reigned more than piety, and he wrote according to the genius of the place. Even those that have the root of the matter in them, are apt to lose the savour of religion, and let their leaf wither, when they converse wholly with those that have little religion. Commend me to Nehemiah's way of writing, *that I would imitate*; and yet learn from Mordecai's, that men may be truly devout, though they do not abound in the shews and expressions of devotion, and therefore that we must not judge or despise our brethren. But because there is so little of the language of Canaan in this book, many think it was not written by Mordecai, but was an extract out of the journals of the kings of Persia, giving an account of the matter of fact, which the Jews themselves knew how to comment upon.

II. A festival was instituted, to be observed yearly, from generation to generation, by the Jews, in remembrance of this wonderful work which God wrought for them; *that the children which should be born might know it, and declare it to their children, that they might set their hope in God*, Ps. 78. 6, 7. It would be for the honour of God, as the Protector of his people, and the honour of Israel, as the care of Heaven, a confirmation of the fidelity of God's covenant, an invitation to strangers to come into the bonds of it, and an encouragement to God's own people cheerfully to depend upon him, his wisdom, power, and goodness, in the greatest straits. Posterity would reap the benefit of this deliverance, and therefore ought to celebrate the memorial of it.

Now concerning this festival we are here told,

1. When it was observed; every year on the 14th and 15th day of the 12th month, just a month before the passover, v. 21. Thus the first month and the last month of the year kept in remembrance the months that were past, even the days when God preserved them. They kept two days together as thanksgiving-days, and did not think that too much to spend in praising God. Let us not be niggardly in our returns of praise to him, who bestows his favours so liberally upon us. Observe, They did not keep the day when they fought, but the days when they rested; on the 14th day the country Jews rested, and on the 15th those in Shushan, and both those they kept. The sabbath was appointed, not on the day that God finished his work, but on the day that he rested from it. The modern Jews observe the 13th day, the day appointed for their destruction, as a fasting-day, grounding it on v. 31. *the matters of their fastings and cry*. But that refers to what was in the day of their distress, (ch. 4. 3, 16.) which was not to be continued, when God had turned their fasts into joy and gladness, Zech. 8. 19.

2. How it was called; *The feast of Purim*, (v. 26.) from *Pur*, a Persian word, which signifies a lot, because Haman had by lot determined this to be the time of the Jews' destruction, while the Lord, at whose disposal the lot is, had determined it to be the time

of their triumph. The name of this festival would remind them of the sovereign dominion of the God of Israel, who served his own purposes by the foolish superstitions of the heathen, and outwitted the *monthly prognosticators in their own craft*, (Isa. 47. 13.) *frustrating the tokens of the liars, and making the diviners mad*, Isa. 44. 25, 26.

3. By whom it was instituted and enacted; it was not a divine institution, and therefore it is not called a *holy day*, but a human appointment, by which it was made a *good day*, v. 19, 22. (1.) The Jews ordained it, and took it upon themselves, (v. 27.) voluntarily *undertook to do as they had begun*, v. 23. They obliged themselves to it by common consent. (2.) Mordecai and Esther confirmed their resolve, that it might be the more binding to posterity, and might come well recommended by those great names. They wrote, [1.] *With all authority*; (v. 29.) as well they might, Esther being queen, and Mordecai prime-minister of state. It is well when those who are in authority use it to authorize that which is good. [2.] *With words of peace and truth*; though they wrote with authority, they wrote with tenderness; not imperious, not imposing, but in such language as the council at Jerusalem use in their decree, (Acts. 15. 29.) "*If ye do so and so, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.*" Such was the style of these letters, or such the salutation or valediction of them, *Peace and truth be with you*.

4. By whom it was to be observed; by *all the Jews*, and by *their seed*, and by all such as *joined themselves to them*, v. 27. The observation of this feast was to be both universal and perpetual; the proselytes must observe it, in token of their sincere affection to the Jewish nation, and their having united interests with them. A concurrence in joys and praises is one branch of the communion of saints.

5. Why it was to be observed; that the memorial of the great things God had done for his church might never *perish from their seed*, v. 28. God does not work wonders for a day, but to be had in everlasting remembrance. *What he doeth, shall be for ever*, and therefore should for ever be had in mind, Eccl. 3. 14. In this affair, they would remember, (1.) Haman's bad practices against the church, to his perpetual reproach, (v. 24.) *Because he had devised against the Jews to destroy them*. Let this be kept in mind, that God's people may never be secure, while they have such malicious enemies, on whom they ought to have a jealous eye; their enemies aim at no less than their destruction, on God therefore let them depend for salvation. (2.) Esther's good services to the church, to her immortal honour. When Esther, in peril of her life, *came before the king*, he repealed the edict, v. 25. This also must be remembered, that, wherever this feast should be kept, and this history read in explication of it, this which she did might be *told for a memorial* of her. Good deeds, done for the Israel of God, ought to be remembered, for the encouragement of others to do the like. God will not forget them, and therefore we must not. (3.) Their own prayers, and the answers given to them, (v. 31.) *the matters of their fastings and their cry*. The more cries we have offered up in our trouble, and the more prayers for deliverance, the more we are obliged to be thankful to God for deliverance. *Call upon me in the time of trouble*, and then *offer to God thanksgiving*.

6. How it was to be observed. And of this let us see,

(1.) What was here enjoined, which was very good; that they should make it, [1.] A day of cheerfulness, *a day of feasting and joy*; (v. 22.) *a feast was made for laughter*, Eccl. 10. 19. When God gives us cause to rejoice, why should we not express our joy? [2.] A day of generosity; *sending portions one to another*, in token of their pleasantness and mutual respect, and their being knit by this and other public common dangers and deliverances so much the closer to each other in love. Friends have their goods in common. [3.] A day of charity; *sending gifts to the poor*. It is not to our kinsmen, and rich neighbours only, that we are to send tokens, but to the *poor and the maimed*, Luke, 14. 12, 13. They that have received mercy, must, in token of their gratitude, shew mercy; and there never wants occasion, for the poor we have always with us. Thanksgiving and almsgiving should go together, that when we are rejoicing and blessing God, the heart of the poor may rejoice with us, and their loins may bless us.

(2.) What was added to this, which was much better. They always, at the feast, read the whole story over in the synagogue, each day, and put up three prayers to God; in the first of which, they praise God for counting them worthy to attend this divine service; in the second, they praise him for the miraculous preservation of their ancestors; in the third, they praise him, that they have lived to observe another festival in memory of it. So Bishop Patrick.

(3.) What it is since degenerated to, which is much worse. Their own writers own that this feast is commonly celebrated among them with gluttony and drunkenness, and excess of riot. Their Talmud says expressly, that, in the feast of Purim, a man should drink till he knows not the difference between, *Cursed be Haman, and, Blessed be Mordecai*. See what the corrupt and wicked nature of man often brings that to, which was at first well intended: here is a religious feast turned into a carnival, a perfect revel; as wakes among us. Nothing more purifies the heart, and adorns religion, than holy joy; nothing more pollutes the heart, and reproaches religion, than carnal mirth and sensual pleasure. *Corruptio optimi est pessima—What is best, when corrupted, becomes the worst.*

CHAP. X.

This is but a part of a chapter; the rest of it, beginning at v. 4. with six chapters more, being found only in the Greek, is rejected as apocryphal. In these three verses, we have only some short hints, I. Concerning Ahasuerus in the throne, what a mighty prince he was, v. 1, 2. II. Concerning Mordecai his favourite, what a distinguished blessing he was to his people, v. 2, 3.

1. **A**ND the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea.
2. And all the acts of his power, and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, wherunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? 3. For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.

We are here told,

1. How great and powerful king Ahasuerus was.

He had a vast dominion, both in the continent and among the islands, from which he raised a vast revenue. Beside the usual customs which the king of Persia exacted, (Ezra, 4. 13.) he laid an additional tribute upon his subjects, to serve for some great occasion he had for money; (v. 1.) *The king laid a tribute*. Happy is our island, that pays no tribute but what is laid upon it by its representatives, and those of its own choosing, and is not squeezed or oppressed by an arbitrary power, as some of the neighbouring nations are. Beside this instance of the grandeur of Ahasuerus, many more might be given, that were *acts of his power and of his might*, but they were not thought fit to be recorded here in the sacred story, which is confined to the Jews, and relates the affairs of other nations only as they fell in with their affairs, but they are

written in the *Persian chronicles*, (v. 2.) which are long since lost and buried in oblivion, while the sacred writings live, live in honour, and will live, till time shall be no more. When the *kingdom of men*, monarchs and their monarchies, are destroyed, and *their memorial is perished with them*, (Ps. 9. 6.) the kingdom of God among men, and the records of that kingdom, shall remain, and be as *the days of heaven*, Dan. 2. 44.

II. How great and good Mordecai was.

1. He was great; and it does one good to see virtue and piety thus in honour. (1.) He was great with the king; next to him, as one he most delighted and confided in. Long had Mordecai sitten contentedly in the king's gate, and now, at length, he is advanced to the head of his council-board. Men of merit may, for a time, seem buried alive, but often, by some means or other, they are discovered and preferred at last. The declaration of the greatness to which the king advanced Mordecai, was *written in the chronicles of the kingdom*, as very memorable, and contributing to the great achievements of the king. He never did such acts of power, as he did when Mordecai was his right hand. (2.) He was *great among the Jews*; (v. 3.) not only great *above* them, more honourable than any of them, but great *with* them, dear to them, familiar with them, and much respected by them. So far were they from envying his pre-eminence, that they rejoiced in it, and added to it, by giving him a commanding interest among them, and submitting all their affairs to his direction.

2. He was good, very good, for he did good; that made him truly great, and then his greatness gave him an opportunity of doing so much the more good. When the king advanced him, (1.) He did not disown his people the Jews, nor was he ashamed of his relation to them, though they were strangers and captives, dispersed and despised. Still he wrote himself *Mordecai the Jew*, and therefore, no doubt, adhered to the Jews' religion, by the observances of which he distinguished himself, and yet it was no hindrance to his preferment, nor looked upon as a blemish to him. (2.) He did not seek his own wealth, and the raising of an estate for himself and his family, which is the chief thing most aim at, when they get into great places at court, but he consulted the welfare of his people, and made it his business to advance that. His power, his wealth, and all his interest in the king and queen, he improved for the public good. (3.) He not only did good, but he did it in a humble condescending way, was easy of access, courteous and affable in his behaviour, and spake peace to all that made their application to him. Doing good works is the best and chief thing expected from those that have wealth and power; but giving good words is also commendable, and makes the good deed the more acceptable. (4.) He did not side with any one party of his people against another, nor make some his favourites, while the rest were neglected and crushed; but, whatever differences there were among them, he was a common father to them all, recommended himself to *the multitude of his brethren*, not despising the crowd, and spake peace to *all their seed*, without distinction. Thus making himself acceptable by humility and beneficence, he was universally accepted, and gained the good word of all his brethren. Thanks be to God, such a government as this, we are blessed with, which *seeks the welfare of our people, speaking peace to all their seed*. God continue it long, very long! and grant us, under the happy protection and influence of it, to *live quiet and peaceable lives, in godliness, honesty, and charity*.

AN
EXPOSITION,

WITH
Practical Observations,

UPON THE
POETICAL BOOKS

OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT;

NAMELY,

JOB,
PSALMS,
PROVERBS,

ECCLESIASTES,
AND
SOLOMON'S SONG.

THE
P R E F A C E

TO THE

Poetical Books.

THESE five books of scripture, which I have here endeavoured, according to the measure of the gift given to me, to explain and improve, for the use of those who desire to read them, not only with understanding, but to their edification—though they have the same divine origin, design, and authority, as those that went before, yet, upon some accounts, are of a very different nature from them, and from the rest of the sacred writings: such variety of methods has Infinite Wisdom seen fit to take, in conveying the light of divine revelation to the children of men, that this heavenly food might have (as the Jews say of the manna) something in it agreeable to every palate, and suited to every constitution. If every eye be not thus opened, every mouth will be stopped, and such as perish in their ignorance will be left without excuse. *We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced: we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented,* Matth. 11. 17.

I. The books of scripture have hitherto been, for the most part, very plain and easy narratives of matter of fact, which he that runs may read and understand, and which are milk for babes, such as they can receive and digest, and both entertain and nourish themselves with. The waters of the sanctuary have hitherto been but to the ancles or to the knees, such as a lamb might wade in, to drink of and wash in; but here we are advanced to a higher form in God's school, and have books put into our hands, wherein are many things *dark, and hard to be understood*, which we do not apprehend the meaning of so suddenly and so certainly as we could wish; the study whereof requires a more close application of mind, a greater intenseness of thought, and the accomplishing of a diligent search, which yet the treasure hid in them, when it is found, will abundantly recompense. The waters of the sanctuary are here *to the loins*, and still, as we go forward, we shall find the waters still risen in the prophetical books, *waters to swim in*, (Ezek. 47. 3. .5.) not fordable, nor otherwise to be passed over; depths in which an elephant will not find footing; *strong meat for strong men*. The same method is observable in the New Testament, where we find the plain history of Christ and his gospel placed first in the Evangelists, and the Acts of the Apostles; then the mystery of both in the Epistles, which are more difficult to be understood; and, lastly, the prophecies of things to come, in the Apocalyptic visions.

This method, so exactly observed in both the Testaments, directs us in what order to proceed, both in studying the things of God ourselves, and in teaching them to others; we must go in the order that the scripture does; and where can we expect to find a better method of divinity, and a better method of preaching?

1. We must begin with those things that are most plain and easy, as, blessed be God, those things are which are most necessary to salvation, and of the greatest use. We must lay our foundation firm, in a sound experimental knowledge of the principles of religion, and then the superstructure will be well-reared, and stand firm. It is not safe to *launch out into the deep at first*, or to venture into points difficult and controverted, until we have first thoroughly digested the elements of the oracles of God, and turned them *in succum et sanguinem—juice and blood*. Those that begin their Bible at the wrong end, commonly use their knowledge of it in the wrong way.

And, in training up others, we must be sure to ground them well at first in those truths of God which are plain, and in some measure level to their capacity, which we find they take and relish, and know how to make use of, and not amuse those that are weak with things above them, things of doubtful disputation, which they cannot apprehend any certainty of, or advantage by. Our Lord Jesus spake the word to the people *as they were able to hear it*, (Mark, 4. 33.) and had many things to say to his disciples which he did not say, because as yet they *could not bear them*, John, 16. 12, 13. And those whom St. Paul *could not speak to as unto spiritual*—though he blamed them for their backwardness, yet he accommodated himself to their weakness, and spake to them *as unto babes in Christ*, 1 Cor. 3. 1, 2.

2. Yet we must not rest in these things; we must not be always children, that have need of milk, but, nourished up with that, and gaining strength, we must *go on to perfection*, (Heb. 6. 1.) that, having, *by reason of use*, our spiritual senses *exercised*, we may come to full age, and put away childish things, and, *forgetting the things which are behind*, (Heb. 5. 14.) that is, so well remembering them, (PLD 3. 13.) that we need not be still poring over them, as those that are ever learning the same

PREFACE.

lesson, we may reach forth to the things which are before. Though we must never think to learn above our Bible, as long as we are here in this world, yet we must still be getting forward in it. *Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain; now turn you, and take your journey onward in the wilderness toward Canaan: our motto must be Plus ultra—Onward. And then shall we know, if thus, by regular steps, (Hos. 6. 3.) we follow on to know the Lord, and what the mind of the Lord is.*

II. The books of scripture have hitherto been mostly historical, but now the matter is of another nature; it is doctrinal and devotional, preaching and praying. In this way of writing, as well as in the former, a great deal of excellent knowledge is conveyed, which serves very valuable purposes. It will be of good use to know, not only what others did that went before us, and how they fared, but what their notions and sentiments were, what their thoughts and affections were, that we may, with the help of them, form our minds aright.

Plutarch's *Morals* are reputed as useful a treasure in the commonwealth of learning as Plutarch's *Lives*; and the wise disquisitions and discourses of the philosophers, as the records of the historians; nor is this divine philosophy, (if I may so call it,) which we have in these books, less needful, or less serviceable, to the church, than the sacred history was. Blessed be God for both.

III. The Jews make these books to be given by a divine inspiration somewhat different from that both of Moses and the prophets. They divided the books of the Old Testament into the Law, the Prophets, and the כתובים—the *Writings*, which Epiphanius emphatically translates Γραφεία—*Things written*, and these books are more commonly called among the Greeks Ἀγιόγραφα—*Holy Writings*: the Jews attribute them to that distinct kind of inspiration which they call רוח הקודש—*The Holy Spirit*. Moses they supposed to write by the Spirit, in a way above all the other prophets, for *with him God spake mouth to mouth, even apparently; knew him*, (Numb. 12. 8.) that is, conversed with him *face to face*, Deut. 34. 10. He was made partaker of divine revelation, (as Maimonides distinguishes, *De Fund. Legis*, c. 7.) *per vigiliam—while awake**, whereas God manifested himself to all the other prophets in a dream or vision: and he adds, that Moses understood the words of prophecy without any perturbation or astonishment of mind, whereas the other prophets commonly fainted and were troubled. But the writers of the Hagiographa they suppose to be inspired in a degree somewhat below that of the other prophets, and to receive divine revelation, not as they did, by dreams, and visions, and voices, but (as Maimonides describes it, *More Nevochim—part 2. ch. 45.*) they perceived some power to rise within them, and rest upon them, which urged and enabled them to write or speak far above their own natural ability, in psalms or hymns, or in history, or in rules of good living, still enjoying the ordinary vigour and use of their senses. Let David himself describe it. *The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue: the God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me*, 2 Sam. 23. 2, 3. This gives such a magnificent account of the inspiration by which David wrote, that I see not why it should be made inferior to that of the other prophets, for David is expressly called a *prophet*, Acts, 2. 30.

But, since our hand is in with the Jewish masters, let us see what books they account Hagiography. These five that are now before us come, without dispute, into this rank of sacred writers, and the book of the Lamentations is not unfitly added to them. Indeed, the Jews, when they would speak critically, reckon all those songs which we meet with in the Old Testament among the Hagiographa; for, though they were penned by prophets, and under the direction of the Holy Ghost, yet, because they were not the proper result of a *visum propheticum—prophetic vision*, they were not strictly prophecy. As to the Historical Books, they distinguish; (but I think it is a distinction without a difference;) some of them they assign to the prophets, calling them the *prophetæ priores—the former prophets*, namely, Joshua, Judges, and the two books of the Kings; but others they rank among the Hagiographa, as, the book of Ruth, (which yet is but an Appendix to the book of Judges,) the two books of Chronicles, with Ezra, Nehemiah, and the book of Esther, which last the Rabbins have a great value for, and think it is to be had in equal esteem with the law of Moses itself, that it shall last as long as it lasts, and shall survive the writings of the prophets. And, *lastly*, they reckon the book of Daniel among the Hagiographa †, for which no reason can be given, since he was not inferior to any of the prophets in the gift of prophecy: and, therefore, the learned Mr. Smith thinks that their placing him among the Hagiographical writers was fortuitous, and by mistake ‡.

Mr. Smith, in his Discourse, before quoted, though he supposes this kind of divine inspiration to be more “*pacate and serene* than that which was strictly called *prophecy*, not acting so much upon the imagination, but seating itself in the higher and purer faculties of the soul, yet shews that it manifested itself to be of a divine nature, not only as it always acted pious souls into strains of devotion, or moved them strangely to dictate matters of true piety and goodness, but as it came in abruptly upon the minds of those holy men, and transported them from the temper of mind they were in before; so that they perceived themselves captivated by the power of some higher light than that which their own understanding commonly poured out upon them; and this, says he, was a kind of vital form to that light of divine and sanctified reason which they were perpetually possessed of, and that constant frame of holiness and goodness which dwelt in their hallowed minds.” We have reason to *glorify that God of Israel who gave such power unto men*, and has here transmitted to us the blessed products of that power.

IV. The style and composition of these books are different from those that go before and those that follow. Our Saviour divides the books of the Old Testament into *the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms*, (Luke, 24. 44.) and thereby teaches us to distinguish those books that are poetical, or metrical, from the Law and the Prophets; and such are all these that are now before us, except Ecclesiastes, which yet, having something restrained in its style, may well enough be reckoned among them. They are books in verse, according to the ancient rules of versifying, though not according to the Greek and Latin *prosodies*.

Some of the ancients call these five books the *second Pentateuch of the Testament* ¶, five sacred volumes, which are as the satellites to the five books of the law of Moses. Gregory Nazianzen, (*carm. 33. p. 98.*) || calls these *αἱ στιχάραι πέντε—the five metrical books*; first, Job, (so he reckons them up,) then David, then the three of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, the Song, and Proverbs,

* See Mr. Smith's Discourse on Prophecy, ch. 11.

† Hil. Megil. c. 2. § 11.

‡ Vid. Hottinger. Thesaur. Philol. lib. 2. cap. 1. § 5.

¶ Damascen. Orthod. Fid. l. 4. cap. 18.

|| Via. Suicer. Thesaur. in στιχάραι.

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Amphilochius, Bishop at *Iconium*, in his Iambic Poem to *Seleucus*, reckons them up particularly, and calls them *πέντε βιβλία*—the five verse-books. *Epiphanius*, (*lib. de ponder. et mensur.* p. 533.) *πέντε στιχίρεις*—the five verse-books. And *Cyriil. Hierosol. Collect.* 4. p. (*mihi—in my copy*) 30. calls these five books *τὰ στιχῆρά*—books in verse. *Polychronius*, in his prologue to *Job*, says, that, as those that are *without*, call their tragedies and comedies *Ποήτικα*—Poetics, so, in sacred writ, those books which are composed in Hebrew metre, (of which he reckons *Job* the first,) we call *στιχῆρά βιβλία*—Books in verse, written *κατὰ σῆχον*—according to order. What is written in metre, or rhythm, is so called from *μέτρος*—a measure, and *ἀριθμός*—a number, because regulated by certain measures, or numbers of syllables, which please the ear with their smoothness and cadency, and so insinuate the matter the more movingly and powerfully into the fancy.

Sir William Temple*, in his essay upon poetry, thinks it is generally agreed to have been the first sort of writing that was used in the world; nay, that, in several nations, poetical compositions preceded the very invention or usage of letters. The Spaniards (he says) found in America many strains of poetry, and such as seemed to flow from a true poetic vein, before any letters were known in those regions. The same (says he) is probable of the Scythians and Grecians: the oracles of *Apollo* were delivered in verse; so were those of the Sibyls. And *Tacitus* says, that the ancient Germans had no annals or records but what were in verse. *Homer* and *Hesiod* wrote their poems (the very *Alcoran* of the Pagan *Dæmonology*) many ages before the appearing of any of the Greek philosophers or historians; and, long before them, (if we may give credit to the antiquities of Greece,) even before the days of *David*, *Orpheus* and *Linus* were celebrated poets and musicians in Greece; and, at the same time, *Carmenta*, the mother of *Evander*, who was the first that introduced letters among the natives of Greece, was so called a *carmine*—from a song, because she delivered herself in verse. And in such veneration was this way of writing among the ancients, that their poets were called *Vates*—Prophets, and their muses were deified.

But, which is more certain and considerable, the most ancient composition that we meet with in scripture was the song of *Moses* at the Red Sea, (*Exod.* 15.) which we find before the very first mention of writing, for that occurs not until *Exod.* 17. 14. when God bade *Moses* write a memorial of the war with *Amalek*. The first, and indeed the true and general end of writing, is, the help of memory; and poetry does in some measure answer that end, and even in the want of writing, much more with writing, helps to preserve the remembrance of ancient things. The book of the wars of the Lord, (*Numb.* 21. 14.) and the book of *Jasher*, (*Josh.* 10. 13. *2 Sam.* 1. 18.) seem to have been both written in poetic measures.

Many sacred songs we meet with in the Old Testament, scattered both in the historical and prophetic books, penned on particular occasions, which, in the opinion of very competent judges, “have in them as true and noble strains of poetry and picture as are met with in any other language whatsoever, in spite of all disadvantages from translations into so different tongues and common prose†; nay, are nobler examples of the true sublime style of poetry than any that can be found in the Pagan writers; the images are so strong, the thoughts so great, the expressions so divine, and the figures so admirably bold and moving, that the wonderful manner of these writers is quite inimitable‡.” It is fit that what is employed in the service of the sanctuary should be the best in its kind.

The books here put together are poetical. *Job* is an heroic poem; the book of *Psalms*, a collection of divine odes or lyrics. *Solomon's Song*, a pastoral and an epithalamium: they are poetical, and yet sacred and serious, grave and full of majesty. They have a poetic force and flame, without poetic fury and fiction, and strangely command and move the affections, without corrupting the imagination, or putting a cheat upon it; and while they gratify the ear, they edify the mind, and profit the more by pleasing. It is, therefore, much to be lamented that so powerful an art, which was at first consecrated to the honour of God, and has been so often employed in his service, should be debauched, as it has been, and is at this day, into the service of his enemies; that his corn, and wine, and oil, should be prepared for *Baal*.

V. As the manner of the composition of these books is excellent, and very proper to engage the attention, move the affections, and fix them in the memory, so the matter is highly useful, and such as will be every way serviceable to us. They have in them the very sum and substance of religion, and what they contain is more fitted to our hand, and made ready for use, than any part of the Old Testament; upon which account, if we may be allowed to compare one star with another, in the firmament of the scripture, these will be reckoned stars of the first magnitude.

All scripture is profitable (and this part of it in a special manner) for instruction in doctrine, in devotion, and in the right ordering of the conversation. The book of *Job* directs us what we are to believe concerning God; the book of *Psalms*, how we are to worship him, pay our homage to him, and maintain our communion with him; and then the book of the *Proverbs* shews very particularly how we are to govern ourselves *ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ*—in every turn of human life: thus shall the man of God, by a due attendance to these lights, be perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good work. And these are placed according to their natural order, as well as according to the order of time; for very fitly are we first led into the knowledge of God, our judgments rightly formed concerning him, and our mistakes rectified; and then instructed how to worship him, and to choose the things that please him.

We have here much of natural religion, its principles, its precepts—much of God, his infinite perfections, his relations to man, and his government both of the world and of the church: here is much of Christ, who is the Spring, and Soul, and Centre, of revealed religion, and whom both *Job* and *David* were eminent types of, and had clear and happy prospects of. We have here that which will be of use to enlighten our understandings, and to acquaint us more and more with the things of God, with the deep things of God; speculations to entertain the most contemplative, and discoveries to satisfy the most inquisitive, and increase the knowledge of those that are most knowing. Here is that also which, with a divine light, will bring into the soul the heat and influence of a divine fire, will kindle and inflame pious and devout affections, on which wings we may soar upward, until we enter into the holiest. We may here be in the mount with God, to behold his beauty; and when we come down from that mount, if we retain (as we ought) the impressions of our devotion upon our spirits, and make conscience of doing that good which the Lord our God here requires of us, our faces shall shine before all with whom we converse, who shall take occasion thence to glorify our Father which is in heaven, *Matth.* 5. 16.

Thus great, thus noble, thus truly excellent, is the subject, and thus capable of being improved, which gives me the more reason to be ashamed of the meanness of my performance, that the comment breathes so little of the life and spirit of the

* *Miscell.* part 2.

† *Sir W. Temple.* p. 329.

‡ *Sir R. Blackmore's preface to Job.*

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text. We often wonder at those that are not at all affected with the great things of God, and have no taste or relish of them, because they know little of them: but, perhaps, we have more reason to wonder at ourselves, that, conversing so frequently, so intimately, with them, we are not more affected with them, so as even to be wholly taken up with them, and in a continual transport of delight in the contemplation of them. We hope to be so shortly: in the mean time, though, like the three disciples that were the witnesses of Christ's transfiguration upon the mount, we are but dull and sleepy, yet we can say, *Master, it is good to be here; here let us make tabernacles*, Luke, 9. 32, 33.

I have nothing here to boast of, nothing at all; but a great deal to be humbled for, that I have not come up to what I have aimed at, in respect of fulness and exactness. In the review of it, I find many defects, and those who are critical perhaps will meet with some mistakes in it; but I have done it with what care I could, and desire to be thankful to God, who, by his grace, has carried me on in his work thus far: let that grace have all the glory, (Phil. 2. 13.) which *works in us both to will and to do* whatever we will or do, that is good, or serves any good purpose. What is *from God*, I trust, shall be *to him*, shall be graciously accepted by him, *according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not*, and shall be of some use to his church; and what is from myself, that is, all the defects and errors, shall, I trust, be favourably passed by and pardoned. That prayer of *St. Austin* is mine, *Domine Deus, quæcunque dixi in his libris de tuo, agnoscant et tui; et quæ de meo, et tu ignosce et tui*—Lord God, whatever I have maintained in these books correspondent with what is contained in thine, grant that thy people may approve as well as thyself; whatever is but the doctrine of my book, forgive thou, and grant that thy people may forgive also.

I must beg likewise to own, to the honour of our great Master, that I have found the work to be its own wages; and that the more we converse with the word of God, the more it is to us as *the honey* and the *honeycomb*, Ps. 19. 10. In gathering some gleanings of this harvest for others, we may feast ourselves; and when we are enabled, by the grace of God, to do so, we are best qualified to feed others. I was much pleased with the passage I lately met with of Erasmus, that great scholar and celebrated wit, in an epistle dedicatory before his book *De Ratione Concionandi*, where, as one weary of the world and the hurry of it, he expresses an earnest desire to spend the rest of his days in secret communion with Jesus Christ, encouraged by his gracious invitation to those who *labour and are heavy-laden to come unto him for rest*; (Matth. 11. 28.) and this alone is that which he thinks will yield him true satisfaction. I think his words worth transcribing, and such as deserve to be inserted among the testimonies of great men to serious godliness. *Neque quisquam faciliè credat quàm miserè animus jamdudum affectet ab his laboribus in tranquillum otium secedere, quodque superest vitæ, (superest autem vix brevis palmus sive pugillus,) solum cum eo solo colloqui, qui clamavit olim, (nec hodiè mutat vocem suam,) "Venite ad me, omnes qui laboratis, et onerati estis, ego reficiam vos;" quandoquidem in tam turbulento, ne dicam furente, sæculo, in tot molestiis quas vel ipsa tempora publicè invehunt, vel privatim adfert ætas ac valetudo, nihil reperio in qua mens mea libentiùs conquiescat; quàm in hoc arcano colloquio*—No one will easily believe how anxiously, for a long time past, I have wished to retire from these labours into a scene of tranquillity, and, during the remainder of life, (dwindled, it is true, to the shortest span,) to converse only with him who once cried, (nor does he now retract,) "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you;" for in this turbulent, not to say furious, age, the many public sources of disquietude connected with the infirmities of advancing age leave no solace to my mind to be compared with this secret communion. In the pleasing contemplation of the divine beauty and benignity we hope to spend a blessed eternity, and therefore in this work it is good to spend as much as may be of our time.

One volume more, containing the *Prophetical* books, will finish the Old Testament, if the Lord continue my life, and leisure, and ability of mind and body for this work. It is begun, and I find it will be larger than any of the other volumes, and longer in the doing; but as God, by his grace, shall furnish me for it, and assist me in it, (without which grace I am nothing, less than nothing, worse than nothing,) it shall be carried on with all convenient speed; and *sat citò, si sat bene—if with sufficient ability, it will be with sufficient speed*. I desire the prayers of my friends, that God would *minister seed to the sower, and bread to the eaters*, (Isa. 55. 10.) that he would *multiply the seed sown, and increase the fruits of our righteousness*; (2 Cor. 9. 10.) that so he who *sows and they who reap may rejoice together*; (John, 4. 36.) and the great Lord of the harvest shall have the glory of all.

M. H.

Chester,
May 13, 1710

AN
E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH
Practical Observations,

OF THE BOOK OF

J O B.

THIS book of Job stands by itself, is not connected with any other, and is therefore to be considered alone. Many copies of the Hebrew Bible place it after the book of Psalms, and some after the Proverbs, which perhaps has given occasion to some learned men to imagine it to be written by Isaiah, or some of the later prophets. But, as the subject appears to have been much more ancient, so we have no reason to think but that the composition of the book was, and that therefore it is most fitly placed first in this collection of divine morals; also, being doctrinal, it is proper to precede, and introduce, the book of Psalms, which is devotional, and the book of Proverbs, which is practical; for how shall we worship or obey a God whom we know not?

As to this book,

- I. We are sure that *it is given by inspiration of God, though we are not certain who was the penman of it.* The Jews, though no friends to Job, because he was a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, yet, as faithful conservators of *the oracles of God* committed to them, always retained this book in their sacred canon. The history is referred to by one apostle; (James, 5. 11.) and one passage (*ch. 5. 13.*) is quoted by another apostle, with the usual form of quoting scripture, *It is written*, 1 Cor. 3. 19. It is the opinion of many of the ancients, that this history was written by Moses himself in Midian, and delivered to his suffering brethren in Egypt, for their support and comfort under their burthens, and the encouragement of their hope that God would, in due time, deliver and enrich them, as he did this patient sufferer. Some conjecture that it was written originally in Arabic, and afterward translated into Hebrew, for the use of the Jewish church, by Solomon, (so Monsieur Jurieu,) or some other inspired writer. It seems most probable to me, that Elihu was the penman of it, at least of the discourses, because (*ch. 32. 15, 16.*) he mingles the words of an historian with those of a disputant: but Moses perhaps wrote the two first chapters and the last, to give light to the discourses; for in *them* God is frequently called *Jehovah*, but not once in all the *discourses*, except *ch. 12. 9.* That name was but little known to the patriarchs before Moses, Exod. 6. 3. If Job wrote it himself, some of the Jewish writers themselves own him a *prophet among the Gentiles*; if Elihu, we find he had a spirit of prophecy which *filled him with matter, and constrained him, ch. 32. 18.*
- II. We are sure that *it is, for the substance of it, a true history, and not a romance, though the dialogues are poetical.* No doubt there was such a man as Job; the prophet Ezekiel names him with Noah and Daniel, Ezek. 14. 14. The narrative we have here of his prosperity and piety, his strange afflictions and exemplary patience, the substance of his conferences with his friends, and God's discourse with him out of the whirlwind, with his return, at length, to a very prosperous condition, no doubt, is exactly true, though the inspired penman is allowed the usual liberty of putting the matter of which Job and his friends discoursed, into his own words.
- III. We are sure that *it is very ancient, though we cannot fix the precise time either when Job lived, or when the book was written.* So many, so evident, are its hoary hairs, the marks of its antiquity, that we have reason to think it of equal date with

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the book of Genesis itself, and that holy Job was cotemporary with Isaac and Jacob; though not co-heir with them of the promise of the earthly Canaan, yet a joint-expectant with them of the *better country*, that is, *the heavenly*. Probably, he was of the posterity of Nahor, Abraham's brother, whose first-born was *Uz*, (Gen. 22. 21.) and in whose family religion was, for some ages, kept up, as appears, Gen. 31. 53. where God is called, not only *the God of Abraham*, but *the God of Nahor*. He lived before the age of man was shortened to 70 or 80, as it was in Moses's time; before sacrifices were confined to one altar; before the general apostacy of the nations from the knowledge and worship of the true God; and while yet there was no other idolatry known than the worship of the sun and moon, and that punished by the Judges, *ch.* 31. 26, 28. He lived while God was known by the name of *God Almighty*, more than by the name of *Jehovah*; for he is called *Shaddai—the Almighty*, above thirty times in this book: he lived while divine knowledge was conveyed, not by writing, but by tradition; for to that appeals are here made, *ch.* 8. 8.—21. 29.—15. 18.—5. 1. And we have therefore reason to think that he lived before Moses, because here is no mention at all of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, or the giving of the law. There is indeed one passage which might be made to allude to the drowning of Pharaoh, (*ch.* 26. 12.) *He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through Rahab*; which name Egypt is very frequently called by in scripture, as Ps. 87. 4.—89. 10. Isa. 51. 9. But that may as well refer to the proud waves of the sea. We conclude therefore that we are here got back to the patriarchal age, and, beside its authority, we receive this book with veneration for its antiquity.

- IV. We are sure that *it is of great use to the church, and to every good Christian, though there are many passages in it dark and hard to be understood*. We cannot perhaps be confident of the true meaning of every Arabic word and phrase we meet with in it. It is a book that finds a great deal of work for the critics; but enough is plain to make the whole profitable, and it was all written for our learning. This noble poem presents to us, in very clear and lively characters, these five things among others:—
1. *A monument of primitive theology*. The first and great principles of the light of nature, on which natural religion is founded, are here, in a warm, and long, and learned, dispute, not only taken for granted on all sides, and not the least doubt made of them, but by common consent plainly laid down as eternal truths, illustrated and urged as affecting commanding truths. Were ever the being of God, his glorious attributes and perfections, his unsearchable wisdom, his irresistible power, his inconceivable glory, his inflexible justice, and his incontestable sovereignty, discoursed of with more clearness, fulness, reverence, and divine eloquence, than in this book? The creation of the world, and the government of it, are here admirably described, not as matters of nice speculation, but as laying most powerful obligations upon us to fear and serve, to submit to, and trust in, our Creator, Owner, Lord, and Ruler. Moral good and evil, virtue and vice, were never drawn more to the life, (the beauty of the one and the deformity of the other,) than in this book; nor the inviolable rule of God's judgment more plainly laid down, That happy are the righteous, it shall be well with them; and woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with them. These are not questions of the schools, to keep the learned world in action, nor engines of state, to keep the unlearned world in awe; no, it appears by this book that they are sacred truths of undoubted certainty, and which all the wise and sober part of mankind have in every age subscribed and submitted to.
 2. It presents us with a *specimen of Gentile piety*. This great saint descended, not from Abraham, but Nahor; or, if from Abraham, not from Isaac, but from one of the sons of the concubines that were sent into the east-country; (Gen. 25. 6.) or, if from Isaac, yet not from Jacob, but Esau; so that he was out of the pale of the covenant of peculiarity, no Israelite, no proselyte, and yet none like him for religion, nor such a favourite of heaven upon this earth. It was a truth, therefore, before St. Peter perceived it, that, *in every nation, he that fears God, and works righteousness, is accepted of him*, Acts, 10. 35. There were *children of God scattered abroad*, (John, 11. 52.) beside the incorporated *children of the kingdom*, Matth. 8. 11, 12.
 3. It presents us with an *exposition of the book of Providence*, and a clear and satisfactory solution of many of the difficult and obscure passages of it. The prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the righteous, have always been reckoned two as hard chapters as any in that book; but they are here expounded, and reconciled with the divine wisdom, purity, and goodness, by the *end of these things*.
 4. It presents us with a *great example of patience*, and close adherence to God, in the midst of the sorest calamities. Sir Richard Blackmore's most ingenious pen, in his excellent preface to his paraphrase on this book, makes Job a hero proper for an epic poem; for, (says he,) "He appears brave in distress, and valiant in affliction, maintains his virtue, and with that his character, under the most exasperating provocations that the malice of hell could invent, and thereby gives a most noble example of passive fortitude, a character no way inferior to that of the active hero," &c.
 5. It presents us with an *illustrious type of Christ*, the particulars of which we shall endeavour to take notice of as we go along. In general, Job was a great sufferer, was emptied and humbled, but in order to his greater glory. So Christ abased himself, that we might be exalted. The learned Bishop Patrick quotes St. Jerom more than once speaking of Job as a type of Christ, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, who was persecuted for a time by men and devils, and seemed forsaken of God too, but was raised up to be an intercessor even for his friends that had added affliction to his misery. When the apostle speaks of the *patience of Job*, he immediately takes notice of *the end of the Lord*, that is, of the Lord Jesus, (as some understand it,) typified by Job, James, 5. 11.
- In this book we have, (1.) The history of Job's sufferings, and his patience under them, (*ch.* 1, 2.) not without a mixture of human frailty, *ch.* 3. (2.) A dispute between him and his friends upon them, in which, [1.] The opponents were Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. [2.] The respondent was Job. [3.] The moderators *vide*, *First*, Elihu, *ch.* 32. . 37. *Secondly*, God himself, *ch.* 38. . 41. (3.) The issue of all in Job's honour and prosperity, *ch.* 42. Upon the whole, we learn, that many are the afflictions of the righteous, but that, when the Lord delivers them out of all, the trial of their faith will be found to praise, and honour, and glory.

CHAP. I.

The history of Job begins here, with an account, I. Of his great piety in general, (v. 1.) and in a particular instance, v. 5. II. Of his great prosperity, v. 2. .4. III. Of the malice of Satan against him, and the permission he obtained to try his constancy, v. 6. .12. IV. Of the surprising troubles that befell him; the ruin of his estate, (v. 13. .17.) and the death of his children, v. 18, 19. V. Of his exemplary patience and piety under these troubles, v. 20. .22. In all which, he is set forth for an example of suffering affliction, from which no prosperity can secure us, but through which integrity and uprightness will preserve us.

1. **T**HERE was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. 2. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. 3. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

Concerning Job, we are here told,

I. That he was a man; therefore subject to like passions as we are. He was *Ish*, a worthy man, a man of note and eminency, a magistrate, a man in authority. The country he lived in was the land of Uz, in the eastern part of Arabia, which lay toward Chaldea, near Euphrates, probably not far from Ur of the Chaldees, whence Abraham was called. When God called one good man out of that country, yet he *left not himself without witness*, but raised up another in it to be a *preacher of righteousness*. God has his remnant in all places, sealed ones out of every nation, as well as out of every tribe of Israel, Rev. 7. 9. It was the privilege of the land of Uz to have so good a man as Job in it; now it was *Arabia the Happy* indeed: and it was the praise of Job, that he was eminently good in so bad a place; the worse others were round about him, the better he was.

His name *Job*, or *Jjob*, (some say,) signifies *one hated*, and counted as an enemy; others make it to signify one that grieves, or groans; thus the sorrow he carried in his name might be a check to his joy in his prosperity. Dr. Cave derives it from *Jaab*, *to love*, or *desire*, intimating how welcome his birth was to his parents, and how much he was *the desire of their eyes*; and yet there was a time when he cursed the day of his birth. Who can tell what the day may prove, which yet begins with a bright morning?

II. That he was a very good man, eminently pious, and better than his neighbours. *He was perfect and upright*. This is intended to shew us, not only what reputation he had among men, (that he was generally taken for an honest man,) but what was really his character; for it is the judgment of God concerning him, and we are sure that is according to truth. 1. Job was a religious man, one that *feared God*, that is, worshipped him according to his will, and governed himself by the rules of the divine law in every thing. 2. He was sincere in his religion; he was perfect, not sinless; he himself owns, (ch. 9. 20.) *If I say I am perfect, I shall be proved perverse*. But, having a respect to all God's commandments, aiming at perfection, he was really as good as he seemed to be, and did not dissemble in his profession of piety; his heart was sound, and his eye single. Sincerity is gospel-perfection; I know no religion without it. 3. He was upright in his dealings both with God and man; was faithful to his promises, steady in his counsels, true to every trust reposed in him, and made conscience of all he said and did. See Isa. 33. 15. Though he was not of Israel, he was indeed an *Israelite without guile*. 4. The fear of God reigning in his heart was the principle that governed his whole conversation. That made him perfect and upright, inward and entire for God, universal and uniform in religion; that kept him close and constant to his duty. He *feared God*, had a reverence for his majesty, a regard to his authority, and a dread of his wrath. 5. He dreaded the thought of doing what was wrong;

with the utmost abhorrence and detestation, and, with a constant care and watchfulness, he *eschewed evil*, avoided all appearances of sin and approaches to it, and this, *because of the fear of God*, Neh. 5. 15. *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil*; (Prov. 8. 13.) and then, *by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil*, Prov. 16. 6.

III. That he was a man who prospered greatly in this world, and made a considerable figure in his country. He was prosperous, and yet pious. Though it is hard and rare, it is not impossible, for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven: with God, even this is possible, and by his grace the temptations of worldly wealth are not insuperable. He was pious, and his piety was a friend to his prosperity; for godliness has the promise of the life that now is. He was prosperous, and his prosperity put a lustre upon his piety, and gave him, who was so good, so much greater opportunity of doing good. The acts of his piety were grateful returns to God for the instances of his prosperity; and, in the abundance of the good things God gave him, he served God the more cheerfully.

1. He had a numerous family; he was eminent for religion, and yet not a hermit; not a recluse, but the father and master of a family. It is an instance of his prosperity, that his house was filled with children, which are a *heritage of the Lord*, and his reward, Ps. 127. 3. He had *seven sons and three daughters*, v. 2. Some of each sex, and more of the more noble sex, in which the family is built up. Children must be looked upon as blessings, for so they are, especially to good people, that will give them good instructions, and set them good examples, and put up good prayers for them. Job had many children, and yet he was neither oppressed nor uncharitable, but very liberal to the poor, ch. 31. 17, &c. Those that have great families to provide for ought to consider, that what is prudently given in alms is set out to the best interest, and put into the best fund for their children's benefit.

2. He had a good estate for the support of his family; his *substance* was considerable, v. 3. Riches are called *substance*, in conformity to the common form of speaking; otherwise, to the soul and another world, they are but shadows, *things that are not*, Prov. 23. 5. It is only in heavenly wisdom that we *inherit substance*, Prov. 8. 21. In those days, when the earth was not fully peopled, it was, as now, in some of the plantations, men might have land enough upon easy terms, if they had but wherewithal to stock it; and therefore Job's substance is described, not by the acres of land he was lord of, but,

(1.) By his cattle; *sheep and camels, oxen and asses*. The numbers of each are here set down, probably not the exact number, but thierabout, a very few under or over. The sheep are put first, because of most use in the family, as Solomon observes, (Prov. 27. 23, 26, 27.) *Lambs for thy clothing, and milk for the food of thy household*. Job, it is likely, had silver and gold, as well as Abraham; (Gen. 13. 2.) but then men valued their own and their neighbours' estates by that which was for service and present use, more than by that which was for shew and state, and fit only to be hoarded. As soon as God had made man, and provided for his maintenance by the herbs and fruits, he made him rich and great by giving him *dominion over the creatures*, Gen. 1. 28. That, therefore, being still continued to man, notwithstanding his defection, (Gen. 9. 2.) is still to be reckoned one of the most considerable instances of men's wealth, honour, and power, Ps. 8. 6.

(2.) By his servants; he had a very good household or husbandry, many that were employed for him and maintained by him; and thus he both had honour and did good; yet thus he was involved in a great deal of care, and put to a great deal of charge. See the vanity of this world; as goods are increased, they must be increased that tend them and occupy them, and *they will be increased that eat them; and what good has the owner thereof, save the beholding of them with his eyes?* Eccles. 5. 11.

In a word, *Job was the greatest of all the men of the east*; and they were the richest in the world: those were rich indeed who were *replenished more than the east*, Isa. 2. 6. Margin. Job's wealth, with his wisdom, entailed him to the honour and power he had in his country, which he describes, ch. 29. and made him sit chief. Job was upright and honest, and yet grew rich, nay

therefore grew rich; for honesty is the best policy, and piety and charity are ordinarily the surest ways of thriving. He had a great household and much business, and yet kept up the fear and worship of God; and he and his house served the Lord. The account of Job's piety and prosperity comes before the history of his great afflictions, to shew that neither will secure us from the common, no, nor from the uncommon, calamities of human life. Piety will not secure us, as Job's mistaken friends thought, for all things come alike to all; prosperity will not, as a careless world thinks; (Isa. 47. 8.) *I sit as a queen, and therefore shall see no sorrow.*

4. And his sons went and feasted *in their houses*, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. 5. And it was so, when the days of *their feasting* were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings *according to the number of them all*: for Job said, *It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.* Thus did Job continually.

We have here a further account of Job's prosperity and his piety.

I. His great comfort in his children is taken notice of as an instance of his prosperity; for our temporal comforts are borrowed, depend upon others, and are as those about us are. Job himself mentions it as one of the greatest joys of his prosperous estate, that his *children were about him*, ch. 29. 5. They kept a circular feast at some certain times; (v. 4.) *they went and feasted in their houses.* It was a comfort to this good man, 1. To see his children grown up and settled in the world; all his son's were in houses of their own, probably married; and to each of them he had given a competent portion to set up with. They that had been olive-plants round his table, were removed to tables of their own. 2. To see them thrive in their affairs, and able to feast one another, as *well as to feed themselves.* Good parents desire, promote, and rejoice in, their children's wealth and prosperity, as their own. 3. To see them in health, no sickness in their houses; for that would have spoiled their feasting, and turned it into mourning. 4. Especially to see them live in love and unity, and mutual good affection; no jars or quarrels among them, no strangeness, no shyness one of another, no strait-handedness; but, though every one knew his own, they lived with as much freedom as if they had had all in common. It is comfortable to the hearts of parents, and comely in the eyes of all, to see brethren thus knit together; *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is!* Ps. 133. 1. 5. It added to the comfort, to see the brothers so kind to their sisters, that they sent for them to feast with them; who were so modest, that they would not have gone, if they had not been sent for. Those brothers that slight their sisters, care not for their company, and have no concern for their comfort, are ill-bred and ill-natured, and very unlike Job's sons. It seems their feast was so sober and decent, that their sisters were good company for them at it. 6. They feasted in their own houses, not in public houses, where they would be more exposed to temptations, and which were not so creditable.

We do not find that Job himself feasted with them; doubtless they invited him, and he would have been the most welcome guest at any of their tables; nor was it from any sourness or moroseness of temper, or for want of natural affection, that he kept away, but he was old and dead to those things, like Barzillai, (2 Sam. 19. 35.) and considered that the young people would be more free and pleasant, if there were none but themselves. Yet he would not restrain his children from that diversion which he denied himself. Young people may be allowed a youthful liberty, provided they flee youthful lusts.

II. His great care about his children is taken notice of as an instance of his piety: for that we are really, which we are relatively. Those that are good will be good to their children, and especially do what they can for the good of their souls. Observe, (v. 5.) Job's pious concern for the spiritual welfare of his children.

1. He was jealous over them with a godly jealousy; and so we ought to be over ourselves and those that are dearest to us, as far as is necessary to our care and endeavour for their good. Job had given his children a good education, had comfort in them, and good hope concerning them; and yet he said, "*It may be my sons have sinned* in the days of their feasting, more than at other times; have been too merry, have taken too great a liberty in eating and drinking, and have *cursed God in their hearts,*" that is, "have entertained atheistical, profane, thoughts in their minds, unworthy notions of God and his providence, and the exercises of religion." When they were *full*, they were ready to *deny God, and to say, Who is the Lord?* ready (Prov. 30. 9.) to *forget God*, and to say, *The power of our hand has gotten us this wealth,* Deut. 8. 12, &c. Nothing alienates the mind more from God than the indulgence of the flesh.

2. As soon as the days of their feasting were over, he called them to the solemn exercises of religion: not while their feasting lasted; (Let them take their time for that; there is a time for all things;) but, when it was over, their good father reminded them that they must know when to take up, and not think to fare sumptuously every day; though they had their days of feasting the *week round*, they must not think to have them the *year round*; they had something else to do. Note, Those that are merry must find a time to be serious.

3. He sent to them to prepare for solemn ordinances, *sent and sanctified them*; ordered them to examine their own consciences, and repent of what they had done amiss in their feasting; to lay aside their vanity, and compose themselves for religious exercises. Thus he kept his authority over them for their good, and they submitted to it, though they were got into houses of their own. Still he was the priest of the family, and at his altar they all attended, valuing their share in his prayers more than their share in his estate. Parents cannot give grace to their children, (it is God that sanctifies,) but they ought, by seasonable admonitions and counsels, to further their sanctification. In their baptism they were sanctified to God; let it be our desire and endeavour that they may be sanctified for him.

4. He offered sacrifice for them, both to atone for the sins he feared they had been guilty of in the days of their feasting, and to implore for them mercy to pardon, and grace to prevent, the debauching of their minds, and corrupting of their manners, by the liberty they had taken, and to preserve their piety and purity.

For he, with mournful eyes, had often spy'd,
Scatter'd on Pleasure's smooth but treacherous tide,
The spoils of virtue overpower'd by sense,
And floating wrecks of ruin'd innocence.

Sir R. BLACKMORE.

Job, like Abraham, had an altar for his family, on which, it is likely, he offered sacrifice daily; but, on this extraordinary occasion, he offered more sacrifices than usual, and with more solemnity, *according to the number of them all*, one for each child. Parents should be particular in their addresses to God for the several branches of their family; "For this child I prayed, according to its particular temper, genius, and condition;" to which the prayers, as well as the endeavours, must be accommodated.

When these sacrifices were to be offered, (1.) He rose early, as one in care that his children might not lie long under guilt, and as one whose heart was upon his work, and his desire towards it. (2.) He required his children to attend the sacrifice, that they might join with him in the prayers he offered with the sacrifice, that the sight of the killing of the sacrifice might humble them much for their sins, for which they deserved to die, and the sight of the offering of it up might lead them to a Mediator. This serious work would help to make them serious again, after the days of their gaiety.

Lastly, Thus he did continually; not only whenever an occasion of this kind recurred, for *he that is washed, needs to wash his feet*; (John, 13. 10.) the acts of repentance and faith must be often renewed, because we often repeat our transgressions; but, all days, every day, he offered up his sacrifices, was constant to his devotions, and did not omit them any day. The occasional exercises

of religion will not excuse us from those that are stated. He that serves God uprightly will serve him continually.

6. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. 7. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. 8. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?* 9. Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? 10. Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. 11. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. 12. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath *is in thy power*; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

Job was not only so rich and great, but withal so wise and good, and had such an interest both in heaven and earth, that one would think the mountain of his prosperity stood so strong, that it could not be moved; but here we have a thick cloud gathering over his head, pregnant with a horrible tempest. We must never think ourselves secure from storms, while we are in this lower region.

Before we are told how his troubles surprised and seized him here in this visible world, we are here told how they were concerted in the world of spirits: that the Devil having a great enmity to Job for his eminent piety, begged and obtained leave to torment him. It does not at all derogate from the credibility of Job's story in general, to allow that this discourse between God and Satan, in these verses, is parabolical, like that of Micahiah, (1 Kings, 22. 19, &c.) and an allegory designed to represent the malice of the Devil against good men, and the divine check and restraint that malice is under. Only thus much further is intimated, that the affairs of this earth are very much the subject of the counsels of the unseen world. That world is dark to us, but we lie very open to it.

Now here we have,

I. Satan among the sons of God, (v. 6.) an *adversary* (so *Satan* signifies) to God, to men, to all good. He thrust himself into an assembly of the *sons of God*, that came to *present themselves before the Lord*. This means, either, 1. A meeting of the saints on earth. Professors of religion, in the patriarchal age, were called *sons of God*; (Gen. 6. 2.) they had then religious assemblies, and stated times for them. The King came in to see his guests; the eye of God was on all present: but there was a serpent in paradise, a Satan among the *sons of God*; when they came together, he is among them to distract and disturb them, stands at their right hand to resist them; *the Lord rebuke thee, Satan!* Or, 2. A meeting of the angels in heaven; they are the *sons of God*, ch. 38. 7. They came to give an account of their negotiations on earth, and to receive new instructions. Satan was one of them originally; but *how art thou fallen, O Lucifer!* He shall no more stand in that congregation; yet he is here represented as coming among them, either summoned to appear as a criminal, or connived at, for the present, though an intruder.

II. His examination, how he came thither; (v. 7.) *The Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou?* He knew very well whence

he came, and with what design he came thither; that, as the good angels came to do good, he came for a permission to do hurt; but he would, by calling him to an account, shew him that he was under check and controul. *Whence comest thou?* He asks this, 1. As wondering what brought him thither. *Is Saul among the prophets?* Satan among the sons of God? Yes, for *he transforms himself into an angel of light*, (2 Cor. 11. 13, 14.) and would seem one of them. Note, It is possible that a man may be a child of the Devil, and yet be found in the assemblies of the sons of God in this world, and *there* may pass undiscovered by men, and yet be challenged by the all-seeing God; *Friend, how comest thou in hither?* Or, 2. As inquiring what he had been doing before he came thither: the same question was perhaps put to the rest of them that presented themselves before the Lord, "Whence came you?" We are accountable to God for all our haunts, and all the ways we traverse.

III. The account he gives of himself, and the tour he had made. I come (says he) *from going to and fro on the earth*. 1. He could not pretend he had been doing any good, could give no such account of himself as the *sons of God* could, who *presented themselves before the Lord*, who came from executing his orders, serving the interest of his kingdom, and ministering to the heirs of salvation. 2. He would not own he had been doing any hurt; that he had been drawing men from their allegiance to God, deceiving and destroying souls; no, *I have done no wickedness*, Prov. 30. 20. *Thy servant went no whither*. In saying that he had *walked to and fro through the earth*, he intimates that he had kept himself within the bounds allotted him, and had not transgressed his tether; for *the dragon is cast out into the earth*, (Rev. 12. 9.) and not yet confined to his place of torment. While we are on this earth, we are within his reach; and with so much subtlety, swiftness, and industry, does he penetrate into all the corners of it, that we cannot be in any place secure from his temptations. 3. He yet seems to give some representation of his own character. (1.) Perhaps it is spoken proudly, and with an air of haughtiness, as if he were indeed the *prince of this world, as if the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them were his*, (Luke, 4. 6.) and he had now been walking in circuit through his own territories. (2.) Perhaps it is spoken fretfully, and with discontent; he had been walking to and fro, and could find no rest, but was as much a fugitive and a vagabond as Cain in the land of Nod. (3.) Perhaps it is spoken carefully; "I have been hard at work, going to and fro," or (as some read it) "searching about in the earth;" really in quest of an opportunity to do mischief. He walks about seeking whom he may devour. It concerns us therefore to be sober and vigilant.

IV. The question God puts to him concerning Job, (v. 8.) *Hast thou considered my servant Job?* As when we meet with one that has been in a distant place, where we have a friend we dearly love, we are ready to ask, "You have been in such a place: pray did you see my friend there?" Observe,

1. How honourably God speaks of Job; he is *my servant*. Good men are God's servants, and he is pleased to reckon himself honoured in their services, and that they are to him for *a name and a praise*, (Jer. 13. 11.) and *a crown of glory*, Isa. 62. 3. "Yonder is *my servant Job*; there is *none like him*, none I value like him; of all the princes and potentates of the earth, one such saint as he is worth them all: *none like him* for uprightness and serious piety; many do well, but *he excelleth them all*; there is not to be found *such great faith, no not in Israel*." Thus Christ, long after held up the centurion and the woman of Canaan, who were both of them, like Job, strangers to that commonwealth. The saints glory in God; *Who is like thee among the gods?* And he is pleased to glory in them; *Who is like Israel among the people?* So here, *none like Job*, none in earth, that state of imperfection; those in heaven do indeed far outshine him; those who are least in that kingdom are greater than he; but *on earth there is none his like*. There is none like him in that land: so some good men are the glory of their country.

2. How closely he gives to Satan this good character of Job, *Hast thou set thy heart to my servant Job?* Designing hereby, (1.) To aggravate the apostacy and misery of that wicked spirit; "How unlike him art thou!" Note, The holiness and happiness

when the way of the wicked prospers, and hey carry off their booty, when just and good men are suddenly cut off, God's righteousness is like the great deep, the bottom of which we cannot find, Ps. 36. 6.

(4.) His dearest and most valuable possessions were his ten children; and, to conclude the tragedy, news is brought him, at the same time, that they were killed, and buried in the ruins of the house in which they were feasting, and all the servants that waited on them, except one that came express with the tidings of it, v. 18, 19. This was the greatest of Job's losses, and which could not but go nearest him; and therefore the Devil reserved it for the last, that, if the other provocations failed, this might make him curse God. Our children are pieces of ourselves; it is very hard to part with them, and touches a good man in as tender a part as any other. But to part with them all at once, and for them to be all cut off in a moment, who had been so many years his cares and hopes, went to the quick indeed. [1.] They all died together, and not one of them was left alive. David, though a wise and good man, was very much discomposed by the death of one son; how hard then did it bear upon poor Job, who lost them all, and, in one moment, was written childless! [2.] They died suddenly: had they been taken away by some lingering disease, he had had notice to expect their death, and prepare for the breach; but this came upon him without giving him any warning. [3.] They died when they were feasting and making merry: had they died suddenly, when they were praying, he might the better have borne it; he would have hoped that death had found them in a good frame, if their blood had been mingled with their sacrifices; but to have it mingled with their feast, where he himself used to be jealous of them, that they had sinned, and cursed God in their hearts—to have that day come upon them at unawares, like a thief in the night, when perhaps their heads were overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness; this could not but add much to his grief, considering what a tender concern he always had for his children's souls, and that they were now out of the reach of the sacrifices he used to offer, according to the number of them all. See how all things came alike to all. Job's children were constantly prayed for by their father, and lived in love one with another, and yet came to this untimely end. [4.] They died by a wind of the Devil's raising, who is *the prince of the power of the air*; (Eph. 2. 2.) but it was looked upon to be an immediate hand of God, and a token of his wrath. So Bildad construed it; (ch. 8. 4.) *Thy children have sinned against him, and he has cast them away in their transgression.* [5.] They were taken away when he had most need of them to comfort him under all his other losses. Such miserable comforters are all creatures; in God only have a present help at all times.

20. Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, 21. And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. 22. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

The Devil had done all he desired leave to do against Job, to provoke him to curse God; he had touched all he had, touched it with a witness; he whom the rising sun saw the richest of all the men in the east, before night was poor to a proverb. If his riches had been, as Satan insinuated, the only principle of his religion, now that he had lost his riches, he had certainly lost his religion; but the account we have, in these verses, of his pious deportment under his affliction, sufficiently proved the Devil a liar, and Job an honest man.

1. He conducted himself like a man, under his afflictions; not stupid and senseless, like a stock or stone, not unnatural and unaffected at the death of his children and servants; no, (v. 20.) he arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, which were the usual expressions of great sorrow, to shew that he was sensible of

the hand of the Lord that was gone out against him; yet he did not break out into any indecencies, nor discover any extravagant passion; he did not faint away, but arose, as a champion to the combat; he did not, in a heat, throw off his clothes, but very gravely, in conformity to the custom of the country, rent his mantle, his cloke, or outer garment; he did not passionately tear his hair, but deliberately shaved his head; by all which it appeared that he kept his temper, and bravely maintained the possession and repose of his own soul, in the midst of all these provocations. The time when he began to shew his feelings is observable; it was not till he heard of the death of his children, and then he arose, then he rent his mantle. A worldly unbelieving heart would have said, "Now that the meat is gone, it is well that the mouths are gone too; now that there are no portions, it is well that there are no children;" but Job knew better, and would have been thankful if Providence had spared his children, though he had had little or nothing for them, for *Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide*. Some expositors, remembering that it was usual with the Jews to rend their clothes when they heard blasphemy, conjecture that Job rent his clothes in a holy indignation at the blasphemous thoughts which Satan now cast into his mind, tempting him to curse God.

II. He conducted himself like a wise and good man, under his affliction, like a *perfect and upright man*, and one that *feared God*, and *eschewed the evil of sin* more than that of outward trouble.

1. He humbled himself under the hand of God, and accommodated himself to the providences he was under, as one that knew how to want as well as how to abound. When God called to weeping and mourning, he wept and mourned, *rent his mantle, and shaved his head*; and, as one that abased himself even to the dust before God, he *fell down upon the ground*, in a penitent sense of sin, and a patient submission to the will of God, *accepting the punishment of his iniquity*. Hereby he shewed his sincerity; for *hypocrites cry not when God binds them*, Job, 36. 13. Hereby he prepared himself to get good by the affliction; for how can we improve the grief which we will not feel?

2. He composed himself with quieting considerations, that he might not be disturbed, and put out of the possession of his own soul by these events: he reasons from the common state of human life, which he describes with application to himself; *Naked came I (as others do) out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither*, into the lap of our common mother, the earth; as the child, when it is sick or weary, lays its head in its mother's bosom. *Dust we were in our original, and to dust we return in our exit*, (Gen. 3. 19.) *to the earth as we were*; (Eccl. 12. 7.) *naked shall we return thither*, whence we were taken, namely, to the clay, Job, 33. 6. St. Paul refers to this of Job, (1 Tim. 6. 7.) *We brought nothing of this world's goods into the world, but have them from others; and it is certain that we can carry nothing out, but must leave them to others.* We come into the world naked; not only unarmed, but unclothed, helpless, shiftless, not so well covered and fenced as other creatures. The sin we are born in, makes us naked to our shame, in the eyes of the holy God. We go out of the world naked; the body does, though the sanctified soul goes clothed, 2 Cor. 5. 3. Death strips us of all our enjoyments; clothing can neither warm nor adorn a dead body. This consideration silenced Job under all his losses. (1.) He is but where he was at first; he looks upon himself only as naked, not maimed, not wounded; he was himself still his own man, when nothing else was his own, and therefore but reduced to his first condition. *Nemo tam pauper potest esse quam natus est—No one can be so poor as he was when born.* Min. Feix. If we are impoverished, we are not wronged, nor much hurt, for we are but as we were born. (2.) He is but where he must have been at last, and is only unclothed, or unloaded rather, a little sooner than he expected. If we put off our clothes before we go to bed, it is some inconvenience, but it may be the better borne when it is near bed-time.

3. He gave glory to God, and expressed himself upon this occasion with a great veneration for the Divine Providence, and an

awful submission to its disposals; we may well rejoice to find Job in this good frame, because this was the very thing upon which the trial of his integrity was put, though he did not know it. The Devil said that he would, under his affliction, curse God; but he blessed him, and so proved himself an honest man.

(1.) He acknowledged the hand of God both in the mercies he had formerly enjoyed, and in the afflictions he was now exercised with: *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.* We must own the Divine Providence, [1.] In all our comforts. God gave us our being, *made us, and not we ourselves*, gave us our wealth; it was not our own ingenuity or industry that enriched us, but God's blessing on our cares and endeavours; he gave us power to get wealth; not only made the creatures for us, but bestowed upon us our share. [2.] In all our crosses. The same that gave, hath taken away; and may he not do what he will with his own? See how he looks above instruments, and keeps his eye upon the First Cause; he does not say, "The Lord gave, and the Sabeans and Chaldeans have taken away; God made me rich, and the Devil has made me poor;" but, "He that gave, has taken;" and, for that reason, he is dumb, and has nothing to say, because God did it: He that gave all, may take which and when, how and how much, he pleases. Seneca could argue thus, *Abstulit, sed et dedit—He took away, but he also gave*; and Epictetus excellently, (cap. 15.) "When thou art deprived of any comfort, suppose a child taken away by death, or a part of thy estate lost, say not ἀπώλεσα αὐτὸ—I have lost it; but, ἀπέδωκα—I have restored it to the right owner. But thou wilt object, (says he) κακὸς ὁ ἀφελόμενος—He is a bad man, that has robbed me; to which he answers, τί ἔστι σοι μέλει—What is it to thee, by what hand he that gives remands what he gave?"

(2.) He adores God in both. When all was gone, he fell down and worshipped. Note, Afflictions must not divert us from, but quicken us to, the exercises of religion. Weeping must not hinder sowing, not hinder worshipping. He eyed not only the hand of God, but the name of God, in his afflictions, and gave glory to that, *Blessed be the name of the Lord.* He has still the same great and good thoughts of God that ever he had, and is as forward as ever to speak them forth to his praise; and can find in his heart to bless God, even when he takes away, as well as when he gives. Thus must we sing both of mercy and judgment, Ps. 101. 1. [1.] He blesses God for what was given, though now it was taken away. When our comforts are removed from us, we must thank God that ever we had them, and had them so much longer than we deserved. Nay, [2.] He adores God, even in taking away, and gives him honour by a willing submission; nay he gives him thanks for good designed him by his afflictions, for gracious supports under his afflictions, and the believing hopes he had of a happy issue at last.

Lastly, Here is the honourable testimony which the Holy Ghost gives to Job's constancy and good conduct under his afflictions. He passed his trials with applause, v. 22. In all this, Job did not act amiss, for he did not attribute folly to God, nor in the least reflect upon his wisdom in what he had done. Discontent and impatience do, in effect, charge God with folly. Against the workings of these, therefore, Job carefully watched; and so must we, acknowledging, that as God has done right, but we have done wickedly, so God has done wisely, but we have done foolishly, very foolishly. They who not only keep their temper under crosses and provocations, but keep up good thoughts of God and sweet communion with him, whether their praise be of men or no, it will be of God, as Job's here was.

CHAP. II.

We left Job honourably acquitted, upon a fair trial between God and Satan concerning him. Satan had leave to touch, to touch and take, all he had, and was confident that he would then curse God to his face; but, on the contrary, he blessed him, and so he was proved an honest man, and Satan a false accuser. Now, one would have thought, this had been conclusive, and that Job should never have had his reputation called in question again; but Job is known to be armour of proof, and therefore is here set up for a mark, and brought upon his trial, a second time. I. Satan moved for another trial which should touch his bone and his flesh, v. 1. 5. II. God, for holy ends,

permits it, v. 6. III. Satan smites him with a very painful and loathsome disease, v. 7, 8. IV. His wife tempts him to curse God, but he resists the temptation, v. 9, 10. V. His friends come to condole with him, and to comfort him, v. 11. 13. And in this that good man is set forth for an example of suffering affliction and of patience.

1. **A** GAIN there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. 2. And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. 3. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? And still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. 4. And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. 5. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. 6. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

Satan, that sworn enemy to God and all good men, is here pushing forward his malicious prosecution of Job, whom he hated because God loved him, and did all he could to separate between him and his God, to sow discord, and make mischief, between them, urging God to afflict him, and then urging him to blaspheme God. One would have thought that he had enough of his former attempt upon Job, in which he was so shamefully baffled and disappointed; but malice is restless, the Devil and his instruments are so. They that calumniate good people, and accuse them falsely, will have their saying, though the evidence to the contrary be ever so plain and full, and they have been cast in the issue which they themselves have put it upon. Satan will have Job's cause called over again. The malicious, unreasonable, importunity of that great persecutor of the saints is represented, (Rev. 12. 10.) by his accusing them before our God day and night, still repeating and urging that against them which has been many a time answered: so did Satan after day. Here is,

I. The court set, and the prosecutor, or accuser, making his appearance, (v. 1, 2) as before, ch. 1. 6, 7. The angels attended God's throne, and Satan among them. One would have expected him to come and confess his malice against Job, and his mistake concerning him, to cry, *Peccavi—I have done wrong*, for belying one whom God spake well of, and to beg pardon; but, instead of that, he comes with a further design against Job. He is asked the same question as before, *Whence comest thou?* And answers as before, *From going to and fro in the earth*; as if he had been doing no harm, though he had been abusing that good man.

II. The Judge himself of counsel for the accused, and pleading for him; (v. 3.) "Hast thou considered my servant Job better than thou didst, and art thou now at length convinced that he is a faithful servant of mine, a perfect and an upright man; for thou seest he still holds fast his integrity?" This is now added to his character as a further achievement; instead of letting go his religion, and cursing God, he holds it faster than ever, as that which he has now more than ordinary occasion for; he is the same in adversity that he was in prosperity, and rather better, and more hearty and lively in blessing God than ever he was, and takes root the faster for being thus shaken. See, 1. How Satan is con-

demned for his allegations against Job; *Thou movedst me against him, as an accuser, to destroy him without cause.* Or, "Thou in vain movedst me to destroy him, for I will never do that." Good men, when they are *cast down*, are *not destroyed*, 2 Cor. 4. 9. How well is it for us, that neither men nor devils are to be our judges, for perhaps they would destroy us, right or wrong; but our judgment proceeds from the Lord, whose judgment never errs, or is biassed. 2. How Job is commended for his constancy, notwithstanding the attacks made upon him; "*Still he holds fast his integrity, as his weapon, and thou canst not disarm him; as his treasure, and thou canst not rob him of that; nay, thine endeavours to do it make him hold it the faster; instead of losing ground by the temptation, he gets ground.*" God speaks of it with wonder, and pleasure, and something of triumph in the power of his own grace; *Still he holds fast his integrity.* Thus the trial of Job's faith was found to his *praise and honour*, 1 Pet. 1, 7. Constancy crowns integrity.

III. The accusation further prosecuted, v. 4. What excuse can Satan make for the failure of his former attempt? What can he say to palliate it, when he had been so very confident that he should gain his point? Why, truly, he has this to say, *Skin for skin, and all that a man has, will he give for his life.* Something of truth there is in this, that self-love and self-preservation are very powerful commanding principles in the hearts of men. Men love themselves better than their nearest relations, even their children, that are pieces of themselves; will not only venture, but give, their estates to save their lives. All account life sweet and precious, and while they are themselves in health and at ease, they can keep trouble from their hearts, whatever they lose. We ought to make a good use of this consideration, and while God continues to us our life and health, and the use of our limbs and senses, we should the more patiently bear the loss of other comforts. See Matth. 6. 25.

But Satan grounds upon this an accusation of Job, slyly representing him, 1. As unnatural to those about him, and one that laid not to heart the death of his children and servants, nor cared how many of them had their skins (as I may say) stripped over their ears, so long as he slept in a whole skin himself. As if he that was so tender of his children's souls, could be careless of their bodies, and, like the ostrich, hardened against his young ones, as though they were not his. 2. As wholly selfish, and minding nothing but his own ease and safety, as if his religion made him sour, and morose, and ill-natured. Thus are the ways and people of God often misrepresented by the Devil and his agents.

IV. A challenge given to make a further trial of Job's integrity; (v. 5.) "*Put forth thine hand now, (for I find my hand too short to reach him, and too weak to hurt him,) and touch his bone and his flesh, (that is with him the only tender part, make him sick with smiting him, Mic. 6. 13.) and then, I dare say, he will curse thee to thy face, and let go his integrity.*" Satan knew it, and we find it by experience, that nothing is more likely to ruffle the thoughts, and put the mind into disorder, than acute pain and distemper of body. There is no disputing against sense. St. Paul himself had much ado to bear a thorn in the flesh, nor could he have borne it without special grace from Christ, 2 Cor. 12. 7, 9.

V. A permission granted to Satan to make this trial, v. 6. Satan would have had God put forth his hand and do it; but he *afflicts not willingly*, nor takes any pleasure in *grieving the children of men*, much less his own children; (Lam. 3. 33.) and therefore, if it must be done, let Satan do it, who delights in such work: *He is in thine hand*, do thy worst with him; (but with a proviso and limitation;) *only save his life, or his soul.* Afflict him, but not to death. Satan hunted for the precious life, would have taken that if he might, in hopes that dying agonies would have forced Job to curse his God; but God had mercy in store for Job after this trial, and therefore he must survive it, and, however he is afflicted, must have his life given him for a prey. If God did not chain up the roaring lion, how soon would he devour us! As far as he permits the wrath of Satan and wicked men to proceed against his people, he will make it turn to *his praise* and their's, and *the remainder thereof he will restrain,*

Ps. 76. 10. "Save his soul," that is, "his reason;" (so some;) "preserve to him the use of that, for, otherwise, it will be no fair trial; if, in his delirium, he should curse God, that will be no disproof of his integrity. It would be the language not of his heart, but of his distemper."

Job, in being thus maligned by Satan, was a type of Christ, the first prophecy of whom was, that Satan should *bruise his heel*, (Gen. 3. 15.) and so he was foiled, as in Job's case. Satan tempted him to let go his integrity, his adoption; (Matth. 4. 6.) *If thou be the Son of God.* He entered into the heart of Judas who betrayed Christ, and (some think) with his terrors put Christ into his agony in the garden. He had permission to touch his bone and his flesh, without exception of his life, because by dying he was to do that which Job could not do; *destroy him that had the power of death, that is the Devil.*

7. So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. 8. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. 9. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die. 10. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

The Devil, having got leave to tear and worry poor Job, presently fell to work with him, as a tormentor first, and then a tempter. His own children he tempts first, and draws them to sin, and afterward torments, when thereby he has brought them to ruin; but this child of God he tormented with affliction, and then tempted to make a bad use of his affliction. That which he aimed at, was, to make Job curse God; now here we are told what course he took both to move him to it, and move it to him; both to give him the provocation, else it would be to no purpose to urge him to it, and to give him the information, else he would not have thought of it: thus artfully is the temptation managed with all the subtlety of the old serpent, who is here playing the same game against Job that he played against our first parents; (Gen. 3.) aiming to seduce him from his allegiance to his God, and to rob him of his integrity.

1. He provokes him to curse God, by smiting him with sore boils, and so making him a burthen to himself, v. 7, 8. The former attack was extremely violent, but Job kept his ground, bravely made good the pass, and carried the day: yet he is still but girding on the harness, there is worse behind; the clouds return after the rain; Satan, by the divine permission, follows his blow, and now deep calls unto deep.

1. The disease was very grievous with which Job was seized; Satan *smote him with boils, sore boils*, all over him, from head to foot; with an *evil inflammation*, so some render it; an erysipelas, perhaps, in a higher degree. One boil, when it is gathering, is torment enough, and gives a man abundance of pain and uneasiness. What a condition was Job then in, that had boils all over him, and no part free, and those of as raging a heat as the Devil could make them, and, as it were, *set on fire of hell!* The small-pox is a very grievous and painful disease, and would be much more terrible than it is, but that we know the extremity of it ordinarily lasts but a few days; how grievous then was Job's disease, who was smitten all over with sore boils or grievous ulcers, which make him sick at heart, put him to exquisite torture, and so spread themselves over him, that he could lay himself no way for any ease. If at any time we be exercised with sore and grievous distempers, let us not think ourselves dealt with any otherwise than as God has sometimes dealt with the best of his saints and servants. We know not how much Satan may have a hand (by divine permission) in the diseases with which the children of men, and especially the children of

God, are afflicted; what infections that prince of the air may spread, what inflammations may come from that fiery serpent. We read of one whom Satan had bound many years, Luke, 13. 16. Should God suffer that roaring lion to have his will against any of us, how miserable would he soon make us!

2. His management of himself, in this distemper, was very strange, v. 3.

(1.) Instead of healing salves he took a potsherd, a piece of a broken pitcher, to *scrape himself withal*: a very sad pass this poor man was come to. When a man is sick and sore, he may bear it the better, if he be well-tended and carefully looked after: many rich people have, with a soft and tender hand, charitably ministered to the poor in such a condition as this; even Lazarus had some ease from the tongues of the dogs that came and *licked his sores*; but poor Job has no help afforded him. [1.] Nothing is done to his sores but what he does himself, with his own hands. His children and servants are all dead, his wife unkind, *ch. 19. 17.* He has not wherewithal to fee a physician, or surgeon; and, which is most sad of all, none of those he had formerly been kind to had so much sense of honour and gratitude as to minister to him in his distress, and lend him a hand to dress or wipe his running sores, either because the disease was loathsome and noisome, or because they apprehended it to be infectious. Thus it was in the former days, as it will be in the last days: men were *lovers of their own selves, unthankful, and without natural affection.* [2.] All that *he* does to his sores is, to *scrape them*; they are not bound up with soft rags, nor mollified with ointment, not washed or kept clean; no healing plaisters laid on them, no opiates, no anodynes, ministered to the poor patient, to alleviate the pain, and compose him to rest, nor any cordials to support his spirits; all the operation is the scraping of the ulcers, which, when they were come to a head, and began to die, made his body all over like a scurf, as is usual in the end of the small-pox. It would have been an endless thing to dress his boils one by one, he therefore resolves thus to do it by wholesale; a remedy which one would think as bad as the disease. [3.] He has nothing to do this with but a potsherd, no surgeon's instrument proper for the purpose, but that which would rather rake into his wounds, and add to his pain, than give him any ease. People that are sick and sore, have need to be under the discipline and direction of others, for they are often but bad managers of themselves.

(2.) Instead of reposing himself in a soft and warm bed, he *sat down among the ashes.* Probably he had a bed left him; (for, though his fields were stripped, we do not find that his house was burnt or plundered;) but he chose to sit in the ashes, either because he was weary of his bed, or because he would put himself into the place and posture of a penitent, who, in token of his self-abhorrence, lay in dust and ashes, *ch. 42. 6.* Isa. 58. 5. Jon. 3. 6. Thus did he humble himself under the mighty hand of God, and bring his mind to the meanness and poverty of his condition. He complains, (*ch. 7. 5.*) that his flesh was *clothed with worms, and clods of dust*; and therefore *dust to dust, ashes to ashes.* If God lay him among the ashes, there he will contentedly sit down: a low spirit becomes low circumstances, and will help to reconcile us to them. The Septuagint reads it, He *sat down upon a dunghill without the city*; (which is commonly said, in mentioning this story;) but the original says no more than that he *sat in the midst of the ashes*, which he might do in his own house.

II. He urges him, by the persuasions of his own wife, to curse God, v. 9. The Jews (who covet much to be wise above what is written) say that Job's wife was Dinah, Jacob's daughter: so the Chaldee paraphrase. It is not likely that she was; but, whoever it was, she was to him like Michal to David, a scoffer at his piety. She was spared to him, when the rest of his comforts were taken away, for this purpose, to be a troubler and tempter to him. If Satan leaves any thing that he has permission to take away, it is with a design of mischief. It is policy to send his temptations by the hand of those that are dear to us, as he tempted Adam by Eve, and Christ by Peter. We must therefore carefully watch, that we be not drawn to say or do a wrong thing by the influence, interest, or entreaty, of any, no not those for whose opinion and

favour we have ever so great a value. Observe how strong this temptation was,

I. She baunters Job for his constancy in his religion; "*Dost thou still retain thine integrity?*" Art thou so very obstinate in thy religion, that nothing will cure thee of it? So tame and sheepish, as thus to truckle to a God, who is so far from rewarding thy services with marks of his favour, that he seems to take a pleasure in making thee miserable, strips thee, and scourges thee, without any provocation given? Is this a God to be still loved, and blessed, and served?"

Dost thou not see that thy devotion's vain?
What have thy prayers procur'd, but woe and pain?
Hast thou not yet thine interest understood?
Perversely righteous, and absurdly good?
Those painful sores, and all thy losses, shew
How Heaven regards the foolish saint below.
Incorrigibly pious! Canst thy God
Reform thy stupid virtue with his rod?

Sir R. BLACKMORE.

Thus Satan still endeavours to draw men from God, as he did our first parents, by suggesting hard thoughts of him, as one that envies the happiness, and delights in the misery, of his creatures, than which nothing is more false. Another artifice he uses, is, to drive men from their religion, by loading them with scoffs and reproaches for their adherence to it: we have reason to expect it, but we are fools if we heed it: our Master himself has undergone it, we shall be abundantly recompensed for it, and with much more reason may we retort it upon the scoffers, "*Are you such fools as still to retain your impiety, when you might bless God, and live?*"

2. She urges him to renounce his religion, to blaspheme God, set him at defiance, and dare him to do his worst; "*Curse God, and die*; live no longer in dependence upon God, wait not for relief from him, but be thine own deliverer, by being thine own executioner, end thy troubles by ending thy life, better die once than be always dying thus; thou mayest now despair of having any help from thy God, even curse him, and hang thyself." These are two of the blackest and most horrid of all Satan's temptations, and yet such as good men have sometimes been violently assaulted with: nothing is more contrary to natural conscience than blaspheming God, nor to natural sense than self-murder; therefore the suggestion of either of these may well be suspected to come immediately from Satan. Lord, lead us not into temptation, not into such, not into any, temptation, but *deliver us from the evil one.*

III. He bravely resists and overcomes the temptation, v. 10. He soon gave her an answer, (for Satan spared him the use of his tongue, in hopes he would curse God with it,) which shewed his constant resolution to cleave to God, to keep his good thoughts of him, and not to let go his integrity.

See, 1. How he resented the temptations; he was indignant at having such a thing mentioned to him; "*What! Curse God? I abhor the thought of it; get thee behind me, Satan.*" In other cases, Job reasoned with his wife with a great deal of mildness, even when she was unkind to him; (*ch. 19. 17.*) *I entreated her for the children's sake of my own body.* But when she persued him to curse God, he was much displeased; *Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh.* He does not call her a fool, and an atheist, nor does he break out into any indecent expressions of his displeasure, as those who are sick and sore are apt to do, and think they may be excused; but he shews her the evil of what she said, that she spake the language of the infidels and idolaters, who, when they are *hardly bestead, fret themselves, and curse their king and their God,* Isa. 8. 21. We have reason to suppose, that, in such a pious household as Job had, his wife was one that had been well-affected to religion, but that now, when all their estate and comfort were gone, she could not bear the loss with that temper of mind that Job had; but that she should go about to infect his mind with her wretched distemper, was a great provocation to him, and he could not forbear thus shewing his resentment. Note, (1.) Those are angry and sin not, who are angry only at sin, and take a temptation as the greatest affront; who *cannot bear them that are evil,* Rev. 2. 2. When Peter was a Satan to Christ, he told him plainly,

Thou art an offence to me. (2.) If those whom we think wise and good, at any time speak that which is foolish and bad, we ought to reprove them faithfully for it, and shew them the evil of what they say, that we suffer not sin upon them. (3.) Temptations to curse God ought to be rejected with the greatest abhorrence, and not so much as to be parleyed with: whoever persuades us to that, must be looked upon as our enemy, to whom if we yield it is at our peril. Job did not curse God, and then think to come off with Adam's excuse, *The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she persuaded me to it*, (Gen. 3. 12.) which had in it a tacit reflection on God, his ordinance, and providence; no, if thou scornest, if thou cursest, thou alone shalt bear it.

2. How he reasoned against the temptation; *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil also?* Those whom we reprove, we must endeavour to convince; and it is no hard matter to give a reason why we should still hold fast our integrity, even when we are stripped of every thing else. He considers that though good and evil are contraries, yet they do not come from contrary causes, but both from the hand of God; (Isa. 45. 7. Lam. 3. 38.) and therefore that in both we must have our eye up unto him, with thankfulness for the good he sends, and without fretfulness at the evil. Observe the force of his argument,

(1.) What he argues *for*; not only the bearing, but the receiving, of evil; *Shall we not receive evil?* that is, [1.] "Shall we not expect to receive it? If God give us so many good things, shall we be surprised, or think it strange, if he sometimes afflict us, when he has told us that prosperity and adversity are set the one over-against the other?" 1 Pet. 4. 12. [2.] "Shall we not set ourselves to receive it aright?" The word signifies to receive as a gift, and denotes a pious affection and disposition of soul under our afflictions, neither despising them nor fainting under them, accounting them gifts; (Phil. 1. 29.) accepting them as punishments of our iniquity; (Lev. 26. 41.) acquiescing in the will of God in them; ("Let him do with me as seemeth him good;") and accommodating ourselves to them, as those that know how to want as well as how to abound, Phil. 4. 12. When the heart is humbled, and weaned, by humbling weaning providences, then we *receive correction*, (Zech. 3. 2.) and take up our cross.

(2.) What he argues *from*; "Shall we receive so much good as has come to us from the hand of God, during all those years of peace and prosperity that we have lived; and shall we not now receive evil, when God thinks fit to lay it on us?" Note, The consideration of the mercies we receive from God, both past and present, should make us receive our afflictions with a suitable disposition of spirit. If we receive our share of the common good in the seven years of plenty, shall we not receive our share of the common evil in the years of famine? *Qui sentit commodum, sentire debet et onus—He who feels the privilege, should prepare for the privation.* If we have so much that pleases us, why should we not be content with that which pleases God? If we receive so many comforts, shall we not receive some afflictions, which will serve as foils to our comforts, to make them the more valuable; (we are taught the worth of mercies, by being made to want them sometimes;) and as allays to our comforts, to make them the less dangerous, to keep the balance even, and to prevent our being *lifted up above measure?* 2 Cor. 12. 7. If we receive so much good for the body, shall we not receive some good for the soul; that is, some afflictions, by which we partake of God's holiness; (Heb. 12. 10.) something which, by saddening the countenance, makes the heart better? Let murmuring, therefore, as well as boasting, be for ever excluded.

IV. Thus, in a good measure, Job still held fast his integrity; and Satan's design against him was defeated. *In all this did not Job sin with his lips*; he not only said this well, but all he said, at this time, was under the government of religion and right reason; in the midst of all these grievances, he did not speak a word amiss; and we have no reason to think but that he also preserved a good temper of mind, so that though there might be some stirrings and risings of corruption in his heart, yet grace got the upper hand, and he took care that the root of bitterness might not spring up to trouble him, Heb. 12. 15. The *abundance of his heart* was for God, produced good things, and suppressed the evil that was there,

which was out-voted by the better side. If he did think any evil, yet he *laid his hand upon his mouth*, (Prov. 30. 32.) stilled the evil thought, and let it go no further; by which it appeared, not only that he had true grace, but that it was strong, and victorious: in short, that he had not forfeited the character of a *perfect and upright man*; for so he appears to be, who, in the midst of such temptation, *offends not in word*, Jam. 3. 2. Ps. 17. 3.

11. Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him, and to comfort him.

12. And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

13. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that *his* grief was very great.

We have here an account of the kind visit which Job's three friends made him in his affliction. The news of his extraordinary troubles spread into all parts; he being an eminent man, both for greatness and goodness, and the circumstances of his troubles being very uncommon. Some, who were his enemies, triumphed in his calamities; (*ch.* 16. 10.—19. 18.—30. 1, &c.) perhaps they made ballads on him: but his friends concerned themselves for him, and endeavoured to comfort him; *a friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.* Three of them are here named, (*v.* 11.) Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. We shall meet with a fourth after, who, it should seem, was present at the whole conference, namely, Elihu; whether he came as a friend of Job, or only as an auditor, does not appear: these three are said to be his *friends*, his intimate acquaintance, as David and Solomon had each of them one in their court, that was called *the king's friend*. These three were eminently wise and good men, as appears by their discourses; they were old men, very old, they had a great reputation for knowledge, and much deference was paid to their judgment, *ch.* 32. 6. It is probable that they were men of figure in their country—princes, or heads of houses. Now observe,

I. That Job, in his prosperity, had contracted a friendship with them: if they were his equals, yet he had not that jealousy of them; if his inferiors, yet he had not that disdain of them, which was any hinderance to an intimate converse and correspondence with them. To have such friends, added more to his happiness in the day of his prosperity, than all the head of cattle he was master of. Much of the comfort of this life lies in acquaintance and friendship with those that are prudent and virtuous; and he that has a few such friends, ought to value them highly. Job's three friends are supposed to be all of them of the posterity of Abraham, which, for some descents, even in the families that were shut out from the covenant of peculiarity, retained some good fruits of that pious education which the father of the faithful gave to those under his charge. Eliphaz descended from Teman, the grandson of Esau; (*Gen.* 36. 11.) Bildad (it is probable) from Shuah, Abraham's son by Keturah, *Gen.* 25. 2. Zophar is thought by some to be the same with Zepho, a descendant from Esau, *Gen.* 36. 11. The preserving of so much wisdom and piety among those that were strangers to the covenants of promise, was a happy presage of God's grace to the Gentiles, when the partition-wall should, in the latter days, be taken down. Esau was rejected; yet many that came from him inherited some of the best blessings.

II. That they continued their friendship with Job in his adversity, when most of his friends had forsaken him, *ch.* 19. 14. Two ways they shewed their friendship,

1. By the kind visit they made him in his affliction, to mourn with him, and to comfort him, v. 11. Probably, they had been wont to visit him in his prosperity, not to hunt or hawk with him, not to dance or play at cards with him, but to entertain and edify themselves with his learned and pious converse; and now, that he was in adversity, they came to share with him in his griefs, as formerly they had come to share with him in his comforts. These were wise men, whose *heart was in the house of mourning*, Eccl. 7. 4. Visiting the afflicted, sick or sore, fatherless or childless, in their sorrow, is made a branch of *pure religion and undefiled*; (Jam. 1. 27.) and, if done from a good principle, will be abundantly recompensed shortly, Matth. 25. 36. By visiting the sons and daughters of affliction, we may contribute to the improvement, (1.) Of our own graces; for many a good lesson is to be learned from the troubles of others; we may look upon them, and receive instruction, and be made wise and serious. (2.) Of their comforts; by putting a respect upon them, we encourage them, and some good word may be spoken to them, which may help to make them easy. Job's friends came, not to satisfy their curiosity with an account of his troubles, and the strangeness of the circumstances of them; much less, as David's false friends, to make invidious remarks upon him, (Ps. 41. 6. . 8.) but to mourn with him, to mingle their tears with his, and so to comfort him. It is much more pleasant to visit those in affliction, to whom comfort belongs, than those to whom we must first speak conviction.

Concerning these visitants, observe, [1.] That they were not sent for, but came of their own accord; (*ch. 6. 22.*) whence Mr. Caryl observes, that *it is good manners to be an unbidden guest at the house of mourning*, and, in comforting our friends, to prevent their invitations. [2.] That they made an appointment to come. Note, Good people should make appointments among themselves for doing good, so exciting and obliging one another to it, and assisting and encouraging one another in it. For the carrying on of any pious design, let hand join in hand. [3.] That they came with a design (and we have reason to think it was a sincere design) to comfort him, and yet proved miserable comforters, through their unskillful management of his case. Many that aim well, by mistake, come short of their aim.

2. By their tender sympathy with him and concern for him in his affliction; when they saw him at some distance, he was so disfigured and deformed with his sores, that *they knew him not*, v. 12. His face was *foul with weeping*, (*ch. 16. 16.*) like Jerusalem's Nazarites, that had been *ruddy as the rubies*, but were now *blacker than a coal*, Lam. 4. 7, 8. What a change will a sore disease, or, without that, oppressing care and grief, make in the countenance, in a little time! *Is this Naomi?* Ruth, 1. 19. So, *Is this Job?* How art thou fallen! How is thy glory stained and sullied, and all thine honour laid in the dust! God fit us for such changes!

Observing him thus miserably altered, they did not leave him, in a fright or loathing, but expressed so much the more tenderness toward him.

(1.) Coming to mourn with him, they vented their undissembled grief in all the then usual expressions of that passion; they wept aloud; the sight of them, (as is usual,) revived Job's grief, and set him a-weeping afresh, which fetched floods of tears from their eyes. They rent their clothes, and sprinkled dust upon their heads, as men that would strip themselves, and abase themselves, with their friend that was stripped and abased.

2.) Coming to comfort him, they sat down with him upon the ground, for so he received visits; and they, not in compliment to him, but in true compassion, put themselves into the same humble and uneasy place and posture. They had many a time, it is likely, sitten with him on his couches, and at his table, in his prosperity, and were therefore willing to share with him in his grief and poverty, because they had shared with him in his joy and plenty. It was not a modish short visit that they made him, just to look upon him and be gone; but, as those that could have no enjoyment of themselves, if they had returned to their place, while their friend was in so much misery, they resolved to stay with him till they saw him mend or end, and therefore took lodgings near him, though he was not now able to entertain them as he had done, and

they must therefore bear their own charges. Every day, for seven days together, at the hours in which he admitted company, they came and sat with him, as his companions in tribulation, and exceptions from that rule, *Nullus ad admissas ibit amicus opes—They who have lost their wealth, are not to expect the visits of their friends.*

They sat with him, but none spake a word to him, only they all attended to the particular narratives he gave of his troubles. They were silent, as men astonished and amazed; *Curæ leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent—Our lighter griefs have a voice; those which are more oppressive, are mute*; or, according to Sir R. Blackmore,

So long a time they held their peace, to shew
A reverence due to such prodigious woe.

They spake not a word to him, whatever they said one to another, by way of instruction, for the improvement of the present providence. They said nothing to that purport to which afterward they said much—nothing to grieve him; (*ch. 4. 2.*) because they saw his grief was very great already, and they were loath at first to add affliction to the afflicted. There is a *time to keep silence*, when either *the wicked is before us*, and by speaking we may harden them, (Ps. 39. 1.) or when by speaking we may *offend the generation of God's children*, Ps. 73. 15. Their not entrecing upon the following solemn discourses till the seventh day, may perhaps intimate that it was the sabbath-day, which, doubtless, was observed in the patriarchal age, and to that day they adjourned the intended conference, because, probably, then company resorted, as usual, to Job's house, to join with him in his devotions, who might be edified by the discourse. Or rather, by their silence so long, they would intimate, that what they afterwards said was well-considered and digested, and the result of many thoughts. *The heart of the wise studies to answer.* We should think twice before we speak once, especially in such a case as this, think long, and we shall be the better able to speak short and to the purpose.

CHAP. III.

We have heard of the patience of Job, says the apostle, Jam. 5. 11. *So we have, and of his impatience too.* We wondered that a man should be so patient as he was; (*ch. 1. and 2.*) but we wondered also, that a good man should be so impatient as he is here in this chapter, where we find him cursing his day, and, in passion, I. Complaining that he was born, v. 1. . 10. II. Complaining that he did not die as soon as he was born, v. 11. . 19. III. Complaining that his life was now continued when he was in misery, v. 20. . 26. In this, it must be owned that Job sinned with his lips, and it is written, not for our imitation, but our admonition, that he who thinks he stands, may take heed lest he fall.

1. **A**FTER this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day. 2. And Job spake, and said, 3. Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. 4. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above; neither let the light shine upon it. 5. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. 6. As for that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months. 7. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein. 8. Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to raise up their mourning. 9. Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark; let it look for light, but have none; neither let it see the dawning of the day: 10. Because it shut not up the doors of my mother's womb, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes.

Long was Job's heart hot within him; while he was musing, the fire burned, and the more for being stifled and suppressed; at length, he spake with his tongue, but not such a good word as David spake after a long pause, *Lord, make me to know my end*, Ps. 39. 3, 4. Seven days the prophet Ezekiel sat down astonished with the captives, and then (probably on the sabbath-day) *the word of the Lord came to him*, Ezek. 3. 15, 16. So long Job and his friends sat thinking, but said nothing; they were afraid of speaking what they thought, lest they should grieve him, and he durst not give vent to his thoughts, lest he should offend them. They came to comfort him, but, finding his afflictions very extraordinary, they began to think comfort did not belong to him, suspecting him to be a hypocrite, and therefore they said nothing. But losers think they may have leave to speak, and therefore Job gives vent first to his thoughts. Unless they had been better, it had been well if he had kept them to himself.

In short, he cursed his day, the day of his birth, wished he had never been born, could not think or speak of his own birth without regret and vexation. Whereas men usually observe the annual return of their birth-day with rejoicing, he looked upon it as the unhappiest day of the year, because the unhappiest of his life, being the inlet into all his woe. Now,

I. This was bad enough. The extremity of his trouble and the discomposure of his spirits may excuse it in part, but he can by no means be justified in it. Now he has forgotten the good he was born to, the lean kine have eaten up the fat ones, and he is filled with thoughts of the evil only, and wishes he had never been born. The prophet Jeremiah himself expressed his resentment of his calamities, in language not much unlike this, *Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me!* (Jer. 15. 10.) *Cursed be the day wherein I was born*, Jer. 20. 14, &c. We may suppose that Job, in his prosperity, had many a time blessed God for the day of his birth, and reckoned it a happy day; yet now he brands it with all possible marks of infamy. When we consider the iniquity in which we were conceived and born, we have reason enough to reflect with sorrow and shame upon the day of our birth, and to say that *the day of our death*, by which we are *freed from sin*, (Rom. 6. 7.) is far better, Eccl. 7. 1. But to curse the day of our birth, because then we entered upon the calamitous scene of life, is to quarrel with the God of nature, to despise the dignity of our being, and to indulge a passion which our own calm and sober thoughts will make us ashamed of. Certainly there is no condition of life a man can be in in this world, but he may, in it, (if it be not his own fault,) so honour God, and work out his own salvation, and make sure a happiness for himself in a better world, that he will have no reason at all to wish he had never been born, but a great deal of reason to say that he had his being to good purpose. Yet it must be owned, if there were not another life after this, and divine consolations to support us in the prospects of it, so many are the sorrows and troubles of this, that we might sometimes be tempted to say that we were *made in vain*, (Ps. 89. 47.) and to wish we had never been. There are those in hell, who, with good reason, wish they had never been born, as Judas, Matth. 26. 24. But, on this side hell, there can be no reason for so vain and ungrateful a wish. It was Job's folly and weakness to curse his day; we must say of it, This was his infirmity; but good men have sometimes failed in the exercise of those graces which they have been most eminent for, that we may understand, that, when they are said to be *perfect*, it is meant that they were upright, not that they were sinless. *Lastly*, Let us observe it, to the honour of the spiritual life above the natural, that, though many have cursed the day of their first birth, never any cursed the day of their new-birth, nor wished they never had had grace, and the spirit of grace, given them; those are the most excellent gifts, above life and being itself, and which will never be a burthen.

II. Yet it was not so bad as Satan promised himself: Job cursed his day, but he did not curse his God; was weary of his life, and would gladly have parted with that, but not weary of his religion; he resolutely cleaves to that, and will never let it go. The dispute between God and Satan concerning Job, was not whether Job had his infirmities, and whether he was subject to like passions as we

are; (that was granted;) but whether he was a hypocrite, and secretly hated God, and, if he were provoked, would shew it: upon trial, it proved that he was no such man. Nay, all this may consist with his being a pattern of patience; for though he did thus speak unadvisedly with his lips, yet, both before and after, he expressed great submission and resignation to the holy will of God, and repented of his impatience; he condemned himself for it, and therefore God did not condemn him; nor must we, but watch the more carefully over ourselves, lest we sin after the similitude of this transgression.

The particular expressions which Job used, in cursing his day, are full of poetical fancy, flame, and rapture; and create as much difficulty to the critics as the thing itself does to the divines: we need not be particular in our observations upon them.

When he would express his passionate wish that he had never been, he falls foul upon the day; and,

1. He wished that earth might *forget it*; *Let it perish*, v. 3. *Let it not be joined to the days of the year*, v. 6. "Let it be not only not inserted in the calendar in red letters, as the day of the king's nativity useth to be," (and Job was a king, *ch. 29. ult.*) "but let it be erased and blotted out, and buried in oblivion. Let not the world know that ever such a man as I was born into it, and lived in it, who am made such a spectacle of misery."

2. That Heaven might *frown upon it*; *Let not God regard it from above*, v. 4. "Every thing is indeed as it is with God; that day is honourable on which he puts honour, and which he distinguishes and crowns with his favour and blessing, as he did the seventh day of the week; but let my birth-day never be so honoured, let it be *nigro carbone notandus*—marked as with a black coal, for an evil day, by him that determines the times before appointed. The Father and Fountain of light appointed the greater light to rule the day, and lesser lights to rule the night; but let that want the benefit of both." (1.) *Let that day be darkness*; (v. 4.) and if the light of the day be darkness, *how great is that darkness!* It is terrible, because then we look for light. Let the gloominess of the day represent Job's condition, whose sun went down at noon. (2.) As for that night too, let it want the benefit of moon and stars, and *let darkness seize upon it*, thick darkness, darkness that may be felt, which will not befriend the repose of the night by its silence, but rather disturb it with its terrors.

3. That all joy might forsake it; "Let it be a melancholy night, solitary, and not a merry night of music or dancing; *let no joyful voice come therein*;" (v. 7.) "let it be a long night, and not see the *eye-lids of the morning*;" (v. 9.) "which bring joy with them."

4. That all curses might follow it; (v. 8.) "Let none ever desire to see it, or bid it welcome when it comes, but, on the contrary, *let them curse it that curse the day*. Whatever day any are tempted to curse, let them at the same time bestow one curse upon my birth-day; particularly those that make it their trade to raise up mourning at funerals with their ditties of lamentation. Let them that curse the day of the death of others, in the same breath curse the day of my birth." Or, those who are so fierce and daring as to be ready to raise up the *Leviathan*, for that is the word here; who, being about to strike the whale or crocodile, curse it with the bitterest curse they can invent, hoping by those incantations to weaken it, and so to make themselves masters of it. Probably some such custom might there be used, to which our divine poet alludes. Let it be as odious as *the day wherein men bewail the greatest misfortune*, or the time *wherein they see the most dreadful apparition*: so Bishop Patrick, I suppose, taking the Leviathan here to signify the Devil, as others do, who understand it of the curses used by conjurers and magicians in raising the Devil, or when they have raised a devil that they cannot lay.

But what is the ground of Job's quarrel with the day and night of his birth? It is *because it shut not up the doors of his mother's womb*, v. 10. See the folly and madness of a passionate discontent, and how absurdly and extravagantly it talks, when the reins are laid on the neck of it. Is this Job, who was so much admired for his wisdom, that *unto him men gave ear, and kept silence at his counsel, and after his words they spake not again?* *ch. 29. 21, 22.* Surely his wisdom failed him, (1.) When he took so much pains

to express his desire that he had never been born, which, at the best, was a vain wish, for it is impossible to make that which has been, not to have been. (2.) When he was so liberal of his curses upon a day and a night, that could not be hurt, or made ever the worse for his curses. (3.) When he wished a thing so very barbarous to his own mother, as that she might not have brought him forth, when her full time was come; which must inevitably have been her death, and a miserable death. (4.) When he despised the goodness of God to him, (in giving him a being, such a being, so noble and excellent a life, such a life, so far above that of any other creature in this lower world,) and undervalued the gift, as not worth the acceptance, only because *transiit cum onere*—it was clogged with a proviso of trouble, which now, at length, came upon him, after many years' enjoyment of its pleasures. What a foolish thing it was to wish that his eyes had never seen the light, that so they might not have seen sorrow, which yet he might hope to see through, and beyond which he might see joy! Did Job believe and hope that he should in his flesh see God at the latter day; (ch. 19. 26.) and yet would he wish he never had had a being capable of such a bliss, only because, for the present, he had sorrow in the flesh? God, by his grace, arm us against this foolish and hurtful lust of impatience!

11. Why died I not from the womb? *why* did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? 12. Why did the knees prevent me? Or why the breasts that I should suck? 13. For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest, 14. With kings and counsellors of the earth, which build desolate places for themselves; 15. Or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver: 16. Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants *which* never saw light. 17. There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. 18. *There* the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. 19. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master.

Job, perhaps reflecting upon himself for his folly in wishing he had never been born, follows it, and thinks to mend it, with another, little better, that he had died as soon as he was born, which he enlarges upon in these verses. When our Saviour would set forth a very calamitous state of things, he seems to allow such a saying as this, *Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck*; (Luke, 23. 29.) but blessing the barren womb is one thing, and cursing the fruitful womb is another! It is good to make the best of afflictions, but it is not good to make the worst of mercies. Our rule is, *Bless, and curse not*.

Life is often put for all good, and death for all evil; yet Job here very absurdly complains of life and its supports, as a curse and plague to him, and covets death and the grave, as the greatest and most desirable bliss. Surely Satan was deceived in Job, when he applied that maxim to him, *All that a man hath will he give for his life*; for never any man valued life at a lower rate than he did.

I. He ungratefully quarrels with life, and is angry that it was not taken from him as soon as it was given him; (v. 11, 12.) *Why died not I from the womb?* See here, 1. What a weak and helpless creature man is when he comes into the world, and how slender the thread of life is, when it is first drawn. We are ready to die from the womb, and to breathe our last, as soon as we begin to breathe at all. We can do nothing for ourselves, as other creatures can, but should drop into the grave, if the knees did not prevent us; and the lamp of life, when first lighted, would go out of itself, if the breasts given us, that we should suck, did not supply

it with fresh oil. 2. What a merciful and tender care Divine Providence took of us, at our entrance into the world. It was owing to this, that we *died not from the womb*, and did not give up the ghost when we came out of the belly. Why were we not cut off as soon as we were born? Not because we did not deserve it; justly might such weeds have been plucked up as soon as they appeared, justly might such cockatrices have been crushed in the egg: not because we did, or could, take any care of ourselves and our own safety; no creature comes into the world so shiftless as man. It was not our might, or the power of our hand, that preserved us these beings; but God's power and providence upheld our frail lives, and his pity and patience spared our forfeited lives. It was owing to this that the knees prevented us. Natural affection is put into parents' hearts by the hand of the God of nature: and hence it was, that the blessings of the breast attended those of the womb. 3. What a great deal of vanity and vexation of spirit attends human life. If we had not a God to serve in this world, and better things to hope for in another world, considering the faculties we are endued with, and the troubles we are surrounded with, we should be strongly tempted to wish that we had *died from the womb*, which had prevented a great deal both of sin and misery.

He that is born to-day, and dies to-morrow,
Loses some hours of joy, but months of sorrow.

4. The evil of impatience, fretfulness, and discontent; when they thus prevail, they are unreasonable and absurd, impious and ungrateful; they are a slighting and undervaluing of God's favour. How much soever life is imbibited, we must say, "It was of the Lord's mercies that we died not from the womb, that we were not consumed." Hatred of life is a contradiction to the common sense and sentiments of mankind, and our own at another time. Let discontented people declaim ever so much against life, they will be loath to part with it when it comes to the point. When the old man in the fable, being tired with his burthen, threw it down with discontent, and called for death, and death came to him, and asked him what he would have with him, he then answered, "Nothing, but help me up with my burthen."

II. He passionately applauds death and the grave, and seems quite in love with them. To desire to die, that we may be with Christ, that we may be free from sin, and that we may be *clothed upon with our house which is from heaven*, is the effect and evidence of grace; but to desire to die, only that we may be quiet in the grave, and delivered from the troubles of this life, savours of corruption. Job's considerations here may be of good use to reconcile us to death when it comes, and to make us easy under the arrest of it; but they ought not to be made use of as a pretence to quarrel with life while it is continued, or to make us uneasy under the burthens of it. It is our wisdom and duty to make the best of that which is, be it living or dying, and so to *live to the Lord*, and *die to the Lord*, and to be his in both, Rom. 14. 8.

Job here frets himself with thinking, that, if he had but died as soon as he was born, and been carried from the womb to the grave,

1. His condition would have been as good as that of the best. I should have been (says he, v. 14.) *with kings and counsellors of the earth*, whose pomp, power, and policy, cannot set them out of the reach of death, nor secure them from the grave, nor distinguish their's from common dust in the grave. Even princes, who had gold in abundance, could not, with it, bribe death to overlook them when he came with commission; and though they filled their houses with silver, yet they were forced to leave it all behind them, no more to return to it. Some, by the desolate places which the kings and counsellors are here said *to build for themselves*, understand the sepulchres or monuments they prepared for themselves in their life-time; as Shebna (Isa. 22. 16.) *hevel him out a sepulchre*; and by the gold which the princes had, and the silver with which they filled their houses, they understand the treasures which, they say, it was usual to deposit in the graves of great men. Such arts have been used to preserve their dignity, if possible, on the other side death, and to keep themselves from lying even with those of inferior rank; but it will not do; death

is, and will be, an irresistible leveller; *Mors sceptrā ligonibus æquat—Death mingles sceptres with spades.* Rich and poor meet together in the grave; and there, a *hidden untimely birth*, (v. 16.) a child that either never saw light, or but just opened its eyes, and peeped into the world, and, not liking it, closed them again, and hastened out of it, lies as soft and easy, lies as high and safe, as kings, and counsellors, and princes that had gold; "And therefore," says Job, "would I had lain there in the dust, rather than live to lie here in the ashes!"

2. His condition would have been much better than now it was, v. 13. "*Then should I have lain still and been quiet*, which now I cannot do, I cannot be, but am still tossing and unquiet; then I should have slept, whereas now sleep departeth from mine eyes; then had I been at rest, whereas now I am restless." Now that life and immortality are brought to a much clearer light by the gospel than before they were placed in, good Christians can give a better account than this of the gain of death; "Then should I have been present with the Lord, then should I have seen his glory face to face, and no longer through a glass darkly;" but all that poor Job dreamed of, was rest and quietness in the grave, out of the fear of evil tidings, and out of the feeling of sore boils. *Then should I have been quiet*; and had he kept his temper, his even easy temper still, which he was in, in the two foregoing chapters, entirely resigned to the holy will of God, and acquiescing in it, he might have been quiet now; his soul, at least, might have dwelt at ease, even when his body lay in pain, Ps. 25. 13.

Observe how finely he describes the repose of the grave; which (provided the soul also be at rest in God) may much assist our triumphs over it.

(1.) Those that now are troubled, will there be out of the reach of trouble; (v. 17.) *There the wicked cease from troubling*: when persecutors die, they can no longer persecute, their *hatred and envy are now perished*. Herod had vexed the church, but when he became a prey for worms, he ceased from troubling. When the persecuted die, they are out of the danger of being any further troubled. Had Job been at rest in his grave, he had had no disturbance from the Sabæans and Chaldeans, none of all his enemies had created him any trouble.

(2.) Those that are now toiled, will there see the period of their toils; *there the weary are at rest*: heaven is more than a rest to the souls of the saints, but the grave is a rest to their bodies; their pilgrimage is a weary pilgrimage; sin and the world they are weary of; their services, sufferings, and expectations, they are wearied with; but in the grave they *rest from all their labours*, Rev. 14. 13. Isa. 57. 2. They are easy there, and make no complaints; there believers sleep in Jesus.

(3.) Those that were here enslaved, are there at liberty: death is the prisoner's discharge, the relief of the oppressed, and the servant's manumission, v. 18. There the prisoners, though they walk not at large, yet they rest together, and are not put to work, to grind in that prison-house. They are no more insulted and trampled upon, menaced and terrified, by their cruel task-masters; *they hear not the voice of the oppressor*. They that were here doomed to perpetual servitude, that could call nothing their own, no not their own bodies, are there no longer under command or controul; there the servant is free from his master; which is a good reason why those that have power should use it moderately, and those that are in subjection should bear it patiently, yet a little while.

(4.) Those that were at a vast distance from all others, there are upon a level, v. 19. The small and great are there, there the same, there all one, all alike free among the dead. The tedious pomp and state, which attend the great, are at an end there; all the inconveniencies of a poor and low condition are likewise over; death and the grave know no difference.

Levell'd by death, the conqueror and the slave,
The wise and foolish, cowards and the brave,
Lie mix'd and undistinguish'd in the grave.

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Sir R. BLACKMORE.

20. Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; 21. Which long for death, but it *cometh* not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; 22. Which rejoice exceedingly, *and* are glad, when they can find the grave? 23. *Why is light given* to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in? 24. For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters. 25. For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. 26. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came.

Job, finding it to no purpose to wish either that he had not been born, or had died as soon as he was born, here complains that his life was now continued, and not cut off. When men are set on quarrelling, there is no end of it; the corrupt heart will carry on the humour: having cursed the day of his birth, here he courts the day of his death. The beginning of this strife and impatience is as the letting forth of water.

1. He thinks it hard, in general, that miserable lives should be prolonged; (v. 20. 22.) *Wherefore is light in life given to them that are bitter in soul?* Bitterness of soul, through spiritual grievances, makes life itself bitter. *Why doth he give light?* So it is in the original: he means *God*, yet does not name him, though the Devil had said, "He will curse thee to thy face;" but he tacitly reflects on the Divine Providence as unjust and unkind, in continuing life, when the comforts of life are removed. Life is called *light*, because pleasant and serviceable for walking and working; it is candle-light, the longer it burns, the shorter, and the nearer to the socket, it grows. This light is said to be *given* us; for if it were not daily renewed to us by a fresh gift, it would be lost. But Job reckons, that, to those who are in misery, it is *δῶρον ἄδωρον—gift and no gift*, a gift that they had better be without, while the light only serves them to see their own misery by. Such is the vanity of human life, that it sometimes becomes a vexation of spirit; and so alterable is the property of death, that, though dreadful to nature, it may become even desirable to nature itself. He speaks of those here, (1.) Who long for death, when they have out-lived their comforts and usefulness, are burthened with age and infirmities, with pain or sickness, poverty or disgrace, and yet it comes not; while, at the same time, it comes to many who dread it, and would put it far from them. The continuance and period of life must be according to God's will, not according to our's. It is not fit that we should be consulted how long we would live, and when we would die; our times are in a better hand than our own. (2.) Who *dig for it as for hid treasures*; that is, would give any thing for a fair dismissal out of this world, which supposes that *then* the thought of men's being their own executioners was not so much as entertained or suggested, else those who longed for it needed not take much pains for it, they might soon come at it, (as Seneca tells them,) if they pleased. (3.) Who bid it welcome, and are glad when they can find the grave, and see themselves stepping into it. If the miseries of this life can prevail, contrary to nature, to make death itself desirable, shall not much more the hopes and prospects of a better life, to which death is our passage, make it so, and set us quite above the fear of it? It may be a sin to long for death, but I am sure it is no sin to long for heaven.

2. He thinks himself, in particular, hardly dealt with, that he might not be eased of his pain and misery by death, when he could not get ease any other way. To be thus impatient of life, for the sake of the troubles we meet with, is not only unnatural in itself, but ungrateful to the Giver of life, and argues a sinful indulgence of our own passion, and a sinful inconsideration of our future state. Let it be our great and constant care to get ready for another world, and then let us leave it to God to order the

circumstances of our removal thither as he thinks fit; "Lord, when and how thou pleasest;" and this with such an indifference, that if he should refer it to us, we would refer it to him again. Grace teaches us, in the midst of life's greatest comforts, to be willing to die, and, in the midst of its greatest crosses, to be willing to live.

Job, to excuse himself in this earnest desire which he had to die, pleads the little comfort and satisfaction he had in life.

(1.) In his present afflicted state, troubles were continually felt, and were likely to be so. He thought he had cause enough to be weary of living, for, [1.] He had no comfort of his life; *My sighing comes before I eat*, v. 24. The sorrows of life prevented and anticipated the supports of life; nay, they took away his appetite for his necessary food. His griefs returned as duly as his meals, and affliction was his daily bread. Nay, so great was the extremity of his pain and anguish, that he did not only sigh, but roar, and his roarings were poured out like the waters in a full and constant stream. Our Master was acquainted with grief, and we must expect to be so too. [2.] He had no prospect of bettering his condition, his way was hid, and God had hedged him in, v. 23. He saw no way open of deliverance, nor knew he what course to take; his way was *hedged up with thorns*, that he could not find his path. See *ch. 23. 8. Lam. 3. 7.*

(2.) Even in his former prosperous state troubles were continually feared; so that *then* he was never easy, v. 25, 26. He knew so much of the vanity of the world, and the troubles to which, of course, he was born, that he was not in safety, neither had he rest then. That which made his grief now the more grievous, was, that he was not conscious to himself of any great degree either of negligence or security in the day of his prosperity, which might provoke God thus to chastise him. [1.] He had not been negligent and unmindful of his affairs, but kept up such a fear of trouble as was necessary to the maintaining of his guard: he was afraid for his children, when they were feasting, lest they should offend God; (*ch. 1. 5.*) afraid for his servants, lest they should offend his neighbours; he took all the care he could of his own health, and managed himself and his affairs with all possible precaution; yet all would not do. [2.] He had not been secure, nor indulged himself in ease and softness, had not trusted in his wealth, nor flattered himself with the hopes of the perpetuity of his mirth; yet trouble came, to convince and remind him of the vanity of the world, which yet he had not forgotten when he lived at ease. Thus his way was hid, for he knew not wherefore God contended with him. Now this consideration, instead of aggravating his grief, might rather serve to alleviate it: nothing will make trouble easy so much as the testimony of our consciences for us, that, in some measure, we did our duty in a day of prosperity: and an expectation of trouble will make it sit the lighter when it comes. The less it is a surprise, the less it is a terror.

CHAP. IV.

Job having warmly given vent to his passion, and so broken the ice, his friends here come graciously to give vent to their judgment upon his case; which perhaps they had communicated to one another apart, compared notes upon it, and talked it over among themselves, and found they were all agreed in their verdict, that Job's afflictions certainly proved him to have been a hypocrite; but they did not attack Job with this high charge, till, by the expressions of his discontent and impatience, in which they thought he reflected on God himself, he had confirmed them in the bad opinion they had before conceived of him and his character. Now they set upon him with great fear. The dispute begins, and it soon becomes fierce. The opponents are Job's three friends, Job himself is respondent, Elihu appears, first, as moderator, and, at length, God himself gives judgment upon the controversy, and the management of it. The question in dispute, is, whether Job was an honest man or no? The same question that was in dispute between God and Satan in the two first chapters. Satan had yielded it, and durst not pretend that his cursing of his day was a constructive cursing of his God; no, he cannot deny but that Job still holds fast his integrity; but Job's friends will needs have it, that, if Job were an honest man, he would not have been thus sorely and thus tediously afflicted, and therefore urge him to confess himself a hypocrite in the profession he had made of religion: "No," says Job, "that I will never do; I have offended God, but my heart, notwithstanding, has been upright with him;" and still he holds fast the comfort of his integrity. Eliphaz, who, it is likely, was the senior, or of the best quality, begins with him in this chapter: in

which, I. He bespeaks a patient hearing, v. 2. II. He compliments Job with an acknowledgment of the eminency and usefulness of the profession he had made of religion, v. 3, 4. III. He charges him with hypocrisy in his profession, grounding his charge upon his present troubles, and his conduct under them, v. 5, 6. IV. To make good the inference, he maintains, that man's wickedness is that which always brings God's judgments, v. 7, 11. V. He corroborates his assertion by a vision which he had, in which he was reminded of the incontestable purity and justice of God, and the meanness, weakness, and sinfulness, of man, v. 12, 21. By all this he aims to bring down Job's spirit, and to make him both penitent and patient under his afflictions.

1. **T**HEN Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, 2. *If we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? But who can withhold himself from speaking?* 3. Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. 4. Thy words have uphelden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. 5. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. 6. *Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?*

In these verses,

I. Eliphaz excuses the trouble he is now about to give to Job by his discourse; (v. 2.) "If we assay a word with thee, offer a word of reproof and counsel, wilt thou be grieved, and take it ill? We have reason to fear thou wilt: but there is no remedy; *Who can refrain from words?*" Observe, 1. With what modesty he speaks of himself and his own attempt. He will not undertake the management of the cause alone, but very humbly joins his friends with him; "We will commune with thee:" they that plead God's cause, must be glad of help, lest it suffer through their weakness. He will not promise much, but begs leave to assay or attempt, and try if he could propose any thing that might be pertinent, and suit Job's case. In difficult matters, it becomes us to pretend no further, but only to try what may be said or done. Many excellent discourses have gone under the modest title of *Essays*. 2. With what tenderness he speaks of Job, and his present afflicted condition; "If we tell thee our mind, wilt thou be grieved? Wilt thou take it ill? Wilt thou lay it to thine own heart as thine affliction, or to our charge as our fault? Shall we be reckoned unkind and cruel, if we deal plainly and faithfully with thee? We desire we may not, we hope we shall not, and should be sorry if that should be ill-resented which is well-intended." Note, We ought to be afraid of grieving any, especially those that are already in grief, lest we add affliction to the afflicted, as David's enemies, Ps. 69. 26. We should shew ourselves backward to say that which we foresee will be grievous, though ever so necessary. God himself, though he afflicts justly, yet he does not afflict willingly, Lam. 3. 33. 3. With what assurance he speaks of the truth and pertinency of what he was about to say; *Who can withhold himself from speaking?* Surely it was a pious zeal for God's honour, and the spiritual welfare of Job, that laid him under this necessity of speaking; "Who can forbear speaking in vindication of God's honour, which we hear reprov'd, in love to thy soul, which we see endangered?" Note, It is foolish pity not to reprove our friends, even our friends in affliction, for what they say or do amiss, only for fear of offending them. Whether men take it well or ill, we must with wisdom and meekness do our duty, and discharge a good conscience.

II. He exhibits a twofold charge against Job.

1. As to his particular conduct under this affliction; he charges him with weakness and faint-heartedness; this article of his charge there was too much ground for, v. 3, 5. And here,

(1.) He takes notice of Job's former serviceableness to the comfort of others. He owns that Job had instructed many, not only his own children and servants, but many others, his neighbours and friends, as many as fell within the sphere of his activity. He did not only encourage those who were teachers by office and

courtenance them, and pay for the teaching of those who were poor, but he did himself instruct many: though a great man, he did not think it below him. King Solomon was a preacher: though a man of business, he found time to do it, went among his neighbours, talked to them about their souls, and gave them good counsel. O that this example of Job were imitated by our great men! If he met with those who were ready to fall into sin, or sink under their troubles, his words upheld them: a wonderful dexterity he had in offering that which was proper to fortify persons against temptations, to support them under their burthens, and to comfort afflicted consciences. He had, and used, the tongue of the learned, knew how to speak a word in season to them that were weary, and employed himself much in that good work. With suitable counsels and comforts he *strengthened the weak hands* for work and service and the spiritual warfare, and the feeble knees for bearing up the man in his journey and under his load. It is not our duty only to *lift up our own hands, that hang down*, by quickening and encouraging ourselves in the way of duty, (Heb. 12. 12.) but we must also strengthen the weak hands of others, as there is occasion, and do what we can to confirm their feeble knees, by saying to them *that are of a fearful heart, Be strong*, Isa. 35. 3, 4. The expressions seem to be borrowed thence. Note, They who have abundance of spiritual riches, should abound in spiritual charity. A good word, well and wisely spoken, may do more good than perhaps we think of.

But why does Eliphaz mention this here? [1.] Perhaps praises him thus for the good he had done, that he might make the intended reproof the more passable with him. Just commendation is a good preface to a just reprehension, will help to remove prejudices, and will shew that the reproof comes not from ill-will. Paul praised the Corinthians before he chid them, 1 Cor. 11. 2. [2.] He remembers how Job had comforted others as a reason why he might justly expect to be himself comforted; and yet, if conviction was necessary in order to comfort, they must be excused if they applied themselves to that first: the *Comforter shall reprove*, John 16. 8. [3.] He speaks this, perhaps, in a way of pity, lamenting, that, through the extremity of his affliction, he could not apply those comforts to himself which he had formerly administered to others. It is easier to give good counsel than to take it; to preach meekness and patience than to practise them. *Facile omnes, cum valemus, rectum concilium ægrotis damus—We all find it easy, when in health, to give good advice to the sick.* Terent. [4.] Most think that he mentions it as an aggravation of his present discontent, upbraiding him with his knowledge, and the good offices he had done for others, as if he had said, "Thou that hast taught others, why dost not thou teach thyself? Is not this an evidence of thine hypocrisy, that thou hast prescribed that medicine to others which thou wilt not now take thyself, and so contradictest thyself, and actest against thine own known principles? Thou that teachest another not to faint, dost thou faint? Rom. 2. 21. Physician, heal thyself." They who have rebuked others, must expect to hear of it, if they themselves become obnoxious to rebuke.

(2.) He upbraids him with his present low-spiritedness, v. 5. "Now that it is come upon thee, now that it is thy turn to be afflicted, and the bitter cup, that goes round, is put into thy hand, now that it *touches thee, thou faintest, thou art troubled.*" Here, [1.] He makes too light of Job's afflictions; "*It touches thee.*" The very word that Satan himself had used, ch. 1. 11.—2. 5. Had Eliphaz felt but the one half of Job's affliction, he would have said, "It smites me, it wounds me;" but, speaking of Job's afflictions, he makes a mere trifle of it; "*It touches thee, and thou canst not bear to be touched; Noli me tangere—Touch me not.*" [2.] He makes too much of Job's resentments, and aggravates them; "Thou faintest, or thou art beside thyself; thou ravest, and knowest not what thou sayest. Men in deep distress must have grains of allowance, and a favourable construction put upon what they say; when we make the worst of every word, we do not as we would be done by.

5. As to his general character before this affliction, he charges him with wickedness and false-heartedness; that article of his

charge was utterly groundless and unjust. How unkindly does he banter him, and upbraid him with the great profession of religion he had made, as if it were all now come to nothing, and proved a sham; (v. 6.) "*Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?*" Does it not all appear now to be a mere pretence? For, hadst thou been sincere in it, God would not thus have afflicted thee, nor wouldst thou have behaved thus under the affliction." This was the very thing Satan aimed at, to prove Job a hypocrite, and disprove the character God had given of him: when he could not himself do this to God, but He still saw and said, *Job is perfect and upright*, then he endeavoured, by his friends, to do it to Job himself, and to persuade him to confess himself a hypocrite: could he have gained that point, he would have triumphed, *Habes confitentem reum—Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee.* But, by the grace of God, Job was enabled to hold fast his integrity, and would not bear false witness against himself. Note, Those that pass rash and uncharitable censures upon their brethren, and condemn them for hypocrites, do Satan's work, and serve his interest, more than they are aware of. I know not how it comes to pass that this verse is differently read in several editions of our common English Bibles; the original, and all the ancient versions, put *thy hope* before the *uprightness of thy ways*. So does the Geneva and most of the editions of the last translation; but I find one of the first, in 1612, has it, *Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, the uprightness of thy ways, and thy hope?* Both the Assembly's Annotations, and Mr. Pool's, have that reading; and an edition in 1660 reads it, "*Is not thy fear thy confidence, and the uprightness of thy ways thy hope?*" Does it not appear now, that all the religion, both of thy devotion, and of thy conversation, was only in hope and confidence that thou shouldst grow rich by it? Was it not all mercenary?" The very thing that Satan suggested. *Is not thy religion thy hope, and thy right ways thy confidence?* So Mr. Broughton. Or, "Was it not? Didst thou not think that that would have been thy protection? But thou art deceived." Or, "Would it not have been so? If it had been sincere, would it not have kept thee from this despair?" It is true, *if thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength, thy grace, is small*; (Prov. 24. 10.) but it does not therefore follow that thou hast no grace, no strength at all. A man's character is not to be taken from a single act.

7. Remember, I pray thee, who *ever* perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off? 8. Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. 9. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed. 10. The roaring of the lion, and the voice of the fierce lion, and the teeth of the young lions, are broken. 11. The old lion perisheth for lack of prey, and the stout lion's whelps are scattered abroad.

Eliphaz here advances another argument to prove Job a hypocrite, and will have not only his impatience under his afflictions to be evidence against him, but even his afflictions themselves, being so very great and extraordinary, and there being no prospect at all of his deliverance out of them.

To strengthen this argument, he here lays down these two principles, which seem plausible enough.

1. That *good men were never thus ruined*: for the proof of this, he appeals to Job's own observation; (v. 7.) "*Remember, I pray thee; recollect all that thou hast seen, heard, or read, and give me an instance of any one that was innocent and righteous, and yet perished as thou dost, and was cut off as thou art.*" If we understand it of a final and eternal destruction, his principle is true. None that are innocent and righteous, perish for ever: it is only a man of sin that is a *son of perdition*, 2 Thess. 2. 3. But then it is ill applied to Job; he did not thus perish, nor was he cut off: a man is never undone till he is in hell. But, if we understand it of any temporal calamity, his principle is not true. *The righteous*

perish; (Isa. 57. 1.) *There is one event both to the righteous and to the wicked*, (Ecc. 9. 2.) both in life and death; the great and certain difference is after death. Even before Job's time, (as early as it was,) there were instances sufficient to contradict this principle, Did not righteous *Abel perish being innocent*; and was not he cut off in the beginning of his days? Was not righteous Lot burnt out of house and harbour, and forced to retire to a melancholy cave? Was not righteous Jacob, a Syrian *ready to perish*? Deut. 26. 5. Similar instances, no doubt, there were, which are not on record.

11. That *wicked men were often thus ruined*: for the proof of this, he vouches his own observation; (v. 8.) "Even as I have seen, many a time, *They that plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, by the blast of God they perish*, v. 9. We have daily instances of that; and therefore, since thou dost thus perish, and art consumed, we have reason to think that, whatever profession of religion thou hast made, thou hast but *ploughed iniquity, and sown wickedness*. Even as I have seen in others, so do I see in thee."

1. He speaks of sinners in general, politic busy sinners, that take pains in sin, for they plough iniquity; and expect gain by sin, for they sow wickedness: they that plough, plough in hope; but what is the issue? *They reap the same*: they shall, of the *flesh*, *reap corruption and ruin*, Gal. 6. 7, 8. The harvest will be a *heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow*, Isa. 17. 11. He shall reap the same, that is, the proper product of that seedness: that which the sinner sows, he *sows not that body that shall be*, but God will give it a body, a body of death, *the end of those things*, Rom. 6. 21. Some, by iniquity and wickedness, understand wrong and injury done to others; they who plough and sow them, shall reap the same, that is, they shall be paid in their own coin. They who are troublesome, shall be troubled, 2 Thess. 1. 6. Josh. 7. 25. *The spoilers shall be spoiled*; Isa. 33. 1. (and they that led captive, shall go captive, Rev. 13. 10.

He further describes their destruction; (v. 9.) *By the blast of God they perish*. The projects they take so much pains in, are defeated; God cuts in sunder the cords of those ploughers, Ps. 129. 3, 4. They themselves are destroyed, which is the just punishment of their iniquity. They perish, that is, they are destroyed utterly; they are consumed, that is, they are destroyed gradually; and this, by the blast and breath of God, that is, (1.) By his *wrath*: his anger is the ruin of sinners, who are therefore called *vessels of wrath*, and his breath is said to *kindle Tophet*, Isa. 30. 33. *Who knows the power of his anger?* Ps. 90. 11. (2.) By his *word*; he speaks, and it is done, easily and effectually. The Spirit of God, in the word, consumes sinners; with that he slays them, Hos. 6. 5. Saying and doing are not two things with God. The man of sin is said to be consumed with the *breath of Christ's mouth*, 2 Thess. 2. 8. Compare Isa. 11. 4. Rev. 19. 21. Some think that in attributing the destruction of sinners to the blast of God, and the breath of his nostrils, he refers to the wind which blew the house down upon Job's children, as if they were therefore *sinners above all men, because they suffered such things*, Luke, 13. 2.

2. He speaks particularly of tyrants and cruel oppressors, under the similitude of lions, v. 10, 11. Observe, (1.) How he describes their cruelty and oppression. The Hebrew tongue has five several names for lions, and they are all here used to set forth the terrible tearing power, fierceness, and cruelty, of proud oppressors; they roar, and rend, and prey, upon all about them, and bring up their young ones to do so too, Ezek. 19. 3. The Devil is a roaring lion; and they partake of his nature, and do his lusts. They are strong as lions, and subtle; (Ps. 10. 9.—17. 12.) and, as far as they prevail, lay all desolate about them. (2.) How he describes their destruction; the destruction both of their power and of their persons; they shall be restrained from doing further hurt, and reckoned with for the hurt they have done. An effectual course shall be taken, [1.] That they shall not terrify; the voice of their roaring shall be stopped. [2.] That they shall not tear; God will disarm them, will take away their power to do hurt, *the teeth of the young lions are broken*, Ps. 3. 7. Thus shall the remainder of wrath be restrained. [3.] That they shall not enrich themselves with the spoil of their neighbours. Even the old lion is famished, and perishes for lack of prey: they that have surfeited on spoil and

rapine, are perhaps reduced to such straits as to die of hunger at last. [4.] That they shall not, as they promise themselves, leave a succession; the *stout lion's whelps are scattered abroad*, to seek for food themselves, which the old ones used to bring in for them, Nah. 2. 12. *The lion did tear in pieces for his whelps*, but now they must shift for themselves. Perhaps Eliphaz intended, in this, to reflect upon Job, as if he, being the *greatest of all the men of the east*, had got his estate by spoil, and used his power in oppressing his neighbours; but now, his power and estate were gone, and his family scattered: if so, it was pity that a man whom God praised, should be thus abused.

12. Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. 13. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, 14. Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. 15. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: 16. It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image *was* before mine eyes, *there was* silence, and I heard a voice, *saying*, 17. Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker? 18. Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: 19. How much less *in* them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation *is* in the dust, *which* are crushed before the moth? 20. They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding *it*. 21. Doth not their excellency *which is* in them go away? They die, even without wisdom.

Eliphaz, having undertaken to convince Job of the sin and folly of his discontent and impatience, here vouches a vision he had been favoured with, which he relates to Job for his conviction. What comes immediately from God, all men will pay a particular deference to, and Job, no doubt, as much as any. Some think Eliphaz had this vision now *late*, since he came to Job, putting words into his mouth wherewith to reason with him; and it had been well if he had kept to the purport of this vision, which would serve for a ground on which to reprove Job for his murmuring, but not to condemn him for a hypocrite. Others think he had it *formerly*; for God did in this way, often communicate himself to the children of men in those first ages of the world, ch. 33. 15. Probably, God had sent Eliphaz this messenger and message some time or other, when he was himself in an unquiet discontented frame, to calm and pacify him. Note, As we should comfort others with that wherewith we have been comforted, (2 Cor. 1. 4.) so we should endeavour to convince others with that which has been powerful to convince us.

The people of God had not then any written word to quote, and therefore God sometimes notified to them even common truths, by the extraordinary ways of revelation. We that have Bibles, have there (thanks be to God) a more sure word to depend upon than even visions and voices, 2 Pet. 1. 19. Observe,

I. The manner in which this message was sent to Eliphaz, and the circumstances of the conveyance of it to him. 1. It was brought him secretly, or by stealth; some of the sweetest communion gracious souls have with God, is in secret, where he only, who is all eye, can perceive. God has ways of bringing conviction, counsel, and comfort, to his people, unobserved by the world, by private whispers, as powerfully and effectually as by the public ministry. *His secret is with them*, Ps. 25. 14. As the evil spirit often steal good words out of the heart, (Matth. 13. 19.) so the good Spirit sometimes steals good words into the heart, or ever we are aware. 2. *He received a little thereof*, v. 12. And it is but little of divine knowledge that the best receive in this world: we know little, in

comparison with what is to be known, and with what we shall know when we come to heaven. *How little a portion is heard of God!* ch. 26. 14. *We know but in part*, 1 Cor. 13. 12. See his humility and modesty. He pretends not to have understood it fully, but something of it he perceived. 3. It was brought him in the visions of the night; (v. 13.) when he was retired from the world and the hurry of it, and all about him was composed and quiet. Note, The more we are withdrawn from the world and the things of it, the fitter we are for communion with God. When we are *communing with our own hearts, and are still*, (Ps. 4. 4.) then is a proper time for the Holy Spirit to commune with us. When others were asleep, Eliphaz was ready to receive this visit from Heaven, and probably, like David, was *meditating upon God in the night-watches*: in the midst of those good thoughts, this thing was brought to him. We should hear more from God, if we thought more of him; yet some are surprised with convictions in the night, ch. 33. 14, 15. 4. It was prefaced with terrors; *Fear came upon him, and trembling*, v. 14. It should seem, before he either heard or saw any thing, he was seized with this trembling, which shook his bones, and perhaps the bed under him. A holy awe and reverence of God and his majesty being struck upon his spirit, he was thereby prepared for a divine visit. Whom God intends to honour, he first humbles and lays low, and will have us all to serve him with holy fear, and to rejoice with trembling.

II. The messenger by whom it was sent; a spirit, one of the good angels, who are employed not only as the ministers of God's providence, but sometimes as the ministers of his word. Concerning this apparition which Eliphaz saw, we are here told, (v. 15, 16.) 1. That it was real, and not a dream, not a faery; an image was before his eyes, he plainly saw it; at first, it passed and repassed before his face, moved up and down, but, at length, it stood still to speak to him. If some have been so knavish as to impose false visions on others, and some so foolish as to be themselves imposed upon, it does not, therefore, follow that there have been no apparitions of spirits, both good and bad. 2. That it was indistinct, and somewhat confused. He could not discern the form thereof, so as to frame any exact idea of it in his own mind, much less to give a description of it. His conscience was to be awakened and informed, not his curiosity gratified. We know little of spirits, we are not capable of knowing much of them, nor is it fit we should; all in good time; we must shortly remove to the world of spirits, and shall then be better acquainted with them. 3. That it put him into a great consternation, so that his hair stood on end. Ever since man sinned, it has been terrible to him to receive an express from Heaven, as conscious to himself that he can expect no good tidings thence; apparitions, therefore, even of good spirits, have always made deep impressions of fear, even upon good men. How well is it for us, that God sends us his messages, not by spirits, but by men like ourselves, whose terror shall not make us afraid! See Dan. 7. 28.—10. 8, 9.

III. The message itself; before it was delivered, there was silence, profound silence, v. 16. When we are to speak either from God, or to him, it becomes us to address ourselves to it with a solemn pause, and so to set bounds about the mount on which God is to come down, and not be hasty to utter any thing. It was in a still small voice that the message was delivered, and this was it, (v. 17.) "*Shall mortal man be more just than God, the immortal God? Shall a man be thought to be, or pretend to be, more pure than his Maker? Away with such a thought!*" 1. Some think that Eliphaz aims hereby to prove that Job's great afflictions were a certain evidence of his being a wicked man; a mortal man would be thought unjust and very impure, if he should thus correct and punish a servant or subject, unless he had been guilty of some very great crime. "If, therefore, these were not some great crimes for which God thus punishes thee, man would be more just than God, which is not to be imagined." 2. I rather think it is only a reproof of Job's murmuring and discontent; "Shall a man pretend to be more just and pure than God? More truly to understand, and more strictly to observe, the rules and laws of equity, than God? Shall *Enosh*, mortal, miserable, man, be so insolent; *ay*, shall *Geber*, the strongest and most eminent man—man at his

best estate, pretend to compare with God, or stand in competition with him?" Note, It is most impious and absurd to think either others or ourselves more just and pure than God. Those that quarrel and find fault with the directions of the divine law, the dispensations of the divine grace, or the disposals of the divine providence, make themselves more just and pure than God; and they who thus *reprove God, let them answer it*. What! sinful man! (for he had not been mortal, if he had not been sinful!) short-sighted man! Shall he pretend to be more just, more pure, than God, who, being his Maker, is his Lord and Owner? Shall the clay contend with the potter? What justice and purity there is in man, God is the Author of it, and therefore is himself more just and pure. See Ps. 94. 9, 10.

IV. The comment which Eliphaz makes upon this, for so it seems to be; yet some take all the following verses to be spoken in vision. It comes all to one.

1. He shews how little the angels themselves are in comparison with God, v. 18. Angels are God's servants, waiting servants, working servants, they are his ministers; (Ps. 104. 4.) bright and blessed things they are; but God neither needs them, nor is benefited by them, and is himself infinitely above them; and therefore, (1.) He put no trust in them, did not repose a confidence in them, as we do in those we cannot live without; there is no service in which he employs them, but, if he pleased, he could have it done as well without them. He never made them his confidants, or of his cabinet-council, Matth. 24. 36. He does not leave his business wholly to them, but *his own eyes run to and fro through the earth*, 2 Chron. 16. 9. See this phrase, ch. 39. 11. Some give this sense of it, "So mutable is even the angelical nature, that God would not trust angels with their own integrity; if he had, they would all have done, as some did, left their first estate; but he saw it necessary to give them supernatural grace to confirm them." (2.) He charges them with folly, vanity, weakness, infirmity, and imperfection, in comparison with God. If the world were left to the government of the angels, and they were trusted with the sole management of affairs, they would take false steps, and every thing would not be done for the best, as now it is. Angels are intelligences, but finite ones. Though not chargeable with iniquity, yet with imprudence. This last clause is variously rendered by the critics. I think it would bear this reading, repeating the negation, which is very common. He will put no trust in his saints. *In angelis suis non ponet gloriationem—Nor will he glory in his angels, or make his boast of them, as if their praises or services added anything to him: it is his glory, that he is infinitely happy without them.*

2. Thence he infers how much less man is, how much less to be trusted in, or gloried in: if there is such distance between God and angels, what is there between God and man! See how man is represented here in his meanness.

(1.) Look upon man *in his life*, and he is *very mean*, v. 19. Take man in his best estate, and he is a very despicable creature in comparison with the holy angels; though honourable, if compared with the brutes. It is true, angels are spirits, and the souls of men are spirits; but, [1.] Angels are pure spirits, the souls of men dwell in houses of clay; such the bodies of men are. Angels are free, human souls are housel, and the body is a cloud, a fog, to it, it is its cage, it is its prison. It is a house of clay, mean and mouldering; an earthen vessel, soon broken, as it was first formed, according to the good pleasure of the potter. It is a cottage, not a house of cedar, or a house of ivory, but of clay, which would soon be in ruins, if not kept in constant repair. [2.] Angels are fixed; but the very foundation of that house of clay in which man dwells, is in the dust. A house of clay, if built upon a rock, might stand long; but, if founded in the dust, the uncertainty of the foundation will hasten its fall, and it will sink with its own weight. As man was made out of the earth, so he is maintained and supported by that which comes out of the earth. Take away that, and his body returns to its earth. We stand but upon the dust; some have a higher heap of dust to stand upon than others, but still it is the earth that stays us up, and will shortly swallow us up [3.] Angels are immortal, but man is soon crushed, the earthly

house of his tabernacle is dissolved, he dies and wastes away, is crushed like a moth between one's fingers, as easily, as quickly; one may almost as soon kill a man as kill a moth. A little thing will do it; he is *crushed before the face of the moth*, so the word is. If some lingering distemper, which consumes like a moth, be commissioned to destroy him, he can no more resist it than he can resist an acute distemper, which comes roaring upon him like a lion. See Hos. 5. 12, 14. Is such a creature as this to be trusted in, or can any service be expected from him, by that God who puts no trust in angels themselves?

(2.) Look upon him in *his death*, and he appears yet more despicable, and unfit to be trusted. Men are mortal, and dying, v. 20, 21. [1.] In death, they are destroyed, and perish for ever, as to this world; it is the final period of their lives, and all their employments and enjoyments here; their place will know them no more. [2.] They are dying daily, and continually wasting; *destroyed from morning to evening*; death is still working in us, *like a mole digging our grave at each remove*, and we so continually exposed, that we are killed all the day long. [3.] Their life is short, and in a little time they are cut off; it lasts perhaps but from morning to evening. It is but a day; (so some understand it;) their birth and death are but the sun-rise and sun-set of the same day. [4.] In death, all their excellency passes away; beauty, strength, learning, not only cannot secure them from death, but die with them; nor shall their pomp, their wealth, or power, descend after them. [5.] Their wisdom cannot save them from death; they die without wisdom, die for want of wisdom, by their own foolish management of themselves, digging their graves with their own teeth. [6.] It is so common a thing that no body heeds it, or takes any notice of it; they perish *without any regarding it*, or laying it to heart. The deaths of others are much the subject of common talk, but little the subject of serious thought.

Some think the eternal damnation of sinners is here spoken of, as well as their temporal death. *They are destroyed, or broken to pieces, by death, from morning to evening; and if they repent not, they perish for ever*, so some read it, v. 20. They perish for ever, because they regard not God and their duty, they *consider not their latter end*, Lam. 1. 9. They have no excellency but that which death takes away, and they die, they die the second death, for want of wisdom to lay hold on eternal life. Shall such a mean, weak, foolish, sinful, dying, creature as this, pretend to be *more just than God, and more pure than his Maker*? No, instead of quarrelling with his afflictions, let him wonder that he is out of hell.

CHAP. V.

Eliphaz, in the foregoing chapter, for the making good of his charge against Job, had roused a word from Heaven, sent him in a vision. In this chapter, he appeals to those that bear record on earth, to the saints, the faithful witnesses of God's truths, in all ages, v. 1. *They will testify, I. That the sin of sinners is their ruin, v. 2. .5. II. That yet affliction is the common lot of mankind, v. 6, 7. III. That when we are in affliction, it is our wisdom and duty to apply ourselves to God, for he is able and ready to help us, v. 8. .16. IV. That the afflictions which are borne well will end well; and Job particularly, if he would come to a better temper, might assure himself that God had great mercy in store for him, v. 17. .27. So that he concludes his discourse in somewhat a better humour than he began it.*

1. **C**ALL now, if there be any that will answer thee; and to which of the saints wilt thou turn? 2. For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one. 3. I have seen the foolish taking root: but suddenly I cursed his habitation. 4. His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them. 5. Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance.

A very warm dispute being begun between Job and his friends, Eliphaz here makes a fair motion to put the matter to a reference; in all debates, perhaps, the sooner that is done the better, if the

contenders cannot end it between themselves. So well assured is Eliphaz of the goodness of his own cause, that he moves Job himself to choose the arbitrators; (v. 1.) *Call now, if there be any that will answer thee*; that is, 1. "If there be any that suffer as thou sufferest: canst thou produce an instance of any one, that was really a saint, that was reduced to such extremity as thou art now reduced to? God never dealt with any that love his name so as he deals with thee, and therefore surely thou art none of them." 2. "If there be any that say as thou sayest: did ever any good man curse his day as thou dost? Or, will any of the saints justify thee in these heats or passions, or say that these are the spots of God's children? Thou wilt find none of the saints that will be either thine advocates, or mine antagonists. *To which of the saints wilt thou turn?* Turn to which thou wilt, and thou wilt find they are all of my mind; I have the *communis sensus fidelium*—the unanimous vote of all the saints on my side; they will all subscribe to what I am going to say." Observe, (1.) Good people are called *saints*, even in the Old Testament; and therefore I know not why we should, in common speaking, (unless because we must *loqui eum vulgo*—speak as our neighbours,) appropriate the title to those of the New Testament, and not say St. Abraham, St. Moses, and St. Isaiah, as well as St. Matthew, and St. Mark; and St. David the psalmist, as well as St. David the British bishop. Aaron is expressly called *the saint of the Lord*. (2.) All that are themselves saints, will turn to those that are so; will choose them for their friends, and converse with them; will choose them for their judges, and consult with them. See Ps. 119. 79. The saints shall *judge the world*, 1 Cor. 6. 1, 2. *Walk in the way of good men*, (Prov. 2. 20.) *the old way, the footsteps of the flock*. Every one chooses some sort of people or other to whom he studies to recommend himself, and whose sentiments are to him the test of honour and dishonour: now all true saints endeavour to recommend themselves to those that are such, and to stand right in their opinion. (3.) There are some truths so plain, and so universally known and believed, that one may venture to appeal to any of the saints concerning them. However there are some things, about which they unhappily differ, there are many more, and more considerable, in which they are agreed; as the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the worth of the soul, the necessity of a holy life, and the like. Though they do not all live up, as they should, to their belief of these truths, yet they are all ready to bear their testimony to them.

Now there are two things which Eliphaz here maintains, and in which he doubts not but all the saints concur with him.

I. That the sin of sinners directly tends to their own ruin; (v. 2.) *Wrath kills the foolish man*, his own wrath, and therefore he is foolish for indulging it; it is a fire in his bones, in his blood, enough to put him into a fever; envy is the rottenness of the bones, and so slays the silly one that frets himself with it. "So it is with thee;" says Eliphaz; "while thou quarrellest with God, thou doest thyself the greatest mischief; thine anger at thine own troubles, and thine envy at our prosperity, do but add to thy pain and misery: turn to the saints, and thou wilt find they understand themselves better." Job had told his wife she spake as the foolish women, now Eliphaz tells him he acted as the foolish men, the silly ones. Or, it may be meant thus: "If men are ruined and undone, it is always their own folly that ruins and undoes them. They kill themselves by some lust or other; therefore, no doubt, Job, thou hast done some foolish thing, by which thou hast brought thyself into this calamitous condition." Many understand it of God's wrath and jealousy. Job needed not be uneasy at the prosperity of the wicked, for the world's smiles can never shelter them from God's frowns; they are foolish and silly, if they think they will. God's anger will be the death, the eternal death, of those on whom it fastens. What is hell, but God's anger without mixture or period?

II. That their prosperity is short, and their destruction certain, v. 3. .5. He seems here to parallel Job's case with that which is commonly the case of wicked people.

1. Job had prospered for a time, seemed confirmed, and was secure in his prosperity; and it is common for foolish wicked men to do so. *Thave seen them taking root*, planted, and, in their own

and other's apprehension, fixed, and likely to continue. See Jer. 12. 2. Ps. 37. 35, 36. We see worldly men taking root in the earth; on earthly things they fix the standing of their hopes, and from them they draw the sap of their comforts. The outward estate may be flourishing, but the soul cannot prosper that takes root in the earth.

2. Job's prosperity was now at an end, and so has the prosperity of other wicked people quickly been.

(1.) Eliphaz foresaw their ruin with an eye of faith. They who looked only at present things, blessed their habitation, and thought them happy, blessed it long, and wished themselves in their condition. But Eliphaz cursed it, suddenly cursed it, as soon as he saw them begin to take root, that is, he plainly foresaw and foretold their ruin; not that he prayed for it, (*I have not desired the woeful day,*) but he prognosticated it. *He went into the sanctuary, and there understood their end,* and heard their doom read, (Ps. 73. 17, 18.) That the *prosperity of fools will destroy them*, Prov. 1. 32. They who believe the word of God, can see a *curse in the house of the wicked*, (Prov. 3. 33.) though it be ever so finely and firmly built, and ever so full of all good things; and can foresee that it will, in time, infallibly consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof, Zech. 5. 4.

(2.) He saw, at length, what he had foreseen: he was not disappointed in his expectation concerning him, the event answered it; his family was undone, and his estate ruined. In these particulars, he plainly and very invidiously reflects on Job's calamities. [1.] His children were crushed, v. 4. They thought themselves safe in their eldest brother's house, but were far from safety, for they were crushed in the gate; perhaps the door or gate of the house was highest built, and fell heaviest upon them, and there was none to deliver them from perishing in the ruins. This is commonly understood of the families of wicked men, by the execution of justice upon them to oblige them to restore what they have ill-gotten. They leave it to their children; but the descent shall not bar the entry of the rightful owners, who will crush their children, and cast them by due course of law, (and there shall be none to help them,) or perhaps by oppression, Ps. 109. 9, &c. [2.] His estate was plundered, v. 5. Job's was so; the hungry robbers, the Sabeans and Chaldeans, ran away with it, and swallowed it: and this, says he, I have often observed in others. What has been got by spoil and rapine, has been lost the same way. The careful owner hedged it about with thorns, and then thought it safe; but the fence proved insignificant against the greediness of the spoilers, (if hunger will break through stone-walls, much more through thorn-hedges,) and against the divine curse, which will go through the thorns and briers, and *burn them together*, Isa. 27. 4.

6. Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; 7. Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. 8. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: 9. Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number: 10. Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields: 11. To set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety. 12. He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform *their* enterprise. 13. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong. 14. They meet with darkness in the day-time, and grope in the noon-day as in the night. 15. But he saveth the poor from the sword, from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty. 16. So the poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth.

Eliphaz, having touched Job in a very tender part, in mentioning both the loss of his estate and the death of his children as the just punishment of his sin, that he might not drive him to despair, here begins to encourage him, and puts him in a way to make himself easy. Now he very much changes his voice. (Gal. 4. 20.) and accosts Job gently, as if he would atone for the hard words he had given him.

I. He reminds him, that no affliction comes by chance, nor is to be attributed to second causes. *It doth not come forth of the dust, nor spring out of the ground*, as the grass doth, v. 6. *It doth not come of course*, at certain seasons of the year, as natural productions do, by a chain of second causes. The proportion between prosperity and adversity is not so exactly observed by Providence, as that between day and night, summer and winter, but according to the will and counsel of God, when and as he thinks fit. Some read it, *Sin comes not forth of the dust, nor iniquity out of the ground*. If men be bad, they must not lay the blame upon the soil, the climate, or the stars, but on themselves. *If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it*. We must not attribute our afflictions to fortune, for they are from God, nor our sins to fate, for they are from ourselves; so that, whatever trouble we are in, we must own that God sends it upon us, and we procure it to ourselves; the former is a reason why we should be very patient, the latter why we should be very penitent, when we are afflicted.

II. He reminds him, that trouble and affliction are what we have all reason to expect in this world. *Man is born to trouble*; (v. 7.) not as man, (had he kept his innocency, he had been born to pleasure,) but as sinful man, as *born of a woman*, (ch. 14. 1.) who was in the transgression. Man is born in sin, and therefore born to trouble. Even those that are born to honour and estate, yet are born to trouble in the flesh. In our fallen state, it is become natural to us to sin, and the natural consequence of that, is affliction, Rom. 5. 12. There is nothing in this world we are born to, and can truly call our own, but sin and trouble; both are as the sparks that fly upward. Actual transgressions are the sparks that fly out of the furnace of original corruption; and, being called *transgressors from the womb*, no wonder that we *deal very treacherously*, Isa. 48. 8. Such too is the frailty of our bodies, and the vanity of all our enjoyments, that our troubles also thence arise as naturally as the sparks fly upward; so many are they, so thick and so fast does one follow another. Why then should we be surprised at our afflictions as strange, or quarrel with them as hard, when they are but what we are born to? Man is born to *labour*, so it is in the margin, is sentenced to eat his bread in the sweat of his face, which should inure him to hardness, and make him bear his affliction the better.

III. He directs him how to behave himself under his affliction; (v. 8.) *I would seek unto God; surely I would*: so it is in the original. Here is, 1. A tacit reproof to Job for not seeking to God, but quarrelling with Him; "Job, if I had been in thy case, I would not have been so peevish and passionate as thou art, I would have acquiesced in the will of God." It is easy to say what we would do, if we were in such a man's case; but, when it comes to the trial, perhaps it will be found not so easy to do as we say. 2. Very good and seasonable advice to him, which Eliphaz transfers to himself in a figure; "For my part, the best way, I should think I could take, if I were in thy condition, would be to apply myself to God." Note, We should give our friends no other counsel than what we would take ourselves if we were in their case, that we may be easy under our afflictions, may get good by them, and may see a good issue of them. (1.) We must by prayer fetch in mercy and grace from God; seek to him as a Father and Friend, though he contend with us, as one who is alone able to support and succour us. His favour we must seek, when we have lost all we have in the world; to him we must address ourselves, as the Fountain and Father of all good, all consolation. *Is any afflicted? Let him pray*. It is heart's-ease, a salve for every sore. (2.) We must by patience refer ourselves and our cause to him. "To God would I commit my cause: having spread it before him, I would leave it with him; having laid it at his feet, I would lodge it in his hand: *Here I am, let the Lord do with me as seemeth him good*." If our cause be indeed a good cause, we need not fear committing it to

God, for he is both just and kind. They that would seek so as to speed, must refer themselves to God.

IV. He encourages him thus to seek to God, and commit his cause to him. It will not be in vain to do so, for he is one in whom we shall find effectual help. He recommends to his consideration God's almighty power and sovereign dominion.

1. In general, he *doeth great things*; (v. 9.) great indeed, for he can do any thing; he doth do every thing; and all according to the counsel of his own will: great indeed, for the operations of his power are, (1.) Unsearchable, and such as can never be fathomed, can never be found out *from the beginning to the end*, Eccl. 3. 11. The works of nature are mysteries; the most curious searches come far short of full discoveries, and the wisest philosophers have owned themselves at a loss. The designs of Providence are much more deep and unaccountable, Rom. 11. 33. (2.) Numerous, and such as never can be reckoned up. He doeth great things without number; his power is never exhausted, nor will all his purposes ever be fulfilled till the end of time. (3.) They are marvellous, and such as never can be sufficiently admired; eternity itself will be short enough to be spent in the admiration of them. Now, by the consideration of this, Eliphaz intends, [1.] To convince Job of his fault and folly in quarrelling with God. We must not pretend to pass a judgment upon his works, for they are unsearchable and above our inquiries; nor must we strive with our Maker, for he will certainly be too hard for us, and is able to crush us in a moment. [2.] To encourage Job to seek unto God, and to refer himself to him. What more encouraging than to see that he is one to whom power belongs? He can do great things and marvellous for our relief, when we are brought ever so low.

2. He gives some instances of God's dominion and power.

(1.) God doeth great things in the kingdom of nature; he *gives rain upon the earth*, (v. 10.) put here for all the gifts of common providence, all the *fruitful seasons*, by which he *filleth our hearts with food and gladness*, Acts, 14. 17. Observe, When he would shew what great things God doeth, he speaks of his giving rain, which, because it is a common thing, we are apt to look upon as a little thing; but if we duly consider both how it is produced, and what is produced by it, we shall see it to be a great work, both of power and goodness.

(2.) He doeth great things in the affairs of the children of men: not only enriches the poor, and comforts the needy, by the rain he sends, (v. 10.) but, in order to the advancing of those that are low, he *disappoints the devices of the crafty*; for v. 11. is to be joined to v. 12. and compared with Luke, 1. 51. 53. He hath *scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts*, and so hath *exalted them of low degree*, and *filled the hungry with good things*.

See, [1.] How he *frustrates the counsels of the proud and politic*, v. 12. 14. There is a supreme power that manages and overrules men who think themselves free and absolute, and fulfils its own purposes in despite of their projects. Observe, *First*, The froward, that walk contrary to God and the interest of his kingdom, are often very crafty, for they are the seed of the old serpent, that was noted for subtlety. They think themselves wise, but, at the end, will be fools. *Secondly*, The froward enemies of God's kingdom have their devices, their enterprises, and their counsels, against it, and against the loyal faithful subjects of it. They are restless and unwearied in their designs, close in their consultations, high in their hopes, deep in their politics, and fast linked in their confederacies, Ps. 2. 1, 2. *Thirdly*, God easily can, and (as far as is for his glory) certainly will, blast and defeat all the designs of his and his people's enemies. How were the plots of Ahithophel, Sanballat, and Haman, baffled! The confederates of Syria and Ephraim against Judah, of Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek, against God's Israel, the kings of the earth, and the princes, against the Lord and against his anointed, broken! The hands that have been stretched out against God, and his church, have not performed their enterprise, nor have the weapons formed against Zion prospered. *Fourthly*, That which enemies have designed for the ruin of the church, has often turned to their own ruin; (v. 13.) *He takes the wise in their own craftiness, and snares them in the work of their own hands*, Ps. 7. 15, 16.—9. 15, 16.

This is quoted by the apostle, (1 Cor. 3. 19.) to shew how the learned men of the heathen were befooled by their own vain philosophy. *Fifthly*, When God infatuates men, they are perplexed, and at a loss, even in those things that seem most plain and easy; (v. 14.) *They meet with darkness even in the day-time*; nay, as it is in the margin, *They run themselves into darkness by the violence and precipitation of their own counsels*. See ch. 12. 20, 24, 25.

[2.] How he favours the cause of the poor and humble, and espouses that.

First, He exalts the humble, v. 11. Those whom proud men contrive to crush, he raises from under their feet, and sets them in safety, Ps. 12. 5. The lowly in heart, and those that mourn, he advances, comforts, and makes to *dwell on high*, in the *munitions of rocks*, Isa. 33. 16. Zion's mourners are the sealed ones, marked for safety, Ezek. 9. 4.

Secondly, He delivers the oppressed, v. 15. The designs of the crafty are to ruin the poor: tongue, and hand, and sword, and all, are at work in order to this; but God takes under his special protection those who, being poor, and unable to help themselves, being his poor, and devoted to his praise, have committed themselves to him. He saves them from the mouth that speaks hard things against them, and the hand that does hard things against them; for he can, when he pleases, tie the tongue, and wither the hand.

The effect of this is, (v. 16.) 1. That weak and timorous saints are comforted: *so the poor*, that began to despair, *has hope*. The experiences of some are encouragements to others to hope the best in the worst of times; for it is the glory of God to send help to the helpless, and hope to the hopeless. 2. That daring threatening sinners are confounded; iniquity stops her mouth, being surprised at the strangeness of the deliverance, ashamed of its enmity against those who appear to be the favourites of Heaven, mortified at the disappointment, and compelled to acknowledge the justice of God's proceedings, having nothing to object against them. Those that domineered over God's poor, that frightened them, menaced them, and falsely accused them, will not have a word to say against them when God appears for them. See Ps. 76. 8, 9. Isa. 26. 11. Mic. 7. 16.

17. Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: 18. For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. 19. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. 20. In famine, he shall redeem thee from death: and in war, from the power of the sword. 21. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. 22. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. 23. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. 24. And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin. 25. Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth. 26. Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season. 27. Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.

Eliphaz, in this concluding paragraph of his discourse, gives Job (what he himself knew not how to take) a comfortable prospect of

the issue of his afflictions, if he did but recover his temper, and accommodate himself to them.

Observe,

I. The seasonable word of caution and exhortation that he gives him; (v. 17.) "*Despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.* Call it a chastening, which comes from the father's love, and is designed for the child's good. Call it the chastening of the Almighty, with whom it is madness to contend, to whom it is wisdom and duty to submit, and who will be a God all-sufficient" (for so the word signifies) "to all those that trust in him. Do not despise it;" it is a copious word in the original. 1. "Be not averse to it. Let grace conquer the antipathy which nature has to suffering, and reconcile thyself to the will of God in it." We need the rod, and we deserve it; and therefore we ought not to think it either strange or hard if we feel the smart of it. Let not the heart rise against a bitter pill or potion, when it is prescribed us for our good. 2. "Do not think ill of it, do not put it from thee, (as that which is either hurtful, or, at least, not useful, which there is no occasion for, nor advantage by,) only because, for the present, it is not joyous, but grievous." We must never scorn to stoop to God, nor think it a thing below us to come under his discipline, but reckon, on the contrary, that God really magnifies man, when he thus visits and tries him, ch. 7. 17, 18. 3. "Do not overlook and disregard it, as if it were only a chance, and the production of second causes, but take great notice of it as the voice of God, and a messenger from Heaven." More is implied than is expressed: "*Reverence the chastening of the Lord;* have an humble, awful, regard to his correcting hand, and tremble when the lion roars, Amos, 3. 8. Submit to the chastening, and study to answer the call, to answer the end of it, and then thou reverencest it." When God, by an affliction, draws upon us for some of the effects he has intrusted us with, we must honour his bill by accepting it, and subscribing it, resigning him his own when he calls for it.

II. The comfortable words of encouragement which he gives him, thus to accommodate himself to his condition, and (as he himself had expressed it) to receive evil from the hand of God, and not despise it as a gift not worth the accepting. If his affliction was thus borne,

1. The nature and property of it would be altered: though it looked like a man's misery, it would really be his bliss. *Happy is the man whom God correcteth*, if he make but a due improvement of the correction. A good man is happy, though he be afflicted; for, whatever he has lost, he has not lost his enjoyment of God, nor his title to heaven; nay, he is happy, *because* he is afflicted; correction is an evidence of his sonship, and a means of his sanctification; it mortifies his corruptions, weans his heart from the world, draws him nearer to God, brings him to his Bible, brings him to his knees, works him for, and so is for working him, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; *Happy therefore is the man whom God correcteth*, Jam. 1. 12.

2. The issue and consequence of it would be very good, v. 18. (1.) Though he makes sore the body with sore boils, the mind with sad thoughts, yet he binds up at the same time; as the skillful tender surgeon binds up the wounds he had occasion to make with his incision-knife. When God makes sores by the rebukes of his providence, he binds up by the consolations of his Spirit, which oftentimes abound, as most afflictions do abound, and balance them, to the unspeakable satisfaction of the patient sufferers. (2.) Though he wounds, yet his hands make whole in due time; as he supports his people, and makes them easy under their afflictions, so in due time he delivers them, and makes a way for them to escape. All is well again; and he comforts them according to the time wherein he afflicted them. God's usual method is first to wound, and then to heal, first to convince, and then to comfort, first to humble, and then to exalt; and (as Mr. Caryl observes) he never makes a wound too great, too deep, for his own cure. *Una cademque manus rubeus opemque tulit—The hand that inflicts the wound, applies the cure.* God tears the wicked, and goes away, let them heal that will, if they can; (Jos. 5. 14.) but the humble and penitent may say, *He has torn, and he will heal us*, Hos. 6. 1.

This is general; but in the following verses he applies himself directly to Job, and gives him many precious promises of great and kind things which God would do for him, if he did but humble himself under his hand. Though then they had no Bibles that we know of, yet Eliphaz had sufficient warrant to give Job these assurances, from the general discoveries God had made of his good will to his people. And though, in every thing which Job's friends said, they were not directed by the Spirit of God, (for they spake both of God and Job some things that were not right,) yet the general doctrines they laid down spake the pious sense of the patriarchal age; and as St. Paul quoted, v. 13. for canonical scripture, and as the command, v. 17. is, no doubt, binding on us, so these promises here may be, and must be, received and applied as divine promises, and we may, *through patience and comfort of this part of scripture, have hope.*

Let us therefore give diligence to make sure our interest in these promises, and then view the particulars of them, and take the comfort of them.

[1.] It is here promised, *that as afflictions and troubles do recur, supports and deliverances shall be graciously repeated*, be it never so often. *In six troubles*, he shall be ready to deliver thee; yea, and in seven. This intimates, that, as long as we are here in this world, we must expect a succession of troubles, that the clouds will return after the rain; after six troubles may come a seventh. After many, look for more; but *out of them all will God deliver* those that are his. 2Tim. 3. 11. Ps. 34. 19. Former deliverances are earnest of, not, as among men, excuses from, farther deliverances, Prov. 19. 19.

[2.] That, whatever troubles good men may be in, there shall no evil touch them, they shall do them no real harm; the malignity of them, shall be taken out; they may hiss, they cannot hurt, Ps. 91. 10. *The evil one toucheth not God's children*, 1John. 5. 18. Being kept from sin, they are kept from the evil of every trouble.

[3.] *That, when desolating judgments are abroad, they shall be taken under special protection*, v. 20. Do many perish about them, for want of the necessary supports of life? They shall be supplied. "*In famine he shall redeem thee from death: whatever becomes of others, thou shalt be kept alive*, Ps. 33. 19. *Verily thou shalt be fed*, nay, even *in the days of famine thou shalt be satisfied*, Ps. 37. 3, 19. In time of war, when thousands fall on thy right and left hand, he shall redeem thee from the power of the sword. If God pleases, it shall not touch thee; or, if it wound thee, if it kill thee, it shall not hurt thee; it can but kill the body, nor has it power to do that, unless it be given from above."

[4.] *That whatever is maliciously said against them, it shall not affect them, to do them any hurt*, v. 21. "Thou shalt not only be protected from the killing sword of war, but shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue, which, like a scourge, is vexing and painful, though not mortal." The best men, and the most inoffensive, cannot, even with their innocency, secure themselves from calumny, reproach, and false accusation. From these a man cannot hide himself, but God can hide him, so that the most malicious standers shall be so little heeded by him, as not to disturb his peace; and so little heeded by others, as not to blemish his reputation; and the remainder of wrath God can and does restrain, for it is owing to the hold he has of the consciences of bad men, that the scourge of the tongue is not the ruin of all the comforts of good men in this world.

[5.] That they shall have a holy security and serenity of mind, arising from their hope and confidence in God, even in the worst of times. When dangers are most threatening, they shall be easy, believing themselves safe; and shall not be afraid of destruction, no, not when they see it coming, (v. 21.) nor the beasts of the field, when they set upon them, nor of men as cruel as beasts; nay, *at destruction and famine thou shalt laugh*, (v. 22.) not so as to despise any of God's chastenings, or make a jest of his judgments, but so as to triumph in God, and his power and goodness, and therein to triumph over the world and all its grievances; to be not only easy, but cheerful and joyful, in tribulation. Blessed Paul laughed at destruction, when he said, *O death, where is thy sting?*

When, in the name of all the saints, he defied all the calamities of this present time to separate from the love of God, concluding, *In all these things we are more than conquerors*, Rom. 8. 35, &c. See Isa. 37. 22.

[6.] That, *being at peace with God, there shall be a covenant of friendship between them and the whole creation*, v. 23. "When thou walkest thy grounds, thou shalt not need to fear stumbling, for thou shalt be at league with the stones of the field, not to dash thy foot against any of them; nor shalt thou be in danger from the beasts of the field, for they all shall be at peace with thee;" compare Hos. 2. 18. *I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field*. This implies, that while man is at enmity with his Maker, the inferior creatures are at war with him; but *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat omnia—A reconciled God reconciles all things*. Our covenant with God is a covenant with all the creatures, that they shall do us no hurt, but be ready to serve us, and do us good.

[7.] That *their houses and families shall be comfortable to them*, v. 24. Peace and piety in the family will make it so. "Thou shalt know and be assured that thy tabernacle is, and shall be, in peace; thou mayest be confident both of its present and its future prosperity." *That peace is thy tabernacle*, so the word is. Peace is the house in which they dwell, who dwell in God, and are at home in him; "Thou shalt visit," that is, "inquire into, the affairs of thy habitation, and take a review of them, and shalt not sin." *First*, God will provide a settlement for his people, mean, perhaps, and moveable, a cottage, a tabernacle, but a fixed and quiet habitation. "Thou shalt not sin," or *wander*, that is, as some understand it, "thou shalt not be a fugitive and a vagabond," (Cain's curse,) "but shalt dwell in the land, and verily, not uncertainly as vagrants, shalt thou be fed." *Secondly*, Their families shall be taken under the special protection of the Divine Providence, and shall prosper as far as is for their good. *Thirdly*, They shall be assured of peace, and of the continuance and entail of it; "Thou shalt know, to thine unspeakable satisfaction, that peace is sure to thee and thine, having the word of God for it." Providence may change, but the promise cannot. *Fourthly*, They shall have wisdom to govern their families aright, to order their affairs with discretion, and to look well to the ways of their household, which is here called *visiting their habitation*; masters of families must not be strangers at home, but have a watchful eye over what they have, and what their servants do. *Fifthly*, They shall have grace to manage the concerns of their families after a godly sort, and not to sin in the management of them. They shall call their servants to account without passion, pride, covetousness, worldliness, or the like; they shall look into their affairs without discontent at what is, or distrust of what shall be. Family piety crowns family peace and prosperity. The greatest blessing, both in our employments, and in our enjoyments, is, to be kept from sin in them. When we are abroad, it is comfortable to hear that our tabernacle is in peace; and when we return home to visit our habitation, with satisfaction in our success, that we have not failed in our business, and with a good conscience, that we have not offended God.

[8.] That their posterity should be numerous and prosperous. Job had lost all his children; "But," says Eliphaz, "if thou return to God, he will again build up thy family, and thy seed shall be many, and as great as ever, and thine offspring increasing and flourishing as the grass of the earth," (v. 25.) "and thou shalt know it." God has blessings in store for the seed of the faithful, which they shall have, if they do not stand in their own light, and forfeit them by their folly. It is a comfort to parents to see the prosperity, especially the spiritual prosperity, of their children; if they are truly good, they are truly great, how small a figure soever they make in the world.

[9.] That *their death shall be seasonable, and they shall finish their course, at length, with joy and honour*, v. 26. It is a great mercy, *First*, To live to a full age, and not to have the number of our months cut off in the midst. If the providence of God do not give us long life, if the grace of God give us to be satisfied with the time allotted us, we may be said to come to a full age. That man lives long enough that has done his work, and is fit for another world. *Secondly*, To be willing to die, to come cheerfully

to the grave, and not to be forced thither, as he whose soul was required of him. *Thirdly*, To die seasonably, as the corn is cut and housed when it is full ripe; not till then, but then not suffered to stand a day longer, lest it shed. Our times are in God's hand; it is well they are so, for he will take care that those who are his die in the best time: however their death may seem to us untimely, it will be found not unseasonable.

In the last verse, he recommends those promises to Job, 1. As faithful sayings, which he might be confident of the truth of: "Lo, this we have searched, and so it is. We have indeed received these things by tradition from our fathers, but we have not taken them upon trust, we have carefully searched them, have compared spiritual things with spiritual, have diligently studied them, and been confirmed in our belief of them, from our own observation and experience; and we are all of a mind that so it is." Truth is a treasure that is well worth digging for, diving for; and then we shall know both how to value it ourselves, and how to communicate it to others, when we have taken pains in searching for it. 2. As well-worthy of all acceptance, which he might improve to his great advantage! "Hear it, and know thou it for thy good." It is not enough to hear and know the truth, but we must improve it, and be made wiser and better by it, receive the impressions of it, and submit to the commanding power of it. *Know it for thyself*, so the word is; with application to thyself, and thy own case; not only This is true, but This is true concerning me. That which we thus hear and know for ourselves, we hear and know for our good, as we are nourished by the meat which we digest. That is, indeed, a good sermon, which does us good.

CHAP. VI.

Eliphaz concluded his discourse with an air of assurance; very confident he was that what he had said was so plain and so pertinent, that nothing could be objected in answer to it. But though he that is first in his own cause, seems just, yet his neighbour comes and searches him. Job is not convinced by all he had said, but still justifies himself in his complaints, and condemns him for the weakness of his arguing. I. He shows that he had just cause to complain as he did of his troubles, and so it would appear to any impartial judge, v. 2. 7. II. He continues his passionate wish, that he might speedily be cut off by the stroke of death, and so be eased of all his miseries, v. 8. 13. III. He reproaches his friends for their uncharitable censures of him, and their unkind treatment, v. 14. 30. It must be owned that Job, in all this, spake much that was reasonable, but with a mixture of passion and human infirmity. And in this contest, as indeed in most contests, there was fault on both sides.

1. **B**UT Job answered and said, 2. Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! 3. For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. 4. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. 5. Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass? Or loweth the ox over his fodder? 6. Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg? 7. The things that my soul refused to touch are as my sorrowful meat.

Eliphaz, in the beginning of his discourse, had been very sharp upon Job, and yet it does not appear that Job gave him any interruption, but heard him patiently, till he had said all he had to say: they that would make an impartial judgment of a discourse, must hear it out, and take it entire. But when he had concluded, he makes his reply, in which he speaks very feelingly.

I. He represents his calamity, in general, as much heavier than either he had expressed it, or they had apprehended it, v. 2. 3. He could not fully describe it, they would not fully apprehend it, or, at least, not own that they did; and therefore he would gladly appeal to a third person, who had just weights and just balances

with which to weigh his grief and calamity, and would do it with an impartial hand; he wished that they would set his grief in one scale, and all the expressions of it; his calamity in the other, and all the particulars of it; and (though he would not altogether justify himself in his grief, yet) they would find (as he says, *ch. 23. 2.*) that *his stroke was heavier than his groanings*; for, whatever his grief was, his calamity was *heavier than the sand of the sea*; it was complicated, it was aggravated, every grievance weighty, and all together numerous as the sand: Therefore (says he) *my words are swallowed up*; that is, "Therefore you must excuse both the brokenness and the bitterness of my expression; do not think it strange if my speech be not so fine and polite as that of an eloquent orator, or so grave and regular as that of a morose philosopher; no, in these circumstances I can pretend neither to the one nor to the other; my words are, as I say, quite swallowed up."

Now, 1. He hereby complains of it as his unhappiness, that his friends undertook to administer spiritual physic to him, before they thoroughly understood his case, and knew the worst of it. It is seldom that those who are at ease themselves, rightly weigh the afflictions of the afflicted; every one feels most from his own burthen, few feel from other people's. 2. He excuses the passionate expressions he had used when he cursed his day. Though he could not himself justify all he had said, yet he thought his friends should not thus violently condemn it, for really the case was extraordinary; and that might be connived at in such a man of sorrows as he now was, which, in any common grief, would by no means be allowed of. 3. He bespeaks the charitable and compassionate sympathy of his friends with him, and hopes, by representing the greatness of his calamity, to bring them to a better temper toward him. To those that are joined, it is some ease to be pitted.

II. He complains of the trouble and terror of mind he was in, as the sorest part of his calamity, *v. 4.* Herein he was a type of Christ, who, in his sufferings, complained most of the sufferings of his soul; *Now is my soul troubled*, John 12. 27. *My soul is exceeding sorrowful*, Matth. 26. 37, 38. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Matth. 27. 46. Poor Job sadly complains here, 1. Of what he feared: *The arrows of the Almighty are within me*. It was not so much the troubles themselves he was under that put him into this confusion, his poverty, disgrace, and bodily pain; that which cut him to the heart, and put him into this agitation, was, to think that the God he loved, and served, had brought all this upon him, and laid him under these marks of his displeasure. Note, Trouble of mind is the sorest trouble: *a wounded spirit who can bear?* Whatever burthen of affliction, in body or estate, God is pleased to lay upon us, we may well afford to submit to it as long as he continues to us the use of our reason, and the peace of our consciences; but if, in either of these, we be disturbed, our case is sad indeed, and very pitiable. The way to prevent God's fiery darts of trouble, is, with the shield of faith, to quench Satan's fiery darts of temptation. Observe, He calls them *the arrows of the Almighty*; for it is an instance of the power of God above that of any man, that he can with his arrows reach the soul. He that made it can make his sword to approach to it. The poison or heat of these arrows is said to drink up his spirit, because it disturbed his reason, shook his resolution, exhausted his vigour, and threatened his life; and therefore his passionate expressions, though they could not be justified, yet might be excused. 2. Of what he feared. He saw himself charged by the terrors of God, as by an army set in battle-array, and surrounded by them. God, by his terrors, fought against him: as he had no comfort when he retired inward into his own bosom, so he had none when he looked upward toward Heaven. He that used to be encouraged with the consolations of God, not only wanted those, but was amazed with the terrors of God.

III. He reflects upon his friends for their severe censures of his complaints, and their unskilful management of his case. 1. Their reproofs were causeless. He complained, it is true, now that he was in this affliction, but he never used to complain, as those do who are of a fretful unquiet spirit, when he was in prosperity: he did not *bray when he had grass*, nor *low over his fodder*, *v. 5.* but now, that he was utterly deprived of all his comforts, he must

be a stock or a stone, and not have the sense of an ox or a wild ass, if he did not give some vent to his grief. He was forced to eat unsavoury meats, and was so poor, that he had not a grain of salt, wherewith to relish them, nor to give a little taste to the white of an egg, which was now the choicest dish he had at his table, *v. 6.* Even that food which once he would have scorned to touch, now he was glad of, and it was his sorrowful meat, *v. 7.* Note, It is wisdom not to use ourselves or our children to be nice and dainty about meat and drink, because we know not how we or they may be reduced, nor how that which we now disdain may be made acceptable by necessity. 2. Their comforts were sapless and insipid; so some understand, *v. 6, 7.* He complains he had nothing now offered him for his relief, that was proper for him; no cordial, nothing to revive and cheer his spirits; what they had afforded, was in itself as tasteless as the white of an egg, and, when applied to him, as loathsome and burthensome as the most sorrowful meat. I am sorry he should say thus of what Eliphaz had excellently well said, *ch. 5. 8.* &c. But peevish spirits are too apt thus to abuse their comforters.

8. Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! 9. Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off! 10. Then should I yet have comfort; yea, I would harden myself in sorrow: let him not spare; for I have not concealed the words of the Holy One. 11. What is my strength, that I should hope? And what is mine end, that I should prolong my life? 12. Is my strength the strength of stones or is my flesh of brass? 13. Is not my help in me? and is wisdom driven quite from me?

Ungoverned passion often grows more violent when it meets with some rebuke and check; the troubled sea rages most when it dashes against a rock. Job had been courting death, as that which would be the happy period of his miseries, *ch. 3.* For this, Eliphaz had gravely reproved him; but he, instead of unsaying it, says it here again with more vehemence than before; it is as ill said as almost any thing we meet with in all his discourses, and is recorded for our admonition, not our imitation.

I. He is still most passionately desirous to die, as if it were not possible that he should ever see good days again in this world, or that, by the exercise of grace and devotion, he might make even these days of affliction good days: he could see no end of his trouble but death, and had not patience to wait the time appointed for that. He has a request to make, there is a thing he longs for; (*v. 8.*) and what is that? One would think it should be, *That it would please God to deliver me*, and restore me to my prosperity again; no, *That it would please God to destroy me*, *v. 9.* "As once he let loose his hand to make me poor, and then to make me sick, let him loose it once more to put an end to my life. Let him give the fatal stroke; it shall be to me the *coup de grace—the stroke of favour*," as, in France, they call the last blow which despatches them that are broken on the wheel. There was a time when *destruction from the Almighty was a terror to Job*; (*ch. 31. 23.*) yet now he courts the destruction of the flesh, but in hopes that the spirit should be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Observe, Though Job was extremely desirous of death, and very angry at its delays, yet he did not offer to destroy himself, nor to take away his own life; only he begged that it would *please God to destroy him*. Seneca's morals, which recommend self-murder as the lawful redress of insupportable grievances, were not then known, nor will ever be entertained by any that have the least regard to the law of God and nature. How uneasy soever the soul's confinement in the body may be, it must by no means break prison, but wait for a fair discharge.

II. He puts this desire into a prayer, that God would grant him

this request, that it would please God to do this for him. It was his sin, so passionately to desire the hastening of his own death, and offering up that desire to God made it no better; nay, what looked ill in his wish, looked worse in his prayer; for we ought not to ask any thing of God but what we can ask in faith, and we cannot ask any thing in faith, but what is agreeable to the will of God. Passionate prayers are the worst of passionate expressions; for we should lift up pure hands without wrath.

III. He promises himself effectual relief, and the redress of all his grievances, by the stroke of death; (v. 10.) "*Then should I yet have comfort, which now I have not, nor ever expect till then.*" See, 1. The vanity of human life; so uncertain a good is it, that it often proves men's greatest burthen, and nothing is so desirable as to get clear of it. Let grace make us willing to part with it, whenever God calls; for it may so happen, that even sense may make us desirous to part with it before he calls. 2. The hope which the righteous have in their death. If Job had not had a good conscience, he could not have spoken with this assurance of comfort on the other side death, that circumstance which made all the difference between the rich man and Lazarus; *Now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

IV. He challenges death to do its worst. If he could not die without the dreadful prefaces of bitter pains and agonies, and strong convulsions; if he must be racked before he be executed, yet, in prospect of dying at last, he would make nothing of dying pangs. "*I would harden myself in sorrow, would open my breast to receive death's darts, and not shrink from them; let him not spare; I desire no mitigation of that pain which will put a happy period to all my pains. Rather than not die, let me die so as to feel myself die.*" These are passionate words, which might better have been spared. We should soften ourselves in sorrow, that we may receive the good impressions of it, and, by the sadness of the countenance, our hearts, being made tender, may be made better; but, if we harden ourselves, we provoke God to proceed in his controversy; *for when he judgeth, he will overcome.* It is great presumption to dare the Almighty, and to say, *Let him not spare; for, Are we stronger than he?* 1 Cor. 10. 22. We are much indebted to sparing mercy; it is bad indeed with us when we are weary of that. Let us rather say, with David, *O spare me a little.*

V. He grounds his comfort upon the testimony of his conscience for him, that he had been faithful and firm to his profession of religion, and in some degrees useful and serviceable to the glory of God in his generation; *I have not concealed the words of the Holy One.* Observe, 1. Job had the words of the Holy One committed to him. The people of God were, at that time, blessed with divine revelation. 2. It was his comfort, that he had not concealed them, had not received the grace of God therein in vain. (1.) He had not kept them from himself, but had given them full scope to operate upon him, and in every thing to guide and govern him. He had not stifled his convictions, *imprisoned the truth in unrighteousness*, nor done any thing to hinder the digestion of this spiritual food, and the operation of this spiritual physic. Let us never conceal God's word from ourselves, but always receive it in the light of it. (2.) He had not kept them to himself, but had been ready, on all occasions, to communicate his knowledge for the good of others; was never ashamed or afraid to own the word of God to be his rule, nor remiss in his endeavours to bring others into an acquaintance with it. Note, Those, and those only, may promise themselves comfort in death, who are good, and do good, while they live.

VI. He justifies himself in this extreme desire of death, from the deplorable condition he was now in, v. 11, 12. Eliphaz, in the close of his discourse, had put him in hopes that he should yet see a good issue of his troubles; but poor Job puts these cordials away from him, refuses to be comforted, abandons himself to despair, and very ingeniously, yet perversely, argues against the encouragements that were given him. Disconsolate spirits will reason strangely against themselves. In answer to the pleasing prospects Eliphaz had flattered him with, he here intimates, 1. That he had no reason to expect any such thing: "*What is my strength, that I should hope?*" You see how I am weakened and brought low,

how unable I am to grapple with my distempers; and therefore, what reason have I to hope that I should out-live them, and see better days? *Is my strength the strength of stones? Are my muscles brass, and sinews steel?* No, they are not, and therefore I cannot hold out always in this pain and misery, but must needs sink under the load. Had I strength to grapple with my distemper, I might hope to look through it; but, alas! I have not; "*the weakening of my strength in the way*" will certainly be the *shortening of my days*, Ps. 102. 23. Note, All things considered, we have no reason to count upon the long continuance of life in this world. *What is our strength?* It is depending strength; we have no more strength than God gives us, for in him we live and move: it is decaying strength; we are daily spending the stock, and by degrees it will be exhausted. It is disproportionable to the encounters we may meet with; what is our strength to be depended upon, when two or three days' sickness will make us weak as water? Instead of expecting a long life, we have reason to wonder that we have lived hitherto, and to feel that we are hastening off apace. 2. That he had no reason to desire any such thing; "*What is my end, that I should desire to prolong my life?*" What comfort can I promise myself in life, comparable to the comfort I promise myself in death? Note, Those who, through grace, are ready for another world, cannot see much to invite their stay in this world, or to make them fond of it. That, if it be God's will, we may do him more service, and may get to be fitter and ripe for heaven, is an end for which we may wish the prolonging of life, in subserviency to our chief end; but, otherwise, what can we propose to ourselves in desiring to tarry here? The longer life is, the more grievous will its burthens be, (Ecc. 12. 1.) and the longer life is, the less pleasant will be its delights, 2 Sam. 19. 34, 35. We have already seen the best of this world, but we are not sure that that we have seen the worst of it.

VII. He obviates the suspicion of his being delirious; (v. 13.) *Is not my help in me?* that is, "Have I not the use of my reason, with which, I thank God, I can help myself, though you do not help me? Do you think wisdom is driven quite from me, and that I am gone distracted? No, I am not mad, most noble Eliphaz, but *speak the words of truth and soberness.*" Note, Those who have grace in them, who have the evidence of it, and have it in exercise, have wisdom in them, which will be their help in the worst of times. *Sat lucis intus—They have light within.*

14. To him that is afflicted pity *should be shewed* from his friend; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty. 15. My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, *and* as the stream of brooks they pass away; 16. Which are blackish by reason of the ice, *and* wherein the snow is hid: 17. What time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place. 18. The paths of their way are turned aside; they go to nothing, and perish. 19. The troops of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them. 20. They were confounded because they had hoped; they came thither, and were ashamed. 21. For now ye are nothing; ye see *my* casting down, and are afraid.

Eliphaz had been very severe in his censures of Job; and his companions, though as yet they had said little, yet had intimated their concurrence with him: their unkindness therein poor Job here complains of, as an aggravation of his calamity, and a further excuse of his desire to die; for what satisfaction could he ever expect in this world, when those that should be his comforters, thus proved his tormentors?

1. He shews what reason he had to expect kindness from them. His expectation was grounded upon the common principles of humanity; (v. 14.) "To him that is afflicted, and that is wasting

and melting under his affliction, pity should be shewed from his friend; and he that does not shew that pity, *forsakes the fear of the Almighty.* Note, 1. Compassion is a debt owing to those that are in affliction. The least which those that are at ease can do for those that are pained and in anguish, is, to pity them, to manifest the sincerity of a tender concern for them, and to sympathize with them; to take cognizance of their case, inquire into their grievances, hear their complaints, and mingle tears with theirs; to comfort them, and do all we can to help and relieve them: this well becomes the members of the same body, who should feel from the grievances of their fellow-members, not knowing how soon the same may be their own. 2. Inhumanity is impiety and irreligion. *He that withholdeth compassion from his friend, forsakes the fear of the Almighty.* So the Chaldee. *How dwells the love of God in that man?* 1 John, 3. 17. Surely those have no fear of the rod of God upon themselves, who have no compassion for those that feel the smart of it. See Jam. 1. 27. 3. Troubles are the trials of friendship. When a man is afflicted, he will see who are his friends indeed, and who are but pretenders; for a brother is born for adversity, Prov. 17. 17.—18. 24.

II. He shews how wretchedly he was disappointed in his expectations from them; (v. 15.) "*My brethren, who should have helped me, have dealt deceitfully as a brook.*" They came by appointment, with a great deal of ceremony, to mourn with him, and to comfort him; (ch. 2. 11.) and some extraordinary things were expected from such great men, such good men, such wise, learned, knowing, men, and Job's particular friends; none questioned but that the drift of their discourses would be to comfort Job with the remembrance of his former piety, the assurance of God's favour to him, and the prospect of a glorious issue; but, instead of this, they most barbarously fall upon him with their reproaches and censures, condemn him as a hypocrite, insult over his calamities, and pour vinegar, instead of oil, into his wounds, and thus they dealt deceitfully with him. Note, 1. It is fraud and deceit not only to violate our engagements to our friends, but to frustrate their just expectations from us, especially the expectations we have raised. 2. It is our wisdom to cease from man; we cannot expect too little from the creature, nor too much from the Creator. It is no new thing even for brethren to *deal deceitfully*; (Jer. 9. 4, 5. Mic. 7. 5.) let us therefore put our confidence in the Rock of ages, not in broken reeds; in the Fountain of life, not in broken cisterns. God will out do our hopes as much as men come short of them.

This disappointment which he met with, he here illustrates by the failing of brooks in summer.

(1.) The similitude is very elegant, v. 15. .20. [1.] Their pretensions are fitly compared to the great shew which the brooks make, when they are swelled with the waters of a land-flood, by the melting of the ice and snow, which makes them blackish or muddy, v. 16. [2.] His expectations from them, which their coming so solemnly to comfort him had raised, he compares to the expectation which the weary thirsty travellers have of finding water in the summer there, where they have often seen it in great abundance in the winter, v. 19. *The troops of Tema and Sheba*, the caravans of the merchants of those countries, whose road lay through the deserts of Arabia, looked and waited for a supply of water from those brooks: "Hard by here," says one, "A little further," says another, "when I last travelled this way, there was water enough, we shall have that to refresh us." Where we have met with relief and comfort, we are apt to expect it again; and yet it does not follow: for, [3.] The disappointment of his expectation is here compared to the confusion which seizes the poor travellers, when they find heaps of sand where they expected floods of water. In the winter, when they were not thirsty, there was water enough; every one will applaud and admire those that are full and in prosperity: but, in the heat of summer, when they needed water, then it failed them, it was consumed, (v. 17.) it was turned aside, v. 18. When those who are rich and high, are sunk and impoverished, and stand in need of comfort, then those who before gathered about them, stand aloof from them, who before recommended them, are forward to run them down: thus they who

raise their expectations high from the creature, will find it fail them then when it should help them; whereas they who make God their confidence, have help *in the time of need*, Heb. 4. 16. They who make gold their hope, sooner or later will be ashamed of it, and of their confidence in it; (Ezek. 7. 19.) and the greater their confidence was, the greater their shame will be; *They were confounded because they had hoped*, v. 20. We prepare confusion for ourselves by our vain hopes: the reeds break under us, because we lean upon them. If we build a house upon the sand, we shall certainly be confounded, for it will fall in the storm, and we must thank ourselves for being such fools to expect it would stand. We are not deceived unless we deceive ourselves.

(2.) The application is very close; (v. 21.) *For now ye are nothing.* They seemed to be somewhat, but in conference they added nothing to him. Allude to Gal. 2. 6. He was never the wiser, never the better, for the visit they made him. Note, Whatever complacency we may take, or whatever confidence we may put, in creatures, how great soever they may seem, and how dear soever they may be, to us, one time or other we shall say of them, *Now ye are nothing.* When Job was in prosperity, his friends were something to him, he took complacency in them and their society; but "*Now ye are nothing*, now I can find no comfort but in God." It were well for us, if we had always such convictions of the vanity of the creature, and its insufficiency to make us happy, as we have sometimes had, or shall have, on a sick-bed, a death-bed, or in trouble of conscience; "*Now ye are nothing.* You are not what you have been, what you should be, what you pretend to be, what I thought you would have been; for you see my casting down, and are afraid. When you saw me in my elevation, you caressed me; but, now that you see me in my dejection, you are shy of me, are afraid of shewing yourselves kind, lest I should take boldness thence, to beg something of you, or to borrow;" (compare v. 22.) "you are afraid, lest, if you own me, you should be obliged to keep me." Perhaps they were afraid of catching his distemper, or of coming within smell of the noisomeness of it. It is not good, either out of pride or niceness, for love of our purses, or of our bodies, to be shy of those in distress, and afraid of coming near them. Their case may soon be our own.

22. Did I say, Bring unto me? or, Give a reward for me of your substance? 23. Or, Deliver me from the enemy's hand? or, Redeem me from the hand of the mighty? 24. Teach me, and I will hold my tongue: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred. 25. How forcible are right words! But what doth your arguing reprove? 26. Do ye imagine to reprove words, and the speeches of one that is desperate, *which are as wind*? 27. Yea, ye overwhelm the fatherless, and ye dig a *pit* for your friend. 28. Now therefore be content, look upon me; for *it is* evident unto you if I lie. 29. Return, I pray you, let it not be iniquity; yea, return again, my righteousness *is* in it. 30. Is there iniquity in my tongue? Cannot my taste discern perverse things?

Poor Job goes on here to upbraid his friends with their unkindness, and the hard usage they gave him. He here appeals to themselves concerning several things which tended both to justify him and condemn them. If they would but think impartially, and speak as they thought, they could not but own,

I. That though he was necessitous, yet he was not craving, nor burthensome to his friends. Those that are so, whose troubles serve them to beg by, are commonly less pitied than the silent poor. Job would be glad to see his friends, but he did not say, *Bring unto me*, (v. 22.) or, *Deliver me*, v. 23. He did not desire to put them to any expense; did not urge his friends, either, 1. To make a collec-

tion for him, to set him up again in the world, though he could plead that his losses came upon him by the hand of God, and not by any fault or folly of his own; that he was utterly ruined and impoverished; that he had lived in good condition, and that, when he had wherewithal, he was charitable, and ready to help those that were in distress; that his friends were rich, and able to help him; yet he did not say, *Give me of your substance*. Note, A good man, when troubled himself, is afraid of being troublesome to his friends. Or, 2. To raise the country for him, to help him to recover his cattle out of the hands of the Sabeans and Chaldeans, or to make reprisals upon them; "Did I send for you to *deliver me out of the hand of the mighty*? No, I never expected you should either expose yourselves to any danger, or put yourselves to any charge, upon my account; I will rather sit down content under my affliction, and make the best of it, than sponge upon my friends." St. Paul worked with his hands, that he might not be burthensome to any. Job's not asking their help, did not excuse them from offering it when he needed it, and it was in the power of their hands to give it; but it much aggravated their unkindness, when he desired no more from them than a good look, and a good word, and yet could not obtain them. It often happens that from man, even when we expect little, we have less, but from God, even when we expect much, we have more, Eph. 3. 20.

II. That though he differed in opinion from them, yet he was not obstinate, but ready to yield to conviction, and to strike sail to truth, as soon as ever it was made to appear to him that he was in an error; (v. 24, 25.) "If, instead of invidious reflections and uncharitable insinuations, you will give me plain instructions and solid arguments, which shall carry their own evidence along with them, I am ready to acknowledge my error, and own myself in a fault; *Teach me, and I will hold my tongue*, for I have often found, with pleasure and wonder, *how forcible right words are*: but the method you take will never make proselytes; *what doth your arguing reprove*? Your hypothesis is false, your surmises are groundless, your management weak, and your application peevish and uncharitable." Note, 1. Fair reasoning has a commanding power, and it is a wonder if men are not conquered by it; but railing and foul language is impotent and foolish, and it is no wonder if men are exasperated and hardened by it. 2. It is the undoubted character of every honest man, that he is truly desirous to have his mistakes rectified, and to be made to understand wherein he has erred; and that right words, when they appear to him to be so, though contrary to his former sentiments, are both forcible and acceptable.

III. That though he had been indeed in a fault, yet they ought not to have given him such hard usage; (v. 26, 27.) "*Do you imagine*, or contrive with a great deal of art," (for so the word signifies,) "*to reprove words*, some passionate expressions of mine in this desperate condition, as if they were certain indications of reigning impiety and atheism? A little candour and charity would have served to excuse them, and to put a better construction upon them. Shall a man's spiritual state be judged of by some rash and hasty words, which a surprising trouble extorts from him? Is it fair, Is it kind, Is it just, to criticise in such a case? Would you yourselves be served thus?" Two things aggravated their unkind treatment of him. 1. That they took advantage of his weakness, and the helpless condition he was in; *Ye overwhelm the fatherless*, a proverbial expression, bespeaking that which is most barbarous and inhuman. "The fatherless cannot secure themselves from insults; which emboldens men of base and sordid spirits to insult them and trample upon them; and you do so by me." Job, being a childless father, thought himself as much exposed to injury as a fatherless child, (Ps. 127. 5.) and had reason to take it ill at those who, therefore, triumphed over him. Let those, who overwhelm and overpower them that upon any account may be looked upon as fatherless, know that therein they not only put off the compassions of man, but fight against the compassions of God, who is, and will be, a Father of the fatherless, and a Helper of the helpless. 2. That they made pretence of kindness; "*You dig a pit for your friend*; not only you are unkind to me, who am your friend, but, under colour of friend-

ship, you insnare me." When they came to see and sit with him, he thought he might speak his mind freely to them, and that the more bitter his complaints to them were, the more they would have endeavoured to comfort him. This made him take a greater liberty than otherwise he would have done. David, though he smothered his resentments when the wicked were before him, it is likely, would have given vent to them, if none had been by but friends, Ps. 39. 1. But this freedom of speech, which their professions of concern for him made him use, had exposed him to their censures, and so they might be said to dig a pit for him. Thus, when our hearts are hot within us, what is ill done we are apt to misrepresent, as if done designedly.

IV. That though he had let fall some passionate expressions, yet, in the main, he was in the right, and that his afflictions, though very extraordinary, did not prove him to be a hypocrite, or wicked man. His righteousness he holds fast, and will not let it go.

For the evincing of it, he here appeals,

1. To what they saw in him; (v. 28.) "*Be content*, and *look upon me*; what do you see in me, that bespeaks me either a mad man, or a wicked man? Nay, look in my face, and you may discern there the indications of a patient and submissive spirit, for all this. Let the shew of my countenance witness for me, that though I have cursed my day, I do not curse my God." Or rather, "Look upon my ulcers and sore boils, and by them it will be evident to you that I do not lie;" that is, "that I do not complain without cause. Let your own eyes convince you that my condition is very sad, and that I do not quarrel with God, by making it worse than it is."

2. To what they heard from him; (v. 30.) "You hear what I have to say; *Is there iniquity in my tongue*? That iniquity that you charge me with? Have I blasphemed God, or renounced him? Are not my present arguings right? Do not you perceive, by what I say, that I can discern perverse things? I can discover your fallacies and mistakes, and if I were myself in an error, I could perceive it. Whatever you think of me, I know what I say."

3. To their own second and sober thoughts; (v. 29.) "*Return, I pray you*, consider the thing over again, without prejudice and partiality, and let not the result be iniquity, let it not be an unrighteous sentence; and you will find *my righteousness is in it*," that is, "I am in the right in this matter; and though I cannot keep my temper as I should, I keep my integrity, and have not said, or done, or suffered, anything which will prove me other than an honest man." A just cause desires nothing more than a just hearing, and, if need be, a re-hearing.

CHAP. VII.

Job, in this chapter, goes on to express the bitter sense he had of his calamities, and to justify himself in his desire of death. 1. He complains to himself and his friends of his troubles, and the constant agitation he was in, v. 1..6. 11. He turns to God, and expostulates with him, v. 7, to the end. In which, 1. He pleads the final period which death puts to our present state, v. 7..10. 2. He passionately complains of the miserable condition he was now in, v. 11..16. 3. He wonders that God will thus contend with him, and begs for the pardon of his sins, and a speedy release out of his miseries, v. 17..21. It is hard to methodise the speeches of one who owned himself almost desperate, ch. 6. 26.

1. *IS there* not an appointed time to man upon earth? *Are not* his days also like the days of an hireling? 2. As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work: 3. So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. 4. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? And I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. 5. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome. 6. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope.

terrify those whom it is out of his reach to destroy; but Job looked up to God, who permitted Satan to do this, (*Thou scarest me,*) and mistook Satan's representations for the *terrors of God setting themselves in array against him*. We have reason to pray to God that our dreams may neither defile nor disquiet us, neither tempt us to sin, nor torment us with fear; that He who keeps Israel, and neither slumbers nor sleeps, may keep us when we slumber and sleep; that the Devil may not then do us a mischief, either as an insinuating serpent, or as a roaring lion; and to bless God if we lie down and our sleep is sweet, and we are not thus scared.

2. He covets to rest in his grave, that bed where there are no tossings to and fro, nor any frightful dreams, *v. 15, 16.* (1.) He was sick of life, and hated the thoughts of it; "I loathe it, I have had enough of it, I would not live alway: not only not live alway in this condition, in pain and misery, but not live alway in the most easy and prosperous condition, to be continually in danger of being thus reduced: *my days are vanity* at the best, empty of solid comfort, exposed to real griefs; and I would not be forever tied to such uncertainty." Note, A good man would not (if he might) live always in this world, no, not though it smile upon him, because it is a world of sin and temptation, and he has a better world in prospect. (2.) He was fond of death, and pleased himself with the thoughts of it: his soul (his judgment, he thought, but really it was his passion) chose strangling and death rather; any death rather than such a life as this. Doubtless, this was Job's infirmity; for though a good man would not wish to live alway in this world, and would choose strangling and death rather than sin, as the martyrs did, yet he will be content to live as long as pleases God, not choose them rather than life, because life is our opportunity of glorifying God, and getting ready for heaven.

17. What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? 18. And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment? 19. How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle? 20. I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou Preserver of men? Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burthen to myself? 21. And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? For now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.

Job here reasons with God,

I. Concerning his dealings with man in general; (*v. 17, 18.*) *What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him?* This may be looked upon either, 1. As a passionate reflection upon the proceedings of divine justice; as if the great God did diminish and disparage himself, in contending with man. Great men think it below them to take cognizance of those who are much their inferiors, so far as to reprove and correct their follies and indecencies; why then does God magnify man, by visiting him, and trying him, and making so much ado about him? Why will he thus pour all his forces upon one that is such an unequal match for him? Why will he visit him with afflictions, which, like a quotidian ague, return as duly and constantly as the morning-light, and try, every moment, what he can bear? We mistake God, and the nature of his providence, if we think it any lessening to him, to take notice of the meanest of his creatures. Or, 2. As a pious admiration of the condescensions of divine grace, like that, *Ps. 8. 4.—144. 3.* He owns God's favour to man in general, even then when he complains of his own particular troubles. "What is man, miserable man, a poor, mean, weak creature, that Thou, the great and glorious God, shouldest deal with him as thou dost? What is man," (1.) "That thou shouldest put such honour upon him; shouldest magnify him, by taking him into covenant and communion with thyself?" (2.) "That thou shouldest concern thyself so much about him, shouldest set thy

heart upon him, as dear to thee, and one thou hast a kindness for?" (3.) "That thou shouldest visit him with thy compassions every morning, as we daily visit a particular friend, or as the physician visits his patients every morning, to help them?" (4.) "That thou shouldest try him, shouldest feel his pulse, and observe his looks, every moment, as in care about him, and jealous over him?" That such a worm of the earth as man is, should be the darling and favourite of Heaven, is what we have reason for ever to admire.

II. Concerning his dealings with him in particular. Observe,

1. The complaint he makes of his afflictions, which he here aggravates, and (as we are all too apt to do) makes the worst of, in three expressions. (1.) That he was the butt to God's arrows; "Thou hast set me as a mark against thee," *v. 20.* "My case is singular, and none is shot at so as I am." (2.) That he was a burthen to himself, ready to sink under the load of his own life. How much delight soever we take in ourselves, God can, when he pleases, make us burthens to ourselves. What comfort can we take in ourselves, if God appear against us as an Enemy, and we have not comfort in him? (3.) That he had no intermission of his griefs; (*v. 19.*) "How long will it be ere thou cause thy rod to depart from me, or abate the rigour of the correction, at least, for so long as that I may swallow down my spittle?" It should seem, Job's distemper lay much in his throat, and almost choked him, so that he could not swallow his spittle. He complains, (*ch. 30. 18.*) that it bound him about like the collar of his coat. "Lord," says he, "wilt not thou give me some respite, some breathing time?" *ch. 9. 13.*

2. The concern he is in about his sins. The best men have sin to complain of, and the better they are, the more they will complain of it.

(1.) He ingenuously owns himself guilty before God; *I have sinned.* God had said of him, that he was a *perfect and an upright man*; yet he says of himself, *I have sinned.* Those may be upright who yet are not sinless; and those who are sincerely penitent are accepted, through a Mediator, as evangelically perfect. Job maintained, against his friends, that he was not a hypocrite, not a wicked man; and yet owns to his God, that he had sinned. If we have been kept from gross acts of sin, it does not, therefore, follow that we are innocent. The best must acknowledge, before God, that they have sinned. His calling God the *Observer*, or *Preserver*, of men, may be looked upon as designed for an aggravation of his sin; "Though God has had his eye upon me, his eye upon me for good, yet I have sinned against him." When we are in affliction, it is seasonable to confess sin, as the procuring cause of our affliction. Penitent confessions would drown and silence passionate complaints.

(2.) He seriously inquires how he might make his peace with God: "What shall I do unto thee, having done so much against thee?" Are we convinced that we have sinned, and are we brought to own it? We cannot but conclude that something must be done, to prevent the fatal consequences of it. The matter must not rest as it is, but some course must be taken, to undo what has been ill-done. And, if we are truly sensible of the danger we have run ourselves into, we shall be willing to do anything; to take a pardon upon any terms; and therefore shall be *inquisitive as to what we shall do*, (*Mic. 6. 6, 7.*) what we shall do to God, not to satisfy the demands of his justice, (that is done only by the Mediator,) but to qualify ourselves for the tokens of his favour, according to the tenor of the gospel-covenant. In making this inquiry, it is good to eye God as the Preserver or Saviour of men, not the Destroyer. In our repentance, we must keep up good thoughts of God, as one that delights not in the ruin of his creatures, but would rather they should return and live. "Thou art the Saviour of men; be my Saviour, for I cast myself upon thy mercy."

(3.) He earnestly begs for the forgiveness of his sins, *v. 21.* The heat of his spirit, as, on the one hand, it made his complaints the more bitter, so, on the other hand, it made his prayers the more lively and importunate; as here, "Why dost thou not pardon my transgression? Art not thou a God of infinite mercy, that art ready to forgive? Hast not thou wrought repentance in me? Why then dost thou not give me the pardon of my sin, and make

me to hear the voice of that joy and gladness?" Surely he means more than barely the removing of his outward trouble, and is herein earnest for the return of God's favour, which he complained of the want of, *ch. 6. 4.* "Lord, pardon my sins, and give me the comfort of that pardon, and then I can easily bear my afflictions," *Matth. 9. 2.* *Isa. 33. 24.* When the mercy of God pardons the transgression that is committed by us, the grace of God takes away the iniquity that reigns in us. Wherever God removes the guilt of sin, he breaks the power of sin.

(4.) To enforce his prayer for pardon, he pleads the prospect he had of dying quickly; *For now shall I sleep in the dust*; death will lay us in the dust, will lay us to sleep there, and perhaps now in a little time. Job had been complaining of restless nights, and that sleep departed from his eyes; (*v. 3, 4, 13, 14.*) but those who cannot sleep in a bed of down, will shortly sleep in a bed of dust, and not be scared with dreams, nor tossed to and fro. "*Thou shalt seek me in the morning*, to shew me favour, but *I shall not be*, it will be too late then. If my sins be not pardoned while I live, I am lost and undone for ever." Note, The consideration of this, that we must shortly die, and perhaps may die suddenly, should make us all very solicitous to get our sins pardoned, and our iniquity taken away.

CHAP. VIII.

Job's friends are like Job's messengers; those followed one another close with evil tidings, these with harsh censures; both, unawares, served Satan's design; those to drive him from his integrity, these to drive him from the comfort it. Eliphaz did not reply to what Job had said in answer to him, but left it to Bildad, whom he knew to be of the same mind with himself in this affair. Those are not the wisest of the company, but the weakest rather, who cooet to have all the talk. Let others speak in their turn, and let the first keep silence, 1 Cor. 11. 30, 31. Eliphaz had undertaken to shew, that, because Job was sorely afflicted, he was certainly a wicked man; Bildad is much of the same mind, and will conclude Job a wicked man, unless God do speedily appear for his relief. In this chapter, he endeavours to convince Job, I. That he had spoken too passionately, v. 2. II. That he and his children had suffered justly, v. 3, 1. III. That, if he were a true penitent, God would soon turn his captivity, v. 5. .7. IV. That it was a usual thing for Providence to extinguish the joys and hopes of wicked men, as his were extinguished; and therefore that they had reason to suspect him for a hypocrite, v. 8. .19. V. That they should be abundantly confirmed in their suspicion, unless God did speedily appear for his relief, v. 20. .22.

1. **T**HEN answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, 2. How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind? 3. Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice? 4. If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression; 5. If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes, and make thy supplication to the Almighty; 6. If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous. 7. Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.

Here,

1. Bildad reproves Job for what he had said; (*v. 2.*) checks his passion, but perhaps, (as is too common,) with greater passion. We thought Job spake a great deal of good sense, and much to the purpose, and that he had reason and right on his side; but Bildad, like an eager angry disputant, turns it all off with this, *How long wilt thou speak these things?* taking it for granted that Eliphaz had said enough to silence him, and that therefore all he said was impertinent. Thus (as Caryl observes) reproofs are often grounded upon mistakes. Men's meaning is not taken aright, and then they are gravely rebuked, as if they were evil-doers. Bildad compares Job's discourse to a strong wind. Job had

excused himself with this, that *his speeches* were but *as wind*, (*ch. 6. 26.*) and therefore they should not make such ado about them; "Yea, but" (says Bildad) "they are as a strong wind, blustering and threatening, boisterous and dangerous, and therefore we are concerned to fence against them."

II. He justifies God in what he had done. This he had no occasion to do at this time, for Job did not condemn God, as he would have it thought he did; and this he might have done, without reflecting upon Job's children, as he does here. Could not he be an advocate for God, but he must be an accuser of the brethren?

1. He is right in general, that *God doth not pervert judgment*, nor ever go contrary to any settled rule of justice, *v. 3.* Far be it from him that he should, and from us that we should suspect him. He never oppresses the innocent, nor lays more load on the guilty than they deserve. He is God, the Judge; and shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? *Gen. 18. 25.* If there should be unrighteousness with God, *how shall he judge the world?* *Rom. 3. 5, 6.* He is Almighty, Shaddai, All-sufficient. Men pervert justice, sometimes, for fear of the power of others; but God is Almighty, and stands in awe of none. Men have respect to the favour of others; but God is all-sufficient, and cannot be benefited by the favour of any. It is man's weakness and impotency, that he often is unjust; it is God's omnipotence, that he cannot be so.

2. Yet he is not fair and candid in the application: he takes it for granted that Job's children (the death of whom was one of the greatest of his afflictions) had been guilty of some notorious wickedness, and that the unhappy circumstances of their death were sufficient evidence that they were sinners above all the children of the east, *v. 4.* Job readily owned that God did not pervert judgment; and yet it did not therefore follow either that his children were cast-aways, or that they died for some great transgression. It is true that we and our children have sinned against God, and we ought to justify him in all he brings upon us and our's; but extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sins, but sometimes the trial of extraordinary graces; and, in our judgment of another's case, (unless the contrary appears,) we ought to take the more favourable side, as our Saviour directs, *Luke, 13. 2, 4.* Here Bildad missed it.

III. He puts Job in hope, that, if he were indeed upright, as he said he was, he should yet see a good issue of his present troubles; "*Although thy children have sinned against him, and are cast away in their transgression*, they have died in their own sin, yet, if thou be pure and upright thyself, and, as an evidence of that, wilt now seek unto God, and submit to him, all shall be well yet," *v. 5. .7.* This may be taken two ways: either,

1. As designed to prove Job a hypocrite, and a wicked man, though not by the greatness, yet by the continuance, of his afflictions. "When thou wast impoverished, and thy children killed, if thou hadst been pure and upright, and approved thyself so in the trial, God would, before now, have returned in mercy to thee, and comforted thee according to the time of thine affliction; but because he does not so, we have reason to conclude thou art not so pure and upright as thou pretendest to be. If thou hadst conducted thyself well under the former affliction, thou hadst not been struck with the latter." Herein Bildad was not in the right; for a good man may be afflicted for his trial, not only very sorely, but very long, and yet, if for life, it is, in comparison with eternity, but for a moment. But, since Bildad put it to this issue, God was pleased to join issue with him, and proved his servant Job an honest man, by Bildad's own argument; for, soon after, he blessed his latter end more than his beginning. Or,

2. As designed to direct and encourage Job, that he might not thus run himself into despair, and give up all for gone; yet there might be hope, if he would take the right course. I am apt to think Bildad here intended to condemn Job, yet would be thought to counsel and comfort him. (1.) He gives him good counsel, yet perhaps not expecting he would take it; the same that Eliphaz had given him, (*ch. 5. 3.*) to seek unto God, and that betimes, that is, speedily and seriously, and not to be dilatory and

trifling in his return and repentance. He advises him not to complain, but to petition, and to make his supplication to the Almighty with humility and faith; and to see that there was (what he feared had hitherto been wanting) sincerity in his heart, "Thou must be pure and upright;" and honesty in his house, "That must be the habitation of thy righteousness, and not filled with ill-gotten goods; else God will not hear thy prayers," Ps. 66. 18. It is only the prayer of the upright that is the acceptable and prevailing prayer, Prov. 15. 8. (2.) He gives him good hopes that he should yet again see good days, secretly suspecting, however, that he was not qualified to see them. He assures him, That if he would be early in seeking God, God would awake for his relief, would remember him, and return to him, though now he seemed to forget him and forsake him; That if his habitation were righteous it should be prosperous; for honesty is the best policy, and inward piety a sure friend to outward prosperity. - When we return to God in a way of duty, we have reason to hope that he will return to us in a way of mercy. Let not Job object that he had so little left to begin the world with again, that it was impossible he should ever prosper as he had done; no, "Though thy beginning should be ever so small, a little meal in the barrel, and a little oil in the cruse, God's blessing shall multiply that to a great increase." This is God's way of enriching the souls of his people with graces and comforts, not *per saltum*—as by a bound, but *per gradum*—step by step. The beginning is small, but the progress is to perfection. Dawning light grows to noon-day; a grain of mustard-seed to a great tree. Let us not therefore despise the day of small things, but hope for the day of great things.

3. For inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: 9. (For we *are but of yesterday*, and know nothing, because our days upon earth *are a shadow*;) 10. Shall not they teach thee, *and* tell thee, and utter words out of their heart? 11. Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water? 12. Whilst it *is* yet in his greenness, *and* not cut down, it withereth before any *other* herb. 13. So *are* the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish: 14. Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust *shall be* a spider's web. 15. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure. 16. He *is* green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden. 17. His roots are wrapped about the heap, *and* seeth the place of stones. 18. If he destroy him from his place, then *it* shall deny him, *saying*, I have not seen thee. 19. Behold, this *is* the joy of his way, and out of the earth shall others grow.

Bildad here discourses well of the sad catastrophe of hypocrites and evil-doers, and the fatal period of all their hopes and joys. He will not be so bold as to say, with Eliphaz, that none that were righteous were ever cut off thus; (*ch.* 4. 7.) yet he takes it for granted that God, in the course of his providence, does ordinarily bring wicked men, who seemed pious, and were prosperous, to shame and ruin in this world; and that, by making their prosperity short, he discovers their piety to be counterfeit. Whether this will certainly prove that all who are thus ruined must be concluded to have been hypocrites, he will not say, but rather suspects and thinks the application is easy.

I. He proves this truth, of the certain destruction of all the hopes and joys of hypocrites, by an appeal to antiquity, and the concurring sentiment and observation of all wise and good men. It is an

undoubted truth, if we take in the other world, that, if not in this life, yet in the life to come, hypocrites will be deprived of all their trusts and all their triumphs. Whether Bildad so meant or no, we must so take it.

Let us observe the method of his proof, v. 8. . 10.

1. He insists not on his own judgment, and that of his companions; *We are but of yesterday, and know nothing*, v. 9. He perceived that Job had no opinion of their abilities, but thought they knew little; "We will own," says Bildad, "that we know nothing, are as ready to confess our ignorance as thou art to condemn it; for we are but as yesterday in comparison, and our days upon earth are short and transient, and hastening away as a shadow. And therefore," (1.) "We are not so near the fountain-head of divine revelation" (which then, for aught that appears, was conveyed by tradition) "as the former age was; and therefore we must inquire what they said, and recount what we have been told of their sentiments." Blessed be God, now that we have the word of God in writing, and are directed to search that, we need not inquire of the former age, nor prepare ourselves to the search of their fathers; for, though we ourselves are but of yesterday, the word of God in the scripture is as high as them; (Rom. 10. 8.) and it is the most sure word of prophecy, to which we must take heed. If we study and keep God's precepts, we may by them *understand more than the ancients*, Ps. 119. 99, 100. (2.) "We do not live so long as they of the former age did, to make observations upon the methods of Divine Providence, and therefore cannot be such competent judges as they, in a cause of this nature." Note, The shortness of our lives is a great hindrance to the improvement of our knowledge; and so is the frailty and weakness of our bodies. *Vita brevis, ars longa—Life is short, the progress of art boundless.*

2. He refers himself to the testimony of the ancients, and to the knowledge which Job himself had of their sentiments. "Do thou *inquire of the former age*, and let them tell thee, not only their own judgment in this matter, but the judgment also of *their fathers*;" (v. 8.) *they will teach thee*, and inform thee, (v. 10.) that, all along, in their time, the judgments of God followed wicked men. This they will utter of their hearts, that is, as that which they firmly believe themselves, which they are greatly affected with, and desirous to acquaint and affect others with." Note, (1.) For the right understanding of Divine Providence, and the unfolding of the difficulties of it, it will be of use to compare the observations and experiences of former ages with the events of our own day; and, in order thereunto, to consult history, especially the sacred history, which is the most ancient, infallibly true, and written designedly for our learning. (2.) They that would fetch knowledge from the former ages, must search diligently, prepare for the search, and take pains in the search. (3.) Those words are most likely to reach to the hearts of the learners, that come from the hearts of the teachers. They shall teach thee best, that utter words out of their heart, that speak by experience, and not by rote, of spiritual and divine things.

The learned Bishop Patrick suggests, that Bildad, being a Shebite, descended from Shuah, one of Abraham's sons by Keturah, Gen. 25. 2. In this appeal which he makes to history, he has a particular respect to the rewards which the blessings of God secured to the posterity of faithful Abraham, who hitherto, and long after, continued in his religion; he refers also to the judicial extirpation of those eastern people, neighbours to Job, (in whose country they were settled,) for their wickedness: whence he infers, that it is God's usual way to prosper the just, and root out the wicked, though for a while they may flourish.

II. He illustrates this truth by some similitudes.

1. The hopes and joys of the hypocrites are here compared to a rush or flag, v. 11. . 13. (1.) It grows up out of the mire and water. The hypocrite cannot gain his hope without some false rotten ground or other, out of which to raise it, and with which to support it and keep it alive, any more than the rush can grow without mire. He grounds it on his worldly prosperity, the plausible profession he makes of religion, the good opinion of his neighbours, and his own good conceit of himself, which are no

solid foundation on which to build his confidence. It is all but mire and water; and the hope that grows out of it, is but rush and flag. (2.) It may look green and gay for a while, (the rush outgrows the grass,) but it is light, and hollow, and empty, and good for nothing. It is green for shew, but of no use. (3.) It withers presently, *before any other herb*, v. 12. Even while it is in its greenness, it is dried away, and gone in a little time. Note, The best state of hypocrites and evil-doers borders upon withering; even when it is green, it is going. The grass is *cut down*, and *withers*; (Ps. 90. 6.) but the rush is not cut down, and yet *withers afore it grows up*; (Ps. 129. 6.) as it has no use, so it has no continuance. *So are the paths of all that forget God*; (v. 13.) they take the same way that the rush does, *for the hypocrite's hope shall perish*. Note, [1.] Forgetfulness of God is at the bottom of men's hypocrisy, and of the vain hopes with which they flatter and deceive themselves in their hypocrisy. Men would not be hypocrites, if they did not forget that the God with whom they have to do searches the heart, and requires truth there; that he is a Spirit, and has his eye on our spirits. Hypocrites could have no hope, if they did not forget that God is righteous, and will not be mocked with the torn and the lame. [2.] The hope of hypocrites is a great cheat upon themselves, and though it may flourish a while, it will certainly perish at last, and they with it.

2. They are here compared to a spider's web, or a spider's house, as it is in the margin; a cob-web, v. 14, 15. The hope of the hypocrite, (1.) Is woven out of his own bowels; it is the creature of his own fancy, and arises merely from a conceit of his own merit and sufficiency. There is a great deal of difference between the work of the bee and that of the spider; a diligent Christian, like the laborious bee, fetches in all his comfort from the heavenly dews of God's word; but the hypocrite, like the subtle spider, weaves his out of a false hypothesis of his own, concerning God, as if he were altogether such a one as himself. (2.) He is very fond of it, as the spider of her web; pleases himself with it, wraps himself in it, calls it his house, *leans upon it*, and *holds it fast*. It is said of the spider, that *she takes hold with her hands*, and *is in king's palaces*, Prov. 30. 28. So does a carnal worldling hug himself in the fulness and firmness of his outward prosperity; he prides himself in that house as his palace, and fortifies himself in it as his castle, and makes use of it as the spider of her web, to insnare those he has a mind to prey upon. So does a formal professor; he flatters himself in his own eyes, doubts not of his salvation, is secure of heaven, and cheats the world with his vain confidences. (3.) It will easily and certainly be swept away, as the cob-web with the besom, when God shall come to purge his house. The prosperity of worldly people will fail them, when they expect to find safety and happiness in it. They seek to hold fast their estates, but God is plucking them out of their hands; and whose shall those things be which they have provided? or what the better will they be for them? The confidences of hypocrites will fail them; *I tell you, I know you not*. The house built on the sand will fall in the storm, when the builder most needs it, and had promised himself the benefit of it. *When a wicked man dies, his expectation perishes*. The ground of his hopes will prove false; he will be disappointed of the thing he hoped for, and his foolish hope, with which he buoyed himself up, will be turned into endless despair; and thus his hope will be cut off, his web, that refuge of lies, swept away, and he crushed in it.

3. They are here compared to a flourishing and well-rooted tree, which, though it do not wither of itself, yet will easily be cut down, and its place know it no more. The secure and prosperous sinner may think himself wronged when he is compared to a rush and a flag, he thinks he has a better root; "We will allow him his conceit," (says Bildad,) "and give him all the advantage he can desire, and yet bring him in suddenly cut off." He is here represented, as Nebuchadnezzar was in his own dream, (Dan. 4. 10.) by a great tree.

(1.) See this tree fair and flourishing, (v. 16.) like a *green bay-tree*, (Ps. 37. 35.) green before the sun, that keeps its greenness in defiance of the scorching sun-beams, and his branch shoots forth

under the protection of his garden-wall, and with the benefit of his garden-soil: see it fixed, and taking deep root, never likely to be overthrown by stormy winds, for his roots are interwoven with the stones; (v. 17.) it grows in firm ground, not as the rush, in mire and water. Thus does a wicked man, when he prospers in the world, think himself secure; his wealth is a *high wall in his own conceit*.

(2.) See this tree felled and forgotten notwithstanding; *destroyed from his place*, (v. 18.) and so entirely extirpated, that there shall remain no sign or token where it grew; the very place shall say, *I have not seen thee*; and the standers by shall say the same, *I sought him, but he could not be found*, Ps. 37. 36. He made a great shew and a great noise for a time, but he is gone of a sudden, and *neither root nor branch left him*, Mal. 4. 1. *This is the joy*, that is, this is the end and conclusion, *of the wicked man's way*, (v. 19.) this is that which all his joy comes to—*The way of the ungodly shall perish*, Ps. 1. 6. His hope, he thought, would, in the issue, be turned into joy, but this is the issue, this is the joy, *The harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow*, Isa. 17. 11. This is the best of it; and what then is the worst of it? But shall he not leave a family behind him to enjoy what he has? No, *out of the earth*, (not out of his roots,) *shall others grow*, that are nothing akin to him, and shall fill up his place, and rule over that for which he laboured. Others, namely, of the same spirit and disposition, shall grow up in his place, and be as secure as ever he was, not warned by his fall. The way of worldlings is their folly, and yet there is a race of them that *approve their sayings*, Ps. 49. 13.

20. Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers: 21. Till he fill thy mouth with laughing, and thy lips with rejoicing. 22. They that hate thee shall be clothed with shame; and the dwelling place of the wicked shall come to nought.

Bildad here, in the close of his discourse, sums up what he had to say, in a few words, setting before Job life and death, the blessing and the curse; assuring him, that as he was, so he should fare, and therefore they might conclude, that as he fared, so he was.

1. On the other hand, if he were a perfect upright man, God would not *cast him away*, v. 20. Though now he seemed forsaken of God, he would yet return to him, and, by degrees, would *turn his mourning into dancing*, (Ps. 30. 11.) and comforts should flow in upon him so plentifully, that his mouth should be *filled with laughing*, v. 21. So affecting should the happy change be, Ps. 126. 2. They that loved him, would rejoice with him; but they that hated him, and had triumphed in his fall, would be ashamed of their insolence, when they see him restored to his former prosperity. *God will not cast away an upright man*; he may cast down for a time, but he shall not be cast away for ever; it is true, that, if not in this world, yet in another, the mouth of the righteous shall be *filled with rejoicing*. Though their sun should sit under a cloud, yet it shall rise again clear, never more to be clouded; though they go mourning to the grave, that shall not hinder their entrance into the joy of their Lord. It is true, that the enemies of the saints will be clothed with shame, when they see them crowned with honour. But it does not therefore follow, that, if Job were not perfectly restored to his former prosperity, he forfeited the character of a perfect man.

2. On the other hand, if he were a wicked man, and an evil doer, God would not help him, but leave him to perish in his present distresses; (v. 20.) and his dwelling-place should *come to nought*, 22. And here, also, it is true that *God will not help the evil-doers*; they throw themselves out of his protection, and forfeit his favour; he will *not take the ungodly by the hand*, so it is in the margin, will not have fellowship and communion with them; for *what communion between light and darkness*? He will not lend them his hand to pull them out of the miseries, the eternal miseries, into which they have plunged themselves; they will then stretch

out their hand to him for help, but it is too late, he will not *take them by the hand*: *Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed*. It is true, that *the dwelling-place of the wicked, sooner or later, will come to nought*. Those only who make God their dwelling-place, are safe for ever, Ps. 90. 1.—91. 1. They who make other things their refuge, will be disappointed. Sin brings ruin on persons and families. Yet to argue, (as Bildad, I doubt, slyly does,) that because Job's family was sunk, and he himself, at present, seemed helpless, therefore he certainly was an ungodly wicked man, was neither just nor charitable, as long as there appeared no other evidence of his wickedness and ungodliness. Let us judge nothing before the time, but wait till the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest; and the present difficulties of Providence be solved, to universal and everlasting satisfaction, when the *mystery of God shall be finished*.

CHAP. IX.

In this, and the following chapter, we have Job's answer to Bildad's discourse, wherein he speaks honourably of God, humbly of himself, and feelingly of his troubles; but not one word by way of reflection upon his friends, or their unkindness to him, nor in direct reply to what Bildad had said. He wisely keeps to the merits of the cause, and makes no remarks upon the person that managed it, nor seeks occasion against him. In this chapter, we have, I. The doctrine of God's justice laid down, v. 2. II. The proof of it, from his wisdom, and power, and sovereign dominion, v. 3.—13. III. The application of it, in which, 1. He condemns himself, as not able to contend with God, either in law or battle, v. 14.—21. 2. He maintains his point, that we cannot judge of men's character by their outward condition, v. 22.—24. 3. He complains of the greatness of his troubles, the confusion he was in, and the loss he was at what to say or do, v. 25.—35.

1. **THEN** Job answered and said, 2. I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God? 3. If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. 4. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? 5. Which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. 6. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. 7. Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars. 8. Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. 9. Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south. 10. Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number. 11. Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not: he passeth on also, but I perceive him not. 12. Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, What dost thou? 13. If God will not withdraw his anger, the proud helpers do stoop under him.

Bildad began with a rebuke to Job for talking so much, ch. 8. 2. Job makes no answer to that, though it had been easy enough to retort it upon himself; but what he next lays down as his principle, that God never perverts judgment, Job agrees with him in, *I know it is so of a truth*, v. 2. Note, We should be ready to own how far we agree with those with whom we dispute, and we should not slight, much less resist, a truth, though produced by an adversary, and urged against us, but receive it in the light and love of it, though it have been misapplied. "*It is so of a truth*, that wickedness brings men to ruin, and the godly are taken under God's special protection. These are truths which I subscribe to; but how can any man make good his part with God?" *In his sight shall no flesh living be justified*, Ps. 143. 2. *How should man be just with God?* Some understand this as a passionate complaint of God's strictness and severity, that he is a God whom there is

no dealing with: and it cannot be denied that there are, in this chapter, some peevish expressions, which seem to speak such language as that. But I take this rather as a pious confession of man's sinfulness, and his own in particular, that if God should deal with any of us according to the desert of our iniquities, we were certainly undone.

1. He lays this down for a truth, that man is an unequal match for his Maker, either in dispute or combat.

1. In dispute; (v. 3.) *If he will contend with him*, either at law or at an argument, *he cannot answer him one of a thousand*. (1.) God can ask a thousand puzzling questions, which those that quarrel with him, and arraign his proceedings, cannot give an answer to. When God spake to Job out of the whirlwind, he asked him a great many questions; *Dost thou know this? Canst thou do that?* To none of which Job could give an answer, ch. 38, 39. God can easily manifest the folly of the greatest pretenders to wisdom. (2.) God can lay to our charge a thousand offences, can draw up against us a thousand articles of impeachment, and we cannot answer him so as to acquit ourselves from the imputation of any of them, but must, by silence, give consent that they are all true; we cannot set aside one as foreign, another as frivolous, and another as false; we cannot, as to one, deny the fact, and plead not guilty, and, as to another, deny the fault, confess, and justify; no, we are not able to answer him, but must *lay our hand upon our mouth*, as Job did, (ch. 40. 4, 5.) and cry, *Guilty, Guilty*.

2. In combat; (v. 4.) *Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?* The answer is very easy; You cannot produce any instance, from the beginning of the world to this day, of any daring sinner, who has *hardened himself against God*, has obstinately persisted in rebellion against him, who did not find God too hard for him, and pay dear for his folly. They have not prospered or had peace; they have had no comfort in it nor success. What did ever man get by trials of skill, or trials of titles, with his Maker? All the opposition given to God, is but setting briars and thorns before a consuming fire; so foolish, so fruitless, so destructive, is the attempt, Isa. 27. 4. 1 Cor. 10. 22. Apostate angels hardened themselves against God, but did not prosper, 2 Pet. 2. 4. The dragon fights, but is cast out, Rev. 12. 8. Wicked men harden themselves against God, dispute his wisdom, disobey his laws, are impenitent for their sins, and incorrigible, under their afflictions; they reject the offers of his grace, and resist the strivings of his Spirit; they make nothing of his threatenings, and make head against his interest in the world; but have they prospered? Can they prosper? No, they are but *treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath*. They that roll this stone, will find it return upon them.

II. He proves it by shewing what a God he is, with whom we have to do: *He is wise in heart*, and therefore we cannot answer him at law; he is *mighty in strength*, and therefore we cannot fight it out with him. It is the greatest madness that can be, to think to contend with a God of infinite wisdom and power, who knows every thing, and can do every thing; who can be neither outwitted nor overpowered. The Devil promised himself that Job, in the day of his affliction, would curse God, and speak ill of him, but, instead of that, he sets himself to honour God, and to speak highly of him. As much pained as he is, and as much taken up with his own miseries, when he has occasion to mention the wisdom and power of God, he forgets his complaints, dwells with delight, and expatiates with a flood of eloquence, upon that noble useful subject.

Evidences of the wisdom and power of God he fetches,

1. From the kingdom of nature, in which the God of nature acts with an uncontrollable power, and does what he pleases; for all the orders and all the powers of nature are derived from him, and depend upon him.

(1.) When he pleases, he alters the course of nature, and turns back its streams, v. 5.—7. By the common law of nature, the mountains are settled, and are therefore called *everlasting mountains*; the earth is established, and cannot be removed, (Ps. 93. 1.) and the pillars thereof are immovably fixed, the sun rises in its

season, and the stars shed their influences on this lower world; but, when God pleases, he can not only drive out of the common track, but invert the order, and change the law, of nature. [1.] Nothing more firm than the mountains: when we speak of removing mountains, we mean that which is impossible; yet the divine power can make them change their seat; he removes them, and they know not; removes them whether they will or no; he can make them lower their heads; he can level them, and overturn them in his anger; he can spread the mountains as easily as the husbandman spreads the mole-hills, be they ever so high, and large, and rocky. Men have much ado to pass over them; but God, when he pleases, can make them pass away. He made Sinai shake, Ps. 68. 8. *The hills skipped*, Ps. 114. 4. *The everlasting mountains were scattered*, Hab. 3. 6. [2.] Nothing more fixed than the earth on its axle-tree; yet God can, when he pleases, shake that out of its place, heave it off its centre, and make even its pillars to tremble; what seemed to support it, will itself need support, when God gives it a shock. See how much we are indebted to God's patience; God has power enough to shake the earth from under that guilty race of mankind, which makes it groan under the burthen of sin, and so to *shake the wicked out of it*; (ch. 38. 13.) yet he continues the earth, and man upon it, and makes it not still, as once, to swallow up the rebels. [3.] Nothing more constant than the rising sun, it never misses its appointed time; yet God, when he pleases, can suspend it. He that at first commanded it to rise, can countermand it. Once the sun was bid to stand, and another time to retreat, to shew that it is still under the check of its great Creator. Thus great is God's power; and how great then is his goodness, which causes his sun to shine even upon the evil and unthankful, though he could withhold it! He that made the stars also, can, if he pleases, seal them up, and hide them from our eyes. By earthquakes, and subterraneous fires, mountains have sometimes been removed, and the earth shaken: in very dark and cloudy days and nights, it seems to us as if the sun were forbidden to rise, and the stars were sealed up, Acts, 27. 20. It is sufficient to say, that Job here speaks of what God can do; but if we must understand it of what he has done in fact, all these verses may perhaps be applied to Noah's flood, when the mountains of the earth were shaken, and the sun and stars were darkened. The world that now is, we believe to be reserved for that fire which will consume the mountains, and melt the earth with its fervent heat, and which will turn the sun into darkness.

(2.) As long as he pleases, he preserves the settled course and order of nature; and this is a continued creation. He himself alone, by his own power, and without the assistance of any other, [1.] *Spreads out the heaven*; (v. 8.) not only did spread them out at first, but still spreads them out, that is, keeps them spread out; for otherwise they would of themselves roll together like a scroll of parchment. [2.] *He treads upon the waves of the sea*; that is, he suppresses them and keeps them under, that they return not to deluge the earth; (Ps. 104. 9.) which is given as a reason why we should all fear God, and stand in awe of him, Jer. 5. 22. He is mightier than the proud waves, Ps. 93. 4.—65. 7. [3.] He makes the constellations; three are named for all the rest, (v. 9.) *Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades*, and, in general, *the chambers of the south*: the stars of which these are composed, he made at first, and put into that order, and he still makes them, preserves them in being, and guides their motions; he makes them to be what they are to man, and inclines the hearts of men to observe them, which the beasts are not capable of doing. Not only those stars which we see and give names to, but those also in the other hemisphere, about the antarctic pole, which never come in our sight, called here *the chambers of the south*, are under the divine direction and dominion. How wise is he then, and how mighty!

2. Evidences are here fetched from the kingdom of Providence, that special Providence which is conversant about the affairs of the children of men. Consider what God does in the government of the world, and you will say, He is *wise in heart, and mighty in strength*.

(1.) He does many things and great, many and great to admiration, v. 10. Job here says the same that Eliphaz had said; (ch. 5. 9.) and, in the original, in the very same words, not declining to speak after him, though now his antagonist. God is a great God, and doeth great things, a wonder-working God; his works of wonder are so many that we cannot number them, and so mysterious that we cannot find them out. O the depth of his counsels!

(2.) He acts invisibly and undiseerned, v. 11. He goes by me in his operations, *and I see him not, I perceive him not*; his way is in the sea, Ps. 77. 19. The operations of second causes are commonly obvious to sense, but God doeth all about us, and yet we see him not, Acts, 17, 23. Our finite understandings cannot fathom his counsels, apprehend his motions, or comprehend the measures he takes. We are therefore incompetent judges of God's proceedings, because we know not what he doeth, or what he designeth. The *arcana imperii*—*secrets of government*, are things above us, which therefore we must not pretend to expound, or comment upon.

(3.) He acts with an uncontrollable sovereignty, v. 12. He takes away our creature-comforts and confidences, when and as he pleases, takes away health, estate, relations, friends, takes away life itself; whatever goes, it is he that takes it; by what hand soever it is removed, his hand must be acknowledged in it; the Lord takes away, and *who can hinder him? Who can turn him away? Marg. Who shall make him restore?* So some. Who can dissuade him, or alter his counsels? Who can resist him, or oppose his operations? Who can controul him, or call him to an account for it? What action can be brought against him? Or *who will say unto him, What doest thou?* Or, Why doest thou so? Dan. 4. 35. God is not obliged to give us a reason of what he doeth. The meaning of his proceedings we know not now; it will be time enough to know hereafter, when it will appear that what seemed now to be done by prerogative, was done in infinite wisdom, and for the best.

(4.) He acts with an irresistible power, which no creature can resist, v. 13. *If God will not withdraw his anger*, (which he can do when he pleases, for he is *Lord of his anger*, lets it out, or calls it in, according to his will,) *the proud helpers do stoop under him*; that is, He certainly breaks and crushes those that proudly help one another against him; proud men set themselves against God and his proceedings; in this opposition they join hand in hand. *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together*, to throw off his yoke, to run down his truths, and to persecute his people; *Men of Israel, help*, Acts, 21. 28. Ps. 83. 8. If one enemy of God's kingdom fall under his judgment, the rest come proudly to help that, and think to deliver that out of his hand: but in vain; unless he pleases to withdraw his anger, (which he often does, for it is the day of his patience,) the proud helpers stoop under him, and fall with those whom they designed to help. *Who knows the power of God's anger?* They who think they have strength enough to help others, will not be able to help themselves against it.

14. How much less shall I answer him, *and choose out my words to reason with him?* 15. Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, *but I would make supplication to my Judge.* 16. If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice. 17. For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause. 18. He will not suffer me to take my breath, but filleth me with bitterness. 19. If *I speak of strength*, lo, *he is strong*; and if of judgment, who shall set me a time to plead? 20. If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: *if I*

say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. 21. *Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.*

What Job had said of man's utter inability to contend with God, he here applies to himself, and, in effect, despairs of gaining his favour; which (some think) arises from the hard thoughts he had of God, as one who, having set himself against him, right or wrong, would be too hard for him. I rather think it arises from the sense he had of the imperfection of his own righteousness, and the dark and cloudy apprehensions which, at present, he had of God's displeasure against him.

I. He dares not dispute with God; (v. 14.) "*If the proud helpers do stoop under him, how much less shall I,* a poor weak creature, (so far from being a helper, that I am very helpless,) *how shall I answer him?* What can I say against that which God doeth? If I go about to reason with him, he will certainly be too hard for me." If the potter make the clay into a vessel of dishonour, or break in pieces the vessel he has made, shall the clay or the broken vessel reason with him? So absurd is the man who replies against God, or thinks to talk it out with him. No, let all flesh be silent before him.

II. He dares not insist upon his own justification before God. Though he vindicated his own integrity to his friends, and would not yield that he was a hypocrite and a wicked man, as they suggested, yet he would never plead it as his righteousness before God. I will never venture upon the covenant of innocency, nor think to come off by virtue of that.

Job knew so much of God, and knew so much of himself, that he durst not insist upon his own justification before God.

1. He knew so much of God, that he durst not stand a trial with him, v. 15. 19. He knew how to make his part good with his friends, and thought himself able to deal with them; but, though his cause had been better than it was, he knew it was to no purpose to debate it with God.

(1.) God knew him better than he knew himself; and therefore, (v. 15.) "*Though I were righteous in my own apprehension, and my own heart did not condemn me, yet God is greater than my heart,* and knows those secret faults and errors of mine which I do not, and cannot, understand, and is able to charge me with them, and therefore I will not answer." St. Paul speaks to the same purport; *I know nothing by myself*, am not conscious to myself of any reigning wickedness, and yet *I am not hereby justified*, 1 Cor. 4. 4. "*I dare not put myself upon that issue, lest God charge that upon me which I did not discover in myself.*" Job will therefore waive that plea, and *make supplication to his Judge*; that is, will cast himself upon *God's mercy*, and not think to come off by his own merit.

(2.) He had no reason to think that there was any thing in his prayers to recommend them to the divine acceptance, or to fetch in an answer of peace; no worth or worthiness at all, to which to ascribe their success; but it must be attributed purely to the grace and compassion of God, who answers *before* we call, and not *because* we call, and gives gracious answers to our prayers, but not for our prayers, v. 16. "*If I had called, and he had answered,* had given the thing I called to him for, yet, so weak and defective are my best prayers, that I would not believe he had therein hearkened to my voice; I could not say that he had *saved with his right hand, and answered me*," Ps. 60. 5.) "*but that he did it purely for his own name's sake.*" Bishop Patrick expounds it thus; "*If I had made supplication, and he had granted my desire, I would not think my prayer had done the business.*" *Not for your sakes be it known to you.*

(3.) His present miseries, which God had brought him into, notwithstanding his integrity, gave him too sensible a conviction, that, in the ordering and disposing of men's outward condition in this world, God acts by sovereignty, and though he never doeth wrong to any, yet he doth not ever give full right to all; that is, the best do not always fare best, nor the worst fare worst, in this life, because he reserves the full and exact distribution of rewards

and punishments for the future state. Job was not conscious to himself of any extraordinary guilt, and yet fell under extraordinary afflictions, v. 17, 18. Every man must expect the wind to blow upon him, and ruffle him, but Job was broken with a tempest; every man, in the midst of these thorns and briers, must expect to be scratched, but Job was wounded, and his wounds multiplied. Every man must expect a cross daily, and to taste sometimes of the bitter cup; but poor Job's troubles came so thick upon him, that he had no breathing time, he was filled with bitterness; and he presumes to say that all this was without cause, without any great provocation given. We have made the best of what Job said hitherto, though contrary to the judgment of many good interpreters; but here, no doubt, he *spake unadvisedly with his lips*; he reflected on God's goodness, in saying that he was not suffered to take his breath, while yet he had such good use of his reason and speech to be able to talk thus; and on his justice, in saying that it was without cause. Yet it is true, that, as, on the one hand, there are many who are chargeable with more sin than the common infirmities of the human nature, and yet feel no more sorrow than that of the common calamities of human life; so, on the other hand, there are many who feel more than the common calamities of human life, and yet are conscious to themselves of no more than the common infirmities of human nature.

(4.) He was in no capacity at all to make his part good with God, v. 19. [1.] Not by force of arms; "*I dare not enter the lists of the Almighty; for, if I speak of strength, and think to come off by that, lo, he is strong; stronger than I, and will certainly overpower me.*" There is no disputing (said one once to Cæsar) with him that commands legions; much less with him that has legions of angels at command. Can thine heart endure, (thy courage and presence of mind,) or can thine hands be strong to defend thyself, *in the days that I shall deal with thee?* Ezek. 22. 14. [2.] Not by force of arguments: "*I dare not try the merits of the cause; if I speak of judgment, and insist upon my right, who will set me a time to plead?* There is no higher power to which I may appeal, no superior court to appoint a hearing of the cause, for He is supreme, and from Him every man's judgment proceeds, which he must abide by."

2. He knew so much of himself, that he durst not stand a trial, v. 20, 21. "*If I go about to justify myself, and to plead a righteousness of my own, my defence will be my offence; and mine own mouth shall condemn me,* even when it goes about to acquit me." A good man, who knows the deceitfulness of his own heart, and is jealous over it with a godly jealousy, and has often discovered that amiss there, which had long lain undiscovered, is suspicious of more evil in himself than he is really conscious of, and therefore will by no means think of justifying himself before God. If we say, "*We have no sin,*" we not only deceive ourselves, but we affront God, for we sin in saying so, and give the lie to the scripture, which has concluded all under sin. "*If I say, I am perfect, I am sinless,* God has nothing to lay to my charge, my very saying so shall prove me perverse, proud, ignorant, and presumptuous. Nay, though I were perfect, though God should pronounce me just, yet would I not know my soul; I would not be in care about the prolonging of my life, while it is loaded with all these miseries." Or, "*Though I were free from gross sin,* though my conscience should not charge me with any enormous crime, yet would I not believe my own heart so far as to insist upon my innocency, nor think my life worth striving for with God." In short, it is folly to contend with God, and our wisdom, as well as duty, to submit to him, and throw ourselves at his feet.

22. This *is one thing*, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked. 23. If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent. 24. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked: he covereth the faces of the judges thereof; if not, where, *and who is he?*

Here Job touches briefly upon the main point now in dispute between him and his friends. They maintained that those who are righteous and good always prosper in this world, and none but the wicked are in misery and distress; he asserted, on the contrary, that it is a common thing for the wicked to prosper, and the righteous to be greatly afflicted: this is the one thing, the chief thing, wherein he and his friends differed; and they had not proved their assertion; therefore he abides by his: "I said it, and say it again, that all things come alike to all."

Now it must be owned,

1. That there is very much truth in what Job here means; that temporal judgments, when they are set abroad, fall both upon good and bad, and the destroying angel seldom distinguishes (though once he did) between the houses of Israelites and the houses of Egyptians.

In the judgment of Sodom, indeed, which is called *the vengeance of eternal fire*, (Jude, 7.) far be it from God to *slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked*; (Gen. 18, 25.) but in judgments merely temporal the righteous have their share, and sometimes the greatest share. The sword devours one as well as another, Josiah as well as Ahab. Thus God *destroys the perfect and the wicked*, involves them both in the same common ruin; good and bad were sent together into Babylon, Jer. 24. 5, 9. If the scourge slay suddenly, and sweep down all before it, God will be well pleased to see how the same scourge, which is the perdition of the wicked, is the trial of the innocent, and of their faith, which *will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory*, 1 Pet. 1. 7. Ps. 66. 10.

Against the just th' Almighty's arrows fly,
For he delights the innocent to try;
To shew their constant and their God-like mind,
Not by afflictions broken, but refin'd.

Sir R. BLACKMORE.

Let this reconcile God's children to their troubles; they are but trials, designed for their honour and benefit; and, if God be pleased with them, let not them be displeased; if he laugh at the trial of the innocent, knowing how glorious the issue of it will be, at destruction and famine let them also laugh, (ch. 5. 22.) and triumph over them, saying, *O death, where is thy sting!*

On the other hand, the wicked are so far from being made the marks of God's judgments, that *the earth is given into their hand*, v. 24. They enjoy large possessions and great power, *have what they will, and do what they will. Into the hand of the wicked one: in the original, it is singular; the Devil, that wicked one, is called the god of this world*, and boasts that *into his hands it is delivered*, Luke, 4. 6. Or, *into the hand of a wicked man*, meaning (as Bishop Patrick and the Assembly's Annotations conjecture) some noted tyrant then living in those parts, whose great wickedness and great prosperity were well known both to Job and his friends. The wicked have the earth given them, but the righteous have heaven given them; and which is better—heaven without earth, or earth without heaven? God, in his providence, advances wicked men, while he covers the faces of those who are fit to be judges, who are wise and good, and qualified for government, and buries them alive in obscurity; perhaps suffers them to be run down and condemned, and to have their faces covered as criminals, by those wicked ones into whose hand the earth is given. We daily see this is done; if it be not God that doeth it, where and who is he that doeth it? To whom can it be ascribed but to Him that rules in the kingdoms of men, and gives them to whom he will? Dan. 4. 32.

2. Yet it must be owned that there is too much passion in what Job here says. The manner of expression is peevish: when he meant that God afflicts, he ought not to have said, *He destroys both the perfect and the wicked*: when he meant that God pleases himself with the trial of the innocent, he ought not to have said, *He laughs at it*, for he doth not afflict willingly. When the spirit is heated, either with dispute or with discontent, we have need to set a watch before the door of our lips, that we may observe decorum in speaking of divine things.

25. Now my days are swifter than a post: they

flee away, they see no good. 26. They are passed away as the swift ships: as the eagle *that* hasteth to the prey. 27. If I say, I will forget my complaint, I will leave off my heaviness, and comfort *myself*: 28. I am afraid of all my sorrows, I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent. 29. *If* I be wicked, why then labour I in vain? 30. If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean; 31. Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. 32. For *he* is not a man, as *I am*, *that* I should answer him, *and* we should come together in judgment: 33. Neither is there any days man betwixt us, *that* might lay his hand upon us both. 34. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me: 35. *Then* would I speak, and not fear him; but *it* is not so with me.

Job here grows more and more querulous, and does not conclude this chapter with such awful expressions of God's wisdom and justice as he began with. They that indulge a complaining humour, know not to what indecencies, nay to what impieties, it will hurry them. The beginning of that strife with God is as the letting forth of water: therefore leave it off, before it be meddled with. When we are in trouble, we are allowed to complain to God, as the Psalmist, often, but must by no means complain of God, as Job here.

I. His complaint here of the passing away of the days of his prosperity is proper; (v. 25, 26.) "My days, that is, all my good days, are gone, never to return; gone of a sudden, gone ere I was aware: never did any courier that went express," (like Cush and Ahimaaz,) "with good tidings, make such haste as all my comforts did from me; never did ship sail to its port, never did eagle fly upon his prey, with such incredible swiftness; nor does there remain any traces of my prosperity, any more than there does of *an eagle in the air, or a ship in the sea*," Prov. 30. 19. See here, 1. How swift the motion of time is; it is always upon the wing, hastening to its period; it stays for no man. What little need have we of pastimes, and what great need to redeem time, when time runs out, runs on so fast towards eternity, which comes as time goes! 2. How vain the enjoyments of time are, which we may be quite deprived of while yet time continues! Our day may be longer than the sun-shine of our prosperity; and when that is gone, it is as if it had not been. The remembrance of having done our duty will be pleasing afterward; so will not the remembrance of our having got a great deal of worldly wealth, when it is all lost and gone. They flee away, past recall; they see no good, and leave none behind them.

II. His complaint of his present uneasiness is excusable, v. 27, 28.

1. It should seem he did his endeavour to quiet and compose himself, as his friends advised him. That was the good he would do: he would fain forget his complaints and praise God, would leave off his heaviness and comfort himself, that he might be fit for converse both with God and man; but, 2. He found he could not do it; "*I am afraid of all my sorrows*; then when I strive most against my trouble, it prevails most over me, and proves too hard for me!" It is easier, in such a case, to know what we should do than to do it; to know what temper we should be in than to get into that temper, and keep in it. It is easy to preach patience to those that are in trouble, and to tell them they must forget their complaints, and comfort themselves; but it is not so soon done as said. Fear and sorrow are tyrannizing things, not easily brought into the subjection they ought to be kept in to religion and right reason.

III. But his complaint of God, as implacable and inexorable, was by no means to be excused. It was the language of his corruption. He knew better things, and, at another time, would

have been far from harbouring any such hard thoughts of God as now broke in upon his spirit, and broke out in these passionate complaints. Good men do not always speak like themselves; but God considers their frame, and the strength of their temptations; gives them leave afterward to unsay it by repentance, and will not lay it to their charge.

Job seems to speak here,

1. As if he despaired of obtaining from God any relief or redress of his grievances, though he should produce ever so good proofs of his integrity; "*I know thou wilt not hold me innocent; my afflictions have continued so long upon me, and increased so fast, that I do not expect thou wilt ever clear up my innocency by delivering me out of them, and restoring me to a prosperous condition. Right or wrong, I must be treated as a wicked man; my friends will continue to think so of me, and God will continue upon me the afflictions which give them occasion to think so; why then do I labour in vain to clear myself, and maintain my own integrity?*"

2. 29. It is to no purpose to speak in a cause that is already pre-judged. With men it is often labour in vain for the most innocent to go about to clear themselves; they must be adjudged guilty, though the evidence be ever so plain for them: but it is not so in our dealings with God, who is the Patron of oppressed innocency, and to whom it was never in vain to commit a righteous cause.

Nay, he not only despairs of relief, but expects that his endeavour to clear himself would render him yet more obnoxious; (v. 30, 31.) "*If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my integrity ever so evident, it will be all to no purpose, judgment must go against me, thou shalt plunge me in the ditch,*" (the pit of destruction, so some, or rather the filthy kennel, or sewer,) "*which will make me so offensive in the nostrils of all about me, that my own clothes shall abhor me, and I shall even loathe to touch myself.*" He saw his afflictions coming from God, those were the things that blackened him in the eye of his friends, and, upon that score, he complained of them, and of the continuance of them, as the ruin, not only of his comfort, but of his reputation. Yet these words are capable of a good construction. If we be ever so industrious to justify ourselves before men, and to preserve our credit with them, if we keep our hands ever so clean from the pollutions of gross sin, which fall under the eye of the world; yet God, who knows our hearts, can charge us with so much secret sin as will for ever take off all our pretensions to purity and innocency, and make us see ourselves odious in the sight of the holy God. Paul, while a Pharisee, made his hands very clean; but when the commandment came, and discovered to him his heart-sins, made him know lust, that *plunged him in the ditch.*

2. As if he despaired to have so much as a fair hearing with God, and that were hard indeed.

(1.) He complains that he was not upon even terms with God; (v. 32.) "*He is not a man, as I am.*" I could venture to dispute with a man like myself, (the potsherds may strive with the potsherds of the earth,) but he is infinitely above me, and therefore I dare not enter the lists with him, I shall certainly be cast if I contend with him." Note, [1.] God is not a man as we are. Of the greatest princes we may say, "They are men as we are," but not of the Great God. His thoughts and ways are infinitely above our's, and we must not measure him by ourselves. Man is foolish and weak, frail and fickle, but God is not. We are depending, dying, creatures; he the independent and immortal Creator. [2.] The consideration of this should keep us very low, and very silent, before God. Let us not make ourselves equal with God, but always eye him as infinitely above us.

(2.) That there was no arbitrator or umpire to adjust the differences between him and God, and to determine the controversy; (v. 33.) *Neither is there any daysman.* This complaint that there was not, is, in effect, a wish that there were, and so the LXX. read it; *O that there were a mediator between us!* Job would gladly refer the matter, but no creature was capable of being a referee, and therefore he must even refer it still to God himself, and resolve to acquiesce in his judgment. Our Lord Jesus is the blessed Daysman, who has mediated between Heaven and earth, has laid his hand upon us both; to him the Father has committed all

judgment, and we must: but this matter was not then brought to so clear a light as it is now by the gospel, which leaves no room for such a complaint as this.

(3.) That the terrors of God, which set themselves in array against him, put him into such confusion, that he knew not how to address himself to God with the confidence with which he was formerly wont to approach him; (v. 34, 35.) "*Beside the distance which I am kept at by his infinite transcendency, his present dealings with me are very discouraging. Let him take his rod away from me:*" he means not so much his outward afflictions, as the load which lay upon his spirit from the apprehensions of God's wrath; that was his fear which terrified him: "Let that be removed, let me recover the sight of his mercy, and not be amazed with the sight of nothing but his terrors, and then I would speak, and order my cause before him. But it is not so with me, the cloud does not at all scatter, the wrath of God still fastens upon me, and preys on my spirits, as much as ever; and what to do I know not."

From all this let us take occasion, [1.] To stand in awe of God, and to fear the power of his wrath. If good men have been put into such consternation by it, *where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* [2.] To pity those that are wounded in spirit, and pray earnestly for them, because in that condition they know not how to pray for themselves. [3.] Carefully to keep up good thoughts of God in our minds, for hard thoughts of him are the inlets of much mischief. [4.] To bless God that we are not in such a disconsolate condition as poor Job was here in, but that we walk in the light of the Lord; let us rejoice therein, but *rejoice with trembling.*

CHAP. X.

Job owns here that he was full of confusion; (v. 15.) and as he was, so was his discourse: he knew not what to say, and perhaps sometimes scarcely knew what he said. In this chapter, I. He complains of the hardships he was under; (v. 1..7.) and then comforts himself with this, that he was in the hand of the God that made him, and pleads that, v. 8..13. II. He complains again of the severity of God's dealings with him, (v. 14..17.) and then comforts himself with this, that death would put an end to his troubles, v. 18..22.

1. **M**Y soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself: I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. 2. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me? 3. *Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?* 4. Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth? 5. *Are thy days as the days of man? are thy years as man's days,* 6. That thou inquirest after mine iniquity, and searchest after my sin? 7. Thou knowest that I am not wicked; and *there is none that can deliver out of thine hand.*

Here is,

1. A passionate resolution to persist in his complaint, v. 1. Being daunted with the dread of God's majesty, so that he could not plead his cause with him, he resolves to give himself some ease by giving vent to his resentments. He begins with vehement language, "*My soul is weary of my life, weary of this body, and impatient to get clear of it, fallen out with life, and displeased at it, sick of it, and longing for death.*" Through the weakness of grace, he went contrary to the dictates even of nature itself. We should act more like men, did we act more like saints: faith and patience would keep us from being weary of our lives, (and *cruel to them*, as some read it,) even then when Providence has made them most wearisome to us; for that is to be weary of God's correction. Job, being weary of his life, and having ease no other way, resolves to complain, resolves to speak: he will not give vent to his soul by

violent hands, but he will give vent to the bitterness of his soul by violent words. Losers think they may have leave to speak; and unbridled passions, as well as unbridled appetites, are apt to think it an excuse for their excursions, that they cannot help it; but what have we wisdom and grace for, but to keep the mouth as with a bridle? Job's corruption speaks here, yet grace puts in a word: 1. He will complain, but he will leave his complaint upon himself: he would not impeach God, nor charge him with unrighteousness or unkindness; but, though he knew not particularly the ground of God's controversy with him, and the cause of action, yet, in the general, he would suppose it to be in himself, and willingly bear all the blame. 2. He will speak, but it shall be the bitterness of his soul that he will express, not his settled judgment. If I speak amiss, it is not I, but sin that dwells in me, not my soul, but its bitterness.

II. A humble petition to God. He will speak, but the first word shall be a prayer, and, as I am willing to understand it, it is a good prayer, v. 2. 1. That he might be delivered from the sting of his afflictions, which is sin; "Do not condemn me, do not separate me for ever from thee. Though I lie under the cross, let me not lie under the curse; though I smart by the rod of a Father, let me not be cut off by the sword of a Judge. Thou dost correct me, I will bear that as well as I can, but O do not condemn me!" It is the comfort of those who are in Christ Jesus, that, though they are in affliction, there is no condemnation to them, Rom. 8. 1. Nay, they are chastened of the Lord, that they may not be condemned with the world, 1 Cor. 11. 32. This, therefore, we should deprecate above any thing else, when we are in affliction; "However thou art pleased to deal with me, Lord, do not condemn me; my friends condemn me, but do not thou." 2. That he might be made acquainted with the true cause of his afflictions, and that is sin too; Lord, shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. When God afflicts us, he contends with us; when he contends with us, there is always a reason. He is never angry without a cause, though we are, and it is desirable to know what the reason is, that we may repent of, mortify, and forsake, the sin for which God has a controversy with us: in inquiring it out, let conscience have leave to do its office, and to deal faithfully with us, as Gen. 42. 21.

III. A peevish expostulation with God concerning his dealings with him. Now he speaks in the bitterness of his soul indeed, not without some ill-natured reflections upon the righteousness of his God.

1. He thinks it unbecoming the goodness of God, and the mercifulness of his nature, to deal so hardly with his creature, as to lay upon him more than he can bear; (v. 3.) *Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress?* No, certainly it is not; what he approves not in men, (Lam. 3. 34. 36.) he will not do himself. "Lord, in dealing with me, thou seemest to oppress thy subject, to despise thy workmanship, and to countenance thine enemies. Now, Lord, what is the meaning of this? Such is thy nature, that this cannot be a pleasure to thee; and such is thy name, that it cannot be an honour to thee; why then dealest thou thus with me? What profit is there in my blood?" Far be it from Job to think that God did him wrong, but he is quite at a loss how to reconcile his providences with his justice, as good men have often been, and must wait until the day shall declare it. Let us, therefore, now harbour no hard thoughts of God, because we shall then see there was no cause for them.

2. He thinks it unbecoming the infinite knowledge of God to put a prisoner thus upon the rack, as it were, by torture, to extort a confession from him, v. 4. 6.

(1.) He is sure that God does not discover things, nor judge of them, as men do; he has not eyes of flesh, (v. 4.) for he is a Spirit. Eyes of flesh cannot see in the dark, but darkness hides not from God. Eyes of flesh are but in one place at a time, and can see but a little way; but the eyes of the Lord are in every place, and run to and fro through the whole earth. Many things are hid from eyes of flesh, the most curious and piercing; there is a path which even the vulture's eye has not seen: but nothing is, or can be, hid from the eye of God, to which all things are naked and open. Eyes of flesh see the outward appearance only, and may be imposed upon, a *deceptio visus*—an illusion of the senses; but God

sees every thing truly; his sight cannot be deceived, for he tries the heart, and is a Witness to the thoughts and intents of that. Eyes of flesh discover things gradually, and when we gain the sight of one thing, we lose the sight of another, but God sees every thing at one view. Eyes of flesh are soon tired, must be closed every night, that they may be refreshed, and will shortly be darkened by age, and shut up by death, but the Keeper of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps, nor does his sight ever decay. God sees not as man sees; that is, he does not judge as man judges, at the best *secundum allegata et probata*—according to what is alleged and proved, as the thing appears, rather than as it is, and too often according to the bias of the affections, passions, prejudices, and interest; but we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth, and that he knows truth, not by information, but by his own inspection. Men discover secret things by search, and examination of witnesses, comparing evidence and giving conjectures upon it, wheedling or forcing the parties concerned to confess. But God needs not any of these ways of discovery, he sees not as man sees.

(2.) He is sure that, as God is not short-sighted, like man, so he is not short-lived; (v. 5.) "Are thy days as the days of man, few and evil? Do they roll on in succession, or are they subject to change, like the days of man? No, by no means." Men grow wiser by experience, and more knowing by daily observation; with them, truth is the daughter of time, and therefore they must take time for their searches, and, if one experiment fail, must try another; but it is not so with God, to him nothing is past, nothing future, but every thing present. The days of time, by which the life of man is measured, are nothing to the years of eternity, in which the life of God is wrapt up.

(3.) He therefore thinks it strange that God should thus prolong his torture, and continue him under the confinement of this affliction, and neither bring him to a trial, nor grant him a release: as if he must take time to inquire after his iniquity, and use means to search after his sin, v. 6. Not as if Job thought that God did thus torment him, that he might find occasion against him; but his dealings with him had such an aspect, which was dishonourable to God, and would tempt men to think him a hard master. "Now, Lord, if thou wilt not consult my comfort, consult thine own honour; do something for thy great name, and do not disgrace the throne of thy glory," Jer. 14. 21.

3. He thinks it looked like an abuse of his omnipotence, to keep a poor prisoner in custody, whom he knew to be innocent, only because there was none that could deliver him out of his hand; (v. 7.) *Thou knowest that I am not wicked.* He had already owned himself a sinner, and guilty before God, but he here stands to it, that he was not wicked, not devoted to sin, not an enemy to God, not a dissembler in his religion, that he had not wickedly departed from his God, Ps. 18. 21. "But there is none that can deliver out of thy hand, and therefore there is no remedy; I must be content to lie there, waiting thy time, and throwing myself on thy mercy, in submission to thy sovereign will." Here see, (1.) What ought to quiet us under our troubles; that it is to no purpose to contend with Omnipotence. (2.) What will abundantly comfort us, if we are able to appeal to God, as Job here, "Lord, thou knowest that I am not wicked. I cannot say that I am not wanting, or I am not weak; but, through grace, I can say, I am not wicked: thou knowest I am not, for thou knowest I love thee."

3. Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me. 9. Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again? 10. Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese? 11. Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. 12. Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. 13. And these things

hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee.

In these verses, we may observe,

1. How Job eyes God as his Creator and Preserver, and describes his dependence upon him as the Author and Upholder of his being. This is one of the first things we are all concerned to know and consider.

(1.) That God made us: he, and not our parents, who were only the instruments of his power and providence in our production. *He made us, and not we ourselves. His hands have made and fashioned these bodies of our's, and every part of them; (v. 8.)* and they are *fearfully and wonderfully made*. The soul also, which animates the body, is his gift. He takes notice of both here. [1.] The body is made *as the clay, (v. 9.)* east into shape, into this shape, as the clay is formed into a vessel, according to the skill and will of the potter. We are earthen vessels: mean in our original, and soon broken in pieces, made *as the clay; let not, therefore, the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?* We must not be proud of our bodies, because the matter is from the earth, yet not dishonour our bodies, because the mould and shape are from the Divine Wisdom. The formation of human bodies in the womb is described by an elegant similitude, *(v. 10.) Thou hast poured me out like milk*, which is coagulated into cheese; and by an induction of some particulars, *(v. 11.)* Though we come into the world naked, yet the body is itself both clothed and armed; the skin and flesh are its clothing; the bones and sinews are its armour, not offensive, but defensive. The vital parts, the heart and lungs, are thus clothed, not to be seen; thus fenced, not to be hurt. The admirable structure of human bodies is an illustrious instance of the wisdom, power, and goodness, of the Creator. What pity is it that these bodies should be instruments of unrighteousness, which are capable of being temples of the Holy Ghost! [2.] The soul is the life, the soul is the man, and this is the gift of God; *Thou hast granted me life*, breathed into me the breath of life, without which the body would be but a worthless carcase. God is the Father of spirits: he made us living souls, and endued us with the powers of reason; he gave us life and favour; and life is a favour, a great favour, more than meat, more than raiment; a distinguishing favour, a favour that puts us into a capacity of receiving other favour. Now Job was in a better mind than he was when he quarrelled with life as a burthen, and asked, *Why died I not from the womb?* Or, by life and favour may be meant life and all the comforts of life, referring to his former prosperity. Time was, when he walked in the light of the divine favour, and thought, as David, that through that favour his mountain stood strong.

(2.) That God maintains us: having lighted the lamp of life, he does not leave it to burn upon its own stock, but continually supplies it with fresh oil; *"Thy visitation has preserved my spirit, kept me alive, protected me from the adversaries of life, the death we are in the midst of, and the dangers we are continually exposed to; and blessed me with all the necessary supports of life, and the daily supplies it needs and craves."*

2. How he pleads this with God, and what use he makes of it. He reminds God of it: *(v. 9.) Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me. What then?*

(1.) "Thou hast made me, and therefore thou hast a perfect knowledge of me, (Ps. 139. 1. 13.) and needest not to examine me by scourging, nor to put me upon the rack for the discovering of what is within me."

(2.) "Thou hast made me, as the clay, by an act of sovereignty; and wilt thou, by a like act of sovereignty, unmake me again? If so, I must submit."

(3.) "Wilt thou destroy the work of thine own hands?" It is a plea the saints have often used in prayer; *We are the clay, and thou our Potter*, Isa. 64. 8. *Thy hands have made me and fashioned me*, Ps. 119. 73. So here, *Thou madest me; and wilt thou destroy me? v. 8. Wilt thou bring me into dust again?* v. 9. "Wilt thou not pity me? Wilt thou not spare and help me, and stand by the work of thine own hands? Ps. 138. 8. Thou madest

me, and knowest my strength; wilt thou then suffer me to be pressed above measure? Was I made to be made miserable? Was I preserved only to endure these calamities?" If we plead this with ourselves as an inducement to duty, "God made me and maintains me, and therefore I will serve him and submit to him," we may plead it with God as an argument for mercy, *Thou hast made me, new make me; I am thine, save me.* Job knew not how to reconcile God's former favours and his present frowns, but concludes, *(v. 13.) "These things hast thou hid in thine heart; both are according to the counsel of thine own will, and, therefore, undoubtedly consistent, however they seem."* When God thus strangely changes his way, though we cannot account for it, we are bound to believe there are good reasons for it hid in his heart, which will be manifested shortly. It is not with us, or in our reach, to assign the cause, but *I know that this is with thee.* Known unto God are all his works.

14. If I sin, then thou markest me, and thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity. 15. If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head. I am full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction; 16. For it increaseth. Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again thou shewest thyself marvellous upon me. 17. Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me; changes and war are against me. 18. Wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? Oh that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me! 19. I should have been as though I had not been; I should have been carried from the womb to the grave. 20. Are not my days few? Cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, 21. Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; 22. A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.

Here we have,

I. Job's passionate complaints. On that harsh and unpleasant string he harps much, in which, though he cannot be justified, he may be excused. He complained not for nothing, as the murmuring Israelites, but had cause to complain. If we think it looks ill in him, let it be a warning to us to keep our temper better.

1. He complains of the strictness of God's judgment, and the rigour of his proceedings against him, and is ready to call it *Summun jus—Justice bordering on severity*. (1.) That he took all advantages against him; *"If I sin, then thou markest me; (v. 14.)* if I do but take one false step, misplace a word, or cast a look awry, I shall be sure to hear of it. Conscience, thy deputy, will be sure to upbraid me with it, and to tell me, that this gripe, this twitch of pain, is to punish me for that." If God should thus mark iniquities, we are undone; but he does not thus mark them; though we sin, God does not deal in extremity with us. (2.) That he prosecuted those advantages to the utmost; *Thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity.* While his troubles continued, he could not take the comfort of his pardon, nor hear that voice of joy and gladness; so hard is it to see love in God's heart, when we see frowns in his face, and a rod in his hand. (3.) That, whatever was his character, his case, at present, was very uncomfortable, v. 15. [1.] If he be wicked, he is certainly undone in the other world; *If I be wicked, woe to me.* Note, A sinful state is a woeful state. This we should each of us believe, as Job here, with application to ourselves; *"If I be wicked, though prosperous, and living in pleasure, yet woe to me."* Some especially have reason to dread double

woes if they be wicked; "I that have knowledge, that have made a great profession of religion, that have been so often under strong convictions, and have made so many fair promises; I that was born of such good parents, blessed with a good education, that have lived in good families, and long enjoyed the means of grace, *if I be wicked, woe, and a thousand woes, to me.*" [2.] If he be *righteous*, yet he dares not *lift up his head*; dares not answer as before, *ch. 9. 15.* He is so oppressed and overwhelmed with his troubles, that he cannot look up with any comfort or confidence. Without were fightings, within were fears; so that, between both, he was full of confusion: not only confusion of face, for the disgrace he was brought down to, and the censures of his friends, but confusion of spirit; his mind was in a constant hurry, and he was almost distracted, *Ps. 88. 15.*

2. He complains of the severity of the execution. God (he thought) did not only punish him for every failure, but punish him *in a high degree*, *v. 16, 17.* His affliction was, (1.) Grievous, very grievous, marvellous, exceeding marvellous. God hunted him as a lion, as a fierce lion hunts and runs down his prey. God was not only strange to him, but shewed himself marvellous upon him, by bringing him into uncommon troubles, and so making him a prodigy, a wonder unto many. All wondered that God would inflict, and that Job could bear, so much. That which made his afflictions most grievous, was, that he felt God's indignation in them; that was it that made them taste so bitter, and lie so heavy. They were God's witnesses against him, tokens of his displeasure; this made the sores of his body wounds in his spirit. (2.) It was growing, still growing, worse and worse. This he insists much upon; when he hoped the tide would turn, and begin to ebb, still it flowed higher and higher. His affliction increased, and God's indignation in the affliction; he found himself no way better; these witnesses were renewed against him, that, if one did not reach to convict him, another might. Changes and war were against him. If there was any change with him, it was not for the better; still he was kept in a state of war. As long as we are here in this world, we must expect that the clouds will return after the rain, and perhaps the sorest and sharpest trials may be reserved for the last. God was at war with him, and it was a great change. He did not use to be so, which aggravated the trouble, and made it truly marvellous. God usually shews himself kind to his people; if at any time he shews himself otherwise, it is his strange work, his strange act, and he doth in it shew himself marvellous.

3. He complains of his life, and that ever he was born to all this trouble and misery; (*v. 18, 19.*) "If this was designed for my lot, *why was I brought out of the womb*, and not smothered there, or stifled in the birth?" This was the language of his passion, and it was a relapse into the sin he fell into before. He had just now called life a *favour*, (*v. 12.*) yet now he calls it a *burthen*, and quarrels with God for giving it, or rather laying it upon him. Mr. Caryl gives this a good turn in favour of Job. "We may charitably suppose," (says he,) "that that which troubled Job was, that he was in a condition of life which (as he conceived) hindered the main end of his life, which was the glorifying God. His harp was hung on the willow-trees, and he was quite out of tune for praising God. Nay, he feared lest his troubles should reflect dishonour upon God, and give occasion to his enemies to blaspheme; and, therefore, he wishes, *O that I had given up the ghost!* A godly man reckons that he lives to no purpose, if he do not live to the praise and glory of God." But, if that had been his meaning, it was grounded on a mistake, for we may *glorify the Lord in the fires*. But this use we may make of it, not to be over-fond of life, since the case has been such, sometimes, even with wise and good men, that they have complained of it. Why should we dread giving up the ghost, or covet to be seen of men, since the time may come, when we may be ready to wish we had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen us? Why should we inordinately lament the death of our children in their infancy, that are as if they had not been, and are carried from the womb to the grave, when perhaps we ourselves may sometimes wish it had been our own lot?

4. Job's humble requests. He prays,

1. That God would *see his affliction*, (*v. 15.*) take cognizance of his case, and take it into his compassionate consideration. Thus David prays, (*Ps. 25. 18.*) *Look upon mine afflictions and my pain.* Thus we should, in our troubles, refer ourselves to God, and may comfort ourselves with this, that he knows our souls in adversity.

2. That God would grant him some ease. If he could not prevail for the removal of his troubles, yet might he not have some intermission? "Lord, let me not be always upon the rack, always in extremity; *O let me alone, that I may take comfort a little!*" *v. 20.* Grant me some respite, some breathing time, some little enjoyment of myself." This he would reckon a great favour. Those that are not duly thankful for constant ease, should think how welcome one hour's ease would be, if they were in constant pain. Two things he pleads;

(1.) That life and its light were very short; "*Are not my days few?*" *v. 20.* Yes, certainly, they are very few; Lord, let them not be all miserable, all in the extremity of misery. I have but a little time to live, let me have some comfort of life while it does last." This plea fastens on the goodness of God's nature, the consideration of which is very comfortable to an afflicted spirit. And if we would use this as a plea with God for mercy, "*Are not my days few?*" Lord, pity me;" we should use it as a plea with ourselves, to quicken us to duty. "*Are not my days few?*" Then it concerns me to redeem time, to improve opportunities; what my hand finds to do, to do it with all my might, that I may be ready for the days of eternity, which shall be many."

(2.) That *death and its darkness* were very near, and would be very long; (*v. 21, 22.*) "Lord, give me some ease before I die," that is, "lest I die, of my pain." Thus David pleads, (*Ps. 13. 3.*) "*Lest I sleep the sleep of death*, and then it will be too late to expect relief; for, *Will thou shew wonders to the dead?*" (*Ps. 88. 10.*) Let me have a little comfort before I die, that I may take leave of this world calmly, and not in such confusion as I am now in." Thus earnest should we be for grace, and thus should we plead; "Lord, renew me in the inward man; Lord, sanctify me before I die, for then it will never be done."

See how he speaks here of the state of the dead.

[1.] It is a fixed state, whence we shall not return ever again to live such a life as we now live, *ch. 7. 10.* At death, we must bid a final farewell to this world. The body must then be laid where it will lie long, and the soul adjudged to that state in which it must be for ever. That had need be well done, which is to be done but once, and done for eternity.

[2.] It is a **very melancholy** state; so it appears to us. Holy souls, at death, remove to a land of light, where there is no death; but their bodies they leave to a land of darkness, and the shadow of death. He heaps up expressions here of the same import, to shew that he has as dreadful apprehensions of death and the grave as other men naturally have, so that it was only the extreme misery he was in, that made him wish for it. Come and let us look a little into the grave, and we shall find, *First*, That there is no order there; it is *without any order*; perpetual night, and no succession of day. All there lie on the same level, and there is no distinction between prince and peasant, but *the servant* is there *free from his master*, *ch. 3. 19.* No order is observed in bringing people to the grave, not the eldest first, not the richest, not the poorest, and yet every one in his own order, the order appointed by the God of life. *Secondly*, That there is no light there. In the grave there is thick darkness, darkness that cannot be felt indeed, yet cannot but be feared by those that enjoy the light of life. In the grave there is no knowledge, no comfort, no joy, no praising God, no working out our salvation, and therefore no light. Job was so much ashamed that others should see his sores, and so much afraid to see them himself, that the darkness of the grave, which would hide them and huddle them up, would, upon that account, be welcome to him. Darkness comes upon us, and therefore let us walk and work while we have the light with us. The grave being a land of darkness, it is well we are carried thither with our eyes closed, and then it is all one.

The grave is a land of darkness to man; our friends that are gone thither, we reckon removed into darkness, Ps. 88. 18. But that it is not so to God, will appear by this, that the dust of the bodies of the saints, though scattered, though mingled with other dust, will none of it be lost, for God's eye is upon every grain of it, and it shall be forthcoming in the great day.

CHAP. XI.

Poor Job's wounds were yet bleeding, his sore still runs and ceases not, but none of his friends bring him any oil, any balm; Zophar, the third, pours into them as much vinegar as the two former had done. I. He exhibits a very high charge against Job, as proud and false in justifying himself, v. 1. 4. II. He appeals to God for his conviction, and begs that God would take him to task, (v. 5.) and that Job might be made sensible, 1. Of God's unerring wisdom, and his inviolable justice, v. 6. 2. Of his unsearchable perfections, v. 7. 9. 3. Of his incontestable sovereignty, and uncontrollable power, v. 10. 4. Of the cognizance he takes of the children of men, v. 11, 12. III. He assures him, that, upon his repentance and reformation, (v. 13, 14.) God would restore him to his former prosperity and safety; (v. 15. 19.) but that if he were wicked, it was in vain to expect it, v. 20.

1. **T**HEN answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, 2. Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? 3. Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed? 4. For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes. 5. But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; 6. And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that *they are* double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee *less* than thine iniquity *deserveth*.

It is sad to see what intemperate passions even wise and good men are sometimes betrayed into by the heat of disputation; of which Zophar here is an instance. Eliphaz began with a very modest preface, ch. 4. 2. Bildad was a little more rough upon Job, ch. 8. 2. But Zophar falls upon him without mercy, and gives him very bad language; *Should a man full of talk be justified? And should thy lies make men hold their peace?* Is this the way to comfort Job? No, nor to convince him neither. Does this become one that appears as an advocate for God and his justice? *Tantane animis celestibus ira?*—*In heavenly breasts can such resentments dwell?* They that engage in controversy will find it very hard to keep their temper. All the wisdom, caution, and resolution, they have, will be little enough to prevent their breaking out into such indecencies as we here find Zophar guilty of.

1. He represents Job otherwise than what he was; (v. 2, 3.) he would have him thought idle and impertinent in his discourse, and one that loved to hear himself talk; he gives him the lie, and calls him *a mocker*; and all this, that it might be looked upon as a piece of justice to chastise him. Those that have a mind to fall out with their brethren, and to fall foul upon them, find it necessary to put the worst colours they can upon them and their performances, and, right or wrong, to make them odious. We have read and considered Job's discourses in the foregoing chapters, and have found them full of good sense, and much to the purpose; that his principles are right, his reasonings strong, many of his expressions weighty and very considerable, and that what there is in them of heat and passion, a little candour and charity will excuse and overlook; yet Zophar here invidiously represents him,

(1.) As a man that never considered what he said, but uttered what came uppermost, only to make a noise with the multitude of words, hoping by that means to carry his cause, and run down his reprovers. *Should not the multitude of words be answered?* Truly, sometimes it is no great matter whether it be or no; silence perhaps is the best confutation of impertinence, and puts the greatest contempt upon it; *Answer not a fool according to his folly*. But, if it be answered, let reason and grace have the answering of it, not pride and passion. *Should a man full of talk*

(Marg. *a man of lips*, that is, all tongue, *vox et præterea nihil—mere voice*;) *be justified?* Should he be justified in his loquacity, as, in effect, he is, if he be not reproved for it? No, for *in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin*. Should he be justified by it? Shall many words pass for valid pleas? Shall he carry the day with the flourishes of language? No, he shall not be accepted with God, or any wise men, *for his much speaking*, Matth. 6. 7.

(2.) As a man that made no conscience of what he said, a liar, and one that hoped, by the impudence of lies, to silence his adversaries; (*Should thy lies make men hold their peace?*) a mocker, one that bantered all mankind, and knew how to put false colours upon any thing, and was not ashamed to impose upon every one that talked with him. *When thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?* Is it not time to speak, to stem such a violent tide as this? Job was not mad, but spake the words of truth and soberness, and yet is thus misrepresented. Eliphaz and Bildad had answered him, and said what they could to make him ashamed; it was, therefore, no instance of Zophar's generosity, to set upon a man so violently, who was already thus harassed: here were three matched against one.

2. He charges Job with saying that which he had not said; (v. 4.) *Thou hast said, My doctrine is pure*. And what if he had said so? It is true that Job was sound in the faith, and orthodox in his judgment, and spake better of God than his friends did. If he had expressed himself unwarily, yet it did not therefore follow but that his doctrine was true; but he charges him with saying, *I am clean in thine eyes*. Job had not said so: he had, indeed, said, *Thou knowest that I am not wicked*; (ch. 10. 7.) but he had also said, *I have sinned*, and never pretended to a spotless perfection. He had, indeed, maintained that he was not a hypocrite, as they charged him; but to infer thence that he would not own himself a sinner, was an unfair insinuation. We ought to put the best construction on the words and actions of our brethren that they will bear; but contenders are tempted to put the worst.

3. He appeals to God, and wishes him to appear against Job. So very confident is he that Job is in the wrong, that nothing will serve him but that God must immediately appear to silence and condemn him. We are commonly ready with too much assurance to interest God in our quarrels, and to conclude that if he would but speak, he would take our part, and speak for us; as Zophar here, *O that God would speak*, for he would certainly *open his lips against thee*; whereas, when God did speak, he opened his lips for Job against his three friends. We ought indeed to leave all controversies to be determined by the judgment of God, which we are sure *is according to truth*; but they are not always in the right, who are most forward to appeal to that judgment, and prejudice it against their antagonists.

Zophar despairs to convince Job himself, and therefore desires God would convince him of two things, which it is good for every one of us duly to consider, and, under all our afflictions, cheerfully to confess.

(1.) The unsearchable depth of God's counsels. Zophar cannot pretend to do it, but he desires that God himself would shew Job so much of the secrets of the divine wisdom, as might convince him that they are, at least, double to that which is, v. 6. Note, [1.] There are secrets in the divine wisdom; *arcana imperii—state secrets*. God's way is in the sea; clouds and darkness are round about him; he has reasons of state which we cannot fathom, and must not pry into. [2.] What we know of God, is nothing to what we cannot know. What is hid, is more than double to what appears, Eph. 3. 9. [3.] By employing ourselves in adoring the depth of those divine counsels of which we cannot find the bottom, we shall very much tranquillize our minds under the afflicting hand of God. [4.] God knows a great deal more evil of us than we do of ourselves; so some understand it. When God gave David a sight and sense of sin, he said that he had *in the hidden part made him to know wisdom*, Ps. 51. 6.

(2.) The unexceptionable justice of his proceedings; "Know, therefore, that how sore soever the correction is, that thou art under, *God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserves*;" or, as some read it, "He remits thee part of thine iniquity, and does not deal

with thee according to the full demerit of it." Note, [1.] When the debt of duty is not paid, it is justice to insist upon the debt of punishment. [2.] Whatever punishment is inflicted upon us in this world, we must own that it is less than our iniquities deserve, and therefore, instead of complaining of our troubles, we must be thankful that we are out of hell, Lam. 3. 39. Ps. 103. 10.

7. Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? 8. *It is* as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? 9. The measure thereof *is* longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. 10. If he cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him? 11. For he knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider *it*? 12. For vain man would be wise, though man be born *like* a wild ass's colt.

Zophar here speaks very good things concerning God and his greatness and glory, concerning man and his vanity and folly: these two compared together, and duly considered, will have a powerful influence upon our submission to all the dispensations of the Divine Providence.

I. See here what God is, and let him be adored.

1. He is an incomprehensible Being, infinite and immense, whose nature and perfections our finite understandings cannot possibly form any adequate conceptions of, and whose counsels and actions we cannot therefore, without the greatest presumption, pass a judgment upon. We, that are so little acquainted with the Divine nature, are incompetent judges of the Divine Providence; and, when we censure the dispensations of it, we talk of things that we do not understand. We cannot find out God; how dare we then find fault with him? Zophar here shews,

(1.) That God's nature infinitely exceeds the capacities of our understandings; "*Canst thou find out God: find him out to perfection? No, What canst thou do? What canst thou know?*" v. 7, 8. Thou, a poor, weak, short-sighted creature, a worm of the earth, that art but of yesterday? Thou, though ever so inquisitive after him, ever so desirous and industrious to find him out, yet darest thou attempt the search, or canst thou hope to speed in it? We may by searching *find* God, (Acts, 17. 27.) but we cannot *find him out* in any thing he is pleased to conceal; we may apprehend him, but cannot comprehend him; we may know *that* he is, but cannot know *what* he is; the eye can see the ocean, but not see over it; we may, by a humble, diligent, and believing search, find out something of God, but cannot find him out to perfection; we may know, but cannot know fully, what God is, nor find out his work *from the beginning to the end*, Eccl. 3. 11. Note, God is unsearchable. The ages of his eternity cannot be numbered, nor the spaces of his immensity measured: the depths of his wisdom cannot be fathomed, nor the reaches of his power bounded: the brightness of his glory can never be described, nor an inventory be made of the treasures of his goodness. This is a good reason why we should always speak of God with humility and caution, and never prescribe to him or quarrel with him; why we should be thankful for what he has revealed of himself, and long to be there where we shall see him as he is, 1 Cor. 13. 9, 10.

(2.) That it infinitely exceeds the limits of the whole creation; *It is higher than heaven*, (so some read it,) deeper than hell, the great abyss, longer than the earth, and broader than the sea, many parts of which are, to this day, undiscovered, and more were then. It is quite out of our reach to comprehend God's nature; *such knowledge is too wonderful for us*, Ps. 139. 6. We cannot fathom God's designs, nor find out the reasons of his proceedings; his judgments are a great deep. St. Paul attributes such immeasurable dimensions to the divine love, as Zophar here attributes to the divine wisdom, and yet recommends it to

our acquaintance, (Eph. 3. 18.) *That ye may know the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, of the love of Christ.*

2. God is a sovereign Lord; (v. 10.) If he cut off by death, (Marg. *If he make a change*, for death is a change; if he make a change in nations, in families, in the posture of our affairs,) if he shut up in prison, or in the net of affliction; (Ps. 66. 11.) if he seize any creature as a hunter his prey, he will gather it, (so Bishop Patrick,) and who shall force him to restore? Or, if he gather together, as tares for the fire, or, *if he gather to himself man's spirit and breath*, (ch. 34. 14.) then who can hinder him? Who can either arrest the sentence, or oppose the execution? Who can controul his power, or arraign his wisdom and justice? If he that made all out of nothing, think fit to reduce all to nothing, or to their first chaos again; if he that separated between light and darkness, dry land and sea, at first, please to gather them together again; if he that made, unmake, *who can turn him away*, alter his mind, stay his hand, impede or impeach his proceedings?

3. God is a strict and just Observer of the children of men; (v. 11.) *He knows vain men*. We know little of him, but he knows us perfectly; he sees wickedness also, not to approve it, (Hab. 1. 13.) but to animadvert upon it. (1.) He observes vain men; (such all are, *every man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity*;) and he considers it in his dealings with them. He knows what the projects and hopes of vain men are, and can blast and defeat them, the workings of their foolish fancies; he sits in heaven, and laughs at them. He takes knowledge of the vanity of men, that is, their little sins, so some; their vain thoughts and vain words, and unsteadiness in that which is good. (2.) He observes bad men; he sees gross wickedness also, though acted ever so secretly, and ever so artfully palliated and disguised. All the wickedness of the wicked is naked and open before the all-seeing eye of God; *will he not then consider it*? Yes, certainly he will, and will reckon for it, though for a time he seems to keep silence.

II. See here what man is; and let him be humbled; (v. 12.) God sees this concerning vain man, that he would be wise, would be thought so, though he is *born like a wild ass's colt*, so sottiſh and foolish, unteachable and untameable. See what man is: 1. He is a vain creature; empty; so the word is: God made him full, but he emptied himself, impoverished himself, and now he is *vaca*, a creature that has nothing in him. 2. He is a foolish creature, become *like the beasts that perish*, (Ps. 49. 20.—73. 22.) an idiot, born like an ass, the most stupid animal, an ass's colt, not yet brought to any service. If ever he come to be good for any thing, it is owing to the grace of Christ, who once, in the day of his triumph, served himself of an ass's colt. 3. He is a wilful ungovernable creature. An ass's colt may be made good for something, but the wild ass's colt will never be reclaimed, nor regards the crying of the driver. See Job, 39. 5. . 7. Man thinks himself as much at liberty, and his own master, as the wild ass's colt does, that is *used to the wilderness*, (Jer. 2. 24.) eager to gratify his own appetites and passions. 4. Yet he is a proud creature and self-conceited. He would be wise, would be thought so, values himself upon the honour of wisdom, though he will not submit himself to the laws of wisdom. He would be wise, that is, he reaches after forbidden wisdom, and, like his first parents, aiming to be wise above what is written, loses the tree of life for the tree of knowledge. Now, is such a creature as this fit to contend with God, or call him to an account? Did we but better know God and ourselves, we should better know how to conduct ourselves toward God.

13. If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; 14. If iniquity *be* in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. 15. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear: 16. Because thou shalt forget *thy* misery, and remember *it* as waters

that pass away: 17. And *thine* age shall be clearer than the noon day: thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning. 18. And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety. 19. Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee. 20. But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.

Zophar, as the other two, here encourages Job to hope for better times, if he would but come to a better temper.

1. He gives him good counsel, (v. 13, 14.) as Eliphaz did, (ch. 5. 3.) and Bildad, ch. 8. 5. He would have him repent, and return to God. Observe the steps of that return;

1. He must look within, and get his mind changed, and the tree made good. He must prepare his heart; there the work of conversion and reformation must begin. The heart that wandered from God must be reduced; that was defiled with sin and put into disorder, must be cleansed and put in order again; that was wavering and unfixed, must be settled and established: so the word here signifies. The heart is then prepared to seek God, when it is determined and fully resolved to make a business of it, and to go through with it.

2. He must look up, and stretch out his hand toward God, that is, must stir up himself to take hold on God; must pray to him with earnestness and importunity, striving in prayer, and with expectation to receive mercy and grace from him. To give the hand to the Lord, signifies to yield ourselves to him and to covenant with him, 2 Chron. 30. 8. This Job must do, and, for the doing of it, must prepare his heart. Job had prayed, but Zophar would have him to pray in a better manner, not as an appellant, but as a petitioner and humble suppliant.

3. He must amend what was amiss in his own conversation, else his prayers would be ineffectual; (v. 14.) *If iniquity be in thy hand*, that is, "If there be any sin, which thou dost yet live in the practice of, put it far away, forsake it with detestation and a holy indignation, stedfastly resolving not to return to it, nor ever to have any thing more to do with it, Ezek. 18. 31. Hos. 14. 9. Isa. 30. 22. If any of the gains of iniquity, any goods gotten by fraud or oppression, be in thine hand, make restitution of it," (as Zaccheus, Luke, 19. 8.) "and shake thy hands from holding it," Isa. 33. 15. The guilt of sin is not removed, if the gain of sin be not restored.

4. He must do his utmost to reform his family too; "Let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles; let not thy house harbour or shelter any wicked persons, any wicked practices, or any wealth gotten by wickedness." He suspected that Job's great household had been ill-governed, and that where there were many, there were many wicked, and the ruin of his family was the punishment of the wickedness of it; and therefore, if he expected God should return to him, he must reform what was amiss there, and, though wickedness might come into his tabernacles, he must not suffer it to dwell there, Ps. 101. 3, &c.

II. He assures him of comfort if he took this counsel, v. 15, &c. If he would repent and reform, he should, without doubt, be easy and happy, and all would be well. Perhaps Zophar might insinuate, that, unless God did speedily make such a change as this in his condition, he and his friends would be confirmed in their opinion of him as a hypocrite and a dissembler with God: a great truth, however, is conveyed, That the work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever, Isa. 32. 17.

Those that sincerely turn to God, may expect,

1. A holy confidence toward God; "Then shalt thou lift up thy face toward heaven without spot; thou mayest come boldly to the throne of grace," and not with that terror and amazement expressed, ch. 9. 34. If our hearts condemn us not for hypocrisy

and impenitency, then have we confidence in our approaches to God and expectations from him, 1 John, 3. 21. If we are looked upon in the face of the Anointed, our faces, that were dejected, may be lifted up; that were polluted, being washed with the blood of Christ, may be lifted up without spot. We may draw near in full assurance of faith, when we are sprinkled from an evil conscience, Heb. 10. 22. Some understand this of the clearing up of his credit before men, Ps. 37. 6. If we make our peace with God, we may with cheerfulness look our friends in the face.

2. A holy composedness in themselves; *Thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear, not be afraid of evil tidings*, thy heart being fixed, Ps. 112. 7. Job was now full of confusion, (ch. 10. 15.) while he looked upon God as his Enemy, and quarrelled with him; but Zophar assures him, that, if he would submit and humble himself, his mind would be stayed, and he would be freed from those frightful apprehensions he had of God, which put him into such an agitation. The less we are frightened, the more we are fixed; and, consequently, the more fit we are for our services and for our sufferings.

3. A comfortable reflection upon their past troubles; (v. 13.) "Thou shalt forget thy misery; (as the mother forgets her travelling pains, for joy that the child is born;) thou shalt be perfectly freed from the impressions it makes upon thee, and thou shalt remember it as waters that pass away, or are poured out of a vessel, which leave no taste or tincture behind them, as other liquors do. The wounds of thy present affliction shall be perfectly healed, not only without a remaining scar, but without a remaining pain." Job had endeavoured to forget his complaint, (ch. 9. 27.) but found he could not; his soul had still in remembrance the wormwood and the gall: but here Zophar puts him in a way to forget it: let him by faith and prayer bring his griefs and cares to God, and leave them with him, and then he shall forget them. Where sin sits heavy, affliction sits light. If we duly remember our sins, we shall, in comparison with them, forget our misery; much more if we obtain the comfort of a sealed pardon and a sealed peace. He whose iniquity is forgiven shall not say, I am sick, but forget that, Isa. 33. 24.

4. A comfortable prospect of their future peace. This Zophar here thinks to please Job with, in answer to the many despairing expressions he had used, as if it were to no purpose for him to hope ever to see good days again in this world; "Yea, but thou mayest," (says Zophar,) "and good nights too."

A blessed change he here puts him in hopes of.

(1.) That though now his light was eclipsed, it should shine out again, and brighter than ever, v. 17. That even his setting sun should out-shine his noon-day sun, and his evening be fair and clear as the morning, in respect both of honour and pleasure; that his light should shine out of obscurity; (Isa. 58. 10.) and the thick and dark cloud, from behind which his sun should break forth, would serve as a foil to its lustre. That it should shine even in old age, and those evil days should be good days to him. Note, They that truly turn to God then begin to shine forth; their path is as the shining light which increases, the period of their day will be the perfection of it, and their evening to this world their morning to a better.

(2.) That though now he was in a continual fear and terror, he should live in a holy rest and security, and find himself continually safe and easy; (v. 18.) *Thou shalt be secure, because there is hope*. Note, Those who have a good hope, through grace, in God, and of heaven, are certainly safe, and have reason to be secure, how difficult soever the times are through which they pass in this world. He that walks uprightly may thus walk surely, because, though there are trouble and danger, yet there is hope that all will be well at last. Hope is an anchor of the soul, Heb. 6. 19. "Thou shalt dig about thee," that is, "Thou shalt be as safe as an army in its intrenchments." They that submit themselves to God's government shall be taken under his protection, and then they are safe both day and night. [1.] By day, when they employ themselves abroad; "Thou shalt dig in safety, thou and thy servants for thee, and not be again set upon by the plunderers, who fell upon thy servants at plough," ch. 1. 14. It is no

part of the promised prosperity, that he should live in idleness, but that he should have a calling and follow it, and, when he was about the business of it, should be under the divine protection; Thou shalt *dig* and be safe, not *rob* and be safe; the way of duty is the way of safety. [2.] By night, when they repose themselves at home; *Thou shalt take thy rest (and the sleep of the labouring man is sweet) in safety*, notwithstanding the dangers of the darkness. The pillar of cloud by day shall be a pillar of fire by night; "*Thou shalt lie down*, (v. 19.) not forced to wander where there is no place to lay thy head on, not forced to watch and sit up in expectation of assaults; but thou shalt go to bed at bedtime, and not only shall none hurt thee, but none shall make thee afraid, or so much as give thee an alarm." Note, It is a great mercy to have quiet nights and undisturbed sleeps; those say so that are within the hearing of the noise of war. And the way to be quiet, is, to seek unto God, and keep ourselves in his love. Nothing needs make those afraid, who *return to God as their rest*, and take him for their habitation.

(3.) That though now he was slighted, yet he should be courted; "Many shall make suit to thee, and think it their interest to secure thy friendship." Suit is made to those that are eminently wise or reputed to be so, that are very rich, or in power. Zophar knew Job so well, that he foresaw, how low soever this present ebb was, if once the tide turned, it would flow as high as ever, and he would be again the darling of his country. They that rightly make suit to God, will probably see the day when others will make suit to them, as the foolish virgins to the wise, *Give us of your oil*.

Lastly, Zophar concludes with a brief account of the doom of wicked people; (v. 20.) *But the eyes of the wicked shall fail*. It should seem, he suspected that Job would not take his counsel, and here tells him what would then come of it, setting death as well as life before him. See what will come of those who persist in their wickedness, and will not be reformed.

1. They shall not reach the good they flatter themselves with the hopes of, in this world and in the other. Disappointments will be their doom, their shame, their endless torment. Their eyes shall fail with expecting that which will never come. *When a wicked man dieth, his expectation perishes*, Prov. 11. 7. *Their hope shall be as a puff of breath*, (Marg.) vanished and gone, past recall: or their hope will perish and expire as a man does when he gives up the ghost; it will fail them when they have most need of it, and when they expected the accomplishment of it; it will die away, and leave them in utter confusion.

2. They shall not avoid the evil which sometimes they frighten themselves with the apprehension of: they shall not escape the execution of the sentence past upon them; can neither out-brave it, nor out-run it. Those that will not fly to God, will find it in vain to think of flying from him.

CHAP. XII.

In this and the two following chapters, we have Job's answer to Zophar's discourse. In which, as before, he first reasons with his friends, (see ch. 13. 19.) and then turns to his God, and directs his expostulations to him, from thence to the end of his discourse. In this chapter, he addresses himself to his friends, and, I. He condemns what they had said of him, and the judgment they had given of his character, v. 1. .5. II. He contradicts and confronts what they had said of the destruction of wicked people in this world, shewing that they often prosper, v. 6. .11. III. He consents to what they had said of the wisdom, power, and sovereignty, of God, and the dominion of his providence over the children of men and all their affairs; he confirms this, and enlarges upon it, v. 12. .25.

1. **A**ND Job answered and said, 2. No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. 3. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these? 4. I am as one mocked of his neighbour, who calleth upon God, and he answereth him: the just upright man is laughed to scorn. 5. He that is ready to slip with his feet, is

as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease

The reproofs Job here gives to his friends, whether they were just or no, were very sharp, and may serve for a rebuke to all that are proud and scornful, and an exposing of their folly.

I. He upbraids them with their conceitedness of themselves, and the good opinion they seemed to have of their own wisdom in comparison with him; than which nothing is more weak and unbecoming, nor better deserves to be ridiculed, as it is here.

1. He represents them as claiming the monopoly of wisdom, v. 2. He speaks ironically, "*No doubt, you are the people*; you think yourselves fit to dictate and give law to all mankind, and your own judgment to be the standard by which every man's opinion must be measured and tried; as if nobody could discern between truth and falsehood, good and evil, but you only; and therefore every top-sail must lower to you, and, right or wrong, we must all say as you say, and you three must be the people, the majority, to have the casting vote." Note, It is a very foolish sinful thing for any to think themselves wiser than all mankind besides, or to speak and act confidently and imperiously, as if they thought so. Nay, he goes further; "*You not only think there are none, but that there will be none, as wise as you, and therefore that wisdom must die with you, and all the world must be fools when you are gone, and in the dark when your sun is set*." Note, It is folly for us to think that there will be any great irreparable loss of us when we are gone, or that we can be ill-spared, since God has the residue of the Spirit, and can raise up others more fit than we are, to do his work. When wise men and good men die, it is a comfort to think that wisdom and goodness shall not die with them. Some think Job here reflects upon Zophar's comparing him (as he thought) and others to the wild ass's colt, ch. 11. 12. "Yes," says he, "we must be asses, you are the only men."

2. He does himself the justice to put in his claim as a sharer in the gifts of wisdom; (v. 3.) "*But I have understanding, a heart, as well as you; nay, I fall not lower than you*;" (as it is in the margin;) "I am as well able to judge of the methods and meanings of the Divine Providence, and to construe the hard chapters of it, as you are." He says not this, to magnify himself; it was no great applause of himself to say, *I have understanding as well as you*; no, nor to say, "I understand this matter as well as you;" for what reason had either he or they to be proud of understanding that which was obvious and level to the capacity of the meanest; "*Yea, who knows not such things as these?*" What things you have said, that are true, are plain truths, and common themes, which there are many that can talk as excellently of as either you or I: but he says it, to humble them, and check the value they had for themselves as doctors of the chair. Note, (1.) It may justly keep us from being proud of our knowledge, to consider how many there are that know as much as we do, and perhaps much more, and to better purpose. (2.) When we are tempted to be harsh in our censures of those we differ from and dispute with, we ought to consider that they also have understanding as well as we, a capacity of judging, and a right of judging, for themselves; nay, perhaps they are not inferior to us, but superior, and it is possible that they may be in the right, and we in the wrong; and therefore we ought not to judge or despise them, (Rom. 14. 3.) nor pretend to be masters, (Jam. 3. 1.) while *all we are brethren*, Matth. 23. 8. It is a very reasonable allowance to be made to all we converse with, all we contend with, that they are rational creatures as well as we.

II. He complains of the great contempt with which they had treated him. Those that are haughty and think too well of themselves, are commonly scornful, and ready to trample upon all about them: Job found it so, at least he thought he did; (v. 4.) *I am as one mocked*. I cannot say there was cause for this charge; we will not think Job's friends designed him any abuse, nor aimed at any thing but to convince him, and so, in the right method, to comfort him; yet he cries out, *I am as one mocked*. Note, We are apt to call reproofs *reproaches*, and to

think ourselves mocked when we are but advised and admonished; this peevishness is our folly, and a great wrong to ourselves and to our friends. Yet we cannot but say there was a colour for this charge; they came to comfort him, but they vexed him; gave him counsels and encouragements, but with no great opinion that either the one or the other would take effect; and therefore he thought they mocked him, and it added much to his grief. Nothing is more grievous to those that are fallen from the height of prosperity into the depth of adversity, than to be trodden on, and insulted over, when they are down; and on this head they are too apt to be suspicious.

Observe, 1. What aggravated this grievance to him. Two things: (1.) That they were his neighbours, his friends, his companions, so the word signifies; and the scoffs of such are often most spitefully given, and always most indignantly received; (Ps. 55. 12, 13.) *It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have slighted it, and so borne it; but it was thou, a man mine equal.* (2.) That they were professors of religion, such as called upon God, and said that he answered them; for some understand that of the persons mocking; "They are such as have a regard to Heaven, and an interest in Heaven, whose prayers I would therefore be glad of and thankful for, and whose good opinion I cannot but covet, and therefore whose censures are the more grievous." Note, It is sad that any who call upon God should mock their brethren; (Jam. 3. 9, 10.) and it cannot but lie heavy on a good man to be thought ill of by those whom he thinks well of; yet this is no new thing.

2. What supported him under it. (1.) That he had a God to go to, with whom he could lodge his appeal; for some understand those words of the person mocked, that he *calls upon God, and he answers him*; and so it agrees with ch. 16. 20. *My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears to God.* If our friends be deaf to our complaints, God is not; if they condemn us, God knows our integrity; if they make the worst of us, he will make the best of us; if they give us cross answers, he will give us kind ones. (2.) That his case was not singular, but very common: *The just upright man is laughed to scorn*; by many he is laughed at even for his justice and his uprightness, his honesty toward men, and his piety toward God; these are derided as foolish things, which silly people needlessly hamper themselves with: as if religion were a jest, and therefore to be made a jest of. By most he is laughed at for any little infirmity or weakness, notwithstanding his justice and uprightness, without any consideration had of that which is so much his honour. Note, It was of old the lot of honest good people to be despised and derided; we are not therefore to think it strange, (1 Pet. 4. 12.) no nor to think it hard, if it be our lot; so persecuted they not only the prophets, but even the saints of the patriarchal age, Matth. 5. 12. And can we expect to fare better than they?

3. What he suspected to be the true cause of it, and that was, in short, this; they were themselves rich and at ease, and therefore they despised him who was fallen into poverty. It is the way of the world, we see instances of it daily; they that prosper are praised, but of them that are going down it is said, "Down with them." *He that is ready to slip with his feet, and fall into trouble, though he has formerly shone as a lamp, is then looked upon as a lamp going out, like the snuff of a candle, which we throw to the ground, and tread upon, and is accordingly despised in the thought of him that is at ease, v. 5.* Even the just upright man, that is in his generation as a burning and shining light, if he enter into temptation, (Ps. 73. 2.) or come under a cloud, is looked upon with contempt. See here, (1.) What is the common fault of those that live in prosperity; being full and easy and merry themselves, they look scornfully upon those that are in want, pain, and sorrow; they overlook them, take no notice of them, and study to forget them. See Ps. 123. 4. The chief butler drinks wine in bowls, but makes nothing of the afflictions of Joseph. Wealth without grace often makes men thus haughty, thus careless of their poor neighbours. (2.) What is the common fate of those that fall into adversity. Poverty serves to eclipse all their lustre; though they are lamps, yet, if taken out of golden candlesticks,

and put, like Gideon's, into earthen pitchers, nobody values them as formerly, but they that live at ease despise them.

6. The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly. 7. But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: 8. Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. 9. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? 10. In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. 11. Doth not the ear try words? and the mouth taste his meat?

Job's friends, all of them, went upon this principle, that wicked people cannot prosper long in this world, but some remarkable judgment or other will suddenly light on them: Zophar had concluded with it, that *the eyes of the wicked shall fail, ch. 11. 20.* This principle Job here opposes, and maintains, that God, in disposing men's outward affairs, acts as a Sovereign, reserving the exact distribution of rewards and punishments for the future state.

1. He asserts it as an undoubted truth, that wicked people may, and often do, prosper long in this world, v. 6. Even great sinners may enjoy great prosperity. Observe, 1. How he describes the sinners; they are robbers, and such as provoke God, the worst kind of sinners, blasphemers and persecutors; perhaps he refers to the Sabeans and Chaldeans, who had robbed him, and had always lived by spoil and rapine, and yet they prospered; all the world saw they did, and there is no disputing against sense; one observation built upon matter of fact is worth twenty notions framed by an hypothesis. Or, more generally, All proud oppressors are robbers and pirates. It is supposed that what is injurious to men, is provoking to God, the Patron of right, and the Protector of mankind. It is not strange, if those that violate the bonds of justice, break through the obligations of all religion, bid defiance even to God himself, and make nothing of provoking him. 2. How he describes their prosperity: it is very great; for, (1.) Even their tabernacles prosper, those that live with them, and those that come after them, and descend from them. It seems as if a blessing were entailed upon their families; and that is preserved sometimes to succeeding generations, which was got by fraud. (2.) They are secure, and not only feel no hurt, but fear none, are under no apprehensions of danger, either from threatening providences, or an awakened conscience. But those that provoke God are never the more safe for their being secure. (3.) *Into their hand God brings abundantly. They have more than heart could wish, Ps. 73. 7.* They have, not for necessity only, but for delight; not for themselves only, but for others; not for the present only, but for hereafter; and this from the hand of Providence too. God brings plentifully to them; we cannot therefore judge of men's piety by their plenty, nor of what they have in their heart by what they have in their hand.

II. He appeals even to the inferior creatures for the proof of this—the beasts, and fowls, and trees, and even the earth itself; consult these, and they shall tell thee; (v. 7, 8.) many a good lesson we may learn from them; but what are they here to teach us?

1. We may learn from them that the tabernacles of robbers prosper; so some. For, (1.) Even among the brute-creatures, the greater devour the lesser, and the stronger prey upon the weaker, and men are as the fishes of the sea, Hab. 1. 14. If sin had not entered, we may suppose there had been no such disorder among the creatures, but the wolf and the lamb had lain down together. (2.) These creatures are serviceable to wicked men, and so they declare their prosperity. Ask the herds and the flocks, to whom they belong, and they will tell you that such a robber, such an oppressor, is their owner: the fishes and fowls will tell you that they

are served up to the tables, and feed the luxury, of proud sinners: the earth brings forth her fruits to them, (*ch. 9. 24.*) and the whole creation groans under the burthen of their tyranny, *Rom. 8. 20, 22.* Note, All the creatures which wicked men abuse, by making them the food and fuel of their lusts, will witness against them, another day, *Jam. 5. 3, 4.*

2. We may from them learn the wisdom, power, and goodness, of God, and that sovereign dominion of his, into which plain and self-evident truth all these difficult dispensations must be resolved. Zophar had made a vast mystery of it, *ch. 11. 7.* "So far from that," (says Job,) "that what we are concerned to know, we may learn even from the inferior creatures; for who knows not from all these? Any one may easily gather from the book of the creatures, that *the hand of the Lord has wrought this,*" (*v. 9.*) that is, "that there is a wise providence which guides and governs all these things by rules which we are neither acquainted with, nor are competent judges of." Note, From God's sovereign dominion over the inferior creatures, we should learn to acquiesce in all his disposals of the affairs of the children of men, though contrary to our measures.

III. He resolves all into the absolute propriety which God has in all the creatures; (*v. 10.*) *In whose hand is the soul of every living thing.* All the creatures, and mankind particularly; derive their being from him, owe their being to him, depend upon him for the support of it, lie at his mercy, are under his direction and dominion, and entirely at his disposal, and at his summons must resign their lives. All souls are his; and may he not do what he will with his own? The name *Jehovah* is used here, (*v. 9.*) and it is the only time that we meet with it in all the discourses between Job and his friends; for God was, in that age, more known by the name of *Shaddai, the Almighty.*

Those words, (*v. 11.*) *Doth not the ear try words, as the mouth tastes meat?* may be taken either as the conclusion to the foregoing discourse, or the preface to what follows. The mind of man has as good a faculty of discerning between truth and error, when duly stated, as the palate has of discerning between what is sweet and what is bitter. He therefore demands from his friends a liberty to judge for himself of what they had said; and desires them to use the same liberty in judging of what he had said; nay, he seems to appeal to any man's impartial judgment in this controversy; let the ear try the words on both sides, and it would be found that he was in the right. Note, The ear must try words before it receives them so as to subscribe to them. As by the taste we judge what food is wholesome to the body, and what not, so by the spirit of discerning we must judge what doctrine is sound, and savoury, and wholesome, and what not, *1 Cor. 10. 15.—11. 13.*

12. With the ancient *is* wisdom; and in length of days understanding. 13. With him *is* wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding. 14. Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. 15. Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth. 16. With him *is* strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver *are* his. 17. He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. 18. He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle. 19. He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. 20. He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. 21. He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty. 22. He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of

death. 23. He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them *again.* 24. He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness *where there is no way.* 25. They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man.

This is a noble discourse of Job's concerning the wisdom, power, and sovereignty, of God, in ordering and disposing of all the affairs of the children of men, according to the counsel of his own will, which none dares gainsay, or can resist. Take both him and them out of the controversy in which they were so warmly engaged, and they all spake admirably well; but in *that*, we sometimes scarcely know what to make of them. It were well if wise and good men, that differ in their apprehensions about lesser things, would see it to be for their honour and comfort, and the edification of others, to dwell most upon those great things in which they are agreed. On this subject, Job speaks like himself; here are no passionate complaints, no peevish reflections, but every thing masculine and great.

I. He asserts the unsearchable wisdom, and irresistible power, of God. It is allowed that among men there *is* wisdom and understanding, *v. 12.* But it is to be found only with some few, with the ancient, and those who are blessed with length of days, who get it by long experience and constant experience; and, when they have got the wisdom, they have lost their strength, and are unable to execute the results of their wisdom: but now with God there are both wisdom and strength, wisdom to design the best, and strength to accomplish what is designed; he does not get counsel and understanding, as we do, by observation, but he has it essentially and eternally in himself, *v. 13.* What is the wisdom of ancient men compared with the wisdom of the Ancient of days! It is but little that we know, and less that we can do; but God can do every thing, and *no thought can be withholden from him.* Happy they who have this God for their God, for they have infinite wisdom and strength engaged for them! Foolish and fruitless are all the attempts of men against him, *v. 14.* *He breaketh down, and it cannot be built again.* Note, There is no contending with the Divine Providence, nor breaking the measures of it. As he had said before; (*ch. 9. 12.*) *He takes away, and who can hinder him?* So he says again, What God says, cannot be gainsaid, nor what he does, undone. There is no rebuilding what God will have to lie in ruins; witness the tower of Babel, which the undertakers could not go on with; and the desolations of Sodom and Gomorrah, which could never be repaired. See *Isa. 25. 2. Ezek. 26. 14. Rev. 18. 21.* There is no releasing of those whom God has condemned to a perpetual imprisonment; if he shut up a man by sickness, reduce him to straits, and embarrass him in his affairs, there can be no opening. He shuts up in the grave, and none can break open those sealed doors; shuts up in hell, in chains of darkness, and none can pass that great gulf fixed.

II. He gives an instance, for the proof of it, in nature, *v. 15.* He has the command of the waters, binds them as in a garment, (*Prov. 30. 4.*) holds them in the hollow of his hand; (*Isa. 40. 12.*) and he can punish the children of men either by the defect, or by the excess of them: as men break the laws of virtue by extremes on each hand, both defects and excesses, while virtue is in the mean, so God corrects them by extremes, and denies them the mercy which is in the mean. 1. Great droughts are sometimes great judgments; he *withholds the waters, and they dry up*; if the heaven be as brass, the earth is as iron; if the rain be denied, fountains dry up, and their streams are wanted, fields are parched, and their fruits are wanted, *Amos. 4. 7.* 2. Great wet is sometimes a great judgment; he raises the waters, and overturns the earth, the productions of it, the buildings upon it. A sweeping rain is said to *leave no food*, *Prov. 28. 3.* See how many ways God has of contending with a sinful people, and taking from them abused, forfeited, mercies; and how utterly unable we are to contend with him! If we might invert the order, this

verse would fitly refer to Noah's flood, that ever-memorable instance of the divine power. God then, in wrath, sent the waters out, and they overturned the earth; but, in mercy, he withheld them, shut the windows of heaven, and the fountains of the great deep, and then, in a little time, they dried up.

III. He gives many instances of it in God's powerful management of the children of men, crossing their purposes, and serving his own by them and upon them, over-ruling all their counsels, overpowering all their attempts, and overcoming all their oppositions. What changes does God make with men, what turns does he give to them; how easily, how surprisingly!

In general, (v. 16.) *With him is strength and reason*, so some translate it; strength and consistency with himself: it is an elegant word in the original. With him are the very quintessence and extract of wisdom. With him are power and all that is, so some read it. He is what he is himself, and by him, and in him, all things subsist. Having this strength and wisdom, he knows how to make use, not only of those who are wise and good, who willingly and designedly serve him, but even of those who are foolish and bad, who, one would think, could be made no way serviceable to the designs of his providence: *the deceived and the deceiver are his*; the simplest men that are deceived, are not below his notice, the subtlest men that deceive, cannot, with all their subtlety, escape his cognizance. The world is full of deceit, the one half of mankind cheats the other, and God suffers it, and from both will, at last, bring glory to himself. The deceivers make tools of the deceived, but the great God makes tools of them both, wherewith he works, and none can let him. He has wisdom and might enough to manage all the fools and knaves in the world, and knows how to serve his own purposes by them, notwithstanding the weakness of the one, and the wickedness of the other. When Jacob by a fraud got the blessing, the design of God's grace was served; when Ahab was drawn by a false prophecy into an expedition that was his ruin, the design of God's justice was served; and in both *the deceived and the deceiver* were at his disposal. See Ezek. 14. 9. God would not suffer the sin of the deceiver, nor the misery of the deceived, if he knew not how to set bounds to both, and bring glory to himself out of both. *Hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent* thus reigns; and it is well he does, for otherwise there is so little wisdom, and so little honesty, in the world, that it had all been in confusion and ruin long ago.

He next descends to the particular instances of the wisdom and power of God in the revolutions of states and kingdoms: for thence he fetches his proofs, rather than from the like operations of Providence concerning private persons and families; because the more high and public the station is, in which men are placed, the more the changes that befall them are taken notice of, and, consequently, the more illustriously does Providence shine forth in them. And it is easy to argue, If God can thus turn and toss the great ones of the earth, like a ball in a large place, (as the prophet speaks, Isa. 22. 18.) much more the little ones; and with him, to whom states and kingdoms must submit, it is surely the greatest madness for us to contend. Some think that Job here refers to the extirpation of those powerful nations, the Rephaim, the Zuzim, the Emim, and the Horites, (mentioned Gen. 14. 5, 6. Dent. 2. 10, 20.) in which, perhaps, it was particularly noticed, how strangely they were infatuated and enfeebled; if so, it is designed to shew, that, whenever the like is done in the affairs of nations, it is God that doeth it, and we must therein observe his sovereign dominion, even over those that think themselves most powerful, politic, and absolute. Compare this with that of Eliphaz, ch. 5. 12, &c.

Let us gather up the particular changes here specified, which God makes upon persons, either for the destruction of nations, and the planting of others in their room, or for the turning out of a particular government and ministry, and the elevation of another in its room, which may be a blessing to the kingdom; witness the glorious Revolution in our own land twenty years ago, in which we saw as happy an exposition as ever was given of this discourse of Job's.

1. Those that were wise, are sometimes strangely infatuated; and in that the hand of God must be acknowledged; (v. 17.) *He*

leadeth counsellors away spoiled, as trophies of his victory over them, spoiled of all the honour and wealth they have got by their policy, nay, spoiled of the wisdom itself for which they have been celebrated, and the success they promised themselves in their projects: his counsel stands, while all their devices are brought to nought, and their designs baffled, and so they are spoiled both of the satisfaction and the reputation of their wisdom. *He maketh the judges fools*: by a work on their minds he deprives them of their qualifications for business, and so they become really fools; and by his disposal of their affairs he makes the issue and event of their projects to be quite contrary to what they themselves intended, and so he makes them look like fools. The counsel of Ahithophel, one in whom this scripture was remarkably fulfilled, became foolishness, and he, according to his name, *the brother of a fool*. See Isa. 19. 13. *The princes of Zoan are become fools, they have seduced Egypt, even they that are the stay of the tribes thereof*. Let not the wise man, therefore, glory in his wisdom, nor the ablest counsellors and judges be proud of their station, but humbly depend upon God for the continuance of their abilities. Even the aged, who seem to hold their wisdom by prescription, and think they have got it by their own industry, and therefore have an indefeasible title to it, may yet be deprived of it, and often are, by the infirmities of age, which make them twice children; he *taketh away the understanding of the aged*, v. 20. The aged, who were most depended on for advice, fail those that depended on them. We read of an old and yet foolish king, Eccl. 4. 13.

2. Those that were high and in authority, are strangely brought down, impoverished, and enslaved; and it is God that humbles them; (v. 18.) *He looseth the bond of kings*, and taketh from them the power wherewith they ruled their subjects, perhaps enslaved them, and ruled them with rigour; strips them of all the ensigns of their honour and authority, and all the supports of their tyranny; unbuckles their belts, so that the sword drops from their side, and then no marvel if the crown quickly drops from their heads; on which, immediately follows the girding of their loins with a girdle, a badge of servitude, for servants went with their loins girt. Thus he leads great princes away spoiled of all their power and wealth, and that in which they pleased and prided themselves, v. 19. Note, *Kings* are not exempt from God's jurisdiction. To us they are gods, but men to him, and subject to more than the common changes of human life.

3. Those that were strong, are strangely weakened; and it is God that weakens them, (v. 21.) and *overthrows the mighty*, v. 19. Strong bodies are weakened by age and sickness, powerful armies moulder and come to nothing, and their strength will not secure them from a fatal overthrow. No force can stand before Omnipotence, no net that of Goliath.

4. Those that were famed for eloquence, and entrusted with public business, are strangely silenced, and have nothing to say; (v. 20.) *He removeth away the speech of the trusty*, so that they cannot speak as they intended, and as they used to do, with freedom and clearness, but blunder and falter, and make nothing of it. Or, they cannot speak what they intended, but the contrary, as Balaam, who blessed those whom he was called to curse. Let not the orator therefore be proud of his rhetoric, nor use it to any bad purposes, lest God take it away, who made man's mouth.

5. Those that were honoured and admired, strangely fall into disgrace; (v. 21.) *He poureth contempt upon princes*. He leaves them to themselves to do mean things, or alters the opinions of men concerning them. If princes themselves dishonour God, and despise him, if they do indignities to the people of God, and trample upon them, they shall be lightly esteemed, and God will pour contempt upon them. See Ps. 107. 40. Commonly, none more abject in themselves, nor more abused by others when they are down, than those who were haughty and insolent when they were in power.

6. That which was secret, and lay hid, is strangely brought to light, and laid open; (v. 22.) *He discovers deep things out of darkness*. Plots closely laid are discovered and defeated; wickedness closely committed, and artfully concealed, is discovered, and the guilty brought to condign punishment; secret treasons, (Eccl. 10. 20.) secret murders, secret whoredoms. The cabinet councils of princes are before God's eye, 2 Kings, 6. 11.

7. Kingdoms have their ebbs and flowings, their waxings and wanings; and both are from God; (v. 23.) He sometimes *increases their numbers*, and enlarges their bounds, so that they make a figure among the nations, and become formidable; but, after a while, by some undiscerned cause, perhaps, they are destroyed and straitened, made few and poor, cut short, and many of them cut off, and so they are rendered despicable among their neighbours; and they that were the head, become the tail, of the nations. See Ps. 107. 38, 39.

8. They that were bold and courageous, and made nothing of dangers, are strangely cowed and dispirited; and this also is the Lord's doing; (v. 24.) *He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people*, that were their leaders and commanders, and were most famed for their martial fire and great achievements; when any thing was to be done, they were heartless, and ready to flee at the shaking of a leaf. Ps. 76. 5.

9. They that were driving on their projects with full speed, are strangely bewildered and at a loss; they know not where they are, nor what they do, are unsteady in their counsels, and uncertain in their motions, off and on, this way and that way, wandering like men in a desert, (v. 24.) groping like men in the dark, and staggering like men in drink, v. 25. Isa. 59. 10. Note, God can soon non-plus the deepest politicians, and bring the greatest wits to their wit's end; to shew that wherein they deal proudly, he is above them.

Thus are the revolutions of kingdoms wonderfully brought about by an over-ruling Providence. Heaven and earth are shaken, but the Lord sits King for ever, and with him we look for a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

CHAP. XIII.

Job here comes to make application of what he had said in the foregoing chapter; and now we have him not in so good a temper as he was in then; for, 1. He is very bold with his friends, comparing himself with them, notwithstanding the mortifications he was under, v. 1, 2. Condemning them for their falsehood, their forwardness to judge, their partiality and deceitfulness, under colour of pleading God's cause, (v. 4, 8.) and threatening them with the judgments of God for their so doing, (v. 9, 12.) desiring them to be silent, (v. 5, 13, 17.) And, turning from them to God, v. 3. II. He is very bold with his God. 1. In some expressions, his faith is very bold, yet that is not more bold than welcome, v. 15, 16, 18. But, 2. In other expressions, his passion is rather too bold in expostulations with God concerning the deplorable condition he was in, (v. 11, 19, &c.) complaining of the confusion he was in, (v. 20, 22.) and the loss he was at to find out the sin that provoked God thus to afflict him; and, in short, of the rigour of God's proceedings against him, v. 23, 28.

1. **L**O, mine eye hath seen all *this*, mine ear hath heard and understood it. 2. What ye know, *the same* do I know also: I *am* not inferior unto you. 3. Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God. 4. But ye *are* forgers of lies, ye *are* all physicians of no value. 5. O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom. 6. Hear now my reasoning, and hearken to the pleadings of my lips. 7. Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him? 8. Will ye accept his person? will ye contend for God? 9. Is it good that he should search you out? or as one man mocketh another, do ye *so* mock him? 10. He will surely reprove you, if ye do secretly accept persons. 11. Shall not his excellency make you afraid? and his dread fall upon you? 12. Your remembrances *are* like unto ashes, your bodies to bodies of clay.

Job here warmly expresses his resentments of the unkindness of his friends.

I. He comes up with them as one that understood the matter in dispute as well as they, and did not need to be taught by them, v. 1, 2. They compelled him, as the Corinthians did Paul, to commend himself and his own knowledge, yet not in a way of self-applause, but of self-justification. All he had said before, his eye had seen confirmed by many instances, and his ear had heard seconded by many authorities, and he well understood it, and what use to make of it. Happy they, who do not only see and hear, but understand, the greatness, glory, and sovereignty, of God. This, he thought, would justify what he had said before, (ch. 12. 3.) which he repeats here; (v. 2.) "*What ye know, the same do I know also*, so that I need not come to you to be taught; *I am not inferior unto you in wisdom*." Note, Those who enter into disputation, enter into temptation to magnify themselves, and vilify their brethren, more than is fit, and therefore ought to watch and pray against the workings of pride.

II. He turns from them to God; (v. 3.) *Surely I would speak to the Almighty*; as if he had said, "I can promise myself no satisfaction in talking to you: O that I might have liberty to reason with God! He would not be so hard upon me as you are." The prince himself will perhaps give audience to a poor petitioner with more mildness, patience, and condescension, than the servants will. Job would rather argue with God himself than with his friends. See here, 1. What confidence *they* have toward God, whose hearts condemn them not of reigning hypocrisy: they can, with humble boldness, appear before him and appeal to him. 2. What comfort *they* have in God, whose neighbours unjustly condemn them: if they may not speak to them with any hopes of a fair hearing, yet they may speak to the Almighty, they have easy access to him, and shall find acceptance with him.

III. He condemns them for their unjust and uncharitable treatment of him, v. 4. 1. They falsely accused him, and that was unjust; *Ye are forgers of lies*. They framed a wrong hypothesis concerning the Divine Providence, and misrepresented it, as if it did never remarkably afflict any but wicked men in this world; and from thence they drew a false judgment concerning Job, that he was certainly a hypocrite. For this gross mistake, both in doctrine and application, he thinks an indictment of forgery lies against them. To speak lies is bad enough, though but at second hand, but to forge them with contrivance and deliberation is much worse: yet against this wrong neither innocency nor excellency will be a fence. 2. They basely deceived him, and that was unkind. They undertook his cure, and pretended to be his physicians, but they were all physicians of no value; "*idol-physicians, who can do me no more good than an idol can*." They were worthless physicians, who neither understood his case, nor knew how to prescribe to him: mere empirics, who pretended to great things, but in conference added nothing to him—he was never the wiser for all they said. Thus, to broken hearts and wounded consciences, all creatures, without Christ, are physicians of no value, on which one may spend all, and be never the better, but rather grow worse, Mark, 5. 26.

IV. He begs they would be silent, and give him a patient hearing, v. 5, 6. 1. He thinks it would be a credit to themselves, if they would say no more, having said too much already; "*Hold your peace, and it shall be your wisdom*, for thereby you will conceal your ignorance and ill-nature, which now appear in all you say." They pleaded that they could not forbear speaking; (ch. 4. 2.—11. 2, 3.) but he tells them that they had more consulted their own reputation, if they had enjoined themselves silence. Better say nothing than nothing to the purpose, or that which tends to the dishonour of God, and the grief of our brethren. *Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise*, because nothing appears to the contrary, Prov. 17. 28. And as silence is an evidence of wisdom, so it is a means of it, as it gives time to think and hear. 2. He thinks it would be a piece of justice to him, to hear what he had to say; *Hear now my reasoning*. Perhaps, though they did not interrupt him in his discourse, yet they seemed careless, and did not much heed what he said; he therefore begs they would not only hear, but hearken. Note, We should be very willing and glad to hear what those have to say for themselves,

whom, upon any account, we are tempted to have hard thoughts of. Many a man, if he could but be fairly heard, would be fairly acquitted, even in the consciences of those that run him down.

V. He endeavours to convince them of the wrong they did to God's honour, while they pretended to plead for him, v. 7, 8. They valued themselves upon it, that they spake for God, were advocates for him, and had undertaken to justify him and his proceedings against Job. And being (as they thought) of counsel for the Sovereign, they expected not only the ear of the court, and the last word, but judgment on their side. But Job tells them plainly, 1. That God and his cause did not need such advocates; "Will you think to contend for God, as if his justice were clouded, and wanted to be cleared up, or as if he were at a loss what to say, and wanted you to speak for him? Will you, who are so weak and passionate, put in for the honour of pleading God's cause?" Good work ought not to be put into bad hands. *Will you accept his person?* If those who have not right on their side, carry their cause, it is by the partiality of the judge in favour of their persons; but God's cause is so just, that it needs no such methods for the support of it. He is a God, and can plead for himself; (Judg. 6. 34.) and if you were for ever silent, the heavens would declare his righteousness. 2. That God's cause suffered by such management. Under pretence of justifying God in afflicting Job, they magisterially condemn him as a hypocrite and a bad man. "This" (says he) "is speaking wickedly," (for uncharitableness and censoriousness are wickedness, great wickedness; it is an offence to God to wrong our brethren,) "it is talking deceitfully, for you condemn one whom yet perhaps your own consciences, at the same time, cannot but acquit. Your principles are false, and your arguments fallacious; and will it excuse you, to say, *It is for God?*" No, for a good intention will not justify, much less will it sanctify, a bad word or action. God's truth needs not our lie, nor God's cause either our sinful policies or our sinful passions. The wrath of man works not the righteousness of God, nor may we *do evil, that good may come*, Rom. 3. 7, 8. Pious frauds (as they call them) are impious cheats; and devout persecutions horrid profanations of the name of God, as theirs who *hated their brethren, and cast them out, saying, Let the Lord be glorified*, Isa. 66. 5. John, 16. 2.

VI. He endeavours to possess them with a fear of God's judgment, and so to bring them to a better temper. Let them not think to impose upon God as they might upon a man like themselves, nor expect to gain his countenance in their bad practices, by pretending a zeal for him and his honour. "As one man mocks another by flattering him, do you think so to mock him and deceive him?" Assuredly, those who think to put a cheat upon God, will prove to have put a cheat upon themselves; *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*.

That they might not think thus to jest with God, and affront him, he would have them to consider both God and themselves, and then they would find themselves unable to enter into judgment with him.

1. Let them consider what a God he is, into whose service they had thus thrust themselves, and to whom they really did so much disservice, and inquire whether they could give him a good account of what they did.

Consider, (1.) The strictness of his scrutiny and inquiries concerning them; (v. 9.) "*Is it good that he should search you out?*" Can you bear to have the principles looked into, which you go upon in your censures, and to have the bottom of the matter found out? Note, It concerns us all seriously to consider whether it will be to our advantage or no, that God searches the heart. It is good to an upright man, who means honestly, that God should search him, therefore he prays for it; *Search me, O God, and know my heart*. God's omniscience is a witness of his sincerity; but it is bad to him who looks one way and rows another, that God should search him out, and lay him open to his confusion.

(2.) The severity of his rebukes and displeasure against them; (v. 10.) "*If ye do accept persons*, though but secretly and in heart, *he will surely reprove you*; he will be so far from being pleased with your censures of me, though under colour of vindicating him, that he will resent them as a great provocation, as any prince or

great man would, if a base action were done under the sanction of his name, and under the colour of advancing his interest." Note, What we do amiss, we shall certainly be reprov'd for, one way or other, one time or other, though it be done ever so secretly.

(3.) The terror of his majesty, which, if they would duly stand in awe of, they would not do that which would make them obnoxious to his wrath; (v. 11.) "*Shall not his excellency make you afraid?*" You that have great knowledge of God, and profess religion and a fear of him, how dare you talk at this rate, and give yourselves so great a liberty of speech? *Ought ye not to walk and talk in the fear of God?* Neh. 5. 9. *Should not his dread fall upon you*, and give check to your passions?" Methinks, Job speaks this as one that did himself know the terror of the Lord, and lived in a holy fear of him, whatever his friends suggested to the contrary. Note, [1.] There is in God a dreadful excellency. He is the most excellent Being, has all excellencies in himself, and in each infinitely excels any creature. His excellencies in themselves are amiable and lovely. He is the most beautiful Being; but, considering man's distance from God by nature, and his defection and degeneracy by sin, his excellencies are dreadful. His power, holiness, justice, yea, and his goodness too, are dreadful excellencies. They shall fear the Lord and his goodness. [2.] A holy awe of this dreadful excellency should fall upon us, and make us afraid. This would awaken impenitent sinners, and bring them to repentance, and would influence all to be careful to please him, and afraid of offending him.

2. Let them consider themselves, and what an unequal match they were for this great God; (v. 12.) "Your remembrances (all that in you for which you hope to be remembered when you are gone) are like unto ashes, worthless and weak, and easily trampled on and blown away; *your bodies are like bodies of clay*, mouldering and coming to nothing; your memories, you think, will survive your bodies; but, alas! they are like ashes which will be shovelled up with your dust." Note, The consideration of our own meanness and mortality should make us afraid of offending God, and is a good reason why we should not despise and trample upon our brethren. Bishop Patrick gives another sense of this verse: "Your remonstrances on God's behalf are no better than dust, and the arguments you accumulate, but like so many heaps of dirt."

13. Hold your peace, let me alone, that I may speak, and let come on me what *will*. 14. Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in mine hand? 15. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. 16. He also *shall be* my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him. 17. Hear diligently my speech, and my declaration, with your ears. 18. Behold, now, I have ordered *my* cause; I know that I shall be justified. 19. Who *is* he *that* will plead with me? for now, if I hold my tongue, I shall give up the ghost. 20. Only do not two *things* unto me: then will I not hide myself from thee. 21. Withdraw thine hand far from me: and let not thy dread make me afraid. 22. Then call thou, and I will answer: or let me speak, and answer thou me.

Job here takes hold, fast hold, of his integrity, as one that was resolved not to let it go, nor suffer it to be wrested from him: his firmness in this matter is commendable, and his warmness excusable.

1. He entreats his friends and all the company to let him alone, and not interrupt him in what he was about to say, (v. 13.) but diligently to hearken to it, v. 17. He would have his own protestation to be decisive, for none but God and himself knew his heart; "Be silent, therefore, and let me hear no more of you, but

hearken diligently to what I say, and let my own oath for confirmation be an end of the strife."

II. He resolves to adhere to the testimony his own conscience gave of his integrity; and though his friends called it obstinacy, that should not shake his constancy; "I will speak in my own defence, and let come on me what will, v. 13. Let my friends put what construction they please upon it, and think the worse of me for it, I hope God will not make my necessary defence to be my offence, as you do: he will justify me, (v. 18.) and then nothing can come amiss to me." Note, Those that are upright, and have the assurance of their uprightness, may cheerfully welcome every event. Come what will, *bene præparatum pectus—they are ready for it*. He resolves (v. 15.) that he will maintain his own ways; he will never part with the satisfaction he had in having walked uprightly with God; but, though he could not justify every word he had spoken, yet, in the general, his ways were good, and he would maintain it; and why should he not, since that was his great support under his present exercises, as it was Hezekiah's, *Now, Lord, remember how I have walked before thee!* Nay, he would not only not betray his own cause, or give it up, but he would openly avow his sincerity, for, (v. 19.) "If I hold my tongue, and do not speak for myself, my silence now will for ever silence me, for I shall certainly give up the ghost," v. 19. "If I cannot be cleared, yet let me be eased by what I say," as Elihu, ch. 32. 17, 20.

III. He complains of the extremity of pain and misery he was in: (v. 14.) *Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth?* That is, 1. "Why do I suffer such agonies? I cannot but wonder that God should lay so much upon me, when he knows I am not a wicked man." He was ready, not only to rend his clothes, but even to tear his flesh, through the greatness of his affliction, and saw himself at the brink of death, and his life in his hand, yet his friends could not charge him with any enormous crime, nor could he himself discover any; no marvel then that he was in such confusion. 2. "Why do I stifle and smother the protestations of my innocency?" When a man with great difficulty keeps in what he would say, he bites his lips: "Now," says he, "why may not I take liberty to speak, since I do but vex myself, add to my torment, and endanger my life, by refraining?" Note, It would vex the most patient man, when he has lost every thing else, to be denied the comfort (if he deserves it) of a good conscience and a good name.

IV. He comforts himself in God, and still keeps hold of his confidence in him. Observe here,

1. What he depends upon God for: Justification and Salvation, the two great things we hope for through Christ. (1.) Justification; (v. 18.) *I have ordered my cause*, and, upon the whole matter, *I know that I shall be justified*. This he knew, because he knew that his Redeemer lived, ch. 19. 25. They whose hearts are upright with God, in walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, may be sure that through Christ there shall be no condemnation to them, but that, whoever lays any thing to their charge, they shall be justified. (2.) Salvation; (v. 16.) *He also shall be my salvation*. He means it not of temporal salvation, he had little expectation of that, but, concerning his eternal salvation, he was very confident that God would not only be his Saviour to make him happy, but his Salvation, in the vision and fruition of whom he should be happy. And the reason why he depended on God for salvation, is, Because *a hypocrite shall not come before him*. He knew himself not to be a hypocrite, and that none but hypocrites are rejected of God, and therefore concluded he should not be rejected. Sincerity is our evangelical perfection, nothing will ruin us but the want of that.

2. With what constancy he depends upon him; *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*, v. 15. This is a high expression of faith, and what we should all labour to come up to; to trust in God, though he slay us. That is, we must be well pleased with God as a Friend, even then when he seems to come forth against us as an Enemy, ch. 23. 8, 10. We must believe that all shall work for good to us, even then when all seems to make against us, Jer. 24. 5. We must proceed and persevere in the way of our duty,

though it costs us all that is dear to us in this world, even life itself, Heb. 11. 35. We must depend upon the performance of the promise, when all the ways leading to it are shut up, Rom. 4. 18. We must rejoice in God, when we have nothing else to rejoice in, and cleave to him, yea, though we cannot for the present find comfort in him. In a dying hour, we must derive from him living comforts; and this is to trust in him, though he slay us.

V. He wishes to argue the case even with God himself, if he might but have leave to settle the preliminaries of the treaty, v. 20. 22. He had desired (v. 3.) to *reason with God*, and is still of the same mind; he will not hide himself, that is, he will not decline the trial, nor dread the issue of it, but under two provisos, 1. That his body might not be tortured with this exquisite pain; *Withdraw thine hand far from me*; for, while I am in this extremity, I am fit for nothing. I can make a shift to talk with my friends, but I know not how to address myself to thee." When we are to converse with God, we have need to be composed, and as free as possible from every thing that may make us uneasy. 2. That his mind might not be terrified with the tremendous majesty of God; *Let not thy dread make me afraid*; either let the manifestations of thy presence be familiar, or let me be enabled to bear them without disorder and disturbance." Moses himself trembled before God, so did Isaiah and Habakkuk: *O God, thou art terrible even in thy holy places*. "Lord," says Job, "let me not be put into such a consternation of spirit, together with this bodily affliction, for then I must certainly drop the cause, and shall make nothing of it." See what a folly it is for men to put off their repentance and conversion to a sick-bed, and a death-bed! How can even a good man, much less a bad man, reason with God, so as to be justified before him, when he is upon the rack of pain, and under the terror of the arrests of death? At such a time, it is very bad to have the great work to do, but very comfortable to have it done, as it was to Job, who, if he might but have a little breathing time, was ready either, (1.) To hear God speaking to him by his word, and return an answer; *Call thou, and I will answer*; or, (2.) To speak to him by prayer, and expect an answer; *Let me speak, and answer thou me*, v. 22. Compare this with ch. 9. 34, 35. where he speaks to the same purport. In short, the badness of his case was at present such a damp upon him, as he could not get over; otherwise he was well-assured of the goodness of his cause, and doubted not but to have the comfort of it at last, when the present cloud was over. With such holy boldness may the upright come to the throne of grace, not doubting but to find mercy there.

23. How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin.
24. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?
25. Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro? and wilt thou pursue the dry stubble?
26. For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.
27. Thou puttest my feet also in the stocks, and lookest narrowly unto all my paths; thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet.
28. And he, as a rotten thing, consumeth, as a garment that is moth eaten.

Here,

1. Job inquires after his sins, and begs to have them discovered to him: he looks up to God, and asks him what was the number of them; *How many are mine iniquities*, and what the particulars of them? *Make me to know my transgressions*, v. 23. His friends were ready enough to tell him how numerous and how heinous they were, ch. 22. 5. "But, Lord," says he, "let me know them from Thee, for thy judgment is according to truth, their's is not." This may be taken, either, 1. As a passionate complaint of hard usage, that he was punished for his faults, and yet was not told what his faults were. Or, 2. As a prudent appeal to God

from the censures of his friends; he desired that all his sins might be brought to light, as knowing they would then appear not so many, nor so mighty, as his friends suspected him to be guilty of. Or, 3. As a pious request, to the same purport with that which Elihu directed him to; *ch. 34. 32. That which I see not, teach thou me.* Note, A true penitent is willing to know the worst of himself; and we should all desire to know what our transgressions are, that we may be particular in the confession of them, and on our guard against them for the future.

II. He bitterly complains of God's withdrawals from him; (*v. 24.*) *Wherefore hidest thou thy face?* This must be meant of something more than his outward afflictions; for the loss of estate, children, health, might well consist with God's love; when that was all, he blessed the name of the Lord; but *his soul was also sore vexed*, and that is it which he here laments. 1. That the favours of the Almighty were suspended; God hid his face as one strange to him, displeased with him, shy and regardless of him. 2. That the terrors of the Almighty were inflicted and impressed upon him; God held him for his enemy; shot his arrows at him, (*ch. 6. 4.*) and set him as a mark, *ch. 7. 20.* Note, The holy God sometimes denies his favours, and discovers his terrors, to the best and dearest of his saints and servants in this world. This case occurs, not only in the production, but sometimes in the progress, of the divine life; evidences for heaven are eclipsed, sensible communions interrupted, dread of divine wrath impressed, and the returns of comfort, for the present, despaired of, *Ps. 77. 7. 9.—88. 7, 15, 16.* These are grievous burthens to a gracious soul, that values God's loving-kindness as better than life, *Prov. 18. 14. A wounded spirit who can bear?* Job, by asking here, *Why hidest thou thy face?* teaches us, that when, at any time, we are under the sense of God's withdrawals, we are concerned to inquire into the reason of them; what is the sin for which he corrects us; and what the good he designs us. Job's sufferings were typical of the sufferings of Christ, from whom not only men hid their faces, (*Isa. 53. 3.*) but God hid his. Witness the darkness which surrounded him on the cross, when he cried out, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* If this were done to these green trees, what shall be done to the dry? They will for ever be forsaken.

III. He humbly pleads with God his own utter inability to stand before him: (*v. 25.*) *Wilt thou break a leaf, pursue the dry stubble?* Lord, is it for thine honour to trample upon one that is down already? Or to crush one that neither has, nor pretends to, any power to resist thee? Note, We ought to have such an apprehension of the goodness and compassion of God, as to believe that he will not break the bruised reed, *Matth. 12. 20.*

IV. He sadly complains of God's severe dealings with him: he owns it was for his sins that God thus contended with him, but thinks it hard.

1. That his former sins, long since committed, should now be remembered against him, and he should be reckoned with for the old scores; (*v. 26.*) *Thou writest bitter things against me.* Afflictions are bitter things; writing of them denotes deliberation and determination, written as a warrant for execution; it denotes also the continuance of his affliction, for that which is written remains, and, "Herein thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth," that is, "thou punishest me for them, and thereby puttest me in mind of them, and obligest me to renew my repentance for them." Note, (1.) God sometimes writes very bitter things against the best and dearest of his saints and servants, both in outward afflictions and inward disquiet; trouble in body and trouble in mind, that he may humble them and prove them, and do them good in their latter end. (2.) That the sins of youth are often the smart of age, both in respect of sorrow within, (*Jer. 31. 13, 19.*) and suffering without, *ch. 20. 11.* Time does not wear out the guilt of sin. (3.) That when God writes bitter things against us, his design therein is, to make us possess our iniquities, to bring forgotten sins to mind, and so to bring us to remorse for them, as to break us off from them. This is all the fruit, to take away our sin.

2. That his present mistakes and miscarriages should be so strictly taken notice of, and so severely animadverted upon; (*v. 27.*) *"Thou puttest my feet also in the stocks, not only to afflict me, and*

expose me to shame, not only to keep me from escaping the strokes of thy wrath, but that thou mayest critically remark all my motions, and look narrowly to all my paths, to correct me for every false step, nay, for but a look awry, or a word misapplied; nay, thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet, scorest down every thing I do amiss, to reckon for it; or, no sooner have I trodden wrong, though ever so little, than immediately I smart for it; the punishment treads upon the very heels of the sin. Guilt, both of the oldest and of the freshest date, is put together, to make up the cause of my calamity." Now, (1.) It was not true that God did thus seek advantages against him; he is not thus extreme to mark what we do amiss; if he were, there were no abiding for us, *Ps. 130. 3.* But he is so far from this, that he deals not with us according to the desert, nor of our manifest sins which are not found by secret search, *Jer. 2. 34.* This therefore was the language of Job's melancholy; his sober thoughts never represented God thus as a hard Master. (2.) But we should keep such a strict and jealous eye as this upon ourselves and our own steps, both for the discovery of sin past, and the prevention of it for the future. It is good for us all to ponder the path of our feet.

V. He finds himself wasting away apace under the heavy hand of God, *v. 28.* He, that is, man, as a rotten thing, the principle of whose putrefaction is in itself, consumes, even like a moth-eaten garment, which becomes continually worse and worse. Or, He, that is, God, like rottenness, and like a moth, consumes me. Compare this with *Hos. 5. 12. I will be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness:* and see *Ps. 39. 11.* Note, Man, at the best, wears fast; but, under God's rebukes especially, he is soon gone. While there is so little soundness in the soul, no marvel there is so little soundness in the flesh, *Ps. 38. 3.*

CHAP. XIV.

Job had turned from speaking to his friends, finding it to no purpose to reason with them, and here goes on to speak to God and himself. He had reminded his friends of their frailty and mortality; (*ch. 13. 12.*) here he reminds himself of his own, and pleads it with God for some mitigation of his miseries. We have here an account, I. Of man's life, that it is, 1. Short, *v. 1.* 2. Sorrowful, *v. 1.* 3. Sinful, *v. 4.* 4. Stinted, *v. 5, 14.* II. Of man's death, that it puts a final period to our present life, to which we shall not again return, *v. 7, 12.* That it hides us from the calamities of life; (*v. 13.*) destroys the hopes of life; (*v. 18, 19.*) sends us away from the business of life; (*v. 20.*) and keeps us in the dark concerning our relations in this life, how much sorer we have formerly been in care about them, *v. 21, 22.* III. The use Job makes of all this. 1. He pleads it with God, who, he thought, was too strict and severe with him; (*v. 16, 17.*) begging that, in consideration of his frailty, he would not contend with him; (*v. 3.*) but grant him some respite, *v. 6.* 2. He engages himself to prepare for death, (*v. 14.*) and encourages himself to hope that it would be comfortable to him, *v. 15.* This chapter is proper for funeral solemnities; and serious meditations on it will help us both to get good by the death of others, and to get ready for our own.

1. **M**AN that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble. 2. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. 3. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? 4. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one. 5. Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds, that he cannot pass; 6. Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

We are here led to think,

I. Of the original of human life; God is indeed its great Original, for he breathed into man the breath of life, and in him we live; but we date it from our birth, and thence we must date both its frailty and its pollution. Its frailty; *Man, that is born of a woman,*

man, is *therefore* of few days, v. 1. It may refer to the first woman, who was called *Eve*, because she was the mother of all living: of her, who, being deceived by the tempter, was first in the transgression, we are all born, and consequently derive from her that sin and corruption which both shorten our days, and sadden them. Or it may refer to every man's immediate mother. The woman is the weaker vessel, and we know that *Partus sequitur ventrem—The child takes after the mother*. Let not the strong man therefore glory in *his* strength, or in the strength of his father, but remember that he is born of a woman, and that, when God pleases, the *mighty men become as women*, Jer. 51. 30. 2. Its pollution; (v. 4.) *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?* If man be born of a woman that is a sinner, how can it be otherwise than that he should be a sinner? See ch. 25. 4. *How can he be clean that is born of a woman?* Clean children cannot come from unclean parents, any more than pure streams from an impure spring, or grapes from thorns. Our habitual corruption is derived, with our nature, from our parents, and is therefore bred in the bone: our blood is not only tainted by a legal conviction, but tainted with an hereditary disease. Our Lord Jesus, being made sin for us, is said to be *made of a woman*, Gal. 4. 4.

II. Of the nature of human life; it is a flower, it is a shadow, v. 2. The flower is fading, and all its beauty soon withers and is gone. The shadow is fleeting, and its very being will soon be lost and drowned in the shadows of the night: of neither do we make any account, in neither do we put any confidence.

III. Of the shortness and uncertainty of human life; man is of few days. Life is computed, not by months or years, but by days, for we cannot be sure of any day but that it may be our last. These days are few, fewer than we think of; few, at the most, in comparison with the days of the first patriarchs, much more, in comparison with the days of eternity; but much fewer to most, who come short of what we call *the age of man*. Man sometimes no sooner comes forth, than he is cut down, comes forth out of the womb, than he dies in the cradle, comes forth into the world and enters into the business of it, than he is hurried away as soon as he has laid his hand to the plough. If not cut down immediately, yet it flees as a shadow, and never continues in one stay, in one shape, but the fashion of it passes away: so does this world and our life in it, 1 Cor. 7. 31.

IV. Of the calamitous state of human life; man, as he is short-lived, so he is sad-lived. Though he had but a few days to spend here, yet if he might rejoice in those few, it were well; (a short life and a merry, is the boast of some;) but it is not so; during these few days, he is full of trouble, not only troubled, but full of trouble, either toiling or fretting, grieving or fearing; no day passes without some vexation, some hurry, some disorder or other. They that are fond of the world, shall have enough of it. He is *satur tremore—full of commotion*. The fewness of his days creates him a continual trouble and uneasiness in expectation of the period of them, and he always hangs in doubt of his life. Yet since man's days are so full of trouble, it is well that they are few, that the soul's imprisonment in the body, and banishment from the Lord, are not perpetual, are not long. When we come to heaven, our days will be many, and perfectly free from trouble, and, in the mean time, faith, hope, and love, balance the present grievances.

V. Of the sinfulness of human life, arising from the sinfulness of the human nature. So some understand that question; (v. 4.) *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?* A clean performance from an unclean principle? Note, Actual transgressions are the natural product of habitual corruption; which is *therefore* called *original sin*, because it is the original of all our sins. This holy Job here laments, as all that are sanctified do, running up the streams to the fountain; (Ps. 51. 5.) and some think he intends it as a plea with God for compassion; "Lord, be not extreme to mark my sins of human frailty and infirmity, for thou knowest my weakness; *O remember that I am flesh*." The Chaldee-paraphrase has an observable reading of this verse; *Who can make a man clean, that is polluted with sin? Cannot one? that is, God. Or who but God, who is one, and will spare him? God, by his almighty grace,*

can change the skin of the Ethiopian, the skin of Job, though clothed with worms.

VI. Of the settled period of human life, v. 5. We are here assured, 1. That our life will come to an end; our days upon earth are not numberless, are not endless, no, they are numbered, and will soon be finished, Dan. 5. 26. 2. That it is determined, in the counsel and decree of God, how long we shall live, and when we shall die. The number of our months is with God, at the disposal of his power which cannot be controlled, and under the view of his omniscience which cannot be deceived. It is certain that God's providence has the ordering of the period of our lives, our times are in his hand, the powers of nature depend upon him, and act under him; in him we live and move, diseases are his servants, he kills and makes alive, nothing comes to pass by chance, no not the execution done by a bow drawn at a venture; it is therefore certain that God's prescience has determined it before, for known unto God are all his works. Whatever he does, he determined, yet with a regard partly to the settled course of nature, (the end and the means are determined together,) and to the settled rules of moral government, punishing evil, and rewarding good, in this life; we are no more governed by the Stoic's blind fate than by the Epicurian's blind fortune. 3. That the bounds God has fixed, we cannot pass, for his counsels are unalterable, his foresight being infallible.

These considerations Job here urges as reasons,

(1.) Why God should not be so strict in taking cognizance of him, and of his slips, and failings; (v. 3.) "Since I have such a corrupt nature within, and am liable to so much trouble, which is a constant temptation from without, dost thou open thine eyes and fasten them upon such a one, extremely to mark what I do amiss? ch. 13. 27. And dost thou bring me, such a worthless worm as I am, into judgment with thee who art so quick-sighted to discover the least failing, so holy to hate it, so just to condemn it, and so mighty to punish it?" The consideration of our own inability to contend with God, of our own sinfulness and weakness, should engage us to pray, *Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant*.

(2.) Why he should not be so severe in his dealings with him; "Lord, I have but a little time to live, I must certainly and shortly go hence, and the few days I have to spend here are, at the best, full of trouble. O let me have a little respite, v. 6. Turn from afflicting a poor creature thus, and let him rest awhile; allow him some breathing time, *until he shall accomplish, as a hireling, his day*. It is appointed to me once to die, let that one day suffice me, and let me not thus be continually dying, dying a thousand deaths. Let it suffice that my life, at best, is *as the day of an hireling*, a day of toil and labour; I am content to accomplish that, and will make the best of the common hardships of human life, the burthen and heat of the day; but let me not feel those uncommon tortures, let not my life be as the day of a malefactor, all execution-day." Thus may we find some relief under great troubles, by recommending ourselves to the compassion of that God who knows our frame, will consider it, and our being out of frame too.

7. For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. 8. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; 9. *Yet*, through the scent of water, it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. 10. But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? 11. *As* the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: 12. So man lieth down, and riseth not till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. 13. O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou

wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! 14. If a man die, shall he live *again*? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. 15. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.

We have seen what Job has to say concerning life, let us now see what he has to say concerning death, which his thoughts were very much conversant with, now that he was sick and sore. It is not unseasonable, when we are in health, to think of dying; but it is an inexcusable incogitancy, if, when we are already taken into the custody of death's messengers, we look upon it as a thing at a distance. Job had already shewed that death will come, and that its hour is already fixed. Now here he shews,

I. That death is a removal for ever out of this world. This he had spoken of before, (*ch. 7. 9, 10.*) and now he mentions it again: for though it be a truth that needs not be proved, yet it needs to be much considered, that it may be duly improved.

1. A man cut down by death, will not revive again, as a tree cut down will. What hope there is of a tree, he shews very elegantly, *v. 7. 9.* If the body of the tree be cut down, and only the stem or stump left in the ground, though it seem dead and dry, yet it will shoot out young boughs again, as if it were but newly planted. The moisture of the earth and the rain of heaven are, as it were, scented and perceived by the stump of a tree, and they have an influence upon it to revive it: but the dead body of a man would not perceive them, nor be in the least affected by them. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, when his being deprived of the use of his reason was signified by the cutting down of a tree, his return to it again was signified by the leaving of the stump in the earth, with a band of iron and brass, to be *wet with the dew of heaven*. *Dan. 4. 15.* But man has no such prospect of a return to life. The vegetable life is a cheap and easy thing, the scent of water will recover it; the animal life, in some insects and fowls, is so, the heat of the sun retrieves it; but the rational soul, when once retired, is too great, too noble, a thing to be recalled by any of the powers of nature; it is out of the reach of sun or rain, and cannot be restored but by the immediate operations of Omnipotence itself; for, (*v. 10.*) *Man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?* Two words are here used for man. *Geber, a mighty man*, though mighty, dies; *Adam, a man of the earth*, because earthly, gives up the ghost. Note, Man is a dying creature; he is here described by what occurs, (1.) *Before death*; he wastes away, he is continually wasting, dying daily, spending upon the quick stock of life; sickness and old age are wasting things to the flesh, the strength, the beauty. (2.) *In death*; he gives up the ghost, the soul leaves the body, and returns to God who gave it, the Father of spirits. (3.) *After death*; Where is he? He is not where he was, his place knows him no more; but, Is he nowhere? So some read it. Yes, he is somewhere; and it is a very awful consideration to think where they are that have given up the ghost, and where we shall be, when we give it up. It is gone to the world of spirits, gone into eternity, gone to return no more to this world.

2. A man laid down in the grave will not rise up again, *v. 11, 12.* Every night, we lie down to sleep, and in the morning, we awake and rise again; but, at death, we must lie down in the grave, not to awake or rise again to such a world, such a state, as we are now in, never to awake or arise until the heavens, the faithful measures of time, shall be no more, and, consequently, time itself shall come to an end, and be swallowed up in eternity; so that the life of man may fitly be compared to the waters of a land-flood, which spread far and make a great shew, but they are shallow, and, when they are cut off from the sea or river, the swelling and overflowing of which was the cause of them, they soon decay and dry up, and their place knows them no more. The waters of life are soon exhaled, and disappear; the body, like some of those

waters, sinks and soaks into the earth, and is buried there; the soul, like others of them, is drawn upward, to mingle with the waters above the firmament. The learned Sir Richard Blackmore makes this also to be a dissimilitude; if the waters decay and be dried up in the summer, yet they will return again in the winter; but it is not so with the life of man. Take part of his paraphrase in his own words:

A flowing river, or a standing lake,
May their dry banks and naked shores forsake;
Their waters may exhale and upward move,
Their channel leave to roll in clouds above;
But the returning winter will restore
What in the summer they had lost before:
But if, O man, thy vital streams desert
Their purple channels, and defraud the heart,
With fresh recruits they ne'er will be supply'd,
Nor feel their leaping life's returning tide.

II. That yet there will be a return of man to life again in another world, at the end of time, when *the heavens are no more*. Then *they shall awake, and be raised out of their sleep*. The resurrection of the dead was, doubtless, an article of Job's creed, as appears, *ch. 19. 26.* and to that, it should seem, he has an eye here; where, in the belief of that, we have three things:

1. A humble petition for a hiding-place in the grave, *v. 13.* It was not only in a passionate weariness of this life, that he wished to die, but in a pious assurance of a better life, to which, at length, he should arise. *O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave!* The grave is not only a resting-place, but a hiding-place, to the people of God. God has the key of the grave, to let in now, and to let out at the resurrection. He *hides men in the grave*, as we hide our treasure in a place of secrecy and safety; and he who hides will find, and nothing shall be lost. "O that thou wouldest hide me, not only from the storms and troubles of this life, but for the bliss and glory of a better life; let me lie in the grave, reserved for immortality, in secret from all the world, but not from thee, not from those eyes which saw my substance when first curiously wrought in the *lowest parts of the earth*," *Ps. 139. 15, 16.* There let me lie, (1.) *Until thy wrath be past*. As long as the bodies of the saints lie in the grave, so long there are some remains of that wrath which they were by nature children of, so long they are under some of the effects of sin; but when the body is raised, it is wholly past; death, the last enemy, will then be totally destroyed. (2.) Until the set time comes for my being remembered, as Noah was remembered in the ark, (*Gen. 8. 1.*) where God not only hid him from the destruction of the old world, but reserved him for the reparation of a new world. The bodies of the saints shall not be forgotten in the grave; there is a time appointed, a time set, for their being inquired after. We cannot be sure that we shall look through the darkness of our present troubles, and see good days after them in this world; but if we can but get well to the grave, we may with an eye of faith look through the darkness of that, as Job here, and see better days on the other side it, in a better world.

2. A holy resolution patiently to attend the will of God both in his death and in his resurrection; (*v. 14.*) *If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change come.* Job's friends proving miserable comforters, he set himself to be the more his own comforter; his case was now bad, but he pleases himself with the expectation of a change. I think it cannot be meant of his return to a prosperous condition in this world. His friends indeed flattered him with the hopes of that, but he himself all along despaired of it. Comforts founded upon uncertainties, at best, must needs be uncertain comforts; and therefore, no doubt, it is something more sure than that which he here bears up himself with the expectation of. The change he waits for must, therefore, be understood, either, (1.) Of the change of the resurrection, when the vile body shall be changed, (*Phil. 3. 21.*) and a great and glorious change it will be; and then that question, *If a man die, shall he live again?* must be taken by way of admiration. "Strange! Shall these dry bones live! If so, all the time appointed for the continuance of the se-

paration between soul and body, my separate soul shall wait until that change comes, when it shall be united again to the body, and my flesh also shall rest in hope," Ps. 16. 9. Or, (2.) Of the change at death. "If a man die, shall he live again? No, not such a life as he now lives; and therefore I will patiently wait until that change comes, which will put a period to my calamities, and not impatiently wish for the anticipation of it, as I have done." Observe here, [1.] That it is a serious thing to die, it is a work by itself. It is a change; there is a visible change in the body, its appearance altered, its actions brought to an end, but a greater change with the soul, which quits the body, and removes to the world of spirits, finishes its state of probation, and enters upon that of retribution. This change will come, and it will be a final change, not like the transmutations of the elements, which return to their former state. No, we must die, not thus to live again. It is but once to die, and that had need be well done that is to be done but once. An error here is fatal, conclusive, and not again to be rectified. [2.] That therefore it is the duty of every one of us to wait for that change, and to continue waiting all the days of our appointed time. The time of life is an appointed time; that time is to be reckoned by days, and those days are to be spent in waiting for our change. That is, *First*, We must expect that it will come, and think much of it. *Secondly*, We must desire that it would come, as those that long to be with Christ. *Thirdly*, We must be willing to tarry until it does come, as those that believe God's time to be the best. *Fourthly*, We must give diligence to get ready against it comes, that it may be a blessed change to us.

3. A joyful expectation of bliss and satisfaction in this; (v. 15.) *Then thou shalt call, and I will answer thee.* Now, he was under such a cloud, that he could not, he durst not, answer; (ch. 9. 15, 35.—13. 22.) but he comforted himself with this, that there would come a time when God would call, and he should answer; then, that is, (1.) At the resurrection; "Thou shalt call me out of the grave, by the voice of the archangel, and I will answer, and come at the call." The body is the *work of God's hands*, and he will have a desire to that, having prepared a glory for it. Or, (2.) At death; "Thou shalt call my body to the grave, and my soul to thyself, and I will answer, Ready, Lord, ready, coming, coming; here I am." Gracious souls can cheerfully answer death's summons, and appear to his writ. Their spirits are not forcibly required from them, (as Luke, 12. 20.) but willingly resigned by them, and the earthly tabernacle not violently pulled down, but voluntarily laid down; with this assurance, "Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands; thou hast mercy in store for me, not only as made by thy providence, but new-made by thy grace; otherwise he that made them will not save them." Note, Grace in the soul is the work of God's own hands, and therefore he will not forsake it in this world, (Ps. 138. 8.) but will have a desire to it, to perfect it in the other, and to crown it with endless glory.

16. For now thou numberest my steps; dost thou not watch over my sin? 17. My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity. 18. And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place. 19. The waters wear the stones: thou wastest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man. 20. Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. 21. His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them. 22. But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn.

Job here returns to his complaints; and though he is not without

hope of future bliss, he finds it very hard to get over his present grievances.

I. He complains of the particular hardships he apprehended himself under from the strictness of God's justice, v. 16, 17. Therefore he longed to go hence to that world where God's wrath will be past, because now he was under the continual tokens of it, as a child, under the severe discipline of the rod, longs to be of age. "When shall my change come? For now thou seemest to me to number my steps, and watch over my sin, and seal it up in a bag, as bills of indictment are kept safe, to be produced against the prisoner." See Deut. 32, 34. "Thou takest all advantages against me, old scores are called over, every infirmity is animadverted upon, and no sooner is a false step taken, than I am beaten for it." Now, 1. Job does right to the divine justice, in owning that he smarted for his sins and transgressions, that he had done enough to deserve all that was laid upon him; for there was sin in all his steps, and he was guilty of transgression enough to bring all this ruin upon him, if it were strictly inquired into: he is far from saying that he perishes being innocent. But, 2. He does wrong to the divine goodness, in suggesting that God was extreme to mark what he did amiss, and made the worst of every thing: he spake to this purport, ch. 13. 27. It was unadvisedly said, and therefore we will not dwell too much upon it. God does indeed see all our sins, he sees sin in his own people, but he is not severe in reckoning with us, nor is the law ever stretched against us, but we are punished less than our iniquities deserve. God does indeed seal and sow up, against the day of wrath, the transgression of the impenitent, but the sins of his people he blots out as a cloud.

II. He complains of the wasting condition of mankind in general: we live in a dying world; *who knows the power of God's anger, by which we are consumed and troubled, and in which all our days are passed away?* See Ps. 90. 7, 9, 11. And who can bear up against his rebukes? Ps. 39. 11.

1. We see the decays of the earth itself. (1.) Of the strongest parts of it, v. 18. Nothing will last always, for we see even mountains moulder and come to nought, they wither and fall as a leaf, rocks wax old and pass away by the continual beating of the sea against them. *The waters wear the stones with constant dropping, non vi, sed sæpe cadendo—not by the violence, but by the constancy, with which they fall.* On this earth every thing is the worse for the wearing; *Tæmpus edax rerum—Time devours all things.* It is not so with the heavenly bodies. (2.) Of the natural products of it: the things which grow out of the earth, and seem to be firmly rooted in it, are sometimes, by an excess of rain, washed away, v. 19. Some think he pleads this for relief: "Lord, my patience will not hold out always, even rocks and mountains will fail at last; therefore cease the controversy."

2. No marvel, then, if we see the decays of man upon the earth, for he is of the earth, earthy. Job begins to think his case is not singular, and therefore he ought to reconcile himself to the common lot.

We perceive by many instances,

(1.) How vain it is to expect much from the enjoyments of life; "Thou destroyest the hope of man," that is, "puttest an end to all the projects he had framed, and all the prospects of satisfaction he had flattered himself with." Death will be the destruction of all those hopes which are built upon worldly confidences, and confined to worldly comforts. Hope in Christ, and hope in heaven, death will consummate, and not destroy.

(2.) How vain it is to struggle against the assaults of death; (v. 20.) *Thou prevailest for ever against him.* Note, [1.] Man is an unequal match for God; whom God contends with, he will certainly prevail against, prevail for ever against, so that they shall never be able to make head again. [2.] The stroke of death is irresistible; it is to no purpose to dispute its summons; God prevails against man, and he passes away, and, lo, he is not. Look upon a dying man, and see,

First, How his looks are altered. Thou changest his countenance, two ways. 1. By the disease of his body. When a man has been a few days sick, what a change is there in his countenance! How much more when he has been a few minutes dead!

The countenance which was majestic and awful, becomes mean and despicable; that was lovely and amiable, becomes ghastly and frightful: *Bury my dead out of my sight.* Where then is the admired beauty? Death changes the countenance, and then sends us away out of this world, gives us one dismissal hence, never to return. 2. By the discomposure of his mind. Note, The approach of death will make the strongest and stoutest to change countenance; it will make the most merry smiling countenance to look grave and serious, and the most bold daring countenance to look pale and timorous.

Secondly, How little he is concerned in the affairs of his family, which once lay so near his heart. When he is in the hands of the harbingers of death, suppose struck with a palsy or apoplexy, or delirious in a fever, or in conflict with death, tell him then the most agreeable news, or the most painful, concerning his children, it is all alike, he knows it not, he perceives it not, v. 21. He is going to that world where he will be a perfect stranger to all those things which here filled and affected him. The consideration of this should moderate our cares concerning our children and families. God will know what comes of them when we are gone, to him therefore let us commit them, with him let us leave them, and not burthen ourselves with needless, fruitless, cares concerning them.

Thirdly, How dreadful the agonies of death are; (v. 22.) *While his flesh is upon him,* (so it may be read,) that is, the body he is so loath to lay down, *it shall have pain; and while his soul is within him,* that is, the spirit he is so loath to resign, it shall mourn. Note, Dying work is hard work; dying pangs are, commonly, sore pangs. It is folly, therefore, for men to defer their repentance to a death-bed, and to have that to do, which is the one thing needful, when they are really unfit to do anything: but it is true wisdom, by making our peace with God in Christ, and keeping a good conscience, to treasure up comforts which will support and relieve us against the pains and sorrows of a dying hour.

CHAP. XV.

Perhaps Job was so clear, and so well satisfied, in the goodness of his own cause, that he thought if he had not convinced, yet he had, at least, silenced, all his three friends; but, it seems, he had not; in this chapter, they begin a second attack upon him, each of them charging him afresh, with as much vehemence as before. It is natural to us to be fond of our own sentiments, and therefore to be firm to them, and with difficulty to be brought to recede from them. Eliphaz here keeps close to the principles upon which he had condemned Job, and, I. He reproves him for justifying himself, and fathers on him many evil things which are unfairly inferred from thence, v. 2. 13. II. He persuades him to humble himself before God, and to take shame to himself, v. 14. 16. III. He reads him a long lecture concerning the woeful estate of wicked people, who harden their hearts against God and the judgments which are prepared for them, v. 17. 35. A good use may be made both of his reproofs, (for they are plain,) and of his doctrine, (for it is sound,) though both the one and the other are misapplied to Job.

1. **THEN** answered Eliphaz the Temanite, and said, 2. Should a wise man utter vain knowledge, and fill his belly with the east-wind? 3. Should he reason with unprofitable talk? or with speeches wherewith he can do no good? 4. Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God. 5. For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity, and thou choosest the tongue of the crafty. 6. Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I: yea, thine own lips testify against thee. 7. *Art* thou the first man *that* was born? or wast thou made before the hills? 8. Hast thou heard the secret of God? and dost thou restrain wisdom to thyself? 9. What knowest thou, that we know not? *what* understandest thou, which is not in us? 10. With us are both the gray-headed and very aged men, much elder than thy father. 11. *Are* the consolations

of God small with thee? is there any secret thing with thee? 12. Why doth thine heart carry thee away? and what do thine eyes wink at, 13. That thou turnest thy spirit against God, and lettest *such* words go out of thy mouth? 14. What is man, that he should be clean? and *he which* is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? 15. Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. 16. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water!

Eliphaz here falls very foul upon Job, because he contradicted what he and his colleagues had said, and did not acquiesce in it, and applaud it, as they expected. Proud people are apt thus to take it very much amiss, if they may not have leave to dictate and give law to all about them, and to censure those as ignorant and obstinate, and all that is naught, who cannot, in every thing, say as they say.

Several great crimes Eliphaz here charges Job with, only because he would not own himself a hypocrite.

I. He charges him with folly and absurdity; (v. 2, 3.) That whereas he had been reputed a wise man, he had now quite forfeited his reputation; any one would say that his wisdom was departed from him, he talked so extravagantly, and so little to the purpose. Bildad began thus, (ch. 8. 2.) and Zophar, ch. 11. 2, 3. It is common for angry disputants thus to represent one another's reasonings as impertinent and ridiculous, more than there is cause, forgetting the doom of him that calls his brother *Raca*, and *Thou Fool*. It is true, 1. That there is in the world a great deal of vain knowledge, science falsely so called, that is useless, and therefore worthless. 2. That this is the knowledge that puffs up, with which men swell in a fond conceit of their own accomplishments. 3. That whatever vain knowledge a man may have in his head, if he would be thought a wise man, he must not utter it, but let it die with himself, as it deserves. 4. Unprofitable talk is evil talk: we must give an account, in the great day, not only for *wicked* words, but for *idle* words. Speeches, therefore, which do no good, which do no service either to God or our neighbour, or no justice to ourselves, which are no way to the use of edifying, were better unspoken. Those words which are as wind, light and empty, especially which are as the east wind, hurtful and pernicious, it will be wrong to fill either ourselves or others with, for they will pass very ill in the account. 5. Vain knowledge and unprofitable talk ought to be reproved and checked, especially in a wise man, whom it worst becomes, and who does most hurt by the bad example of it.

II. He charges him with impiety and irreligion; (v. 4.) "*Thou castest off fear,*" that is, "the fear of God, and that regard to him which thou shouldest have; and then thou restrainest prayer." See what religion is summed up in—fearing God, and praying to him; the former the most needful principle, the latter the most needful practice. Where no fear of God is, no good is to be expected; and those who live without prayer, certainly live without God in the world. Those who restrain prayer, prove that they cast off fear. Surely those have no reverence of God's majesty, no dread of his wrath, and are in no care about their souls and eternity, who make no applications to God for his grace. Those who are prayerless, are fearless and graceless. When the fear of God is cast off, all sin is let in, and a door open to all manner of profaneness. It is especially bad with those who have had some fear of God, but have now cast it off, have been frequent in prayer, but now restrain it. How are they fallen! How is their first love lost! It denotes a kind of force put upon themselves. The fear of God would cleave to them, but they throw it off; prayer would be uttered, but they restrain it, and, in both, baffle their convictions. Those who either omit prayer, or straiten and abridge themselves in it, quenching the spirit of adoption, and denying themselves the liberty they might take in the duty, restrain prayer: this is bad

enough, but it is worse to restrain others from prayer, to prohibit and discourage prayer, as Darius, Dan. 6. 7.

Now Eliphaz charges this upon Job, either, 1. As that which was his own practice. He thought that Job talked of God with such liberty as if he had been his equal, and that he charged him so vehemently with hard usage of him, and challenged him so often to a fair trial, that he had quite thrown off all religious regard to him. This charge was utterly false, and yet wanted not some colour. We ought not only to take care that we keep up prayer and the fear of God, but that we never drop any unwary expressions, which may give occasion to those who seek occasion to question our sincerity and constancy in religion. Or, 2. As that which others would infer from the doctrine he maintained. "If this be true," (thinks Eliphaz,) "which Job says, that a man may be thus sorely afflicted, and yet be a good man, then farewell all religion, farewell prayer and the fear of God. If all things come alike to all, and the best men may have the worst treatment in this world, every one will be ready to say, *It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it to keep his ordinances?* (Mal. 3. 14.) *Verily I have cleansed my hands in vain,* (Ps. 73. 13, 14.) Who will be honest, if the tabernacles of robbers prosper? (ch. 12. 6.) If there be no forgiveness with God, (ch. 7. 21.) who will fear him? (Ps. 130. 4.) If he laugh at the trial of the innocent, (ch. 9. 23.) if he be so difficult of access, (ch. 9. 32.) who will pray to him?" Note, It is a piece of injustice, which even wise and good men are too often guilty of, in the heat of disputation, to charge upon their adversaries those consequences of their opinions, which are not fairly drawn from them, and which really they abhor. This is not doing as we would be done by.

Upon this strained innuendo Eliphaz grounds that high charge of impiety; (v. 5.) *Thy mouth utters thine iniquity*, teaches it, so the word is. "Thou teachest others to have the same hard thoughts of God and religion that thou thyself hast." It is bad to *break even the least of the commandments*, but worse to *teach men so*, Matth. 5. 19. If we ever thought evil, let us lay our hand upon our mouth to suppress the evil thought, (Prov. 30. 32.) and let us by no means utter it, that is putting an *imprimatur* to it, publishing it with allowance, to the dishonour of God, and the damage of others. Observe, When men have cast off fear and prayer, their mouths utter iniquity. They that cease to do good, soon learn to do evil. What can we expect but all manner of iniquity from those that arm not themselves with the grace of God against it? But, *thou chooseth the tongue of the crafty*, that is, "Thou utterest thine iniquity with some shew and pretence of piety, mixing some good words with the bad, as tradesmen do with their wares to help them off." The mouth of iniquity could not do so much mischief as it does, without the tongue of the crafty. The serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, Rom. 16. 18. The tongue of the crafty speaks with design and deliberation; and therefore they that use it may be said to *choose* it, as that which will serve their purpose better than the tongue of the upright; but it will be found, at last, that honesty is the best policy.

Eliphaz, in his first discourse, had proceeded against Job upon mere surmise; (ch. 4. 6, 7.) but now he has got proof against him from his own discourses; (v. 6.) *Thine own mouth condemns thee, and not I*. But he should have considered that he and his fellows had provoked him to say that which now they took advantage of; and that was not fair. Those are most effectually condemned, that are condemned by themselves, Tit. 3. 11. Luke, 19. 22. Many a man needs no more to sink him, than for his own tongue to fall upon him.

III. He charges him with intolerable arrogancy and self-conceitedness. It was a just, and reasonable, and modest, demand that Job had made; (ch. 12. 3.) *Allow that I have understanding as well as you*: but see how they seek occasion against him; that is misconstrued, as if he pretended to be wiser than any man. Because he will not grant to them, they will have it thought that he claims to himself, the monopoly of wisdom, v. 7. . 9. As if he thought he had the advantage of all mankind, 1. In length of acquaintance with the world, which furnishes men with so much the more experience; "Art thou the first man that was born, and,

consequently, senior to us, and better able to give the sense of antiquity, and the judgment of the first and earliest, the wisest and purest, ages? Art thou prior to Adam?" (So it may be read,) "Did not he suffer for sin; and yet wilt not thou, who art so great a sufferer, own thyself a sinner? *Wast thou made before the hills*, as Wisdom herself was? (Prov. 8. 23, &c.) Must God's counsels, which are as the great mountains, (Ps. 36. 6.) and immoveable as the everlasting hills, be subject to thy notions, and bow to them? Dost thou know more of the world than any of us do? No, thou art but of yesterday, even as we are," ch. 8. 9. Or, 2. In intimacy of acquaintance with God; (v. 8.) "Hast thou heard the secret of God? Dost thou pretend to be of the cabinet-council of Heaven, that thou canst give better reasons than others can for God's proceedings?" There are secret things of God, which belong not to us, and which, therefore, we must not pretend to account for: those are daringly presumptuous who do. He also represents him, (1.) As assuming to himself such knowledge as none else had; "Dost thou restrain wisdom to thyself, as if none were wise besides?" Job had said, (ch. 13. 2.) *What ye know, the same do I know also*; and now they return upon him, according to the usage of eager disputants, who think they have a privilege to commend themselves; *What knowest thou that we know not?* How natural are such replies as these, in the heat of argument! But how simple do they look afterward, upon the review! (2.) As opposing the stream of antiquity, a venerable name, under the shade of which all contending parties strive to shelter themselves; "With us are the gray-headed, and very aged men," v. 10. We have the fathers on our side; all the ancient doctors of the church are of our opinion." A thing soon said, but not so soon proved; and, when proved, truth is not so soon discovered and proved by it, as most people imagine. David preferred right scripture-knowledge before that of antiquity; (Ps. 119. 100.) *I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts*. Or perhaps one or more, if not all three, of these friends of Job, were elder than he, (ch. 32. 6.) and therefore they thought he was bound to acknowledge them to be in the right. This also serves contenders to make a noise with, to very little purpose. If they are elder than their adversaries, and can say they knew such a thing before they were born, it will serve to make them arrogant and overbearing; whereas the eldest are not always the wisest, ch. 32. 9.

IV. He charges him with a contempt of the counsels and comforts that were given him by his friends; (v. 11.) *Are the consolations of God small with thee?* 1. Eliphaz takes it ill that Job did not value the comforts, which he and his friends administered to him, more than it seems he did, and did not welcome every word they said as true and important. It is true, they had said some very good things, but, in their application to Job, they were miserable comforters. Note, We are apt to think that great and considerable, which we ourselves say, when others perhaps, with good reason, think it small and trifling. Paul found that those who seemed to be somewhat, yet, in conference, added nothing to him, Gal. 2. 6. 2. He represents this as a slight put upon divine consolations in general, as if they were of small account with him, whereas really they were not: if he had not highly valued them, he could not have borne up as he did under his sufferings. Note, (1.) The consolations of God are not in themselves small. Divine comforts are great things, that is, the comfort which is from God, especially the comfort which is in God. (2.) The consolations of God not being small in themselves, it is very bad if they be small with us. It is a great affront to God, and an evidence of a degenerate, depraved, mind, to disesteem and undervalue spiritual delights, and despise the pleasant land. "What!" (says Eliphaz,) "is there any secret thing with thee? Hast thou some cordial to support thyself with, that is a *Proprium*, an *Arcanum*, that no body else can pretend to, or knows anything of?" Or, "Is there some secret sin harboured and indulged in thy bosom, which hinders the operation of divine comforts?" None disesteem divine comforts but those that secretly affect the world and the flesh.

V. He charges him with opposition to God himself, and to religion; (v. 12, 13.) "Why doth thine heart carry thee away into such indecent, irreligious, expressions?" Note, Every man is

tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, Jam. 1. 14. If we fly off from God and our duty, or fly out into anything amiss, it is our own heart that carries us away. *If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.* There is a violence, an ungovernable impetus, in the turnings of the soul; the corrupt heart carries men away, as it were, by force, against their convictions. "What is it that thine eyes wink at? Why so careless and mindless of what is said to thee, hearing it as if thou wert half asleep? Why so scornful, disdaining what we say, as if it were below thee to take notice of it? What have we said, that deserves to be thus slighted? Nay, *that thou turnest thy spirit against God?*" It was bad that his heart was carried away from God, but much worse that it was turned against God. But they that forsake God will soon break out in open enmity to him. But how did this appear? "Thou lettest such words go out of thy mouth, reflecting on God, and his justice and goodness." It is the character of the wicked, that they *set their mouth against the heavens*, (Ps. 73. 9.) which is a certain indication that the spirit is turned against God. He thought Job's spirit was soured against God, and so turned from what it had been, and exasperated at his dealings with him. Eliphaz wanted candour and charity, else he would not have put such a harsh construction upon the speeches of one that had such a settled reputation for piety, and was now in temptation. This was, in effect, to give the cause on Satan's side, and to own that Job had done as Satan said he would, had *cursed God to his face*.

VI. He charges him with justifying himself to that degree as even to deny his share in the common corruption and pollution of the human nature; (v. 14.) *What is man, that he should be clean?* that is, that he should pretend to be so, or that any should expect to find him so. What is he, that is born of a woman, a sinful woman, that he should be righteous? Note, 1. Righteousness is cleanness; it makes us acceptable to God, and easy to ourselves, Ps. 18. 24. 2. Man, in his fallen state, cannot pretend to be clean and righteous before God, either to acquit himself to God's justice, or recommend himself to his favour. 3. He is *therefore* to be adjudged unclean and unrighteous, because born of a woman, from whom he derives a corrupt nature, which is both his guilt and his pollution. With these plain truths Eliphaz thinks to convince Job, whereas he had just now said the same; (ch. 14. 4.) *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?* But does it therefore follow that Job is a hypocrite, and a wicked man, which is all that he denied? By no means. Though man, as born of a woman, is not clean, yet, as born again of the Spirit, he is.

Further to evince this, he here shews,

(1.) That the brightest creatures are imperfect and impure before God, v. 15. God places no confidence in saints and angels; he employs both, but trusts neither with his service, without giving them fresh supplies of strength and wisdom for it, as knowing they are not sufficient of themselves, neither more nor better than his grace makes them. He takes no complacency in the heavens themselves. How pure soever they seem to us, in his eye they have many a speck and many a flaw; *The heavens are not clean in his sight.* If the stars (says Mr. Caryl) have no light in the sight of the sun, what light has the sun in the sight God? See Isa. 24. 23.

(2.) That man is much more so; (v. 16.) *How much more abominable and filthy is man!* If saints are not to be trusted, much less sinners. If the heavens are not pure, which are as God made them, much less man, who is degenerated. Nay, he is abominable and filthy in the sight of God, and, if ever he repent, he is so in his own sight, and therefore he abhors himself. Sin is an odious thing, it makes men hateful. The body of sin is so, and is therefore called a *dead body*, a loathsome thing. Such is the filthiness of man, that he drinks iniquity (that abominable thing which the Lord hates) as greedily, and with as much pleasure, as a man drinks water when he is thirsty. It is his constant drink; it is natural to sinners to commit iniquity. It gratifies, but does not satisfy, the appetites of the old man. It is like water to a man in a drowsy. The more men sin, the more they would sin.

17. I will shew thee, hear me; and that *which* I have seen I will declare; 18. Which wise men

have told from their fathers, and have not hid it: 19. Unto whom alone the earth was given, and no stranger passed among them. 20. The wicked man travaileth with pain all *his* days, and the number of years is hidden to the oppressor. 21. A dreadful sound *is* in his ears: in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him. 22. He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword. 23. He wandereth abroad for bread, *saying*, Where *is it*? He knoweth that the day of darkness is ready at his hand. 24. Trouble and anguish shall make him afraid; they shall prevail against him, as a king ready to the battle. 25. For he stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty. 26. He runneth upon him, *even* on *his* neck, upon the thick bosses of his bucklers: 27. Because he covereth his face with his fatness, and maketh collops of fat on *his* flanks. 28. And he dwelleth in desolate cities, *and* in houses which no man inhabiteth, which are ready to become heaps. 29. He shall not be rich, neither shall his substance continue, neither shall he prolong the perfection thereof upon the earth. 30. He shall not depart out of darkness; the flame shall dry up his branches, and by the breath of his mouth shall he go away. 31. Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompence. 32. It shall be accomplished before his time, and his branch shall not be green. 33. He shall shake off his unripe grape as the vine, and shall cast off his flower as the olive. 34. For the congregation of hypocrites *shall be* desolate, and fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery. 35. They conceive mischief, and bring forth vanity, and their belly prepareth deceit.

Eliphaz, having reproved Job for his answers, here comes to maintain his own thesis, upon which he built his censure of Job. His opinion is, That those who are wicked are certainly miserable; whence he would infer, that those who are miserable are certainly wicked, and that therefore Job was so. Observe,

1. His solemn preface to this discourse, in which he bespeaks Job's attention, which he had little reason to expect, he having given so little heed to, and put so little value upon, what Job had said; (v. 17.) "I will shew thee that which is worth hearing, and not reason, as thou dost, with unprofitable talk." Thus apt are men, when they condemn the reasonings of others, to commend their own. He promises to teach him, 1. From his own experience and observation; "That which I have myself seen in divers instances, I will declare." It is of good use to take notice of the providences of God concerning the children of men, from which many a good lesson may be learned. What good observations we have made, and have found benefit by ourselves, we should be ready to communicate for the benefit of others: and we may then speak boldly, when we declare what we have seen. 2. From the wisdom of the ancients, (v. 18.) *which wise men have told from their fathers.* Note, The wisdom and learning of the moderns are very much derived from that of the ancients. Good children will learn a good deal from their good parents: and what we have learned from our ancestors we must transmit to our posterity, and not hide from the generations to come. See Ps. 78. 3. 6. If the thread

of the knowledge of many ages be cut off by the carelessness of one, and nothing be done to preserve it pure and entire, all that succeed, fare the worse. The authorities Eliphaz vouched, were authorities indeed, men of rank and figure, (v.19.) *unto whom alone the earth was given*, and therefore you may suppose them favourites of Heaven, and best capable of making observations concerning the affairs of this earth. The dictates of wisdom come with advantage from those who are in places of dignity and power, as Solomon; yet there is a wisdom *which none of the princes of this world knew*, 1 Cor. 2. 7, 8.

II. The discourse itself. He here aims to shew,

1. That those who are wise and good do ordinarily prosper in this world. This he only hints at, v.19. That those of whose mind he was, were such as had the earth given to them, and to them only; they enjoyed it entirely and peaceably, and no stranger passed among them, either to share with them, or give disturbance to them. Job had said, *The earth is given into the hand of the wicked, ch. 9. 24.* "No," says Eliphaz, "it is given into the hands of the saints, and runs along with the faith committed unto them. And they are not robbed and plundered by strangers and enemies making inroads upon them, as thou art by the Sabaeans and Chaldeans." But because many of God's people have remarkably prospered in this world, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it does not therefore follow, that those who are crossed and impoverished, as Job, are not God's people.

2. That wicked people, and particularly oppressors, and tyrannizing rulers, are subject to continual terrors, live very uncomfortably, and perish very miserably. On this head he enlarges, shewing that even they who impiously dare God's judgments, yet cannot but dread them, and will feel them at last. He speaks in the singular number, the wicked man, meaning, as some think, Nimrod, or perhaps Chedorlaomer, or some such mighty hunter before the Lord. I fear he meant Job himself, whom he expressly charges both with the tyranny, and with the timorousness, here described, *ch. 22. 9, 10.* Here he thinks the application easy, and that Job might, in this description, as in a glass, see his own face. Now,

(1.) Let us see how he describes the sinner who lives thus miserably. He does not begin with that, but brings it in as a reason of his doom, v. 25. . 28. It is no ordinary sinner, but one of the first rate, an *oppressor*, (v.20.) a *blasphemer*, and a *persecutor*, one that neither fears God, nor regards man.

[1.] He bids defiance to God, and to his authority and power, v.25. Tell him of the divine law, and its obligations; he breaks those bonds asunder, and will not have, no not him that made him, to restrain him or rule over him. Tell him of the divine wrath, and its terrors; he bids the Almighty do his worst, he will have his will, he will have his way, in spite of him, and will not be controlled by law, or conscience, or the notices of a judgment to come. He stretches out his hand against God, in defiance of him, and of the power of his wrath. God is indeed out of his reach, but he stretches out his hand against him, to shew, that, if it were in his power, he would ungod him.

This applies to the audacious impiety of some sinners, who are really *haters of God*, (Rom. 1. 30.) and whose carnal mind is not only an enemy to him, but enmity itself, Rom. 8. 7. But, alas! the sinner's malice is as impotent as it is impudent; what can he do? *He strengthens himself* (he would be valiant, so some read it) *against the Almighty*; he thinks with his exorbitant despotic power to *change times and laws*, (Dan. 7. 25.) and, in spite of Providence, to carry the day for rapine and wrong, clear of the check of conscience. Note, It is the prodigious madness of presumptuous sinners, that they enter the lists with Omnipotence. *Woe unto him that strives with his Maker.* That is generally taken for a further description of the sinner's daring presumption; (v.26.) *He runs upon him*, upon God himself, in a direct opposition to him, to his precepts and providences, even upon his neck, as a desperate combatant, when he finds himself an unequal match for his adversary, flies in his face, though, at the same time, he falls on his sword's point, or the sharp spike of his buckler. Sinners, in general, run from God; but the presumptuous sinner, who sins with a

high hand, runs upon him, fights against him, and bids defiance to him; and it is easy to foretell what will be the issue.

[2.] He wraps himself up in security and sensuality; (v.27.) *He covers his face with his fatness.* This signifies both the pampering of his flesh with daily delicious fare, and the hardening of his heart thereby against the judgments of God. Note, The gratifying of the appetites of the body, feeding and feasting that to the full, often turns to the damage of the soul and its interests. Why is God forgotten and slighted, but because the belly is made a god of, and happiness placed in the delights of sense? They that fill themselves with wine and strong drink, abandon all that is serious, and flatter themselves with hopes that *to-morrow shall be as this day*, Isa. 56. 12. *Woe to them that are thus at ease in Zion*, Amos, 6. 1, 3, 4. Luke, 12. 19. The fat that covers his face, makes him look bold and haughty, and that which covers his flanks, makes him lie easy and soft, and feel little; but this will prove poor shelter against the darts of God's wrath.

[3.] He enriches himself with the spoils of all about him, v.28. He dwells in cities which he himself has made desolate by expelling the inhabitants out of them, that he might be placed alone in them, Isa. 5. 8. Proud and cruel men take a strange pleasure in ruins, when they are of their own making; in *destroying cities*, (Ps. 9. 6.) and triumphing in the destruction, since they cannot make them their own, but by making them ready to become heaps, and frightening the inhabitants out of them. Note, Those that aim to engross the world to themselves, and grasp at all, lose the comfort of all, and make themselves miserable in the midst of all. How does this tyrant gain his point, and make himself master of cities that have all the marks of antiquity upon them? We are told, (v.35.) he does it by malice and falsehood, the two chief ingredients of his wickedness, who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning; they conceive mischief, and then they effect it by preparing deceit, pretending to protect those whom they design to subdue, and making leagues of peace, the more effectually to carry on the operations of war. From such wicked men God deliver all good men.

(2.) Let us see now what is the miserable condition of this wicked man, both in spiritual and temporal judgments.

[1.] His inward peace is continually disturbed. He seems to those about him to be easy, who, therefore, envy him, and wish themselves in his condition; but He who knows what is in men, tells us that a wicked man has so little comfort and satisfaction in his own breast, that he is rather to be pitied than envied.

First, His own conscience accuses him, and, with the pangs and throes of that, *he travaileth in pain all his days*, v.20. He is continually uneasy at the thought of the cruelties he has been guilty of, and the blood in which he has imbrued his hands; his sins stare him in the face at every turn. *Diri conscia facti men habet attonitos—Conscious guilt astonishes and confounds.*

Secondly, He is vexed at the uncertainty of the continuance of his wealth and power; *the number of years is hidden to the oppressor*. He knows, whatever he pretends, that it will not last always, and has reason to fear that it will not last long, and this he frets at.

Thirdly, He is under a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, (Heb. 10. 27.) which puts him into, and keeps him in, a continual terror and consternation, so that he dwells with Cain in the land of Nod, or commotion, (Gen. 4. 16.) and is made like *Pashur, Magor-missabib—A terror round about*, Jer. 20. 3, 4. *A dreadful sound is in his ears*, v.21. He knows that both Heaven and earth are incensed against him, that God is angry with him, and that all the world hates him; he has done nothing to make his peace with either, and therefore he thinks that every one who meets him will slay him, Gen. 4. 14. Or, like a man absconding for debt, who thinks every man a bailiff. Fear came in, at first, with sin, (Gen. 3. 10.) and still attends it. Even in prosperity, he is apprehensive that the destroyer will come upon him, either some destroying angel sent of God to avenge his quarrel, or some of his injured subjects who will be their own avengers. Those who are the *terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, usually go down slain to the pit,

(Ezek. 32. 25.) the expectation of which makes them a terror to themselves. This is further set forth, v. 22. that he is, in his own apprehension, *waited for of the sword*; for he knows that *he who killeth with the sword, must be killed with the sword*, Rev. 13. 10. A guilty conscience represents to the sinner a *flaming sword turning every way*, (Gen. 3. 24.) and himself inevitably running on it. Again, (v. 23.) *He knows that the day of darkness*, (or the night of darkness rather) *is ready at his hand*, that it is appointed to him, and cannot be put by, that it is hastening on apace, and cannot be put off. This day of darkness is something beyond death; it is that day of the Lord which, to all wicked people, will be darkness and not light, and in which they will be doomed to utter, endless, darkness. Note, Some wicked people, though they seem secure, have already received the sentence of death, eternal death, within themselves, and plainly see hell gaping for them. No marvel that it follows, (v. 24.) *Trouble and anguish* (that inward tribulation and anguish of soul spoken of Rom. 2. 8, 9. which is the effect of God's *indignation and wrath* fastening upon the conscience) *shall make him afraid of worse to come*. What is the hell before him, if this be the hell within him? And though he would fain shake off his fears, drink them away, and jest them away, it will not do; *they shall prevail against him*, and overpower him, *as a king ready to the battle*, with forces too strong to be resisted. He that would keep his peace, let him keep a good conscience.

Fourthly, If at any time he be in trouble, he despairs of getting out; (v. 22.) *He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness*, but he gives himself up for gone and lost in an endless night. Good men expect *light at evening time, light out of darkness*; but what reason have they to expect that they shall return out of the darkness of trouble, who would not return from the darkness of sin, but *went on in it*? Ps. 82. 5. It is the misery of damned sinners, that they know they shall never return out of that utter darkness, nor pass the gulf there fixed.

Fifthly, He perplexes himself with continual care, especially if Providence ever so little frown upon him, v. 23. Such a dread he has of poverty, and such a waste does he discern upon his estate, that he is already, in his own imagination, *wandering abroad for bread*, going a-begging for a meal's meat, and *saying, Where is it?* The rich man, in his abundance, cried out, *What shall I do?* Luke, 12. 17. Perhaps he pretends fear of wanting, as an excuse of his covetous practices; justly may he be brought to this extremity at last. We read of those who *were full*, but have *hired out themselves for bread*, (1 Sam. 2. 5.) which this sinner will not do; he cannot dig, he is too fat, (v. 27.) but to beg he may well be ashamed. See Ps. 109. 10. David never saw the righteous so far forsaken as to beg their bread, for, verily, they shall be fed by the charitable, unasked, Ps. 37. 3, 25. But the wicked want it, and cannot expect it should be readily given them. How should they find mercy, who never shewed mercy?

[2.] His outward prosperity will soon come to an end, and all his confidence, and all his comfort, will come to an end with it. How can he prosper, when God runs upon him? So some understand that, v. 26. Whom God runs upon, he will certainly run down; for when he judges, he will overcome. See how the judgments of God cross this worldly wicked man in all his cares, desires, and projects, and so complete his misery.

First, He is in care to get, but *he shall not be rich*, v. 29. His own covetous mind keeps him from being truly rich. He is not rich, that has not enough; and he has not enough, that does not think he has. It is contentment only that is great gain. Providence remarkably keeps some from being rich, defeating their enterprises, breaking their measures, and keeping them always behind-hand. Many that get much by fraud and injustice, yet do not grow rich; it goes as it comes, it is got by one sin, and spent upon another.

Secondly, He is in care to keep what he has got, but in vain, *his substance shall not continue*; it will dwindle and come to nothing, God blasts it, and what *came up in a night, perishes in a night*. *Wealth, gotten by vanity, will certainly be diminished*. Some have themselves lived to see the ruin of those estates which

have been raised by oppression; it goes, however, with a curse to those who succeed. *De male quesitis vix gaudet tertius hæres*—*All-gotten property will scarcely be enjoyed by the third generation*. He purchases estates to him and his heirs for ever; but to what purpose? *He shall not prolong the perfection thereof upon the earth*; neither the credit nor the comfort of his riches shall be prolonged; and, when those are gone, where is the perfection of them? How indeed can we expect the perfection of any thing to be prolonged upon the earth, where every thing is transitory, and we soon see the end of all perfection?

Thirdly, He is in care to leave what he has got and kept, to his children after him; but in this he is crossed, the branches of his family shall perish, in whom he hoped to have lived and flourished, and to have had the reputation of making them all great men. *They shall not be green*, v. 32. *The flame shall dry them up*, v. 30. He shall shake them off as blossoms that never knit, or as the *unripe grape*, v. 33. They shall die in the beginning of their days, and never come to maturity. Many a man's family is ruined by his iniquity.

Fourthly, He is in care to enjoy it a great while himself; but in that also he is crossed. 1. He may perhaps be taken from it; (v. 30.) *By the breath of God's mouth*—(that is, by his wrath, which, like a stream of brimstone, kindles the fire that devours him, Isa. 30. 33. Or, by his word; he speaks, and it is done immediately)—shall he go away, and leave his wealth to others. *This night, thy soul shall be required of thee*; and so *the wicked is driven away in his wickedness*, the worldling in his worldliness. 2. It may perhaps be taken from him, and fly away like an eagle toward heaven: *It shall be accomplished* (or cut off) *before his time*, (v. 32.) that is, He shall survive his prosperity, and see himself stripped of it.

Fifthly, He is in care, when he is in trouble, how to get out of it; (not how to get good by it;) but in this also he is crossed; (v. 30.) *He shall not depart out of darkness*; when he begins to fall, like Haman, down with him. It was said of him, (v. 22.) *He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness*; he frightened himself with the perpetuity of his calamity, and God also shall choose his delusions, and bring his fears upon him, (Isa. 66. 4.) as he did upon Israel, Numb. 14. 28. God says, Amen, to his distrust and despair.

Sixthly, He is in care to secure his partners, and hopes to secure himself by his partnership with them; but that is in vain too, v. 34, 35. The congregation of them, the whole confederacy, they, and all their tabernacles, shall be desolate, and consumed with fire. Hypocrisy and bribery are here charged upon them; that is, deceitful dealing both with God and man: God affronted, under colour of religion, man wronged, under colour of justice. It is impossible that these should end well. *Though hand join in hand for the support of these perfidious practices, yet shall not the wicked go unpunished*.

(3.) The use and application of all this. Will the prosperity of presumptuous sinners end thus miserably? Then, (v. 31.) *Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity*. Let the mischiefs which befall others be our warnings, and let not us rest on that broken reed which always failed those who leaned on it. [1.] Those who trust to their sinful ways of getting wealth, *trust in vanity*, and *vanity will be their recompense*, for they shall not get what they expected. Their arts will deceive them, and perhaps ruin them in this world. [2.] Those who trust to their wealth when they have gotten it, especially to the wealth they have gotten dishonestly, *trust in vanity*, for it will yield them no satisfaction. The guilt that cleaves to it, will ruin the joy of it. They sow the wind, and will reap the whirlwind, and will own, at length, with the utmost confusion, that a *deceived heart turned them aside*, and that they cheated themselves with a *lie in their right hand*.

CHAP. XVI.

This chapter begins Job's reply to that discourse of Eliphaz which we had in the foregoing chapter; it is but the second part of the same song of lamentation with which he had before bemoaned himself, and set to the same melancholy tune. 1. He upbraids his friends with their unkind usage of him,

v. 1. 5. *11. He represents his own case as very deplorable upon all accounts, v. 6. 16. 111. He still holds fast his integrity, concerning which he appeals to God's righteous judgment, from the unrighteous censures of his friends, v. 17. 22.*

1. **THEN** Job answered and said, 2. I have heard many such things: miserable comforters *are ye all*. 3. Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee, that thou answerest? 4. I also could speak as ye *do*: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you. 5. *But* I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage *your* grief.

Both Job and his friends took the same way that disputants commonly take, which is, to undervalue one another's sense, and wisdom, and management. The longer the saw of contention is drawn, the hotter it grows; and the *beginning* of this sort of strife is as the letting forth of water, therefore leave it off before it be meddled with. Eliphaz had represented Job's discourses as idle and unprofitable, and nothing to the purpose; and Job here gives his the same character. Those who are free in passing such censures, must expect to have them retorted; it is easy, it is endless: but *Cui bono?*—*What good does it do?* It will stir up men's passions, but will never convince their judgments, nor set truth in a clear light.

Job here reproves Eliphaz,

1. For needless repetitions; (v. 2.) "*I have heard many such things*. You tell me nothing but what I knew before; nothing but what you yourselves have before said; you offer nothing new, it is the same thing over and over again;" which Job thinks as great a trial of his patience as almost any of his troubles. The inculcating of the same things thus by an adversary, is indeed provoking and nauseous, but by a teacher it is often necessary, and must not be grievous to the learner, to whom *precept must be upon precept, and line upon line*. Many things we have heard, which it is good for us to hear again, that we may understand and remember them better, and be more affected with them, and influenced by them.

2. For unskilful applications. They came with a design to comfort him, but they went about it very awkwardly, and, when they touched Job's case, quite mistook it; "*Miserable comforters are ye all*, who, instead of offering any thing to alleviate the affliction, add affliction to it, and make it yet more grievous." The patient's case is sad indeed, when his medicines are poisons, and his physicians his worst disease. What Job says here of his friends, is true of all creatures, in comparison with God, and, one time or other, we shall be made to see it and own it, that miserable comforters are they all. When we are under convictions of sin, terrors of conscience, and the arrests of death, it is only the blessed Spirit that can comfort effectually; all others, without him, do it miserably, and sing songs to a heavy heart, to no purpose.

3. For endless impertinence. Job wishes that *vain words might have an end*, v. 3. If vain, it were well that they were never begun, and the sooner they are ended the better. Those who are so wise as to speak to the purpose, will be so wise as to know when they have said enough of a thing, and when it is time to break off.

4. For causeless obstinacy. *What emboldeneth thee, that thou answerest?* It is very rash and unjust confidence, with Eliphaz, to charge men with those crimes which we cannot prove upon them, to pass a judgment on men's spiritual state, upon the view of their outward condition, and to re-advance those objections which have been again and again answered.

5. For the violation of the sacred laws of friendship; doing by his brother as he would not have been done by, and as his brother

would not have done by him. This is a cutting reproof, and very affecting, v. 4, 5.

(1.) He desires his friends, in imagination, for a little while, to change conditions with him, to put their souls in his soul's stead; to suppose themselves in misery like him, and him at ease like them. This was no absurd or foreign supposition, but what might quickly become true in fact; so strange, so sudden, frequently, are the vicissitudes of human affairs, and such the turns of the wheel, that the spokes soon change places. Whatever our brethren's sorrows are, we ought by sympathy to make them our own, because we know not how soon they may be so.

(2.) He represents the unkindness of their conduct toward him, by shewing what he could do to them, if they were in his condition. *I could speak as ye do*. It is an easy thing to trample upon those that are down, and to find fault with what those say that are in extremity of pain and affliction. "*I could heap up words against you*, as you do against me; and how would you like it? How would you bear it?"

(3.) He shews them what they *should* do, by telling them what, in that case, he would do; (v. 5.) "*I would strengthen you*, and say all I could to assuage your grief, but nothing to aggravate it." It is natural to sufferers to think what they would do, if the tables were turned; but perhaps our hearts may deceive us; we know not what we should do. We find it easier to discern the reasonableness and importance of a command, when we have occasion to claim the benefit of it, than when we have occasion to do the duty of it. See what is the duty we owe to our brethren in affliction. [1.] We should say and do all we can to strengthen them, suggesting to them such considerations as are proper to encourage their confidence in God, and to support their sinking spirits. Faith and patience are the strength of the afflicted; what helps these graces, confirms the feeble knees. [2.] To assuage their grief, the causes of their grief, if possible, or, however, their resentment of those causes. Good words cost nothing; but they may be of good service to those that are in sorrow, not only as it is some comfort to them to see their friends concerned for them, but as they may be so reminded of that which, through the prevalency of grief, was forgotten. Though hard words (we say) break no bones, yet kind words may help to make broken bones rejoice; and those have the *torque of the learned*, that know how to *speak a word in season to the weary*.

6. Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged: and *though* I forbear, what am I eased? 7. But now he hath made me weary: thou hast made desolate all my company. 8. And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, *which* is a witness *against me*: and my leanness, rising up in me, beareth witness to my face. 9. He teareth *me* in his wrath, who hateth me: he gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me. 10. They have gaped upon me with their mouth; they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully; they have gathered themselves together against me. 11. God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked. 12. I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken *me* by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark. 13. His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground. 14. He breaketh me with breach upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant. 15. I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and defiled my horn in

the dust. 16. My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death;

Job's complaint is here as bitter as any where in all his discourses, and he is at a stand whether to smother it or to give it vent. Sometimes the one, and sometimes the other, is a relief to the afflicted, according as the temper or the circumstances are; but Job found help by neither, v.6. (1.) Sometimes giving vent to grief gives ease; but, "*Though I speak,*" (says Job,) "*my grief is not assuaged,*" my spirit is never the lighter for the pouring out of my complaint; nay, what I speak is so misconstrued as to be turned to the aggravation of my grief." (2.) At other times, keeping silence makes the trouble the easier and the sooner forgotten; but (says Job) *though I forbear,* I am never the nearer; *what am I eased?* If he complained, he was censured as passionate; if not, as sullen. If he maintained his integrity, that was his crime; if he made no answer to their accusations, his silence was taken for a confession of his guilt.

Here is a doleful representation of Job's grievances. O what reason have we to bless God, that we are not making such complaints! He complains,

1. That his family was scattered; (v.7.) "*He hath made me weary,*" weary of speaking, weary of forbearing, weary of my friends, weary of life itself; my journey through the world proves so very uncomfortable, that I am quite tired with it; this made it as tiresome as any thing, that all his company was made desolate; his children and servants being killed, and the poor remains of his great household dispersed. The company of good people, that used to meet at his house for religious worship, was now scattered, and he spent his sabbaths in silence and solitude. He had company indeed, but such as he would rather have been without, for they seemed to triumph in his desolation. If lovers and friends are put far from us, we must see and own God's hand in it, making our company desolate.

2. That his body was worn away with diseases and pains, so that he was become a perfect skeleton, nothing but skin and bones, v.8. His face was furrowed, not with age, but sickness; *Thou hast filled me with wrinkles.* His flesh was wasted with the running of his sore boils, so that his leanness rose up in him, that is, his bones, that were not seen, stuck out, ch.33. 21. These are called *witnesses against him*, witnesses of God's displeasure against him, and such witnesses as his friends produced against him to prove him a wicked man. Or, "They are witnesses for me, that my complaint is not causeless," or, "witnesses to me, that I am a dying man, and must be gone shortly."

3. That his enemy was a terror to him, threatened him, frightened him, looked stern upon him, and gave all the indications of rage against him; (v.9.) *He tears me in his wrath.* But who is this enemy? Either, (1.) *Eliphaz*; who shewed himself very much exasperated against him, and perhaps had expressed himself with such marks of indignation as are here mentioned: at least, what he said tore Job's good name, and thundered nothing but terror to him; his eyes were sharpened to spy out matter of reproach against Job, and very barbarously both he and the rest of them used him. Or, (2.) *Satan*: he was his enemy, that hated him, and perhaps, by the divine permission, terrified him with apparitions, as (some think) he terrified our Saviour, which put him into his agonies in the garden; and thus he aimed to make him curse God. It is not improbable that this is the enemy he means. Or, (3.) *God* himself: if we understand it of him, the expressions are indeed as rash as any he used. God hates none of his creatures; but Job's melancholy did thus represent to him the terrors of the Almighty: and nothing can be more grievous to a good man, than to apprehend God to be his Enemy. If the wrath of a king be as messengers of death, what is the wrath of the King of kings!

4. That all about him were abusive to him; (v.10.) They came upon him with open mouth to devour him, as if they would swallow him alive, so terrible were their threats, and so scornful was their conduct to him. They offered him all the indignities they could invent, and even smote him on the cheek; and herein many were confederate, they *gathered themselves together against him,*

even the abjects, Ps.35. 15. Herein Job was a type of Christ, as many of the ancients make him; these very expressions are used in the predictions of his sufferings; (Ps.22. 13.) *They gaped upon me with their mouths*; and (Mic. 5. 1.) *They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek*, which was literally fulfilled, Matth.26. 67. How were they increased that troubled him!

5. That God, instead of delivering him out of their hands, as he hoped, delivered him into their hands; (v.11.) *He hath turned me over into the hands of the wicked.* They could have had no power against him, if it had not been given them from above; he therefore looks beyond them to God, who gave them their commission, as David did when Shimei cursed him; but he thinks it strange, and almost thinks it hard, that those should have power against him, who were God's enemies as much as his. God sometimes makes use of wicked men as his sword to one another, (Ps.17. 13.) and his rod to his own children, Isa.10. 5. Herein also Job was a type of Christ, who was delivered into wicked hands, to be crucified and slain, by the *determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God*, Acts, 2. 23.

6. That God not only delivered him into the hands of the wicked, but took him into his own hands too, into which it is a fearful thing to fall; (v.12.) "I was at ease, in the comfortable enjoyment of the gifts of God's bounty, not fretting and uneasy, as some are in the midst of their prosperity, who thereby provoke God to strip them; yet he has broken me asunder, put me upon the rack of pain, and torn me limb from limb." God, in afflicting him, had seemed, (1.) As if he were furious: though fury is not in God, he thought it was, when he took him by the neck, (as a strong man in a passion would take a child,) and shook him to pieces, triumphing in the irresistible power he had to do what he would with him. (2.) As if he were partial: "He has distinguished me from the rest of mankind by this hard usage of me; he has set me up for his mark, the butt at which he is pleased to let fly all his arrows: at me they are directed, and they come not by chance; against me they are levelled, as if I were the greatest sinner of all the men of the east, or were singled out to be made an example." When God set him up for a mark, his archers presently compassed him round. God has archers at command, who will be sure to hit the mark that he sets up. Whoever are our enemies, we must look upon them as God's archers, and see him directing the arrow. *It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.* (3.) As if he were cruel, and his wrath as relentless as his power was resistless. As if he contrived to touch him in the tenderest part, cleaving his reins asunder with acute pains, perhaps they were nephritic pains, those of the stone, which lie in the region of the kidneys. As if he had no mercy in reserve for him, he does not spare, nor abate any thing of the extremity. And, as if he aimed at nothing but his death, and his death in the midst of the most grievous tortures, *he pours out my gall upon the ground.* As when men have taken a wild beast, and killed it, they open it, and pour out the gall with a loathing of it. He thought his blood was poured out, as if it were not only not precious, but nauseous. (4.) As if he were unreasonable and insatiable in his executions; (v.14.) "*He breaketh me with breach upon breach,*" follows me with one wound after another." So his troubles came at first; while one messenger of evil tidings was speaking, another came; and so it was still, new boils were rising every day, so that he had no prospect of the end of his troubles. Thus he thought that God ran upon him like a giant, whom he could not possibly stand before or confront; as the giants of old ran down all their poor neighbours, and were too hard for them. Note, Even good men, when they are in great and extraordinary troubles, have much ado not to entertain hard thoughts of God.

7. That he had divested himself of all his honour, and all his comfort, in compliance with the afflicting providences that surrounded him. Some can lessen their own troubles by concealing them, holding their heads as high, and putting as good a face upon them, as ever; but Job could not do so; he received the impressions of them, and, as one truly penitent, and truly patient, he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, v.15, 16. (1.) He now laid aside all his ornaments and soft clothing, consulted

not either his ease or finery in his dress, but sewed sackcloth upon his skin; that clothing he thought good enough for such a defiled distempered body as he had. Silks upon sores, such sores, he thought, would be unsuitable, sackcloth would be more becoming. Those are fond indeed of gay clothing, that will not be weaned from it by sickness and old age, and, as Job was, (v. 8.) by wrinkles and leanness. He not only put on sackcloth, but sewed it on, as one that resolved to continue his humiliation as long as the affliction continued. (2.) He insisted not upon any points of honour, but humbled himself under humbling providences; he defiled his horn in the dust, and refused the respect that used to be paid to his dignity, power, and eminency. Note, When God brings down our condition, that should bring down our spirits. Better lay the horn in the dust, than lift it up in contradiction to the designs of Providence, and have it broken at last. Eliphaz had represented Job as high and haughty, and unhumiliated under his affliction; "No," says Job, "I know better things; the dust is now the fittest place for me." (3.) He banished mirth as utterly unseasonable, and set himself to sow in tears; (v. 16.) "*My face is foul with weeping* so constantly for my sins, for God's displeasure against me, and for my friends' unkindness; this has brought a shadow of death upon my eye-lids." He had not only wept away all his beauty, but almost wept his eyes out. In this also, he was a type of Christ, who was a man of sorrows, and much in tears, and pronounced those blessed that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

17. Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure. 18. O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no place. 19. Also now, behold, my Witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. 20. My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God. 21. O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour! 22. When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return.

Job's condition was very deplorable; but had he nothing to support him, nothing to comfort him? Yes, and he here tells us what it was.

1. He had the testimony of his conscience for him, that he had walked uprightly, and had never allowed himself in any gross sin. None was ever more ready than he to acknowledge his sins of infirmity; but, upon search, he could not charge himself with any enormous crime, for which he should be made more miserable than other men, v. 17. He had kept a conscience void of offence, 1. Toward men. "*Not for any injustice in my hands*, any wealth that I have unjustly got or kept." Eliphaz had represented him as a tyrant and an oppressor; "No," says he, "I never did any wrong to any man, but always despised the gain of oppression." 2. Toward God. *Also my prayer is pure*; but prayer cannot be pure, as long as there is *injustice in our hands*, Isa. 1. 15. Eliphaz had charged him with hypocrisy in religion, but he specifies prayer, the great act of religion, and professes that in that he was pure, though not from all infirmity, yet from reigning and allowed guile: it was not like the prayers of the Pharisees, who looked no further than to be seen of men, and to serve a turn.

This assertion of his own integrity he backs with a solemn imprecation of shame and confusion to himself, if it were not true, v. 18. (1.) If there were any injustice in his hands, he wishes it might not be concealed, *O earth, cover thou not my blood*, that is, "the innocent blood of others, which I am suspected to have shed." Murder will out; and "Let it," says Job, "if I have ever been guilty of it," Gen. 4. 10, 11. The day is coming when the earth shall disclose her blood; (Isa. 26. 21.) and a good man is far from dreading that day. (2.) If there were any impurity in his prayers, he wishes they might not be accepted, *Let my cry have no place*.

He was willing to be judged by that rule, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me*, Ps. 66. 18. There is another probable sense of these words, that he does hereby, as it were, lay his death upon his friends, who broke his heart with their harsh censures, and charges the guilt of his blood upon them, begging of God to avenge it, and that the cry of his blood might have no place in which to lie hid, but might come up to heaven, and be heard by him that makes inquisition for blood.

II. He could appeal to God's omniscience concerning his integrity, v. 19. The witness in our own bosoms for us will stand us in little stead, if we have not a witness in heaven for us too, for *God is greater than our hearts*, and we are not to be our own judges; this, therefore, is Job's triumph, *My Witness is in heaven*. Note, It is an unspeakable comfort to a good man, when he lies under the censure of his brethren, that there is a God in heaven, who knows his integrity, and will clear it up sooner or later. See John, 5. 31, 37. This one Witness is instead of a thousand.

III. He had a God to go to, before whom he might unbosom himself, v. 20, 21. See here, 1. How the case stood between him and his friends; he knew not how to be free with them, nor could he expect either a fair hearing with them, or fair dealing from them; "My friends (so they call themselves) scorn me; they set themselves not only to resist me, but to expose me; they are of counsel against me, and use all their art and eloquence," (so the word signifies,) "to run me down." The scorn of friends are more cutting than those of enemies; but we must expect them, and provide accordingly. 2. How it stood between him and God. He doubted not but that, (1.) God did now take cognizance of his sorrows, *Mine eye pours out tears to God*. He had said, (v. 16.) that he wept much; here he tells us in what channel his tears ran, and which way they were directed: his sorrow was not that of the world, but he sorrowed after a godly sort, wept before the Lord, and offered to him the sacrifice of a broken heart. Note, Even tears, when sanctified to God, give ease to troubled spirits; and, if men slight our grief, this may comfort us, that God regards them. (2.) That he would in due time clear up his innocence; (v. 21.) *O that one might plead for a man with God!* If he could but now have the same freedom at God's bar, that men commonly have at the bar of the civil magistrate, he doubted not but to carry his cause, for the Judge himself was a witness to his integrity. The language of this wish is, that (Isa. 50. 7, 8.) *I know that I shall not be ashamed, for he is near that justifies me*. Some give a gospel-sense of this verse, and the original will very well bear it: *and he will plead* (that is, there is one that will plead) *for man with God, even the Son of man, for his friend, or neighbour*. Those who pour out tears before God, though they cannot plead for themselves, by reason of their distance and defects, have a Friend to plead for them, even the Son of man, and on this we must bottom all our hopes of acceptance with God.

IV. He had a prospect of death, which would put a period to all his troubles: such confidence had he toward God, that he could take pleasure in thinking of the approach of death, when he should be determined to his everlasting state, as one that doubted not but it would be well with him then: *When a few years are come, (the years of number which are determined and appointed to me,) then I shall go the way whence I shall not return*. Note, 1. To die is to go the way whence we shall not return; it is to go a journey, a long journey, a journey for good and all; to remove from this to another country, from the world of sense to the world of spirits; it is a journey to our long home; there will be no coming back to our state in this world, nor any change of our state in the other world. 2. We must all of us, very certainly, and very shortly, go this journey; and it is comfortable to those who keep a good conscience, to think of it, for it is the crown of their integrity.

CHAP. XVII.

In this chapter, 1. Job reflects upon the harsh censures which his friends had passed upon him, and, looking upon himself as a dying man, (v. 1.) he appeals to God, and begs of him speedily to appear for him, and right him, because they had wronged him, and he knew not how to right himself, v. 2, 7. But he hopes, that, though it should be a surprise, it will be no stumbling-

block, to good people, to see him thus abused, v. 8, 9. *II. He reflects upon the vain hopes they had fed him with, that he should yet see good days; shewing that his days were just at an end, and with his body all his hopes would be buried in the dust, v. 10. 16. His friends becoming strange to him, which greatly grieved him, he makes death and the grave familiar to him, which yielded him some comfort.*

1. **M**Y breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me. 2. Are there not mockers with me? and doth not mine eye continue in their provocation? 3. Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee; who is he that will strike hands with me? 4. For thou hast hid their heart from understanding: therefore shalt thou not exalt them. 5. He that speaketh flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail. 6. He hath made me also a by-word of the people; and aforetime I was as a tabret. 7. Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow. 8. Upright men shall be astonished at this, and the innocent shall stir up himself against the hypocrite. 9. The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.

Job's discourse here is somewhat broken and interrupted, and he passes suddenly from one thing to another, as is usual with men in trouble: but we may reduce what is said here to three heads.

1. The deplorable condition which poor Job was now in, which he describes, to aggravate the great unkindness of his friends to him, and to justify his own complaints. Let us see what his case was.

1. He was a *dying man*, v. 1. He had said, (ch. 16. 22.) "When a few years are come, I shall go that long journey." But here he corrects himself, "Why do I talk of years to come? Alas! I am just setting out on that journey, am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; my breath is already corrupt, or broken off, my spirits are spent, I am a gone man." It is good for every one of us thus to look upon ourselves as dying, and especially to think of it when we are sick. We are dying, that is, (1.) Our life is going, for the breath of life is going. It is continually going forth, it is in our nostrils, (Isa. 2. 22.) the door at which it entered; (Gen. 2. 7.) there it is upon the threshold, ready to depart. Perhaps, Job's distemper obstructed his breathing, and short breath will, after a while, be no breath. Let the Anointed of the Lord be the breath of our nostrils, and let us get spiritual life breathed into us, and that breath will never be corrupted. (2.) Our time is ending; *My days are extinct, are put out*, as a candle, which, from the first lighting, is continually wasting and burning down, and will by degrees burn out of itself, but may by a thousand accidents be extinguished. Such is life. It concerns us, therefore, carefully to redeem the days of time, and to spend them in getting ready for the days of eternity, which will never be extinct. (3.) We are expected in our long home; *The graves are ready for me*. But would not one grave serve? Yes, but he speaks of the *sepulchres of his fathers*, to which he must be gathered: "The graves where they are laid, are ready for me also," graves in consort, the congregation of the dead. Wherever we go, there is but a step between us and the grave. Whatever is unready, that is ready; it is a bed soon made. If the graves be ready for us, it concerns us to be ready for the graves. *The graves for me*, so it runs; denoting not only his expectation of death, but his desire of it; "I have done with the world, and have nothing now to wish for but a grave."

2. He was a *despised man*; (v. 6.) "He" that is, Eliphaz, so come, or rather God, whom he all along acknowledges to be the Author of his calamities) "has made me a by-word of the people, the talk of the country, a laughing stock to many, a gazing-stock

to all; and aforetime, or, to men's faces, publicly, I was as a tabret, that whoever chose might play upon;" they made ballads of him; his name became a proverb; it is so still, *As poor as Job*. He has now made me a by-word, a reproach of men, whereas, aforetime, in my prosperity, I was as a tabret, *Deliciae humani generis*—The darling of the human race, whom they were all pleased with. It is common for those who were honoured in their wealth, to be despised in their poverty.

3. He was a *man of sorrows*, v. 7. He wept so much, that he had almost lost his sight; *Mine eye is dim by reason of sorrow*, ch. 16. 16. The sorrow of the world thus works darkness and death. He vexed so much, that he had fretted all the flesh away, and was become a perfect skeleton; nothing but skin and bones; "All my members are as a shadow. I am grown so poor and thin, that I am not to be called a man, but the shadow of a man."

II. The ill use which his friends made of his miseries; they trampled upon him, and insulted over him, and condemned him as a hypocrite, because he was thus grievously afflicted. Hard usage! Now observe,

1. How Job describes it, and what construction he puts upon their discourses with him. He looks upon himself as basely abused by them. (1.) They abused him with their foul censures, condemning him as a bad man, justly reduced thus, and exposed to contempt, v. 2. "They are mockers, who deride my calamities, and insult over me, because I am thus brought low. They are so with me, abusing me to my face, pretending friendship in their visit, but intending mischief. I cannot get clear of them; they are continually tearing me, and they will not be wrought upon, either by reason or pity, to let fall the prosecution." (2.) They abused him too with their fair promises, for in them they did but banter him. He reckons them (v. 5.) among those that speak flattery to their friends. They all came to mourn with him; Eliphaz began with a commendation of him, ch. 4. 3. They had all promised him that he would be happy, if he would take their advice. Now all this he looked upon as flattery, and as designed to vex him so much the more. All this he calls their *provocation*, v. 2. They did what they could to provoke him, and then condemned him for his resentment of it; but he thinks himself excusable when his eye continued thus in their provocation; it never ceased, and he could never look off it. Note, The unkindness of those that trample upon their friends in affliction, that banter and abuse them then, is enough to try, if not to tire, the patience even of Job himself.

2. How he condemns it. (1.) It was a sign that *God had hid their heart from understanding*, (v. 4.) and that in this matter they were infatuated, and their wonted wisdom was departed from them. Wisdom is a gift of God, which he grants to some, and withholds from others, grants at some times, and withholds at other times. Those that are void of compassion, are so far void of understanding. Where there is not the *tenderness* of a man, one may question whether there be the *understanding* of a man. (2.) It would be a lasting reproach and diminution to them; *Therefore shalt thou not exalt them*. Those are certainly kept back from honour, whose hearts are hid from understanding. When God infatuates men, he will abase them. Surely they who discover so little acquaintance with the methods of Providence, shall not have the honour of deciding this controversy! That is reserved for a man of better sense, and better temper, such an one as Elihu afterward appeared to be. (3.) It would entail a curse upon their families. He that thus violates the sacred laws of friendship, forfeits the benefit of it, not only for himself, but for his posterity. "Even the eyes of his children shall fail, and when they look for succour and comfort from their own and their father's friends, they shall look in vain, as I have done, and be as much disappointed as I am in you." Note, Those that wrong their neighbours, may, in the end, wrong their own children more than they are aware of.

3. How he appeals from them to God; (v. 3.) *Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee*, that is, "Let me be assured that God will take the hearing and determining of the cause into his own hands, and I desire no more. Let some one engage for God to bring on this matter." Thus they whose hearts condemn them

not, have confidence toward God, and can, with humble and believing boldness, beg of him to search and try them. Some make Job here to glance at the mediation of Christ, for he speaks of a Surety with God, without whom he durst not appear before God, nor try his cause at his bar; for though his friends' accusations of him were utterly false, yet he could not justify himself before God but in a Mediator. Our English annotations give this reading of the verse, "*Appoint, I pray thee, my Surety with thee*, namely, Christ, who is with thee in heaven, and has undertaken to be my Surety: let him plead my cause, and stand up for me; and *who is he then that will strike upon mine hand?*" that is, "Who dares then contend with me? Who shall lay any thing to my charge, if Christ be an advocate for me?" Rom. 8. 32, 33. Christ is the Surety of the better testament, (Heb. 7. 22.) a Surety of God's appointing; and if he undertake for us, we need not fear what can be done against us.

III. The good use which the righteous should make of Job's afflictions from God, from his enemies, and from his friends, v. 8, 9. Observe here,

1. How the saints are described. (1.) They are upright men, honest, and sincere, and that act from a steady principle, with a single eye. This was Job's own character; (*ch. 1. 1.*) and, probably, he speaks of such upright men especially as had been his intimates and associates. (2.) They are the innocent; not perfectly so, but it is what they aim at, and press toward. Sincerity is evangelical innocency, and they that are upright are said to be *innocent from the great transgression*, Ps. 19. 13. (3.) They are the righteous, who walk in the way of righteousness. (4.) They have clean hands, kept clean from the gross pollutions of sin, and, when spotted with infirmities, *washed with innocency*, Ps. 26. 6.

2. How they should be affected with the account of Job's troubles. Great inquiry, no doubt, would be made concerning him, and every one would speak of him and his case; and what use will good people make of it?

(1.) It will amaze them; *Upright men shall be astonished at this*; they will wonder to hear that so good a man as Job should be so grievously afflicted in body, name, and estate, that God should lay his hand so heavy upon him, and that his friends, who ought to have comforted him, should add to his grief; that such a remarkable saint should be such a remarkable sufferer, and so useful a man laid aside in the midst of his usefulness; what shall we say to these things? Upright men, though satisfied, in general, that God is wise and holy in all he does, yet cannot but be astonished at such dispensations of Providence; paradoxes which will not be unfolded till the mystery of God shall be finished.

(2.) It will animate them. Instead of being deterred from, and discouraged in, the service of God, by the hard usage which this faithful servant of God met with, they shall be so much the more emboldened to proceed and persevere in it. That which was St. Paul's care, (1 Thess. 3. 3.) was Job's, that no good man should be moved either from his holiness, or his comfort, by these afflictions, that none should, for the sake hereof, think the worse of the ways or work of God. And that which was St. Paul's comfort, was his too, that *the brethren of the Lord would wax confident by his bonds*, Philip. 1. 14. They would hereby be animated,

[1.] To oppose sin, and to confront the corrupt and pernicious inferences which evil men would draw from Job's sufferings, as, That God has forsaken the earth, That it is in vain to serve him; and the like; *The innocent shall stir up himself against the hypocrite*, will not bear to bear this, (Rev. 2. 2.) but will withstand him to his face; will stir up himself to search into the meaning of such providences, and study these hard chapters, that he may read them readily; will stir up himself to maintain religion's just, but injured, cause against all its opposers. Note, The boldness of the attacks which profane people make upon religion, should sharpen the courage and resolution of its friends and advocates. It is time to stir, when proclamation is made in the gate of the camp, *Who is on the Lord's side?* When vice is daring, it is no time for virtue, through fear, to hide itself.

[2.] To persevere in religion. The righteous, instead of draw-

ing back, or so much as starting back, at this frightful spectacle, or standing still to deliberate whether he should proceed or no, (allude to 2 Sam. 2. 23.) shall, with so much the more constancy and resolution, hold on his way, and press forward. Though, in me, he foresees that bonds and afflictions abide him, yet *none of those things shall move him*, Acts. 20. 24. Those who keep their eye upon heaven as their end, will keep their feet in the paths of religion as their way, whatever difficulties and discouragements they meet with in it.

[3.] In order thereto, to grow in grace. He will not only hold on his way notwithstanding, but will grow stronger and stronger, and, by the sight of other good men's trials, and the experience of his own, he will be made more vigorous and lively in his duty, more warm and affectionate, more resolute and undaunted: the worse others are, the better he will be; that which dismays others, imboldens him. The blustering wind makes the traveller gather his cloak the closer about him, and gird it the faster. They that are truly wise and good, will be continually growing wiser and better. Proficiency in religion is a good sign of sincerity in it.

10. But as for you all, do ye return, and come now: for I cannot find *one wise man* among you.

11. My days are past, my purposes are broken off, *even the thoughts of my heart*. 12. They change the night into day: the light is short because of darkness. 13. If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. 14. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father; to the worm, *Thou art my mother, and my sister*. 15. And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it? 16. They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when *our rest together is* in the dust.

Job's friends had pretended to comfort him with the hopes of his return to a prosperous estate again; now he here shews,

I. That it was their folly to talk so; (v. 10.) "*Return, and come now*, be convinced that you are in an error, and let me persuade you to be of my mind: for *I cannot find any wise man among you*, that knows how to explain the difficulties of God's providence, or how to apply the consolations of his promises." Those do not go wisely about the work of comforting the afflicted, who fetch their comforts from the possibility of their recovery and enlargement in this world; though that is not to be despaired of, it is, at the best, uncertain, and if it should fail, as perhaps it may, the comfort built upon it will fail too. It is therefore our wisdom to comfort ourselves, and others, in distress, with that which will not fail, the promise of God, his love and grace, and a well-grounded hope of eternal life.

II. That it would be much more his folly to heed them; for,

1. All his measures were already broken, and he was full of confusion, v. 11, 12. He owns he had, in his prosperity, often pleased himself both with projects of what he should do, and prospects of what he should enjoy; but now that he looked upon his days as past, and drawing towards a period, all those purposes were broken off, and those expectations dashed. He had had thoughts about enlarging his border, increasing his stock, and settling his children, and many pious thoughts, it is likely, of promoting religion in his country, redressing grievances, reforming the profane, relieving the poor, and raising funds, perhaps, for charitable uses; but all these thoughts of his heart were now at an end, and he would never have the satisfaction of seeing his designs effected. Note, The period of our days will be the period of all our contrivances and hopes for this world; but if with full purpose of heart we cleave to the Lord, death will not break off that purpose.

Job, being thus put upon new counsels, was under a constant uneasiness; (v. 12.) *The thoughts of his heart being broken, they changed the night into day, and shortened the light*. Some, in their vanity and riot, turn night into day and day into night; but

Job did so, through trouble and anguish of spirit, which was a hinderance, (1.) To the repose of the night; keeping his eyes waking, so that the night was as wearisome to him as the day, and the tosses of the night tired him as much as the toils of the day. (2.) To the entertainments of the day. "The light of the morning is welcome, but, by reason of this inward darkness, the comfort of it is soon gone, and the day is to me as dismal as the black and dark night," Deut. 28. 67. See what reason we have to be thankful for the health and ease which enable us to welcome both the shadows of the evening and the light of the morning.

2. All his expectations from this world would very shortly be buried in the grave with him; so that it was a jest for him to think of such mighty things as they had flattered him with the hopes of; (ch. 5. 19.—8. 21.—11. 17.) "Alas, you do but make a fool of me."

(1.) He saw himself just dropping into the grave. A convenient house, an easy bed, and agreeable relations, are some of those things which we take satisfaction in in this world: Job expected not any of these above ground; all he felt, and all he had in view, was unpleasant and disagreeable, but under ground he expected them.

[1.] He counted upon no house but the grave; (v. 13.) "If I wait, if there be any place where I shall ever be easy again, it must be in the grave. I should deceive myself, if I should count upon any out-let from my trouble but what death will give me. Nothing is so sure as that." Note, In all our prosperity, it is good to keep death in prospect. Whatever we expect, let us be sure to expect that; for that may prevent other things which we expect, but nothing will prevent that. But see how he endeavours not only to reconcile himself to the grave, but to recommend it to himself: "It is my house." The grave is a house; to the wicked it is a prison-house; (ch. 24. 19, 20.) to the godly it is *Bethabara*, a passage-house in their way home. "It is my house, mine by descent, I am born to it; it is my father's house; mine by purchase, I have made myself obnoxious to it." We must every one of us shortly remove to this house, and it is our wisdom to provide accordingly; let us think of removing, and send before to our long home.

[2.] He counted upon no quiet bed but in the darkness; "There," says he, "*I have made my bed*. It is made, for it is ready, and I am just going to it." The grave is a bed, for we shall rest in it the evening of our day on earth, and rise from it in the morning of our everlasting day, Isa. 57. 2. Let this make good people willing to die; it is but going to bed, they are weary and sleepy, and it is time that they were in their beds; why should they not go willingly, when their Father calls? "Nay, *I have made my bed*, by preparation for it; have endeavoured to make it easy, by keeping conscience pure, by seeing Christ lying in this bed, and so turning it into a bed of spices, and by looking beyond it to the resurrection."

[3.] He counted upon no agreeable relations but what he had in the grave; (v. 14.) "*I have cried to corruption*, that is, to the grave, where the body will corrupt, *Thou art my father*, for our bodies were formed out of the earth, and *to the worms there*, *Ye are my mother and my sister*, to whom I am allied, for *man is a worm*, and with whom I must be conversant, for the *worms shall cover us*, ch. 21. 26. Job complained that his kindred were estranged from him, (ch. 19. 13, 14.) therefore here he claims acquaintance with other relations, that would cleave to him, when those disowned him. Note, *First*, We are all of us near akin to corruption and the worms. *Secondly*, It is, therefore, good to make ourselves familiar with them, by conversing much with them in our thoughts and meditations, which would very much help us above the inordinate love of life and fear of death.

(2.) He saw all his hopes from this world dropping into the grave with him; (v. 15, 16.) "Seeing I must shortly leave the world, *where is now my hope?* How can I expect to prosper, who do not expect to live?" He is not hopeless, but his hope is not there where they would have it be. *If in this life only* he had hope, *he were of all men most miserable*: "No, as for my hope, that hope which I comfort and support myself with, who shall see it?"

It is something out of sight that I hope for, not things that are seen, that are temporal, but things not seen, that are eternal." What is his hope, he will tell us, ch. 19. 25. *Non est mortale quod opto, immortale peto—I seek not for that which perishes, but for that which abides for ever*. "But as for the hopes you would buoy me up with, they shall go down with me to the bars of the pit; you are dying men, and cannot make good your promises, I am a dying man, and cannot enjoy the good you promise. Since, therefore, our rest will be together in the dust, let us all lay aside the thoughts of this world, and set our hearts upon another." We must shortly be in the dust, for dust we are, dust and ashes in the pit, under the bars of the pit, held fast there, never to loose the bands of death till the general resurrection. But we shall rest there, we shall rest together there. Job and his friends could not agree now, but they will both be quiet in the grave; the dust of that will shortly stop their mouths, and put an end to the controversy. Let the foresight of this cool the heat of all contenders, and moderate the disputers of this world.

CHAP. XVIII.

In this chapter, Bildad makes a second assault upon Job. In his first discourse (ch. 8.) he had given him encouragement to hope that all should yet be well with him. But here, there is not a word of that; he is grown more peevish, and is so far from being convinced by Job's reasonings, that he is but more exasperated. I. He sharply reproves Job, as haughty and passionate, and obstinate in his opinion, v. 1. .4. II. He enlarges upon the doctrine he had before maintained, concerning the misery of wicked people, and the ruin that attends them, v. 5. .21. In which he seems, all along, to have an eye to Job's complaints of the miserable condition he was in, that he was in the dark, bewildered, ensnared, terrified, and hastening out of the world. "This," says Bildad, "is the condition of a wicked man; and, therefore, thou art one."

1. **THEN** answered Bildad the Shuhite, and I said, 2. How long will it be ere ye make an end of words? mark, and afterwards we will speak. 3. Wherefore are we counted as beasts, and reputed vile in your sight? 4. He teareth himself in his auger: shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place?

Bildad here shoots his arrows, even bitter words, against poor Job, little thinking, that, though he was a wise and good man, in this instance he was serving Satan's design, in adding to his affliction.

1. He charges him with idle, endless, talk, as Eliphaz had done; (ch. 15. 2, 3.) *How long will it be ere ye make an end of words?* v. 2. Here he reflects, not only upon Job himself, but either upon all the managers of the conference, (thinking, perhaps, that Eliphaz and Zophar did not speak so close to the purpose as they might have done,) or upon some that were present, who, possibly, took part with Job, and put in a word now and then in his favour, though it be not recorded. Bildad was weary of hearing others speak, and impatient till it came to his turn; which cannot be observed to any man's praise, for we ought to be swift to hear, and slow to speak. It is common for contenders to monopolize the reputation of wisdom, and then to insist upon it as their privilege to be dictators. How unbecoming that is in others, every one can see; but few that are guilty of it can see it in themselves. Time was, when Job had the last word in all debates; (ch. 29. 22.) *After my words they spake not again*. Then he was in power and prosperity; but now that he was impoverished and brought low, he could scarcely be allowed to speak at all, and every thing he said was as much vilified as formerly it had been magnified. *Wisdom*, therefore, (as the world goes) *is good with an inheritance*; (Eccl. 7. 11.) *for the poor man's wisdom is despised*, and, because he is poor, *his words are not heard*, Eccl. 9. 16.

2. With a regardlessness of what was said to him, intimated in that, *Mark, and afterwards we will speak*. And it is to no purpose to speak, though what is said be ever so much to the purpose, if those to whom it is spoken will not mark and observe it. Let the ear be opened to hear as the learned, and then the tongues of the learned will do good service, (Isa. 50. 4.) and not otherwise. It is

an encouragement to those that speak of the things of God, to see the hearers attentive.

3. With a haughty contempt and disdain of his friends, and of that which they offered; (v. 3.) *Wherefore are we counted as beasts?* This was invidious: Job had indeed called them *mockers*, had represented them both as unwise and as unkind, wanting both in the reason and tenderness of men, but he did not count them beasts; yet Bildad so represents it, (1.) Because his high spirit resented what Job had said, as if it had been the greatest affront imaginable. Proud men are apt to think themselves slighted more than really they are. (2.) Because his hot spirit was willing to find a pretence to be hard upon Job. Those that incline to be severe upon others, will have it thought that they have first been so upon them.

4. With outrageous passion; *He teareth himself in his anger*, v. 4. Herein he seems to reflect upon what Job had said, (ch. 13. 14.) *Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth?* "It is thine own fault," says Bildad; or he reflected upon what he said, (ch. 16. 9.) where he seemed to charge it upon God; or, as some think, upon Eliphaz; *He teareth me in his wrath*. "No," says Bildad, "thou alone shalt bear it." *He teareth himself in his anger*. Note, Anger is a sin that is its own punishment. Fretful, passionate, people tear and torment themselves. *He teareth his soul*, so the word is; every sin wounds the soul, tears that, wrongs that, (Prov. 8. 36.) unbridled passion particularly.

5. With a proud and arrogant expectation to give law even to Providence itself; *"Shall the earth be forsaken for thee?"* Surely not; there is no reason for that, that the course of nature should be changed, and the settled rules of government violated, to gratify the humour of one man. Job, dost thou think the world cannot stand without thee; but that, if thou art ruined, all the world is ruined and forsaken with thee?" Some make it a reproof of Job's justification of himself, falsely insinuating, that either Job was a wicked man, or we must deny a Providence, and suppose that God has forsaken the earth, and the Rock of ages is removed. It is rather a just reproof of his passionate complaints; when we quarrel with the events of Providence, we forget, that, whatever befalls us, it is, (1.) According to the eternal purpose and counsel of God. (2.) According to the written word. Thus it is written, that in the world we must have tribulation, that since we sin daily, we must expect to smart for it; and, (3.) According to the usual way and custom, the track of Providence, nothing but what is common to men: and to expect that God's counsels should change, his method alter, and his word fail, to please us, is as absurd and unreasonable as to think that *the earth should be forsaken for us, and the rock removed out of its place*.

5. Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. 6. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him. 7. The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down. 8. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare. 9. The gin shall take him by the heel, and the robber shall prevail against him. 10. The snare is laid for him in the ground, and a trap for him in the way.

The rest of Bildad's discourse is entirely taken up in an elegant description of the miserable condition of a wicked man, in which there is a great deal of certain truth, and which will be of excellent use, if duly considered, that a sinful condition is a sad condition, and that iniquity will be men's ruin, if they do not repent of it. But, 1. It is not true that all wicked people are visibly and openly made thus miserable in this world; nor, 2. That all who are brought into great distress and trouble in this world, are therefore to be deemed and adjudged wicked men, though no other proof appears against them; and therefore, though Bildad

thought the application of it to Job was easy, yet it was not safe nor just. In these verses we have,

(1.) The destruction of the wicked foreseen and foretold, under the similitude of darkness; (v. 5, 6.) *Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out*. Even his light, the best and brightest part of him, shall be put out; even that which he rejoiced in, shall fail him. Or, the yea may refer to Job's complaints of the great distress he was in, and the darkness he should shortly make his bed in. "Yea," says Bildad, "so it is, thou art clouded, and straitened, and made miserable, and no better could be expected; for *the light of the wicked shall be put out*, and therefore thine shall." Observe here, [1.] The wicked may have some light for a while, some pleasure, some joy, some hope, within, as well as wealth, and honour, and power, without. But his light is but a spark, (v. 5.) a little thing, and soon extinguished. It is but a candle, (v. 6.) wasting and burning down, and easily blown out. It is not the light of the Lord, (that is, sun-light,) but the *light of his own fire*, and *sparks of his own kindling*, Isa. 50. 11. [2.] Light will certainly be put out at length, quite put out, so that not the least spark of it shall remain, with which to kindle another fire. Even while he is in his tabernacle, while he is in the body, which is the tabernacle of the soul, (2 Cor. 5. 1.) the light shall be dark, he shall have no true solid comfort, no joy that is satisfying, no hope that is supporting; even *the light that is in him is darkness*; and *how great is that darkness!* But, when he is put out of this tabernacle by death, *his candle shall be put out with him*. The period of his life will be the final period of all his days, and will turn all his hopes into endless despair. *When a wicked man dies, his expectation shall perish*, Prov. 11. 7. *He shall lie down in sorrow*.

(2.) The preparatives for that destruction represented under the similitude of a beast or bird caught in a snare, or a malefactor arrested and taken into custody, in order to his punishment, v. 7. . 10.

[1.] Satan is preparing for his destruction. He is *the robber that shall prevail against him*; (v. 9.) for as he was a murderer, so he was a robber, from the beginning. He, as the tempter, lays snares for sinners in the way, wherever they go, and he shall prevail. If he make them sinful like himself, he will make them miserable like himself. *He hunts for the precious life*.

[2.] He is himself preparing for his own destruction, by going on in sin, and so *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*. God gives him up, as he deserves and desires, to his own counsels, and then *his own counsels cast him down*, v. 7. His sinful projects and pursuits bring him into mischief. He is *cast into a net by his own feet*, (v. 8.) runs upon his own destruction, is *snared in the work of his own hands*, (Ps. 9. 16.) *his own tongue falls upon him*, Ps. 64. 8. *In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare*.

[3.] God is preparing for his destruction. The sinner by his sin is preparing the fuel, and then God by his wrath is preparing the fire. See here, *First*, How the sinner is infatuated, to run himself into the snare; whom God will destroy, he infatuates. *Secondly*, How he is embarrassed; *The steps of his strength, his mighty designs and efforts, shall be straitened*, so that he shall not compass what he intended; and the more he strives to extricate himself, the more will he be entangled. Evil men wax worse and worse. *Thirdly*, How he is secured and kept from out-running the judgments of God that are in pursuit of him; *The gin shall take him by the heel*. He can no more escape the divine wrath that is in pursuit of him, than a man, so held, can flee from the pursuer. *God knows how to reserve the wicked for the day of judgment*, 2 Pet. 2. 9.

11. Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet. 12. His strength shall be hunger-bitten, and destruction shall be ready at his side. 13. It shall devour the strength of his skin: even the first-born of death shall devour his strength. 14. His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him

to the king of terrors. 15. It shall dwell in his tabernacle, because *it is none of his*: brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation. 16. His roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off. 17. His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street. 18. He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the world. 19. He shall neither have son nor nephew among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings. 20. They that come after *him* shall be astonished at his day, as they that went before were affrighted. 21. Surely such *are* the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of *him that knoweth not God*.

Bildad here describes the destruction itself which wicked people are reserved for in the other world, and which, in some degree, often seizes them in this world. Come, and see what a miserable condition the sinner is in, when his day comes to fall.

I. See him disheartened and weakened by continual terrors, arising from the sense of his own guilt and the dread of God's wrath; (v. 11, 12.) *Terror shall make him afraid on every side*: the terrors of his own conscience shall haunt him, so that he shall never be easy; wherever he goes, these shall follow him, which way soever he looks, these shall stare him in the face. It will make him tremble to see himself fought against by the whole creation, to see Heaven frowning on him, hell gaping for him, and earth sick of him. He that carries his own accuser, and his own tormentor, always in his bosom, cannot but be afraid on every side. This will drive him to his feet, like the malefactor, who, being conscious of his guilt, *flees when none pursues*, Prov. 28. 1. But his feet will do him no service, they are fast in the snare, v. 9. The sinner may as soon overpower the divine omnipotence, as overrun the divine omniscience, Amos, 9. 2, 8.

No marvel that the sinner is dispirited, and distracted with fear, for, 1. He sees his ruin approaching; destruction shall be ready at his side, to seize him whenever justice gives the word, so that he is *brought into desolation in a moment*, Ps. 73. 19. 2. He feels himself utterly unable to grapple with it, either to escape it, or to bear up under it. That which he relied upon as his strength, (his wealth, power, pomp, friends, and the hardness of his own spirit,) shall fail him in the time of need, and be hunger-bitten, that is, it shall do him no more service than a famished man, pining away for hunger, would do in work or war. The case being thus with him, no marvel that he is a terror to himself. Note, The way of sin is a way of fear, and leads to everlasting confusion, of which the present terrors of an impure and unpacified conscience are earnest, as they were to Cain and Judas.

II. See him devoured and swallowed up by a miserable death; and miserable indeed a wicked man's death is, how secure and jovial soever his life was.

1. See him dying, arrested by *the first-born of death*, some disease, or some stroke that has in it a more than ordinary resemblance of death itself; *so great a death*, as it is called, (2 Cor. 1. 10.) a messenger of death, that has in it an uncommon strength and terror: the harbingers of death *devour the strength of his skin*, they bring rottenness into his bones, and consume them. *His confidence shall then be rooted out of his tabernacle*; (v. 14.) that is, all that he trusts to, for his support, shall be taken from him, and he shall have nothing to rely upon, no not his own tabernacle. His own soul was his confidence, but that shall be rooted out of the tabernacle of the body, as a tree that cumbered the ground. Thy soul shall be required of thee.

2. See him dead, and see his case then with an eye of faith. (1.) He is then brought to *the king of terrors*. He was surrounded with terrors while he lived, (v. 11.) and death was the king of all those terrors; they fought against the sinner in death's

name, for it is by reason of death that sinners are, *all their lifetime, subject to bondage*, (Heb. 2. 15.) and, at length, they will be brought to that which they so long feared, as a captive to the conqueror. Death is terrible to nature; our Saviour himself prayed, *Father, save me from this hour*; but to the wicked it is, in a special manner, *the king of terrors*, both as it is a period to that life in which they placed their happiness, and a passage to that life where they will find their endless misery. How happy then are the saints, and how much indebted to the Lord Jesus, by whom death is so far abolished, and the property of it altered, that this king of terrors is become a friend and servant! (2.) He is then *driven from light into darkness*; (v. 13.) from the light of this world, and his prosperous condition in it, into darkness, the darkness of the grave, the darkness of hell, into utter darkness, never to see light, (Ps. 49. 19.) not the least gleam, nor any hopes of it. (3.) He is then *chased out of the world*, hurried and dragged away by the messengers of death, sore against his will; chased as Adam out of paradise, for the world is his paradise. It intimates that he would fain stay here, he is loath to depart, but go he must; all the world is weary of him, and therefore chases him out, as glad to be rid of him. This is death to a wicked man.

III. See his family sunk and cut off, v. 15. The wrath and curse of God light and lie, not only upon his head and heart, but upon his house too, to consume it, with the *timber and stones thereof*, Zech. 5. 4. Death itself shall dwell in his tabernacle, and, having expelled him, shall take possession of his house, to the terror and destruction of all that he leaves behind; even the dwelling shall be ruined for the sake of its owner, *brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation*, rained upon it as upon Sodom, to the destruction of which this seems to have reference. Some think he here upbraids Job with the burning of his sheep and servants with fire from heaven. The reason is here given why his tabernacle is thus marked for ruin, *because it is none of his*; that is, it was unjustly got, and kept from the rightful owner, and therefore let him not expect either the comfort or the continuance of it.

His children shall perish, either with him or after him, v. 16. So that his roots being in his own person *dried up beneath, above, his branch*, every child of his family, shall be cut off. Thus the houses of Jeroboam, Baasha, and Abah were cut off; none that descended from them were left alive. They who take root in the earth, may expect it will thus be dried up; but if we be rooted in Christ, even our leaf shall not wither, much less shall our branch be cut off. Those who consult the true honour of their family, and the welfare of its branches, will be afraid of withering it by sin. The extirpation of the sinner's family is mentioned again; (v. 19.) *He shall neither have son nor nephew, child nor grandchild, to enjoy his estate, and bear up his name, nor shall there be any remaining in his dwelling akin to him*. Sin entails a curse upon posterity, and the iniquity of the fathers is often visited upon the children. Herein, also, it is probable that Bildad reflects upon the death of Job's children and servants, as a further proof of his being a wicked man; whereas all that are written childless, are not thereby written graceless; there is a name better than that of sons and daughters.

IV. See his memory buried with him, or made odious; he shall either be forgotten or spoken of with dishonour; (v. 17.) *His remembrance shall perish from the earth*; and if it perish from thence, it perishes wholly, for it was never written in heaven, as the names of the saints are, Luke, 10. 20. All his honour shall be laid and lost in the dust, or stained with perpetual infamy, so that he shall have no name in the street, departing without being desired. Thus the judgments of God follow him, after death, in this world, as an indication of the misery his soul is in after death, and an earnest of that everlasting shame and contempt to which he shall rise in the great day. *The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot*, Prov. 10. 7.

V. See a universal amazement at his fall, v. 20. They that see it are affrighted, so sudden is the change, so dreadful the execution, so threatening to all about him; and they that come after, and hear the report of it, are astonished at it; their ears are

made to tingle, and their hearts to tremble, and they cry out, *Lord, how terrible art thou in thy judgments!* A place or person, utterly ruined, is said to be *made an astonishment*, Deut. 28. 37. 2 Chron. 7. 21. Jer. 25. 9, 18. Horrible sins bring strange punishments.

Lastly, See all this averred as the unanimous sense of the patriarchal age, grounded upon their knowledge of God, and their many observations of his providence; (v. 21.) *Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place*, this the condition, of him that knows not God! See here what is the beginning, and what is the end, of the wickedness of this wicked world. 1. The beginning of it is ignorance of God, and it is a wilful ignorance, for there is that to be known of him which is sufficient to leave them for ever inexcusable. They know not God, and then they commit all sin; Pharaoh knows not the Lord, and therefore will not obey his voice. 2. The end of it, and that is utter destruction. Such, so miserable, are the dwellings of the wicked. Vengeance will be taken of those that *know not God*, 2 Thess. 1. 8. For those whom he has not honour from, he will get him honour upon. Let us therefore stand in awe and not sin, for it will certainly be bitterness in the latter end.

CHAP. XIX.

This chapter is Job's answer to Bildad's discourse in the foregoing chapter.

Though his spirit was grieved and much heated, and Bildad was very peevish, yet he gave him leave to say all he designed to say, and did not break in upon him in the midst of his argument; but, when he had done, he gave him a fair answer; in which, I. He complains of unkind usage. And very unkindly he takes it, 1. That his comforters added to his affliction, v. 2. .7. 2. That his God was the Author of his affliction, v. 8. .12. 3. That his relations and friends were strange to him, and shy of him, in his affliction, v. 13. .19. 4. That he had no compassion shewn him in his affliction, v. 20. .22. II. He comforts himself with the believing hopes of happiness in the other world, though he had so little comfort in this, making a very solemn confession of his faith, with a desire that it might be recorded as an evidence of his sincerity, v. 23. .27. III. He concludes with a caution to his friends not to persist in their hard censures of him, v. 28, 29. If the remonstrance Job here makes of his grievances may serve sometimes to justify our complaints, yet his cheerful views of the future state, at the same time, may shame us Christians, and may serve to silence our complaints, or, at least, to balance them.

1. THEN Job answered and said, **2. How** long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words? **3. These ten times** have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed *that* ye make yourselves strange to me. **4. And be it indeed that** I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself. **5. If indeed ye will magnify yourselves** against me, and plead against me my reproach: **6. Know now** that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net. **7. Behold**, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but *there is no judgment.*

Job's friends had passed a very severe censure upon him as a wicked man, because he was so grievously afflicted; now here he tells them how ill he took it to be so censured. Bildad had twice begun with a *How long*; (ch. 18. 2.) and therefore Job, being now to answer him particularly, begins with a *How long too*, v. 2. What is not liked, is commonly thought long; but Job had more reason to think them long who assaulted him, than they had to think him long, who only vindicated himself. Better cause may be shewn for defending ourselves, if we have right on our side, than for offending our brethren, though we have right on our side. Now observe here,

I. How he describes their unkindness to him, and what account he gives of it. 1. They *vexed his soul*, and that is more grievous than the vexation of the bones, Ps. 6. 2, 3. They were his friends, they came to comfort him, pretended to counsel him for the best; but, with a great deal of gravity, and affectation of wisdom and piety, they set themselves to rob him of the only comfort

he had now left him in a good God, a good conscience, and a good name; and this vexed him to the heart. 2. They *brake him in pieces with words*, and those were surely hard and very cruel words that would break a man to pieces: they grieved him, and so brake him; and therefore there will be a reckoning hereafter for all the hard speeches spoken against Christ and his people, Jude, 15. 3. They *reproached him*, (v. 3.) gave him a bad character, and laid to his charge things that he knew not. To an ingenuous mind reproach is a cutting thing. 4. They *made themselves strange to him*, were shy of him, now that he was in his troubles; they did not know him, (ch. 2. 12.) were not free with him, as they used to be when he was in his prosperity. Those are governed by the spirit of the world, and not by any principles of true honour or love, who make themselves strange to their friends, or God's friends, when they are in trouble: *a friend loves at all times*. 5. They not only estranged themselves from him, but *magnified themselves against him*; (v. 5.) not only looked shy of him, but looked big upon him, and insulted over him, magnifying themselves, to depress him. It is a mean thing, it is a base thing, thus to trample upon those that are down. 6. They *pleaded against him his reproach*, that is, they made use of his affliction as an argument against him to prove him a wicked man. They should have pleaded for him his integrity, and helped him to take the comfort of that under his affliction, and so have pleaded that against his reproach, as St. Paul; (2 Cor. 1. 12.) but, instead of that, they pleaded his reproach against his integrity, which was not only unkind, but very unjust; for where shall we find an honest man, if reproach may be admitted for a plea against him?

II. How he aggravates their unkindness. 1. They had thus abused him often; (v. 3.) *These ten times ye have reproached me*, that is, very often, as Gen. 31. 7. Numb. 14. 22. Five times they had spoken, and every speech was a double reproach. He spake as if he had kept a particular account of their reproaches, and could tell just how many they were: it is but a peevish and unfriendly thing to do so, and looks like a design of retaliation and revenge: we better befriend our own peace by forgetting injuries and unkindnesses, than by remembering them and scoring them up. 2. They continued still to do it, and seemed resolved to persist in it; "How long will ye do it?" v. 2. 5. "I see you will magnify yourselves against me, notwithstanding all I have said in mine own justification." Those that speak too much, seldom think they have said enough; and, when the mouth is opened in passion, the ear is shut to reason. 3. They were not ashamed of what they did, v. 3. They had reason to be ashamed of their hard-heartedness, so ill becoming men, and their uncharitableness, so ill becoming good men, and their deceitfulness, so ill becoming friends; but were they ashamed? No, though they were told of it again and again, yet they could not blush.

III. How he answers their harsh censures, by shewing them that what they condemned was capable of excuse, which they ought to have considered.

1. The errors of his judgment were excusable; (v. 4.) "*Be it indeed that I have erred*, that I am in the wrong through ignorance or mistake," which may well be supposed concerning men, concerning good men; *Humanum est errare—Error cleaves to humanity*; and we must be willing to suppose it concerning ourselves. It is folly to think ourselves infallible. "But be it so," said Job, "*mine error remaineth with myself*," that is, "I speak according to the best of my judgment, with all sincerity, and not from a spirit of contradiction." Or, "If I be in an error, I keep it to myself, and do not impose it upon others as you do. I only prove myself and my own work by it, I meddle not with other people, either to teach them or to judge them." Men's errors are the more excusable, if they keep them to themselves, and do not disturb others with them. *Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself*. Some give this sense of these words; "If I be in an error, it is I that must smart for it; and therefore you need not concern yourselves; nay, it is I that do smart, and smart severely, for it; and therefore you need not add to my misery by your reproaches."

2. The breakings out of his passion, though not justifiable, yet were excusable, considering the vastness of his grief, and the extremity of his misery. "If you will go on to cavil at every complaining word I speak, will make the worst of it, and improve it against me, yet take the cause of the complaint along with you, and weigh that, before you pass a judgment upon the complaint, and turn it to *my reproach: know then that God has overcome me.*" v. 6. Three things he would have them consider, (1.) That his trouble was very great. He was overthrown, and could not help himself, inclosed as in a net, and could not get out. (2.) That God was the Author of it, and that in it he fought against him: "It was his hand that overthrew me, it is in his net that I am inclosed; and therefore you need not appear against me thus; I have enough to do to grapple with God's displeasure, let me not have your's also. Let God's controversy with me be ended, before you begin your's." It is barbarous to *persecute him whom God hath smitten, and to talk to the grief of one whom he hath wounded*, Ps. 69. 26. (3.) That he could not obtain any hope of the redress of his grievance, v. 7. He complained of his pain, but got no ease; begged to know the cause of his afflictions, but could not discover it; appealed to God's tribunal for the clearing of his innocency, but could not obtain a hearing, much less a judgment, upon his appeal; *I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard*. God, for a time, may seem to turn away his ear from his people, to be angry at their prayers, and overlook their appeals to him, and they must be excused if, in that case, they complain bitterly. Woe unto us if God be against us!

8. He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths. 9. He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown *from* my head. 10. He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree. 11. He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as *one of* his enemies. 12. His troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp round about my tabernacle. 13. He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. 14. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. 15. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight. 16. I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I entreated him with my mouth. 17. My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's *sake* of mine own body. 18. Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. 19. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me. 20. My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth. 21. Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me. 22. Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?

Bildad had very disingenuously perverted Job's complaints, by making them the description of the miserable condition of a wicked man; and yet he repeats them here, to move their pity, and to work upon their good nature, if they had any left in them.

I. He complains of the tokens of God's displeasure which he was under, and which infused the wormwood and gall into the

affliction and misery. How doleful are the accents of his complaints; (v. 11.) "*He hath kindled his wrath against me*, which flames and terrifies me, which burns and pains me." What is the fire of hell but the wrath of God? Seared consciences will feel it hereafter, but do not fear it now. Enlightened consciences fear it now, but shall not feel it hereafter. Job's present apprehension was, that *God counted him as one of his enemies*; and yet, at the same time, God loved him, and gloried in him, as his faithful friend. It is a gross mistake, but a very common one, to think that whom God afflicts, he treats as his enemies; whereas, on the contrary, *as many as he loves, he rebukes and chastens*; it is the discipline of his sons.

Which way soever Job looked, he thought he saw the tokens of God's displeasure against him.

1. Did he look back upon his former prosperity? He saw God's hand putting an end to that; (v. 9.) "*He has stripped me of my glory*, my wealth, honour, power, and all the opportunity I had of doing good; my children were my glory, but I have lost them; and whatever was a crown to my head, he has taken it from me, and has laid all mine honour in the dust." See the vanity of worldly glory, it is what we may be soon stripped of; and whatever strips us, we must see and own God's hand in it, and comply with his design.

2. Did he look down upon his present troubles? He saw God giving them their commission, and their orders to attack him. They are his troops, that act by his direction, which *encamp against me*, v. 12. It did not so much trouble him, that his miseries came upon him in troops, as that they were *God's troops*, in whom it seemed as if God fought against him, and intended his destruction. God's troops *encamped round his tabernacle*, as soldiers lay siege to a strong city, cutting off all provisions from being brought into it, and battering it continually; thus was Job's tabernacle besieged. Time was when God's hosts encamped round him for safety; *Hast thou not made a hedge about him?* Now, on the contrary, they surrounded him, to his terror, and *destroyed him on every side*, v. 10.

3. Did he look forward for deliverance? He saw the hand of God cutting off all hopes of that; (v. 8.) "*He hath fenced up my way, that I cannot pass*, I have now no way left to help myself, either to extricate myself out of my troubles, or to ease myself under them. Would I make any motion, take any steps, toward deliverance? I find *my way hedged up*; I cannot do what I would; nay, if I would please myself with the prospect of a deliverance hereafter, I cannot do it; it is not only out of my reach, but out of my sight; *God hath set darkness in my paths*, and there is none to tell me how long," Ps. 74. 9. He concludes; (v. 10.) "I am gone, quite lost and undone for this world; *my hope hath he removed like a tree*, cut down, or plucked up by the roots, which will never grow again." Hope in this life is a perishing thing, but the hope of good men, when it is cut off from this world, is but removed like a tree, transplanted from this nursery to the garden of the Lord. We shall have no reason to complain, if God thus remove our hopes from the sand to the rock, from things temporal to things eternal.

II. He complains of the unkindness of his relations, and of all his old acquaintance. In this also he owns the hand of God; (v. 13.) *He has put my brethren far from me*, that is, "He has laid those afflictions upon me, which frighten them from me, and make them stand aloof from my sores." As it was their sin, God was not the Author of it; it is Satan that alienates men's minds from their brethren in affliction; but as it was Job's trouble, God ordered it for the completing of his trial. As we must eye the hand of God in all the injuries we receive from our enemies, (the Lord bade Shimei curse David,) so also in all the slights and unkindnesses we receive from our friends, which will help us to bear them the more patiently. Every creature is that to us, (kind or unkind, comfortable or uncomfortable,) which God makes it to be: yet this does not excuse Job's relations and friends from the guilt of horrid ingratitude and injustice to him, which he had reason to complain of; few could have borne it so well as he did. He takes notice of the unkindness,

1. Of his kindred and acquaintance, his neighbours, and such, as he had formerly been familiar with, who were bound by all the laws of friendship and civility to concern themselves for him, to visit him, and inquire after him, and to be ready to do him all the good offices that lay in their power; yet these were *estranged from him*, (v. 13.) they took no more care about him than if he had been a stranger whom they never knew. His kinsfolk, who claimed relation to him when he was in prosperity, now failed him; they came short of their former professions of friendship to him, and his present expectations of kindness from them. Even his familiar friends, whom he was mindful of, had now forgotten him, had forgotten both his former friendliness to them and his present miseries: they had heard of his troubles, and designed him a visit; but truly they forgot it, so little affected were they with it.

Nay, his inward friends, the men of his secret, whom he was most intimate with, and laid in his bosom, not only forgot him, but abhorred him, kept as far off him as they could, because he was poor, and could not entertain them as he used to do, and because he was sore, and a loathsome spectacle. Those whom he loved, and who therefore were worse than publicans if they did not love him now that he was in distress, not only turned from him, but were turned against him, and did all they could to make him odious, so to justify themselves in being so strange to him, v. 19. So uncertain is the friendship of men; but, if God be our Friend, he will not fail us in a time of need. But let none that pretend either to humanity or Christianity, ever use their friends as Job's friends used him: adversity is the proof of friendship.

2. Of his domestics and family-relations. Sometimes, indeed, we find that, beyond our expectation, there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother; but, at least, the master of a family expects to be attended on, and taken care of, by those of his family, even then when, through weakness of body or mind, he is become despicable to others. But poor Job was misused by his own family, and some of his worst foes were those of his own house. He mentions not his children, they were all dead, and we may suppose that the unkindness of his surviving relations made him lament the death of his children so much the more: "If they had been alive," (would he think,) "I should have had comfort in them." As for those that were now about him,

(1.) His own servants slighted him: his maids did not attend him in his illness, but *counted him for a stranger and an alien*, v. 15. His other servants never heeded him; if he called to them they would not come at his call, but pretended that they did not hear him. If he asked them a question, they would not vouchsafe to *give him an answer*, v. 16. Job had been a good master to them, and did not *despise their cause when they pleaded with him*, (ch. 31. 13.) and yet they were rude to him now, and despised his cause when he pleaded with them. We must not think it strange if we receive evil at the hand of those from whom we have deserved well. Though he was now sickly, yet he was not cross with his servants, and imperious, as is too common, but he entreated his servants with his mouth, when he had authority to command: and yet they would not be civil to him, neither kind nor just. Note, Those that are sick and in sorrow are apt to take things ill, and be jealous of a slight, and to lay to heart the least unkindness done to them: when Job was in affliction, even his servants' neglect of him troubled him.

(2.) But, one would think, when all forsook him, the wife of his bosom should have been tender of him: no, because he would not curse God and die, as she persuaded him, his breath was strange to her too, she did not care for coming near him, nor took any notice of what he said, v. 17. Though he spake to her, not with the authority, but with the tenderness, of a husband, did not command, but entreated her by that conjugal love which their children were the pledges of, yet she regarded him not. Some read it, "Though I lamented, or bemoaned myself, for the children," that is, "for the death of the children of my own body;" an affliction in which she was equally concerned with him. Now, it appeared, the Devil spared her to him, not only to be his tempter, but to be his tormentor. By what she said to him at

first, *Curse God and die*, it appeared that she had little religion in her; and what can one expect that is kind and good from those that have not the fear of God before their eyes, and are not governed by conscience?

(3.) Even the little children who were born in his house, the children of his own servants, who were his servants by birth, despised him, and spake against him; (v. 18.) though he arose in civility to speak friendly to them, or with authority to check them, they let him know, that they neither feared him, nor loved him.

III. He complains of the decay of his body; all the beauty and strength of that were gone. When those about him slighted him, if he had been in health, and at ease, he might have enjoyed himself. But he could take as little pleasure in himself as others took in him; (v. 20.) *My bone cleaves now to my skin*, as formerly it did to my flesh; this was it that filled him with wrinkles; (ch. 16. 8.) he was a perfect skeleton, nothing but skin and bones. Nay, his skin too was almost gone, little remained unbroken but the skin of his teeth, his gums, and perhaps his lips, all the rest was fetched off by his sore boils. See what little reason we have to indulge the body, which, after all our care, may be thus consumed by the diseases which it has in itself the seeds of.

Lastly, Upon all these accounts, he recommends himself to the compassion of his friends, and justly blames their harshness with him. From this representation of his deplorable case, it was easy to infer,

1. That they ought to *pity him*, v. 21. This he begs in the most moving, melting, language that could be, enough (one would think) to break a heart of stone: "*Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends*; if ye will do nothing else for me, be sorry for me, and shew some concern for me; *have pity upon me, for the hand of God hath touched me*; my case is sad indeed, for I am fallen into the hands of the living God, my spirit is touched with the sense of his wrath, a calamity of all other the most piteous." Note, It becomes friends to pity one another when they are in any trouble, and not to shut up the bowels of compassion.

2. That, however, they ought not to persecute him: if they would not ease his affliction by their pity, yet they must not be so barbarous as to add to it by their censures and reproaches; (v. 22.) "*Why do ye persecute me as God?*" Surely his rebukes are enough for one man to bear, you need not add your worm-wood and gall to the cup of affliction he puts into my hand, it is bitter enough without that: God has a sovereign power over me, and may do what he pleases with me; but do you think that you may do so too?" No, we must aim to be like the Most Holy and the Most Merciful, but not like the Most High and Most Mighty. God gives not account of any of his matters, but we must. If they did delight in his calamity, let them be satisfied with his flesh, which was wasted and gone, but let them not, as if that were too little, wound his spirit, and ruin his good name. Great tenderness is owing to those that are in affliction, especially to those that are troubled in mind.

23. Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! 24. That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! 25. For I know *that* my Redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: 26. And *though* after my skin worms destroy this *body*, yet in my flesh shall I see God: 27. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; *though* my reins be consumed within me. 28. But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me? 29. Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath *bringeth* the punishments of the sword, that ye may know *there is* a judgment.

In all the conferences between Job and his friends, we do not find any more weighty and considerable lines than these; would one have expected it? Here is much both of Christ and heaven in these verses: and he that said such things as these, *declared plainly that he sought the better country; that is, the heavenly*; as the patriarchs of that age did, Heb. 11. 14. We have here Job's creed, or confession of faith: his belief in God the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth, and the principles of natural religion, he had often professed; but here we find him no stranger to revealed religion. Though the revelation of the Promised Seed, and the promised inheritance, was then discerned only like the dawning of the day, yet Job was taught of God to believe in a living Redeemer, and to *look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come*, for of these, doubtless, he must be understood to speak: these were the things he comforted himself with the expectation of, and not a deliverance from his trouble, or revival of his happiness, in this world, as some would understand him. For, beside that the expressions he here uses, of the Redeemer's *standing at the latter day upon the earth*, of his seeing God, and *seeing him for himself*, are wretchedly forced, if they be understood of any temporal deliverance, it is very plain that he had no expectation at all of his return to a prosperous condition in this world. He had just now said, that *his way was fenced up*, (v. 8.) and *his hope removed like a tree*, v. 10. Nay, and after this, he expressed his despair of any comfort in this life, ch. 23. 8, 9.—30. 23. So that we must necessarily understand him of the redemption of his soul from the power of the grave, and his reception to glory, which is spoken of, Ps. 49. 15. We have reason to think that Job was just now under an extraordinary impulse of the blessed Spirit, which raised him above himself, gave him light, and gave him utterance, even to his own surprise. And some observe, that, after this, we do not find in Job's discourses such passionate, peevish, unbecoming, complaints of God and his providence, as we have before met with: this hope quieted his spirit, stilled the storm, and, having here cast anchor within the veil, his mind was kept steady from this time forward. Let us observe,

I. To what intent Job makes this confession of his faith here; never did any thing come in more pertinently, or to better purpose. 1. Job was now accused, and this was his appeal. His friends reproached him as a hypocrite, and contemned him as a wicked man; but he appeals to his creed, to his faith, to his hope, and to his own conscience; which not only acquitted him from reigning sin, but comforted him with the expectation of a blessed resurrection: *these are not the words of him that has a devil. He appeals to the coming of the Redeemer*, from this wrangle at the bar to the judgment of the bench, even to Him to whom all judgment is committed, who, he knew, would right him. The consideration of God's day coming, will make it a *very small thing with us to be judged of man's judgment*, 1 Cor. 4. 3, 4. How easily may we bear the unjust calumnies and reproaches of men, while we expect the glorious appearance of our Redeemer, and his redeemed, at the last day; and that there will then be a resurrection of names as well as bodies! 2. Job was now afflicted, and this was his cordial; when he was pressed above measure, this kept him from fainting; he believed that he should see the *goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*; not in this world, for that is the land of the dying.

II. With what a solemn preface he introduces it, v. 23, 24. He breaks off his complaints abruptly, to triumph in his comforts; which he does, not only for his own satisfaction, but for the edification of others. Those now about him, he feared, would little regard what he said, and so it proved; he therefore wished it might be recorded for the generations to come. *O that my words were now written*, the words I am now about to say! As if he had said, "I own I have spoken many unadvised words, which I could wish might be forgotten, for they will neither do me credit, nor do others good. But I am now going to speak deliberately, and that which I desire may be published to all the world, and preserved for the generations to come, in *perpetuam rei memoriam*—for an abiding memorial, and therefore that it may be written plain,

drawn out in large and legible characters, so that he that runs may read it; and that it may not be left in loose papers, but put into a book; or, if that should perish, that it may be engraven like an inscription upon a monument, *with an iron pen, in lead, or in the stone*; let the engraver use all his art to make it a durable appeal to posterity." That which Job here somewhat passionately wished for, God graciously granted him; his words are written, they are printed in God's book; so that wherever that book is read, there shall this be told for a memorial concerning Job, He believed, therefore he spake.

III. What his confession itself is; what are the words which he would have to be written. We here have them written, v. 25. . 27. Let us observe them.

1. He believes *the glory of the Redeemer*, and his own interest in him; (v. 25.) *I know that my Redeemer liveth*; that he is in being, and is my Life, and that he shall stand at last, or stand the last, or at the latter day, upon (or above) the earth. He shall be raised up, or, He shall be (at the latter day, that is, in the fulness of time; the gospel-day is called *the last time*, because that is the last dispensation) upon the earth: so it points at his incarnation; or, He shall be lifted up from the earth; (so it points at his crucifixion;) or, raised up out of the earth; so it is applicable to his resurrection; or, as we commonly understand it, At the end of time, he shall appear over the earth, for *he shall come in the clouds, and every eye shall see him*, so close shall he come to this earth. He shall stand *upon the dust*, so the word is; upon all his enemies, which shall be put as dust under his feet; and he shall tread upon them and triumph over them.

Observe here, (1.) That there is a Redeemer provided for fallen man, and Jesus Christ is that Redeemer. The word is *Goel*, which is used for the next of kin, to whom, by the law of Moses, the right of redeeming a mortgaged estate did belong, Lev. 25. 25. Our heavenly inheritance was mortgaged by sin, we are ourselves utterly unable to redeem it, Christ is near of kin to us, the next Kinsman that is able to redeem; he has paid our debt, satisfied God's justice for sin, and so has taken off the mortgage, and made a new settlement of the inheritance! Our persons also want a Redeemer, we are sold for sin, and sold under sin; our Lord Jesus has wrought out a redemption for us, and proclaims redemption to us, and so he is truly the Redeemer. (2.) He is a living Redeemer: as we are made by a living God, so we are saved by a living Redeemer, who is both almighty and eternal, and is therefore able to save to the uttermost. *Of him it is witnessed that he liveth*; Heb. 7. 8. Rev. 1. 18. We are dying, but he liveth, and hath assured us, that *because he lives, we shall live also*, John, 14. 19. (3.) There are those that, through grace, have an interest in this Redeemer, and can, upon good grounds, call him their's. When Job had lost all his wealth, and all his friends, yet he was not separated from Christ, nor cut off from his relation to him. "Still he is my Redeemer." That next Kinsman adhered to him when all his other kindred forsook him, and he had the comfort of it. (4.) Our interest in the Redeemer is a thing that may be known; and, where it is known, it may be triumphed in, as sufficient to balance all our griefs; *I know*. Observe with what an air of assurance he speaks it, as one confident of this very thing; *I know that my Redeemer lives*. His friends had often charged him with ignorance or vain knowledge; but he knows enough, and knows to good purpose, who knows Christ to be his Redeemer. (5.) There will be a latter day, a last day, a day when *time shall be no more*, Rev. 10. 6. That is a day we are concerned to think of every day. (6.) Our Redeemer will, at that day, stand upon the earth, or over the earth, to summon the dead out of their graves, and determine them to an unchangeable state, for to him all judgment is committed. He shall stand, at the last, on the dust to which this earth will be reduced by the conflagration.

2. He believes the happiness of the redeemed, and his own title to that happiness, that, at Christ's second coming, believers shall be raised up in glory, and so made perfectly blessed in the vision and fruition of God; and this he believes with application to himself.

(1.) He counts upon the corrupting of his body in the grave, and

speaks of it with a holy carelessness and unconcernedness; Though, *after my skin* (which is already wasted and gone, none of it remaining but *the skin of my teeth*, v. 20.) *they destroy* (they that are appointed to destroy it, the grave, and the worms in it, of whom he had spoken, *ch. 17. 14.*) *this body*. The word *body* is added: "Though they destroy this, this skeleton, this shadow, (*ch. 17. 7.*) this that I lay my hand upon," or (pointing perhaps to his weak and withered limbs) "this that you see, call it what you will, I expect that shortly it will be a feast for the worms." Christ's body saw not corruption, but our's must! And Job mentions this, that the glory of the resurrection he believed and hoped for might shine the more bright. Note, It is good for us often to think, not only of the approaching death of our bodies, but of their destruction and dissolution in the grave; yet let not that discourage our hope of their resurrection, for the same power that made man's body at first, out of common dust, can raise it out of its own dust. This body, which we now take such care about, and make such provision for, will, in a little time, be destroyed; Even *my reins* (says Job) *shall be consumed within me*; (v. 27.) the innermost part of the body, which perhaps putrifies first.

(2.) He comforts himself with the hopes of happiness on the other side death and the grave; *After I shall awake*, (so the margin reads it,) *though this body be destroyed, yet out of my flesh shall I see God*.

[1.] Soul and body shall come together again. That body which must be destroyed in the grave, shall be raised again, a glorious body; *Yet in my flesh I shall see God*. The separate soul has eyes wherewith to see God, eyes of the mind; but Job speaks of seeing him with eyes of flesh, *in my flesh, with mine eyes*; the same body that died shall rise again, a true body, but a glorified body, fit for the employments and entertainments of that world; and therefore a *spiritual body*, 1 Cor. 15. 44. Let us therefore glorify God with our bodies, because there is such a glory designed for them.

[2.] Job and God shall come together again; *In my flesh shall I see God*, that is, the glorified Redeemer, who is God. *I shall see God in my flesh*, so some read it; the Son of God clothed with a body which will be visible even to eyes of flesh. Though the body, in the grave, seem despicable and miserable, yet it shall be dignified and made happy in the vision of God. Job now complained that he could not get a sight of God, (*ch. 23. 8, 9.*) but hopes to see him shortly, never more to lose the sight of him, and that sight of him will be the more welcome after the present darkness and distance. Note, It is the blessedness of the blessed that they shall see God, shall see him as he is, see him face to face, and no longer through a glass darkly. See with what pleasure holy Job enlarges upon this; (v. 27.) "*Whom I shall see for myself*," that is, "see and enjoy, see to my own unspeakable comfort and satisfaction. I shall see him as mine, as mine with an appropriating sight," Rev. 21. 3. *God himself shall be with them, and be their God*, they shall be like him, for they shall see him as he is, that is, seeing for themselves, 1 John, 3. 2. Mine eyes shall behold him, and not another. First, "He, and not another for him, shall be seen, not a type or figure of him, but he himself." Glorified saints are perfectly sure that they are not imposed upon, it is no *deceptio visus*—illusion of the senses. Secondly, "I, and not another for me, shall see him. Though my flesh and body be consumed, yet I shall not need a proxy, I shall see him with my own eyes." This was what Job hoped for, and what he earnestly desired; which, some think, is the meaning of the last clause, *My reins are spent in my bosom*, that is, "All my desires are summed up and concluded in this; this will crown and complete them all; let me have this, and I shall have nothing more to desire; it is enough, it is all." With this the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.

IV. The application of this to his friends. His creed spake comfort to himself, but warning and terror to them that set themselves against him.

1. It was a word of caution to them, not to proceed and persist in their unkind usage of him, v. 28. He had reprov'd them for what they had said, and now tells them what they should say for the reducing of themselves and one another to a better temper. "Why persecute we him thus? Why do we grieve him and vex him, by

ertising and condemning him, seeing the root of the matter, or the root of the word, is found in him?" Let this direct us, (1.) In our care concerning ourselves. We are all concerned to see to it that the root of the matter be found in us. A living, quickening, commanding, principle of grace in the heart, is the root of the matter, as necessary to our religion as the root to the tree, to which it owes both its fixedness and its fruitfulness: love to God and our brethren, faith in Christ, hatred of sin—these are the root of the matter, other things are but leaves in comparison with this; serious godliness is the one thing needful. (2.) In our conduct toward our brethren. We are to believe that many have the root of the matter in them, who are not in every thing of our mind, who have their follies, and weaknesses, and mistakes: and, to conclude, it is at our peril if we persecute any such. Woe be to him that offends one of those little ones! God will resent and revenge it. Job and his friends differed in some notions concerning the methods of Providence, but they agreed in the root of the matter, the belief of another world, and therefore should not persecute one another for these differences.

2. It was a word of terror to them. Christ's second coming will be very dreadful to those that are found *smiting their fellow servants*; (Matth. 24. 49.) and therefore, (v. 29.) "*Be ye afraid of the sword*, the flaming sword of God's justice, which turns every way; fear lest you make yourselves obnoxious to it." Good men need to be frightened from sin by the terrors of the Almighty, particularly from the sin of rashly judging their brethren, Matth. 7. 1. Jam. 3. 1. Those that are peevish and passionate with their brethren, censorious of them, and malicious toward them, should know, not only that their wrath, whatever it pretends, works not the righteousness of God, but, (1.) They may expect to smart for it in this world; *it brings the punishments of the sword*: wrath leads to such crimes as expose men to the sword of the magistrate; however, God often takes vengeance for it, and those that shewed no mercy, shall find no mercy. (2.) If they repent not, that will be an earnest of worse. By these you may know there is a judgment, not only a present government, but a future judgment, in which hard speeches must be accounted for.

CHAP. XX.

One would have thought that such an excellent confession of faith as Job made in the close of the foregoing chapter, should have satisfied his friends, or, at least, have mollified them; but they do not seem to have taken any notice of it, and therefore Zophar here takes his turn, enters the lists with Job, and attacks him with as much vehemence as before. I. His preface is short, but hot, v. 2, 3. II. His discourse is long, and all upon one subject, the very same that Bildad was large upon, (*ch. 18.*) the certain misery of wicked people, and the ruin that awaits them. 1. He asserts in general, that the prosperity of a wicked person is short, and his ruin sure, v. 4, 9. 2. He proves the misery of his condition by many instances—That he should have a diseased body, a troubled conscience, a ruined estate, a beggared family, an infamous name, and that he himself shall perish under the weight of divine wrath. All this is most curiously described here in lofty expressions and lively similitudes; and it often proves true in this world, and always in another, without repentance, v. 10, 29. But the great mistake was, and (as Bishop Patrick expresses it) all the flaw in his discourse, (which was common to him with the rest,) that he imagined God never varied from this method, and therefore Job was, without doubt, a very bad man, though it did not appear he was, any other way than by his infelicity.

1. **THEN** answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said 2 Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for *this* I make haste. 3. I have heard the cack of my reproach, and the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer. 4. Knowest thou *not* this of old, since man was placed upon earth, 5. That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite *but* for a moment? 6. Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; 7. *Yet* he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say,

Where is he? 8. He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. 9. The eye also which saw him shall see him no more; neither shall his place any more behold him.

Here,

I. Zophar begins very passionately, and seems to be in a great heat at what Job had said. Being resolved to condemn Job for a bad man, he was much displeased that he talked so like a good man, and, as it should seem, brake in upon him, and began abruptly; (v. 2.) *Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer.* He takes no notice of what Job had said, to move their pity, or to evidence his own integrity, but fastens upon the reproof he gave them in the close of his discourse, counts that a reproach, and thinks himself therefore obliged to answer, because Job had bidden them be afraid of the sword, that he might not seem to be frightened by his menaces. The best counsel is too often ill taken from an antagonist, and therefore usually may be well spared. Zophar seemed more in haste to speak than became a wise man: but he excuses it with two things. 1. That Job had given him a strong provocation; (v. 3.) *"I have heard the check of my reproach, and cannot bear to hear it any longer."* Job's friends, I doubt, had spirits too high to deal with a man in his low condition; and high spirits are impatient of contradiction, and think themselves affronted, if all about them do not say as they say: they cannot bear a check, but they call it *the check of their reproach*, and then they are bound in honour to return it, if not to draw upon him that gave it. 2. That his own heart gave him a strong instigation. His thoughts caused him to answer, (v. 2.) for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; but he fathers it (v. 3.) upon the spirit of his understanding: that indeed should cause us to answer, we should rightly apprehend a thing, and duly consider it, before we speak to it; but whether it did so here or no, is a question: men often mistake the dictates of their passion for the dictates of their reason, and therefore think they do well to be angry.

II. Zophar proceeds very plainly to shew the ruin and destruction of wicked people, insinuating that because Job was destroyed and ruined, he was certainly a wicked man, and a hypocrite. Observe,

1. How this doctrine is introduced; (v. 4.) where he appeals, (1.) To Job's own knowledge and conviction; *"Knowest thou not this? Canst thou be ignorant of a truth so plain? Or canst thou doubt of a truth which has been confirmed by the suffrage of all mankind?"* Those know little, who do not know that the wages of sin is death. (2.) To the experience of all ages. It was known of old, since man was placed upon the earth, that is, ever since man was made, he has had this truth written in his heart, that the sin of sinners will be their ruin; and ever since there were instances of wickedness, (which there were soon after man was placed on the earth,) there were instances of the punishments of it, witness the exclusions of Adam and Cain. When sin entered into the world, death entered with it: all the world knows that evil pursues sinners, whom *vengeance suffers not to live*, (Acts, 28. 4.) and subscribes to that, (Isa. 3. 11.) *Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, sooner or later.*

2. How it is laid down; (v. 5.) *The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment.* Observe, (1.) He asserts the misery, not only of those who are openly wicked and profane, but of hypocrites, who secretly practise wickedness under a shew and profession of religion, because such a wicked man he looked upon Job to be; and it is true that a form of godliness, if it be made use of for a cloke of maliciousness, does but make bad worse; dissembled piety is double iniquity, and the ruin that attends it will be accordingly. The hottest place in hell will be the portion of hypocrites, as our Saviour intimates, Matth. 24. 51. (2.) He grants that wicked men may, for a time, prosper, may be secure and easy, and very merry; you may see them in triumph and joy, triumphing and rejoicing in their wealth and power, their grandeur and success, triumphing and rejoicing over their poor

honest neighbours whom they vex and oppress: they feel no evil, they fear none. Job's friends were loath to own, at first, that wicked people might prosper at all, (ch. 4. 9.) until Job proved it plainly; (ch. 9. 24.—12. 6.) and now Zophar yields it: but, (3.) He lays it down for a certain truth, that they will not prosper long. Their joy is but for a moment, and will quickly end in endless sorrow; though he be ever so great, and rich, and jovial, he will be humbled, and mortified, and made miserable.

3. How it is illustrated, v. 6, &c.

(1.) He supposes his prosperity to be very high, as high as you can imagine, v. 6. It is not his wisdom and virtue, but his worldly wealth and greatness, that he accounts his excellency, and values himself upon: we will suppose those to mount up to the heavens, and, since his spirit always rises with his condition, you may suppose that with it his head reaches to the clouds. He is every way advanced, the world has done the utmost it can for him, he looks down upon all about him with disdain, while they look up to him with admiration, envy, or fear; we will suppose him to bid fair for a universal monarchy. And though he cannot but have made himself many enemies before he arrived to this pitch of prosperity, yet he thinks himself as much out of the reach of their darts as if he were in the clouds.

(2.) He is confident that his ruin will, accordingly, be very great, and his fall the more dreadful for his having risen so high; *He shall perish for ever*, v. 7. His pride and security were the certain presages of his misery. This will certainly be true of all impenitent sinners in the other world, they shall be undone, for ever undone; but Zophar means his ruin in this world: and indeed sometimes notorious sinners are remarkably cut off by present judgments, they have reason enough to fear what Zophar here threatens even the triumphant sinner with. [1.] A *shameful* destruction. He shall perish like his own dung or dunghill, so loathsome is he to God and all good men, and so willing will the world be to part with him, Ps. 119. 119. Isa. 66. ult. [2.] A *surprising* destruction. He will be brought into desolation in a moment, (Ps. 73. 19.) so that those about him, that saw him but just now, will ask, *"Where is he?"* Could he that made so great a figure vanish and expire so suddenly? [3.] A *swift* destruction, v. 8. He shall fly away upon the wings of his own terrors, and be chased away by the just imprecations of all about him, who would gladly be rid of him. [4.] An *utter* destruction. It will be total; he shall go away like a dream, or vision of the night, which was a mere phantasm, and, whatever in it pleased the fancy, it is quite gone, and nothing of it remains, but what serves us to laugh at the folly of. It will be final, v. 9. The eye that saw him, and was ready to adore him, shall see him no more, and the place he filled shall no more behold him, having given him an eternal farewell when he went to his own place, as Judas, Acts, 1. 25.

10. His children shall seek to please the poor, and his hands shall restore their goods. 11. His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust. 12. Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; 13. Though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth: 14. Yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him. 15. He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly. 16. He shall suck the poison of asps: the viper's tongue shall slay him. 17. He shall not see the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter. 18. That which he laboured for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down: according to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein. 19. Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor;

because he hath violently taken away a house which he builded not; 20. Surely he shall not feel quietness in his belly, he shall not save of that which he desired. 21. There shall none of his meat be left; therefore shall no man look for his goods. 22. In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits: every hand of the wicked shall come upon him.

The instances here given of the miserable condition of the wicked man in this world, are expressed with a great fulness and fluency of language, and the same thing returned to again, and repeated in other words. Let us therefore reduce the particulars to their proper heads; and observe,

I. What his wickedness is, for which he is punished.

1. The lusts of the flesh, here called *the sins of his youth*; (v. 11.) for those are the sins which, at that age, people are most tempted to. The forbidden pleasures of sense are said to be *sweet in his mouth*; (v. 12.) he indulges himself in all the gratifications of the carnal appetite, and takes an inordinate complacency in them, as yielding the most agreeable delights. That is the satisfaction which he hides under his tongue, and rolls there, as the most dainty delicate thing that can be: he keeps it still within his mouth; (v. 13.) let him have that, and he desires no more; he will never part with that for the spiritual and divine pleasures of religion, which he has no relish of, nor affection for. His keeping it still in his mouth, denotes both his obstinate persisting in his sin, (he spares it when he should kill and mortify it, and forsakes it not, but holds it fast, and goes on frowardly in it,) and also his re-acting of his sin, by revolving it, and remembering it with pleasure, as that adulterous woman, (Ezek. 23. 19.) who *multiplied her whoredoms by calling to remembrance the days of her youth*; so does this wicked man here. Or, his hiding it and keeping it under his tongue denotes his industrious concealment of his beloved lust: being a hypocrite, that he may save the credit of his profession, he has secret haunts of sin; but he who knows what is in the heart, knows what is under the tongue too, and will discover it shortly.

2. The love of the world and the wealth of it; that is it in which he places his happiness, and which therefore he sets his heart upon. See here, (1.) How greedy he is of it, v. 15. He has swallowed down riches, as eagerly as ever a hungry man swallowed down meat; and is still crying, "Give, give." It is that which he desired; (v. 20.) it was, in his eye, the best gift, and that which he coveted earnestly. (2.) What pains he takes for it; it is that which he laboured for, (v. 18.) not by honest diligence in a lawful calling, but by an unwearied prosecution of all ways and methods, *per fas, per nefas—right or wrong*, to be rich. We must labour, not *to be rich*, (Prov. 23. 4.) but to be charitable, *that we may have to give*, (Eph. 4. 28.) not to spend. (3.) What great things he promises himself from it, intimated in the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter; (v. 17.) his being disappointed of them supposes that he had flattered himself with the hopes of them: he expected rivers of sensual delights.

3. Violence, and oppression, and injustice, to his poor neighbours, v. 19. This was the sin of the giants of the old world, and a sin that, as much as any other, brings God's judgments upon nations and families. It is charged upon this wicked man, (1.) That he has forsaken the poor, taken no care of them, shewed no kindness to them, nor made any provision for them. At first, perhaps, for a pretence, he gave alms like the Pharisees, to gain a reputation; but, when he had served his turn with it, he left it off, and forsook the poor, whom before he seemed to be concerned for. Those who do good, but not from a good principle, though they may abound in it, will not abide in it. (2.) That he has oppressed them, crushed them, taken all advantages against them to do them a mischief: to enrich himself, he has made the poor poorer. (3.) That he has violently taken away their houses, which he had no right to, as Ahab took Naboth's vineyard, not by secret fraud,

by forgery, perjury, or some trick in law, but avowedly, and by open violence.

II. What his punishment is, for this wickedness.

1. He shall be disappointed in his expectations, and shall not find that satisfaction in his worldly wealth which he vainly promised himself; (v. 17.) *He shall never see the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter*, with which he hoped to glut himself. The world is not that to those who love it, and court it, and admire it, which they fancy it will be. The enjoyment sinks far below the raised expectation.

2. He shall be diseased and distempered in his body; and how little comfort a man has in riches, if he has not health! Sickness and pain, especially if they be in extremity, imbitter all his enjoyments. This wicked man has all the delights of sense wound up to the height of pleasurable-ness; but what real happiness can he enjoy, when *his bones are full of the sins of his youth*, (v. 11.) that is, of the effects of those sins? By his drunkenness and gluttony, his uncleanness and wantonness, when he was young, he contracted those diseases which are painful to him long after, and, perhaps, make his life very miserable, and, as Solomon speaks, consume his flesh and his body, Prov. 5. 11. Perhaps he was given to fight when he was young, and then made nothing of a cut or a bruise in a fray; but he feels it in his bones long after. But can he get no ease, no relief? No, he is likely to carry his pains and diseases with him to the grave, or rather, they are likely to carry him thither, and so the sins of his youth shall *lie down with him in the dust*: the very putrifying of his body in the grave is to him the effect of sin; (ch. 24. 19.) so that his iniquity is upon his bones there, Ezek. 32. 27. The sin of sinners follows them to the other side death.

3. He shall be disquieted and troubled in his mind; *Surely he shall not feel quietness in his belly*, v. 20. He has not that ease in his own mind that people think he has, but is in continual agitation. The ill-gotten wealth which he has swallowed down, makes him sick, and, like undigested meat, is always upbraiding him. Let none expect to enjoy that comfortably which they have gotten unjustly. The unquietness of his mind arises, (1.) From his conscience looking back, and filling him with the fear of the wrath of God against him, for his wickedness. Even that wickedness which was sweet in the commission, and was rolled under the tongue as a delicate morsel, becomes bitter in the reflection, and, when it is reviewed, fills him with horror and vexation. In his bowels, it is turned, (v. 14.) like John's book; *in his mouth as sweet as honey*, but, *when he had eaten it, his belly was bitter*, Rev. 10. 10. Such a thing is sin; it is turned into the gall of asps, than which nothing is more bitter, the poison of asps, (v. 16.) than which nothing more fatal, and so it will be to him; what he sucked so sweetly, and with so much pleasure, will prove to him the poison of asps; so will all unlawful gains be. The fawning tongue will prove the viper's tongue. All the charming graces that are thought to be in sin, when conscience is awakened, will turn into so many raging furies. (2.) From his cares looking forward, v. 22. In the fulness of his sufficiency, when he thinks himself most happy, and most sure of the continuance of his happiness, he shall be in straits, that is, he shall think himself so, through the anxieties and perplexities of his own mind, as that rich man who, when his ground brought forth plentifully, cried out, *What shall I do?* Luke, 12. 17.

4. He shall be dispossessed of his estate; that shall sink and dwindle away to nothing, so that he shall not rejoice therein, v. 18. He shall not only never rejoice truly, but not long rejoice at all.

(1.) What he has unjustly swallowed, he shall be compelled to disgorge; (v. 15.) *He swallowed down riches*, and then thought himself sure of them, and that they were as much his own as the meat he has eaten, but he is deceived, he shall vomit them up again; his own conscience perhaps may make him so uneasy in the keeping of what he has gotten, that, for the quiet of his own mind, he shall make restitution, and that not with the pleasure of a virtue, but the pain of a vomit, and with the utmost reluctancy. Or, if he do not himself refund what he has violently taken away, God shall, by his providence, force him to it, and bring it about, one way or other, that ill-gotten goods shall return to the right owners. God

shall cast them out of his belly, while yet the love of the sin is not cast out of his heart. So loud shall the clamours of the poor, whom he has impoverished, be against him, that he shall be forced to send his children to them, to sooth them, and beg their pardon; (v. 10.) *His children shall seek to please the poor*, while his own hands shall restore them their goods with shame, v. 18. That which he laboured for, by all the arts of oppression, shall he restore, and shall not so swallow it down as to digest it; it shall not stay with him, but according to his shame shall the restitution be; having gotten a great deal unjustly, he shall restore a great deal, so that when every one has his own, he will have but a little left for himself. To be made to restore what was unjustly gotten, by the sanctifying grace of God, as Zaccheus was, is a great mercy; he voluntarily and cheerfully restored four-fold, and yet had a great deal left to *give to the poor*, Luke, 19. 8. But to be forced to restore, as Judas was, merely by the horrors of a despairing conscience, has none of that benefit and comfort attending it, for he *threw down the pieces of silver, and went and hanged himself*.

(2.) He shall be stripped of all he has, and become a beggar. He that spoiled others, shall himself be spoiled; (Isa. 33. 1.) *for every hand of the wicked shall be upon him*. The innocent, whom he has wronged, sit down by their loss, saying, as David, *Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked, but my hand shall not be upon him*, 1 Sam. 24. 13. But though they have forgiven him, though they will make no reprisals, divine justice will, and often makes the wicked to avenge the quarrel of the righteous, and squeezes and crushes one bad man by the hand of another upon him. Thus when he is plucked on all sides, he shall not save of that which he desired; (v. 20.) not only he shall not save it all, but he shall save nothing of it. There shall none of his meat (which he coveted so much, and fed upon with so much pleasure) be left, v. 21. All his neighbours and relations shall look upon him to be in such bad circumstances, that, when he is dead, no man shall look for his goods, none of his kindred shall expect to be a penny the better for him, nor be willing to take out letters of administration for what he leaves behind him. In all this Zophar reflects upon Job, who had lost all, and was reduced to the last extremity.

23. *When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain it upon him while he is eating.* 24. *He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through.* 25. *It is drawn, and cometh out of the body; yea, the glittering sword cometh out of his gall: terrors are upon him.* 26. *All darkness shall be hid in his secret places: a fire not blown shall consume him; it shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle.* 27. *The heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him.* 28. *The increase of his house shall depart, and his goods shall flow away in the day of his wrath.* 29. *This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God.*

Zophar, having described the many embarrassments and vexations which commonly attend the wicked practices of oppressors and cruel men, here comes to shew their utter ruin at last.

1. Their ruin will take its rise from God's wrath and vengeance, v. 23. The hand of the wicked was upon him; (v. 22.) every hand of the wicked. His hand was against every one, and therefore every man's hand will be against him—yet, in grappling with these, he might go near to make his part good; but his heart cannot endure, nor his hands be strong, when *God shall deal with him*, (Ezek. 22. 14.) when God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and rain it upon him. Every word here speaks terror. It is not only the *justice* of God, that is engaged against him, but

his *wrath*, the deep resentment of provocations given to himself: it is *the fury of his wrath*, incensed to the highest degree; it is cast upon him with force and fierceness; it is rained upon him in abundance; it comes on his head like the fire and brimstone upon Sodom, to which the psalmist also refers, (Ps. 11. 6.) *On the wicked God shall rain fire and brimstone*. There is no fence against this, but in Christ, who is the only Covert from the storm and tempest, Isa. 32. 2. This wrath shall be cast upon him, when he is about to fill his belly, just going to glut himself with what he has gotten, and promising himself abundant satisfaction in it. Then, when he is eating, shall this tempest surprise him, when he is secure and easy, and in apprehension of no danger; as the ruin of the old world and Sodom came, when they were in the depth of their security, and the height of their sensuality, as Christ observes, Luke, 17. 26, &c. Perhaps Zophar here reflects on the death of Job's children, when they were eating and drinking.

2. Their ruin will be inevitable, and there will be no possibility of escaping it; (v. 24.) *He shall flee from the iron weapon*. Flight argues guilt: he will not humble himself under the judgments of God, nor seek means to make his peace with him; all his care is to escape the vengeance that pursues him, but in vain: if he escape the sword, yet the bow of steel shall strike him through. God has weapons of all sorts, he has both *whet his sword, and bent his bow*; (Ps. 7. 12, 13.) he can deal with his enemies *cominus* or *eminus*—*at hand or afar off*. He has a sword for those that think to fight it out with him by their strength, and a bow for those that think to avoid him by their craft. See Isa. 24. 17, 18. Jer. 48. 43, 44. He that is marked for ruin, though he may escape one judgment, will find another ready for him.

3. It will be a total, terrible, ruin. When the dart that has struck him through, (for when God shoots, he is sure to hit his mark, when he strikes, he strikes home,) comes to be drawn out of his body, when the glittering sword, (the *lightning*, so the word is,) the flaming sword, the sword that is bathed in heaven, (Isa. 34. 5.) when this comes out of his gall, O what terrors are upon him! How strong are the convulsions, how violent are the dying agonies! How terrible are the arrests of death to a wicked man!

4. Sometimes it is a ruin that comes upon him insensibly, v. 26. (1.) The darkness he is wrapped up in, is a hidden darkness: it is all darkness, utter darkness, without the least mixture of light, and it is hid in his secret place, whither he is retreated, and where he hopes to shelter himself; he never retires into his own conscience, but he finds himself in the dark, and utterly at a loss. (2.) The fire he is consumed by is a fire not blown, kindled without noise, a consumption which every body sees the effect of, but nobody sees the cause of; it is plain that the gourd is withered, but the worm at the root, that causes it to wither, is out of sight. He is wasted by a soft gentle fire; surely, but very slowly. When the fuel is very combustible, the fire needs no blowing, and that is his case; he is ripe for ruin; *the proud, and they that do wickedly, shall be stubble*, Mal. 4. 1. An unquenchable fire shall consume him, so some read it; and that is certainly true of hell-fire.

5. It is a ruin, not only to himself, but to his family; *It shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle*, for the curse shall reach him, and he shall be cut off perhaps by the same grievous disease; there is an entail of wrath upon the family, which will destroy both his heirs and his inheritance, v. 28. (1.) His posterity will be rooted out. The increase of his house shall depart; shall either be cut off by untimely deaths, or forced to run their country. Numerous and growing families, if wicked and vile, are soon reduced, dispersed, and extirpated, by the judgments of God. (2.) His estate will be sunk. His goods shall flow away from his family as fast as ever they flowed in to it, when the day of God's wrath comes, for which, all the while his estate was in the getting by fraud and oppression, he was treasuring up wrath.

6. It is a ruin which will manifestly appear to be just and righteous, and what he has brought upon himself by his own wickedness; for, (v. 27.) *the heaven shall reveal his iniquity*, that is, the God of heaven, who sees all the secret wickedness of the wicked, will, by some means or other, let all the world know what a base man he has been, that they may own the justice of God in all that

is brought upon him. The earth also shall rise up against him, both to discover his wickedness, and to avenge it. *The earth shall disclose her blood*, Isa. 26. 21. *The earth rises up against him*, (as the stomach rises against that which is loathsome,) and will no longer keep him: *the Heaven reveals his iniquity*, and therefore will not receive him; whither then must he go but to hell? If the God of heaven and earth be his enemy, neither heaven nor earth will shew him any kindness, but all the hosts of both are, and will be, at war with him.

Lastly, Zophar concludes like an orator; (v. 29.) *This is the portion of a wicked man from God*; it is allotted him, it is designed him as his portion. He will have it at last, as a child has his portion, and he will have it for a perpetuity, it is what he must abide by: *this is the heritage of his decree from God*; it is the settled rule of his judgment, and fair warning is given of it. *O wicked man, thou shalt surely die!* Ezek. 33. 8. Though impenitent sinners do not always fall under such temporal judgments as are here described, (therein Zophar was mistaken,) yet the wrath of God abides upon them, and they are made miserable by spiritual judgments, which are much worse, their consciences being either, on the one hand, a terror to them, and then they are in continual amazement, or, on the other hand, seared and silenced, and then they are given up to a reprobate sense, and bound over to eternal ruin. Never was any doctrine better explained, or worse applied, than this by Zophar, who intended by all this to prove Job a hypocrite. Let us receive the good explication, and make a better application, for warning to ourselves, to stand in awe, and not to sin.

CHAP. XXI.

This is Job's reply to Zophar's discourse; in which he complains less of his own miseries than he had done in his former discourses, (finding that his friends were not moved by his complaints, to pity him in the least,) and comes closer to the general question that was in dispute betwixt him and them, Whether outward prosperity, and the continuance of it, were a mark of the true church, and the true members of it, so that the ruin of a man's prosperity is sufficient to prove him a hypocrite, though no other evidence appear against him: this they asserted, but Job denied. 1. His preface here is designed for the moving of their affections, that he might gain their attention, v. 1. 6. 11. His discourse is designed for the convincing of their judgments, and the rectifying of their mistakes. He owns that God does sometimes hang up a wicked man as it were in chains, in terror—as a terror to others, by some visible remarkable judgment in this life, but denies that he always does so; nay, he maintains that commonly he does otherwise, suffering even the worst of sinners to live all their days in prosperity, and to go out of the world without any visible mark of his wrath upon them. 1. He describes the great prosperity of wicked people, v. 7. 13. 2. He shews their great impiety, in which they are hardened by their prosperity, v. 14. 16. 3. He foretells their ruin, at length, but after a long reprieve, v. 17. 21. 4. He observes a very great variety in the ways of God's providence toward men, even toward bad men, v. 22. 26. 5. He overthrows the ground of their severe censures of him, by shewing that destruction is reserved for the other world, and that the wicked often escape to the last in this world, v. 27. to the end. In this, Job was clearly in the right.

1. **B**UT Job answered and said, 2. Hear diligently my speech, and let this be your consolations. 3. Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on. 4. As for me, is my complaint to man? and if it were so, why should not my spirit be troubled? 5. Mark me, and be astonished, and lay your hand upon your mouth. 6. Even when I remember I am afraid, and trembling taketh hold on my flesh.

Job here recommends himself, both his case and his discourse, both what he suffered, and what he said, to the compassionate consideration of his friends.

1. That which he entreats of them is very fair, that they would suffer him to speak, (v. 3.) and not break in upon him, as Zophar had done, in the midst of his discourse. Losers, of all men, may have leave to speak; and if those that are accused and censured may not speak for themselves, they are wronged without

remedy, and have no way to come at their right. He entreats that they would hear diligently his speech, (v. 2.) as those that were willing to understand him, and, if they were under a mistake, to have it rectified; and that they would *mark him*; (v. 5.) for we may as well not hear as not heed and observe what we hear.

2. That which he urges for this is very reasonable. (1.) They came to comfort him; "Now," says he, "*let this be your consolations*;" (v. 2.) if you have no other comforts to administer to me, yet deny me not this; be so kind, so just, as to give me a patient hearing, and that shall pass for your consolations." Nay, they could not know how to comfort him, if they would not give him leave to open his case, and tell his own story. Or, "It will be a consolation to yourselves, in the reflection, to have dealt tenderly with your afflicted friend, and not harshly."

(2.) He would hear them speak, when it came to their turn. "After I have spoken, you may go on with what you have to say, and I will not hinder you, though you go on to mock me." Those that engage in controversy, must count upon having hard words given them, and resolve to bear it patiently; for, generally, they that mock, will mock on, whatever is said to them.

(3.) He hoped to convince them; "If you will but give me a fair hearing, mock on if you can, but I believe I shall say that which will change your note, and make you pity me, rather than mock me."

(4.) They were not his judges; (v. 4.) "*Is my complaint to man?*" No, if it were, I see it would be to little purpose to complain. But my complaint is to God, and to him do I appeal. Let him be Judge between you and me! Before him we stand upon even terms, and therefore I have the privilege of being heard as well as you. If my complaint were to men, my spirit would be troubled, for they would not regard me, nor rightly understand me; but my complaint is to God, who will suffer me to speak, though you will not." It would be sad if God should deal as unkindly with us as our friends sometimes do.

(5.) There was that in his case, which was very surprising and astonishing, and therefore both needed and deserved their most serious consideration. It was not a common case, but a very extraordinary one.

[1.] He himself was amazed at it, at the troubles God had laid upon him, and the censures of his friends concerning him; (v. 6.) "*When I remember that terrible day, in which I was on a sudden stripped of all my comforts, that day in which I was stricken with sore boils; when I remember all the hard speeches with which you have grieved me, I confess I am afraid, and trembling takes hold of my flesh*, especially when I compare this with the prosperous condition of many wicked people, and the applauses of their neighbours, with which they pass through the world." Note, The providences of God, in the government of the world, are sometimes very astonishing, even to wise and good men, and bring them to their wit's end.

[2.] He would have them *wonder at it*; (v. 5.) "*Mark me, and be astonished*." Instead of expounding my troubles, you should awfully adore the unsearchable mysteries of Providence in afflicting one thus, of whom you know no evil; you should therefore *lay your hand upon your mouth*, silently wait the issue, and judge nothing before the time." *God's way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters*. When we cannot account for what he does, in suffering the wicked to prosper, and the godly to be afflicted, nor fathom the depth of those proceedings, it becomes us to sit down and admire them. *Upright men shall be astonished at this*, ch. 17. 8. Be you so.

7. Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, ye, are mighty in power? 8. Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. 9. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. 10. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. 11. They

send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. 12. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. 13. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. 14. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. 15. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him? 16. Lo, their good is not in their hand: the counsel of the wicked is far from me.

All Job's three friends, in their last discourses, had been very large in describing the miserable condition of a wicked man in this world; "It is true," says Job, "remarkable judgments are sometimes brought upon notorious sinners, but not always; for we have many instances of the great and long prosperity of those that are openly and avowedly wicked; though they are hardened in their wickedness by their prosperity, yet they are still suffered to prosper."

I. He here describes their prosperity, to the height, and breadth, and length, of it. "If this be true, as you say, pray tell me *wherefore do the wicked live?*" v. 7. The matter of fact is taken for granted, for we see instances of it every day. 1. They live, and are not suddenly cut off by the strokes of divine vengeance. They yet speak, who have set their mouths against the heavens. They yet act, who have stretched out their hands against God. Not only they live, that is, they are reprieved, but they *live in prosperity*, 1 Sam. 25. 6. Nay, 2. They become old, they have the honour, satisfaction, and advantage, of living long, time enough to raise their families and estates. We read of a *sinners a hundred years old*, Isa. 65. 20. But this is not all. 3. They are mighty in power, are preferred to places of authority and trust, and not only make a great figure, but bear a great sway. *Vivit imo, et in senatum venit—He not only lives, but walks into the senate-house.* Now wherefore is it so? Note, It is worth while to inquire into the reasons of the outward prosperity of wicked people. It is not because God has forsaken the earth, because he does not see, or does not hate, or cannot punish, their wickedness; but it is because the measure of their iniquities is not full. This is the day of God's patience, and in some way or other he makes use of them, and their prosperity, to serve his own counsels, while it ripens them for ruin; but the chief reason is, because he will make it to appear there is another world, which is the world of retribution, and not this.

The prosperity of the wicked is here described to be,

(1.) Complete and consummate. [1.] They are multiplied, and their family is built up, and they have the satisfaction of seeing it; (v. 8.) *Their seed is established in their sight.* This is put first, as that which gives both a pleasant enjoyment, and a pleasing prospect. [2.] They are easy and quiet, v. 9. Whereas Zophar had spoken of their continual frights and terrors, Job says, *Their houses are safe*, both from danger and from the fear of it; (v. 9.) and so far are they from the killing wounds of God's sword or arrows, that they do not feel the smart of so much as *the rod of God upon them.* [3.] They are rich, and thrive in their estates; of this he gives only one instance, v. 10. Their cattle increase, and they meet with no disappointment in them; not so much as a cow casts her calf, and then their much needs grow more. This is promised, Exod. 23. 26. Deut. 7. 14. [4.] They are merry, and live a jovial life; (v. 11, 12.) *They send forth their little ones* abroad among their neighbours, like a flock, in great numbers, to sport themselves. They have their balls and music-meetings, at which their children dance; and dancing is fittest for children, who know not better how to spend their time, and whose innocency guards them against the mischiefs that commonly attend it. Though the parents are not so very youthful and frolicsome as to dance themselves, yet they take the timbrel

and harp; they pipe, and their children dance after their pipe, and they know no grief to put their instruments out of tune, or to withhold their hearts from any joy. Some observe that this is an instance of their vanity, as well as of their prosperity. Here is none of that care taken of their children, which Abraham took of his, to *teach them the way of the Lord*, Gen. 18. 19. Their children do not pray, or say their catechism, but dance, and sing, and *rejoice at the sound of the organ.* Sensual pleasures are all the delights of carnal people; and as men are themselves, so they breed their children.

(2.) Continuing and constant; (v. 13.) *They spend their days*, all their days, in wealth, and never know what it is to want; in mirth, and never know what sadness means; and at last, without any previous alarms to frighten them, without any anguish, or agony, *in a moment they go down to the grave*, and there are no bands in their death. If there were not another life after this, it were most desirable to die by the quickest, shortest strokes of death. Since we must *go down to the grave*, if that were the furthest of our journey, we would wish to *go down in a moment*, to swallow the bitter pill, and not chew it.

II. He shews how they abuse their prosperity, and are confirmed and hardened by it in their impiety, v. 14, 15. Their gold and silver serve to steel them, to make them more insolent, and more impudent, in their wickedness. Now he mentions this, either, 1. To increase the difficulty. It is strange that any wicked people should prosper thus, but especially that those should prosper, who are arrived at such a pitch of wickedness as openly to bid defiance to God himself, and tell him to his face that they care not for him; nay, and that their prosperity should be continued, though they bear up themselves upon that, in their opposition to God; with that weapon they fight against him, and yet are not disarmed. Or, 2. To lessen the difficulty. God suffers them to prosper; but let us not wonder at it, for *the prosperity of fools destroys them*, by hardening them in sin, Prov. 1. 32. Ps. 73. 7. 9.

See how light these prospering sinners make of God and religion, as if, because they have so much of this world, they had no need to look after another.

(1.) See how ill affected they are to God and religion; they abandon them, and cast off the thoughts of them. [1.] They dread the presence of God, they *say unto him, "Depart from us,* let us never be troubled with the apprehension of our being under God's eye, nor be restrained by the fear of him." Or, They bid him depart, as one they do not need, nor have any occasion to make use of. The world is the portion they have chosen, and take up with, and think themselves happy in; while they have that, they can live without God. Justly will God say to them, *Depart*, (Matth. 25. 41.) who have bid him depart; justly does he now take them at their word. [2.] They dread the knowledge of God, and of his will, and of their duty to him; *We desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* They that are resolved not to walk in God's ways, desire not to know them, because their knowledge will be a continual reproach to their disobedience, John. 3. 19.

(2.) See how they argue against God and religion; (v. 15.) *What is the Almighty?* Strange, that ever creatures should speak so insolently, that ever reasonable creatures should speak so absurdly and unreasonably. The two great bonds by which we are drawn and held to religion, are those of duty and interest; now they here endeavour to break both these bonds asunder. [1.] They will not believe it is their duty to be religious. *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?* Like Pharaoh, (Exod. 5. 2.) *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?* Observe how slightly they speak of God; *What is the Almighty?* As if he were a mere name, a mere cypher, or one they have nothing to do with, and that has nothing to do with them. How hardly they speak of religion! They call it a *service*, and mean a hard service. Is it not enough, they think, to keep up a fair correspondence with the Almighty, but they must serve him, which they look upon as a task and drudgery. Observe also how highly they speak of themselves; *"That we should serve him:* we, who are rich and mighty in power, shall we be subject and accountable to him? No

we are Lords," Jer. 2. 31. [2.] They will not believe it is their interest to be religious; *What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* All the world are for what they can get, and therefore wisdom's merchandise is neglected, because they think there is nothing to be got by it; *It is vain to serve God*, Mal. 3. 13, 14. Praying will not pay debts, nor portion children; nay, perhaps serious godliness may hinder a man's preferment, and expose him to losses; and what then? Is nothing to be called gain but the wealth and honour of this world? If we obtain the favour of God, and spiritual and eternal blessings, we have no reason to complain of losing by our religion. But if we have not profit by prayer, it is our own fault, (Isa. 58. 3, 4.) it is because we ask amiss, Jam. 4. 3. Religion itself is not a vain thing; if it be so to us, we may thank ourselves for resting in the outside of it, Jam. 1. 26.

III. He shews their folly herein, and utterly disclaims all concurrence with them; (v. 19.) *Lo, their good is not in their hand*, that is, They did not get it without God, and therefore they are very ungrateful to slight him thus: it was *not their might, nor the power of their hand*, that got them this wealth, and therefore they ought to remember God who gave it them. Nor can they keep it without God, and therefore they are very unwise to lose their interest in him, and bid him to depart from them. Some give this sense of it; "Their good is in their barns and their bags, hoarded up there; it is not in their hand, to do good to others with it; and then, what good does it do them?" "Therefore," says Job, "*the counsel of the wicked is far from me*. Far be it from me that I should be of their mind, say as they say, do as they do, and take my measures from them. *Their posterity approve their sayings*, though *their way be their folly*; (Ps. 49. 13.) but I know better things than to walk in their counsel."

17. How oft is the candle of the wicked put out? and *how oft* cometh their destruction upon them? *God* distributeth sorrows in his anger. 18. They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away. 19. God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know *it*. 20. His eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty. 21. For what pleasure *hath* he in his house after him, when the number of his months is cut off in the midst? 22. Shall *any* teach God knowledge, seeing he judgeth those that are high? 23. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. 24. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. 25. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. 26. They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them.

Job had largely described the prosperity of wicked people; now, in these verses,

I. He opposes this to what his friends had maintained concerning their certain ruin in this life. "Tell me how often do you see the candle of the wicked put out. Do you not as often see it burn down to the socket, until it goes out of itself? v. 17. How often do you see their destruction come upon them, or God distributing sorrows in his anger among them? Do you not as often see their mirth and prosperity continuing to the last?" Perhaps there are as many instances of notorious sinners ending their days in pomp, as ending them in misery; which observation is sufficient to invalidate their arguments against Job, and to shew that no certain judgment can be made of men's character by their outward condition.

II. He reconciles this to the holiness and justice of God; though wicked people prosper thus all their days, yet we are not therefore to think that God will let their wickedness always go unpunished. No,

1. Even while they prosper thus, they are *as stubble and chaff before the stormy wind*, v. 18. They are light and worthless, and of no account either with God, or with wise and good men. They are fitted to destruction, and continually lie exposed to it; and, in the height of their pomp and power, there is but a step between them and ruin.

2. Though they spend all their days in wealth, God is laying up their iniquity for their children, (v. 19.) and he will visit it upon their posterity when they are gone. The oppressor lays up his goods for his children, to make them gentlemen, but God lays up his iniquity for them, to make them beggars: he keeps an exact account of the fathers' sins; *seals them up among his treasures*, (Deut. 32. 34.) and will justly punish the children, while the riches, to which the curse cleaves, are found as assets in their hands.

3. Though they prosper in this world, yet they shall be reckoned with in another world. God rewards him according to his deeds at last, (v. 19.) though the sentence passed against his evil works be not executed speedily. Perhaps he may not now be made to fear the wrath to come, but he may flatter himself with hopes that he shall have peace, though he go on; but he shall be made to feel it in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. He shall know it; (v. 19.) *His eyes shall see his destruction*, which he would not be persuaded to believe. They *will not see, but they shall see*, Isa. 26. 11. The eyes that have been wilfully shut against the grace of God, shall be opened to see his destruction. *He shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty*; that shall be the portion of his cup. Compare Ps. 11. 6. with Rev. 14. 10. The misery of damned sinners is here set forth in a few words, but they are very terrible ones: they lie under the wrath of an Almighty God, who, in their destruction, both shews his wrath, and makes known his power.

If this will be his condition in the other world, what good will his prosperity in this world do him? (v. 21.) *What pleasure has he in his house after him?* Our Saviour has let us know how little pleasure the rich man in hell had *in his house after him*, when the remembrance of the good things he had received in his life-time, would not cool his tongue, but added much to his misery, as did also the sorrow he was in, lest his five brethren, whom he left in his house after him, should follow him to that place of torment, Luke, 16. 25. . 28. So little will the gain of the world profit him that has lost his soul.

III. He resolves this difference, which Providence makes between one wicked man and another, into the wisdom and sovereignty of God; (v. 22.) *Shall any pretend to teach God knowledge?* Dare we arraign God's proceedings, or blame his conduct? Shall we take upon us to tell God how he should govern the world, what sinner he should spare, and what he should punish? He has both authority and ability to judge those that are high. Angels in heaven, princes and magistrates on earth, are accountable to God, and must receive their doom from him; he manages them, and makes what use he pleases of them: shall he then be accountable to us, or receive advice from us? He is the Judge of all the earth, and therefore, no doubt, he shall do right, (Gen. 18. 25. 1. om. 3. 6.) and those proceedings of his providence which seem to contradict one another, he can make, not only mutually to agree, but jointly to serve his own purposes.

The little difference there is between one wicked man's dying impenitent in peace and pomp, and another wicked man's dying so in pain and misery, when both will, at last, meet in hell, he illustrates by the little difference there is between one man's dying suddenly and another's dying slowly, when they will both meet shortly in the grave. So vast is the disproportion between time and eternity, that, if hell be the lot of every sinner at last, it makes little difference, if one goes singing thither, and another sighing. See,

1. How various the circumstances of people's dying are. There

is one way into the world, we say, but many out; yet, as some are born by quick and easy labour, others by that which is hard and lingering, so dying is to some much more terrible than to others; and, since the death of the body is the birth of the soul into another world, death-bed agonies may not unfitly be compared to child-bed throes. Observe the difference.

(1.) One dies suddenly, in his full strength, not weakened by age or sickness, (v. 23.) being wholly at ease and quiet, under no apprehension at all of the approach of death, nor in any fear of it; but, on the contrary, because his breasts are full of milk, and his bones moistened with marrow, (v. 24.) that is, he is healthful and vigorous, and of a good constitution, (like a milch-cow that is fat and in good liking,) he counts upon nothing but to live many years in mirth and pleasure. Thus fair does he bid for life, and yet he is cut off in a moment by the stroke of death. Note, It is a common thing for persons to be taken away by death when they are in their full strength, in the highest degree of health, when they least expect death, and think themselves best armed against it, and are ready not only to set death at a distance, but to set it at defiance. Let us therefore never be secure; for we have known many well and dead in the same week, the same day, the same hour, nay, perhaps, the same minute. Let us therefore be **always** ready.

(2.) Another dies slowly, and with a great deal of previous pain and misery, (v. 25.) *in the bitterness of his soul*, such as poor Job was himself now in, and never eats with pleasure, has no appetite to his food, nor any relish of it, through sickness, or age, or sorrow of mind. What great reason have those to be thankful, that are in health, and always eat with pleasure! And what little reason have they to complain, who sometimes do not eat thus, when they hear of many that never do!

2. How undiscernible this difference is in the grave: as rich and poor, so healthful and unhealthful, meet there; (v. 26.) *They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them*, and feed sweetly on them. Thus, if one wicked man die in a palace, and another in a dungeon, they will meet in the congregation of the dead and damned, and the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched, will be the same to them, which makes those differences inconsiderable, and not worth perplexing ourselves about.

27. Behold, I know your thoughts, and the devices *which* ye wrongfully imagine against me.
28. For ye say, *Where is the house of the prince?* and where *are* the dwelling-places of the wicked?
29. Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens,
30. That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath.
31. Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him *what* he hath done?
32. Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb.
33. The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him, and every man shall draw after him, as *there are* innumerable before him.
34. How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?

In these verses,

I. Job opposes the opinion of his friends, which he saw they still adhered to, That the wicked are sure to fall into such visible and remarkable ruin, as Job was now fallen into, and none but the wicked; upon which principle, they condemned Job as a wicked man. "I know your thoughts," says Job, (v. 27.) "I know you will not agree with me; for your judgments are tainted and blasted by your piques and prejudices against me, and the devices which you wrongfully imagine against my comfort and honour: and how can such men be convinced?"

Job's friends were ready to say, in answer to his discourse

concerning the prosperity of the wicked, "*Where is the house of the prince?*" (v. 28.) Where is Job's house, or the house of his eldest son, in which his children were feasting: inquire into the circumstances of Job's house and family, and then ask, *Where are the dwelling-places of the wicked?* and compare them together, and you will soon see that Job's house is in the same predicament with the houses of tyrants and oppressors, and may therefore conclude that doubtless he was such a one."

II. He lays down his own judgment to the contrary, and, for proof of it, appeals to the sentiments and observations of all mankind. So confident is he that he is in the right, that he is willing to refer the cause to the next man that comes by; (v. 29.) "*Have ye not asked them that go by the way*—any indifferent person, any that will answer you? I say not, as Eliphaz, (ch. 5. 1.) To which of the *Saints*—I ask, To which of the *children of men*, will you turn? Turn to which you wilt, you will find them all of my mind; that the punishment of sinners is designed more for the other world than for this, according to the prophecy of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, Jude, 14. Do you not know the tokens of this truth, which all that have made any observations upon the providences of God concerning mankind in this world, can furnish you with?"

Now what is it that Job here asserts? Two things,

1. That impenitent sinners will certainly be punished in the other world, and, usually, their punishment is put off until then.

2. That therefore we are not to think it strange if they prosper greatly in this world, and fall under no visible token of God's wrath. *Therefore* they are spared now, because they are to be punished then; *therefore* the workers of iniquity flourish, that they may be destroyed for ever, Ps. 92. 7. The sinner is here supposed,

(1.) To live in a great deal of power, so as to be not only *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, (Ezek. 32. 27.) but the terror of the wise and good too, whom he keeps in such awe, that none dares declare his way to his face, v. 31. None will take the liberty to reprove him, to tell him of the wickedness of his way, and what will be in the end thereof; so that he sins securely, and is not made to know either shame or fear. The prosperity of fools destroys them, by setting them (in their own conceit) above reproofs, by which they might be brought to that repentance which alone will prevent their ruin. Those are marked for destruction that are let alone in sin, Hos. 4. 17. And if none dares declare his way to his face, much less dare any repay him what he has done, and make him refund there where he has done wrong. He is one of those great flies which break through the cobwebs of the law, that hold only the little ones: *this* imboldens sinners in their sinful ways, that they can brow-beat justice, and make it afraid to meddle with them. But there is a day coming when those shall be told of their faults, who now would not bear to hear of them; shall have their sins set in order before them, and their way declared to their face, to their everlasting confusion, who would not have it done here, to their conviction; when those who would not repay the wrongs they had done, shall have them repaid to them.

(2.) To die, and be buried in a great deal of pomp and magnificence, v. 32, 33. There is no remedy; he must die; that is the lot of all men; but every thing you can think of shall be done to take off the reproach of death. [1.] He shall have a splendid funeral: a poor thing for any man to be proud of the prospect of; yet with some it passes for a mighty thing: well, he shall be brought unto the grave in state, surrounded with all the honours of the Heralds' office, and all the respect his friends can then pay to his remains: *the rich man died, and was buried*, but no mention is made of the poor man's burial, Luke, 16. 22. [2.] He shall have a stately monument erected over him, he shall remain in the tomb with a *Hic jacet*—*Here lies*, over him, and a large encomium. Perhaps it is meant of the embalming of his body, to preserve it, which was a piece of honour anciently done by the Egyptians to their great men. He shall *watch* in the tomb, so the word is, shall abide solitary and quiet there, as a watchman in his tower. [3.] *The clods of the valley shall be sweet to him*; there shall be as much done as can be with rich odours, to take off the noisomeness of

the grave, as by lamps to set aside the darkness of it, which perhaps was referred to in the foregoing phrase of *watching in the tomb*: but it is all a jest; what is the light, or what the perfume, to a man that is dead? [4.] It shall be alleged, for the lessening of the disgrace of death, that it is the common lot; he has only yielded to fate, and every man shall draw after him, as there are innumerable before him. Note, Death is the way of all the earth: when we are to cross that darksome valley, we must consider, *First*, That there are innumerable before us, it is a tracked road; which may help to take off the terror of it. To die is *ire ad plures—to go to the great majority*. *Secondly*, That every man shall draw after us: as there is a plain track before, so there is a long train behind; we are neither the first, nor the last, that pass through that dark entry. Every one must go in his own order, the order appointed of God.

Lastly, From all this Job infers the impertinency of their discourses, v. 34. 1. Their foundation is rotten, and they went upon a wrong hypothesis; “*In your answers there remains falsehood*; what you have said, stands not only unproved but disproved, and lies under such an imputation of falsehood as you cannot clear it from.” 2. Their building was therefore weak and tottering: “*You comfort me in vain*. All you have said, gives me no relief; you tell me that I shall prosper again, if I turn to God, but you go upon this presumption, that piety shall certainly be crowned with prosperity, which is false; and therefore how can your inference from it yield me any comfort?” Note, Where there is not truth, there is little comfort to be expected.

CHAP. XXII.

Eliphaz here leads on a third attack upon poor Job, in which, Bildad followed him, but Zophar drew back, and quitted the field. It was one of the unhappinesses of Job, as it is of many an honest man, to be misunderstood by his friends. He had spoken of the prosperity of wicked men in this world as a mystery of Providence, but they took it for a reflection upon Providence, as countenancing their wickedness; and they reproached him accordingly. In this chapter, I. Eliphaz checks him for his complaints of God, and of his dealings with him, as if he thought God had done him wrong, v. 2..4. II. He charges him with many high crimes and misdemeanors, for which he supposes God was now punishing him. 1. Oppression and injustice, v. 5..11. 2. Atheism and infidelity, v. 12..14. III. He compared his case to that of the old world, v. 15..20. IV. He gives him very good counsel, assuring him that, if he would take it, God would return in mercy to him, and he should return to his former prosperity, v. 21..30.

1. **T**HEN Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, 2. Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? 3. *Is it* any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or *is it* gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect? 4. Will he reprove thee for fear of thee? will he enter with thee into judgment?

Eliphaz here insinuates that, because Job complained so much of his afflictions, he thought God was unjust in afflicting him; but it was a strained *innuendo*, Job was far from thinking so. What Eliphaz says here, is therefore unjustly applied to Job, but in itself it is very true and good;

1. That when God does us good, it is not because he is indebted to us; if he were, there might be some colour to say, when he afflicts us, “*He does not deal fairly with us*,” but whoever pretends that he has by any meritorious action made God his Debtor, let him prove this debt, and he shall be sure not to lose it; (Rom. 11. 35.) *Who has given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?* But Eliphaz here shews that the righteousness and perfection of the best man in the world are no real benefit or advantage to God, and therefore cannot be thought to merit any thing from him.

(1.) Man's piety is no *profit* to God, no gain, v. 1, 2. If we could by any thing merit from God, it would be by our piety, our being righteous, and making our way perfect. If that will not merit, surely nothing else will: if a man cannot make God his Debtor by his godliness, and honesty, and obedience to his laws,

much less can he by his wit, and learning, and worldly policy. Now Eliphaz here asks, whether any man can possibly be profitable to God? It is certain that man cannot. By no means: *he that is wise may be profitable to himself*. Note, Our wisdom and piety are that by which we ourselves are, and are likely to be, great gainers. *Wisdom is profitable to direct*, Eccl. 10. 10. *Godliness is profitable to all things*, 1 Tim. 4. 8. *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself*, Prov. 9. 12. The gains of religion are infinitely greater than the losses of it, and so it will appear when they are balanced. But can a man be thus profitable to God? No, for such is the perfection of God, that he cannot receive any benefit or advantage by men; what can be added to that which is infinite? And such is the weakness and imperfection of man, that he cannot offer any benefit or advantage to God. Can the light of a candle be profitable to the sun, or the drop of the bucket to the ocean? He that is wise, is profitable to himself, for his own direction and defence, his own credit and comfort; he can with his wisdom entertain himself, and enrich himself; but can he so be profitable to God? No; God needs not us or our services. We are undone, for ever undone, without him; but he is happy, for ever happy, without us. Is it any gain to him, any real addition to his glory or wealth, if we make our way perfect? Suppose it were absolutely perfect, yet what is God the better? Much less when it is so far short of being perfect.

(2.) It is no *pleasure* to him. God has indeed expressed himself in his word well pleased with the righteous; his countenance be-holds them, and his delight is in them and their prayers; but all that adds nothing to the infinite satisfaction and complacency which the Eternal Mind has in itself. God can enjoy himself without us, though we could have but little enjoyment of ourselves without our friends. This magnifies his condescension, in that, though our services be no real profit or pleasure to him, yet he invites, encourages, and accepts, them.

2. That, when God restrains or rebukes us, it is not because he is in danger from us, or jealous of us; (v. 4.) “*Will he reprove thee for fear of thee*, and take thee down from thy prosperity, lest thou shouldest grow too great for him; as princes sometimes have thought it a piece of policy to curb the growing greatness of a subject, lest he should become formidable?” Satan indeed suggested to our first parents, that God forbade them the tree of knowledge, for fear of them, lest they should be as gods, and so become rivals with him; but it was a base insinuation. God rebukes the good because he loves them, but he never rebukes the great because he fears them. He does not enter into judgment with men, that is, pick a quarrel with them, and seek occasion against them, through fear they should eclipse his honour, or endanger his interest. Magistrates punish offenders for fear of them; Pharaoh oppressed Israel because he feared them; it was for fear that Herod slew the children of Bethlehem; that the Jews persecuted Christ and his apostles. But God does not, as they did, pervert justice for fear of any. See ch. 36. 5..8.

5. *Is not thy wickedness great?* and thine iniquities infinite? 6. For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing. 7. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry. 8. But *as for* the mighty man, he had the earth; and the honourable man dwelt in it. 9. Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken. 10. Therefore snares *are* round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee; 11. Or darkness, *that* thou canst not see; and abundance of waters cover thee. 12. *Is not* God in the height of heaven? and behold the height of the stars, how high they are! 13. And thou sayest, How doth God

know? can he judge through the dark cloud?
14. Thick clouds *are* a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven.

Eliphaz and his companions had condemned Job, in general, as a wicked man and a hypocrite; but none of them had descended to particulars, nor drawn up any articles of impeachment against him, until Eliphaz did it here, where he positively and expressly charges him with many high crimes and misdemeanors, which if he had really been guilty of, they might well have justified themselves in their harsh censures of him. "Come," (says Eliphaz,) "we have been too tender of Job, and afraid of grieving him, which has but confirmed him in his self-justification; it is high time to deal plainly with him; we have condemned him by parables, but that does not answer the end; he is not prevailed with to condemn himself; we must therefore plainly tell him, *'Thou art the man, the tyrant, the oppressor, the atheist, we have been speaking of all this while. Is not thy wickedness great? Certainly it is, or else thy troubles would not be so great.'* I appeal to thyself, and thy own conscience; are not thine iniquities infinite, both in number and heinousness?" Strictly taken, nothing is infinite but God: but he means this, that his sins were more than could be counted; and more heinous than could be conceived. Sin, being committed against Infinite Majesty, has in it a kind of infinite malignity. But when Eliphaz charges Job thus high, and ventures to descend to particulars too, laying to his charge that which he knew not, we may take occasion hence, 1. To be angry at those who unjustly censure and condemn their brethren. For aught I know, Eliphaz, in accusing Job falsely, as he does here, was guilty of as great a sin, and as great a wrong to Job, as the Sabeans and Chaldeans that robbed him; for a man's good name is more precious and valuable than his wealth. It is against all the laws of justice, charity, and friendship, either to raise, or receive, calumnies, jealousies, and evil surmises, concerning others; and it is the more base and disingenuous, if we thus vex those that are in distress, and add to their affliction. Eliphaz could produce no instances of Job's guilt in any of the particulars that follow here, but seems resolved to calumniate boldly, and throw all the reproach he could on Job, not doubting but that some would cleave to him. 2. To pity those who are thus censured and condemned. Innocency itself will be no security against a false and foul tongue. Job, whom God himself praised as the best man in the world, is here represented by one of his friends, and him a wise and good man too, as one of the greatest villains in nature. Let us not think it strange, if at any time we be thus blackened, but learn how to pass by evil report as well as good, and commit our cause, as Job did, to him that judgeth righteously.

Let us see the particular articles of this charge.

I. He charges him with oppression and injustice; that, when he was in prosperity, he not only did no good with his wealth and power, but did a great deal of hurt with it. This was utterly false, as appears by the account Job gives of himself, (ch. 29. 12, &c.) and the character God gave of him, ch. 1. And yet,

1. Eliphaz branches out this charge into divers particulars, with as much assurance as if he could call witnesses to prove upon oath every article of it. He tells him, (1.) That he had been cruel and unmerciful to the poor. As a magistrate, he ought to have protected them, and seen them provided for; but Eliphaz suspects that he never did them any kindness, but all the mischief his power enabled him to do; that, for an inconsiderable debt, he demanded, and carried away by violence, a pawn of great value, even from his brother, whose honesty and sufficiency he could not but know; (v. 6.) *Thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought*; or, as the LXX read it, *Thou hast taken thy brethren for pledges*, and that for nought; imprisoned them, enslaved them, because they had nothing to pay; that he had taken the very clothes of his insolvent tenants and debtors, so that he had stripped them naked, and left them so: the law of Moses forbade this; (Exod. 22. 26. Deut. 24. 13.) that he had not been charitable to the poor, no not to poor travellers, and poor widows. "Thou hast not given so

much as a cup of cold water, (which would have cost thee nothing,) to the weary to drink, when he begged for it, (v. 7.) and was ready to perish for want of it: nay, thou hast withholden bread from the hungry in their extremity, hast not only not given it, but hast forbidden the giving of it; which is *withholding good from those to whom it is really due*, Prov. 3. 27. Poor widows, who, while their husbands were living, troubled nobody, but now were forced to seek relief, thou hast sent away empty from thy doors with a sad heart, v. 9. Those who came to thee for justice, thou didst send away unheard, unhelped; nay, though they came to thee full, thou didst squeeze them, and send them away empty; and, worst of all, the arms of the fatherless have been broken; those that could help themselves but little, thou hast quite disabled to help themselves." This, which is the blackest part of the charge, is but insinuated; *The arms of the fatherless have been broken*: he does not say, "Thou hast broken them," but he would have it understood so: and, if they be broken, and those who have power do not relieve them, they are chargeable with it. "They have been broken by those under thee, and thou hast connived at it, which brings thee under the guilt." (2.) That he had been partial to the rich and great; (v. 8.) "As for the mighty man, if he was guilty of any crime, he was never questioned for it; he had the earth, he dwelt in it: if he brought an action ever so unjustly, or if an action were ever so justly brought against him, yet he was sure to carry his cause in thy courts. The poor were not fed at thy door, while the rich were feasting at thy table." Contrary to this is Christ's rule for hospitality; (Luke, 14. 12. .14.) and Solomon says, *He that gives to the rich shall come to poverty*.

2. He attributes all his present troubles to these supposed sins; (v. 10, 11.) "Those that are guilty of such practices as these, commonly bring themselves into just such a condition as thou art now in; and therefore we conclude thou hast been thus guilty." (1.) "It is the manner of God to cross and embarrass such; and snares are, accordingly, round about thee, so that, which way soever thou steppest or lookest, thou findest thyself in distress; and others are as hard upon thee as thou hast been upon the poor." (2.) "Their own consciences may be expected to terrify and accuse them: no sin makes a louder cry there than unmercifulness: and, accordingly, sudden fear troubles thee; and, though thou wilt not own it, it is guilt of this kind that creates thee all this terror." Zophar had insinuated this, ch. 20. 19, 20. (3.) "They are brought to their wits' end, so amazed and bewildered, that they know not what to do, and that also is thy case; for thou art in darkness, that thou canst not see wherefore God contends with thee, nor what is the best course for thee to take; *for abundance of waters cover thee*," that is, "thou art in a mist, in the midst of dark waters, in the thick clouds of the sky." Note, Those that have not shewed mercy may justly be denied the comfortable hope that they shall find mercy; and then what can they expect but snares, and darkness, and continual fear?

II. He charges him with atheism, infidelity, and gross impiety; and thought this was at the bottom of his injustice and oppressiveness: he that did not fear God did not regard man. He would have it thought that Job was an Epicurean, who did indeed own the being of God, but denied his providence, and fancied that he confined himself to the entertainments of the upper world, and never concerned himself in the inhabitants and affairs of this.

1. Eliphaz observes a good truth, which, he thought, if Job would duly consider, he would not be so passionate in his complaints, nor so bold in justifying himself; (v. 12.) *Is not God in the height of heaven?* Yes, no doubt he is: no heaven so high but God is there; and in the highest heavens, the heavens of the blessed, the residence of his glory, he is, in a special manner; there he is pleased to manifest himself in a way peculiar to the upper world, and thence he is pleased to manifest himself in a way suited to this lower world. There is his throne; there is his court: he is called *the Heavens*, Dan. 4. 26. Thus Eliphaz proves that a man cannot be profitable to God, (v. 2.) that he ought not to contend with God; (it is his folly if he does;) and that we ought always to address ourselves to God with very great reverence; for when we behold the height of the stars, how high they

are, we might, at the same time, also consider the transcendent majesty of God, who is above the stars, and how high he is.

2. He charges it upon Job, that he made a bad use of this doctrine, which he might have made so good a use of; (v. 13.) "This is *holding the truth in unrighteousness*, fighting against religion with its own weapons, and turning its own artillery upon itself: Thou art willing to own that *God is in the height of heaven*, but thence thou inferrest, *How doth God know?*" Bad men expel the fear of God out of their hearts, by banishing the eye of God out of the world; (Ezek. 8. 12.) and care not what they do, if they can but persuade themselves that God does not know. Eliphaz suspects that Job had such a notion of God as this, that, because he is in the height of heaven, (1.) It is therefore impossible for him to see and hear what is done at so great a distance as this earth: especially since there is a dark cloud, (v. 13.) many thick clouds, (v. 14.) that come between him and us, and are a covering to him, so that he cannot see, much less can he judge of, the affairs of this lower world; as if God had *eyes of flesh*, ch. 10. 4. The interposing firmament is to him as transparent crystal, Ezek. 1. 22. Distance of place creates no difficulty to him who is immense, any more than distance of time to him who is eternal. Or, (2.) That it is therefore below him, and a diminution to his glory, to take cognizance of this inferior part of the creation: he walks in the circuit of heaven, and has enough to do, to enjoy himself and his own perfections and glory, in that bright and quiet world; why should he trouble himself about us? This is gross absurdity, as well as gross impiety, which Eliphaz here fathers upon Job; for it supposes that the administration of government is a burthen and disparagement to the Supreme Governor; and the acts of justice and mercy were a toil to a mind infinitely wise, holy, and good. If the sun, a creature, and inanimate, can with his light and influence reach this earth, and every part of it, (Ps. 19. 6.) even from that vast height of the visible heavens in which he is, and in the circuit of which he walks, and through many a thick and dark cloud, shall we question it concerning the Creator?

15. Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? 16. Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood: 17. Which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them? 18. Yet he filled their houses with good things: but the counsel of the wicked is far from me. 19. The righteous see it, and are glad: and the innocent laugh them to scorn. 20. Whereas our substance is not cut down, but the remnant of them the fire consumeth.

Eliphaz, having endeavoured to convict Job, by setting his sins (as he thought) in order before him, here endeavours to awaken him to a sight and sense of his misery and danger, by reason of sin; and this he does, by comparing his case with that of the sinners of the old world; as if he had said, "Thy condition is bad now, but, unless thou repent, it will be worse, as their's was; their's *who were overflown with a flood*, as the old world, (v. 16.) and their's *the remnant of whom the fire consumed*," (v. 20.) namely, the Sodomites, who, in comparison of the old world, were but a remnant. And these two instances of the wrath of God against sin and sinners, are more than once put together, for warning to a careless world; as by our Saviour, Luke, 17. 26, &c. and the apostle, 2 Pet. 2. 5, 6. Eliphaz would have Job to *mark the old way which wicked men have trodden*, (v. 15.) and see what came of it, what the end of their way was. Note, There is an *old way which wicked men have trodden*. Religion had but newly entered, when sin immediately followed it: but though it is an old way, a broad way, a tracked way, it is a dangerous way, and it leads to destruction; and it is good for us to mark it, that we may not dare to walk in it.

Eliphaz here puts Job in mind of it, perhaps in opposition to what he had said of the prosperity of the wicked; as if he had said, "Thou canst find out here and there a single instance, it may be, of a wicked man ending his days in peace; but what is that to those two great instances of the final perdition of ungodly men—the drowning of the whole world, and the burning of Sodom?" Destructions by wholesale, in which he thinks Job may, as in a glass, see his own face.

Observe, 1. The ruin of those sinners; (v. 16.) *They were cut down out of time*; that is, they were cut off in the midst of their days, when, as man's time then went, many of them might, in the course of nature, have lived some hundreds of years longer, which made their immature extirpation the more grievous. They were *cut down out of time*, to be hurried into eternity. And their foundation, the earth on which they built themselves, and all their hopes, was *overflown with a flood*, the flood which was *brought in upon the world of the ungodly*, 2 Pet. 2. 5. Note, Those who build upon the sand, choose a foundation which will be *overflown*, when the rains descend, and the floods come; (Matth. 7. 27.) and then their building must needs fall, and they perish in the ruins of it, and repent of their folly when it is too late.

2. The sin of those sinners, which brought that ruin; (v. 17.) *They said unto God, Depart from us*. Job had spoken of some who said so, and yet prospered, ch. 21. 14. But these did not; (says Eliphaz;) they found, to their costs, what it was to set God at defiance. Those who were resolved to lay the reins on the neck of their appetites and passions, began with this; they said unto God, *Depart*; they abandoned all religion, hated the thoughts of it, and desired to live *without God in the world*; they shunned his word, and silenced conscience, his deputy! *And what can the Almighty do for them?* Some make this to denote the justness of their punishment. They said to God, *Depart from us*; and then *what could the Almighty do with them, but cut them off?* Those who will not submit to God's golden sceptre, must expect to be broken to pieces with his iron rod. Others make it to denote the injustice of their sin; But, *what hath the Almighty done against them?* What iniquity have they found in him? or, Wherein has he wearied them? Mic. 6. 3. Jer. 2. 5. Others make it to denote the reason of their sin; They say unto God, *Depart*, asking *what the Almighty can do to them?* "What has he done to oblige us? What can he do, in a way of wrath, to make us miserable, or, in a way of favour, to make us happy?" As they argue, (Zeph. 1. 12.) *The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil*. Eliphaz shews the absurdity of this in one word, and that is, calling God *The Almighty*; for, if he be so, what cannot he do? But it is not strange if those cast off all religion, who neither dread God's wrath, nor desire his favour.

3. The aggravation of this sin; *Yet he had filled their houses with good things*, v. 18. Both those of the old world, and those of Sodom, had great plenty of all the delights of sense; for *they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, &c.* (Luke, 17. 27.) so that they had no reason to ask *what the Almighty could do for them?* for they lived upon his bounty; no reason to bid him depart from them, who had been so kind to them. Many have their houses full of goods, but their hearts empty of grace, and thereby are marked for ruin.

4. The protestation which Eliphaz makes against the principles and practices of those wicked people; *But the counsel of the wicked is far from me*. Job had said so, (ch. 21. 16.) and Eliphaz will not be behind with him. If they cannot agree in their own principles concerning God, yet they agree in renouncing the principles of those that live without God in the world. Note, Those that differ from each other in some matters of religion, and are engaged in disputes about them, yet ought unanimously and vigorously to appear against atheism and irreligion, and to take great care that their disputes do not hinder either their vigour or unanimity, in that common cause of God, that righteous cause.

5. The pleasure and satisfaction which the righteous shall have in this. (1.) In seeing the *wicked destroyed*, v. 19. They shall see it, that is, observe it, and take notice of it; (Hos. 14. 9.) and they shall be glad, not to see their fellow-creatures miserable, or

(Isa. 58. 14.) and that which will lift them up, is, the belief of this, that God will save the humble person. They that humble themselves shall be exalted, not only in honour, but in comfort.

3. That he should be a blessing to his country, and an instrument of good to many; (v. 30.) *God shall*, in answer to thy prayers, *deliver the island of the innocent*, and have a regard therein to the *pureness of thy hands*, which is necessary to the acceptableness of our prayers, 1 Tim. 2. 8. But, because we may suppose the innocent not to need deliverance, (it was guilty Sodom that wanted the benefit of Abraham's intercession,) I incline to the marginal reading, *The innocent shall deliver the island*, by their advice, (Ecc. 9. 14, 15,) and by their prayers, and their interest in heaven, Acts, 27. 24. Or, *He shall deliver those that are not innocent, and they are delivered by the pureness of thy hands*; so it may be read, and most probably. Note, A good man is a public good. Sinners fare the better for saints, whether they are aware of it or no. If Eliphaz intended hereby, (as some think he did,) to insinuate that Job's prayers were not prevailing, nor his hands pure, (for then he would have relieved others, much more himself,) he was afterward made to see his error, when it appeared that Job had a better interest in heaven than he had; for he and his three friends, who, in this matter, were not innocent, were delivered by the *pureness of Job's hands*, ch. 42. 8.

CHAP. XXIII.

This chapter begins Job's reply to Eliphaz; in this reply, he takes no notice of his friends; either because he saw it was to no purpose, or because he liked the good counsel Eliphaz gave him in the close of his discourse so well, that he would make no answer to the peevish reflections he began with; but he appeals to God; begs to have his cause heard, and doubts not but to make it good, having the testimony of his own conscience concerning his integrity. Here seems to be a struggle between flesh and spirit, fear and faith, throughout this chapter. I. He complains of his calamitous condition, and especially of God's withdrawals from him, so that he could not get his appeal heard, (v. 2. 5.) nor discern the meaning of God's dealings with him, (v. 8, 9.) nor gain any hope of relief, v. 13, 14. This made deep impressions of trouble and terror upon him, v. 15. 17. But, II. In the midst of these complaints, he comforts himself with the assurance of God's clemency, (v. 6, 7.) and his own integrity, which God himself was a Witness to, v. 10. 12. Thus was the light of his day like that spoken of, (Zech. 14. 6, 7.) neither perfectly clear nor perfectly dark, but at evening time it was light.

1. **T**HEN Job answered and said, 2. Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. 3. Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! 4. I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. 5. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. 6. Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me. 7. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge.

Job is confident that he has wrong done him by his friends, and therefore, ill as he is, he will not give up the cause, nor let them have the last word. Here,

I. He justifies his own resentments and representations of his trouble; (v. 2.) *Even to-day, I own, my complaint is bitter*; for the affliction, the cause of the complaint, is so. There are *wormwood and gall in the affliction and misery, my soul has them still in remembrance*, and is imbittered by them, Lam. 3. 19. 20. *Even to-day is my complaint counted rebellion*; so some read it; his friends construed the innocent expressions of his grief into reflections upon God and his providence, and called them *rebellion*. "But," says he, "I do not complain more than there is cause, for my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Even to-day, after all you have said to convince and comfort me, still the pains of my body, and the wounds of my spirit, are such, that I have reason enough for my complaints, if they were more bitter than they are." We

wrong God, if our groaning be heavier than our stroke; like froward children, who, when they cry for nothing, have justly something given them to cry for; but we do not wrong ourselves, though our stroke be heavier than our groaning, for little said is soon amended.

II. He appeals from the censures of his friends to the just judgment of God; and this he thought was an evidence for him that he was not a hypocrite, for then he durst not have made such an appeal as this. St. Paul comforts himself in this, that *he that judged him was the Lord*, and therefore he valued not man's judgment, (1 Cor. 4. 3, 4.) but he was willing to wait till the appointed day of decision comes; whereas Job is impatient, and passionately wishes to have the judgment-day anticipated, and to have his cause tried quickly, as it were, by a special commission. The apostle found it necessary to press it much upon suffering Christians patiently to expect the Judge's coming, James, 5. 7. 9.

1. He is so sure of the equity of God's tribunal, that he longs to appear before it; (v. 3.) *Oh that I knew where I might find him!* This may properly express the pious breathings of a soul convinced that it has, by sin, lost God, and is undone for ever if it recover not its interest in his favour. "Oh that I knew how I might recover his favour! How I might come into covenant and communion with him!" Mic. 6. 6, 7. It is the cry of a poor deserted soul, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? Oh that I knew where I might find him! Oh that he who has laid open the way to him, would direct me into it, and lead me in it!" But Job here seems to speak it too boldly, that his friends wronged him, and he knew not which way to apply himself to God, to have justice done him, else he would go even to his seat, to demand it. A patient waiting for death and judgment is our wisdom and duty; and, if we duly consider things, that cannot be without a holy fear and trembling; but a passionate wishing for death or judgment, without any such fear and trembling, is our sin and folly, and ill becomes us. Do we know what death and judgment are, and are we so very ready for them, that we need not time to get readier? *Woe to them that, thus in a heat, desire the day of the Lord*, Amos, 5. 18.

2. He is so sure of the goodness of his own cause, that he longs to be opening it at God's bar, (v. 4.) "I would order my cause before him, and set it in a true light; I would produce the evidences of my sincerity in a proper method, and would fill my mouth with arguments to prove it." We may apply this to the duty of prayer, in which we have boldness to enter into the holiest, and to come even to the footstool of the throne of grace. We have not only liberty of access, but liberty of speech. We have leave, (1.) To be particular in our requests, to order our cause before God, to speak the whole matter, to lay before him all our grievances, in what method we think most proper; we durst not be so free with earthly princes, as an humble holy soul may be with God. (2.) To be importunate in our requests. We are allowed, not only to pray, but to plead; not only to ask, but to argue; nay, to fill our mouths with arguments: not to move God, (he is perfectly apprized of the merits of the cause without our shewing,) but to move ourselves, to excite our fervency, and encourage our faith, in prayer.

3. He is so sure of a sentence in favour of him, that he even longed to hear it; (v. 5.) "I would know the words which he would answer me," that is, "I would gladly hear what God will say to this matter in dispute between you and me; and will entirely acquiesce in his judgment." This becomes us, in all controversies; let the word of God determine them; let us know what he answers, and understand what he says. Job knew well enough what his friends would answer him; they would condemn him, and run him down; "But," (says he,) "I would fain know what God would answer me; for I am sure his judgment is according to truth, which theirs is not. I cannot understand them, they talk so little to the purpose; but what he says I should understand, and therefore be fully satisfied in."

III. He comforts himself with the hope that God would deal favourably with him in this matter, v. 6, 7. Note, It is of great use to us, in every thing wherein we have to do with God, to keep up good thoughts of him. He believes,

1. That God would not overpower him; that he would not

deal with him either by absolute sovereignty, or in strict justice not with a high hand, not with a strong hand: *Will he plead against me with his great power?* No, Job's friends pleaded against him with all the power they had; but will God do so? No, his power is all just and holy, whatever men's is: against those that are obstinate in their unbelief and impenitency, God will *plead with his great power*, their destruction will come *from the glory of his power*; but with his own people, that love him and trust in him, he will deal in tender compassion.

2. That, on the contrary, he would empower him to plead his own cause before God; "*He would put strength in me, to support me and bear me up, in maintaining mine integrity.*" Note, The same power that is engaged against proud sinners, is engaged for humble saints, who prevail with God by strength derived from him, as Jacob did, Hos. 12. 3. See Ps. 68. 35.

3. That the issue would certainly be comfortable; (v. 7.) There, in the court of heaven, when the final sentence is to be given, *the righteous might dispute with him*, and come off in his righteousness. Now, even the upright are often *chastened of the Lord*, and they cannot dispute against it; integrity itself is no fence either against calamity or calumny; but in that day, *they shall not be condemned with the world*, though God may afflict by prerogative. *Then you shall discern between the righteous and the wicked*, Mal. 3. 18. So vast will be the difference between them in their everlasting state; whereas now we can scarcely distinguish them, so little is the difference between them as to their outward condition, for all things come alike to all. Then, when the final doom is given, "*I shall be delivered for ever from my Judge*," that is, "*I shall be saved from the unjust censures of my friends, and from that divine sentence which is now so much a terror to me.*" Those that are delivered up to God as their Owner and Ruler shall be for ever delivered from him as their Judge and Avenger: and there is no flying from his justice, but by flying to his mercy.

8. Behold, I go forward, but he *is not there*; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: 9. On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: 10. But he knoweth the way that I take: *when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.* 11. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. 12. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.

Here,

1. Job complains that he cannot understand the meaning of God's providences concerning him, but was quite at a loss about them; (v. 8, 9.) *I go forward, but he is not there*, &c. Eliphaz had bid him acquaint himself with God; "*So I would, with all my heart*," says Job, "*if I knew how to get acquainted with him.*" He had himself a great desire to appear before God, and get a hearing of his case, but the Judge was not to be found; look which way he would, he could see no sign of God's appearing for him to clear up his innocence. Job, no doubt, believed that God is everywhere present; but three things he seems to complain of here, 1. That he could not fix his thoughts, nor form any clear judgment of things in his own mind: his mind was so hurried and discomposed with his troubles, that he was like a man in a fright, or at his wit's end, who runs this way, and that way, but, being in confusion, brings nothing to a head. By reason of the disorder and tumult his spirit was in, he could not fasten upon that which he knew to be in God, and which, if he could but have mixed faith with it, and dwelt upon it in his thoughts, would have been a support to him. It is the common complaint of those who are sick or melancholy, that, when they would think of that which is good, they can make nothing of it. 2. That he could not find out the cause of his troubles, nor the sin which provoked God to contend with him: he

took a view of his whole conversation, turned to every side of it, and could not perceive wherein he had sinned more than others, for which he should thus be punished more than others; nor could he discern what other end God should aim at in afflicting him thus. 3. That he could not foresee what would be in the end hereof, whether God would deliver him at all, nor, if he did, when, or which way: he saw not his signs, nor was there any to tell him how long; as the church complains, Ps. 74. 9. He was quite at a loss to know what God designed to do with him; and whatever conjecture he advanced, still something or other appeared against it.

II. He satisfies himself with this, that God himself was a Witness to his integrity, and therefore did not doubt but the issue would be good. After Job had almost lost himself in the labyrinth of the divine counsels, how contentedly does he sit down, at length, with this thought, "*Though I know not the way that he takes, (for his way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, his thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours, and it would be presumption in us to pretend to judge of them,) yet he knows the way that I take,*" v. 10. That is, 1. He is acquainted with it. His friends judged of that which they did not know, and therefore charged him with that which he was never guilty of; but God, who knew every step he had taken, would not do so, Ps. 139. 3. Note, It is a great comfort to those who mean honestly, that God understands their meaning, though men do not, cannot, or will not. 2. He approves of it: "*He knows that however I may sometimes have taken a false step, yet I have still taken a good way; have chosen the way of truth, and therefore he knows it,*" that is, He accepts it, and is well pleased with it, as he is said to *know the way of the righteous*, Ps. 1. 6. This comforted the prophet; (Jer. 12. 3.) *Thou hast tried my heart toward thee.* From this Job infers, *When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.* They that keep the way of the Lord, may comfort themselves, when they are in affliction, with these three things, (1.) That they are but tried; it is not intended for their hurt, but for their honour and benefit; *it is the trial of their faith*, 1 Pet. 1. 7. (2.) That, when they are sufficiently tried, they shall come forth out of the furnace, and not be left to consume in it as dross or reprobate silver. The trial will have an end; *God will not contend for ever.* (3.) That they shall come forth as gold, pure in itself, and precious to the refiner: they shall come forth as gold approved and improved; found to be good, and made to be better. Afflictions are to us, as we are; those that go gold into the furnace, will come out no worse.

Now that which encouraged Job to hope that his present troubles would thus end well, was, the testimony of his conscience for him, that he had lived a good life in the fear of God.

[1.] That God's way was the way he walked in; (v. 11.) "*My foot hath held his steps*," that is, "*held to them, held close to them; the steps he takes.*" I have endeavoured to conform myself to his example." Good people are followers of God: or, "*I have accommodated myself to his providence, and endeavoured to answer all the intentions of that; to follow Providence step by step.*" Or, "*His steps are the steps he has appointed me to take; the way of religion and serious godliness—that way I have kept, and have not declined from it; not only not turned back from it by a total apostacy, but not turned aside out of it by any wilful transgression.*" His holding God's steps, and keeping his way, intimate that the tempter had used all his arts by fraud and force to draw him aside; but, with care and resolution, he had, by the grace of God hitherto persevered, and those that will do so, must hold and keep, hold with resolution, and keep with watchfulness.

[2.] That God's word was the rule he walked by; (v. 12.) he governed himself by *the commandment of God's lips*, and would not go back from that, but go forward according to it. Whatever difficulties we may meet with in the way of God's commandments, though they lead us through a wilderness, yet we must never think of going back, but must press on toward the mark; Job kept close to the law of God in his conversation, for both his judgment and his affection led him to it. *I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food*; that is, He looked upon it as his necessary food; he could as well have lived without his daily bread as without the word of God. *I have laid it up; so the word is, as*

those that lay up provision for a siege, or as Joseph laid up corn before the famine. Eliphaz had bid him *lay up God's words in his heart*, ch. 22. 22. "I do," says he, "and always did, that I might not sin against him, and that, like the good householder, I might bring forth for the good of others." Note, The word of God is to our souls as our necessary food is to our bodies; it sustains the spiritual life, and strengthens us for the actions of life; it is that which we cannot subsist without, and which nothing else can make up the want of: and we ought therefore so to esteem it, to take pains for it, hunger after it, feed upon it with delight, and nourish our souls with it; and this will be our rejoicing in the day of evil, as it was Job's here.

13. But he *is in one mind*, and who can turn him? and *what* his soul desireth, even *that* he doeth. 14. For he performeth *the thing that is appointed for me*: and many such *things are with him*. 15. Therefore am I troubled at his presence; when I consider, I am afraid of him. 16. For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me: 17. Because I was not cut off before the darkness, *neither* hath he covered the darkness from my face.

Some make Job to complain here, that God dealt unjustly and unfairly with him, in proceeding to punish him without the least relenting or relaxation, though he had such incontestable evidences to produce of his innocency. I am loath to think holy Job would charge the holy God with iniquity; but his complaint is indeed bitter and peevish, and he reasons himself into a sort of a *patience per force*, which he cannot do without reflecting upon God, as dealing hardly with him: but he must bear it, because he cannot help it; the worst he says, is, that God deals unaccountably with him.

1. He lays down good truths, which were capable of a good improvement, v. 13, 14.

(1.) That God's counsels are immutable; *He is in one mind, and who can turn him? He is one*. So some read it, or *in one*; he has no counsellors by whose interest he might be prevailed with to alter his purpose: he is one with himself, and never alters his mind, never alters his measures. Prayer has prevailed to change God's way and his providence, but never was his will or purpose changed; for *known unto to God are all his works*.

(2.) That his power is irresistible; *What his soul desires* or designs, even that he does, and nothing can stand in his way, or put him upon new counsels. Men desire many things, which either they may not do, or cannot do, or dare not do; but God has an incontestable sovereignty; his will is so perfectly pure and right, that it is highly fit he should pursue all its determinations; and he has an uncontrollable power; *none can stay his hand*. *Whatever the Lord pleased, that did he*, (Ps. 135. 6.) and always will, for it is always best.

(3.) That all he does, is according to the counsel of his will; (v. 14.) *He performs the thing that is appointed for me*; whatever happens to us, it is God that performs it; (Ps. 57. 2.) and an admirable performance the whole will appear to be, when the mystery of God shall be finished. He performs all that, and that only, which was appointed, and in the appointed time and method; this may silence us, for what is appointed cannot be altered. But to consider, that, when God was appointing us to eternal life and glory as our end, he was appointing to this condition, this affliction, whatever it is, in our way, this may do more than silence us, it may satisfy us that it is all for the best; though what he does we know not now, we shall know hereafter.

(4.) That all he does, is according to the custom of his providence; *Many such things are with him*, that is, He does many things in the course of his providence, which we can give no account of, but must resolve into his absolute sovereignty. Whatever trouble we are in, others have been in the like; our case is

not singular, the same *afflictions are accomplished in our brethren*, 1 Pet. 5. 9. Are we sick or sore, impoverished and stripped, children removed by death, or friends unkind? This is what *God has appointed for us, and many such things are with him*. *Shall the earth be forsaken for us?*

2. He makes but a bad use of these good truths; had he duly considered them, he might have said, "Therefore am I easy and pleased, and well reconciled to the way of my God concerning me; therefore will I rejoice, in hope that my troubles will issue well at last." But he said, *Therefore am I troubled at his presence*, v. 15. Those are indeed of troubled spirits, who are troubled at the presence of God; as the psalmist, who *remembered God, and was troubled*, Ps. 77. 3. See what confusion poor Job was now in, for he contradicted himself: just now, he was troubled for God's absence; (v. 8, 9.) now he is troubled at his presence; *When I consider, I am afraid of him*. What he now felt, made him fear worse: there is indeed that which, if we consider it, will shew that we have cause to be afraid of God—his infinite justice and purity, compared with our own sinfulness and vileness; but if, withal, we consider his grace in a Redeemer, and our compliance with that grace, the fears will vanish, and we shall see cause to hope in him.

See what impressions were made upon him by the wounds of his spirit. (1.) He was very fearful; (v. 16.) *The Almighty troubled him*, and so *made his heart soft*, that is, utterly unable to bear any thing, and afraid of every thing that stirred. There is a gracious softness, like that of Josiah, whose heart was tender, and trembled at the word of God; this is meant of a grievous softness, which apprehends every thing that is present to be pressing, and every thing future to be threatening. (2.) He was very fretful, peevish indeed, for he quarrels with God, v. 17. [1.] Because he did not die before his troubles, that he might never have seen them; (*Because I was not cut off before the darkness*;) and yet if in the height of his prosperity he had received a summons to the grave, he would have thought it hard. This may help to reconcile us to death whenever it comes, that we do not know what evil we may be taken away from. But when trouble is come, it is folly to wish we had not lived to see it, and it is better to make the best of it. [2.] Because he was left to live so long in his troubles and the darkness was not covered from his face by his being hid in the grave. We should bear the darkness better than thus, if we would but remember, that to the upright there sometimes arises a marvellous light in the darkness; however, there is reserved for them a more marvellous light after it.

CHAP. XXIV.

Job, having, by his complaints in the foregoing chapter, given vent to his passion, and thereby gained some ease, breaks them off abruptly, and now applies himself to a further discussion of the doctrinal controversy between him and his friends, concerning the prosperity of wicked people. That many live at ease, who yet are ungodly and profane, and despise all the exercises of devotion; he had shewed, ch. 21. Now here he goes further, and shews that many who are mischievous to mankind, and live in open defiance to all the laws of justice and common honesty, yet thrive and succeed in their unrighteous practices; and we do not see them reckoned with in this world. What he had said before, (ch. 12. 6.) The tabernacles of robbers prosper, he here enlarges upon. He lays down his general proposition, (v. 1.) That the punishment of wicked people is not so visible and apparent as his friends supposed; and then proves it by an induction of particulars. I. Those that openly do wrong to their poor neighbours, are not reckoned with, nor the injured righted, (v. 2. .12.) though the former are very barbarous, v. 21, 22. II. Those that secretly practise mischief, often go undiscovered and unpunished, v. 13. .17. III. That God punishes such by secret judgments, and reserves them for future judgments, v. 18. .20. and v. 23. .25. So that, upon the whole matter, we cannot say, that all who are in trouble are wicked; for it is certain, that all who are in prosperity are not righteous.

1. **W**HY, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days? 2. Some remove the land-marks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof. 3. They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take

the widow's ox for a pledge. 4. They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together. 5. Behold, as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work; rising betimes for a prey: the wilderness *yieldeth* food for them *and for their children*. 6. They reap *every one* his corn in the field: and they gather the vintage of the wicked. 7. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that *they have* no covering in the cold. 8. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter. 9. They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor. 10. They cause *him* to go naked without clothing, and they take away the sheaf *from* the hungry; 11. *Which* make oil within their walls, and tread *their* wine-presses, and suffer thirst. 12. Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly *to them*.

Job's friends had been very positive in it, that they should soon see the fall of wicked people, how much soever they might prosper for a while. By no means, says Job, *though times are not hidden from the Almighty, yet they that know him do not presently see his day, v. 1.* 1. He takes it for granted, that times are not hid from the Almighty: past times are not hid from his judgment, (Eccl. 3. 15.) present times are not hid from his providence, (Matth. 10. 29.) future times are not hid from his prescience, Acts, 15. 13. God governs the world, and therefore we may be sure he takes cognizance of it: bad times are not hid from him, though the bad men, that make the times bad, say one to another that he has *forsaken the earth*, Ps. 94. 6, 7. Every man's times are in his hand and under his eye, and therefore it is in his power to make the times of wicked men in this world miserable; he foresees the time of every man's death, and therefore, if wicked men die before they are punished for their wickedness, we cannot say, "They escaped him by surprise;" he foresaw it, nay, he ordered it. Before Job will inquire into the reasons of the prosperity of wicked men, he asserts God's omniscience, as one prophet, in a like case, asserts his righteousness, (Jer. 12. 1.) another his holiness, (Hab. 1. 13.) another his goodness to his own people, Ps. 73. 1. General truths must be held fast, though we may find it difficult to reconcile them to particular events. 2. He yet asserts, that they who know him, that is, wise and good people who are acquainted with him, and with whom his secret is, *do not see his days*, not the day of his judging for them; this was the thing he complained of in his own case, (*ch.* 23. 8.) That he could not see God appearing on his behalf to plead his cause; nor the day of his judging against open and notorious sinners, that is called *his day*, Ps. 37. 13. We believe that day will come, but we do not see it, because it is future, and its presages secret. 3. Though this is a mystery of Providence, yet there is a reason for it, and we shall shortly know why the judgment is deferred; even the wisest, and those who know God best, do not yet see it. God will exercise their faith and patience, and excite their prayers for the coming of his kingdom, for which they are to *cry day and night to him*, Luke, 18. 7.

For the proof of this, that wicked people prosper, he specifies two sorts of unrighteous ones, whom all the world saw thriving in their iniquity.

1. Tyrants, and those that do wrong under pretence of law and authority. It is a melancholy sight, which has often been *seen under the sun, wickedness in the place of judgment*, Eccl. 3. 16. The unregarded tears of the oppressed, while on the side of the oppressors there was power, Eccl. 4. 1. *The violent perverting of justice and judgment*, Eccl. 5. 8.

1. They disseize their neighbours of their real estates, which came to them by descent from their ancestors. They remove the land-marks, under pretence that they were misplaced; (v. 2.) and so they encroach upon their neighbours' rights, and think they effectually secure that to their posterity, which they have got wrongfully, by making that to be an evidence for *them*, which should have been an evidence for the rightful owner. This was forbidden by the law of Moses, (Deut. 19. 14.) under a curse, Deut. 27. 17. Forging or destroying deeds is now a crime equivalent to this.

2. They disposes them of their personal estates, under colour of justice; they violently take away flocks, pretending they are forfeited, and feed thereof; as the rich man took the poor man's ewe-lamb, 2 Sam. 12. 4. If a poor fatherless child has but an ass of his own to get a little money with, they find some colour or other to take it away, because the owner is not able to contest with them. It is all one if a widow has but an ox for what little husbandry she has; under pretence of distraining for some small debt, or arrears of rent, this ox shall be taken for a pledge, though perhaps it is the widow's all. God has taken it among the titles of his honour to be a *Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows*; and therefore those will not be reckoned his friends, that do not to their utmost to protect and help them; but those he will certainly reckon with as his enemies, that vex and oppress them.

3. They take all occasions to offer personal abuses to them, v. 4. They will mislead them if they can, when they meet them on the highway, so that the poor and needy are forced to hide themselves from them; having no other way to secure themselves from them. They love in their hearts to banter people, and to make fools of them, and do them a mischief if they can, especially to triumph over a poor person, whom they turn out of the way of getting relief, threaten to punish them as vagabonds, and so force them to abscond, and laugh at them when they have done.

Some understand those barbarous actions (v. 9, 10.) to be done by those oppressors that pretend law for what they do. They *pluck the fatherless from the breast*; that is, having made poor infants fatherless, they make them motherless too; having taken away the father's life, they break the mother's heart, and so starve the children, and leave them to perish. Pharaoh and Herod plucked the children *from the breast* to the sword; and we read of *children brought forth to the murderers*, Hos. 9. 13. Those are inhuman murderers indeed that can with so much pleasure suck innocent blood. They *take a pledge of the poor*; nay, they take the poor themselves for a pledge, as some read it, and, probably, it was under this pretence that they *plucked the fatherless from the breast*, distraining them for slaves, as Neh. 5. 5. **Cruelty to the poor is great wickedness, and cries aloud for vengeance.** Those who shew no mercy to them that lie at their mercy, shall themselves have judgment without mercy.

Another instance of their barbarous treatment of those they have advantage against, is, that they take from them even their necessary food and raiment: they squeeze them so with their extortion, that they *make them go naked without clothing*, (v. 10.) and so catch their death. And, if a poor hungry family has gleaned a sheaf of corn, to make a little cake of, that they may eat it and die, even that they take away from them, being well pleased to see them perish for want, while they themselves are fed to the full.

4. They are very oppressive to the labourers they employ in their service; they not only give them no wages, though the labourer is worthy of his hire; (and this is a crying sin, Jam. 5. 4.) but they will not so much as give them meat and drink: *those that carry their sheaves are hungry*; so some read it, (v. 10.) and it agrees with v. 11. that those who *make oil within their walls*, and with a great deal of toil labour at the wine-presses, yet suffer thirst, which was worse than muzzling the mouth of the ox that treads out the corn. Those masters forget that they have a Master in heaven, who will not allow the necessary supports of life to their servants and labourers, not caring whether they can live by their labour or no.

5. It is not only among the poor country people, but in the cities

also, that we see the tears of the oppressed, (v. 12.) *men groan from out of the city*, where the rich merchants and traders are as cruel with their poor debtors, as the landlords in the country are with their poor tenants. In cities, such cruel actions as these are more observed than in obscure corners of the country, and the wronged have easier access to justice to right themselves; and yet the oppressors there fear neither the restraints of the law, nor the just censures of their neighbours, but the oppressed groan and cry out like wounded men, and can no more ease and help themselves, for the oppressors are inexorable, and deaf to their groans.

II. He speaks of robbers, and those that do wrong by downright force, as the bands of the Sabeans and Chaldeans, which had lately plundered him; he does not mention them particularly, lest he should seem partial to his own cause, and to judge of men (as we are apt to do) by what they are to us; but among the Arabians, the children of the east, (Job's country,) there were those that lived by spoil and rapine, making incursions upon their neighbours, and robbing travellers. See how they are described here, and what mischief they do, v. 5. 8. 1. Their character is, that they are as wild asses in the desert, untamed, untractable, unreasonable, Ishmael's character; (Gen. 16. 12.) fierce and furious, and under no restraint of law or government, Jer. 2. 23, 24. They choose the deserts for their dwelling, that they may be lawless and unsociable, and that they may have opportunity of doing the more mischief. The desert is indeed the fittest place for such wild people, *ch.* 39. 6. But no desert can set men out of the reach of God's eye and hand. 2. Their trade is to steal, and to make a prey of all about them. They have chosen it as their trade; it is their work, because there is more to be got by it, and it is got more easily than by an honest calling. They follow it as their trade, they follow it closely; they go forth to it as their work, as man goes forth to his labour, Ps. 104. 23. They are diligent, and take pains at it; they rise betimes for a prey; if a traveller be out early, they will be out as soon to rob him; they live by it as a man lives by his trade; the wilderness (not the grounds there, but the roads there) *yieldeth food for them and for their children*; they maintain themselves and their families by robbing on the highway, and bless themselves in it without any remorse of compassion or conscience, and with as much security as if it were honestly got; as Ephraim, Hos. 12. 7, 8. 3. See the mischief they do to the country. They not only rob travellers, but they make incursions upon their neighbours, and *reap every one his corn in the field*, (v. 6.) that is, They enter upon other people's ground, cut their corn, and carry it away as freely as if it were their own: even *the wicked gather the vintage*, and it is their wickedness; or, as we read it, They gather the vintage of the wicked; and so one wicked man is made a scourge to another. What the wicked got by extortion, (which is their way of stealing,) these robbers get from them in their way of stealing; thus oftentimes are the spoilers spoiled, Isa. 33. 1. 4. The misery of those that fall into their hands; (v. 7, 8.) *They cause the naked*, whom they have stripped, not leaving them the clothes to their backs, to lodge, in the cold nights, without clothing, so that they are wet with the showers of the mountains, and, for want of a better shelter, embrace the rock, and are glad of a cave or den in it to preserve them from the injuries of the weather. Eliphaz had charged Job with such inhumanity as this, concluding that Providence would not thus have stripped him if he had not first *stripped the naked of their clothing*, *ch.* 22. 6. Job here tells him, there were those that were really guilty of those crimes with which he was unjustly charged, and yet prospered and had success in their villainies; the curse they laid themselves under working invisibly: and Job thinks it more just to argue, as he did, from an open notorious course of wickedness to a secret and future punishment, than to argue, as Eliphaz did, from nothing but present trouble, to a course of past secret iniquity.

The impunity of these oppressors and spoilers is expressed in one word; (v. 12.) *Yet God layeth not folly to them*, that is, he does not immediately prosecute them with his judgments for these crimes, nor make them examples, and so evince their folly to all the world. He that *gets riches, and not by right, at his end shall be a fool*, Jer. 17. 11. But while he prospers he passes for a wise

man, and God lays not folly to him until he saith, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee*, Luke, 12. 20.

13. They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. 14. The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. 15. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth *his* face. 16. In the dark they dig through houses, *which* they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. 17. For the morning *is* to them even as the shadow of death: if *one* know *them*, *they are in* the terrors of the shadow of death.

These verses describe another sort of sinners, who *therefore* go unpunished, because they go undiscovered. *They rebel against the light*, v. 13. Some understand it figuratively: they sin against the light of nature, the light of God's law, and that of their own consciences; they profess to know God, but they rebel against the knowledge they have of him, and will not be guided and governed, commanded and controlled, by it. Others understand it literally: they have the day-light, and choose the night as the most advantageous season for their wickedness. Sinful works are *therefore* called *works of darkness*, because he *that does evil, hates the light*, (John, 3. 20.) *knows not the ways thereof*, that is, keeps out of the way of it, or, if he happen to be seen, abides not where he thinks he is known. So that he here describes the worst of sinners, 1. That sin wilfully, and against the convictions of their own consciences, whereby they add rebellion to their sin. 2. That sin deliberately, and with a great deal of plot and contrivance, using a thousand arts to conceal their villainies, fondly imagining, that, if they can but hide them from the eye of men, they are safe, but forgetting that *there is no darkness, or shadow of death*, in which *the workers of iniquity can hide themselves* from God's eye, *ch.* 34. 22.

He specifies three sorts of sinners, that shun the light.

(1.) Murderers, v. 14. They *rise with the light*, as soon as ever the day breaks, to kill the poor travellers that are up early, and abroad about their business, going to market with a little money or goods; and though it is so little, that they are really to be called poor and needy, who with much ado get a sorry livelihood by their marketings, yet, to get it, the murderer will both take his neighbour's life and venture his own; will rather play at such small game than not play at all; nay, he kills for killing sake, thirsting more for blood than booty. See what care and pains wicked men take to compass their wicked designs, and let it shame us out of our negligence and slothfulness in doing good.

Ut jugulent homines, surgunt de nocte latrones,
Tuque ut te serves non expergiscis?—

Rogues nightly rise to murder men for pelf;
Will you not rouse you to preserve yourself?

(2.) Adulterers; *the eyes that are full of adultery*, (2 Pet. 2. 14.) the unclean and wanton eyes, *wait for the twilight*, v. 15. The eye of the adulteress did so, Prov. 7. 9. Adultery hides its head for shame: the sinners themselves, even the most impudent, do what they can to hide it: *si non caste, tamen caute*—if not chastely, yet cautiously, and after all the wretched endeavours of the factors for hell to take away the reproach of it, it is and ever will be a *shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret*, Eph. 5. 12. It hides its head also for fear, knowing that *jealousy is the rage of a husband*, who *will not spare in the day of vengeance*, Prov. 6. 34, 35. See what pains those take that make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lust of it; pains to compass, and then to conceal, that provision, which, after all, will be death and hell at last! Less pains would serve to mortify and crucify the flesh, and would be life and heaven at last. Let the sinner change his heart, and then he needs not disguise his face, but may lift it up without spot.

(3.) House-breakers, v. 16. These mark houses in the day-time, mark the avenues of a house, and on which side they can most easily force their entrance, and then, in the night, dig through them, either to kill, or steal, or commit adultery. The night favours the assault, and makes the defence the more difficult; for the *good man of the house knows not what hour the thief will come*, and therefore is asleep, (Luke, 12. 39.) and he and his lie exposed. For this reason, our law makes burglary, which is the breaking and entering of a dwelling-house in the night-time with a felonious intent, to be felony without benefit of clergy.

And lastly, Job observes, (and perhaps observes it as part of the present, though secret, punishment of such sinners as these,) that they are in a continual terror for fear of being discovered; (v. 17.) *The morning is to them even as the shadow of death.* The light of the day, which is welcome to honest people, is a terror to bad people. They curse the sun, not as the Moors, because it scorches them, but because it discovers them. If one know them, their consciences fly in their faces, and they are ready to become their own accusers; for *they are in the terrors of the shadow of death.* Shame came in with sin, and everlasting shame is at the end of it. See the misery of sinners, they are exposed to continual frights; and yet see their folly, they are afraid of coming under the eye of men, but have no dread of God's eye, which is always upon them: they are not afraid of doing that which yet they are so terribly afraid of being known to do.

18. He is swift as the waters; their portion is cursed in the earth: he beholdeth not the way of the vineyards. 19. Drought and heat consume the snow-waters: so doth the grave those which have sinned. 20. The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him; he shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree. 21. He evil entreateth the barren that beareth not: and doeth not good to the widow. 22. He draweth also the mighty with his power: he riseth up, and no man is sure of life. 23. Though it be given him to be in safety, whercon he resteth; yet his eyes are upon their ways. 24. They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn. 25. And if it be not so now, who will make me a liar, and make my speech nothing worth?

Job here, in the conclusion of his discourse,

I. Gives some further instances of the wickedness of these cruel bloody men. 1. Some are pirates and robbers at sea. To this many learned interpreters apply those difficult expressions; (v. 18.) *He is swift upon the waters.* Privateers choose those ships that are the best sailers: in these swift ships, they cruise from one channel to another, to pick up prizes; and this brings them in so much wealth, that their *portion is cursed in the earth*, and they *behold not the way of the vineyards*, that is, as Bishop Patrick explains it, They despise the employment of those who till the ground, and plant vineyards, as poor and unprofitable. But others make this a further description of the conduct of those sinners that are afraid of the light: if they be discovered, they get away as fast as they can, and choose to look, not in the vineyards, for fear of being discovered, but in some cursed portion, a lonely desolate place, which nobody looks after. 2. Some are abusive to those that are in trouble, and add affliction to the afflicted. Barrenness was looked upon as a great reproach, and those that fall under that affliction they upbraid with it, as Peninnah did Hannah, on purpose to vex them and make them to fret, which is a barbarous thing; this is *evil entreating the barren that beareth not*, (v. 21.) or those that are childless, and so want the arrows

others have in their quiver, which enable them to deal with their enemy in the gate, Ps. 127. 5. He takes that advantage against, and is oppressive to, them: as the fatherless, so the childless, are in some degree helpless. For the same reason, it is a cruel thing to hurt the widow, to whom he ought to do good; and not doing good, when it is in our power, is doing hurt. There are those who, by inuring themselves to cruelty, come, at last, to be so exceeding boisterous, that they are *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, v. 22. *He draws the mighty* into a snare with his power; even the greatest are not able to stand before him when he is in his mad fits: he rises up in his passion, and lays about him with so much fury, that no man is sure of his life; nor can he at the same time be sure of his own, for *his hand is against every man, and every man's hand against him*, Gen. 16. 12. One would wonder how any man can take pleasure in making all about him afraid of him, yet there are those that do.

II. He shows that these daring sinners prosper, and are at ease for a while, nay, and often end their days in peace, as Ishmael, who, though he was a man of such a character as is here given, yet both *lived and died in the presence of all his brethren*, as we are told, Gen. 16. 12.—25. 18. Of these sinners here it is said, 1. That it is *given them to be in safety*, v. 23. They seem to be under the special protection of the Divine Providence, and one would wonder how they escape with life through so many dangers as they run themselves into. 2. That they rest upon this, that is, they rely upon this, as sufficient to warrant all their violences: *because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily*, they think that there is no great evil in them, and that God is not displeased with them, nor will ever call them to account. Their prosperity is their security. 3. That they are exalted for a while; they seem to be the favourites of Heaven, and value themselves as making the best figure on earth. They are set up in honour, set up (as they think) out of the reach of danger, and lifted up in the pride of their own spirits. 4. That, at length, they are carried out of the world very silently and gently, and without any remarkable disgrace or terror. "They go down to the grave as easily as snow-water sinks into the dry ground, when it is melted by the sun." So Bishop Patrick explains v. 19. To the same purport he paraphrases v. 20. *The womb shall forget him, &c.* "God sets no such mark of his displeasure upon him, but that his mother may soon forget him: the hand of justice does not hang him on a gibbet for the birds to feed on; but he is carried to his grave like other men, to be the sweet food of worms: there he lies quietly, and neither he nor his wickedness is any more remembered than a tree which is broken to shivers." And, v. 24. *They are taken out of the way as all other*, that is, "They are shut up in their graves like all other men; nay, they die as easily (without those tedious pains which some endure) as an ear of corn is cropped with your hand." Compare this with Solomon's observation; (Ecc. 8. 10.) *I saw the wicked buried who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten.*

III. He foresees their fall, however, and that their death, though they die in ease and honour, will be their ruin. God's eyes are upon their ways; (v. 23.) Though he keep silence, and seem to connive at them, yet he takes notice, and keeps account, of all their wickedness, and will make it to appear shortly, that their most secret sins, which they thought *no eye should see*, (v. 15.) were under his eye, and will be called over again. Here is no mention of the punishment of these sinners in the other world, but it is intimated in the particular notice taken of the consequences of his death. 1. The consumption of the body in the grave, though common to all, yet to him is in the nature of a punishment for his sin. *The grave shall consume those that have sinned*; that land of darkness will be the lot of those that *love darkness rather than light*. The bodies they pampered shall be a feast for worms, which shall feed as sweetly on them as ever they fed on the pleasures and gains of their sins. 2. Though they thought to make themselves a great name by their wealth, and power, and mighty achievements, yet *their memorial is perished with them*, Ps. 9. 6. He that made himself so much talked of, when he is dead, *shall be no more remembered* with honour; his *name shall rot*, Prov. 10. 7. They

that durst not give him his due character while he lived, shall not spare him when he is dead; so that the womb that bare him, his own mother, shall forget him, that is, shall avoid making mention of him, and shall think *that* the greatest kindness she can do him, since no good can be said of him. That honour which is got by sin will soon turn into shame. 3. The wickedness they thought to establish in their families, shall be broken as a tree; all their wicked projects shall be blasted, and all their wicked hopes dashed and buried with them. 4. Their pride shall be brought down, and laid in the dust; (v.24.) and, in mercy to the world, they shall be taken out of the way, and all their power and prosperity shall be cut off; you may seek him, and he shall not be found. Job owns that wicked people will be miserable at last, miserable on the other side death, but utterly denies what his friends asserted, that they are, usually, miserable in this life.

Lastly, He concludes with a bold challenge to all that were present, to disprove what he had said, if they could; (v.25.) "*If it be not so now*, as I have declared, and if it do not thence follow that I am unjustly condemned and censured, let them that can, undertake to prove that my discourse is either, 1. False in itself, and then they prove me a liar; or, 2. Foreign, and nothing to the purpose, and then they prove my speech frivolous and nothing worth." That, indeed, which is false, is nothing worth; where there is not truth, how can there be goodness? But they that speak the words of truth and soberness, need not fear having what they say brought to the test, but can cheerfully submit it to a fair examination, as Job does here.

CHAP. XXV.

Bildad here makes a very short reply to Job's last discourse, as one that began to be tired of the cause. He drops the main question concerning the prosperity of wicked men, as being unable to answer the proofs Job had produced in the foregoing chapter: but, because he thought Job had made too bold with the Divine Majesty in his appeals to the divine tribunal, (ch.23.) he, in a few words, shews the infinite distance there is between God and man, teaching us, I. To think highly and honourably of God, v.2,3,5. II. To think meanly of ourselves; (v.4,6.) which, however misapplied to Job, are two good lessons for us all to learn.

1. **THEN** answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, 2. Dominion and fear *are* with him, he maketh peace in his high places. 3. Is there any number of his armies? and upon whom doth not his light arise? 4. How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean *that* is born of a woman? 5. Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. 6. How much less man, *that* is a worm; and the son of man, *which* is a worm!

Bildad is to be commended here for two things: 1. For speaking no more on the subject about which Job and he differed. Perhaps he began to think Job was in the right, and then it was justice to say no more concerning it, as one that contended for truth, not for victory; and therefore, for the finding of truth, would be content to lose the victory: or if he still thought himself in the right, yet he knew when he had said enough, and would not wrangle endlessly for the last word. Perhaps, indeed, one reason why he and the rest of them let fall this debate, was because they perceived that Job and they did not differ so much in opinion as they thought: they owned that wicked people might prosper a while, and Job owned they would be destroyed at last; how little then was the difference! If disputants would understand one another better, perhaps they would find themselves nearer one another than they imagined. 2. For speaking so well on the matter about which Job and he were agreed. If we would all get our hearts filled with awful thoughts of God, and humble thoughts of ourselves, we should not be so apt as we are to fall out about matters of doubtful disputation, which are trifling or intricate.

Two ways Bildad takes here to exalt God and abase man.

1. He shews how glorious God is, and thence infers how guilty and impure man is before him, v.2..4. Let us see then,

1. What great things are here said of God, designed to possess Job with a reverence of him, and to check his reflections upon him, and upon his dealings with him.

(1.) God is the sovereign Lord of all, and *with him is terrible majesty. Dominion and fear are with him*, v.2. He that gave being, has an incontestable authority to give laws, and can enforce the laws he gives. He that made all, has a right to dispose of all according to his own will, with an absolute sovereignty. Whatever he will do, he does, and may do; and none can say unto him, *What doest thou?* or *Why doest thou so?* Dan.4.35. His having dominion (or being *Dominus—Lord*) bespeaks him both Owner and Ruler of all the creatures. They are all his, and they are all under his direction, and at his disposal. Hence it follows that he is to be feared, that is, revered and obeyed, and that he is feared by all that know him; the seraphims cover their faces before him; it follows too, that, first or last, all will be made to fear him. Men's dominion is often despicable, often despised, but God is always terrible.

(2.) The glorious inhabitants of the upper world are all perfectly observant of him, and entirely acquiesce in his will. *He maketh peace in his high places.* He enjoys himself in a perfect tranquillity: the holy angels never quarrel with him, nor with one another, but entirely acquiesce in his will, and unanimously execute it, without murmuring or disputing: thus the will of God is done in heaven; and thus we pray it may be done by us and others on earth. The sun, moon, and stars, keep their courses, and never clash with one another: nay, even in this lower region, which is often disturbed with storms and tempests, yet, when God pleases, he commands peace, by *making the storm a calm*, Ps.107. 29.—65. 7. Observe, The high places are *his* high places; for *the heavens, even the heavens, are the Lord's* in a peculiar manner: peace is God's work; where it is made, it is he that makes it, Isa.57.19. In heaven there is perfect peace; for there is perfect holiness, and there is God, who is love.

(3.) He is a God of irresistible power; *Is there any number of his armies?* v.3. The greatness and power of princes is judged of by their armies. God is not only himself almighty, but he has numberless numbers of armies at his beck and disposal; standing armies that are never disbanded; regular troops, and well disciplined, that are never at a loss, that never mutiny; veteran troops, that have been long in his service; victorious troops, that never failed of success, nor were ever foiled. All the creatures are his hosts, angels especially. He is Lord of all, Lord of hosts. He has numberless armies, and yet makes peace; he could make war upon us, but is willing to be at peace with us; and even the heavenly hosts were sent to proclaim *peace on earth and good will toward men*, Luke,2.14.

(4.) His providence extends itself to all; *Upon whom does not his light arise?* The light of the sun is communicated to all parts of the world, and, take the year round, to all equally. See Ps.19.6. That is a faint resemblance of the universal cognizance and care God takes of the whole creation, Matth.5.45. All are under the light of his knowledge, and are naked and open before him. All partake of the light of his goodness: it seems especially to be meant of *that*. He is good to all; the earth is full of his goodness. He is *Deus Optimus—God, the best of beings*, as well as *maximus—the greatest*: he has power to destroy; but his pleasure is, to shew mercy. All the creatures live upon his bounty.

2. What low things are here said of man, and very truly and justly; (v.4.) *How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean?* Man is not only mean, but vile, not only earthy, but filthy: he cannot be justified, he cannot be clean, (1.) In comparison with God. Man's righteousness and holiness, at the best, are nothing to God's, Ps.89.6. (2.) In debate with God. He that will quarrel with the word and providence of God, must unavoidably go by the worst. God will be justified, and then man will be condemned, Ps.51.4. Rom.3.4. There is no error in God's judgment, and therefore there lies no exception against it,

nor appeal from it. (3.) In the sight of God. If God is so great and glorious, how can man, who is guilty and impure, appear before him? Note, [1.] Man, by reason of his actual transgressions, is obnoxious to God's justice, and cannot in himself be justified before him: he can neither plead *Not guilty*, nor plead any merit of his own to balance or extenuate his guilt. The scripture has concluded all under sin. [2.] Man, by reason of his original corruption, as he is born of a woman, is odious to God's holiness, and cannot be clean in his sight. God sees his impurity, and it is certain that by it he is rendered utterly unfit for communion and fellowship with God in grace here, and for the vision and fruition of him in glory hereafter. We have need, therefore, to be born again of water and of the Holy Ghost, and to be bathed again and again in the blood of Christ, that fountain opened.

II. He shews how dark and defective even the heavenly bodies are, in the sight of God, and in comparison with him; and thence infers how little, and mean, and worthless, man is.

1. The lights of heaven, though beauteous creatures, are before God as *clouds of earth*; (v. 5.) *Behold even to the moon*, walking in brightness, and the stars, those glorious lamps of heaven, which the heathen were so charmed with the lustre of, that they worshipped them—yet, in God's sight, in comparison with him, they shine not, they are not pure; they have no glory, by reason of the glory which excelleth. As a candle, though it burn, yet does not shine when it is set in the clear light of the sun. The glory of God, shining in his providences, eclipses the glory of the brightest creatures; (Isa. 24. 23.) *The moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in mount Zion*. The heavenly bodies are often clouded; we plainly see spots in the moon, and, with the help of glasses, may sometimes discern spots upon the sun too; but God sees spots in them, that we do not see. How durst Job then so confidently appeal to God, who would discover that : miss in him, which he was not aware of in himself?

2. The children of men, though noble creatures, are before God but as *worms of the earth*; (v. 6.) *How much less does man shine in honour, how much less is he pure in righteousness, that is a worm, and the son of man*, whoever he be, *that is a worm*! A vermin, so some; not only mean and despicable, but noxious and detestable. A mite, so others; the smallest animal, which cannot be discerned with the naked eye, but through a magnifying glass: such a thing is man. (1.) So mean, and little, and inconsiderable, in comparison with God, and with the holy angels: so worthless and despicable, having his original in corruption, and hastening to corruption. What little reason has man then to be proud, and what great reason to be humble! (2.) So weak and impotent, and so easily crushed, and therefore a very unequal match for Almighty God. Shall man be such a fool to contend with his Maker, who can tread him to pieces more easily than we can a worm? (3.) So sordid and filthy. Man is not pure, for he is a worm, hatched in putrefaction, and therefore odious to God. Let us therefore wonder at God's condescension, in taking such worms as we are into covenant and communion with himself, especially at the condescension of the Son of God, in emptying himself so far as to say, *I am a worm, and no man*, Ps. 22. 6.

CHAP. XXVI.

This is Job's short reply to Bildad's short discourse, in which he is so far from contradicting him, that he confirms what he had said, and out-does him in magnifying God, and setting forth his power, to shew what reason he had still to say as he did, (ch. 13. 2.) What ye know, the same do I know also. I. He shews that Bildad's discourse was foreign to the matter he was discoursing of: though very true and good, yet not to the purpose, v. 2. .4. II. That it was needless to the person he was discoursing with; for he knew it, and believed it, and could speak of it as well as he, and better, and could add to the proofs which he had produced of God's power and greatness, which he does in the rest of his discourse, (v. 5. .13.) concluding, that, when they had both said what they could, all came short of the merit of the subject, and it was still far from being exhausted, v. 14.

1. **B**UT Job answered and said, 2. How hast thou helped *him that is without power*? how savest thou the arm *that hath no strength*?

3. How hast thou counselled *him that hath no wisdom*? and *how* hast thou plentifully declared the thing as it is? 4. To whom hast thou uttered words? and whose spirit came from thee?

One would not have thought that Job, now that he was in so much pain and misery, could have bantered his friend as he does here, and made himself merry with the impertinency of his discourse. Bildad thought that he had made a fine speech, that the matter was so weighty, and the language so fine, that he had gained the reputation both of an oracle and of an orator; but Job peevishly enough shews that his performance was not so valuable as he thought it, and ridicules him for it. He shews,

1. That there was no great matter to be found in it; (v. 3.) *How hast thou plentifully declared the thing as it is?* This is spoken ironically, upbraiding Bildad with the good conceit he himself had of what he had said. (1.) He thought he had spoken very clearly, had *declared the thing as it is*. He was very fond (as we are all apt to be) of his own notions, and thought they only were right, and true, and intelligible, and all other notions of the thing were false, mistaken, and confused; whereas, when we speak of the glory of God, we cannot declare the thing as it is; for we see it through a glass darkly, or but by reflection, and shall not see him as he is, till we come to heaven. Here *we cannot order our speech concerning him*, ch. 37. 19. (2.) He thought he had spoken very fully, though in few words, that he had plentifully declared it; and, alas! it was but poorly and scantily that he declared it, in comparison with the vast compass and copiousness of the subject.

2. That there was no great use to be made of it; *Cui bono*—*What good hast thou done* by all that thou hast said? (v. 2.) *How hast thou, with all this mighty flourish, helped him that is without power?* (v. 3.) *How hast thou, with thy grave dictates, counselled him that has no wisdom?* Job would convince him, (1.) That he had done God no service by it, nor made him in the least beholden to him. It is indeed our duty, and will be our honour, to speak on God's behalf; but we must not think that he needs our service, or is indebted to us for it, nor will he accept it, if it come from a spirit of contention and contradiction, and not from a sincere regard to God's glory. (2.) That he had done his cause no service by it. He thought his friends were mightily beholden to him, for helping them, at a dead lift, to make their part good against Job, when they were quite at a loss, and had no strength, no wisdom. Even weak disputants, when warm, are apt to think truth more beholden to them than really it is. (3.) That he had done him no service by it. He pretended to convince, instruct, and comfort, Job; but, alas! what he had said was so little to the purpose, that it would not avail to rectify any mistakes, nor to assist him either in bearing his afflictions, or in getting good by them; (v. 4.) *To whom hast thou uttered words?* Was it to me that thou didst direct thy discourse? And dost thou take me for such a child as to need these instructions? Or dost thou think them proper for one in my condition? Every thing that is true and good is not suitable and seasonable. To one that was humbled, and broken, and grieved in spirit, as Job was, he ought to have preached of the grace and mercy of God, rather than of his greatness and majesty, to have laid before him the consolations, rather than the terrors, of the Almighty. Christ knows how to speak what is proper for the weary; (Isa. 50. 4.) and his ministers should learn rightly to divide the word of truth, and not make those sad, whom God would not have made sad; as Bildad did: and therefore Job asks him, *Whose spirit came from thee?* that is, "What troubled soul would ever be revived and relieved, and brought to itself, by such discourses as these?" Thus are we often disappointed in our expectations from our friends who should comfort us, but the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, never mistakes in his operations, nor misses of his end.

5. Dead *things* are formed from under the waters, and the inhabitants thereof. 6. Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. 7. He

stretcheth out the north over the empty place, *and* hangeth the earth upon nothing. 8. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them. 9. He holdeth back the face of his throne, *and* spreadeth his cloud upon it. 10. He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end. 11. The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof. 12. He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud. 13. By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent. 14. Lo, these *are* parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him! but the thunder of his power who can understand?

The truth received a great deal of light from the dispute between Job and his friends, concerning those points about which they differed; but now they are upon a subject in which they were all agreed, the infinite glory and power of God. How does truth triumph, and how bright does it shine, when there appears no other strife between the contenders, than which shall speak most highly and honourably of God, and be most large in shewing forth his praise! It were well if all disputes about matters of religion might end thus, in *glorifying God* as Lord of all, and our Lord, *with one mind and one mouth*; (Rom. 15. 6.) for to that we have all attained, in that we are all agreed.

I. Many illustrious instances are here given of the wisdom and power of God, in the creation and preservation of the world.

1. If we look about us, to the earth and waters here below, we shall see striking instances of omnipotence, which we may gather out of these verses.

(1.) *He hangs the earth upon nothing, v. 7.* The vast terraqueous globe neither rests upon any pillars, nor hangs upon any axle-tree; and yet, by the almighty power of God, is firmly fixed in its place, poised with its own weight. The art of man could not hang a feather upon nothing, yet the Divine Wisdom hangs the whole earth so. It is *ponderibus librata suis*—poised by its own weight, so says the poet; it is *upheld by the word of God's power*, so says the apostle. What is hung upon nothing may serve us to set our feet on, and bear the weight of our bodies, but it will never serve us to set our hearts on, nor bear the weight of our souls.

(2.) *He sets bounds to the waters of the sea, and compasses them in, (v. 10.)* that they may not return to cover the earth; and these bounds shall continue unmoved, unshaken, unworn, *till the day and night come to an end*, when time shall be no more. Herein appears the dominion which Providence has over the raging waters of the sea, and so it is an instance of his power, Jer. 5. 22. We see too the care which Providence takes of the poor sinful inhabitants of the earth, who, though obnoxious to his justice, and lying at his mercy, are thus preserved from being overwhelmed, as they were once, by the waters of a flood, and will continue to be so, because they are reserved unto fire.

(3.) *He forms dead things under the waters. Rephaim, giants, are formed under the waters*, that is, vast creatures, of prodigious bulk, as whales, giant-like creatures, among the innumerable inhabitants of the water. So Bishop Patrick.

(4.) By mighty storms and tempests he shakes the mountains, which are here called *the pillars of heaven, (v. 11.)* and even divides the sea, and smites through its proud waves, *v. 12.* At the presence of the Lord, *the sea flies*, and the mountains ship, Ps. 114. 3, 4. See Hab. 3. 6, &c. A storm furrows the waters, and does, as it were, divide them; and then a calm smites through the waves, and lays them flat again. See Ps. 89. 9, 10. Those who think Job lived at, or after, the time of Moses, apply this to the dividing of the Red-sea before the children of Israel, and the drowning of the Egyptians in it. *By his understanding*

he smiteth through Rahab, so the word is, and Rahab is often put for Egypt; as Ps. 87. 4. Isa. 51. 9.

2. If we consider hell beneath, though it is out of our sight, yet we may conceive the instances of God's power there. *By hell and destruction, (v. 6.)* we may understand the grave, and those who are buried in it, that they are under the eye of God, though laid out of our sight, which may strengthen our belief of the resurrection of the dead. God knows where to find, and whence to fetch, all the scattered atoms of the consumed body. We may also consider the grave as the place of the damned, where the separate souls of the wicked are in misery and torment. That is hell and destruction, which are said to be *before the Lord*, (Prov. 15. 11.) and here to be *naked before him*, to which it is probable there is an allusion, (Rev. 14. 10.) where sinners are said to be tormented *in the presence of the holy angels*, (who attended the Shechinah,) and *in the presence of the Lamb*. And this may give light to v. 5. which some ancient versions read thus; (and I think more agreeable to the signification of the word *Rephaim*;) *Behold, the giants groan under the waters, and those that dwell with them*; and then follows, *Hell is naked before him*, typified by the drowning of the giants of the old world; so the learned Mr. Joseph Mede understands it, and with it illustrates Prov. 21. 16. where hell is called *the congregation of the dead*; and it is the same word which is here used, and which he would there have rendered *the congregation of the giants*, in allusion to the drowning of the sinners of the old world. And is there any thing in which the majesty of God appears more dreadful than in the eternal ruin of the ungodly, and the groans of the inhabitants of the land of darkness? Those that will not with angels fear and worship, shall for ever with devils fear and tremble, and God therein will be glorified.

3. If we look up to heaven above, we shall see instances of God's sovereignty and power.

(1.) *He stretches out the north over the empty place, v. 7.* So he did at first, then *he stretched out the heavens like a curtain*, (Ps. 104. 2.) and still continues to keep them stretched out, and will do so till the general conflagration, when they shall be *rolled together as a scroll*, Rev. 6. 14. He mentions the north, because his country (as our's) lay in the northern hemisphere; and the air is the empty place over which it is stretched out. See Ps. 89. 12. What an empty place is *this world*, in comparison with the other!

(2.) He keeps the waters that are said to be *above the firmament* from pouring down upon the earth, as once they did; (v. 8.) *He binds up the waters in his thick clouds*, as if they were tied close in a bag, till there is occasion to use them; and, notwithstanding the vast weight of water so raised and laid up, yet *the cloud is not rent under them*, for then they would burst, and pour out as a spout; but they do, as it were, distil through the cloud, and so come drop by drop, in mercy to the earth, in small rain, or great rain, as he pleases.

(3.) He conceals the glory of the upper world, the dazzling lustre of which we poor mortals could not bear; (v. 9.) *He holds back the face of his throne*, that light in which he dwells, and *spreads a cloud upon it*, through which he judges, ch. 22. 13. God will have us to live by faith, not by sense; for this is agreeable to a state of probation. It were not a fair trial, if the face of God's throne were as visible now, as it will be in the great day.

Lest his high throne, above expression bright,
With deadly glory should oppress our sight,
To break the dazzling force, he draws a screen
Of sable shades, and spreads his clouds between.

Sir R. BLACKMORE.

(4.) The bright ornaments of heaven are the work of his hands; (v. 13.) *By his Spirit*, the eternal Spirit that moved upon the face of the waters, *the breath of his mouth*, (Ps. 33. 6.) *he has garnished the heavens*, not only made them, but beautified them; has curiously bespangled them with stars by night, and painted them with the light of the sun by day. God, having made man to look upward, (*Os homini sublime dedit*—*To man he gave an erect countenance*,) has therefore garnished the heavens, to invite him to look upward, that, by pleasing his eye with the dazzling light of the sun, and the sparkling light of the stars, their number, order, and

various magnitudes, which, as so many golden studs, beautify the canopy drawn over our heads, he may be led to admire the great Creator, the Father and Fountain of lights, and to say, "If the pavement be so richly inlaid, what must the palace be! If the visible heavens be so glorious, what are those that are out of sight!" From the beauteous garniture of the ante-chamber, we may infer the precious furniture of the presence-chamber. If stars be so bright, what are angels! What is meant here by the crooked serpent which his hands have formed is not certain. Some make it part of the garnishing of the heavens, the milky-way, say some; some particular constellation, so called, say others. It is the same word that is used for leviathan, (Isa. 27. 1.) and, probably, may be meant of the whale or crocodile, in which appears much of the power of the Creator; and why may not Job conclude with that inference, when God himself does so? *ch. 41.*

II. He concludes, at last, with an awful *et cætera*; (v. 14.) *Lo, these are parts of his ways*, the out-goings of his wisdom and power, the ways in which he walks, and by which he makes himself known to the children of men. Here, 1. He acknowledges, with adoration, the discoveries that were made of God. These things which he himself had said, and which Bildad had said, are his ways, and this is heard of him; this is something of God. But, 2. He admires the depth of that which is undiscovered. This that we have said is but part of his ways, a small part. What we know of God, is nothing in comparison with what is in God, and what God is. After all the discoveries which God has made to us, and all the inquiries we have made after God, still we are much in the dark concerning him, and must conclude, *Lo, these are but parts of his ways*. Something we hear of him by his works and by his word; but, alas, *how little a portion is heard of him!* heard by us, heard from us! We know but in part, we prophesy but in part. When we have said all we can concerning God, we must even do as St. Paul does; (Rom. 11. 33.) despairing to find the bottom, we must sit down at the brink, and adore the depth: *O the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* It is but a little portion that we hear and know of God in our present state. He is infinite and incomprehensible; our understandings and capacities are weak and shallow, and the full discoveries of the divine glory are reserved for the future state. Even *the thunder of his power*, that is, his powerful thunder, one of the lowest of his ways here in our own region, we cannot understand. See *ch. 37. 4, 5.* Much less can we understand the utmost force and extent of his power, the terrible efforts and operations of it, and particularly *the power of his danger*, Ps. 90. 11. God is great, and we know him not.

CHAP. XXVII.

Job had sometimes complained of his friends, that they were so eager in disputing, that they would scarcely let him put in a word; Suffer me that I may speak, and Oh that you would hold your peace! But now, it seems, they were out of breath, and left him room to say what he would: either they were themselves convinced that Job was in the right, or they despaired of convincing him that he was in the wrong; and therefore they threw away their weapons, and gave up the cause. Job was too hard for them, and forced them to quit the field; for great is the truth, and will prevail. What Job had said (ch. 26.) was a sufficient answer to Bildad's discourse; and now Job paused a while to see whether Zophar would take his turn again; but he declining it, Job himself went on, and, without any interruption or vexation given him, said all he desired to say in this matter. I. He begins with a solemn protestation of his integrity, and of his resolution to hold it fast, v. 2. 6. II. He expresses the dread he had of that hypocrisy which they charged him with, v. 7. 10. III. He shews the miserable end of wicked people, notwithstanding their long prosperity, and the curse that attends them, and is entailed upon their families, v. 11. 23.

1. **M**OREOVER Job continued his parable, and said, 2. *As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul;* 3. *All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils;* 4. *My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.* 5. *God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine in-*

tegrity from me. 6. *My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

Job's discourse here is called a *parable*, (*maschal*;) the title of Solomon's proverbs, because it was grave and weighty, and very instructive; and he spake as one having authority. It comes from a word that signifies *to rule*, or *have dominion*; and some think it intimates that Job now triumphed over his opponents, and spake as one that had baffled them. We say of an excellent preacher, that he knows how *dominari in concionibus*—*to command his hearers*. Job did so here.

A long strife there had been between Job and his friends; they seemed disposed to have the matter compromised; and therefore, since an *oath for confirmation is an end of strife*, (Heb. 6. 16.) Job here backs all he had said, in maintenance of his own integrity, with a solemn oath, to silence contradiction, and take the blame entirely upon himself, if he prevaricated. Observe,

1. The form of his oath; (v. 2.) *As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment.* Here, (1.) He speaks highly of God, in calling him *the living God*, (which means *ever-living*, the eternal God, that has life in himself,) and in appealing to him as the sole and sovereign Judge. We can swear by no greater, and it is an affront to him to swear by any other. (2.) Yet he speaks hardly of him, and unbecomingly, in saying that he had taken away his judgment, that is, refused to do him justice in this controversy, and to appear in defence of him, and that, by continuing his troubles, on which his friends grounded their censures of him, he had taken from him the opportunity he hoped ere now to have had of clearing himself. Elihu reproved him for this word; (*ch. 34. 5.*) for God is righteous in all his ways, and takes away no man's judgment. But see how apt we are to despair of favour, if it be not shewed us immediately; so poor-spirited are we, and so soon weary of waiting God's time. He also charges it upon God, that he had vexed his soul; had not only not appeared for him, but had appeared against him, and, by laying such grievous afflictions upon him, had quite embittered his life to him, and all the comforts of it. We, by our impatience, vex our own souls, and then complain of God that he has vexed them. Yet see Job's confidence in the goodness both of his cause and of his God; that, though God seemed to be angry with him, and to act against him, for the present, yet he could cheerfully commit his cause to him.

2. The matter of his oath, v. 3, 4. (1.) That he would not speak wickedness, nor utter deceit. That, in general, he would never allow himself in the way of lying; that, as in this debate he had all along spoken as he thought, so he would never wrong his conscience by speaking otherwise: he would never maintain any doctrine, nor assert any matter of fact, but what he believed to be true; nor would he deny the truth, how much soever it might make against him: and, whereas his friends charged him with being a hypocrite, he was ready to answer, upon oath, to all their interrogatories, if called to it. On the one hand, he would not, for all the world, deny the charge, if he knew himself guilty, but would declare the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and take to himself the shame of his hypocrisy: on the other hand, since he was conscious to himself of his integrity, and that he was not such a man as his friends represented him, he would never betray his integrity, nor charge himself with that which he was innocent of; he would not be brought, no not by the rack of their unjust censures, falsely to accuse himself. If we must not bear false witness against our neighbour, then not against ourselves. (2.) That he would adhere to this resolution as long as he lived; (v. 3.) *All the while my breath is in me.* Our resolutions against sin should be thus constant, resolutions for life: in things doubtful and indifferent, it is not safe to be thus peremptory; we know not what reason we may see to change our mind, God may reveal to us that which we now are not aware of; but in so plain a thing as this, we cannot be too positive, that we will never speak wickedness. Something of a reason for his resolution is here implied—that our breath will not be always in us; we must shortly breathe

Inflexible justice cannot be biassed, nor the irreversible sentence revoked. See Matth. 7. 22, 23. Luke, 13. 26, and the case of the foolish virgins, Matth. 25. 11.

3. Because the hypocrite's religion is neither comfortable nor constant; (v. 10.) *Will he delight himself in the Almighty?* No, not at any time, (for his delight is in the profits of the world, and the pleasures of the flesh, more than in God,) especially not in the time of trouble. *Will he always call upon God?* No, in prosperity he will not call upon God, but slight him; in adversity, he will not call upon God, but curse him; he is weary of his religion, when he gets nothing by it, or is in danger of losing. Note, (1.) Those are hypocrites, who, though they profess religion, neither take pleasure in it, nor persevere in it; who reckon their religion a task and a drudgery, a weariness, and snuff at it; who make use of it only to serve a turn, and lay it aside when the turn is served; who will call upon God while it is in fashion, or while the pang of devotion lasts, but leave it off when they fall into other company, or when the hot fit is over. (2.) The reason why hypocrites do not persevere in religion, is, because they have no pleasure in it. They that do not delight themselves in the Almighty, will not always call upon him. The more comfort we find in our religion, the more closely we shall cleave to it. Those who have no delight in God, are easily inveigled by the pleasures of sense, and so drawn away from their religion; and they are easily run down by the crosses of this life, and so driven away from their religion, and will not always call upon God.

11. I will teach you by the hand of God: *that which is with the Almighty will I not conceal.* 12. Behold, all ye yourselves have seen *it*; why then are ye thus altogether vain? 13. This *is* the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, *which* they shall receive of the Almighty. 14. If his children be multiplied, *it is* for the sword; and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread. 15. Those that remain of him shall be buried in death: and his widows shall not weep. 16. Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; 17. He may prepare *it*, but the just shall put *it* on, and the innocent shall divide the silver. 18. He buildeth his house as a moth, and as a booth *that* the keeper maketh. 19. The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered: he openeth his eyes, and he *is* not. 20. Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night. 21. The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and as a storm hurleth him out of his place. 22. For *God* shall east upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand. 23. *Men* shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place.

Job's friends had seen a great deal of the misery and destruction that attend wicked people, especially oppressors; and Job, while the heat of disputation lasted, had said as much, and with as much assurance, of their prosperity; but now, that the heat of the battle was nearly over, he was willing to own how far he agreed with them, and where the difference between his opinion and their's lay. 1. He agreed with them, that wicked people are miserable people; that God will surely reckon with cruel oppressors, and, one time or other, one way or other, his justice will make reprisals upon them for all the affronts they have put upon God, and all the wrongs they have done to their neighbours. This truth is abundantly confirmed by the entire concurrence even of these

angry disputants in it. But, 2. In *this* they differed. They held that these deserved judgments are presently and visibly brought upon wicked oppressors; that *they travail with pain all their days*, that in prosperity *the destroyer comes upon them*; that *they shall not be rich*, nor their branch green; and that *their destruction shall be accomplished before their time*; so Eliphaz; (ch. 15. 20, 21, 29, 32.) that *the steps of their strength shall be straitened*; that *terrors shall make them afraid on every side*; so Bildad; (ch. 18. 7, 11.) that *he himself shall vomit up his riches*, and that *in the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits*; so Zophar, ch. 20. 15, 22. Now Job held that, in many cases, judgments do not fall upon them quickly, but are deferred for some time. That vengeance strikes slowly, he had already shewed; (ch. 21. and 24.) now he comes to shew that it strikes surely and severely, and that reprieves are no pardons.

1. Job here undertakes to set this matter in a true light; (v. 11, 12.) *I will teach you*. We must not disdain to learn even from those who are sick and poor, yea, and peevish too, if they deliver what is true and good. Observe, 1. What he would teach them; "*That which is with the Almighty*," that is, "the counsels and purposes of God concerning wicked people, which are hid with him, and which you cannot hastily judge of; and the usual methods of his providence concerning them:" This, says Job, *will I not conceal*. What God has not concealed from us, we must not conceal from those we are concerned to teach. *Things revealed belong to us and our children*. 2. How he would teach them; *By the hand of God*, that is, by his strength and assistance. Those who undertake to teach others must look to the hand of God to direct them, to open their ear, (Isa. 50. 4.) and to open their lips. Those whom God teaches with a strong hand, are best able to teach others, Isa. 8. 11. 3. What reason they had to learn those things which he was about to teach them; (v. 12.) that it was confirmed by their own observation; *You yourselves have seen it*; (but what we have heard, and seen, and known, we have need to be taught, that we may be perfect in our lesson;) and that it would set them to rights in their judgment concerning him; "*Why then are ye thus altogether vain, to condemn me for a wicked man because I am afflicted?*" Truth, rightly understood and applied, would cure us of that vanity of mind which arises from our mistakes.

That particularly which he offers now to lay before them, *is, the portion of a wicked man with God*, particularly of oppressors, v. 13. Compare ch. 20. 29. Their portion in the world may be wealth and preferment, but their portion with God is ruin and misery. They are above the controul of any earthly power, it may be, but the Almighty can deal with them.

II. He does it, by shewing that wicked people may, in some instances, prosper, but that ruin follows them in those very instances; and that is their portion, that is their heritage, that is it which they must abide by.

1. They may prosper in their children, but ruin attends them. *His children perhaps are multiplied*, (v. 14.) or *magnified*, so some; they are very numerous, and are raised to honour and great estates. Worldly people are said to be *full of children*; (Ps. 17. 14.) and, as it is in the margin there, *their children are full*. In them the parents hope to live, and in their preferment to be honoured. But the more children they leave, and the greater prosperity they leave them in, the more and the fairer marks do they leave for the arrows of God's judgments to be levelled at: his three sore judgments, *sword, famine, and pestilence*, 2 Sam. 24. 13. (1.) Some of them shall die by the sword, the sword of war, perhaps; they brought them up to live by their sword, as Esau; (Gen. 27. 40.) and those that do so, commonly die by the sword, first or last: or by the sword of justice for their crimes, or the sword of the murderer for their estates. (2.) Others of them shall die by famine; (v. 14.) *His offspring shall not be satisfied with bread*. He thought he had secured to them large estates, but it may happen that they may be reduced to poverty, so as not to have the necessary supports of life, at least not to live comfortably. They shall be so needy, that they shall not have a competency of necessary food, and so greedy, or so discontented,

that what they have they shall not be satisfied with, because not so much, or not so dainty, as what they have been used to. *Ye eat, but ye have not enough*, Hag. 1. 6. (3.) Those that remain shall be buried in death, that is, shall die of the plague, which is called death, (Rev. 6. 8.) and be buried privately and in haste, as soon as they are dead, without any solemnity; *buried with the burial of an ass*; and even their widows shall not weep; they shall not have wherewithal to put them in mourning. Or it denotes, that these wicked men, as they live undesired, so they die unlamented, and even their widows will think themselves happy that they are got rid of them.

2. They may prosper in their estates, but ruin attends them too, v. 16. . 18. (1.) We will suppose them to be rich in money and plate, in clothing and furniture; *They heap up silver*, in abundance as the dust, and *prepare raiment as the clay*; they have heaps of clothes about them, as plentiful as heaps of clay: or it intimates that they have such abundance of clothes, that they are even a burthen to them; *they lade themselves with thick clay*, Hab. 2. 6. See what is the care and business of worldly people—To heap up worldly wealth. Much would have more, until the silver is cankered, and the garments moth-eaten, Jam. 5. 2, 3. But what comes of it? He shall never be the better for it himself; death will strip him, death will rob him, if he be not robbed and stripped sooner, Luke, 12. 20. Nay, God will so order it, that the just shall wear his raiment, and the innocent shall divide his silver. [1.] They shall have it, and divide it among themselves; some way or other, Providence shall so order it, that good men shall come honestly by that wealth which the wicked man came dishonestly by. *The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just*, Prov. 13. 22. God disposes of men's estates as he pleases, and often makes their wills, against their will. The just, whom he hated and persecuted, shall have rule over all his labour, and, in due time, recover with interest what was violently taken from him. The Egyptians' jewels were the Israelites' pay. Solomon observes, (Eccl. 2. 26.) that God makes the sinners drudges to the righteous; for to the sinner he gives travail to gather and heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. [2.] They shall do good with it; the innocent shall not hoard the silver, as he did that gathered it, but shall divide it to the poor, shall give a portion to seven, and also to eight, which is laying up the best securities. Money is like manure, good for nothing if it be not spread. When God enriches good men, they must remember they are but stewards, and must give an account. What bad men bring a curse upon their families with the ill-getting of, good men bring a blessing upon their families with the well-using of. *He that by unjust gain increaseth his substance, shall gather it for him that will pity the poor*, Prov. 28. 8. (2.) We will suppose them to have built them strong and stately houses; but they are like the house which the moth makes for herself in an old garment, out of which she will soon be shaken, v. 18. He is very secure in it, as a moth, and has no apprehension of danger; but it will prove of as short continuance as a booth which the keeper makes, which will quickly be taken down and gone, and his place shall know him no more.

3. Destruction attends their persons, though they lived long in health, and at ease; (v. 19.) *The rich man shall lie down to sleep, to repose himself in the abundance of his wealth, Soul, take thine ease*; shall lie down in it as his strong city, and seem to others to be very happy and very easy; but he shall not be gathered, that is, he shall not have his mind composed, and settled, and gathered in, to enjoy his wealth. He does not sleep so contentedly as people think he does. He lies down, but his abundance will not suffer him to sleep, at least not so sweetly as the labouring man, Eccl. 5. 12. He lies down, but he is full of tossings to and fro till the dawning of the day, and then he opens his eyes, and he is not; he sees himself, and all he has, hastening away, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye. His cares increase his fears, and both together make him uneasy; so that, when we attend him to his bed, we do not find him happy there. But, in the close, we are called to attend his exit, and see how miserable he is in death, and after death.

(1.) He is miserable in death. It is to him the king of terrors, v. 20, 21. When some mortal disease seizes him, what a fright is he in! *Terrors take hold on him, as waters*, as if he were surrounded by the flowing tides. He trembles to think of leaving this world, and much more of removing to another. This mingles sorrow and wrath with his sickness, as Solomon observes, Eccl. 5. 17. These terrors put him either, [1.] Into a silent and sullen despair; and then the tempest of God's wrath, the tempest of death, may be said to steal him away in the night, when no one is aware, or takes any notice of it. Or, [2.] Into an open and clamorous despair; and then he is said to be carried away, and hurled out of his place, as with a storm, and with an east-wind, violent, and noisy, and very dreadful. Death, to a godly man, is like a fair gale of wind, to convey him to the heavenly country, but, to a wicked man, it is like an east-wind, a storm, a tempest, that hurries him away, in confusion and amazement, to destruction.

(2.) He is miserable after death. [1.] His soul falls under the just indignation of God; and the terror of that puts him into such amazement at the approach of death; (v. 22.) *For God shall cast upon him, and not spare*. While he lived, he had the benefit of sparing mercy; but now the day of God's patience is over, and he will not spare, but pour out upon him the full vials of his wrath. What God casts down upon a man, there is no flying from, nor beating up under. We read of his casting down great stones from heaven upon the Canaanites, (Josh. 10. 11.) which made terrible execution among them; but what was that to his casting down his anger in its full weight upon the sinner's conscience, like the talent of lead? Zech. 5. 7, 8. The damned sinner, seeing the wrath of God break in upon him, would fain flee out of his hand; but he cannot; the gates of hell are locked and barred, and the great gulph fixed, and it will be in vain to call for the shelter of rocks and mountains. Those who will not be persuaded now to fly to the arms of divine grace, which are stretched out to receive them; will not be able to flee from the arms of divine wrath, which will shortly be stretched out to destroy them. [2.] His memory falls under the just indignation of all mankind; (v. 23.) *Men shall clap their hands at him*, that is, they shall rejoice in the judgments of God, by which he is cut off, and be well pleased in his fall. *When the wicked perish, there is shouting*, Prov. 11. 10. When God buries him, men shall bless him out of his place, and leave on his name perpetual marks of infamy. In the same place where he has been caressed and cried up, he shall be laughed at, (Ps. 52. 7.) and his ashes shall be trampled on.

CHAP. XXVIII.

The strain of this chapter is very unlike the rest of this book. Job forgets his sores, and all his sorrows, and talks like a philosopher, or a virtuoso. Here is a great deal both of natural philosophy and moral in this discourse; but the question is, How does it come here? Doubtless, it was not merely for an amusement, or diversion from the controversy; though, if it had been only so, perhaps it had not been much amiss. When disputes grow hot, better lose the question than lose our temper. But this is pertinent, and to the business in hand. Job and his friends had been discoursing about the dispensations of Providence toward the wicked and the righteous. Job had shewed that some wicked men live and die in prosperity, while others are presently and openly arrested by the judgments of God. But, if any ask the reason why some are punished in this world, and not others, they must be told it is a question that cannot be resolved. The knowledge of the reasons of state, in God's government of the world, is kept from us, and we must neither pretend to it, nor reach after it. Zophar had wished that God would shew Job the secrets of wisdom, ch. 11. 6. No, says Job, secret things belong not to us, but things revealed, Deut. 29. 29. And here he shews, I. Concerning worldly wealth, how industriously that is sought for, and pursued, by the children of men, what pains they take, what contrivances they have, and what hazards they run, to get it, v. 1. . 11. II. Concerning wisdom, v. 12. In general, the price of it is very great; it is of inestimable value, v. 15. . 19. The place of it is very secret, v. 14, 20, 22. In particular, there is a wisdom which is hid in God, (v. 23. . 27.) and there is a wisdom which is revealed to the children of men, v. 28. Our inquiries into the former must be checked, into the latter must be quickened, for that is it which is our concern.

1. **SURELY** there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it. 2. Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out

of the stone. 3. He setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection: the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death. 4. The flood breaketh out from the inhabitant; *even the waters* forgotten of the foot: they are dried up, they are gone away from men. 5. *As for* the earth, out of it cometh bread: and under it is turned up as it were fire. 6. The stones of it *are* the place of sapphires: and it hath dust of gold. 7. *There is* a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: 8. The lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it. 9. He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. 10. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing. 11. He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and *the thing that is hid* bringeth he forth to light.

Here Job shews, 1. What a great way the wit of man may go, in diving into the depths of nature, and seizing the riches of it; what a great deal of knowledge and wealth men may, by their ingenious and industrious searches, make themselves masters of. But does it therefore follow that men may, by their wit, comprehend the reasons why some wicked people prosper, and others are punished, why some good people prosper, and others are afflicted? No, by no means. The caverns of the earth may be discovered, but not the counsels of heaven. 2. What a great deal of care and pains worldly men take to get riches. He had observed concerning the wicked man, (*ch. 27. 16.*) that he *heaped up silver as the dust*; now here he shews whence that silver came, and how it was come by, which he is so fond of, to shew what little reason wicked rich men have to be proud of their wealth and pomp. Observe here,

I. The wealth of this world is hid in the earth. Thence the silver and the gold, which afterward they refine, are fetched, *v. 1.* There it lay mixed with a great deal of dirt and dross, like a worthless thing, of no more account than common earth; and abundance of it will so lie neglected, till the earth and all the works therein shall be burned up. Holy Mr. Herbert, in his poem called *Avarice*, takes notice of this, to shame men out of the love of money.

Money, thou bane of bliss, thou source of woe,
Whence com'st thou, that thou art so fresh and fine?
I know thy parentage is base and low;
Man found thee poor and dirty in a mine.

Surely thou didst so little contribute
To this great kingdom which thou now hast got,
That he was fain, when thou wast destitute,
To dig thee out of thy dark cave and grot.

Man calleth thee his wealth, who made thee rich,
And while he digs out thee, falls in the ditch.

Iron and brass, less costly, but more serviceable, metals, are *taken out of the earth*, (*v. 2.*) and are there found in great abundance, which abates their price indeed, but is a great kindness to man, who could much better be without gold than without iron. Nay, *out of the earth comes bread*, that is, bread-corn, the necessary support of life, *v. 5.* Thence man's maintenance is fetched, to remind him of his own original; he is of the earth, and is hastening to the earth. *Under it is turned up as it were fire*; precious stones, that sparkle as fire; brimstone, that is apt to take fire; coal, that is proper to feed fire. As we have our food, so we have our fuel, cut out of the earth. There the sapphires and other gems are, and thence gold-dust is digged up, *v. 6.* The wisdom of the Creator has placed these things, 1. Out

of our sight, to teach us not to set our eyes upon them, *Prov. 23. 6.* 2. Under our feet, to teach us not to lay them in our bosoms, nor to set our hearts upon them, but to trample upon them, with a holy contempt. See how full the *earth is of God's riches*, (*Ps. 104. 24.*) and infer thence, not only how great a God he is, *whose the earth is, and the fulness thereof*, (*Ps. 24. 1.*) but how full heaven must needs be of God's riches, which is the city of the great King, in comparison with which this earth is a poor country.

II. The wealth that is hid in the earth cannot be come at but with a great deal of difficulty. It is hard to be found out; there is but here and there *a vein for the silver*, *v. 1.* The precious stones, though bright themselves, yet, because buried in obscurity and out of sight, are called *stones of darkness, and the shadow of death*. Men may search long before they light on them; when found out, they are hard to be fetched out; men's wits must be set on work to contrive ways and means to get this hid treasure into their hands; they must, with their lamps, set an end to darkness; and if one expedient miscarry, one method fail, they must try another, till they have searched out all perfection, and turned every stone to effect it, *v. 3.* They must grapple with subterraneous waters, (*v. 4, 10, 11.*) and force their way through rocks which are, as it were, the roots of the mountains, *v. 9.* Now God has made the getting of gold and silver, and precious stones, so difficult, (1.) For the exciting and engaging of industry. *Di laboribus omnia vendunt—Labour is the price which the gods affix to all things.* If valuable things were too easily come by, men would never learn to take pains. But the difficulty of gaining the riches of this earth, may suggest to us what violence the kingdom of heaven suffers. (2.) For the checking and restraining of pomp and luxury. What is for necessity is had with a little labour from the surface of the earth; but what is for ornament must be dug with a great deal of pains out of the bowels of it. To be fed is cheap, but to be fine is chargeable.

III. Though the subterraneous wealth is thus hard to come by, yet men will have it. He that loves silver, is not satisfied with silver, and yet is not satisfied without it; but they that have much must needs have more. See here, 1. What inventions men have to get this wealth. They *search out all perfection*, *v. 3.* They have arts and engines to dry up the waters, and carry them off, when they break in upon them in their mines, and threaten to drown the work, *v. 4.* They have pumps, and pipes, and canals, to clear their way, and, obstacles being removed, they tread *the path which no fowl knoweth*, (*v. 7, 8.*) unseen by the vulture's eye, which is piercing and quick-sighted, and untrodden by the lion's whelps, which traverse all the paths of the wilderness. 2. What pains men take, and what vast charge they are at, to get this wealth. They work their way through the rocks, and undermine the mountains, *v. 10.* 3. What hazards they run. They that dig in the mines have their lives in their hands; for they are obliged to *bind the floods from overflowing*, (*v. 11.*) and are continually in danger of being suffocated by damps, or crushed or buried alive by the fall of the earth upon them. See how foolish man adds to his own burthen; he is sentenced to eat bread in the sweat of his face. But as if that were not enough, he will get gold and silver at the peril of his life; though the more is gotten, the less valuable it is; for, in Solomon's time, silver was as stones. But, 4. Observe what it is that carries men through all this toil and peril. *Their eye sees every precious thing*, *v. 10.* Silver and gold are precious things with them, and they have them in their eye in all these pursuits; they fancy they see them glittering before their faces, and, in the prospect of laying hold on them, they make nothing of all these difficulties; for they make something of it at last; *that which is hid bringeth he forth to light*, *v. 11.* What was hid under ground, is laid upon the bank; the metal that was hid in the ore, is refined from its dross, and brought forth pure out of the furnace; and then he thinks his pains well bestowed. Go to the miners, then, thou sluggard in religion, consider their ways, and be wise. Let their courage, diligence, and constancy in seeking the wealth that perisheth, shame us out of slothfulness and faint-heartedness in labouring for the true

riches. *How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! How much easier and safer! Yet gold is sought for, but grace neglected. Will the hopes of precious things out of the earth, (so they call them, though really they are paltry and perishing,) be such a spur to industry, and shall not the certain prospect of truly precious things in heaven be much more so?*

12. But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? 13. Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. 14. The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, *It is not with me.* 15. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. 16. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. 17. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it *shall not be for jewels of fine gold.* 18. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. 19. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold.

Job, having spoken of the wealth of the world, which men put such a value upon, and take so much pains for, here comes to speak of another more valuable jewel, and that is, *wisdom and understanding*, the knowing and enjoying of God and ourselves. They that found out all those ways and means to enrich themselves, thought themselves very wise; but Job will not own that to be wisdom: he supposes them to gain their point, and to bring to light what they sought for, (v. 11.) and yet asks, *Where is wisdom?* For it is not here; this their way is their folly. We must therefore seek it somewhere else, and it will be found nowhere but in the principles and practices of religion. There is more true knowledge, satisfaction, and happiness, in sound divinity, which shews us the way to the joys of heaven, than in natural philosophy, or mathematics, which help us to find a way into the bowels of the earth.

Two things cannot be found out concerning this wisdom.

1. The price of it, for that is inestimable; its worth is infinitely more than all the riches in this world. *Man knows not the price thereof*, (v. 13.) that is, 1. Few put a due value upon it: Men know not the worth of it, its innate excellency, their need of it, and of what unspeakable advantage it will be to them; and therefore, though they have many a price in their hand to get this wisdom, yet they *have no heart to it*, Prov. 17. 16. The cock in the fable knew not the value of the precious stone he found in the dunghill, and therefore would rather have lighted on a barley-corn. Men know not the worth of grace, and therefore will take no pains to get it. 2. None can possibly give a valuable consideration for it, with all the wealth this world can furnish them with. This Job is large upon, (v. 15, &c.) where he makes an inventory of the *Bona notabilia*—*The most valuable treasures of this world*: gold is five times mentioned, silver comes in also, and then divers precious stones, the onyx and sapphire, pearls and rubies, and the topaz of Ethiopia; these are the things that are highest prized in the world's markets: but if a man would give, not only these, heaps of these, but all the substance of his house, all he is worth in the world, for wisdom, it would utterly be contemned: these may give a man some advantage in seeking wisdom, as they did to Solomon, but there is no purchasing wisdom with these. It is a gift of the *Holy Ghost*, which *cannot be bought with money*, Acts, 8. 20. As it does not run in the blood, and thus come to us by descent, so it cannot be got for money, nor does it come to us by purchase. Spiritual gifts are conferred without money and without price, because no money can be a price for them. Wisdom is likewise a more valuable gift to him that has it, makes him richer and happier, than gold or precious

stones. *It is better to get wisdom than gold.* Gold is another's, wisdom our own; gold is for the body and time, wisdom is for the soul and eternity. Let that which is most precious in God's account, be so in our's. See Prov. 3. 14, &c.

II. The place of it, for that is undiscoverable. *Where shall wisdom be found?* v. 12. He asks this,

1. As one that truly desired to find it. This is a question we should all put; while the most of men are asking, "Where shall money be found?" we should ask, *Where may wisdom be found?* that we may seek it and find it; not vain philosophy, or carnal policy, but true religion; for that is the only true wisdom, that is it which best improves our faculties, and best secures our spiritual and eternal welfare. This is that which we should cry after, and dig for, Prov. 2. 3, 4.

2. As one that utterly despaired of finding it any where but in God, and any way but by divine revelation. *It is not found in this land of the living*, v. 13. We cannot attain to a right understanding of God and his will, of ourselves, and our duty, and interest, by reading any books or men, but by reading God's book and the men of God. Such is the degeneracy of human nature, that there is no true wisdom to be found with any but those who are born again, and who, through grace, partake of the divine nature. As for others, even the most ingenious and industrious, they can tell us no tidings of this lost wisdom. (1.) Ask the miners, and by them *the depth will say, It is not in me*, v. 14. Those who dig into the bowels of the earth, to rifle the treasures there, cannot in these dark recesses find this rare jewel, nor with all their art make themselves masters of it. (2.) Ask the mariners, and by them *the sea will say, It is not in me*. It can never be got either by trading on the waters, or diving into them; can never be *sucked from the abundance of the seas, or the treasures hid in the sand*. Where there is a vein for the silver, there is no vein for wisdom, none for grace. Men can more easily break through the difficulties they meet with in getting worldly wealth, than through those they meet with in getting heavenly wisdom; and they will take more pains to learn how to live in this world, than how to live for ever in a better world. So blind and foolish is man become, that it is in vain to ask him, *Where is the place of wisdom*, and which is the road that leads to it?

20. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? 21. Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. 22. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. 23. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. 24. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; 25. To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. 26. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: 27. Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. 28. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

The question which he had asked, (v. 12.) he asks again here; for it is too worthy, too weighty, to be let fall, until we speed in the inquiry. Concerning this, we must seek till we find, till we get some satisfactory account of it. By a diligent prosecution of this inquiry, he brings it, at length, to this issue; that there is a twofold wisdom; one *hid in God*, which is secret, and *belongs not to us*; the other made known by him, and revealed to man, which *belongs to us and to our children*.

I. The knowledge of God's *secret will*, the will of his providence, is out of our reach, and what God has reserved to himself: *it belongs to the Lord our God*. To know the particulars of what

God will do hereafter, and the reasons of what he is doing **now**, is the knowledge he first speaks of.

1. This knowledge is hid from us: it is high, we cannot attain unto it; (v. 21, 22.) *It is hid from the eyes of all living*, even of philosophers, politicians, and saints; it is *kept close from the fowls of the air*; though they fly high and in the open firmament of heaven, though they seem somewhat nearer that upper world where the source of this wisdom is, though their eyes behold afar off, (ch. 39. 29.) yet they cannot penetrate into the counsels of God. No; man is *wiser than the fowls of heaven*, and yet comes short of this wisdom. Even those who, in their speculations, soar highest, and think themselves, like the fowls of the air, above the heads of other people, yet cannot pretend to this knowledge. Job and his friends had been arguing about the methods and reasons of the dispensations of Providence in the government of the world: "What fools are we" (says Job) "to fight in the dark thus; to dispute about that which we do not understand!" The line and plummet of human reason can never fathom the abyss of the divine counsels. Who can undertake to give the rationale of Providence, or account for the maxims, measure, and methods, of God's government, those *arcana imperii*—the cabinet counsels of divine wisdom? Let us then be content not to know the future events of Providence, until time discover them, (Acts. 1. 7.) and not to know the secret reasons of Providence, until eternity discover them. God is now a God that hideth himself; (Isa. 45. 15.) *clouds and darkness are round about him*. Though this wisdom be hid from all living, yet *destruction and death say, We have heard the fame of it*; though they cannot give an account of it themselves, (for there is *no wisdom, nor device, nor knowledge at all in the grave*, much less this, yet there is a world on the other side death and the grave, on which those dark regions border, and to which we must pass through them, and there we shall see clearly what we are now in the dark about. "Have a little patience," says death to the inquisitive soul, "I will fetch thee shortly to a place where even this wisdom will be found." When *the mystery of God shall be finished*, it will be laid open, and we shall know as we are known; when the veil of flesh is rent, and the interposing clouds are scattered, we shall know what God does, though we know not now, John, 13. 7.

2. This knowledge is hid in God, as the apostle speaks, (Eph. 3. 9.) *Known unto God are all his works*, though they are not known to us, Acts, 15. 18. There are good reasons for what he does, though we cannot assign them; (v. 23.) *God understands the way thereof*. Men sometimes do they know not what, but God never does. Men do what they did not design to do; new occurrences put them upon new counsels, and oblige them to take new measures: but God does all according to the purpose which he purposed in himself, and which he never alters. Men sometimes do that which they cannot give a good reason for, but in every will of God there is a counsel: he knows both what he does, and why he does it; the whole series of events, and the order and place of every occurrence. This knowledge he has in perfection, but keeps to himself.

Two reasons are here given why God must needs understand his own way, and he only;

(1.) Because all events are now directed by an *all-seeing and almighty Providence*, v. 24, 25. He that governs the world, is, [1.] Omniscient: *for he looks to the ends of the earth*, both in place and time; distant ages, distant regions, are under his view. We do not understand our own way, much less can we understand God's way, because we are short-sighted; how little do we know of what is doing in the world, much less of what will be done! But *the eyes of the Lord are in every place*; nay, they *run to and fro through the earth*: nothing is, or can be, hid from him; and therefore the reasons why some wicked people prosper remarkably, and others are remarkably punished in this world, which are secret to us, are known to him. One day's events, and one man's affairs, have such a reference to, and such a dependence upon, another's, that He only, to whom all events and all affairs are naked and open, and who sees the whole at one entire and certain view, is a competent Judge of every part. [2.] He is omnipotent; he can do every thing, and is very exact in all he does.

For proof of this, he mentions the winds and waters, v. 25. What is lighter than the wind? Yet God hath ways of poising it; he knows how to *make the weight for the winds*, which he *brings out of his treasures*, (Ps. 135. 7.) keeping a very particular account of what he draws out, as men do of what they pay out of their treasures, not at random, as men bring out of their trash. Nothing sensible is to us more unaccountable than the wind; we *hear the sound of it, yet cannot tell whence it comes, or whither it goes*: but God gives it out by weight, wisely ordering both from what point it shall blow, and with what strength. The waters of the sea, and the rain-waters, he both weighs and measures; allotting the proportion of every tide and every shower. A great and constant communication there is between clouds and seas, the waters above the firmament and those under it; vapours go up, rains come down, air is condensed into water, water rarefied into air: but the great God keeps an exact account of all the stock with which this trade is carried on for the public benefit, and sees that none of it be lost. Now if, in these things, Providence be so exact, how much more in dispensing frowns and favours, rewards and punishments, to the children of men, according to the rules of equity!

(2.) Because all events were, from eternity, designed and determined by an infallible prescience, and immutable decree, v. 26, 27. When he settled the course of nature, he fore-ordained all the operations of his government.

[1.] He settled the course of nature; for this, he mentions *a decree for the rain, and a way for the thunder and lightning*: the general manner and method, and the particular uses and tendencies, of these strange performances, both their causes and their effects, were appointed by the divine purpose; hence he is said to *prepare lightnings for the rain*, Ps. 135. 7. Jer. 10. 13.

[2.] When he did that, he laid all the measures of his providence, and drew an exact scheme of the whole work from first to last: then, from eternity, did he see in himself, and declare to himself, the plan of his proceedings; then he prepared it, fixed it, and established it, set every thing in readiness for all his works; so that, when any thing was to be done, nothing was to seek, nor could any thing unforeseen occur, to put it either out of its method, or out of its time, for all was ordered as exactly as if he had studied it, and searched it out; so that, whatever he does, *nothing can be put to it, or taken from it, and therefore shall be for ever*, Eccl. 3. 14. Some make Job to speak of wisdom here as a person, and translate it, *Then he saw her, and shewed her*, &c. and then it is parallel with that of Solomon, concerning the essential Wisdom of the Father, the eternal Word, Prov. 8. 22, &c. *Before the earth was, then was I by him*, John, 1. 1, 2.

II. The knowledge of God's *revealed will*, the will of his precept, and this is within our reach; it is level to our capacity, and will do us good; (v. 28.) *Unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom*. Let it not be said, that, when God concealed his counsels from man, and forbade him that tree of knowledge, it was because he grudged him any thing that would contribute to his real bliss and satisfaction; no, he let him know as much as he was concerned to know in order to his duty and happiness: he shall be intrusted with as much of his sovereign mind as was needful and fit for a subject, but he must not think himself fit to be a privy-counsellor. He said to Adam, so some, to the first man, in the day in which he was created; he told him plainly, it was not for him to amuse himself with over-curious searches into the mysteries of creation, nor to pretend to solve all the phenomena of nature; he would find it neither possible nor profitable to do so. No less wisdom (says Archbishop Tillotson) than that which made the world, can thoroughly understand the philosophy of it. But let him look upon this as his wisdom, To fear the Lord and to depart from evil; let him learn that, and he is learned enough, let this knowledge serve his turn. When God forbade man the tree of knowledge, he allowed him the tree of life, and this is that tree, Prov. 3. 18. We cannot attain true wisdom but by divine revelation; *The Lord giveth wisdom*, Prov. 2. 6. Now the matter of that, is not the secrets of nature or providence, but the rules of our own practice: unto man he said, not, "Go up to heaven, to fetch happiness thence;" or, "Go down to the deep,

to draw it up thence." No, *the word is nigh thee*; (Deut. 30. 14.) *He hath shewed thee, O man*, not what is great, but what is good, not what the Lord thy God designs to do with thee, but what he requires of thee, Mic. 6. 8. *Unto you, O men, I call*, Prov. 8. 4. Lord, what is man that he should be thus minded, thus visited! Behold, mark, take notice, of this; he that has ears, let him hear what the God of heaven says to the children of men; *The fear of the Lord, that is the wisdom*. Here is, 1. The description of true religion, pure religion, and undefiled; it is to *fear the Lord, and depart from evil*, which agrees with God's character of Job, ch. 1. 1. The *fear of the Lord* is the spring and summary of all religion. There is a slavish fear of God, springing from hard thoughts of him, which is contrary to religion, Matth. 25. 24. There is a selfish fear of God, springing from dreadful thoughts of him, which may be a good step toward religion, Acts, 9. 5. But there is a filial fear of God, springing from great and high thoughts of him, which is the life and soul of all religion. And wherever this reigns in the heart, it will appear by a constant care *to depart from evil*, Prov. 16. 6. This is essential to religion; we must first cease to do evil, or we shall never learn to do well. *Virtus est vitium fugere—E'en in our flight from vice some virtue lies*. 2. The commendation of religion; it is wisdom and understanding; to be truly religious, is to be truly wise: as the wisdom of God appears in the institution of it, so the wisdom of man appears in the practice and observance of it; it is understanding, for it is the best knowledge of truth; it is wisdom, for it is the best conduct of our affairs: nothing more surely guides our way, and gains our end, than being religious.

CHAP. XXIX.

After that excellent discourse concerning wisdom in the foregoing chapter, Job sat down and paused a while, not because he had talked himself out of breath, but because he would not, without the leave of the company, engross the talk to himself, but would give room for his friends, if they pleased, to make their remarks on what he had said; but they had nothing to say, and therefore, after he had recollected himself a little, he went on with his discourse concerning his own affairs, in this and the two following chapters; in which, I. He describes the height of the prosperity from which he was fallen. And, II. The depth of the adversity into which he was fallen; and this he does, to move the pity of his friends, and to justify, or, at least, excuse, his own complaints. But then, III. To obviate his friends' censures of him, he makes a very ample and particular protestation of his own integrity notwithstanding. In this chapter, he looks back to the days of his prosperity, and shews, 1. What comfort and satisfaction he had in his house and family, v. 1. .6. 2. What a great deal of honour and power he had in his country, and what respect was paid him by all sorts of people, v. 7. .10. 3. What abundance of good he did in his place, as a magistrate, v. 11. .17. 4. What a just prospect he had of the continuance of his comfort at home, (v. 18. .20.) and of his interest abroad, v. 21. .25. All this he enlarges upon, to aggravate his present calamities; like Naomi, I went out full, but am brought home again empty.

1. **M**OREOVER Job continued his parable, and said, 2. Oh that I were as *in months* past, as *in the days when God preserved me*; 3. When his candle shined upon my head, *and when* by his light I walked *through* darkness; 4. As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God *was* upon my tabernacle; 5. When the Almighty *was* yet with me, *when* my children *were* about me; 6. When I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil;

Losers may have leave to speak, and there is nothing they speak of more feelingly than of the comforts they are stripped of. Their former prosperity is one of the most pleasing subjects of their thoughts and talk. It was so to Job here, who begins with a wish, (v. 2.) *Oh that I were as in months past!* So he brings in this account of his prosperity. His wish is, 1. "Oh that I were in as good a state as I was then; that I had as much wealth, honour, and pleasure, as I had then!" This he wishes, from a concern he had, not so much for his ease, as for his reputation, and the glory of his God, which, he thought, was eclipsed by his present sufferings. "Oh that I might be restored to my prosperity; and then

the censures and reproaches of my friends would be effectually silenced, even upon their own principles, and for ever rolled away!" If this be our end in desiring life, health, and prosperity, that God may be glorified, and the credit of our holy profession rescued, preserved, and advanced, the desire is not only natural, but spiritual. 2. "Oh that I were in as good a frame of spirit, as I was then!" That which Job complained most of now, was a load upon his spirits, through God's withdrawing from him; and therefore he wishes he had now his spirit as much enlarged and encouraged in the service of God, as he had had then, and that he had as much freedom and fellowship with him, as he then thought himself happy in. This was *in the days of his youth*, (v. 4.) when he was in the prime of his time for the enjoyment of those things, and could relish them with the highest gust. Note, Those that prosper in the days of their youth, know not what black and cloudy days they are yet reserved for.

Two things made the months pass pleasant to Job;

1. That he had comfort in his God. This was the chief thing he rejoiced in, in his prosperity, as the spring of it and the sweetness of it; that he had the favour of God, and the tokens of that favour. He did not attribute his prosperity to a happy turn of fortune, or to his own might, or to the power of his own hand, but makes the same acknowledgment that David does; (Ps. 30. 7.) *Thou, by thy favour, hast made my mountain stand strong*. A gracious soul delights in God's smiles, not in the smiles of this world.

Four things were then very pleasant to holy Job;

1. The confidence he had in the divine protection. They were *the days when God preserved me*, v. 2. Even then he saw himself exposed, and did not make *his wealth his strong city*, nor *trusted in the abundance of his riches*, but *the name of the Lord was his strong tower*, and in that only he thought himself safe, and to that he ascribed it that he was then safe, and his comforts were preserved to him. The Devil saw a hedge about him of God's making, (ch. 1. 10.) and Job saw it himself, and owned it was *God's visitation that preserved his spirit*, ch. 10. 12. Those only whom God protects are safe, and may be secure; and therefore those who have ever so much of this world, must not think themselves safe, unless God preserve them.

2. The complacency he had in the divine favour; (v. 3.) *God's candle shined upon his head*, that is, God lifted up the light of his countenance upon him, gave him the assurances and sweet relishes of his love. The best of the communications of the divine favour to the saints in this world, is but the candle-light, compared with what is reserved for them in the future state. But such abundant satisfaction did Job take in the divine favour, that, by the light of that, he walked through darkness; that guided him in his doubts, comforted him in his griefs, bare him up under his burthens, and helped him through all his difficulties. Those that have the brightest sun-shine of outward prosperity, must yet expect some moments of darkness; they are sometimes crossed, sometimes at a loss, sometimes melancholy; but those that are interested in the favour of God, and know how to value it, can, by the light of that, walk cheerfully and comfortably through all the darkness of this vale of tears. That puts gladness into the heart, enough to balance all the grievances of this present time.

3. The communion he had with the divine word; (v. 4.) *The secret of God was upon my tabernacle*, that is, When God conversed freely with him, as one bosom-friend with another. He knew God's mind, and was not in the dark about it, as, of late, he had been. *The secret of the Lord is said to be with them that fear him*, for he shews them that in his covenant, which others see not, Ps. 25. 14. God communicates his favour and grace to his people, and receives the returns of their devotion in a way secret to the world. Some read it, *When the society of God was in my tabernacle*; which Rabbi Solomon understands of an assembly of God's people, that used to meet at Job's house for religious worship, in which he presided; this he took a great deal of pleasure in, and the scattering of it was a trouble to him. Or, it may be understood of the angels of God pitching their tents about his habitation.

4. The assurance he had of the divine presence; (v. 5.) *The Almighty was yet with me*. Now, he thought God was departed from

him, but, in those days, he was *with him*, and that was all in all to him. God's presence with a man in his house, though it be but a cottage, makes it both a castle and a palace.

II. That he had comfort in his family, every thing was agreeable there: he had both mouths for his meat, and meat for his mouths; the want of either is a great affliction. 1. He had a numerous offspring to enjoy his estate; *My children were about me*. He had many children, enough to compass him round, and they were observant of him, and obsequious to him; they were about him, to know what he would have, and wherein they might serve him. It is a comfort to tender parents to see their children about them; Job speaks very feelingly of this comfort, now that he was deprived of it. He thought it an instance of God's being with him, that his children were about him; and yet we reckon wrong, if, when we have lost our children, we cannot comfort ourselves with this, that we have not lost our God. 2. He had a plentiful estate for the support of this numerous family, *v. 6*. His dairy abounded to that degree, that he might, if he pleased, *wash his steps with butter*; and his olive-yards were so fruitful, beyond expectation, that it seemed as if the *rock poured him out rivers of oil*. He reckons his wealth, not by his silver and gold, which were for hoarding, but by his butter and oil, which were for use; for what is an estate good for, unless we take the good of it ourselves, and do good with it to others?

7. When I went out to the gate through the city, *when I prepared my seat in the street*! 8. The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, *and stood up*. 9. The princes refrained talking, and laid *their* hand on their mouth. 10. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth. 11. When the ear heard *me*, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw *me*, it gave witness to me: 12. Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, *and him that had none to help him*. 13. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. 14. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment *was* as a robe and a diadem. 15. I was eyes to the blind, and feet *was* I to the lame. 16. I *was* a father to the poor: and the cause *which* I knew not I searched out. 17. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth.

We have here Job in a post of honour and power; though he had comfort enough in his own house, yet he did not confine himself to that; we are not born for ourselves, but for the public. When any business was to be done in the gate, the place of judgment, Job *went out to it through the city*, (*v. 7*.) not in an affectation of pomp, but in an affection to justice. Observe, Judgment was administered in the gate, in the street, in the places of concourse, to which every man might have a free access; that every one who would might be a witness to all that was said and done; and that, when judgment was given against the guilty, others might hear and fear.

Job being a prince, a judge, a magistrate, a man in authority, among the children of the east, we are here told,

I. What respect was paid him by all sorts of people, not only for the dignity of his place, but for his personal merit, his eminent prudence, integrity, and good management. 1. The people honoured him, and stood in awe of him, *v. 8*. The gravity and majesty of his looks and mien, and his known strictness in animadverting upon every thing that was evil and indecent, commanded all about him into due decorum. The young men, who could not keep their countenances, or, it may be, were conscious to themselves of something amiss, hid themselves, and got out of his way;

and the aged, though they kept their ground, yet would not keep their seats, they arose and stood up to do obeisance to him; they who expected honour from others, gave honour to him. Virtue and piety challenge respect from all, and usually have it; but they that not only *are* good, but *do* good, are worthy of double honour. Modesty becomes those that are young and in subjection, as much as majesty becomes those that are aged and in power. Honour and fear are due to magistrates, and must be rendered to them, *Rom. 13. 7*. But if a great and good man was thus revered, how is the great and good God to be feared! 2. The princes and nobles paid great deference to him, *v. 9, 10*. Some think that these were inferior magistrates under him, and that the respect they paid him was due to his place, as their sovereign and supreme; it should rather seem that they were his equals in place, and joined in commission with him, and that the peculiar honour they gave him was gained by his extraordinary abilities and services. It was agreed, that he excelled them all in quickness of apprehension, soundness of judgment, closeness of application, clearness and copiousness of expression; and therefore he was, among his fellows, an oracle of law, and counsel, and justice, and what he said all attended to, and acquiesced in. When he came into court, especially when he stood up to speak to any business, *the princes refrained talking, the nobles held their peace*, that they might the more diligently hearken to what he said, and might be sure to take his meaning. They that had been forward to speak their own thoughts, loved to hear themselves talk, and cared not much what any body else said, when it came to Job's turn to speak, were as desirous to know his thoughts, as ever they had been to vent their own. They that suspected their own judgment were satisfied in his, and admired with what dexterity he split the hair, and untied the knots which puzzled them, and which they knew not what to make of. When the princes and nobles wrangled among themselves, all agreed to refer the matters in dispute to Job, and to abide by his judgment. Happy the men that are blessed with such eminent gifts as these; they have great opportunities of honouring God, and doing good, but have great need to watch against pride: happy the people that are blessed with such eminent men; it is a token for good to them.

II. What good he did in his place. He was very serviceable to his country with the power he had; and here we shall see what it was which Job valued himself by in the day of his prosperity. It is natural to men, to have some value for themselves, and we may judge something of our own character, by observing what that is upon which we value ourselves. Job valued himself, not by the honour of his family, the great estate he had, his large income, his full table, the many servants he had at his command, the ensigns of his dignity, his equipage and retinue, the splendid entertainments he gave, and the court that was made to him, but by his usefulness. Goodness is God's glory, and it will be our's; if we be merciful as God is, we are perfect as he is.

1. He valued himself by the interest he had in the esteem, affections, and prayers, of sober people; not by the studied panegyrics of the wits and poets, but the natural praises of all about him. All that heard what he said, and saw what he did, how he laid out himself for the public good with all the authority and tender affection of a father to his country, blessed him, and gave witness to him, *v. 11*. Many a good word they said of him, and many a good prayer they put up for him; he did not think it an honour to make every body fear him, (*Oderint dum metuant—Let them hate, provided they also fear*,) nor to be arbitrary, and to have his own will and way, not caring what people said of him; but, like Mordecai, to be *accepted of the multitude of his brethren*, *Est. 10. 3*. He did not so much value the applauses of those at a distance, as the attestations of those that were the witnesses of his conduct, that constantly attended him, saw him, and heard him, and could speak of their own knowledge; especially their's who had themselves been the better for him, and could speak by their own experience; such was the blessing of him who was ready to perish, (*v. 13*.) and who by Job's means was rescued from perishing. Let great men, and men of estates, thus do good, and they shall have praise of the same; and let those who have good done them, look upon it as a just debt they owe to their protectors and benefactors, to bless them

and give witness to them; to use their interest on earth for their honour, and in heaven for their comfort, to praise them, and pray for them. Those are ungrateful indeed, who grudge these small returns.

2. He valued himself by the care he took of those that were least able to help themselves, the poor and the needy, the widows and fatherless, the blind and lame, who could not be supposed either to merit his favour, or ever to be in a capacity to recompense it. (1.) If the poor were injured or oppressed, they might cry to Job, and, if he found the allegations of their petitions true, they had not only his ear and his bowels, but his hand too; he delivered the poor that cried, (v. 12.) and would not suffer them to be trampled upon and run down. Nay, (v. 16.) he was *a father to the poor*, not only a judge to protect them, and to see that they were not wronged, but a father to provide for them, and to see that they did not want, to counsel and direct them, and to appear and act for them upon all occasions. It is no disparagement to the son of a prince to be a father to the poor. (2.) The fatherless, that had none to help them, found Job ready to help them, and, if they were in straits, to deliver them. He helped them to make the best of what little they had, helped them to pay what they owed, and to get in what was owing to them, helped them out into the world, helped them into business, helped them to it, and helped them in it; thus should the fatherless be helped. (3.) Those that were ready to perish he saved from perishing, relieving them that were hungry and ready to perish for want, taking care of them that were sick, that were outcasts, that were falsely accused, or in danger of being turned out of their estates unjustly, or, upon any other account, were ready to perish: the extremity of the peril, as it quickened Job to appear the more vigorously for them, so it made his seasonable kindness the more affecting and the more obliging, and brought their blessings the more abundantly upon him. (4.) The widows that were sighing for grief, and trembling for fear, he made to sing for joy; so carefully did he protect them, and provide for them, and so heartily did he espouse their interest; it is a pleasure to a good man, and should be so to a great man, to give those occasion to rejoice, that are most acquainted with grief. (5.) Those that were upon any account at a loss, Job gave suitable and seasonable relief to; (v. 15.) *I was eyes to the blind*, counselling and advising those for the best, that knew not what to do; and *feet to the lame*; assisting those with money and friends, that knew what they should do, but knew not how to compass it. Those we best help, whom we help out in that very thing wherein they are defective, and most need help. We may come to be blind or lame ourselves, and therefore should pity and succour those that are so, Isa. 35. 3, 4. Heb. 12, 13.

3. He valued himself by the conscience he made of justice and equity in all his proceedings: his friends had unjustly censured him as an oppressor; "So far from that," (says he,) "that I always made it my business to maintain and support right." (1.) He devoted himself to the administration of justice; (v. 14.) *I put on righteousness, and it clothed me*, that is, He had an habitual disposition to execute justice, and put on a fixed resolution to do it. It was the girdle of his loins, Isa. 11. 5. It kept him tight and steady in all his motions; he always appeared in it, as in his clothing, and never without it. Righteousness will clothe them that put it on; it will keep them warm, and be comfortable to them; it will keep them safe, and fence them against the injuries of the season; it will adorn them, and recommend them to the favour both of God and man. (2.) He took pleasure in it, and, as I may say, a holy pride: he looked upon it as his greatest glory to do justice to all, and injury to none. *My judgment was a robe and a diadem*. Perhaps he did not himself wear a robe and a diadem, he was very indifferent to those ensigns of honour; they were most fond of them who had least intrinsic worth to recommend them; but the settled principles of justice, by which he was governed and did govern, were to him instead of all those ornaments. If a magistrate do the duty of his place, that is an honour to him far beyond his gold or purple, and should be, accordingly, his delight; and truly, if he do not make

conscience of his duty, and, in some measure, answer the end of his elevation, his robe and diadem, his gown and cap, his sword and mace, are but a reproach, like the purple robe and crown of thorns with which the Jews studied to ridicule our Saviour: for as clothes on a dead man will never make him warm, so robes on a bad man will never make him honourable. (3.) He took pains in the business of his place; (v. 16.) *The cause which I knew not I searched out*. He diligently inquired into the matters of fact, patiently and impartially heard both sides, set every thing in its true light, and cleared it from false colours; he laid all circumstances together, that he might find out the truth, and the merits of every cause, and then, and not till then, gave judgment upon it; he never answered a matter before he heard it, nor did he judge a man to be righteous, however he seemed, for his being *first in his own cause*, Prov. 18. 17.

4. He valued himself by the check he gave to the violence of proud and evil men; (v. 17.) *I brake the jaws of the wicked*; he does not say that he brake their necks; he did not take away their lives, but he brake their jaws; he took away their power of doing mischief, he humbled them, mortified them, and curbed their insolence, and so plucked the spoil out of their teeth; delivered the persons and estates of honest men from being made a prey of by them; when they had got the spoil between their teeth, and were greedily swallowing it down, he bravely rescued it, as David did the lamb out of the mouth of the lion, not fearing, though they roared and raged like a lion disappointed of his prey. Good magistrates must thus be a terror and restraint to evil-doers, and a protection to the innocent, and, in order to this, they have need to arm themselves with zeal and resolution, and an undaunted courage: a judge upon the bench has as much need to be bold and brave, as a commander in the field.

18. Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand. 19. My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch. 20. My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand. 21. Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. 22. After my words, they spake not again; and my speech dropped upon them. 23. And they waited for me as for the rain; and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain. 24. If I laughed on them, they believed it not; and the light of my countenance they cast not down. 25. I chose out their way, and sat chief, and dwelt as a king in the army, as one that comforteth the mourners.

That which crowned Job's prosperity, was, the pleasing prospect he had of the continuance of it; though he knew, in general, that he was liable to trouble, and therefore was not secure; (ch. 3. 26.) *I was not in safety, neither had I rest*, yet he had no particular occasion for fear, but as much reason as ever any man had to count upon the lengthening out of his tranquillity.

I see here what his thoughts were in his prosperity; (v. 18.) *Then I said, I shall die in my nest*. Having made himself a warm and easy nest, he hoped nothing would disturb him in it, nor move him out of it, till death removed him. He knew he had never stolen any coal from the altar, which might fire his nest: he saw no storm arising to shake down his nest, and therefore concluded, *To-morrow shall be as this day*; as David; (Ps. 30. 6.) *My mountain stands strong, and shall not be moved*. Observe, 1. In the midst of his prosperity, he thought of dying, and the thought was not uneasy to him. He knew that though his nest was high, it did not

set him out of the reach of the darts of death. 2. Yet he flattered himself with vain hopes, (1.) That he should live long, should *multiply his days as the sand*. He means as the sand on the sea-shore; whereas we should rather reckon our days by the sand in the hour-glass, which will be run out in a little time. See how apt even good people are to think of death as a thing at a distance, and to put far from them that evil day, which will really be to them a good day. (2.) That he should die in the same prosperous state in which he had lived. If such an expectation as this arise from a lively faith in the providence and promise of God, it is well, but if from a conceit of our own wisdom, and the stability of these earthly things, it is ill-grounded, and turns into sin. We hope Job's confidence was like David's; (Ps. 27. 1.) *Whom shall I fear? not like the rich fool's*, (Luke, 12. 19.) *Soul, take thine ease*.

II. See what was the ground of these thoughts.

1. If he looked at home, he found he had a good foundation. His stock was all his own, and none of all his neighbours had a demand upon him. He found no bodily distemper growing upon him, his estate did not lie under any incumbrance, nor was he sensible of any worm at the root of it. He was getting forward in his affairs, and not going behind-hand; he lost no reputation, but gained rather; he knew no rival that threatened either to eclipse his honour, or abridge his power: see how he describes this, v. 19. 20. He was like a tree whose root is not only spread out, which fixes it and keeps it firm, so that it is in no danger of being overturned, but spread out by the waters, which feed it, and make it fruitful and flourishing, so that it is in no danger of withering. And as he thought himself blessed with the fatness of the earth, so also with the kind influences of Heaven too; for the *dew lay all night upon his branch*. Providence favoured him, and made all his enjoyments comfortable, and all his enterprises successful. Let none think to support their prosperity with what they draw from this earth, without that blessing which is derived from above. God's favour being continued to Job, in the virtue of that, his glory was still fresh in him: those about him had still something new to say in his praise, and needed not to repeat the old stories: and it is only by constant goodness that men's glory is thus preserved fresh, and kept from withering and growing stale. His bow also was renewed in his hand, that is, his power to protect himself, and annoy those that assailed him, still increased, so that he thought he had as little reason as any man to fear the insults of the Sabeans and Chaldeans.

2. If he looked abroad, he found he had a good interest and well-confirmed. As he had no reason to dread the power of his enemies, so neither had he any reason to distrust the fidelity of his friends: to the last moment of his prosperity they continued their respects to him, and their dependence on him. What had he to fear, who so gave counsel, as, in effect, to give law to all his neighbours? Nothing surely could be done *against* him, when really nothing was done *without* him.

(1.) He was the *oracle* of his country. He was consulted as an oracle, and his dictates were acquiesced in as oracles, v. 21. When others could not be heard, all men gave ear to him, and kept silence at his counsel, knowing that, as nothing could be said against it, so nothing needed to be added to it. And therefore, after his words they spake not again, v. 22. Why should men meddle with a subject that has already been exhausted?

(2.) He was the *darling* of his country. All about him were well-pleased with every thing he said and did, as David's people were with him, 2 Sam. 3. 36. He had the hearts and affections of all his neighbours, all his servants, tenants, subjects; never was man so much admired, nor so well beloved. [1.] They were thought happy to whom he spake, and they thought themselves so: never were the dews of heaven so acceptable to the parched ground, as his wise discourses were to them that attended on them, especially to whom they were particularly accommodated and directed. His speech dropped upon them, and they waited for it as for the rain; (v. 22, 23.) wondering at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, catching at them, laying hold on them, and treasuring them up as apophthegms. His servants, that stood continually before him to hear his wisdom, would not have envied Solomon's.

Those are wise, or are likely to be so, that know how to value wise discourse, that wish for it, and wait for it, and drink it in as the earth does the *rain that comes often upon it*, Heb. 6. 7. And those who have such an interest as Job had in the esteem of others, whose *ipse dixit*—bare assertion goes so far, as they have a great opportunity of doing good, so they must take great care lest they do hurt, for a bad word out of their mouths is very infectious. [2.] Much more happy were they thought on whom he smiled, and they thought themselves so, v. 24. "If I laughed on them, designing thereby to shew myself pleased in them, or pleasant with them, it was such a favour, that they believed it not for joy, or because it was so rare a thing to see this grave man smile. Many seek the ruler's favour: Job was a ruler whose favour was courted, and valued at a high rate. He to whom a great prince gave a kiss, was envied by another to whom he only gave a golden cup. Familiarity often breeds contempt, but if Job at any time saw fit, for his own diversion, to make himself free with those about him, yet it did not in the least diminish the veneration they had for him: *the light of his countenance they cast not down*. So wisely did he dispense his favours, as not to make them cheap, and so wisely did they receive them, as not to make themselves unworthy of them another time.

(3.) He was the *sovereign* of his country, v. 25. He chose out their way, sat at the helm, and steered for them, all referring themselves to his conduct, and submitting themselves to his command. To this perhaps, in many countries, monarchy owed its rise: such a man as Job, that so far excelled all his neighbours in wisdom and integrity, could not but sit chief, and the fool will, of course, be servant to the wise in heart: and if the wisdom did but for a while run in the blood, the honour and power would certainly attend it, and so by degrees become hereditary. Two things recommended Job to the sovereignty. [1.] That he had the authority of a commander, or general; he dwelt as a king in the army, giving orders which were not to be disputed. Every one that has the spirit of wisdom, has not the spirit of government, but Job had both, and, when there was occasion, could assume state, as the king in the army does, and say, Go, Come, and, Do this, Matth. 8. 9. [2.] That yet he had the tenderness of a comforter. He was as ready to succour those in distress, as if it had been his office to comfort the mourners. Eliphaz himself owned he had been very good in that respect; (ch. 4. 3.) *Thou hast strengthened the weak hands*. And this he now reflected upon with pleasure, when he was himself a mourner; but we find it easier to comfort others with the comforts wherewith we ourselves have been formerly comforted, than to comfort ourselves with those comforts wherewith we have formerly comforted others.

I know not but we may look upon Job as a type and figure of Christ, in his power and prosperity: our Lord Jesus is such a King as Job was; the poor man's King, who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and upon whom the blessing of a world ready to perish comes; see Ps. 72. 2, &c. To him therefore let us give ear, and let him sit chief in our hearts.

CHAP. XXX.

It is a melancholy But now, which this chapter begins with. Adversity is here described as much to the life as prosperity was there, and the height of that did but increase the depth of this. God sets the one over-against the other, and so did Job, that his afflictions might appear the more grievous, and, consequently, his case the more pitiable. I. He had lived in great honour, but now he had fallen into disgrace, and was as much vilified, even by the meanest, as ever he had been magnified by the greatest; this he insists much on, v. 1. 14. II. He had had much inward comfort and delight, but now he was a terror and burthen to himself, (v. 15, 16.) and overwhelmed with sorrow, v. 28. 31. III. He had long enjoyed a good state of health, but now he was sick and in pain, v. 17. 19, 29, 30. IV. Time was, when the secret of God was with him, but now his communication with Heaven was cut off, v. 20. 22. V. He had promised himself a long life, but now he saw death at the door, v. 23. One thing he mentions, which aggravated his affliction, that it surprised him when he looked for peace. But two things gave him some relief; 1. That his troubles would not follow him to the grave, v. 24. 2. That his conscience witnessed for him, that in his prosperity, he had sympathized with those that were in misery, v. 25.

1. **B**UT now *they that are younger than I* have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock. 2. Yea, whereto *might* the strength of their hands profit me, in whom old age was perished? 3. For want and famine *they were* solitary; fleeing into the wilderness in former time desolate and waste. 4. Who cut up mallows by the bushes, and juniper roots for their meat. 5. They were driven forth from among men, (they cried after them as *after* a thief;) 6. To dwell in the cliffs of the valleys, in caves of the earth, and in the rocks. 7. Among the bushes they brayed; under the nettles they were gathered together. 8. *They were* children of fools, yea, children of base men: they were viler than the earth. 9. And now am I their song, yea, I am their byword. 10. They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face. 11. Because he hath loosed my cord, and afflicted me, they have also let loose the bridle before me. 12. Upon my right hand rise the youth; they push away my feet, and they raise up against me the ways of their destruction. 13. They mar my path, they set forward my calamity, they have no helper. 14. They came upon me as a wide breaking in of waters: in the desolation they rolled themselves upon me.

Here Job makes a very large and sad complaint of the great disgrace he was fallen into, from the height of honour and reputation, which was exceedingly grievous and cutting to such an ingenuous spirit as Job's was. Two things he insists upon as very aggravating.

I. The meanness of the persons that affronted him. As it added much to his honour, in the day of his prosperity, that princes and nobles shewed him respect, and paid a deference to him, so it added no less to his disgrace in his adversity, that he was spurned by the footmen, and trampled upon by those that were not only every way his inferiors, but were the meanest and most contemptible of all mankind. None can be represented as more base than they are here represented, who insulted Job, upon all accounts.

1. They were young, younger than he; (v. 1.) the youth, (v. 12.) who ought to have behaved themselves respectfully toward him, for his age and gravity. Even the children, in their play, played upon him, as the children of Bethel upon the prophet, *Go up, thou bald-head*. Children soon learn to be scornful, when they see their parents so.

2. They were of a mean extraction; their fathers were so very despicable, that such a man as Job would have disdained to take them into the lowest service about his house, as that of tending the sheep, and attending the shepherds with the dogs of his flock, v. 1. They were so shabby, that they were not fit to be seen among his servants, so silly, that they were not fit to be employed, and so false, that they were not fit to be trusted in the meanest post. Job here speaks of what he might have done, not of what he did: he was not of such a spirit as to set any of the children of men with the dogs of his flock; he knew the dignity of human nature better than to do so.

3. They and their families were the unprofitable burthens of the earth, and good for nothing; Job himself, with all his prudence and patience, could make nothing of them, v. 2. The young were not fit for labour, they were so lazy, and went about their work so awkwardly; *Whereto might the strength of their hands profit me?*

old were not to be advised with in the smallest matters; for

in them was old age indeed, but their old age was perished, they were twice children.

4. They were extremely poor; (v. 3.) they were ready to starve, for they would not dig, and to beg they were ashamed. Had they been brought to necessity by the providence of God, their neighbours would have sought them out as proper objects of charity, and would have relieved them; but, being brought into straits by their own slothfulness and wastefulness, nobody was forward to relieve them; hence they were forced to flee into the deserts both for shelter and sustenance, and were put to sorry shifts indeed, when they cut up mallows by the bushes, and were glad to eat them, for want of food that was fit for them, v. 4. See what hunger will bring men to: one half of the world does not know how the other half lives; yet those that have abundance ought to think sometimes of those whose fare is very coarse, and who are brought to a short allowance of that too; but we must own the righteousness of God, and not think it strange, if slothfulness clothe men with rags, and the idle soul be made to suffer hunger. This beggarly world is snail of the Devil's poor.

5. They were very scandalous wicked people, not only the burthens, but the plagues, of the places where they lived, the scum of the country; *they were driven forth from among men*, v. 5. They were such lying, thieving, lurking, mischievous, people, that, the best service the magistrates could do, was, to rid the country of them, while the very mob cried after them, as after a thief, *Away with such fellows from the earth, it is not fit they should live*. They were lazy and would not work, and therefore they were exclaimed against as thieves, and justly, for they that do not earn their own bread by honest labour, do, in effect, steal the bread out of other people's mouths; an idle fellow is a public nuisance; but it is better to drive such into a work-house, than, as here, into a wilderness, which will punish them indeed, but never reform them. They were forced to dwell in caves of the earth, and they brayed like asses among the bushes, v. 6, 7. See what is the lot of those that have the cry of the country, the cry of their own conscience, against them; they cannot but be in a continual terror and confusion; they groan among the trees, (so Broughton,) and smart among the nettles; they are stung and scratched there, where they hoped to be sheltered and protected. See what miseries wicked people bring themselves to in this world; yet this is nothing to what is in reserve for them in the other world.

6. They were all that is base, v. 8. They had nothing at all in them to recommend them to any man's esteem: they were a vile kind; yea, a kind without fame; people that nobody could give a good word to, nor had a good wish for; they were banished from the earth, as being viler than the earth. One would not think it possible that ever the human nature should sink so low, and degenerate so far, as it did in these people. When we thank God that we are men, we have reason to thank him that we are not such men. But such as these were abusive to Job, (1.) In revenge; because, when he was in prosperity and power, like a good magistrate, he put the laws in execution, which were in force against vagabonds, and rogues, and sturdy beggars, which these base people now remembered against him. (2.) In triumph over him, because they thought he was now become like one of them. Isa. 14, 10, 11. The abjects, men of mean spirits, insult over the miserable, Ps. 35, 15.

II. The greatness of the affronts that were given him: it cannot be imagined how abusive they were.

1. They made ballads on him, with which they made themselves and their companions merry; (v. 9.) *I am their song, and their byword*. Those have a very base spirit, that turn the calamities of their honest neighbours into a jest, and can sport themselves with their griefs.

2. They shunned him as a loathsome spectacle, abhorred him, fled far from him, (v. 10.) as an ugly monster, or as one infected; they that were themselves driven out from among men, would have driven him out. For,

3. They expressed the greatest scorn and indignation against him. They spit in his face, or were ready to do so; they tripped up his heels, pushed away his feet, (v. 12.) kicked him, either in

wrath, because they hated him, or in sport, to make themselves merry with him, as they did with their companions at foot-ball. The best of saints have sometimes received the worst of injuries and indignities, from a spiteful, scornful, wicked, world, and must not think it strange; our Master himself was thus abused.

4. They were very malicious against him, and not only made a jest of him, but made a prey of him; not only affronted him, but set themselves to do him all the real mischief they could devise. *They raise up against me the ways of their destruction*; or, as some read it, *They cast upon me the cause of their woe*; that is, "They lay the blame of their being driven out, upon me;" and it is common for criminals to hate the judges and laws by which they are punished. But, under this pretence, (1.) They accused him falsely, and misrepresented his former conversation, which is here called *marring his path*. They reflected upon him as a tyrant and an oppressor, because he had done justice upon them; and perhaps Job's friends grounded their uncharitable censures of him (*ch.* 22. 6, &c.) upon the unjust and unreasonable clamours of these sorry people; and it was an instance of their great weakness and inconsideration; for who can be innocent, if the accusations of such persons may be heeded? (2.) They not only triumphed in his calamity, but set it forward, and did all they could to add to his miseries, and make them more grievous to him. It is a great sin to forward the calamity of any, especially of good people: in this they have no helper, nobody to set them on, or to countenance them in it; nobody to bear them out, or to protect them, but they do it of their own accord; they are fools in other things, but wise enough to do mischief, and need no help in inventing that. Some read it thus, *They hold my heaviness a profit, though they be never the better*. Wicked people, though they get nothing by the calamities of others, yet rejoice in them.

5. They that did him all this mischief, were numerous, unanimous, and violent; (*v.* 14.) *They came upon me as a wide breaking in of waters*, when the dam is broken; or, "They came as soldiers into a broad breach which they have made in the wall of a besieged city, pouring in upon me with the utmost fury;" and in this they took a pride and a pleasure; they rolled themselves in the desolation, as a man rolls himself in a soft and easy bed; and they rolled themselves upon him with all the weight of their malice.

Lastly, All this contempt put upon him, was caused by the troubles he was in; (*v.* 11.) "Because he has loosed my cord; has taken away the honour and power with which I was girded, (*ch.* 12. 18.) has scattered what I had got together, and untwisted all my affairs, because he has afflicted me, therefore *they have let loose the bridle before me*," that is, "have given themselves a liberty to say and do what they please against me." They that by Providence are stripped of their honour, may expect to be loaded with contempt by inconsiderate ill-natured people. "Because he hath loosed his cord," (the original has that reading also,) that is, "because he has taken off his bridle of restraint from off their malice, they cast away the bridle from me," that is, "they make no account of my authority, nor stand in any awe of me." It is owing to the hold God has of the consciences even of bad men, and the restraints he lays upon them, that we are not continually thus insulted and abused; and if at any time we meet with such ill treatment, we must acknowledge the hand of God in taking off those restraints; as David did, when Shimei cursed him; *So let him curse, for the Lord hath hidden him*.

Now in all this, (1.) We may see the uncertainty of worldly honour, and particularly of popular applause; how suddenly a man may fall from the height of dignity into the depth of disgrace. What little cause therefore have men to be ambitious or proud of that which may be so easily lost, and what little confidence is to be put in it! They that, to-day, cry, *Hosannah*, may, to-morrow, cry, *Crucify*. But there is an honour which comes from God, which, if we secure, we shall find it not thus changeable and loseable. (2.) We may see that it has often been the lot of very wise and good men, to be trampled upon and abused. And, (3.) That those who look only at the things that are seen, despise those whom the world frowns upon, though they are ever so much the

favourites of Heaven. Nothing is more grievous in poverty than that it renders men contemptible: *Turba Remi sequitur fortunam, ut semper odit damnatos*—*The Roman populace, faithful to the turns of fortune, still persecutes the fallen*. (4.) We may see in Job a type of Christ, who was thus made a reproach of men, and despised of the people, (*Ps.* 22. 6. *Isa.* 53. 3.) and who hid not his face from shame and spitting, but bore it better than Job did.

15. Terrors are turned upon me: they pursue my soul as the wind: and my welfare passeth away as a cloud. 16. And now my soul is poured out upon me; the days of affliction have taken hold upon me. 17. My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest. 18. By the great force of my disease is my garment changed: it bindeth me about as the collar of my coat. 19. He hath cast me into the mire, and I am become like dust and ashes. 20. I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me *not*. 21. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me. 22. Thou liftest me up to the wind; thou causest me to ride upon it, and dissolvest my substance. 23. For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living. 24. Howbeit he will not stretch out his hand to the grave, though they cry in his destruction. 25. Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was *not* my soul grieved for the poor? 26. When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness. 27. My bowels boiled, and rested not: the days of affliction prevented me. 28. I went mourning without the sun: I stood up, and I cried in the congregation. 29. I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls. 30. My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burnt with heat. 31. My harp also is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep.

In this second part of Job's complaint, which is very bitter, and has a great many sorrowful accents in it, we may observe a great deal that he complains of, and some little that he comforts himself with.

I. Here is much that he complains of.

1. In general, it was a day of great affliction and sorrow. (1.) Affliction seized him, and surprised him. It seized him; (*v.* 16.) *The days of affliction have taken hold upon me*; *he caught me*, so some; *they have arrested me*, as the bailiff arrests the debtor, and by violence secures him. When trouble comes with commission, it will take fast hold, and not lose its hold. It surprised him; (*v.* 27.) "The days of affliction prevented me," that is, "they came upon me without giving me any previous warning; I did not expect them, nor made any provision for such an evil day." Observe, He reckons his affliction by days, which will soon be numbered and finished, and are nothing to the ages of eternity, 2 Cor. 4. 17. (2.) He was in great sorrow by reason of it. His bowels boiled with grief, and rested not, *v.* 27. The sense of his calamities was continually preying upon his spirits, without any intermission: he went mourning from day to day, always sighing, always weeping; and such a cloud was constantly

upon his mind, that he went, in effect, without the sun, v. 28. he had nothing that he could take any comfort in; he abandoned himself to perpetual sorrow, as one that, like Jacob, resolved to go to the grave mourning: he walked out of the sun, (so some,) in dark shady places, as melancholy people use to do. If he went into the congregation, to join with them in solemn worship; instead of standing up calmly to desire their prayers, he stood up and cried aloud, through pain of body, or anguish of mind, like one half distracted. If he appeared in public, to receive visits, when the fit came upon him, he could not contain himself, nor preserve due decorum, but stood up, and shrieked aloud. Thus he was a brother to dragons and owls, (v. 29.) both in choosing solitude and retirement, as they do, (Isa. 34. 13.) and in making a fearful hideous noise, as they do; his inconsiderate complaints were fitly compared to their inarticulate ones.

2. The terror and trouble that seized his soul, were the sorest part of his calamity, v. 15, 16. (1.) If he looked forward, he saw every thing frightful before him: if he endeavoured to shake off his terrors, they turned furiously upon him: if he endeavoured to escape from them, they pursued his soul as swiftly and violently as the wind. He complained, at first, of the *terrors of God setting themselves in array against him*, ch. 6. 4. And still, which way soever he looked, they turned upon him; which way soever he fled, they pursued him. *My Soul*.—Heb. *My principal one*. *My princess*; for the soul is the principal part of the man; it is our glory; it is every way more excellent than the body, and therefore that which pursues the soul, and threatens that, should be most dreaded. (2.) If he looked back, he saw all the good he had formerly enjoyed removed from him, and nothing left him but the bitter remembrance of it; *My welfare passeth away*, as suddenly, swiftly, and irrecoverably, as a cloud. (3.) If he looked within, he found his spirit quite sunk, and unable to bear his infirmity, not only wounded, but *poured out upon him*, v. 16. He was not only weak as water, but, in his own apprehension, lost as water spilt upon the ground. Compare Ps. 22. 14. *My heart is melted like wax*.

3. His bodily diseases were very grievous; for, (1.) He was full of pain, piercing pain, pain that went to the bone, to all his bones, v. 17. It was a *sword in his bones*, which *pierced him in the night season*, when he should have been refreshed with sleep; his nerves were affected with strong convulsions, his sinews took no rest. By reason of his pain, he could take no rest, but sleep departed from his eyes. *His bones were burnt with heat*; (v. 30.) He was in a constant fever, which dried up the radical moisture, and even consumed the marrow in his bones. See how frail our bodies are, which carry in themselves the seeds of our own disease and death. (2.) He was full of sores. Some, that are pained in their bones, yet sleep in a whole skin, but Satan's commission against Job extending both to his bone and to his flesh, he spared neither. *His skin was black upon him*, v. 30. The blood settled, and the sores suppurated, which made his skin look black. Even his garment had its colour changed with the continual running of his boils, and the soft clothing he used to wear was now grown so stiff, that all his garments were *like his collar*, v. 18. It would be noisome to describe what a condition poor Job was in, for want of clean linen and good attendance, and what filthy rags all his clothes were. Some think, that, among other diseases, Job was ill of a quinsy, or swelling in his throat, and that that was it which bound him about like a stiff collar.

Thus was he *cast into the mire*, (v. 19.) compared to mire, so some: his body looked more like a heap of dirt than any thing else. Let none be proud of their clothing, nor proud of their cleanness; they know not but some disease or other may *change their garments*, and even *throw them into the mire*, and make them noisome both to themselves and others; *instead of sweet smell, there shall be a stench*, Isa. 3. 24. We are but dust and ashes at the best, and our bodies vile bodies; but we are apt to forget it, till God, by some sore disease, makes us sensibly to feel and own what we are; "*I am become already like that dust and ashes into which I must shortly be resolved: wherever I go, I carry my grave about with me.*"

4. That which afflicted him most of all, was, that God seemed to be his Enemy, and to fight against him. It was *he that cast him into the mire*, (v. 19.) and seemed to trample on him when he had him there. This cut him to the heart more than any thing else. (1.) That God did not appear for him. He addressed himself to him, but gained no grant; appealed to him, but gained no sentence; he was very importunate in his applications, but in vain; (v. 20.) "*I cry unto thee*, as one in earnest, I stand up and cry, as one waiting for an answer, but thou hearest not, thou regardest not, for any thing I can perceive." If our most fervent prayers bring not in speedy and sensible returns, we must not think it strange. Though the seed of Jacob did never seek in vain, yet they have often thought that they did, and that God has not only been deaf, but angry, at the prayers of his people, Ps. 80. 4. (2.) That God did *appear against him*, We have here one of the worst words that ever Job spake; (v. 21.) *Thou art become cruel to me*; far be it from the God of mercy and grace, that he should be cruel to any; his compassions fail not; but especially that he should be so to his own children: Job was unjust and ungrateful, when he said so of him, but harbouring hard thoughts of God was the sin which did, at this time, most easily beset him. Here, [1.] He thought God fought against him, and stirred up his whole strength to ruin him; *With thy strong hand thou opposeth thyself*, or art an Adversary against me. He had better thoughts of God, (ch. 23. 6.) when he concluded he would *not plead against him with his great power*. God has an absolute sovereignty, and an irresistible strength, but he never uses either the one or the other for the crushing or oppressing of any. [2.] He thought he insulted over him; (v. 22.) *Thou liftest me up to the wind*, as a feather or the chaff which the wind plays with; so unequal a match did Job think himself for Omnipotence, and so unable was he to help himself, when he was made to ride, not in triumph, but in terror, upon the wings of the wind, and the judgments of God did even dissolve his substance, as a cloud is dissolved and dispersed by the wind. Man's substance, take him in his best estate, is nothing before the power of God, it is soon dissolved.

5. He expected no other now, than that God, by these troubles, would shortly make an end of him. "If I be made to ride upon the wind, I can count upon no other than to break my neck shortly; and he speaks as if God had no other design upon him than that, in all his dealings with him; "*I know that thou wilt bring me*, with so much the more terror, *to death*, though I might have been brought thither without all this ado, for it is *the house appointed for all living*," v. 23. The grave is a house, a narrow, dark, cold, ill-furnished, house, but it will be our residence, where we shall rest and be safe; it is our long home, our own home, for it is our mother's lap, and in it we are gathered to our fathers. It is a house appointed for us, by him that has appointed us the bounds of all our habitations. It is appointed for all living. It is the common receptacle, where rich and poor meet, it is appointed for the general rendezvous; we must all be brought thither shortly; it is God that brings us, for the keys of death and the grave are in his hand, and we may all know that, sooner or later, he will bring us thither; it would be well for us, if we would duly consider it. *The living know that they shall die*; let us, each of us, know it with application.

6. There were two things that aggravated his trouble, and made it the less tolerable. (1.) That it was a very great disappointment to his expectation; (v. 26.) "*When I looked for good*, for mere good, or, at least, for the continuance of what I had, *then evil came*:" such uncertain things are all our worldly enjoyments, and such a folly is it to feed ourselves with great expectations from them. They that wait for light from the sparks of their creature-comforts, will be wretchedly disappointed, and will *make their bed in the darkness*. (2.) That it was a very great change in his condition; (v. 31.) "*My harp is not only laid by, and hung upon the willow-trees, but it is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep.*" Job, in his prosperity, had taken the timbrel and harp, and *rejoiced at the sound of the organ*, ch. 21. 12. Notwithstanding his gravity and grace, he had found time to be

cheerful; but now his time was altered. Let those, therefore, that rejoice, be *as though they rejoiced not*, for they know not how soon their *laughter will be turned into mourning, and their joy into heaviness*. Thus we see how much Job complains of: but,

II. Here is something, in the midst of all, with which he comforts himself, and it is but a little. 1. He foresees, with comfort, that death will be the period of all his calamities; (v. 24.) Though God now, *with a strong hand, opposed himself against him, yet, says he, he will not stretch out his hand to the grave*. The hand of God's wrath would bring him to death, but would not follow him beyond death; his soul would be safe and happy in the world of spirits, his body safe and easy in the dust. Though men cry in his destruction; though, when they are dying, there is a great deal of agony and outcry, many a sigh, and groan, and complaint, yet in the grave they feel nothing, they fear nothing, but all is quiet there. "Though in hell, which is called *destruction*, they cry, yet not in the grave; and I being delivered from the second death, the first to me will be an effectual relief." Therefore he wished he might be *hid in the grave*, ch. 14. 13. 2. He reflects with comfort upon the concern he always had for the calamities of others, when he was himself at ease; (v. 25.) *Did not I weep for him that was in trouble?* Some think he herein complains of God, thinking it very hard, that he, who had shewed mercy to others, should not himself find mercy. I would rather take it as a quieting consideration to himself; his conscience witnessed for him, that he had always sympathized with persons in misery, and done what he could to help them, and therefore had reason to expect that, at length, both God and his friends would pity him. They who mourn with them that mourn, will bear their own sorrows the better, when it comes to their turn to drink of the bitter cup. *Did not my soul burn for the poor?* So some read it, comparing it with that of St. Paul, (2 Cor. 11. 29.) *Who is offended, and I burn not?* As they who have been unmerciful and hard-hearted to others, may expect to hear of it from their own consciences, when they are themselves in trouble, so they who have considered the poor and succoured them, shall have the remembrance of that to make their bed easy in their sickness, Ps. 41. 1, 3.

CHAP. XXXI.

Job had often protested his integrity in general, here he does it in particular instances; not in a way of commendation, (for he does not here proclaim his good deeds,) but in his own just and necessary vindication, to clear himself from those crimes with which his friends had falsely charged him, which is a debt every man owes to his own reputation. Job's friends had been particular in their articles of impeachment against him, and therefore he is so in his protestation, which seems to refer especially to what Eliphaz had accused him of, ch. 22. 6, &c. They had produced no witnesses against him, neither could they prove the things whereof they now accused him, and therefore he may well be admitted to purge himself upon oath, which he does very solemnly, and with many awful imprecations of God's wrath, if he were guilty of those crimes; this protestation confirms God's character of him, that there was none like him in the earth; perhaps some of his accusers durst not have joined with him; for he not only acquits himself from those gross sins which lie open to the eye of the world, but from many secret sins, which, though he had been guilty of them, nobody could have charged him with, because he will prove himself no hypocrite. Nor does he only maintain the cleanness of his practices, but shews also that in them he went upon good principles; that the reason of his eschewing evil, was, because he feared God, and his piety was at the bottom of his justice and charity; and this crowns the proof of his sincerity. The sins from which he here acquits himself, are, 1. Wantonness and uncleanness of heart, v. 1. 4. 2. Fraud and injustice in commerce, v. 4. 8. 3. Adultery, v. 9. 12. 4. Haughtiness and severity toward his servants, v. 13. 15. 5. Unmercifulness to the poor, the widows, and the fatherless, v. 16. 23. 6. Confidence in his worldly wealth, v. 24. 25. 7. Idolatry, v. 26. 28. 8. Revenge, v. 29. 31. 9. Neglect of poor strangers, v. 32. 10. Hypocrisy in concealing his own sins, and cowardice in conniving at the sins of others, v. 33. 34. 11. Oppression, and the violent invasion of other people's rights, v. 38. 40. And, toward the close, he appeals to God's judgment concerning his integrity, v. 35. 37. Now, in all this, we may see, (1.) The sense of the patriarchal age concerning good and evil, and what was so long ago condemned as sinful, that is, both hateful and hurtful. (2.) A noble pattern of piety and virtue proposed to us for our imitation, which, if our consciences can witness for us that we conform to it, will be our rejoicing, as it was Job's, in the day of evil.

1. **I MADE** a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid! 2. For what portion of God is *there* from above, and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high? 3. Is not destruction to the wicked, and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity? 4. Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps? 5. If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot hath hasted to deceit; 6. Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity. 7. If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to mine hands; 8. *Then* let me sow, and let another eat; yea, let my offspring be rooted out.

The lusts of the flesh, and the love of the world, are the two fatal rocks on which multitudes split; against these Job protests he was always careful to stand upon his guard.

I. Against the lusts of the flesh. He not only kept himself clear from adultery, from defiling his neighbours' wives, (v. 9.) but from all lewdness with any women whatsoever. He kept no concubine, but was inviolably faithful to the marriage-bed, though his wife was none of the wisest, best, or kindest. From the beginning it was so, that a man should have but one wife, and cleave to her only; and Job kept close to that institution, and abhorred the thought of transgressing it; for, though his greatness might tempt him to it, his goodness kept him from it. Job was now in pain and sickness of body, and under that affliction it is in a particular manner comfortable, if our consciences can witness for us, that we have been careful to preserve our bodies in chastity, and to possess those vessels in sanctification and honour, pure from the lusts of uncleanness. Now observe here,

1. What the resolutions were, which, in this matter, he kept to; (v. 1.) *I made a covenant with mine eyes*, that is, "I watched against the occasions of the sin; *why then should I think upon a maid?*" that is, "By that means, through the grace of God, I kept myself from the very first step towards it." So far was he from wanton dalliances, or any act of lasciviousness, that, (1.) He would not so much as admit a wanton look. *He made a covenant with his eyes*, made this bargain with them, that he would allow them the pleasure of beholding the light of the sun, and the glory of God shining in the visible creation, provided they would never fasten upon any object that might occasion any impure imaginations, much less any impure desires, in his mind; and, under this penalty, that if they did, they must smart for it in penitential tears. Note, Those that would keep their hearts pure, must guard their eyes, which are both the outlets and inlets of uncleanness. Hence we read of wanton eyes, (Isa. 3. 16.) and *eyes full of adultery*, 2 Pet. 2. 14. The first sin began in the eye, Gen. 3. 6. What we must not meddle with, we must not lust after; and what we must not lust after, we must not look at; not the forbidden wealth, (Prov. 23. 5.) not the forbidden wine, (Prov. 23. 34.) not the forbidden woman, Matth. 5. 28. (2.) He would not so much as allow a wanton thought; "*Why then should I think upon a maid*, with any unchaste fancy or desire toward her?" Shame and sense of honour might restrain him from *soliciting* the chastity of a beautiful virgin, but only grace and the fear of God would restrain him from so much as *thinking of it*. Those are not chaste, that are not so in spirit as well as body, 1 Cor. 7. 34. See how Christ's exposition of the seventh commandment agrees with the ancient sense of it, and how much better Job understood it than the Pharisees, though they sat in Moses's chair.

2. What the reasons were, which, in this matter, he was governed by. It was not for fear of reproach among men, though that is to be considered, (Prov. 6. 33.) but for fear of the wrath and curse of God. He knew very well,

(1.) That uncleanness is a sin that forfeits all good, and shuts us out from the hope of it; (v. 2.) *What portion of God is there from above?* What blessing can such impure sinners expect from the pure and holy God, or what token of his favour? What inheritance of the Almighty can they look for from on high? There is no portion, no inheritance, no true happiness, for a soul, but what is in God, in the Almighty, and what comes from above, from on high. Those that wallow in uncleanness, render themselves utterly unfit for communion with God, either in grace here, or in glory hereafter, and become allied to unclean spirits, which are for ever separated from him; and then what portion, what inheritance, can they have with God? No unclean thing shall enter into the New Jerusalem, that holy city.

(2.) It is a sin that incurs divine vengeance, v. 3. It will certainly be the sinner's ruin, if it be not repented of in time. Is not destruction a swift and sure destruction to those wicked people, and a strange punishment to the workers of this iniquity? Fools make a mock at this sin, make a jest of it, it is with them a peccadillo, a trick of youth; but they deceive themselves with vain words, for, because of these things, how light soever they make of them, the wrath of God, the insupportable wrath of the eternal God, comes upon the children of disobedience, Eph. 5. 6. There are some sinners whom God sometimes goes out of the common road of providence to meet with; such are these. The destruction of Sodom is a strange punishment. Is there not alienation (so some read it) to the workers of iniquity? This is the sinfulness of the sin, that it alienates the mind from God; (Eph. 4. 18, 19.) and this is the punishment of the sinners, that they shall be eternally set at a distance from him, Rev. 22. 15.

(3.) It cannot be hid from the all-seeing God. A wanton thought cannot be so close, nor a wanton look so quick, as to escape his cognizance, much less any act of uncleanness so secretly done, as to be out of his sight. If Job was at any time tempted to this sin, he restrained himself from it, and all approaches to it, with this pertinent thought, (v. 4.) *Doth not he see my ways?* as Joseph did, (Gen. 39. 9.) *How can I do it, and sin against God?* Two things Job had an eye to. [1.] God's omniscience. It is a great truth, that God's eyes are upon all the ways of men; (Prov. 5. 20, 21.) but Job here mentions it with application to himself and his own actions; *Doth not he see my ways?* O God, thou hast searched me and knowest what rule we walk by, what company we walk with, what end we walk toward, and therefore what ways we walk in. [2.] His observance. "He not only sees, but takes notice; he counts all my steps, all my false steps in the way of duty, all my by-steps into the way of sin." He not only sees our ways in general, but takes cognizance of our particular steps in these ways, every action, every motion. He keeps count of all, because he will call us to account, will bring every work into judgment. God takes a more exact notice of us than we do of ourselves; for who ever counted his own steps? Yet God counts them; let us therefore walk circumspectly.

II. He stood upon his guard against the love of the world, and carefully avoided all sinful indirect means of getting wealth. He dreaded all forbidden profit as much as all forbidden pleasure. Let us see,

1. What his protestation is: in general, that he had been honest and just in all his dealings, and never, to his knowledge, did any body any wrong. (1.) He never walked with vanity, that is, he never durst tell a lie, to get a good bargain. It was never his way to banter, or equivocate, or make many words, in his dealings. Some men's constant walk is a constant cheat. They either make what they have more than it is, that they may be trusted; or less than it is, that nothing may be expected from them. But Job was a different man. His wealth was not gotten by vanity, though now diminished, Prov. 13. 11. (2.) He never hastened to deceit. Those that deceive, must be quick and sharp, but Job's quickness and sharpness were never turned that way. He never made haste to be rich by deceit, but always acted cautiously, lest, through inconsideration, he should do an unjust thing. Note, What we have in the world, may be either used with comfort, or lost with comfort, if it was honestly got. (3.) His steps

never turned out of the way, the way of justice and fair dealing; from that he never deviated, v. 7. He not only took care not to walk in a constant course and way of deceit, but he did not so much as take one step out of the way of honesty. In every particular action and affair, we must closely tie ourselves up to the rules of righteousness. (4.) His heart did not walk after his eyes, that is, he did not covet what he saw, that was another's, nor wish it his own. Covetousness is called the *lust of the eye*, 1 John, 2. 16. Achan saw, and then took, the accursed thing. That heart must needs wander, that walks after the eyes; for then it looks no further than the things that are seen; whereas it ought to be in heaven, whither the eyes cannot reach: it should follow the dictates of religion and right reason: if it follow the eye, it will be misled to that for which *God will bring men into judgment*, Eccl. 11. 9. (5.) That no blot had cleaved to his hands, that is, he was not chargeable with getting any thing dishonestly, or keeping that which was another's, whenever it appeared to be so. Injustice is a blot, a blot to the estate, a blot to the owner; it spoils the beauty of both, and therefore is to be dreaded. Those that deal much in the world may perhaps have a blot come upon their hands, but they must wash it off again by repentance and restitution, and not let it cleave to their hands. See Isa. 33. 15.

2. How he ratifies his protestation. So confident is he of his own honesty, that, (1.) He is willing to have his goods searched; (v. 6.) *Let me be weighed in an even balance*, that is, "Let what I have got be inquired into, and it will be found to weigh well;" a sign that it was not gotten by vanity, for then *Tekel* had been written on it—weighed in the balance, and found too light. An honest man is so far from dreading a trial, that he desires it rather, being well-assured that God knows his integrity, and will approve it, and that the trial of it will be to his praise and honour. (2.) He is willing to forfeit the whole cargo, if there were found any prohibited, contraband, goods, any thing but what he came honestly by; (v. 8.) *"Let me sow, and let another eat,"* which was already agreed to be the doom of oppressors; (ch. 5. 5.) "and let my offspring, all the trees that I have planted, be rooted out." This intimates, that he believed the sin did deserve this punishment, that, usually, it is thus punished; but that, though now his estate was ruined, (and at such a time, if ever, his conscience would have brought his sin to his mind,) yet he knew himself innocent, and would venture all the poor remains of his estate upon the issue of the trial.

9. If mine heart have been deceived by a woman, or if I have laid wait at my neighbour's door; 10. Then let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her. 11. For this is an heinous crime; yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges. 12. For it is a fire that consumeth to destruction, and would root out all mine increase. 13. If I did despise the cause of my man-servant or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me; 14. What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? 15. Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?

Two more instances we have here of Job's integrity.

I. That he had a very great abhorrence of the sin of adultery. As he did not wrong his own marriage-bed, by keeping a concubine, (he did not so much as think upon a maid, (v. 1.) so he was careful not to offer any injury to his neighbour's marriage-bed.

Let us see here,

1. How clear he was from this sin, v. 9. (1.) He did not so much as covet his neighbour's wife, for even his heart was not deceived by a woman. The beauty of another man's wife did not kindle in him any unchaste desires, nor was he ever

moved by the allurements of an adulterous woman, such as is described, Prov. 7. 6, &c. See the original of all the defilements of this life; they come from a deceived heart. Every sin is deceitful, and none more so than the sin of uncleanness. (2.) He never compassed or imagined any unchaste design. He never *laid wait at his neighbour's door*, to get an opportunity to debauch his wife in his absence, when the good man was not at home, Prov. 7. 19. See *ch.* 24. 15.

2. What a dread he had of this sin, and what frightful apprehensions he had concerning the malignity of it—That it was a *heinous crime*, (v. 11.) one of the greatest vilest sins a man can be guilty of, highly provoking to God, and destructive to the prosperity of the soul. With respect to the mischievousness of it, and the punishment it deserved, he owns that, if he were guilty of that heinous crime, (1.) His family might justly be made infamous in the highest degree; (v. 10.) *Let my wife grind to another.* Let her be a *slave*, so some; a *harlot*, so others. God often punishes the sins of one with the sin of another, the adultery of the husband with the adultery of the wife, as in David's case, (2 Sam. 12. 11.) which does not in the least excuse the treachery of the adulterous wife; but, how unrighteous soever she is, God is righteous. See Hos. 4. 13. *Your spouses shall commit adultery.* Note, Those who are not just and faithful to their relations, must not think it strange, if their relations be unjust and unfaithful to them. (2.) He himself might justly be made a public example; *For it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges*; yea, though they who are guilty of it are themselves judges, as Job was. Note, Adultery is a crime which the civil magistrate ought to take cognizance of, and punish: so it was adjudged even in the patriarchal age, before the law of Moses made it capital. It is an evil work, to which the sword of justice ought to be a terror. (3.) It might justly become the ruin of his estate; nay, he knew it would be so; (v. 12.) *It is a fire.* Lust is a fire in the soul: they that indulge it, are said to *burn*. It consumes all that is good there, (the convictions, the comforts,) and lays the conscience waste. It kindles the fire of God's wrath, which, if not extinguished by the blood of Christ, will burn to the lowest hell. It will consume even to that eternal destruction. It consumes the body, (Prov. 5. 11.) it consumes the substance, it roots out all the increase. Burning lusts bring burning judgments. Perhaps it alludes to the burning of Sodom, which was intended for an example to those who should afterward, in like manner, live ungodly.

II. That he had a very great tenderness for his servants, and ruled them with a gentle hand. He had a great household, and he managed it well. By this he evidenced his sincerity, that he had grace to govern his passion as well as his appetite; and he that in these two things has the rule of his own spirit, is *better than the mighty*, Prov. 16. 32. Here observe,

1. What were Job's condescensions to his servants; (v. 13.) He did not *despise the cause of his man-servant*, no, nor of his *maid-servant, when they contended with him*; that is, if they contradicted him in any thing, he was willing to hear their reasons. If they had offended him, or were accused to him, he would patiently hear what they had to say for themselves, in their own vindication or excuse. Nay, if they complained of any hardship he put upon them, he did not brow-beat them, and bid them hold their tongues, but gave them leave to tell their story, and redressed their grievances as far as it appeared they had right on their side. He was tender of them, not only when they served him and pleased him, but even when they contended with him. Herein, he was a great example to masters, to *give unto their servants that which is just and equal*; nay, to do the same things to them, that they expect from them, (Col. 4. 1. Eph. 6. 9.) and not to rule them with rigour, and carry it with a high hand. Many of Job's servants were slain in his service, (ch. 1. 15. 17.) the rest were unkind and undutiful to him, and despised his cause, though he never despised theirs; (ch. 19. 15, 16.) but he had this comfort, that in his prosperity he had behaved well toward them. Note, When relations are either removed from us, or embittered to us, the testimony of our consciences, that we have done our duty to them, will be a great support and comfort to us.

2. What were the considerations that moved him to treat his servants thus kindly; he had, herein, an eye to God, both as his Judge, and their Maker.

(1.) As his Judge; he considered, "If I should be imperious and severe with my servants, *what then shall I do when God riseth up?*" He considered that he had a Master in heaven, to whom he was accountable, who will rise up, and will visit; and we are concerned to consider *what we shall do in the day of his visitation*, (Isa. 10. 3.) and, considering that we are undone, if God should then be strait and severe with us, we ought to be very mild and gentle towards all with whom we have to do. Consider what would become of us, if God should be extreme to mark what we do amiss, should take all advantages against us, and insist upon all his just demands from us; if he should visit every offence, and take every forfeiture; if he should always chide, and keep his anger for ever. And let not us be rigorous with our inferiors. Consider what will become of us, if we be cruel and unmerciful to our brethren. The cries of the injured will be heard, the sins of the injurious will be punished, they that shewed no mercy, shall find none; and what shall we do then?

(2.) As his and his servants' Creator; (v. 15.) when he was tempted to be harsh with his servants, to deny them right, and turn a deaf ear to their reasonings, this thought came very seasonably into his mind, "*Did not he that made me in the womb, make him?*" I am a creature as well as he, and my being is derived and depending as well as his. He partakes of the same nature that I do, and is the work of the same hand; *have we not all one Father?*" Note, Whatever difference there is among men in their outward condition, in their capacity of mind, or strength of body, or place in the world, he that made the one, made the other also; which is a good reason why we should not mock at men's natural infirmities, nor trample upon those that are any way our inferiors, but, in every thing, do as we would be done by. It is a rule of justice, *Parium par sit ratio—Let equals be equally estimated and treated*; and therefore since there is so great a parity among men, they being all made of the same mould, by the same power, for the same end, notwithstanding the disparity of our outward condition, we are bound so far to set ourselves upon the level with those we deal with, as to do to them, in all respects, as we would they should do to us.

16. If I have withheld the poor from *their* desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; 17. Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; 18. (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as *with* a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;) 19. If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; 20. If his loins have not blessed me, *and if* he were *not* warmed with the fleece of my sheep; 21. If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: 22. *Then* let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone. 23. For destruction *from* God *was* a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure.

Eliphaz had particularly charged Job with unmercifulness to the poor; (ch. 22. 6, &c.) Thou hast *withholden bread from the hungry, stripped the naked of their clothing*, and sent *widows away empty*. One would think he could not have been so very positive and express in his charge, unless there had been some truth in it, some ground for it; and yet it appears, by Job's protestation, that it was utterly false and groundless, he was never guilty of any such thing. See here,

I. The testimony which Job's conscience gave in, concerning his constant behaviour toward the poor. He is most large upon this

head, because in this matter he was most particularly accused. He solemnly protests,

1. That he had never been wanting to do good to them, as there was occasion, to the utmost of his ability. He was always compassionate to the poor, and careful of them, especially the widows and fatherless, that were destitute of help. (1.) He was always ready to grant their desires, and answer their expectations, *v. 16.* If a poor person begged a kindness of him, he was ready to gratify him; if he could but perceive, by the widow's mournful craving look, that she expected an alms from him, though she had not confidence enough to ask it, he had compassion enough to give it, and *never caused the eyes of the widow to fail.* (2.) He put a respect upon the poor, and did them honour; for he took the fatherless children to eat with him at his own table, they should fare as he lared, and be familiar with him, and he would shew himself pleased with their company, as if they had been his own, *v. 17.* As it is one of the greatest grievances of poverty, that it exposes to contempt, so it is none of the least supports to the poor, to be respected. (3.) He was very tender of them, and had a fatherly concern for them, *v. 18.* He was a father to the fatherless, took care of orphans, brought them up with him under his own eye, and gave them, not only maintenance, but education. He was a guide to the widow, who had lost the guide of her youth; he advised her in her affairs, took cognizance of them, and undertook the management of them. Those that need not our alms, may yet have occasion for our counsel, and it may be a real kindness to them. This Job says he did *from his youth, from his mother's womb*, that is, he had something of tenderness and compassion woven in his nature; he began betimes to do good, ever since he could remember; he had always some poor widow or fatherless child under his care. His parents taught him betimes to pity and relieve the poor, and brought up orphans with him. (4.) He provided food convenient for them; they ate of the same morsels that he did, (*v. 17.*) not *after* him, of the crumbs that fell from his table, but *with* him, of the best dish upon his table. They that have abundance, must not eat their morsels alone, as if they had none but themselves to take care of, nor indulge their appetite with a dainty bit by themselves, but take others to share with them, as David took Mephibosheth. (5.) He took particular care to clothe them that were without covering, which would be more expensive to him than feeding them, (*v. 19.*) Poor people may perish for want of clothing, as well as for want of food, for want of clothing to lie in by night, or to go abroad in by day. If Job knew of any that were in this distress, he was forward to relieve them, and, instead of giving rich and gaudy liveries to his servants, while the poor were turned off with rags that were ready to be thrown to the dunghill, he had good, warm, strong clothes, made on purpose for them, of *the fleece of his sheep*, (*v. 20.*) so that their loins, whenever they girt those garments about them, blessed him; they commended his charity, blessed God for him, and prayed God to bless him. Job's sheep were burned with fire from heaven, but this was his comfort, that, when he had them, he came honestly by them, and used them charitably, fed the poor with their flesh, and clothed them with their wool.

2. That he had never been accessory to the wronging of any that were poor. It might be said, perhaps, that he was kind here and there to a poor orphan that was a favourite, but to others he was oppressive. No, he was tender of all, and injurious to none. He never so much as *lifted up his hand against the fatherless*, (*v. 21.*) never threatened or frightened them, or offered to strike them; never used his power to crush them that stood in his way, or squeeze what he could out of them; though he *saw his help in the gate*, that is, though he had interest enough both in the people and in the judges, both to enable him to do it, and to bear him out when he had done it. Those that have it in their power to do a wrong thing, and go through with it, and a prospect of getting by it, and yet do justly, and love mercy, and are firm to both, may afterward reflect upon it with much comfort, as Job does here.

II. The imprecation wherewith he confirms this protestation; (*v. 22.*) "If I have been oppressive to the poor, *let mine arm*

fall from my shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone," that is, "Let the flesh rot off from the bone, and one bone be disjointed and broken off from another." Had he not been perfectly clear in this matter, he durst not thus have challenged the divine vengeance. And he intimates, that it is a righteous thing with God to break the arm that is lifted up against the fatherless, as he withered Jeroboam's arm that was stretched out against a prophet.

III. The principles by which Job was restrained from all uncharitableness and unmercifulness. He durst not abuse the poor; for though, with his help in the gate, he could overpower them, yet he could not make his part good against that God who is the Patron of oppressed poverty, and will not let oppressors go unpunished; *v. 23.* "*Destruction from God was a terror to me, whenever I was tempted to this sin, and by reason of his highness I could not endure the thought of making him my Enemy.*" He stood in awe, 1. Of the majesty of God, as a God above him. He thought, of *his highness*, the infinite distance between him and God, which possessed him with such a reverence of him, as made him very circumspect in his whole conversation. They who oppress the poor, and pervert judgment and justice, forget that *he who is higher than the highest, regards, and there is a higher than they*, who is able to deal with them; (*Ecc. 5. 8.*) but Job considered this. 2. Of the wrath of God, as a God that would certainly be against him, if he should wrong the poor. *Destruction from God*, because it would be a certain and an utter ruin to him, if he were guilty of this sin, was a constant terror to him, to restrain him from it. Note, Good men, even the best, have need to restrain themselves from sin with the fear of *destruction from God*, and all little enough. This should especially restrain us from all acts of injustice and oppression—that God himself is the Avenger thereof. Even then when salvation from God is a comfort to us, yet destruction from God should be a terror to us. Adam, in innocence, was awed with a threatening.

24. If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, *Thou art my confidence*; 25. If I rejoiced because my wealth *was* great, and because mine hand had gotten much; 26. If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; 27. And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: 28. This also *were* an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above. 29. If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him: 30. Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin, by wishing a curse to his soul. 31. If the men of my tabernacle said not, Oh that we had of his flesh! we cannot be satisfied. 32. The stranger did not lodge in the street: *but* I opened my doors to the traveller.

Four articles more of Job's protestation we have in these verses, which, as all the rest, not only assure us what he was and did, but teach us what we should be and do.

1. He protests that he never set his heart upon the wealth of this world, nor took the things of it for his portion and happiness. He had gold, he had fine gold, his wealth was great, and he had gotten much. Our wealth is either advantageous or pernicious to us, according as we stand affected to it. If we make it our rest and our ruler, it will be our ruin; if we make it our servant and an instrument of righteousness, it will be a blessing to us. Job here tells how he stood affected to his worldly wealth, 1. He put no great confidence in it; he did not *make gold his hope*, *v. 24.* They are very unwise that do, and enemies to themselves, who

depend upon it as sufficient to make them happy, who think themselves safe and honourable, and sure of comfort, in having abundance of this world's goods. Some make it their hope and confidence for another world, as if it were a certain token of God's favour; and those who have so much sense as not to think so, yet promise themselves that it will be a portion for them in this life, whereas the things themselves are uncertain, and our satisfaction in them much more so. It is hard to have riches, and not to trust in riches; and that is it which makes it so difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, Matth. 19. 23. Mark, 10. 24. 2. He took no great complacency in it; (v. 25.) *If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and boasted that my hand had gotten much.* He took no pride in his wealth, as if it added any thing to his real excellency, nor did he think that his might and the power of his hand got it him, Deut. 8. 17. He took no pleasure in it, in comparison with the spiritual things which were the delight of his soul. His joy did not terminate in the gift, but passed through it to the Giver. When he was in the midst of his abundance, he never said, *Soul, take thine ease* in these things, *eat, drink, and be merry*, nor blessed himself in his riches. He did not inordinately rejoice in his wealth; and that helped him to bear the loss of it so patiently as he did. The way to *weep as though we wept not*, is, to *rejoice as though we rejoiced not*. The less pleasure the enjoyment is, the less pain the disappointment will be.

II. He protests that he never gave the worship and glory to the creature, which are due to God only; he was never guilty of idolatry, v. 26. 28. We do not find that Job's friends charged him with this. But there were those, it seems, at that time, who were so sottish as to worship the sun and moon, else Job would not have mentioned it. Idolatry is one of the old ways which wicked men have trodden, and the most ancient idolatry was, the worshipping of the sun and moon, to which the temptation was most strong, as appears, (Deut. 4. 19.) where Moses speaks of the danger which the people were in of being driven to worship them. But, as yet, it was practised secretly, and durst not appear in open view, as, afterward, the most abominable idolatries did. Observe,

1. How far Job kept from this sin. He not only never bowed the knee to Baal, (which, some think, was designed to represent the sun,) never fell down, and worshipped the sun, but he kept his eye, his heart, and his lips, clean from this sin. (1.) He never so much as beheld the sun or the moon in their pomp and lustre, with any other admiration of them, than what led him to give all the glory of their brightness and usefulness to their Creator. Against spiritual as well as corporal adultery he made a covenant with his eyes; and this was his covenant, that, whenever he looked at the lights of heaven, he should by faith look through them, and beyond them, to the Father of lights. (2.) He kept his heart with all diligence, that that should not be secretly enticed to think that there is a divine glory in their brightness, or a divine power in their influence, and that therefore divine honours are to be paid to them. Here is the source of idolatry; it begins in the heart; every man is tempted to that, as to other sins, when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. (3.) He did not so much as put a compliment upon these pretended deities, did not perform the least and lowest act of adoration. *His mouth did not kiss his hand*, which, it is likely, was a ceremony then commonly used, even by some that yet would not be thought idolaters. It is a long-established piece of civil respect among ourselves, in making a bow, to kiss the hand; a form, it seems, which was anciently used in giving divine honours to the sun and moon; they could not reach to kiss them as *the men that sacrificed, kissed the calves*; (Hos. 13. 2. 1 Kings, 19. 18.) but, to shew their good will, they kissed their hand, reverencing those as their masters, which God has made servants to this lower world, to hold the candle for us: Job never did it.

2. How ill Job thought of this sin, v. 28. (1.) He looked upon it as an affront to the civil magistrate; *It were an iniquity to be punished by the judge*, as a public nuisance, and hurtful to kings and provinces. Idolatry debauches men's minds, corrupts their manners, takes off the true sense of religion which is the great

bond of societies, and provokes God to give men up to a reprobate sense, and to send judgments upon a nation; and therefore the conservators of the public peace are concerned to restrain it by punishing it. (2.) He looked upon it as a much greater affront to the God of heaven, and no less than high treason against his crown and dignity; *For I should have denied the God that is above*, denied his being as God, and his sovereignty as God above. Idolatry is, in effect, atheism; hence the Gentiles are said to be *without God (atheists)* in the world. Note, We should be afraid of every thing that does but implicitly deny the God above, his providence, or any of his perfections.

III. He protests that he was so far from doing or designing mischief to any, that he neither desired nor delighted in the hurt of the worst enemy he had. The forgiving of those that do us evil, it seems, was Old Testament duty. The Pharisees made the law concerning it of no effect, by teaching, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy*, Matth. 5. 43. Observe here,

1. Job was far from revenge. He did not only not return the injuries that were done him, not only not destroy those who hated him; but, (1.) He did not so much as rejoice when any mischief befell them, v. 29. Many who would not wilfully hurt those who stand in their light, or have done them a diskindness, yet are secretly pleased, and laugh in their sleeve, (as we say,) when hurt is done them: but Job was not of that spirit. Though Job was a very good man, yet, it seems, there were those that hated him, but evil found them. He saw their destruction, and was far from rejoicing in it, for that would justly have brought the destruction upon him, as it is intimated, Prov. 24. 17, 18. (2.) He did not so much as wish in his own mind that evil might befall them, v. 30. He never *wished a curse to his soul*; (curses to the soul are the worst of curses;) never desired his death; he knew that, if he did, it would turn into sin to him. He was careful *not to offend with his tongue*, (Ps. 39. 1.) he would *not suffer his mouth to sin*, and therefore durst not imprecate any evil, no not to his worst enemy. If others bear malice to us, that will not justify us in bearing malice to them.

2. He was violently urged to revenge, and yet he kept himself thus clear from it; (v. 31.) *The men of his tabernacle*, his domestics, his servants, and those about him, were so enraged at Job's enemy who hated him, that they could have eaten him, if Job would but have set them on, or given them leave. "*O that we had of his flesh!*" Our master is satisfied to forgive him, but we cannot be so satisfied." See how much beloved Job was by his family, how heartily they espoused his cause, and what enemies they were to his enemies; but see what a strict hand Job kept upon his passions, that he would not avenge himself, though he had those about him that blew the coals of his resentment. Note, (1.) A good man commonly does not himself lay to heart the affronts that are done him so much as his friends do for him. (2.) Great men have commonly those about them that stir them up to revenge. David had so, 1 Sam. 24. 4.—26. 8. 2 Sam. 16. 9. But if they keep their temper, notwithstanding the spiteful insinuations of those about them, afterward it shall be no grief of heart to them, but shall turn very much to their praise.

IV. He protests that he had never been unkind or inhospitable to strangers; (v. 32.) *The stranger lodged not in the street*, as angels might lately have done in the streets of Sodom, if Lot alone had not entertained them. Perhaps, by that instance, Job was taught (as we are, Heb. 13. 2.) not to be forgetful to entertain strangers. He that is at home, must consider those that are from home, and put his soul into their soul's stead, and then do as he would be done by. Hospitality is a Christian duty, 1 Pet. 4. 9. Job, in his prosperity, was noted for good house-keeping: *He opened his door to the road*; so it may be read; he kept the street-door open, that he might see who passed by, and he invited them in, as Abraham, Gen. 18. 1.

33. If I covered my transgressions, as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom: 34. Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families

terrify me, that I kept silence, *and* went not out of the door? 35. Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire *is*, that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book. 36. Surely I would take it upon my shoulder, *and* bind it as a crown to me. 37. I would declare unto him the number of my steps; as a prince would I go near unto him. 38. If my land cry against me, or that the furrows likewise thereof complain; 39. If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life: 40. Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended.

We have here Job's protestation against three more sins, together with his general appeal to God's bar, and his petition for a hearing there, which, it is likely, was intended to conclude his discourse, (and therefore we will consider it last,) but that another particular sin occurred, from which he thought it requisite to acquit himself. He clears himself from the charge,

I. Of dissimulation and hypocrisy, which was the general crime his friends accused him of—That, under the cloke of a profession of religion, he had kept up secret haunts of sin, and that really he was as bad as other people, but had the art of concealing it. Zophar insinuated (*ch.* 20. 12.) that he *hid his iniquity under his tongue*. "No," says Job, "I never did, (*v.* 33.) *I never covered my transgression as Adam*, never palliated a sin with frivolous excuses, nor made fig-leaves the shelter of my shame, nor ever *hid my iniquity in my bosom*, as a fondling, a darling, that I could by no means part with, or as stolen goods which I dreaded the discovery of." It is natural to us to cover our sins; we have it from our first parents; we are loath to confess our faults, willing to extenuate them, and make the best of ourselves, to devolve the blame upon others, as Adam on his wife, not without a tacit reflection upon God himself. But *he that thus covers his sins shall not prosper*, Prov. 28. 13. Job, in this protestation, intimates two things, which were certain evidences of his integrity, 1. That he was not guilty of any great transgression or iniquity, inconsistent with sincerity, which he had now industriously concealed. In this protestation, he had dealt fairly, and, while he denies some sins, was not conscious to himself that he allowed himself in any. 2. That what transgression and iniquity he had been guilty of, (*Who is there that lives, and sins not?*) he had always been ready to own it, and, as soon as ever he perceived he had said or done amiss, he was ready to unsay it, and undo it, as far as he could, by repentance, confessing it both to God and man, and forsaking it: this is doing honestly.

II. From the charge of cowardice and base fear. His courage in that which is good, he produces as an evidence of his sincerity in it; (*v.* 34.) *Did I fear a great multitude, that I kept silence?* No, all that knew Job, knew him to be a man of undaunted resolution in a good cause, that boldly appeared, spake, and acted, in defence of religion and justice, and did not fear the face of man, nor was ever threatened or brow-beaten out of his duty, but set his face as a flint. Observe, 1. What great conscience Job had made of his duty as a magistrate, or a man of reputation, in the place where he lived. He did not, he durst not, keep silence, when he had a call to speak in an honest cause, or keep within doors, when he had a call to go abroad to do good. The case may be such, that it may be our sin to be silent and retired; as when we are called to reprove sin, and bear our testimony against it, to vindicate the truths and ways of God, to do right to those who are injured or oppressed, or any way to serve the public, or do honour to our religion. 2. What little account Job made of the discouragements he met with in the way of his duty. He valued not the clamours of the mob, feared not a great multitude, nor did he value the menaces of the mighty; the contempt of

families never terrified him. He was not deterred by the number or quality, the scorns or insults, of the injurious, from doing justice to the injured; no, he scorned to be swayed and biased by any such considerations, nor ever suffered a righteous cause to be run down by a high hand. He feared the great God, not the great multitude, and his curse, not the contempt of families.

III. From the charge of oppression and violence, and doing wrong to his poor neighbours. And here observe,

1. What his protestation is—That the estate he had, he both got and used honestly, so that his land could not *cry out against him, nor the furrows thereof complain*, (*v.* 38.) as they do against those who get the possession of them by fraud and extortion, Hab. 2. 9. 11. The whole creation is said to *groan* under the sin of man; but that which is unjustly gained and held cries out against a man, and accuses him, condemns him, and demands justice against him for the injury. Rather than his oppression shall go unpunished, the very ground and the furrows of it shall witness against him, and be his prosecutors. Two things he could say safely concerning his estate, (1.) That he *never ate the fruits of it without money*, *v.* 39. What he purchased, he paid for, as Abraham for the land he bought, (*Gen.* 23. 16.) and David, 2 Sam. 24. 24. The labourers that he employed had their wages duly paid them, and if he made use of the fruits of those lands that he let out, he paid his tenants for them, or allowed it in their rent. (2.) That he never caused the owners thereof to lose their life, never got an estate, as Ahab got Naboth's vineyard, killing the heir and seizing the inheritance; never starved those that held lands of him, nor killed them with hard bargains and hard usage. No tenant, no workman, no servant, he had, could complain of him.

2. How he confirms his protestation; he does it, as often before, with a suitable imprecation; (*v.* 40.) "If I have got my estate unjustly, *let thistles grow instead of wheat*; the worst of weeds instead of the best of grains." When men get estates unjustly, they are justly deprived of the comfort of them, and disappointed in their expectations from them: they sow their land, but they sow not that body that shall be; God will give it a body; it was sown wheat, but shall come up thistles. What men do not come honestly by, will never do them any good.

Job, toward the close of his protestation, appeals to the judgment-seat of God concerning the truth of it; (*v.* 35. . 37.) *Oh that he would hear me, even that the Almighty would answer me!* This was what he often desired, and often complained that he could not obtain; and now, that he had drawn up his own defence so particularly, he leaves it upon record, in expectation of a hearing, files it, as it were, till his cause be called.

(1.) A trial is moved for, and the motion earnestly pressed; "Oh that one, any one, would hear me; my cause is so good, and my evidence so clear, that I am willing to refer it to any indifferent person whatsoever; but my desire is, that the Almighty himself would determine it." An upright heart does not dread a scrutiny: he that means honestly, wishes he had a window in his breast, that all men might see the intents of his heart. But an upright heart does particularly desire to be determined in every thing by the judgment of God, which, we are sure, is according to truth. It was holy David's prayer, *Search me, O God, and know my heart*; and it was blessed Paul's comfort, *He that judgeth me, is the Lord*.

(2.) The prosecutor is called, the plaintiff summoned, and ordered to bring in his information, to say what he has to say against the prisoner, for he stands upon his deliverance; "Oh that mine adversary had written a book—That my friends, who charge me with hypocrisy, would draw up their charge in writing, that it might be reduced to a certainty, and that we might the better join issue upon it." Job would be very glad to see the libel, to have a copy of his indictment; he would not hide it under his arm, but take it upon his shoulder, to be seen and read of all men, nay, he would bind it as a crown to him, would be pleased with it, and look upon it as his ornament; for, [1.] If it discovered to him any sin he had been guilty of, which he did not yet see, he should be glad to know it, that he might repent of it, and get it pardoned. A good man is willing to know the worst of himself, and will be thankful to

those that will faithfully tell him of his faults. [2.] If it charged him with what was false, he doubted not but to disprove the allegations, that his innocency would be cleared up as the light, and he should come off with so much the more honour. But, [3.] He did believe that, when his adversaries came to consider the matter so closely as they must do, if they put the charge in writing, the accusations would be trivial and minute, and every one that saw them would say, "If this was all they had to say against him, it was a shame they had given him so much trouble."

(3.) The defendant is ready to make his appearance, and to give his accusers all the fair play they can desire.

He will *declare unto them the number of his steps*, v. 37. He will let them into the history of his own life, will shew them all the stages and scenes of it; he will give them a narrative of his conversation, what would make against him as well as what would make for him, and let them make what use they pleased of it; and so confident he is of his integrity, that, as a prince to be crowned, rather than as a prisoner to be tried, he would go near to him, both to his accuser to hear his charge, and to his judge to hear his doom. Thus the testimony of his conscience was his rejoicing.

Hic murus aheneus esto, nil conscire sibi.

Be this thy brazen butwark of defence,
Still to preserve thy conscions innocence.

Those that have kept their hands without spot from the world, as Job did, may lift up their faces without spot unto God, and may comfort themselves with the prospect of his judgment, when they lie under the unjust censures of men. *If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.*

Thus the words of Job are ended; that is, he has now said all we would say, in answer to his friends: he afterward said something in a way of self-reproach and condemnation; (ch. 40. 4, 5.—42. 2, &c.) but here ends what he had to say in a way of self-defence and vindication. If this suffice not, he will say no more, he knows when he has said enough, and will submit himself to the judgment of the bench. Some think the manner of expression intimates that he concluded with an air of assurance and triumph. He now keeps the field, and doubts not but to win the field. *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies.*

CHAP. XXXII.

The stage is clear, for Job and his three friends are set down, and neither he nor they have any thing more to say; it is therefore very seasonable for a moderator to interpose, and Elihu is the man. In this chapter, we have, I. Some account of him, his parentage, his presence at this dispute, and his sentiments concerning it, v. 1.—5. II. The apology he made for his bold undertaking to speak to a question which had been so largely and learnedly argued by his seniors. He pleads, 1. That though he had not the experience of an old man, yet he had the understanding of a man, v. 6.—10. 2. That he had patiently heard all they had to say, v. 11.—13. 3. That he had something new to offer, v. 14.—17. 4. That his mind was full of this matter, and it would be a refreshment to him to give it vent, v. 18.—20. 5. That he was resolved to speak impartially, v. 21, 22. And he did speak so well to this matter, that Job made no reply to him, and God gave him no rebuke, when he checked both Job himself and his other three friends.

1. **S**O these three men ceased to answer Job, because he *was* righteous in his own eyes. 2. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God. 3. Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job. 4. Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they *were* elder than he. 5. When Elihu saw that *there was* no answer in the mouth of *these* three men, then his wrath was kindled.

Usually young men are the disputants, and old men the moderate.

rators: but here, when old men were the disputants, as a rebuke to them for their unbecoming heat, a young man is raised up to be the moderator. Divers of Job's friends were present, that came to visit him, and to receive instruction. Now here we have,

I. The reason why his three friends were now silent; they ceased to answer him, and let him have his saying, because *he was righteous in his own eyes*, because, they alleged, it was to no purpose to argue with a man that was so opinionative, v. 1. Those that are self-conceited are indeed hard to be wrought upon; there is more hope of a fool (a fool of God's making) than of them who are fools of their own making, Prov. 26. 12. But they did not judge fairly concerning Job: he was really righteous before God, and not righteous only in his own eyes; so that it was only to save their own credit, that they made this the reason of their silence, as peevish disputants commonly do, when they find themselves run a-ground, and are not willing to own themselves unable to make their part good.

II. The reasons why Elihu, the fourth, now spake. His name *Elihu* signifies *My God is he*: they had all tried in vain to convince Job, but *My God is he* that can and will do it, and did it at last: he only can open the understanding. He is said to be a *Buzite*, from Buz, Nahor's second son, (Gen. 22. 21.) and *of the kindred of Ram*, that is, *Aram*; so some; (Gen. 22. 21.) whence the Syrians or Aramites descended and were denominated. *Of the kindred of Abram*; so the Chaldee paraphrase; supposing him to be the first called *Ram*, *High*, then *Aram*, a *high father*, and lastly, *Abraham*, *The high father of a multitude*. Elihu was not so well known as the rest, and therefore is more particularly described thus.

1. Elihu spake because he was angry, and thought he had good cause to be so. When he had made his remarks upon the dispute, he did not go away and calumniate the disputants, striking them secretly with a malicious censorious tongue, but what he had to say, he would say before their faces, that they might vindicate themselves, if they could.

(1.) He was angry at Job, because he thought he did not speak so reverently of God as he ought to have done; and that was too true, (v. 2.) *He justified himself more than God*, that is, took more care and pains to clear himself from the imputation of unrighteousness in being thus afflicted, than to clear God from the imputation of unrighteousness in afflicting him, as if he were more concerned for his own honour than for God's; whereas he should, in the first place, have justified God, and cleared his glory, and then he might well enough have left his own reputation to shift for itself. Note, A gracious heart is jealous for the honour of God, and cannot but be angry, when that is neglected or postponed, or any injury done it. Nor is it any breach of the law of meekness, to be angry at our friends when they are offensive to God; *Get thee behind me, Satan*, says Christ to Simon. Elihu owned Job to be a good man, and yet would not say as he said, when he thought he said amiss: it is too great a compliment to our friends, not to tell them of their faults.

(2.) He was angry at his friends, because he thought they had not been so candid to Job as they ought to have been; (v. 3.) *They had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job*. They had adjudged him to be a hypocrite, a wicked man, and would not recede from that sentence concerning him; and yet they could not prove him so, nor disprove the evidences he produced of his integrity. They could not make good the premises, and yet held fast the conclusion. They had no reply to make to his arguments, and yet they would not yield, but, right or wrong, would run him down; this was not fair. Seldom is a quarrel begun, and more seldom is a quarrel carried on to the length that this was, in which there is not a fault on both sides. Elihu, as became a moderator, took part with neither, but was equally displeased with the mistakes and mismanagement of both. Those that in good earnest seek for truth, must thus be impartial in their judgments concerning the contenders, and not reject what is true and good on either side, for the sake of what is amiss, nor approve or defend what is amiss, for the sake of what is true and good, but must learn to separate between the precious and the vile.

2. Elihu spake because he thought that it was time to speak, and that now, at length, it was come to his turn, *v. 4, 5.* (1.) He had waited on Job's speeches, had patiently heard him out, until the words of Job were ended. (2.) He had waited on his friends' silence; so that, as he would not interrupt him, so he would not prevent them; not because they were wiser than he, but because they were elder than he, and therefore it was expected by the company that they should speak first; and Elihu was very modest, and would by no means offer to abridge them of their privilege. Some certain rules of precedence must be observed, for the keeping of order: though inward real honour will attend true wisdom and worth, yet, because every man will think himself, or his friend, the wisest and worthiest, this consideration can afford no certain rule for the outward ceremonial honour, which therefore must attend seniority either of age or office; and this respect the seniors may the better require, because they paid it when they were juniors, and the juniors may the better pay, because they shall have it when they come to be seniors.

6. And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said, *I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion.* 7. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. 8. But *there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.* 9. Great men are not *always* wise: neither do the aged understand judgment. 10. Therefore I said, Harken to me; I also will shew mine opinion. 11. Behold, I waited for your words; I gave ear to your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say. 12. Yea, I attended unto you, and, behold, *there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words:* 13. Lest ye should say, We have found out wisdom: God thrusteth him down, not man. 14. Now he hath not directed *his words against me: neither will I answer him with your speeches.*

Elihu here appears to be,

I. A man of great modesty and humility: though a young man, and a man of abilities, yet not pert, and confident, and assuming; his face shone, and, like Moses, he did not know it, which made it shine so much the brighter. Let it be observed by all, especially by young people, as worthy their imitation, 1. What a diffidence he had of himself, and of his own judgment; (*v. 6.*) "*I am young, and therefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion,* for fear I should either prove mistaken, or do that which was unbecoming me." He was so observant of all that passed, and applied his mind so closely to what he heard, that he had formed in himself a judgment of it; he neither neglected it as foreign, nor declined it as intricate: but, how clear soever the matter was to himself, he was afraid to deliver himself upon it, because he differed in his sentiments from those that were elder than he. Note, It becomes us to be suspicious of our own judgment in matters of doubtful disputation, to be swift to hear the sentiments of others, and slow to speak our own, especially when we go contrary to the judgment of those whom, upon the score of their learning and piety, we justly have a veneration for. 2. What a deference he paid to his seniors, and what great expectations he had from them; (*v. 7.*) *I said, Days should speak.* Note, Age and experience give a man great advantage in judging of things, both as they furnish a man with so much the more matter for his thoughts to work upon, and as they ripen and improve the faculties he is to work with; which is a good reason why old people should take pains both to learn themselves, and to teach others, (else the advantages of their age are a reproach to them,) and why

young people should attend on their instructions: it is good *lodging with an old disciple*, Acts, 21. 16. Tit. 2. 4.

Elihu's modesty appeared in the patient attention he gave to what his seniors said, *v. 11, 12.* He waited for their words, as one that expected much from them, agreeably to the opinion he had of these grave men. He gave ear to their reasons, that he might take their meaning, and fully understand what was the drift of their discourse, and what the force of their arguments; he attended to them with diligence and care; and this, (1.) Though they were slow, and took up a deal of time in searching out what to say; though they were often to seek for matter and words, paused and hesitated, and were unready at their work, yet he overlooked that, and gave ear to their reasons, which, if really convincing, he would not think the less so for the disadvantages of the delivery of them. (2.) Though they trifled and made nothing of it, though none of them answered Job's words, nor said what was proper to convince him, yet he attended of them, in hopes they would bring it to some head at last. We must often be willing to hear what we do not like, else we cannot prove all things. His patient attendance on their discourses he pleads, [1.] As that which entitled him to a liberty of speech in his turn, and empowered him to require their attention. *Hanc veniam petimusque damusque vicissim—This liberty we mutually allow and ask.* They that have heard may speak, and they that have learned may teach. [2.] As that which enabled him to pass a judgment upon what they had said: he had observed what they aimed at, and therefore knew what to say to it. Let us be thoroughly apprized of the sentiments of our brethren, before we censure them; for *he that answers a matter before he hears it, or when he has heard it only by halves, it is folly and shame to him, and bespeaks him both impertinent and imperious.*

II. He appears to have been a man of great sense and courage, and one that knew as well when and how to speak, as when and how to keep silence. Though he had so much respect to his friends, as not to interrupt them with his speaking, yet he had so much regard to truth and justice, (his better friends,) as not to betray them by his silence. He boldly pleads,

1. That man is a rational creature, and therefore that every man has for himself a judgment of discretion, and ought to be allowed a liberty of speech in his turn. He means the same that Job did, (*ch. 12. 3.*) *But I have understanding as well as you,* when he says, (*v. 8.*) *But there is a spirit in man;* only he expresses it a little more modestly, that one man has understanding as well as another, and no man can pretend to have the monopoly of reason, or to engross all the trade of it. Had he meant, *I have revelation as well as you,* (as some understand it,) he must have proved it; but if he meant only, *I have reason as well as you,* they cannot deny it, for it is every man's honour, and it is no presumption to claim it, nor could they gainsay his inference from it; (*v. 10.*) *Therefore hearken to me.* Learn here, (1.) That the soul is a spirit, neither material itself, nor dependent upon matter, but capable of conversing with things spiritual, which are not the objects of sense. (2.) It is an understanding spirit. It is able to discover and receive truth, to discourse and reason upon it, and to direct and rule accordingly. (3.) This understanding is in every man; it is the light that lighteth every man, John, 1. (4.) It is the inspiration of the Almighty, that gives us this understanding spirit; for he is the Father of spirits, and Fountain of understanding. See Gen. 2. 7. Eccl. 12. 7. Zech. 12. 1.

2. That those who are advanced above others in grandeur and gravity, do not always proportionably go beyond them in knowledge and wisdom; (*v. 9.*) *Great men are not always wise:* it is pity but they were, for then they would never do hurt with their greatness, and would do so much the more good with their wisdom. Men should be preferred for their wisdom, and those that are in honour and power, have most need of wisdom, and have the greatest opportunity of improving in it; and yet it does not follow that great men are always wise, and therefore it is folly to subscribe to the dictates of any with an implicit faith. The aged do not always understand judgment, even *they* may be mistaken, and therefore must not expect to bring every thought into obedience to them; nay, therefore they must not take it as an affront to be contra-

dicted, but rather take it as a kindness to be instructed, by their juniors. *Therefore I said, hearken to me, v. 10.* We must be willing to hear reason from those that are every way inferior to us, and to yield to it. He that has a good eye can see further upon level ground, than he that is purblind can from the top of the highest mountain. *Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, Eccl. 4. 13.*

3. That it was requisite for something to be said, for the setting of this controversy in a true light, which, by all that had hitherto been said, was but rendered more intricate and perplexed; (*v. 13.*) "I must speak, lest you should say, *We have found out wisdom*, lest you should think your argument against Job conclusive and irrefragable, and that Job cannot be convinced and humbled by any other argument than this of your's, *that God casteth him down, and not man*, that it appears by his extraordinary afflictions, that God is his Enemy, and therefore he is certainly a wicked man; I must shew you that this is a false hypothesis, and that Job may be convinced without maintaining it." Or, "Lest you should think you have found out the wisest way, to reason no more with him, but leave it to God to thrust him down." It is time to speak, when we hear errors advanced and disputed for, especially under pretence of supporting the cause of God with them. It is time to speak, when God's judgments are vouched for the patronizing of men's pride and passion, and their unjust, uncharitable, censures of their brethren; then we must speak on God's behalf.

4. That he had something new to offer, and would endeavour to manage the dispute in a better manner than it had hitherto been managed, *v. 14.* He thinks he may expect a favourable hearing; for, (1.) He will not reply to Job's protestations of his integrity, but allows the truth of them, and therefore does not interpose as his enemy; "*He hath not directed his words against me: I have nothing to say against the main of his discourse, nor do I differ from his principles. I have only a gentle reproof to give him for his passionate expressions.*" (2.) He will not repeat their arguments, nor go upon their principles; "*Neither will I answer him with your speeches: not with the same matter; should I only say what has been said, I might justly be silenced as impertinent; nor in the same manner; I will not be guilty of that peevishness toward him myself, which I dislike in you.*" The controversy that has already been fully handled, a wise man will let alone, unless he can amend and improve what has been done: why should he *actum agere—do that which has been done already?*

15. They were amazed, they answered no more: they left off speaking. 16. When I had waited, (for they spake not, but stood still, *and answered no more;*) 17. *I said, I will answer also my part, I also will shew mine opinion.* 18. For I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me. 19. Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles. 20. I will speak, that I may be refreshed: I will open my lips and answer. 21. Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man. 22. For I know not to give flattering titles; *in so doing my Maker would soon take me away.*

Three things here apologize for Elihu's interposing as he does in this controversy, which had already been canvassed by such acute and learned disputants.

1. That the stage was clear, and he did not break in upon any of the managers on either side; (*v. 15.*) *They were amazed, v. 16. They stood still and answered no more.* They not only left off speaking themselves, but they stood still, to hear if any of the company would speak their minds, so that (as we say) he had room and fair play given him. They seemed not fully satisfied themselves with what they had said, else they would have ad-

joined the court, and not have stood still, expecting what might further be offered. And therefore I said, (*v. 17.*) "*I will answer also my part.* I cannot pretend to give a definitive sentence; no, the judgment is the Lord's, and by him it must be determined who is in the right, and who is in the wrong; but, since you have each of you shewed your opinion, I also will shew mine, and let it take its fate with the rest." When what is offered, even by the meanest, is offered thus modestly, it is pity but it should be fairly heard and considered.

I see no inconvenience in supposing that Elihu here discovers himself to be the penman of this book; and that he here writes as an historian, relating the matter of fact, that, after he had bespoken their attention in the foregoing verses, they were amazed, they left off whispering among themselves, did not gainsay the liberty of speech he desired, but stood still to hear what he would say, being much surprised at the admirable mixture of boldness and modesty that appeared in his preface.

2. That he was uneasy, and even in pain, to be delivered of his thoughts upon this matter. They must give him leave to speak, for he cannot forbear; while he is *musings, the fire burns*, (*Ps. 39. 3.*) *shut up in his bones*, as the prophet speaks, *Jer. 20. 9.* He longed to deliver his mind concerning Job's case, *v. 18. . 20.* If any of the disputants would have hit that which he thought was the right joint, he would contentedly have been silent; but, when he thought they all missed it, he was eager to be trying his hand at it. He pleads, (1.) That he had a great deal to say; "I am full of matter; having made my remarks upon all that has hitherto been said." When aged men are drawn dry, and have spent their stock, in discoursing of the Divine Providence, God can raise up others, even young men, and fill them with matter, for the edifying of his church, for it is a subject that can never be exhausted, though they that speak to it may. (2.) That he was under a necessity of saying it. "The Spirit within me not only instructs me what to say, but puts me on to say it; so that if I have not vent, (such a ferment are my thoughts in,) I shall burst like bottles of new wine, when it is working," *v. 19.* See what a great grief it is to a good minister to be silenced, and thrust into a corner; he is full of matter, full of Christ, full of heaven, and would speak of these things for the good of others, but he may not. (3.) That it would be an ease and satisfaction to himself, to deliver his mind; (*v. 20.*) *I will speak, that I may be refreshed*; not only that I may be eased of the pain of stifling it, but that I may have the pleasure of endeavouring, according to my place and capacity, *to do good.* It is a great refreshment to a good man, to have liberty to speak for the glory of God and the edification of others.

3. That he was resolved to speak, with all possible freedom and sincerity, what he thought was true, not what he thought would please; (*v. 21, 22.*) "*Let me not accept any man's person*, as partial judges do, that aim to enrich themselves, not to do justice; I am resolved to flatter no man." He would not speak otherwise than he thought, either, (1.) In compassion to Job, because he was poor and in affliction; would not make his case better than he really took it to be, for fear of increasing his grief; "But, let him bear it as he can, he shall be told the truth." Those that are in affliction must not be flattered, but dealt faithfully with: when trouble is upon any, it is foolish pity to suffer sin upon them too, (*Lev. 19. . 17.*) for that is the worst addition that can be to their trouble. Thou shalt not countenance, any more than discountenance, *a poor man in his cause*, (*Exod. 23. 3.*) nor regard a sad look any more than a big look, so as, for the sake of it, to pervert justice, for that is accepting persons. Or, (2.) In compliment to Job's friends, because they were in prosperity and reputation. "Let him not expect that I shall say as they have said, any further than I am convinced that they have said right, nor applaud their dictates for the sake of their dignities." No, though Elihu is a young man, and upon his preferment, he will not dissemble truth, to court the favour of great men: it is a good resolution he has taken up, "*I know not to give flattering titles to men; I never used myself to that language;*" and it is a good reason he gives for that resolution: "*In so doing my Maker would soon take me away.*" It is good to keep ourselves in awe with a holy fear of God's judgments; he

that made us will take us away in his wrath, if we do not conduct ourselves as we should. He hates all dissimulation and flattery, and will soon *put lying lips to silence, and cut off flattering lips*, Ps. 12.3. The more closely we eye the majesty of God, as our Maker, and the more we dread his wrath and justice, the less danger shall we be in of a sinful fearing, or flattering, of men.

CHAP. XXXIII.

Pompous prefaces, like the teeming mountain, often introduce poor performances: but Elihu's discourse here does not disappoint the expectations which his preface had raised: it is substantial, and lively, and very much to the purpose. He had, in the foregoing chapter, said what he had to say to Job's three friends; and now he comes up close to Job himself, and directs his speech to him. 1. He bespeaks Job's favourable acceptance of what he should say, and desires he would take him for that person whom he had so often wished for, that would plead with him, and receive his plea on God's behalf, v. 1. 7. 11. He does, in God's name, bring an action against him, for words, which he had spoken in the heat of disputation, reflecting upon God as dealing hardly with him, v. 8. 11. III. He endeavours to convince him of his fault and folly herein, by shewing him, 1. God's sovereign dominion over men, v. 12, 13. 2. The care God takes of man, and the various ways and means he uses to do his soul good, which we have reason to think he designs, when he lays bodily afflictions upon him, v. 14. (1.) Job had sometimes complained of unquiet dreams, ch. 7. 14. "God," says Elihu, "sometimes speaks conviction and instruction to men by such dreams," v. 15. 18. (2.) Job had especially complained of his sicknesses and pains; and as to these, he shews largely, that they were so far from being tokens of God's wrath, as Job took them, or evidences of Job's hypocrisy, as his friends took them, that they were really wise and gracious methods, which divine grace took for the increase of his acquaintance with God, to work patience, experience, and hope, v. 19. 30. And, lastly, he concludes with a request to Job, either to answer him, or give him leave to go on, v. 31. 33.

1. **WHEREFORE**, Job, I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words. 2. Behold, now I have opened my mouth, my tongue hath spoken in my mouth. 3. My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly. 4. The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life. 5. If thou canst answer me, set *thy words in order* before me, stand up. 6. Behold, I am, according to thy wish, in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay. 7. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee.

Several arguments Elihu here uses, to persuade Job to give him a patient hearing, to believe that he designed him a good office, and to take it kindly, and be willing to receive the instructions he was now about to give him. Let Job consider,

1. That Elihu does not join with his three friends against him: he has, in the foregoing chapter, declared his dislike of their proceedings, disclaimed their hypothesis, and quite set aside the method they took of healing Job. "Wherefore, Job, *I pray thee, hear my speech*, v. 1. They all spake in the same strain; but I am trying a new way, *therefore hearken to all my words*, and not to some of them only;" for we cannot judge of a discourse unless we take it entire, and hearken to it all.

2. That he intended to make a solemn business of it, not to put in a word by the by, or give a short repartee, to shew his wit; after long silence, *he opened his mouth*, (v. 2.) with deliberation and design; upon mature consideration, he had already begun to speak, and was prepared to go on, if Job would encourage him by his attention.

3. That he was resolved to speak as he thought, and not otherwise; (v. 3.) "*My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart*, the genuine product of my convictions and sentiments." There was reason to suspect that Job's three friends did not think, in their consciences, that Job was so bad a man as they had, in their discourses, merely for the support of their hypothesis, represented him to be; and that was not fair. It is a base thing to condemn

those with our tongues, to serve a turn, whom, at the same time, we cannot but in our consciences think well of: Elihu is an honest man, and scorns to do so.

4. That what he said should be easy, and not dark and hard to be understood; *My lips shall utter knowledge clearly*. Job shall readily take his meaning, and perceive what he aims at. Those that speak of the things of God, should carefully avoid all obscurity and perplexedness, both of notion and expression, and speak as plainly and clearly as they can; for by that it will appear that they do themselves understand what they speak of, that they mean honestly, and design the edification of those they speak to.

5. That he would, in his discourse, make the best use he could of the reason and understanding God had given him, that life, that rational soul which he received from the Spirit of God and the breath of the Almighty, v. 4. He owns himself unfit to enter into the lists with his seniors, yet he desires they will not despise his youth, for that he is God's workmanship as well as they, made by the same hand, endued with the same noble powers and faculties, and designed for the same great end; and therefore why may not the God that made him, make use of him as an instrument of good to Job? With this consideration also we should quicken ourselves (and perhaps Elihu made that use of it) to do good in our places, according to our capacity; God has made us, and given us life, and therefore we should study to use our life to some good purpose, to spend it in glorifying God, and serving our generation according to his will, that we may answer the end of our creation, and it may not be said that we were made in vain.

6. That he would be very willing to hear what Job could object against what he had to say; (v. 5.) "*If thou canst, answer me*. If thou hast so much strength and spirit left thee, and art not quite spent with the distemper, *set thy words in order*, and they shall have their due consideration." Those that can speak reason, will hear reason.

7. That he had often wished for one that would appear for God, with whom he might freely expostulate, and to whom, as arbitrator, he might refer the matter, and such a one Elihu would be; (v. 6.) *I am, according to thy wish, in God's stead*. How pathetically had Job wished, (ch. 16. 21.) *Oh that one might plead for a man with God!* and (ch. 23. 3.) *Oh that I knew where I might find him!* Only he would make it his bargain, that his dread should not make him afraid, ch. 13. 21. "Now," says Elihu, "look upon me, this once, as in God's stead; I will undertake to plead his cause with thee, and to shew thee wherein thou hast affronted him, and what he has against thee; and what appeals or complaints thou hast to make to God, make them to me."

8. That he was not an unequal match for him; "*I also am formed out of the clay*. I also, as well as the first man, (Gen. 2. 7.) I also as well as thou." Job had urged this with God, as a reason why he should not bear hard upon him; (ch. 10. 9.) *Remember that thou hast made me as the clay*; "I," says Elihu, "*am formed out of the clay*, as well as thou;" *formed of the same clay*, so some read it. It is good for us all to consider that we are formed out of the clay; and well for us it is, that those who are to us in God's stead, are so; that he speaks to us by men like ourselves, according to Israel's wish, upon a full trial, Deut. 5. 24. God has wisely deposited the treasure in earthen vessels like ourselves, 2 Cor. 4. 7.

Lastly, That he would have no reason to be frightened at the assault he made upon him; (v. 7.) "*My terror shall not make thee afraid*," (1.) "As thy friends have done with their arguings; I will not reproach thee as they have done, nor draw up such a heavy charge against thee. Nor," (2.) "As God would do, if he should appear to reason with thee. I stand upon the same level with thee, and am made of the same mould, and therefore cannot impress that terror upon thee, which thou mayest justly dread from the appearance of the Divine Majesty." If we would rightly convince men, it must be by reason, not by terror; by fair arguing, not by a heavy hand.

8. Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of *thy words, saying*, 9. I

am clean without transgression, I *am* innocent; neither *is there* iniquity in me. 10. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy. 11. He putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths. 12. Behold, *in this* thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. 13. Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.

In these verses,

I. Elihu particularly charges Job with some indecent expressions that had dropped from him, reflecting upon the justice and goodness of God in his dealings with him. He does not ground the charge upon report, but was himself an ear-witness of what he here reproves him for; (v. 8.) "*Thou hast spoken it in my hearing, and in the hearing of all this company.*" He had it not at second-hand; if so, he would have hoped it had not been so bad as it was represented. He did not hear it from Job in private conversation, then he would not have been so ill-bred as to repeat it thus publicly; but Job had said it openly, and therefore it was fit he should be openly reproved for it. Them that sin before all, rebuke before all. When we hear any thing said, that tends to God's dishonour, we ought publicly to bear our testimony against it. What is said amiss in our hearing, we are concerned to reprove; *for ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, to confront the accuser.*

1. Job had represented himself as innocent; (v. 9.) Thou hast said, *I am clean without transgression*; Job had not said this *totidem verbis*—*in so many words*; nay, he had owned himself to have sinned, and to be impure before God; but he had indeed said, *Thou knowest that I am not wicked: My righteousness I hold fast*, and the like, on which Elihu might ground this charge. It was true, that Job was a perfect and an upright man, and not such a one as his friends had represented him; but he ought not to have insisted so much upon it, as if God had therefore done him wrong in afflicting him. Yet, it should seem, Elihu did not deal fairly in charging Job with saying that he was clean and innocent from all transgression, when he only pleaded, that he was upright and innocent from the great transgression. But those that speak passionately and unwarily, must thank themselves if they be misunderstood; they should have taken more care.

2. He had represented God as severe in marking what he did amiss, and taking all advantages against him, (v. 10, 11.) as if he sought opportunity to pick quarrels with him. *He findeth occasions against me*; which supposes seeking them; to this purport Job had spoken; (ch. 14. 16, 17.) *Dost thou not watch over my sin? He counteth me for his enemy.* So he had expressly said, (ch. 13. 24.—19. 11.) "*He putteth my feet in the stocks*; that, as I cannot contend with him, so I may not be able to flee from him." This he had said, ch. 13. 27; where also we meet with these words, *Thou lookest narrowly unto all my paths.*

II. He endeavours to convince him that he had spoken amiss in speaking thus, and that he ought to humble himself before God for it, and by repentance to unsay it; (v. 12.) *Behold, in this thou art not just. Here thou art not in the right*, so some read it. See the difference between the charge which Elihu exhibited against Job, and that which was preferred against him by his other friends; they would not own that he was just at all, but Elihu only says, "In this, in saying this, thou art not just." 1. "Thou dost not deal justly with God." To be just, is to render to all their due; now we do not render God his due, nor are we just to him, if we do not acknowledge his equity and kindness in all the dispensations of his providence towards us; that he is righteous in all his ways, and that, however it be, yet he is good. 2. "Thou dost not speak the language of a righteous man; I do not deny but thou art such a one, but in this thou dost not make it to appear." Many that are just, yet, in some particular instances, do not speak and act like themselves; and as, on the one hand, we must not fail to tell even a good man wherein he mistakes and does amiss,

nor flatter him in his errors and passions, for in that we are not kind; so, on the other hand, we must not draw men's characters, nor pass a judgment on them, from one instance, or some few misplaced words, for in that we are not just. *In many things we all offend*, and therefore must be candid in our censures.

Two things Elihu proposes to Job's consideration, to convince him that he had said amiss.

(1.) That God is infinitely above us, and therefore it is madness to contend with him; for if he plead against us with his great power, we cannot stand before him. *I will answer thee*, says Elihu, in one word, which carries its own evidence along with it, *That God is greater than man*; no doubt he is infinitely greater. Between God and man there is no proportion. Job had himself said a great deal, and admirably well, concerning the greatness of God, his irresistible power and incontestable sovereignty, his terrible majesty and unsearchable immensity. "Now," said Elihu, "do but consider what thou thyself hast said concerning the greatness of God, and apply it to thyself; if he is greater than man, he is greater than thou, and thou wilt see reason enough to repent of these ill-natured, ill-favoured, reflections upon him, and to blush at thy folly, and tremble to think of thine own presumption." Note, There is enough in this one plain unquestionable truth, *That God is greater than man*, if duly improved, for ever to put to silence and to shame all our complaints of his providence, and our exceptions against his dealings with us. He is not only more wise and powerful than we are, and therefore it is to no purpose to contend with him, who will be too hard for us, but more holy, just, and good, for these are the transcendent glories, and excellencies of the divine nature; in these, God is greater than man, and therefore it is absurd and unreasonable to find fault with him, for he is certainly in the right.

(2.) That God is not accountable to us; (v. 13.) *Why dost thou strive against him?* Those that complain of God, strive against him, impeach him, impeach him, bring an action against him. And why do they do so? For what cause? To what purpose? Note, It is an unreasonable thing for us, weak, foolish, sinful creatures, to strive with a God of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness. Wee to the clay that strives with the Potter; *for he gives no account of any of his matters.* He is under no obligation to shew us a reason for what he does; neither to tell us what he designs to do, in what method, at what time, by what instruments; nor to tell us why he deals thus with us. He is not bound either to justify his own proceedings, or to satisfy our demands and inquiries; his judgments will certainly justify themselves; if we do not satisfy ourselves in them, it is our own fault. It is therefore daring impiety for us to arraign God at our bar, or challenge him to shew cause for what he doeth, to say unto him, *What doest thou?* or, *Why doest thou so?* He gives not account of all his matters; so some read it. He reveals as much as it is fit for us to know, as follows here, v. 14. But still there are secret things, which belong not to us, which it is not for us to pry into.

14. For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. 15. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; 16. Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, 17. That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. 18. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.

Job had complained, that God kept him wholly in the dark concerning the meaning of his dealings with him; and therefore concluded he dealt with him as his enemy. "No," says Elihu, "he speaks to you, but you do not perceive him; so that the fault is your's, not his; he is designing your real good, even in those dispensations which you put this harsh construction upon. Observe in general, v. 14.

1. What a friend God is to our welfare! *He speaketh to us once, yea, twice.* It is a token of his favour, that, notwithstanding the distance and quarrel between us and him, yet he is pleased to speak to us. It is an evidence of his gracious design, that he is pleased to speak to us of our own concerns, to shew us what is our duty, what our interest, what he requires of us, and what we may expect from him; to tell us of our faults, and warn us of our danger; to shew us the way, and to lead us in it. This he does once, yea, twice, that is, again and again; when one warning is neglected, he gives another, not willing that any should perish. *Precept must be upon precept, and line upon line;* it is so, that sinners may be left inexcusable.

2. What enemies we are to our own welfare; *Man perceives it not,* that is, he does not heed it or regard it; he does not discern or understand it; is not aware that it is the voice of God, nor does he receive the things revealed, for they are foolishness to him; he stops his ear, stands in his own light, rejects the counsel of God against himself, and so is never the wiser, no not for the dictates of wisdom itself.

God speaks to us by conscience, by providences, and by ministers; of all which Elihu here discourses at large, to shew Job that God was both telling him his mind, and doing him a kindness, even now that he seemed to keep him in the dark, and so treat him as a stranger, and to keep him in distress, and so treat him as an enemy. There was not then, that we know of, any divine revelation in writing, and therefore that is not here mentioned among the ways by which God speaks to men, though now it is the principal way. In these verses, he shews how God teaches and admonishes the children of men by their own consciences. Observe,

I. The proper season and opportunity for these admonitions; (v. 15.) *In a dream, in slumberings upon the bed,* when men are retired from the world, and the business and conversation of it; it is a good time for them to retire into their own hearts, and commune with them, when they are upon their beds, solitary and still, Ps. 4. 4. It is the time God takes for dealing personally with men. 1. When he sent angels, extraordinary messengers, on his errands, he commonly chose that time for the delivery of them; when, by deep sleep falling on men, the bodily senses were all locked up, and the mind more free to receive the immediate communications of divine light. Thus he made his mind known to the prophets by visions and dreams; (Numb. 12. 6.) thus he warned Abimelech, (Gen. 20. 3.) Laban, (Gen. 31. 24.) Joseph, Matth. 1. 20. Thus he made known to Pharaoh, and Nebuchadnezzar, things that should come to pass hereafter. When he stirred up conscience, that ordinary deputy of his, in the soul, to do its office, he took that opportunity, either when deep sleep fell on men, for though dreams mostly come from fancy, some may come from conscience: or, in slumberings, when men are between sleeping and waking, reflecting at night upon the business of the foregoing day, or projecting in the morning the business of the ensuing day, then is a proper time for their hearts to reproach them for what they have done ill, and to admonish them what they should do. See Isa. 30. 21.

II. The power and force with which those admonitions come, v. 16. When God designs men's good, by the convictions and dictates of their own consciences, 1. He gives them admission, and makes them to be heeded; *Then he opens the ears of men,* which were before shut against the voice of this charmer, Ps. 58. 5. He opens the heart, as he opened Lydia's, and so opens the ears. He takes away that which stopped the ear, so that the conviction finds, or forces, its way; nay, he works in the soul a submission to the regimen of conscience, and a compliance with its rules, for that follows upon God's opening the ear; (Isa. 50. 5.) *God has opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious.* 2. He gives them a settlement, and makes them to abide; *He scaleth their instruction,* that is, the instruction that is designed for them, and is united to them; this he makes their souls to receive the deep and lasting impression of, as the wax of the seal. When the heart is delivered into divine instructions, as into a mould, then the work is done.

III. The end and design of these admonitions that are sent.

1. To keep men from sin, and particularly the sin of pride; (v. 17.) *That he may withdraw man from his purpose,* that is, from his evil purposes; may change the temper of his mind, and the course of his life, his disposition and inclination, or prevent some particular sin he is in danger of falling into: that he may withdraw man from his work; may make him leave off man's work, which is working for the world and the flesh, and may set him to work the work of God. Many a man has been stopped in the full career of a sinful pursuit by the seasonable checks of his own conscience, saying, *Do not this abominable thing which the Lord hates.* Particularly, God does, by this means, hide pride from man, that is, hide those things from him which are the matter of his pride, and take his mind off from dwelling upon them, by setting before him what reason he has to be humble. That he may take away pride from man, so some read it; that he may pluck up that root of bitterness which is the cause of so much sin. All those whom God has mercy in store for he will humble, and hide pride from. Pride makes people eager and resolute in the prosecution of their purposes; they will have their way, therefore God withdraws them from their purposes, by mortifying their pride.

2. To keep men from ruin, v. 18. While sinners are pursuing their evil purposes and indulging their pride, their souls are hastening apace to the pit, to the sword, to destruction, both in this world and that to come: but when God, by the admonitions of conscience, withdraws them from sin, he thereby keeps back their souls from the pit, from the bottomless pit, and saves them from perishing by the sword of divine vengeance, so iniquity shall not be their ruin. That which turns men from sin, saves them from hell, *saves a soul from death,* James, 5. 20. See what a mercy it is to be under the restraints of an awakened conscience; faithful are the wounds, and kind are the bonds, of that friend, for the soul is kept from perishing eternally.

19. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: 20. So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. 21. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. 22. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. 23. If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness: 24. Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. 25. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: 26. He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. 27. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; 28. He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.

God has spoken once to sinners by their own consciences, to keep them from the paths of the destroyer, but they perceive it not; they are not aware that the checks their own hearts give them, in a sinful way, are from God, but they are imputed to melancholy, or the preciseness of their education; and therefore God speaks twice; he speaks a second time, and tries another way to convince and reclaim sinners, that is, by providences, afflictive and merciful, (in which he speaks twice,) and by the seasonable instructions of good ministers setting in with them. Job complained much of his diseases, and judged by them that God was angry with him; his friends did so too: but Elihu shews they

were all mistaken, for God often afflicts the body in love, and with gracious designs of good to the soul, as appears in the issue which here it is brought to. This part of Elihu's discourse will be of great use to us for the due improvement of sickness, in and by which God speaks to men. Here is,

I. The patient described in his extremity. See what work sickness makes, (v. 19, &c.) when God sends it with commission; *Do this, and it doeth it.*

1. The sick man is full of pain all over him; (v. 19.) *He is chastened with pain upon his bed*, such pain as confines him to his bed; or, so extreme the pain is, that he can get no ease, no, not on his bed where he would repose himself. Pain and sickness will turn a bed of down into a bed of thorns, on which he that used to sleep now tosses to and fro till the dawning of the day. The case, as here put, is very bad; pain is more hardly borne than sickness, and with that the patient here is chastened; not a dull heavy pain, but strong and acute; and, frequently, the stronger the patient, the stronger the pain; for the more sanguine the complexion is, the more violent, commonly, the disease is. It is not the smarting of the flesh that is complained of, but the aching of the bones. It is an inward rooted pain; and not only the bones of one limb, but the multitude of the bones, are thus chastened. See what frail, what vile, bodies we have, which, though receiving no external hurt, may be thus pained from causes within themselves: see what work sin makes, what mischief it does. Pain is the fruit of sin; yet, by the grace of God, the pain of the body is often made a means of good to the soul.

2. He has quite lost his appetite, the common effect of sickness; (v. 20.) *His life abhorreth bread*, the most necessary food, and dainty meat, which he most delighted in, and formerly relished with a great deal of pleasure. This is a good reason why we should not be *desirous of dainties, because they are deceitful meat*, Prov. 23. 3. We may be soon made as sick of them as we are now fond of them; and those who live in luxury when they are well, if ever they come, by reason of sickness, to loathe dainty meat, may, with grief and shame, read their sin in their punishment. Let us not inordinately love the *taste* of meat, for the time may come when we may even loathe the *sight* of meat, Ps. 107. 18.

3. He is become a perfect skeleton, nothing but skin and bones, v. 21. By sickness, perhaps a few days' sickness, his flesh, which was fat, and fair, is consumed away, that it cannot be seen: it is strangely wasted and gone, and his bones, which were buried in flesh, now stick out; you may count his ribs, may tell all his bones. The soul that is well-nourished with the bread of life, sickness will not make lean, but it soon makes a change in the body.

He who, before, had such a beauteous air,
And, pamper'd with his ease, seem'd plump and fair,
Doth all his friends (amazing change!) surprise,
With pale lean cheeks, and ghastly hollow eyes;
His bones, a horrid sight, start through his skin,
Which lay before, in flesh and fat, unseen.

Sir R. BLACKMORE.

4. He is given up for gone, and his life despaired of; (v. 22.) *His soul draws near to the grave*, that is, he has all the symptoms of death upon him, and, in the apprehension of all about him, as well as in his own, he is a dying man. The pangs of death, here called the *destroyers*, are just ready to seize him; they compass him about, Ps. 116. 3. Perhaps it intimates the very dreadful apprehensions which those have of death as a destroying thing, when it stares them in the face, who, when it was at a distance, made light of it. All agree, when it comes to the point, whatever they thought of it before, that it is a serious thing to die.

II. The provision made for his instruction, in order to a sanctified use of his affliction, that, when God in that way speaks to man, he may be heard and understood, and not speak in vain, v. 23. He is happy, if there be a messenger with him to attend him in his sickness, to convince, counsel, and comfort him, an interpreter to expound the providence, and give him to understand the meaning of it, a man of wisdom that knows the voice of

the rod and its interpretation; for, when God speaks by afflictions, we are, frequently, so unversed in the language, that we have need of an interpreter; and it is well if we have such a one. The advice and help of a good minister are as needful and seasonable, and should be as acceptable, in sickness, as of a good physician, especially if he be well-skilled in the art of explaining and improving providences; he is then one of a thousand, and to be valued accordingly: his business, at such a time, is, *to shew unto man his uprightness*, that is, *God's uprightness*, that in faithfulness he afflicts him, and does him no wrong; which it is necessary to be convinced of, in order to our making a due improvement of the affliction: or rather, it may mean man's uprightness, or rectitude: 1. The uprightness that *is*. If it appear that the sick person is truly pious, the interpreter will not do as Job's friends had done, make it his business to prove him a hypocrite, because he is afflicted; but, on the contrary, will shew him his uprightness, notwithstanding his afflictions, that he may take the comfort of it, and be easy, whatever the event is. 2. The uprightness, the reformation, that *should be*, in order to life and peace. When men are made to see the way of uprightness to be the only way, and a sure way, to salvation, and to choose it, and walk in it accordingly, the work is done.

III. God's gracious acceptance of him, upon his repentance, v. 24. When he sees that the sick person is indeed convinced that sincere repentance, and that uprightness, which is gospel-perfection, are his interest as well as duty, then He that waits to be gracious, and shews mercy, upon the first indication of true repentance, is gracious unto him, and takes him into his favour and thoughts for good. Wherever God finds a gracious heart, he will be found a gracious God: and, 1. He will give a gracious order for his discharge. He says, *Deliver him*, that is, Let him be delivered from going down to the pit, from that death which is the wages of sin. When afflictions have done their work, they shall be removed. When we return to God in a way of duty, he will return to us in a way of mercy. Those shall be delivered from going down to the pit, who receive God's messengers, and rightly understand his interpreters, so as to subscribe to his uprightness. 2. He will give a gracious reason for this order, *I have found a ransom*, or propitiation; Jesus Christ is that Ransom, so Elihu calls him, as Job had called him his Redeemer, for he is both the Purchaser and the Price, the Priest and the Sacrifice; so high was the value put upon souls, that nothing less would redeem them, and so great the injury done by sin, that nothing less would atone for it, than the blood of the Son of God, who gave his life a ransom for many. This is a ransom of God's finding, a contrivance of Infinite Wisdom; we could never have found it ourselves, and the angels themselves could never have found it; it is the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom; and such an invention as is, and will be, the everlasting wonder of those principalities and powers that desire to look into it. Observe how God glories in the invention here, *εὕρηκα, εὕρηκα*—"I have found, I have found, the Ransom, I, even I, am he that has done it."

IV. The recovery of the sick man, hereupon. Take away the cause, and the effect will cease. When the patient becomes a penitent, see what a blessed change follows.

1. His body recovers its health, v. 25. This is not always the consequence of a sick man's repentance and return to God, but sometimes it is; and recovery from sickness is then a mercy indeed, when it arises from the remission of sin; then it is in love to the soul, that the body is *delivered from the pit of corruption*, when God *casts our sins behind his back*, Isa. 38. 17. That is the method of a blessed recovery; *Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee*; and then, *Rise, take up thy bed, and walk*, Matth. 9. 2, 6. So here, interest him in the Ransom, and then *his flesh shall be fresher than a child's*, and there shall be no remains of his distemper, but *he shall return to the days of his youth*, to the beauty and strength which he had then; when the distemper that oppressed nature is removed, how strangely does nature help itself, in which the power and goodness of the God of nature must be thankfully acknowledged! By such merciful

providences as these, which afflictions give occasion for, God speaketh once, yea twice, to the children of men, letting them know (if they would but perceive it) their dependence upon him, and his tender compassion of them.

2. His soul recovers its peace, *v. 26.* (1.) The patient, being a penitent, is a supplicant, and has learned to pray; he knows God will be sought unto for his favours, and therefore he shall pray unto God, pray for pardon, pray for health. *Is any afflicted, any sick? Let him pray.* When he finds himself recovering, he shall not then think that prayer is no longer necessary, for we need the grace of God as much for the sanctifying of a mercy as for the sanctifying of an affliction. (2.) His prayers are accepted, God will be favourable to him, and be well-pleased with him, his anger shall be turned away from him, and the light of God's countenance shall shine upon his soul; and then it follows, (3.) That he has the comfort of communion with God; he shall now see the face of God, which before was hid from him, and he shall see it with joy, for what sight can be more reviving? See Gen. 33. 10. *As though I had seen the face of God.* All true penitents rejoice more in the returns of God's favour, than in any instance whatsoever of prosperity or pleasure, Ps. 4. 6, 7. (4.) He has a blessed tranquillity of mind, arising from the sense of his justification before God, who will render unto this man his righteousness. He shall receive the atonement, that is, the comfort of it, Rom. 5. 11. Righteousness shall be imputed to him, and peace, thereupon, spoken, the joy and gladness of which he shall then be made to hear, though he could not hear it in the day of his affliction. God will now deal with him as a righteous man, with whom it shall be well. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, even righteousness, Ps. 24. 5. God shall give him grace to go and sin no more. Perhaps this may bespeak the reformation of his life after his recovery. As he shall pray unto God, whom before he had slighted, so he shall render to man his righteousness, whom before he had wronged, shall make restitution, and for the future do justly.

V. The general rule which God will go by in dealing with the children of men, inferred from this instance, *v. 27, 28.* As sick people, upon their submission, are recovered, so all others that truly repent of their sins, shall find mercy with God. See here, 1. What sin is, and what reason we have not to sin. Would we know the nature of sin, and the malignity of it? It is the perverting of that which is right; it is a most unjust, unreasonable, thing, it is the rebellion of the creature against the Creator, the usurped dominion of the flesh over the spirit, and a contradiction to the eternal rules and reasons of good and evil. It is *perverting the right ways of the Lord*; (Acts, 13. 10.) and therefore the ways of sin are called *crooked ways*, Ps. 125. 5. Would we know what is to be got by sin? *It profiteth us not.* The works of darkness are unfruitful works; when profit and loss come to be balanced, all the gains of sin, put them all together, will come far short of countervailing the damage. All true penitents are ready to own this; and it is a mortifying consideration, (Rom. 6. 21.) *What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?* 2. See what repentance is, and what reason we have to repent. Would we approve ourselves true penitents? We must then, with a broken and contrite heart, confess our sins to God, 1 John, 1. 9. We must confess the *fact* of sin, (I have sinned,) and not deny the charge, or stand upon our own justification: we must confess the *fault* of sin, the iniquity, the dishonesty of it; *I have perverted that which was right*: we must confess the *folly* of sin; "So foolish have I been and ignorant, for it *profited me not*; and therefore what have I to do any more with it?" Is there not good reason why we should make such a penitent confession as this? For, (1.) God expects it. He looks upon men, when they have sinned, to see what they will do next, whether they will go on in it, or whether they will bethink themselves, and return. He hearkens and hears whether any say, *What have I done?* Jer. 3. 6. He looks upon sinners with an eye of compassion, desiring to hear this from them, for he has no pleasure in their ruin. He looks upon them, and, as soon as he perceives these workings of repentance in them, he encourages them, and is ready to accept them,

Ps. 32. 5, 6.) as the father went forth to meet the returning prodigal. (2.) It will turn to our unspeakable advantage. The promise is general; if any humble themselves thus, whoever they are, [1.] They shall not come into condemnation, but be saved from the wrath to come; *He shall deliver his soul from going into the pit*, the pit of hell; iniquity shall not be his ruin. [2.] They shall be happy in everlasting life and joy; *His life shall see the light*, that is, all good, in the vision and fruition of God. To obtain this bliss, if the prophet had bid us do some great thing, would we not have done it? How much more, when he only says unto us, *Wash and be clean*; Confess and be pardoned, Repent and be saved?

29. Lo, all these *things* worketh God oftentimes with man, 30. To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living. 31. Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I will speak. 32. If thou hast any thing to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify thee. 33. If not, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom.

We have here the conclusion of this first part of Elihu's discourse, in which,

1. He briefly sums up what he had said, shewing that God's great and gracious design, in all the dispensations of his providence toward the children of men, is, to save them from being for ever miserable, and bring them to be for ever happy; *v. 29, 30.* All these things God is working with the children of men; he deals with them by conscience, by providences, by ministers, by mercies, by afflictions; he makes them sick, and makes them well again; all these are his operations; he has *set the one over against the other*, (Eccl. 7. 14.) but his hand is in all; it is he that performs all things for us. All providences are to be looked upon as God's workings with man, his strivings with him. He uses a variety of methods to do men good; if one affliction do not do the work, he will try another; if neither do, he will try a mercy; and he will send a messenger to interpret both. He often works such things as these, twice, thrice; so it is in the original, referring to *v. 14.* He *speaks once, yea twice*; if that prevail not, he works twice, yea thrice; he changes his method, (*We have piped, we have mourned,*) returns again to the same method, repeats the same applications. Why does he take all this pains with man? It is *to bring back his soul from the pit*, *v. 30.* If God did not take more care of us than we do of ourselves, we were miserable; we would destroy ourselves, but he would have us saved, and devises means, by his grace, to undo that by which we were undoing ourselves. The former method, by dream and vision, was, *to keep back the soul from the pit*, (*v. 13.*) that is, to prevent sin, that we might not fall into it. This, by sickness and the word, is, to bring back the soul, to recover those that have fallen into sin, that they may not lie still and perish in it. With respect to all that by repentance are brought back from the pit, it is, that they may be enlightened with the light of the living, that they may have present comfort and everlasting happiness. Whom God saves from sin and hell, which are darkness, he will bring to heaven, the inheritance of the saints in light; and this he aims at, in all his institutions, and all his dispensations. *Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst thus visit him!* This should engage us to comply with God's designs, to work with him for our own good, and not to counter-work him. This will render those that perish for ever inexcusable, that so much was done to save them, and they would not be healed.

2. He bespeaks Job's acceptance of what he had offered, and begs of him to *mark it well*, *v. 31.* What is intended for our good, challenges our regard. If Job will observe what is said, (1.) He is welcome to make what objections he can against it; (*v. 32.*) "If thou hast any thing to say for thyself in thine own

vindication, answer me; though I am fresh, and thou art spent, I will not run thee down with words; *Speak, for I desire to justify thee*, and am not as thy other friends, that desired to condemn thee." Elihu contends for truth, not, as they did, for victory. Note, Those we reprove, we should desire to justify, and be glad to see them clear themselves from the imputations they lie under, and therefore give them all possible advantage and encouragement to do it. (2.) If he has nothing to say against what is said, Elihu lets him know that he has something more to say, which he desires him patiently to attend to; (v. 33.) *Hold thy peace, and I will teach thee wisdom*. Those that would both shew wisdom and learn wisdom, must hearken and keep silence, be swift to hear and slow to speak. Job was wise and good; but those that are so, may yet be wiser and better, and must therefore set themselves to improve by the means of wisdom and grace.

CHAP. XXXIV.

Elihu, it is likely, paused a while, to see if Job had any thing to say against his discourse in the foregoing chapter; but he sitting silent, and, it is likely, intimating his desire that he would go on, he here proceeds. And, I. He bespeaks not only the audience, but the assistance, of the company, v. 2..4. II. He charges Job with some more indecent expressions that had dropped from him, v. 5..9. III. He undertakes to convince him that he had spoken amiss, by shewing very fully, 1. God's incontestable justice, v. 10..12, 17, 19, 23. 2. His sovereign dominion, v. 13..15. 3. His almighty power, v. 20, 24. 4. His omniscience, v. 21, 22, 25. 5. His severity against sinners, v. 26..28. 6. His over-ruling providence, v. 29, 30. IV. He teaches him what he should say, v. 31, 32. And then, lastly, he leaves the matter to Job's own conscience, and concludes with a sharp reproof of him, for his peevishness and discontent, v. 33..37. All this Job not only bore patiently, but took kindly, because he saw that Elihu meant well; and, whereas his other friends had accused him of that from which his own conscience acquitted him, Elihu charged him with that only for which, it is probable, his own heart, now upon the reflection, began to smite him.

1. FURTHERMORE Elihu answered and said, 2. Hear my words, O ye wise men; and give ear unto me, ye that have knowledge. 3. For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat. 4. Let us choose to us judgment: let us know among ourselves what is good. 5. For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment. 6. Should I lie against my right? my wound is incurable without transgression. 7. What man is like Job, who drinketh up scorning like water? 8. Which goeth in company with the workers of iniquity, and walked with wicked men? 9. For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.

Here,

1. Elihu humbly addresses himself to the auditors, and endeavours, like an orator, to gain their good will, and their favourable attention. 1. He calls them *wise men*, and *men that had knowledge*, v. 2. It is comfortable dealing with such as understand sense; *I speak as to wise men*, who can judge what I say, 1 Cor. 10. 15. Elihu differed in opinion from them, and yet he calls them *wise and knowing men*. Peevish disputants think all fools that are not of their mind; but it is justice to those who are wise to acknowledge it, though our sentiments do not agree with theirs. 2. He appeals to their judgment, and therefore submits to their trial, v. 3. The ear of the judicious tries words, whether what is said be true or false, right or wrong, and he that speaks must stand the test of the intelligent. As we must prove all things we hear, so we must be willing that what we speak should be proved. 3. He takes them into partnership with him in the examination and discussion of this matter, v. 4. He does not pretend to be sole dictator, nor undertake to say what is just and good, and what is not, but he is willing to join with them in searching it out, and desires a consultation; "Let us agree to lay aside all animosities and feuds, all prejudices and affectation of

contradiction, and all stiffness in adhering to the opinion we have once espoused, and let us choose to ourselves judgment; let us fix right principles on which to proceed, and then take right method for finding out truth; and let us know among ourselves, by comparing notes, and communicating our reasons, what is good and what is otherwise." Note, We are then likely to discern what is right, when we agree to assist one another in searching it out.

II. He warmly accuses Job for some passionate words which he had spoken, that reflected on the divine government, appealing to the house, whether he ought not to be called to the bar, and checked for them.

1. He recites the words which Job had spoken, as near as he can remember. (1.) He had insisted upon his own innocence; Job hath said, *I am righteous*, (v. 5.) and, when urged to confess his guilt, has stiffly maintained his plea of *Not guilty*. *Should I lie against my right?* v. 6. Job had spoken to this purport; (ch. 27. 6.) *My righteousness I hold fast*. (2.) He had charged God with injustice in his dealings with him, that he had wronged him in afflicting him, and had not righted him; *God has taken away my judgment*; so Job had said, ch. 27. 2. (3.) He had despaired of relief, and concluded that God could not, or would not, help him; *My wound is incurable*, and likely to be mortal, and yet without transgression; *not for any injustice in my hand*, ch. 16. 16, 17. (4.) He had, in effect, said, that there is nothing to be got in the service of God, and that no man will be the better, at last, for his religion; (v. 9.) *He hath said* that which gives occasion to suspect that he thinks, *It profiteth a man nothing, that he shall delight himself with God*. It is granted that there is a present pleasure in religion, for what is it but to delight ourselves with God, in communion with him, in concurrence with him, in walking with him as Enoch did; this is a true notion of religion, and bespeaks its ways to be pleasantness. Yet the advantage of it is denied, as if it were *vain to serve God*, Mal. 3. 14. This Elihu gathers as Job's opinion, by an innuendo from what he said; (ch. 9. 22.) *He destroys the perfect and the wicked*, which has a truth in it, (for all things come alike to all,) but it was ill-expressed, and gave too much occasion for this imputation, and therefore Job sat down silent under it, and attempted not his own vindication; whence Mr. Caryl well observes, That good men sometimes speak worse than they mean; and that a good man will rather bear more blame than he deserves, than stand to excuse himself when he has deserved any blame.

2. He charges Job very high upon it. In general, *What man is like Job?* (v. 7.) "Did you ever know such a man as Job, or ever hear a man talk at such an extravagant rate?" He represents him, (1.) As sitting in the seat of the scornful; "He drinketh up scorning like water," that is, "he takes a great deal of liberty to reproach both God and his friends, takes a pleasure in it, and is very liberal in his reflections." Or, "He is very greedy in receiving and hearkening to the scorns and contempts which others cast upon their brethren, is well pleased with them, and extols them." Or, as some explain it, "By these foolish expressions of his he makes himself the object of scorn, lays himself very open to reproach, and gives occasion to others to laugh at him; while his religion suffers by it, and the reputation of that is wounded through his side." We have need to pray that God will never leave us to ourselves, to say or do any thing which may make us a reproach to the foolish, Ps. 39. 8. (2.) As walking in the course of the ungodly, and standing in the way of sinners; He goes in company with the workers of iniquity; (v. 8.) not that in his conversation he did associate with them, but, in his opinion he did favour and countenance them, and strengthen their hands. If (as it follows, v. 9. for the proof of this) *it profits a man nothing to delight himself in God*, why should he not lay the reins on the neck of his lusts, and herd himself with the workers of iniquity? He that says, *I have cleansed my hands in vain*, does not only offend against the generation of God's children, (Ps. 73. 13, 14.) but gratifies his enemies, and says as they say.

10. Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that he should do

wickedness; and *from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.* 11. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to *his* ways. 12. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment. 13. Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? 14. If he set his heart upon man, *if* he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; 15. All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.

The scope of Elihu's discourse is to reconcile Job to his afflictions, and to pacify his spirit under them. In order to this, he had shewed, in the foregoing chapter, that God meant him no hurt in afflicting him, but intended it for his spiritual benefit. In this chapter, he shews that he did him no wrong in afflicting him, nor punished him more than he deserved. If the former could not prevail to satisfy him, yet this ought to silence him. In these verses, he directs his discourse to all the company; "*Hearken to me, ye men of understanding, (v.10.) and shew yourselves to be intelligent, by assenting to this which I say.*" And this is that which he says, That the righteous God never did, nor ever will, do any wrong to any of his creatures, but his ways are equal, our's are unequal.

The truth here maintained respects the justice and equity of all God's proceedings. Now observe in these verses,

I. How plainly this truth is laid down, both negatively and positively. 1. He does wrong to none; *God cannot do wickedness, nor the Almighty commit iniquity, v.10.* It is inconsistent with the perfection of his nature, and so it is also with the purity of his will; (v.12.) *God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* He neither can, nor will, do a wrong thing, nor deal hardly with any man. He will never inflict the evil of punishment, but where he finds the evil of sin, nor in any undue proportion, for that would be to commit iniquity and do wickedly. If appeals be made to him, or he be to give a definitive sentence, he will have an eye to the merits of the cause, and not respect the person, for that were to pervert judgment. He will never either do any man wrong, or deny any man right, but *the heavens will shortly declare his righteousness.* Because he is God, and therefore is infinitely perfect and holy, he can neither do wrong himself, nor countenance it in others, any more than he can either die, or lie, or deny himself. Though he be Almighty, yet he never uses his power, as mighty men often do, for the support of injustice. He is *Shaddai*, God *all-sufficient*, and therefore he cannot be *tempted with evil*, (James, 1.13.) to do an unrighteous thing. 2. He ministers justice to all; (v.11.) *The work of a man shall he render unto him.* Good works shall be rewarded, and evil works either punished or satisfied for; so that, sooner or later, in this world or in that to come, he will cause every man to find according to his ways. This is the standing rule of distributive justice, to give to every man according to his work; *Say to the righteous, it shall be well with them; Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him.* If services persevered in now go unrewarded, and sins persisted in now go unpunished, yet there is a day coming, when God will fully render to every man according to his works, with interest for the delay.

II. How warmly it is asserted; 1. With an assurance of the truth of it; *Yea, surely, v.12.* It is a truth which none can deny or call in question, it is what we may take for granted, and are all agreed in, That God will not do wickedly. 2. With an abhorrence of the very thought of the contrary; (v.10.) *Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness*, and from us, that we should imagine such a thing, that we should entertain the least suspicion of it, or say any thing that looks like charging him with it.

III. How evidently it is proved by two arguments.

1. His independent absolute sovereignty and dominion; (v.13.)

Who has given him a charge over the earth, and deputed him to manage the affairs of men upon the earth? Or, Who besides has disposed the whole world of mankind? He has the sole administration of the kingdoms of men, and has it of himself, nor is he intrusted with it by, or for, any other. (1.) It is certain that the government is his, and he does according to his will in all the hosts both of heaven and earth; and therefore he is not to be charged with injustice; for *shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* Gen.18.25. How shall God either rule or judge the world, if there be, or could be, any *unrighteousness with him?* Rom.3.5,6. He that is entitled to such unlimited power must certainly have in himself unspotted purity. This is also a good reason why we should acquiesce in all God's dealings with us. Shall not he, that disposes of the whole world, dispose of us and our concerns? (2.) It is as certain that he does not derive his power from any; nor is it a dispensation that is committed to him, but his power is original, and, like his being, of himself; and therefore, if he were not perfectly just, all the world and the affairs of it would soon be in the utmost confusion. The highest powers on earth have a God above them, to whom they are accountable, because it is not far from them to do iniquity. But *therefore* God has none above him, because it is not possible that he should do any thing (such is the perfection of his nature) that should need to be controlled. And if he be an absolute Sovereign, we are bound to submit to him, for there is no higher power to which we may appeal, so that the virtue is a necessity.

2. His irresistible power; (v.14.) If he *set his heart upon man*, to contend with him, much more if (as some read it) he set his heart *against* man, to ruin him, if he should deal with man either by *summa potestas—mere sovereignty*, or by *summa jus—strict justice*, there were no standing before him; man's spirit and breath would soon be gone, and *all flesh would perish together, v.15.* Many men's honesty is owing purely to their impotency; they do not do wrong, because they cannot support it when it is done, or it is not in their power to do it. But God is able to crush any man easily and suddenly, and yet does not by arbitrary power crush any man, which therefore must be attributed to the infinite perfection of his nature, and that is immutable. See here, (1.) What God can do with us; he can soon bring us to dust; there needs not any positive act of his omnipotence to do it, if he do but withdraw that concurrence of his providence, by which we live, if he gather unto himself that breath which was from his hand at first, and is still in his hand, we expire immediately, like an animal in an air-pump, when the air is exhausted. (2.) What he may do with us, without doing us any wrong; he may recall the being he gave, of which we are but tenants at will, and which also we have forfeited; and therefore, as long as that is continued of his mere favour, we have no reason to cry out of wrong, whatever other comforts are removed.

16. If now *thou hast* understanding, hear this: hearken to the voice of my words. 17. Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that is most just? 18. *Is it fit* to say to a king, *Thou art wicked?* and to princes, *Ye are ungodly?* 19. *How much less* to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all *are* the work of his hands. 20. In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away: and the mighty shall be taken away without hand. 21. For his eyes *are* upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. 22. *There is* no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. 23. For he will not lay upon man more *than right*, that he should enter into judgment with God. 24.

He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and set others in their stead. 25. Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth *them* in the night, so that they are destroyed. 26. He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others; 27. Because they turned back from him, and would not consider any of his ways: 28. So that they cause the cry of the poor to come unto him, and he heareth the cry of the afflicted. 29. When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth *his* face, who then can behold him? whether *it be done* against a nation, or against a man only: 30. That the hypocrite reign not, lest the people be ensnared.

Elihu here applies himself more directly to Job. He had spoken to the rest, (v. 10.) as *men of understanding*; now, speaking to Job, he puts an *if* upon his understanding; *If thou hast understanding*, hear this, and observe it, v. 16.

I. Hear this, That God is not to be quarrelled with for any thing that he does. It is daring presumption to arraign and condemn God's proceedings, as Job had done by his discontents. It was, 1. As absurd as it would be to advance one to power, that is a professed enemy to justice; *Shall even he that hates right, govern?* v. 17. The righteous Lord so loves righteousness, that, in comparison with him, even Job himself, though a perfect and upright man, might be said to *hate right*; and shall he govern? Shall he pretend to direct God, or correct what he does? Shall such unrighteous creatures as we are, give law to the righteous God? Or, must he take his measures from us? When we consider the corruption of our nature, and the contrariety there is in us to the eternal rule of equity, we cannot but see it an impudent, impious, thing for us to prescribe to God. 2. It was as absurd as it would be to call a most righteous innocent person to the bar, and to give judgment against him, though it appeared ever so plain, upon the trial, that he was most just. *Wilt thou condemn him that is righteous in all his ways*, and cannot but be so? 3. It is more absurd and unbecoming than it would be to say to a sovereign prince, *Thou art wicked*, and to judges upon the bench, *Ye are ungodly*, v. 18. This would be looked upon as an insufferable affront to majesty and to magistracy; no king, no prince, would bear it. In favour of government, we presume it is a right sentence that is passed, unless the contrary be very evident; but, whatever we think, it is not fit to tell a king to his face that he is wicked. Nathan reproved David by a parable. But, whatever a high priest or a prophet might do, it is not for an ordinary subject to make so bold with the powers that are. How absurd is it then to say so to God! To impute iniquity to him, who, having no respect of persons, is in no temptation to do an unjust thing! v. 19. *He regardeth not the rich more than the poor*, and therefore it is fit he should rule, and it is not fit we should find fault with him. Note, Rich and poor stand upon the same level before God. A great man shall fare never the better, nor find any favour, for his wealth and greatness; nor shall a poor man fare ever the worse for his poverty, nor an honest cause be starved. Job, now that he was poor, should have as much favour with God, and be as much regarded by him, as when he was rich; for they all are the work of his hands. Their persons are so; the poor are made by the same hand, and of the same mould, as the rich. Their conditions are so; the poor were made poor by the Divine Providence, as well as the rich made rich; and therefore the poor shall fare never the worse for that which is their lot, not their fault.

II. Hear this, That God is to be acknowledged and submitted to in all that he does. Divers considerations Elihu here suggests to Job, to beget in him great and high thoughts of God, and so to persuade him to submit, and proceed no further in his quarrel with him.

I. God is almighty, and able to deal with the strongest of men when he enters into judgment with them; (v. 20.) even the

people, the body of a nation, though ever so numerous, shall be troubled, unbinged, and put into disorder, when God pleases; even the mighty man, the prince, though ever so honourable, ever so formidable among men, shall, if God speak the word, be taken away out of his throne, nay, out of the land of the living; they shall die, they shall pass away. What cannot He do, that has all the powers of death at his command? Observe the suddenness of this destruction; *In a moment shall they die*. It is not a work of time, with God, to bring down his proud enemies, but, when he pleases, it is soon done; nor is he bound to give them warning, no, not an hour's warning; *This night thy soul shall be required*. Observe the season of it; *They shall be troubled at midnight*, when they are secure and careless, and unable to help themselves; as the Egyptians, when their first-born were slain. This is the immediate work of God; they are taken away, without hand, insensibly, by secret judgments. God can himself humble the greatest tyrant, without the assistance or agency of any man. Whatever hand he sometimes uses in the accomplishing of his purposes, he needs none, but can do it without hand. Nor is it one single mighty man only that he can thus overpower, but even hosts of them; (v. 24.) *He shall break in pieces mighty men without number*; for no combined power can stand it out against Omnipotence. Yet, when God destroys tyranny, he does not design anarchy; if those are brought down that ruled ill, it does not therefore follow that people must have no rulers; for, when he breaks mighty men, he sets others in their stead, that will rule better; or, if they do not, he overturns them also in the night, or in a night, so that they are destroyed, v. 25. Witness Belshazzar. Or, if he designs them space to repent, he does not presently destroy them, but *he strikes them as wicked men*, v. 26. Some humbling, mortifying, judgments are brought upon them; these wicked rulers are stricken as other wicked men; as surely, as sorely, stricken in their bodies, estates, or families, and this, for warning to their neighbours; the stroke is given *in terrorem*—as an alarm to others, and therefore is given in the open sight of others, that they also may see, and fear, and tremble, before the justice of God. If kings stand not before him, how shall we stand!

2. God is omniscient, and can discover that which is most secret. As the strongest cannot oppose his arm, so the most subtle cannot escape his eye; and therefore, if some are punished, either more or less than we think they should be, instead of quarrelling with God, it becomes us to ascribe it to some secret cause known to God, only. For, (1.) Every thing is open before him; (v. 21.) *His eyes are upon the ways of man*: not only they are within reach of his eye, so that he can see them, but his eye is upon them, so that he actually observes and inspects them; he sees us all, and sees all our goings; go whither we will, we are under his eye; all our actions, good and evil, are regarded and recorded, and reserved to be brought into judgment when the books shall be opened. (2.) Nothing is or can be concealed from him; (v. 22.) *There is no darkness nor shadow of death*, so close, so thick, so solitary, so remote from light or sight, as that in it the workers of iniquity may hide themselves from the discovering eye, and avenging hand, of the righteous God. Observe here, [1.] The workers of iniquity would hide themselves, if they could, from the eye of the world for shame, and from the eye of God for fear, as Adam among the trees of the garden; the day is coming when mighty men, and chief captains, will call to the rocks and mountains to hide them. [2.] They would gladly be hid even by the shadow of death, be hid in the grave, and die for ever there, rather than appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. (3.) It is in vain to think of flying from God's justice, or absconding, when his wrath is in pursuit of us. The workers of iniquity may find ways and means to hide themselves from men, but not from God; *He knows their works*, (v. 25) both what they do, and what they design.

3. God is righteous, and, in all his proceedings, goes according to the rules of equity. Even then when he is overturning mighty men, and breaking them in pieces, yet *he will not lay upon man more than right*, v. 23. As he will not punish the innocent, so he will not exact of those that are guilty more than their iniquities deserve; of the proportion between the sin and the punishment Infinite

Wisdom shall be the Judge. He will not give any man cause to complain that he deals hardly with him, nor shall any man enter into judgment with God, or bring an action against him. If he do, God will be justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges. Therefore Job was very much to be blamed for his complaints of God, and is here well-advised to let fall his action, for he would certainly be cast, or non-suited. *It is not for man ever to purpose to enter into judgment with the Omnipotent*; so some read the whole verse. Job had often wished to plead his cause before God. Elihu asks, "To what purpose? The judgment already given concerning thee will certainly be affirmed; no errors can be found in it, nor any exceptions taken to it, but, after all, it must rest as it is." All is well that God does, and will be found so.

To prove, that, when God destroys the mighty men, and strikes them as wicked men, he does not lay upon them more than right, he shews what their wickedness was; (v. 27, 28.) and let any compare that with their punishment, and then judge whether they did not deserve it. In short, these unjust judges, whom God will justly judge, neither feared God, nor regarded man, Luke, 18. 2. (1.) They were rebels to God; they turned back from him, cast off the fear of him, and abandoned the very thoughts of him, for they would not consider any of his ways, took no heed either to his precepts or to his providences, but lived without God in the world. 'This is at the bottom of all the wickedness of the wicked, they turn back from God; and it is because they do not consider, not because they cannot; they will not. From inconsideration comes impiety, and thence all immorality. (2.) They were tyrants to all mankind, v. 28. They will not call upon God for themselves; but they cause the cry of the poor to come to him, and that cry is against them. They are injurious and oppressive to the poor, wrong them, crush them, impoverish them yet more, and add affliction to the afflicted, who cry unto God, make their complaint to him, and he hears them, and pleads their cause. Their case is bad who have the prayers and tears of the poor against them; for the cry of the oppressed will, sooner or later, draw down vengeance on the heads of the oppressors, and no one can say that this is more than right, Exod. 22. 23.

4. God has an uncontrollable dominion in all the affairs of the children of men, and so guides and governs whatever concerns both communities and particular persons, that, as what he designs cannot be defeated, so what he does cannot be changed, v. 29. Observe, (1.) The frowns of all the world cannot trouble those whom God quiets with his smiles. When he gives quietness, who can then make trouble? This is a challenge to all the powers of hell and earth, to disquiet those to whom God speaks peace, and for whom he creates it. If God give outward peace to a nation, he can secure what he gives, and disable the enemies of it to give it any disturbance. If God give inward peace to a man only, the quietness and everlasting assurance which are the effect of righteousness, neither the accusations of Satan, nor the afflictions of this present time, no, nor the arrests of death itself, can give trouble. What can make them uneasy, whose souls dwell at ease in God? See Phil. 4. 7. (2.) The smiles of all the world cannot quiet those whom God troubles with his frowns: for if he, in displeasure, hide his face, and withhold the comfort of his favour, who then can behold him? that is, Who can behold a displeased God, so as to bear up under his wrath, or turn it away? Who can make him shew his face when he resolves to hide it, or see through the clouds and darkness which are round about him? Or, Who can behold a disquieted sinner, so as to give him effectual relief? Who can stand a friend to him to whom God is an Enemy? None can relieve the distresses of the outward condition, without God; *If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I?* 2 Kings, 6. 27. Nor can any relieve the distresses of the mind against God and his terrors. If he impress the sense of his wrath upon a guilty conscience, all the comforts the creature can administer are ineffectual: *As vinegar upon nitre, so are songs to a heavy heart.* The irresistibility of God's operations must be acknowledged in his dealings, both with communities and with particular persons: what he does cannot be controuled, whether it be done against a nation in its public capacity, or against a man only in his private

affairs. The same Providence that governs mighty kingdoms, presides in the concerns of the meanest individual. And neither the strength of a whole nation can resist his power, nor the smallness of a single person evade his cognizance; but what he does shall be done effectually and victoriously.

5. God is wise, and careful of the public welfare, and therefore provides that the hypocrite reign not, lest the people be ensnared, v. 30. See here, (1.) The pride of hypocrites; they aim to reign; the praise of men, and power in the world, are their reward, what they aim at. (2.) The policy of tyrants; when they aim to set up themselves, they sometimes make use of religion as a cloke and cover for their ambition, and by their hypocrisy come to the throne. (3.) The danger the people are in, when hypocrites reign; they are likely to be ensnared in sin, or trouble, or both. Power, in the hands of dissemblers, is often destructive to the rights and liberties of a people, which they are more easily wheedled out of, than forced out of. Much mischief has been done likewise to the power of godliness, under the pretence of a form of godliness. (4.) The care which Divine Providence takes of the people, to prevent this danger, that the hypocrite reign not; either that he do not reign at all, or that he do not reign long. If God has mercy in store for a people, he will either prevent the rise, or hasten the ruin, of hypocritical rulers.

31. Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: 32. That which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more. 33. Should it be according to thy mind? he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose; and not I: therefore speak what thou knowest. 34. Let men of understanding tell me, and let a wise man hearken unto me. 35. Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom. 36. My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end, because of his answers for wicked men. 37. For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God.

In these verses,

1. Elihu instructs Job what he should say under his affliction, v. 31, 32. Having reproved him for his peevish passionate words, here he puts better words into his mouth. When we reprove for what is amiss, we must direct to what is good; to the *reproofs of instruction*, Prov. 6. 23. He does not impose it upon Job to use these words, but recommends it to him, as that which was meet to be said. In general, he would have him repent of his misconduct, and indecent expressions, under his affliction. Job's other friends would have had him own himself a wicked man, and by overdoing they undid. Elihu will oblige him only to own that he had, in the management of this controversy, spoken unadvisedly with his lips. Let us remember this, in giving reproofs, and not make the matter worse than it is; for the stretching of the crime may defeat the prosecution. Elihu drives the right nail, and speeds accordingly. He directs Job,

1. To humble himself before God for his sins, and to accept the punishment of them; *"I have borne chastisement."* What I suffer comes justly upon me, and therefore I will bear it, and not only justify God in it, but acknowledge his goodness." Many are chastised, that do not bear chastisement, do not bear it well, and so, in effect, do not bear it at all. Penitents, if sincere, will take all well that God does, and will bear chastisement as a medicinal operation intended for good.

2. To pray to God to discover his sins to him; (v. 32.) *"That which I see not, teach thou me."* Lord, upon the review, I find much amiss in me, and much done amiss by me, but I have reason to fear there is much more that I am not aware of; greater

abominations, which, through ignorance, mistake, and partiality to myself, I do not yet see; Lord, give me to see it, awaken my conscience to do its office faithfully." A good man is willing to know the worst of himself, and particularly, under affliction, desires to be told wherefore God contends with him, and what God designs in correcting him.

3. To promise reformation; (v. 31.) *I will not offend any more.* "If I have done iniquity, (or, Seeing I have,) I will do so no more; whatever thou shalt discover to me to have been amiss, by thy grace I will amend it for the future." This implies a confession that we have offended, true remorse and godly sorrow for the offence, and a humble compliance with God's design in afflicting us, which is to part between us and our sins. The penitent here comp'etes his repentance; for it is not enough to be sorry for our sins, but we must go and sin no more, and, as here, bind ourselves with the bond of a fixed resolution never more to return to folly. This is meet to be said in a steadfast purpose, and meet to be said to God in a solemn promise and vow.

II. He reasons with him concerning his discontent and uneasiness under his affliction, v. 33. We are ready to think every thing that concerns us should be just as we would have it; but Elihu here shews, 1. That it is absurd and unreasonable to expect it; "*Should it be according to thy mind?*" No, what reason for that? Elihu here speaks with a great deference to the divine will and wisdom, and a satisfaction therein. It is highly fit that every thing should be according to God's mind. Elihu speaks also with a just disdain of the pretensions of those that are proud, and would be their own carvers; *Should it be according to thy mind?* Should we always have the good we have a mind to enjoy? We should then wrongfully encroach upon others, and foolishly ensnare ourselves. Must we never be afflicted, because we have no mind to it? Is it fit that sinners should feel no smart, that scholars should be under no discipline? Or, if we must be afflicted, is it fit that we should choose what rod we will be beaten with? No, it is fit that every thing should be according to God's mind, and not our's, for he is the Creator, and we are creatures; he is infinitely wise and knowing, we are foolish and short-sighted; he is in one mind, we are in many. 2. That it is in vain, and to no purpose, to expect it; "*He will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose.*" God will take his own way, fulfil his own counsel, and recompense according to the sentence of his own justice, whether thou art pleased or displeased; he will neither ask thy leave, nor ask thy advice, but, what he pleases, that will he do; it is therefore thy wisdom to be easy, and make a virtue of necessity; *make the best of that which is*, because it is out of thy power to make it otherwise. If thou pretend to choose and refuse," that is, "to prescribe to God, and except against what he does, so will not I, I will acquiesce in all he does; and therefore speak what thou knowest, say what thou wilt do, whether thou wilt oppose or submit. The matter lies plain before thee; be at a point; thou art in God's hand, not in mine."

III. He appeals to all intelligent, indifferent, persons, whether there was not a great deal of sin and folly in that which Job said. 1. He would have the matter thoroughly examined, and brought to an issue; (v. 36.) "*My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end.*" If any will undertake to justify what he has said, let them do it; if not, let us all agree to bear our testimony against it." Many understand it of his trial by afflictions; "Let his troubles be continued till he be thoroughly humbled, and his proud spirit brought down, till he be made to see his error, and to retract what he has so presumptuously said against God and his providence. Let the trial be continued till the end be obtained." 2. He appeals both to God and man, and desires the judgment of both upon it. (1.) Some read v. 36. as an appeal to God, *O my Father, let Job be tried.* So the margin of our Bibles, for the same word signifies *my desire*, and *my father*; and some suppose that he lifted up his eyes, when he said this, meaning, "*O my Father which art in heaven, let Job be tried till he be subdued.*" When we are praying for the benefit of afflictions either to ourselves or others, we must eye God as a Father, because they are fatherly corrections, and a part of our filial education, **Heb. 12. 7.**

(2.) He appeals to the by-standers; (v. 34.) "*Let men of understanding tell me*, whether they can put any more favourable construction upon Job's words than I have put, and whether he had not spoken very ill, and ought not to cry *Peccavi—I have done wrong.*" In what Job had said, he thought it appeared, [1.] That he did not rightly understand himself, but had talked foolishly, v. 35. He cannot say that Job is without knowledge and wisdom; but, in this matter, he has spoken without knowledge, and, whatever his heart is, his words are without prudence. What he said to his wife, may be retorted upon himself, (*He speaks as one of the foolish men speak,*) and for the same reason, *Shall we not receive evil as well as good*, at God's hand? **ch. 2. 10.** Sometimes we need and deserve those reproofs ourselves, which we have given to others. Those that reproach God's wisdom, really reproach their own. [2.] That he had not a due regard to God, but had talked wickedly. If what he has said be tried to the end, that is, if one put it to the utmost stretch, and make the worst of it, it will be found, *First*, That he has taken part with God's enemies. His answers have been for wicked men, that is, what he had said, tends to strengthen the hands, and harden the hearts, of wicked people in their wickedness, he having carried the matter of their prosperity much further than he needed. Let wicked men, like Bael, plead for themselves, if they will, but far be it from us that we should answer for them, or say any thing in favour of them. *Secondly*, That he has insulted God's friends, and hectored over them; "*He clappeth his hands among us*; and if he be not thoroughly tried and humbled, will grow yet more insolent and imperious, as if he had gotten the day, and silenced us all." To speak ill is bad enough, but to clap our hands, and triumph in it when we have done, as if error and passion had won the victory, is much worse. *Thirdly*, That he has spoken against God himself, and, by standing to what he had said, *added rebellion to his sin.* To speak, though but one word, against God, by whom we speak, and for whom we ought to speak, is a great sin; what is it then to multiply words against him, as if we would out-talk him? What is it to repeat them, instead of unsaying them? Those that have sinned, and, when they are called to repent, thus go on frowardly, add rebellion to their sin, and make it exceeding sinful. *Errare possum, hæreticus esse nolo—I may fall into error, but I will not plunge into heresy.*

CHAP. XXXV.

Job being still silent, Elihu follows his blow, and here, a third time, undertakes to shew him that he had spoken amiss, and ought to recant. Three improper sayings he here charges him with, and returns answer to them distinctly. I. He had represented religion as an indifferent, unprofitable, thing, which God enjoins for his own sake, not for our's; Elihu evinces the contrary, v. 1. .8. II. He had complained of God as deaf to the cries of the oppressed, against which imputation Elihu here justifies God, v. 9. .13. III. He had despaired of the return of God's favour to him, because it was so long deferred, but Elihu shews him the true cause of the delay, v. 14. .16.

1. **ELIHU** spake moreover, and said, 2. Think—*Est thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's?* 3. For thou saidst, What advantage will it be unto thee? and, What profit shall I have, *if I be cleansed from my sin?* 4. I will answer thee, and thy companions with thee. 5. Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds *which* are higher than thou. 6. If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or *if* thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? 7. If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? 8. Thy wickedness *may hurt* a man as thou art; and thy righteousness *may profit* the son of man.

We have here,

I. The bad words which Elihu charges upon Job, **v. 2, 3.** To

vince the badness of them, he appeals to himself, and his own sober thoughts, in the reflection, *Thinkest thou this to be right?* This intimates, 1. Elihu's confidence that the reproof he now gave was just, for he could refer the judgment of it even to Job himself. They that have truth and equity on their side, sooner or later will have every man's conscience on their side. 2. His good opinion of Job, that he thought better than he spake, and that, though he had spoken amiss, yet, when he perceived his mistake, he would not stand to it. When we have said, in our haste, that which was not right, it becomes us to own that our second thoughts convince us that it was wrong.

Two things Elihu here reproves Job for ;

(1.) For *justifying himself more than God*, which was the thing that first provoked him ; (ch. 32. 2.) "Thou hast, in effect, said, *My righteousness is more than God's*," that is, "I have done more for God than ever he did for me ; so that, when the accounts are balanced, he will be brought in Debtor to me. As if Job thought his services had been paid less than they deserved, and his sins punished more than they deserved ; which is a most unjust and wicked thought for any man to harbour, and especially to utter. When Job insisted so much upon his own integrity, and the severity of God's dealings with him, he did, in effect, say, *My righteousness is more than God's* ; whereas, though we be ever so good, and our afflictions ever so great, we are chargeable with unrighteousness, and God is not.

(2.) For disowning the benefits and advantages of religion, because he suffers these things ; *What profit shall I have if I be cleansed from my sin?* v. 3. This is gathered from ch. 9. 30, 31. *Though I make my hands ever so clean, what the nearer am I? Thou shalt plunge me in the ditch.* And ch. 10. 15. *If I be wicked, woe to me ; but if I be righteous, it is all one.* The psalmist, when he compared his own afflictions with the prosperity of the wicked, was tempted to say, *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain*, Ps. 73. 13. And if Job said so, he did, in effect, say, *My righteousness is more than God's* ; (v. 2.) for if he got nothing by his religion, God was more beholden to him than he was to God. But though there might be some colour for it, yet it was not fair to charge these words upon Job, when he himself had made them the wicked words of prospering sinners, (ch. 21. 15.) *What profit shall we have, if we pray to him?* and had immediately disclaimed them, (v. 16.) *The counsel of the wicked is far from me.* It is not a fair way of disputing, to charge men with those consequences of their opinions, which they expressly renounce.

II. The good answer which Elihu gives to this ; (v. 4.) "I will undertake to answer thee, and thy companions with thee," that is, "all those that approve thy sayings, and are ready to justify thee in them ; and all others that say as thou sayest : I have that to offer which will silence them all." To do this, he has recourse to his old maxim ; (ch. 33. 12.) *That God is greater than man.* That is a truth, which, if duly improved, will serve many good purposes, and this particularly, to prove that God is Debtor to no man. The greatest of men may be a debtor to the meanest, but such is the infinite disproportion between God and man, that the great God cannot possibly receive any benefit by man, and therefore cannot be supposed to lie under any obligation to man ; for if he be obliged by his purpose and promise, it is only to himself. That is a challenge which no man can take up, (Rom. 11. 35.) *Who hath first given to God*, let him prove it, and it shall be recompensed to him again. Why should we demand it, as a just debt, to gain by our religion, (as Job seemed to do,) when the God we serve does not gain by it?

1. Elihu needs not prove that God is above man ; it is agreed by all ; but he endavours to affect Job and us with it, by an ocular demonstration of the height of the heavens and the clouds, v. 5. They are far above us, and God is far above them ; how much then is he set out of the reach either of our sins or of our services ! *Look unto the heavens, and behold the clouds.* God made man erect, *Caelumque tueri jussit*—And bade him look up to heaven. Idolaters looked up, and worshipped the hosts of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars ; but we must look up to heaven, and

worship the Lord of those hosts. They are higher than we, but God is infinitely above them. His *glory is above the heavens*, (Ps. 8. 1.) and the knowledge of him higher than heaven, ch. 11. 8.

2. But hence he infers that God is not affected, either one way or other, by any thing that we do.

(1.) He owns that men may be either bettered or damaged by what we do ; (v. 8.) *Thy wickedness*, perhaps, may hurt a man as thou art, may occasion him trouble in his outward concerns. A wicked man may wound, or rob, or slander, his neighbour, or may draw him into sin, and so prejudice his soul. Thy righteousness, thy justice, thy charity, thy wisdom, thy piety, may, perhaps, profit the son of man ; our goodness extends to the saints that are in the earth, Ps. 16. 3. To men like ourselves, we are in a capacity either of doing injury, or of shewing kindness. And in both these the sovereign Lord and Judge of all will interest himself, will reward those that do good, and punish those that do hurt, to their fellow-creatures and fellow-subjects ; but,

(2.) He utterly denies that God can really be either prejudiced, or advantaged, by what any, even the greatest of all the men of the East, do, or can do.

[1.] The sins of the worst sinners are no damage to him ; (v. 6.) "If thou sinnest wilfully, and of malice prepense, against him, with a high hand, nay, if thy transgressions be multiplied, and the acts of sin be ever so often repeated, yet what dost thou against him?" This a challenge to the carnal mind, and defies the most daring sinner to do his worst. It speaks much for the greatness and glory of God, that it is not in the power of his worst enemies to do him any real prejudice. Sin is said to be against God, because so the sinner intends it, and so he takes it, and it is an injury to his honour ; yet it cannot do any thing against him. The malice of sinners is impotent malice : it cannot destroy his being or perfections, cannot dethrone him from his power and dominion, cannot diminish his wealth and possessions, cannot disturb his peace and repose, cannot defeat his counsels and designs, nor can it derogate from his essential glory. Job therefore erred in saying, *What profit is it that I am cleansed from my sin?* God was no Gainer by his reformation ; who then would gain, if he himself did not?

[2.] The services of the best saints are no profit to him ; (v. 7.) *If thou be righteous, what givest thou him?* He needs not our service ; or, if he did want to have the work done, he has better hands than ours at command. Our religion brings no accession at all to his felicity. He is so far from being beholden to us, that we are beholden to him for making us righteous, and accepting our righteousness ; and therefore we can demand nothing from him, nor have any reason to complain if we have not what we expect, but to be thankful that we have better than we deserve.

9. By reason of the multitude of oppressions they make the oppressed to cry : they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. 10. But none saith, Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night ; 11. Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven ? 12. There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men. 13. Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it.

Elihu here returns answer to another word that Job had said, which, he thought, reflected much upon the justice and goodness of God, and therefore ought not to pass without a remark. Observe,

I. What it was that Job complained of ; it was this, That God did not regard the cries of the oppressed against their oppressors ; (v. 9.) *By reason of the multitude of oppressions*, the many hardships which proud tyrants put upon poor people, and the barbarous usage they give them, they make the oppressed to cry ; but

it is to no purpose, God does not appear to right them. They cry out, they cry on, *by reason of the arm of the mighty, which lies heavy upon them.* This seems to refer to those words of Job, (ch. 24. 12.) *Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out against the oppressors, yet God lays not folly to them,* does not reckon with them for it. This is a thing that Job knows not what to make of, nor how to reconcile to the justice of God and his government. *Is there a righteous God, and can it be that he should so slowly hear, so slowly see?*

II. How Elihu solves the difficulty: If the cries of the oppressed be not heard, the fault is not in God, he is ready to hear and help them, but the fault is in themselves; they ask and have not, but it is because they ask amiss, James, 4. 3. *They cry out, by reason of the arm of the mighty,* but it is a complaining cry, a wailing cry, not a penitent praying cry, the cry of nature and passion, not of grace. See Hos. 7. 14. *They have not cried unto me with their heart when they howled upon their beds.* How then can we expect that they should be answered and relieved?

1. They do not inquire after God, nor seek to acquaint themselves with him, under their affliction; (v. 10.) *But none saith, Where is God my Maker?* Afflictions are sent to direct and quicken us to *inquire early after God,* Ps. 78. 34. But many, that groan under great oppressions, never mind God, nor take notice of his hand in their troubles; if they did, they would bear their troubles more patiently, and be more benefited by them. Of the many that are afflicted and oppressed, few get the good they might get by their affliction. It should drive them to God, but how seldom is this the case! It is lamentable to see so little religion among the poor and miserable part of mankind. Every one complains of his troubles; *but none saith, Where is God my Maker?* that is, None repent of their sins, none return to him that smites them, none seek the face and favour of God, and that comfort in him which would balance their outward afflictions. They are wholly taken up with the wretchedness of their condition, as if that would excuse them in living without God in the world, which should engage them to cleave the more closely to him. Observe, (1.) God is our Maker, the Author of our being, and, under that notion, it concerns us to regard and remember him, Eccl. 12. 1. *God my Makers,* in the plural number; which some think is, if not an indication, yet an intimation, of the Trinity of persons in the unity of the Godhead; *Let us make man.* (2.) It is our duty therefore to inquire after him. Where is he, that we may pay our homage to him, may own our dependence upon him, and obligations to him? Where is he, that we may apply ourselves to him for maintenance and protection, may receive law from him, and may seek our happiness in his favour, from whose power we received our being? (3.) It is to be lamented, that he is so little inquired after by the children of men. All are asking, Where is mirth? Where is wealth? Where is a good bargain? But none ask, *Where is God my Maker?*

2. They do not take notice of the mercies they enjoy in and under their afflictions, nor are thankful for them, and therefore cannot expect that God should deliver them out of their afflictions. (1.) He provides for our inward comfort and joy under our outward troubles, and we ought to make use of that, and wait his time for the removal of our troubles. He *gives songs in the night,* that is, when our condition is ever so dark, and sad, and melancholy, there is that in God, in his providence and promise, which is sufficient, not only to support us, but to fill us with joy and consolation, and enable us, in every thing, to give thanks, and even to rejoice in tribulation. When we only pore upon the afflictions we are under, and neglect the consolations of God which are treasured up for us, it is just with God to reject our prayers. (2.) He preserves to us the use of our reason and understanding; (v. 11.) *who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth,* that is, who has endued us with more noble powers and faculties than they are endued with, and has made us capable of more excellent pleasures and employments here and for ever. Now this comes in here, [1.] As that which furnishes us with matter for thanksgiving, even under the heaviest burthen of affliction. Whatever we are deprived of, we have our immortal souls,

those jewels, more worth than all the world, continued to us; even those that kill the body, cannot hurt them. And if our affliction prevail not to disturb the exercise of their faculties, but we enjoy the use of our reason, and the peace of our consciences, we have much reason to be thankful, how pressing soever our calamities otherwise are. [2.] As a reason why we should, under our afflictions, inquire after God our Maker, and seek unto him. This is the greatest excellency of reason, that it makes us capable of religion, and it is in that especially that we are *taught more than the beasts and the fowls.* They have wonderful instincts and sagacities in seeking out their food, their physic, their shelter; but none of them are capable of inquiring, *Where is God my Maker?* Something like logic, and philosophy, and politics, has been observed among the brute-creatures, but never any thing of divinity or religion; these are peculiar to man. If, therefore, the oppressed only cry *by reason of the arm of the mighty,* and do not look up to God, they do no more than the brutes, (who complain when they are hurt,) and they forget that instruction and wisdom by which they are advanced so far above them. God relieves the brute-creatures, because they cry to him according to the best of their capacity, Ps. 104. 21. ch. 38. 41. But what reason have men to expect relief, who are capable of inquiring after God as their Maker, and yet cry to him no otherwise than as brutes do?

3. They are proud and unhumiliated under their afflictions, which were sent to mortify them, and to hide pride from them: (v. 12.) *There they cry,* there they lie exclaiming against their oppressors, and filling the ears of all about them with their complaints, not sparing to reflect upon God himself and his providence; but none give answer. God does not work deliverance for them, and perhaps men do not much regard them; and why so? It is *because of the pride of evil men;* they are evil men; they regard iniquity in their hearts, and therefore God will not hear their prayers, Ps. 66. 18. Isa. 1. 15. God hears not such sinners. They have, it may be, brought themselves into trouble by their own wickedness, they are the Devil's poor; and then who can pity them? Yet this is not all; they are proud still, therefore they do not seek unto God; (Ps. 10. 4.) or if they do cry unto him, therefore he does not give answer, for he hears only the *desire of the humble,* (Ps. 10. 17.) and delivers those by his providence, whom he has first, by his grace, prepared and made fit for deliverance; and that we are not, if, under humbling afflictions, our hearts remain unhumiliated, and pride unmortified. The case is plain then, If we cry to God for the removal of the oppression and affliction we are under, and it is not removed, the reason is, not because the Lord's hand is shortened, or his ear heavy, but because the affliction has not done its work; we are not sufficiently humiliated, and therefore must thank ourselves that it is continued.

4. They are not sincere and upright and inward with God, in their supplications to him, and therefore he does not hear and answer them; (v. 13.) *God will not hear vanity,* that is, the hypocritical prayer, which is a vain prayer, coming out of feigned lips. It is a vanity to think that God should hear it, who searches the heart, and requires *truth in the inward part.*

14. Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him. 15. But now, because it is not so, he hath visited in his anger; yet he knoweth it not in great extremity: 16. Therefore doth Job open his mouth in vain; he multiplieth words without knowledge.

Here is,

I. Another improper word, for which Elihu reproves Job; (v. 14.) *Thou sayest thou shalt not see him;* that is, (1.) "Thou complainest that thou dost not understand the meaning of his severe dealings with thee, nor discern the drift and design of them," ch. 23. 8. 9. And, (2.) "Thou despairest of seeing his gracious

returns to thee, of seeing better days again, and art ready to give up all for gone;" as Hezekiah, (Isa. 38. 11.) *I shall not see the Lord.* As, when we are in prosperity, we are ready to think our mountain will never be brought low; so, when we are in adversity, we are ready to think our valley will never be filled, but, in both, to conclude that *to-morrow must be as this day*, which is as absurd as to think that the weather, when it is either fair or foul, will be always so, that the flowing tide will always flow, or the ebbing tide will always ebb.

II. The answer which Elihu gives to this despairing word that Job had said, which is this,

(1.) That, when he looked up to God, he had no just reason to speak thus despairingly; *Judgment is before him*, that is, "He knows what he has to do, and will do all in infinite wisdom and justice; he has the entire plan and model of providence before him, and knows what he will do, which we do not, and therefore we understand not what he does. There is a day of judgment before him, when all the seeming disorders of Providence will be set to rights, and the dark chapters of it will be expounded. Then thou shalt see the full meaning of these dark events, and the final period of these dismal events; then thou shalt see his face with joy; therefore trust in him, depend upon him, wait for him, and believe that the issue will be good at last." When we consider that God is infinitely wise, and righteous, and faithful, and that he is a God of judgment, (Isa. 30. 18.) we shall see no reason to despair of relief from him, but all the reason in the world to hope in him, that it will come in due time, in the best time.

(2.) That, if he had not yet seen an end of his troubles, the reason was, Because he did not thus trust in God, and wait for him; (v. 15.) "*Because it is not so; because thou dost not thus trust in him, therefore the affliction which came at first from love, has now displeasure mixed with it.* Now God has visited thee in his anger, taking it very ill that thou canst not find in thy heart to trust him, but harbourst such hard misgiving thoughts of him." If there be any mixtures of divine wrath in our afflictions, we may thank ourselves, it is because we do not behave aright under them; we quarrel with God, are fretful and impatient, and distrustful of the Divine Providence. This was Job's case; *The foolishness of man perverts his way, and then his heart frets against the Lord;* (Prov. 19. 3.) yet Elihu thinks that Job, being in great extremity, did not know and consider that as he should, that it was his own fault that he was not yet delivered.

He concludes, therefore, that *Job opens his mouth in vain*, (v. 16.) in complaining of his grievances, and crying for redress, or in justifying himself, and clearing up his own innocency; it is all in vain, because he does not trust in God and wait for him, and had not a due regard to him in his afflictions. He had said a great deal, had multiplied words, but all without knowledge; all to no purpose, because he did not encourage himself in God, and humble himself before him. It is in vain for us either to appeal to God, or to acquit ourselves, if we do not study to answer the end for which affliction is sent; and in vain to pray for relief, if we do not trust in God: let not that man who distrusts God, *think that he shall receive any thing from him*, James, 1. 7. Or this may refer to all that Job had said. Having shewed the absurdity of some passages in his discourse, he concludes that there were many other passages which were, in like manner, the fruits of his ignorance and mistake. He did not, as his other friends, condemn him for a hypocrite, but charges him only with Moses's sin, *speaking unadvisedly with his lips*, when his spirit was provoked. When at any time we do so, (and who is there that offends not in word?) it is a mercy to be told of it, and we must take it patiently and kindly, as Job did; not repeating, but recanting, what we have said amiss.

CHAP. XXXVI.

Elihu, having largely reprov'd Job for some of his unadvised speeches, which Job had nothing to say in the vindication of, here comes more generally to set him to rights in his notions of God's dealings with him. His other friends had stood to it, that, because he was a wicked man, therefore his afflictions were so great and so long. But Elihu only maintained that the affliction was

sent for his trial, and that, therefore, it was lengthened out, because Job was not, as yet, thoroughly humbled under it, nor had duly accommodated himself to it. He urges many reasons, taken from the wisdom and righteousness of God, his care of his people, and especially his greatness and almighty power, with which, in this and the following chapter, he persuades him to submit to the hand of God. Here we have, I. His preface, v. 2. 4. II. The account he gives of the methods of God's providences toward the children of men, according as they conduct themselves, v. 5. 15. III. The fair warning and good counsel he gives to Job thereupon, v. 16. 21. IV. His demonstration of God's sovereignty and omnipotence, which he gives instances of, in the operations of common providence, and which is a reason why we should all submit to him in his dealings with us, v. 22. 33. This he prosecutes, and enlarges upon, in the following chapter.

1. **E**LIHU also proceeded, and said, 2. Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that *I have yet to speak in God's behalf.* 3. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker. 4. For truly my words *shall not be false*: he that is perfect in knowledge, is with thee.

Once more Elihu begs the patience of the auditory, and Job's particularly, for he has not said all that he has to say, but he will not detain them long. *Stand about me a little*; so some read it, v. 2. "Let me have your attendance, your attention, a while longer, and I will speak but this once, as plainly and as much to the purpose as I can." To gain this, he pleads,

1. That he had a good cause, a noble and fruitful subject; *I have yet to speak on God's behalf.* He spake as an advocate for God, and therefore might justly expect the ear of the court. Some, indeed, pretend to speak on God's behalf, who really speak for themselves; but those who sincerely appear in the cause of God, and speak in behalf of his honour, his truths, his ways, his people, shall be sure neither to want instructions, (*It shall be given them in that same hour what they shall speak,*) nor to lose their cause, or their fee. Nor need they fear lest they should exhaust their subject. They that have spoken ever so much, may yet find more to be spoken on God's behalf.

2. That he had something to offer that was uncommon, and out of the road of vulgar observation; *I will fetch my knowledge from afar*, (v. 3.) that is, "We will have recourse to our first principles, and the highest notions we can make use of to serve any purpose." It is worth while to go far for this knowledge of God, to dig for it, to travel for it; it will recompense our pains, and, though far-fetched, is not dear-bought.

3. That his design was undeniably honest; for all he aimed at was, to ascribe righteousness to his Maker; to maintain and clear this truth, that God is righteous in all his ways. In speaking of God, and speaking for him, it is good to remember that he is our Maker, to call him so, and therefore to be ready to do him, and the interests of his kingdom, the best service we can. If he be our Maker, we have our all from him, must use our all for him, and be very jealous for his honour.

4. That his management should be very just and fair; (v. 4.) "*My words shall not be false*, neither disagreeable to the thing itself, nor to my own thoughts and apprehensions. It is truth that I am contending for, and that for truth's sake, with all possible sincerity and plainness." He will make use of plain and solid arguments, and not the subtleties and niceties of the schools. "He who is perfect or upright in knowledge, is now reasoning with thee; and, therefore, let him not only have a fair hearing, but let what he says be taken in good part, as meant well." The perfection of our knowledge, in this world, is, to be honest and sincere in searching out truth, in applying it to ourselves, and in making use of what we know for the good of others.

5. Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom. 6. He preserveth not the life of the wicked: but giveth right to the poor. 7. He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are

they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted. 8. And if *they* be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; 9. Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. 10. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. 11. If they obey and serve *him*, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. 12. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge. 13. But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath: they cry not when he bindeth them. 14. They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean.

Elihu, being to speak on God's behalf, and particularly to ascribe righteousness to his Maker, here shews, that the disposals of Divine Providence are all, not only according to the eternal counsels of his will, but according to the eternal rules of equity. God acts as a righteous Governor. For,

I. He does not think it below him to take notice of the meanest of his subjects, nor does poverty or obscurity set any at a distance from his favour. If men are mighty, they are apt to look with a haughty disdain upon those that are not of distinction, and make no figure; but God is mighty, infinitely so, and yet he despises not any, v. 5. He humbles himself, to take cognizance of the affairs of the meanest, to do them justice, and to shew them kindness. Job thought himself and his cause slighted, because God did not immediately appear for him. "No," says Elihu, *God despises not any*; which is a good reason why we should honour all men. He is mighty in strength and wisdom, and yet does not look with contempt upon those that have but a little strength and wisdom, if they but mean honestly. Nay, therefore, he despises not any, because his wisdom and strength are uncontestedly infinite, and therefore the condescensions of his grace can be no diminution to him. They that are wise and good, will not look upon any with scorn and disdain.

II. He gives no countenance to the greatest, if they be bad; (v. 6.) *He preserves not the life of the wicked*. Though their life may be prolonged, yet not under any special care of the Divine Providence, but only its common protection. Job had said that *the wicked live, become old, and are mighty in power, ch. 21. 7.* "No," says Elihu, "he seldom suffers wicked men to become old. He preserves not their life so long as they expected, nor with that comfort and satisfaction which are indeed our life; and their preservation is but a reservation for the day of wrath," Rom. 2. 5.

III. He is always ready to right those that are any way injured, and to plead their causes; (v. 6.) *He gives right to the poor*, avenges their quarrel upon their persecutors, and forces them to make restitution of what they have robbed them of. If men will not right the injured poor, God will.

IV. He takes a particular care for the protection of his good subjects, v. 7. He not only looks on them, but he never looks off them. He withdraws not his eyes from the righteous. Though they may seem sometimes neglected and forgotten, and that befalls them which looks like an oversight of Providence, yet the tender careful eye of their Heavenly Father never withdraws from them. If our eye be ever toward God in duty, his eye will be ever upon us in mercy, and, when we are at the lowest, will not overlook us.

1. Sometimes he prefers good people to places of trust and honour; (v. 7.) *With kings are they on the throne*, and every sheaf is made to bow to their's. When righteous persons are advanced to places of honour and power, it is in mercy to them; for God's grace in them will both arm them against the temptations that attend preferment, and enable them to improve the opportunity it gives them of doing good. It is also in mercy to those over whom they are set; *When the righteous bear rule, the city rejoices*. If the

righteous be advanced, they are established. They that in honour keep a good conscience, stand upon sure ground; and high places are not such slippery ground, to them as they are to others. But, because it is not often that we see good men made great men in this world, this may be supposed to refer to the honour to which the righteous shall rise when their Redeemer shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; for then only they shall be exalted for ever, and established for ever, then shall they all shine forth as the sun, and be made kings and priests to our God.

2. If, at any time, he bring them into affliction, it is for the good of their souls, v. 8..10. Some good people are preferred to honour and power, but others are in trouble. Now observe, (1.) The distress supposed, (v. 8.) *If they be bound in fetters*, laid in prison, as Joseph was, or holden in the cords of any other affliction, confined by pain and sickness, hampered by poverty, bound in their counsels, and, notwithstanding all their struggles, held long in this distress. This was Job's case; he was caught, and kept fast, in the cords of *anguish*, as some read it. But observe, (2.) The design God has, in bringing his people into such distresses as these; it is for the benefit of their souls; the consideration of which should reconcile us to affliction, and make us think well of it. Three things God intends, when he afflicts us, [1.] To discover past sins to us, and to bring them to our remembrance; (v. 9.) *Then he shews them that amiss in them*, which, before, they did not see. He discovers to them the fact of sin, *he shews them their work*. Sin is *our own work*; if there be any good in us, it is *God's work*; and we are concerned to see what work we have made by sin. He discovers the *fault* of sin, shews them their transgressions of the law of God, and, withal, the sinfulness of sin, that they have exceeded, and have been beyond measure sinful. True penitents lay a load upon themselves, do not extenuate, but aggravate, their sins, and own that they have exceeded in them. Affliction sometimes answers to the sin; it serves however to awaken the conscience, and puts men upon considering. [2.] To dispose our hearts to receive present instructions; then *he opens their ear to discipline*, v. 10. Whom God chastens, he teaches; (Ps. 94. 12.) and the affliction makes people willing to learn, softens the wax, that it may receive the impression of the seal; yet it does not do it of itself, but the grace of God, working with and by it: it is he that opens the ear, that opens the heart, who has the key of David. [3.] To deter and draw us off from iniquity for the future. This is the errand on which the affliction is sent; it is a command to return from iniquity, to have no more to do with sin, to turn from it with an aversion to it, and a resolution never to return to it any more, Hos. 14. 8.

3. If the affliction do its work, and accomplish that for which it is sent, he will comfort them again, according to the time that he has afflicted them; (v. 11.) *If they obey and serve him*, if they comply with his design, and serve his purpose, in these dispensations, if, when the affliction is removed, they continue in the same good mind that they were in, when they were under the smart of it, and perform the vows they made then, if they live in obedience to God's commands, particularly those which relate to his service and worship, and, in all instances, make conscience of their duty to him, then they shall spend their days in prosperity again, and their years in true pleasures. Piety is the only sure way to prosperity and pleasure; this is a certain truth, and yet few will believe it. If we faithfully serve God, (1.) We have the promise of outward prosperity, the promise of the life that now is, and the comforts of it, as far as is for God's glory and our good; and who would desire them any further? (2.) We have the possession of inward pleasures, the comfort of communion with God, and a good conscience, and that great peace which they have that love God's law. If we rejoice not in the Lord always, and in hope of eternal life, it is our own fault; and what better pleasures can we spend our years in?

4. If the affliction do not do its work, let them expect the furnace to be heated seven times hotter, till they are consumed; (v. 12.) *If they obey not*, if they are not bettered by their afflictions, are not reclaimed and reformed, they shall perish by the sword of God's wrath. Those whom his rod does not cure, his sword will kill, and the consuming fire will prevail, if the refining fire do not:

for when God judges, he will overcome. If *Ahaz, in his distress, trespass yet more against the Lord, this is that king Ahaz* that is marked for ruin, 2 Chron. 28. 22. Jer. 6. 29, 30. God would have instructed them by their afflictions, but they received not instruction, would not take the hints that were given them; and therefore *they shall die without knowledge*, ere they are aware, without any further previous notices given them; or, *they shall die because they were without knowledge*, notwithstanding the means of knowledge which they were blessed with. They that *die without knowledge*, die without grace, and are undone for ever.

Lastly, He brings ruin upon hypocrites, the secret enemies of his kingdom, such as he described, v. 12. who, though they were numbered among the righteous whom he had spoken of before, yet did not obey him, but, being children of disobedience and darkness, become children of wrath and perdition; there are the *hypocrites in heart, who heap up wrath*, (v. 13.) See the nature of hypocrisy; it lies in the heart, that is, for the world and the flesh, when the outside seems to be for God and religion. Many that are saints in shew, and saints in word, are hypocrites in heart. That spring is corrupt, and there is an evil treasure there. See the mischievousness of it; hypocrites heap up wrath. They are doing that every day which is provoking to God, and will be reckoned with for it altogether in the great day. *They treasure up wrath against the day of wrath*, Rom. 2. 5. Their sins are laid up in store with God among his treasures, Deut. 32. 34. Compare Jam. 5. 3. As what goes up a vapour, comes down a shower, so what goes up sin, if not repented of, will come down wrath. They think they are heaping up wealth, heaping up merits, but, when the treasures are opened, it will prove they were heaping up wrath.

Observe, 1. What they do to heap up wrath: what is it that is so provoking? It is this, *They cry not when he binds them*; that is, When they are in affliction, bound with the cords of trouble, their hearts are hardened, they are stubborn and unhumbled, and will not cry to God, nor make their application to him. They are stupid and senseless, as stocks and stones, despising the chastening of the Lord. 2. What are the effects of that wrath? (v. 14.) *They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean*. This is the portion of hypocrites, whom Christ denounced many woes against. If they continue impenitent, (1.) They shall die a sudden death; *die in youth*, when death is most a surprise; and death (that is, the consequences of it) is always such to hypocrites; as they that die in youth die when they hoped to live, so hypocrites, at death, go to hell, when they hoped to go to heaven. *When a wicked man dies, his expectations shall perish*. (2.) They shall die the second death; *their life, after death, (for so it comes in here,) is among the unclean*; among the fornicators, so some; among the worst and vilest of sinners, notwithstanding their specious and plausible profession. It is among the Sodomites, so the margin; those filthy wretches, who, *going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*, Jude, 7. The souls of the wicked live after death, but they live among the unclean, the unclean spirits, the Devil and his angels, for ever separated from the New Jerusalem, which *no unclean thing shall enter*.

15. He delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression. 16. Even so would he have removed thee out of the strait into a broad place, where *there is no straitness*; and that which should be set on thy table *should be full of fatness*. 17. But thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked: judgment and justice take hold on thee. 18. Because *there is wrath*, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. 19. Will he esteem thy riches? No, not gold, nor all the forces of strength. 20. Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place. 21. Take

heed, regard not iniquity: for this hast thou chosen rather than affliction. 22. Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him? 23. Who hath enjoined him his way? or who can say, Thou hast wrought iniquity?

Elihu here comes more closely to Job; and,

I. He tells him what God would have done for him, before this, if he had been duly humbled under his affliction; "We all know how ready God is to deliver the poor in his affliction; (v. 15.) he always was so; the poor in spirit, those that are of a broken and contrite heart, he looks upon with tenderness, and, when they are in affliction, is ready to help them. He opens their ears, and makes them to hear joy and gladness, even in their oppressions: while he does not yet deliver them, he speaks to them good words and comfortable words, for the encouragement of their faith and patience, the silencing of their fears, and the balancing of their griefs; and even so (v. 16.) would he have done to thee, if thou hadst submitted to his providence, and conducted thyself well; he would have delivered and comforted thee, and we should have had none of these complaints. If thou hadst accommodated thyself to the will of God, thy liberty and plenty would have been restored to thee with advantage." 1. "Thou hadst been enlarged, and not confined thus, by thy sickness and disgrace; he would have removed thee into a broad place, where is no straitness, and thou shouldst no longer have been cramped thus, and have had all thy measures broken." 2. "Thou hadst been enriched, and not in this poor condition; thou shouldst have had thy table richly spread, not only with food convenient, but with the finest of the wheat," (see Deut. 32. 14.) "and the fattest of the flesh." Note, It ought to silence us under our afflictions, to consider that, if we were better, it would be every way better with us; if we had answered the ends of an affliction, the affliction would be removed; and deliverance would come, if we were ready for it. God would have done well for us, if we had conducted ourselves well, Ps. 81. 13, 14. Isa. 48. 18.

II. He charges him with standing in his own light, and makes him the cause of the continuance of his own trouble; (v. 17.) "But thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked," that is, "Whatever thou art really, in this thing thou hast conducted thyself like a wicked man, hast spoken and done like them; thou hast gratified them and served their cause; and therefore judgment and justice take hold on thee as a wicked man, because thou goest in company with them, actest as if thou wert in their interest, aiding and abetting. Thou hast maintained the cause of the wicked; and such as a man's cause is, such will the judgment of God be upon him." So Bishop Patrick. It is dangerous being on the wrong side: accessaries to treason will be dealt with as principals.

III. He cautions him not to persist in his frowardness; several good cautions he gives him to this purport.

1. Let him not make light of divine vengeance, nor be secure, as if he were in no danger of it; (v. 18.) "Because there is wrath," (that is,) "because God is a righteous Governor, who resents all the affronts given to his government, because he has revealed his wrath from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and because thou hast reason to fear that thou art under God's displeasure, therefore beware lest he take thee away suddenly with his stroke, and be so wise as to make thy peace with him quickly, and get his anger turned away from thee." A warning to this purport Job had given his friends; (ch. 19. 29.) *Be ye afraid of the sword, for wrath brings the punishment of the sword*. Thus contenders are apt, with too much boldness, to bind one another over to the judgment of God, and threaten one another with his wrath: but he that keeps a good conscience, needs not fear the impotent menaces of proud men. This was a friendly caution to Job, and necessary. Even good men have need to be kept to their duty by the fear of God's wrath. "Thou art a wise and good man, but beware lest he take thee away, for the wisest and best have enough in them to deserve his stroke."

2. Let him not promise himself that, if God's wrath should kindle against him, he could find out ways to escape the strokes of it. (1.) There is no escaping by money; no purchasing a pardon with silver or gold, and such corruptible things. "Even a great ransom cannot deliver thee, when God enters into judgment with thee; his justice cannot be bribed, nor any of the ministers of his justice. *Will he esteem thy riches*, and take from them a commutation of the punishment? *No, not gold*, v. 19. If thou hadst as much wealth as ever thou hadst, that would not ease thee, would not secure thee from the strokes of God's wrath, in the day of the revelation of which, *riches profit not*," Prov. 11. 4. See Ps. 49. 7, 8. (2.) No escaping by rescue. "If all the forces of strength were at thy command, if thou couldst muster ever so many servants and vassals to appear for thee to force thee out of the hands of divine vengeance, it were all in vain, God would not regard it, there is *none that can deliver out of his hand*." (3.) No escaping by absconding, v. 20. "Desire not the night, which often favours the retreat of a conquered army, and covers it: think not that thou canst so escape the righteous judgment of God, for the *darkness hideth not from him*," Ps. 139. 11, 12. See ch. 34. 22. Think not, because in the night people retire to their place, go up to their beds, and it is easy then to escape being discovered by them, that God also ascends to his place, and cannot see thee: no, he *neither slumbers nor sleeps*; his eyes are open upon the children of men, not only in all places, but at all times: no rocks or mountains can shelter us from his eye. Some understand it of the night of death; that is the night by which men are cut off from their place, and Job had earnestly breathed for that night, as the hireling desires the evening, ch. 7. 2. "But do not do so," says Elihu, "for thou knowest not what the night of death is." Those that passionately wish for death, in hopes to make that their shelter from God's wrath, may perhaps be mistaken. There are those whom wrath pursues into that night.

3. Let him not continue his unjust quarrel with God and his providence, which hitherto he had persisted in, when he should have submitted to the affliction; (v. 21.) "*Take heed*, look well to thine own spirit, and regard not iniquity, return not to it;" so some; "for it is at thy peril if thou do." Let us never dare to think a favourable thought of sin, never indulge it, nor allow ourselves in it. Elihu thinks Job had need of this caution, he having chosen iniquity rather than affliction, that is, having chosen rather to gratify his own pride and humour in contending with God, than to mortify it by a submission to him, and accepting the punishment. We may take it more generally, and observe, that they who choose iniquity rather than affliction, make a very foolish choice; they that ease their cares by sinful pleasures, increase their wealth by sinful pursuits, escape their troubles by sinful projects, and evade sufferings for righteousness' sake by sinful compliances against their consciences, these make a choice they will repent of, for there is more evil in the least sin than in the greatest affliction. It is an evil, it is only evil.

4. Let him not dare to prescribe to God, nor give him his measures; (v. 22, 23.) "*Behold*, God exalteth by his power;" that is, "He does, may, and can, set up and pull down whom he pleases, and therefore it is not for thee and me to contend with him." The more we magnify God, the more do we humble and abase ourselves. Now consider,

(1.) That God is an absolute Sovereign; *He exalts by his own power*, and not by strength derived from any other: he exalts whom he pleases, exalts those that were afflicted and cast down, by the strength and power which he gives his people. And therefore who has enjoined him his way? Who presides above him in his way? Is there any superior from whom he has his commission, and to whom he is accountable? No, he himself is supreme and independent. Who *puts him in mind of his way*? (so some,) Does the Eternal Mind need a remembrancer? No, his own way, as well as our's, is ever before him; he has not received orders or instructions from any, (Isa. 40. 13, 14.) nor is he accountable to any: he enjoins to all the creatures their way; let not us then enjoin him his, but leave it to him to **govern the world**, who is fit to do it.

(2.) That he is an incomparable Teacher; *Who teaches like him*? It is absurd for us to teach him who is himself the Fountain of light, truth, knowledge, and instruction: *he that teaches man knowledge*, and so as none else can, *shall not he know*? Ps. 94. 9, 10. Shall we light a candle to the sun? Observe, When Elihu would give glory to God as a Ruler, he praises him as a Teacher, for rulers must teach; God does so, he binds with the cords of a man. In this, as in other things, he is unequalled. None so fit to direct his own actions as he himself is: he knows what he has to do, and how to do it for the best, and needs no information or advice. Solomon himself had a privy-council to advise him, but the King of kings has none. Nor is any so fit to direct our actions as he is: none teaches with such authority and convincing evidence, with such condescension and compassion, nor with such power and efficacy, as God does. He teaches by the Bible, and that is the best book, teaches by his Son, and he is the best Master.

(3.) That he is unexceptionably just in all his proceedings; *Who can say*, *Thou hast wrought iniquity*? Not, *Who dares say it*? (many do iniquity, and persons tell them of it, at their peril;) but, *Who can say it*? Who had any cause to say it? Who can say it, and prove it? It is a maxim undoubtedly true, without limitation, that *the King of kings can do no wrong*.

24. Remember that thou magnify his work, which men behold. 25. Every man may see it; man may behold it afar off. 26. Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out. 27. For he maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof: 28. Which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly. 29. Also can any understand the spreadings of the clouds, or the noise of his tabernacle? 30. Behold, he spreadeth his light upon it, and covereth the bottom of the sea. 31. For by them judgeth he the people; he giveth meat in abundance. 32. With clouds he covereth the light; and commandeth it *not to shine by the cloud* that cometh betwixt. 33. The noise thereof sheweth concerning it, the cattle also concerning the vapour.

Elihu is here endeavouring to possess Job with great and high thoughts of God, and so to persuade him into a cheerful submission to his providence.

I. He represents the work of God, in general, as illustrious and conspicuous, v. 24. His whole work is so, God does nothing mean: this is a good reason why we should acquiesce in all the operations of his providence concerning us in particular: his visible works, those of nature, and which concern the world in general, are such as we admire and commend, and in which we observe the Creator's wisdom, power, and goodness; shall we then find fault with his dispensations concerning us, and the counsels of his will concerning our affairs? We are here called to *consider the work of God*, Eccl. 7. 13. 1. It is plain before our eyes, nothing more obvious: it is *what men behold*: every man that has but half an eye may see it, may behold it afar off. Look which way we will, we see the productions of God's wisdom and power; we see that done, and that doing, concerning which we cannot but say, *This is the work of God*; the finger of God; it is the Lord's doing. Every man may see, afar off, the heaven and all its lights, the earth and all its fruits, to be the work of Omnipotence: much more when we behold them nigh at hand. Look at the minutest works of nature through a microscope; do they not appear curious? The eternal power and godhead of the Creator are *clearly seen and understood* by the *things that are made*, Rom. 1. 23. Every man, even those that have not the benefit of divine revelation, may see this, for *there is no speech or language where the voice of these natural constant preachers is not heard*.

Ps. 19. 3. 2. It ought to be marvellous in our eyes. The beauty and excellency of the work of God, and the agreement of all the parts of it, are what we must remember to magnify and highly to extol: not only justify it as right and good, and what cannot be blamed, but magnify it as wise and glorious, and such as no creature could contrive or produce. Man may see his works, and is capable of discerning his hand in them, (which the beasts are not,) and therefore ought to praise them, and give him the glory of them.

II. He represents God, the Author of them, as infinite and unsearchable, v. 26. The streams of being, power, and perfection, should lead us to the Fountain. *God is great*, infinitely so: great in power, for he is omnipotent and independent; great in wealth, for he is self-sufficient, and all-sufficient; great in himself, great in all his works; great, and therefore greatly to be praised; great, and therefore we know him not; we know *that* he is, but not *what* he is; we know what he is not, but not what he is. We know in part, but not in perfection. This comes in here as a reason why we must not arraign his proceedings, nor find fault with what he does, because it is speaking evil of the things that we understand not, and answering a matter before we hear it. We know not the duration of his existence, for it is infinite; the number of his years cannot possibly be searched out, for he is eternal, there is no number of them: he is a Being without beginning, succession, or period, who ever was, and ever will be, and ever the same, the great *I AM*. This is a good reason why we should not prescribe to him, or quarrel with him, because, as he is, such are his operations, quite out of our reach.

III. He gives some instances of God's wisdom, power, and sovereign dominion, in the works of nature, and the dispensations of common providence; beginning, in this chapter, with the clouds, and the rain that descends from them. We need not be critical in examining either the phrase, or the philosophy, of this noble discourse. The general scope of it is, to shew, (1.) That God is infinitely great, and the Lord of all, the first Cause and supreme Director of all the creatures, and *has all power in heaven and earth*, and whom therefore we ought, with all humility and reverence, to adore, to speak well of, and to give honour to. (2.) That it is presumption for us to prescribe to him the rules and methods of his special providence toward the children of men, or to expect from him an account of them, when the operations even of common providences, about the meteors, are so various, and so mysterious and unaccountable.

Elihu, to affect Job with God's sublimity and sovereignty, had directed him (*ch.* 35. 5.) to look unto the clouds: in these verses, he shews us what we may observe in the clouds we see, which will lead us to consider the glorious perfections of their Creator. Consider the clouds,

1. As springs to this lower world; the source and treasure of its moisture, and the great bank through which it circulates, a necessary provision, the stagnation of which would be as hurtful to this lower world as of the blood to the body of man. It is worth while to observe, in this common occurrence, (1.) That the clouds above distil upon the earth below: if the heavens become brass, the earth becomes iron; therefore thus the promise of plenty runs, *I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth*. This intimates to us, that every good gift is from above, from him who is both Father of lights, and Father of the rain, and it instructs us to direct our prayers to him, and to look up. (2.) That they are here said to *distil upon man*; (*v.* 28.) for though indeed he *caused it to rain in the wilderness, where no man is*, (*ch.* 38. 26. Ps. 104. 11.) yet special respect is had to man herein, to whom the inferior creatures are all made serviceable, and from whom the actual return of the tributes of praise is required. Among men, he *causes his rain to fall upon the just, and upon the unjust*, Matth. 5. 45. (3.) They are said to distil the water in *small drops*; not in spouts, as when the *windows of heaven were opened*, Gen. 7. 11. God waters the earth with that with which he once drowned it, only dispensing it in another manner, to let us know how much we lie at his mercy, and how kind he is, in giving rain by drops, that the benefit of it may be the further and the more equally diffused, as by

an artificial water-pot. (4.) Though, sometimes, the rain comes in very small drops, yet, at other times, it pours down in great rain, and this difference between one shower and another must be resolved into the Divine Providence which orders it so. (5.) Though it comes down in drops, yet it distils upon man *abundantly*, (*v.* 28.) and therefore is called *the river of God which is full of water*, Ps. 65. 9. (6.) The clouds pour down according to the vapour that they draw up, *v.* 27. So just the heavens are to the earth, but the earth is not so in the return it makes. (7.) The produce of the clouds is, sometimes, a great terror, and, at other times, a great favour, to the earth, *v.* 31. When he pleases, *by them he judges the people* he is angry with. Storms, and tempests, and excessive rains, destroying the fruits of the earth, and causing inundations, come from the clouds; but, on the other hand, from them, usually, he gives meat in abundance; they drop fatness upon the pastures that are clothed with flocks, and the vallies that are *covered with corn*, Ps. 65. 11. 13. *Lastly*, Notice is sometimes given of the approach of rain, *v.* 33. The noise thereof, among other things, *shews concerning it*. Hence we read (1 Kings, 18. 41.) of the *sound of abundance of rain*, or, as it is in the margin, *a sound of a noise of rain*, before it came, and a welcome harbinger it was then. As the noise, so the face of the sky, shews concerning it, Luke, 12. 56. The cattle also, by a strange instinct, are apprehensive of a change in the weather nigh at hand, and seek for shelter, shaming man, who will not foresee the evil, and hide himself.

2. As shadows to the upper world; (*v.* 29.) *Can any understand the spreading of the clouds?* They are spread over the earth as a curtain or canopy; how they come to be so, how stretched out, and how poised, as they are, we cannot understand, though we daily see they are so. Shall we then pretend to understand the reasons and methods of God's judicial proceedings with the children of men, whose characters and cases are so various, when we cannot account for the spreading of the clouds, which cover the light? *v.* 32. It is a cloud coming *betwixt*, *v.* 32. *ch.* 26. 9. And this we are sensible of, that, by the interposition of the clouds between us and the sun, we are, (1.) Sometimes favoured; for they serve as an umbrella to shelter us from the violent heat of the sun, which otherwise would beat upon us. *A cloud of dew in the heat of harvest*, is spoken of as a very great refreshment, Isa. 18. 4. (2.) Sometimes we are by them frowned upon; for they darken the earth at noon-day, and eclipse the light of the sun. Sin is compared to a cloud, (Isa. 44. 22.) because it comes between us and the light of God's countenance, and obstructs the shining of it. But though the clouds darken the sun for a time, and pour down rain, yet, (*Post nubila Phœbus—The sun shines forth after the rain*,) after he has wearied the cloud, *he spreads his light upon it*, *v.* 30. There is a *clear shining after rain*; (2 Sam. 23. 4.) the sun-beams are darted forth, and reach to cover even the bottom of the sea, thence to exhale a fresh supply of vapours, and so raise recruits for the clouds. In all this we must remember to magnify the work of God.

CHAP. XXXVII.

Elihu here goes on to extol the wonderful power of God in the meteors, and all the changes of the weather: if, in those changes, we submit to the will of God, take the weather as it is, and make the best of it, why should we not do so in other changes of our condition? Here he observes the hand of God, I. In the thunder and lightning, *v.* 1. 5. II. In the frost and snow, the rains and wind, *v.* 6. 13. III. He applies it to Job, and challenges him to solve the phenomena of these works of nature, that, confessing his ignorance in them, he might own himself an incompetent judge in the proceedings of Divine Providence, *v.* 14. 22. And then, IV. Concludes with his principle which he undertook to make out, That God is great, and greatly to be feared, *v.* 23. 24.

1. **A**T this also my heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place. 2. Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the sound that goeth out of his mouth. 3. He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth. 4. After it a voice roareth: he thundereth with the

voice of his excellency; and he will not stay them when his voice is heard. 5. God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doth he, which we cannot comprehend.

Thunder and lightning, which usually go together, are sensible indications of the glory and majesty, the power and terror, of Almighty God, one to the ear, and the other to the eye; in these, God leaves not himself without witness of his *greatness*, as, in the rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, he leaves not himself without witness of his *goodness*, (Acts, 14. 17.) even to the most stupid and unthinking. Though there are natural causes and useful effects of them, which the philosophers undertake to account for, yet they seem chiefly designed by the Creator to startle and awaken the slumbering world of mankind to the consideration of a God above them. The eye and the ear are the two learning senses; and therefore, though such a circumstance is possible, they say it was never known in fact, that any one was born both blind and deaf. By the word of God divine instructions are conveyed to the mind through the ear, by his works, through the eye; but because those ordinary sights and sounds do not duly affect men, God is pleased sometimes to astonish men by the eye, with his lightnings, and by the ear, with his thunder. It is very probable that at this time, when Elihu was speaking, it thundered and lightened, for he speaks of it as present: and God being about to speak, (*ch.* 33. 1.) these were, as afterward on mount Sinai, the proper prefaces to command attention and awe. Observe here,

1. How Elihu was himself affected, and desired to affect Job, with the appearances of God's glory in the thunder and lightning; (*v.* 1, 2.) "For my part," (says Elihu,) "my heart trembles at it; though I have often heard it, often seen it, yet it is still terrible to me, and makes every joint of me tremble, and my heart beat as if it would move out of its place." Thunder and lightning have been dreadful to the wicked; the emperor Caligula would run into a corner, or under a bed, for fear of them: those who are very much astonished, we say, are *thunder-struck*. Even good people think thunder and lightning very awful: that which makes them the more terrible, is, the hurt often done by lightning, many having been killed by it: Sodom and Gomorrah were laid in ruins by it: it is a sensible indication of what God *could* do to this sinful world, and what he *will* do, at last, by the fire to which it is reserved. Our hearts, like Elihu's, should tremble at it for fear of God's judgments, Ps. 119. 120. He also calls upon Job to attend to it; (*v.* 2.) *Hear attentively the noise of his voice*. Perhaps, as yet, it thundered at a distance, and could not be heard without listening: or rather, though the thunder itself will be heard, and, whatever we are doing, we cannot help attending to it, yet, to apprehend and understand the instructions God thereby gives us, we have need to hear with great attention and application of mind. Thunder is called *the voice of the Lord*, (Ps. 29. 3, &c.) because, by it, God speaks to the children of men, to fear before him, and it should put us in mind of that mighty word by which the world was at first made, which is called *thunder*; (Ps. 104. 7.) *At the voice of thy thunder, they hasted away*, namely, the waters, when God said, *Let them be gathered into one place*. They that are themselves affected with God's greatness should labour to affect others.

2. How he describes them. (1.) Their original; not their second causes, but the first. God directs the thunder, and the lightning is his, *v.* 3. Their production and motion are not from chance, but from the counsel of God, and under the direction and dominion of his providence, though, to us, they seem accidental and ungovernable. (2.) Their extent. The claps of thunder roll under the whole heaven, and are heard far and near; so are the lightnings darted to the ends of the earth, they come out of the one part under heaven, and shine to the other, Luke, 17. 24. Though the same lightning and thunder do not reach to all places, yet they reach to very distant places in a moment, and there is no place but, some time or other, has these alarms from heaven. (3.) Their order. The lightning is *first* directed, and *after* it a

voice roars, *v.* 4. The flash of fire, and the noise it makes in watery cloud, are really at the same time; but, because the motion of light is much quicker than that of sounds, we see the lightning some time before we hear the thunder, as we see the firing of a great gun at a distance before we hear the report of it. The thunder is here called *the voice of God's excellency*, because by it he proclaims his transcendent power and greatness. *He sends forth his voice, and that a mighty voice*, Ps. 68. 33. (4.) Their violence. *He will not stay them*, that is, he does not need to check them, or hold them back, lest they should grow unruly, and out of his power to restrain them, but lets them take their course, says to them, *Go, and they go; Come, and they come. Do this, and they do it*. He will not stay the rains and showers that usually follow upon the thunder, which he had spoken of; (*ch.* 36. 27, 29.) so some; but will pour them out upon the earth, *when his voice is heard*. Thunder-showers are sweeping rains, and for them he *makes the lightning*, Ps. 135. 7. (5.) The inference he draws from all this; (*v.* 5.) Does God thunder thus marvellously with his voice? We must then conclude that his other works are great, and such as we cannot comprehend: from this one instance we may argue to all, that, in the dispensations of his providence, there is that which is too great, too strong, for us to oppose or strive against, and too high, too deep, for us to arraign or quarrel with.

6. For he saith to the snow, *Be thou on the earth*; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength. 7. He sealeth up the hand of every man; that all men may know his work. 8. Then the beasts go into dens, and remain in their places. 9. Out of the south cometh the whirlwind: and cold out of the north. 10. By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened. 11. Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth his bright cloud: 12. And it is turned round about by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. 13. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for merey.

The changes and extremities of the weather, wet or dry, hot or cold, are the subject of a great deal of our common talk and observation; but how seldom do we think and speak of these things, as Elihu does here, with an awful regard to God the Director of them, who shews his power, and serves the purposes of his providence, by them? We must take notice of the glory of God, not only in the thunder and lightning, but in the more common revolutions of the weather, which are not so terrible, and which make less noise. As,

I. In the snow and rain, *v.* 6. Thunder and lightning happen usually in the summer, but here he takes notice of the winter weather; then *he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth*; he commissions it, he commands it, he appoints it, where it shall light, and how long it shall lie. He speaks, and it is done, as in the creation of the world, *Let there be light*: so in the works of common providence, *Snow, be thou on the earth*. Saying and doing are not two things with God, though they are with us. When he speaks the word, the small rain distils, and the great rain pours down as he pleases. The winter rain, so the LXX; for, in these countries, when the winter was past, the rain was over and gone, Cant. 2. 11. The distinction in the Hebrew between the small rain and the great rain, is this, that the former is called a shower of *rain*, the latter of *rains*, many showers in one; but all are the showers of his strength: the power of God is to be observed as much in the small rain that soaks into the earth, as in the great rain that batters on the house-top, and washes away all before it. Note, the providence of God is to be acknowledged

both by husbandmen in the fields, and travellers upon the road, in every shower of rain, whether it does them a kindness or a kindness. It is sin and folly to contend with God's providence in the weather; if he send the snow or rain, can we hinder them? Or shall we be angry at them? It is as absurd to quarrel with any other disposal of Providence concerning ourselves or our's.

The effect of the extremity of the winter weather, is, that it obliges both men and beasts to retire, making it uncomfortable and unsafe for them to go abroad. (1.) Men retire to their houses from their labours in the field, and keep within doors; (v. 7.) *He seals up the hand of every man.* In frost and snow, husbandmen cannot follow their business, nor some tradesmen, nor travellers, when the weather is extreme: the plough is laid by, the shipping laid up, nothing is to be done, nothing to be got, that men, being taken off from their own work, may know his work, and contemplate that, and give him the glory of that; and, by the consideration of that work of his in the weather which seals up their hands, be led to celebrate his other great and marvellous works. Note, When we are, upon any account, disabled to follow our worldly business, and taken off from it, we should spend our time rather in the exercises of piety and devotion, (in acquainting ourselves with the works of God, and praising him in them,) than in foolish idle sports and recreations. When our hands are sealed up, our hearts should be thus opened, and the less we have at any time to do in the world, the more we should do for God and our souls. When we are confined to our houses, we should thereby be driven to our Bibles and our knees. (2.) The beasts also retire to their dens, and remain in their close places, v. 8. It is meant of the wild beasts, which, being wild, must seek a shelter for themselves, to which, by instinct, they are directed, while the tame beasts, which are serviceable to man, are housed and protected by his care, as Exod. 9. 20. The ass has no den but his master's crib, and thither he goes, not only to be safe and warm, but to be fed. Nature directs all creatures to shelter themselves from a storm; and shall man only be unprovided with an ark?

2. In the winds, which blow from different quarters, and produce different effects, v. 9. Out of *the hidden place* (so it may be read) *comes the whirlwind*; it turns round, and so it is hard to say from which point it comes, but it comes from *the secret chamber*, as the word signifies, which I am not so willing to understand of the south, because he says here, (v. 17.) that the wind out of the south is so far from being a whirlwind, that it is a warming, quieting, wind. But, at this time, perhaps, Elihu saw a whirlwind-cloud coming out of the south and making toward them, out of which the Lord spake soon after, ch. 38. 1. Or, if turbulent winds, which bring showers, come out of the south, cold and drying blasts come out of the north to scatter the vapours, and clear the air of them.

3. In the frost, v. 10. See the cause of it; it is given by *the breath of God*, that is, by the word of his power, and the command of his will; or, as some understand it, by the wind, which is the breath of God, as the thunder is his voice; it is caused by the cold freezing wind out of the north. See the effect of it; *The breadth of the waters is straitened*; that is, the waters that had spread themselves, and flowed with liberty, are congealed, benumbed, arrested, bound up in crystal fetters. This is such an instance of the power of God, as, if were not common, would be next to a miracle.

4. In the clouds; the womb where all these watery meteors are conceived, of which he had spoken, ch. 36. 28. Three sorts of clouds he here speaks of;

(1.) Close, black, thick, clouds, pregnant with showers; these with watering *he wears*; (v. 11.) they spend themselves, and are exhausted by the rain into which they melt and are dissolved, pouring out water till they are weary, and can pour out no more. See what pains, as I may say, the creatures, even those above us, take to serve man; the clouds water the earth till they are weary; they spend, and are spent, for our benefit; which shames and condemns us for the little good we do in our places, though it would be to our own advantage; for *he that watereth shall be watered also himself*.

(2.) Bright, thin, clouds, clouds without water; these *he scattereth*, they are dispersed of themselves, and not dissolved into rain, but what becomes of them we know not. The bright cloud, in the evening, when the sky is red, is scattered, and proves an earnest of a fair day, Matth. 16. 2.

(3.) Flying clouds, which do not dissolve, as the thick cloud, into a close rain, but are carried upon the wings of the wind from place to place, dropping showers as they go; these are said to be *turned round about* by his counsels, v. 12. The common people say that the rain is determined by the planets, which is as bad divinity as it is philosophy, for it is guided and governed by the counsel of God, which extends itself even to those things that seem most casual and minute, *that they may do whatsoever he commands them*; for the stormy winds, and the clouds that are driven by them, fulfil his word; and, by this means, he *causes it to rain upon one city, and not upon another*, Amos, 4. 7, 8. Thus his will is done *upon the face of the world in the earth*, that is, among the children of men, to whom God has an eye in all these things, of whom it is said, that he *made them to dwell on the face of all the earth*, Acts, 17. 26. The inferior creatures, being incapable of doing moral actions, are incapable of receiving rewards and punishments; but, among the children of men, God causes the rain to come, either for the correction of his land, or for a mercy to it, v. 13. [1.] Rain sometimes turns into a judgment; it is a scourge to a sinful land: as once it was for the destruction of the whole world, so it is now often for the correction or discipline of some parts of it, by hindering seedness and harvest, raising the waters, and damaging the fruits. Some have said that our nation has received much more prejudice by the excess of rain than by the want of it. [2.] At other times, it is a blessing: it is for *his land*, that that may be made fruitful, and, beside that which is just necessary, he gives for *mercy*, to fatten it, and make it more fruitful. See what a necessary dependence we have upon God, when the very same thing, according to the proportion in which it is given, may be either a great judgment, or a great mercy, and without God we cannot have either a shower or a fair gleam.

14. Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God. 15. Dost thou know when God disposed them, and caused the light of his cloud to shine? 16. Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge? 17. How thy garments *are* warm, when he quieteth the earth by the south wind? 18. Hast thou with him spread out the sky, *which is strong, and as a molten looking-glass*? 19. Teach us what we shall say unto him; *for we cannot order our speech* by reason of darkness. 20. Shall it be told him that I speak? if a man speak, surely he shall be swallowed up.

Elihu here applies himself closely to Job, desiring him to apply what he had hitherto said, to himself. He begs he would hearken to this discourse, (v. 14.) that he would pause a while; *Stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God*. What we hear, is not likely to profit us, unless we consider it, and we are not likely to consider things fully, unless we stand still, and compose ourselves to the consideration of them. The works of God, being wondrous, both deserve, and need, our consideration, and the due consideration of them will help to reconcile us to all his providences.

Elihu, for the humbling of Job, shews him,

I. That he had no insight into natural causes, could neither see the springs of them, nor foresee the effects of them; (v. 15. . 17.) *Dost thou know the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?* We are here taught,

1. The perfection of God's knowledge: it is one of the most

glorious perfections of God, that he is perfect in knowledge; he is omniscient. His knowledge is intuitive; he sees, and does not know by report: it is intimate and entire; he knows things truly, and not by their colours, thoroughly, and not by piece-meal. To his knowledge there is nothing distant, but all near; nothing future, but all present; nothing hid, but all open. We ought to acknowledge this in all his wondrous works, and it is sufficient to satisfy us, in those wondrous works which we know not the meaning of, that they are the works of one that knows what he does.

2. The imperfection of our knowledge. The greatest philosophers are much in the dark concerning the powers and works of nature. We are a paradox to ourselves, and every thing about us is a mystery. The gravitation of bodies, and the cohesion of the parts, are most certain, and yet unaccountable. It is good for us to be made sensible of our own ignorance; some have confessed it, and those that would not have wished to expose it: but we must all infer from it what incompetent judges we are of the divine politics, who understand so little even of the divine mechanics. (1.) We know not what orders God has given concerning the clouds, nor what orders he will give, v. 15. That all is done by determination and with design, we are sure; but what is determined, and what designed, and when the plan was laid, we know not. God often causes the light of his cloud to shine; in the rainbow, so some; in the lightning, so others; but did we foresee, or could we foretell, when he would do it? If we foresee the change of weather a few hours before, by vulgar observation, or when second causes have begun to work by the weather-glass, yet how little do these shew us of the purposes of God by these changes! (2.) We know not how the clouds are poised in the air, the balancing of them, which is one of the wondrous works of God. They are so balanced, so spread, that they never rob us of the benefit of the sun; even the cloudy day is day: so balanced, that they do not fall at once, or burst into cataracts or water-spouts: the rainbow is an intimation of God's favour in balancing the clouds, so as to keep them from drowning the world. Nay, so are they balanced, that they impartially distribute their showers on the earth, so that, one time or other, every place has its share. (3.) We know not how the comfortable change comes, when the winter is past, v. 17. [1.] How the weather becomes warm, after it has been cold. We know how our garment came to be warm upon us, that is, how we come to be warm in our clothes, by reason of the warmth of the air we breathe in. Without God's blessing, we should clothe us, yet not be warm, Hag. 1. 6. But when he so orders it, the clothes are warm upon us, which, in the extremity of cold weather, would not serve to keep us warm. [2.] How it becomes calm, after it has been stormy; he quiets the earth by the south-wind, when the spring comes. As he has a blustering, freezing, north-wind, so he has a thawing, composing, south-wind; the Spirit is compared to both, because he both convinces and comforts, Cant. 4. 16.

II. That he had no share at all in the first making of the world; (v. 18.) "*Hast thou with him spread out the sky?*" Thou canst not pretend to have stretched it out without him, no nor to have stretched it out in conjunction with him, for he was far from needing any help, either in contriving or in working." The creation of the vast expanse of the visible heavens, (Gen. 1. 6. . 8.) which we see in being to this day, is a glorious instance of the divine power, considering, 1. That, though it is fluid, yet it is firm. It is strong, and has its name from its stability. It still is what it was, and suffers no decay, nor shall the ordinances of heaven be altered, till the lease expires with time. 2. That, though it is large, it is bright and most curiously fine; it is a molten looking-glass, smooth and polished, and without the least flaw or crack. In this, as in a looking-glass, we may behold the glory of God, and the wisdom of his handy-work, Ps. 19. 1. When we look up to heaven above, we should remember it is a mirror or looking-glass, not to shew us our own faces, but to be a faint representation of the purity, dignity, and brightness of the upper world, and its glorious inhabitants.

III. That neither he nor they were able to speak of the glory

of God, in any proportion to the merit of the subject, v. 19, 20. 1. He challenges Job to be their director, if he durst undertake it. He speaks it ironically, "*Teach us, if thou canst, what we shall say unto him.*" Thou hast a mind to reason with God, and wouldest have us to contend with him on thy behalf; teach us, then, what we shall say; canst thou see further into this abyss than we can? If thou canst, favour us with the discoveries, furnish us with instructions." 2. He owns his own insufficiency, both in speaking to God, and in speaking of him; "*We cannot order our speech by reason of darkness.*" Note, The best of men are much in the dark concerning the glorious perfections of the divine nature, and the administrations of the divine government. They that through grace know much of God, know little, nothing, in comparison with what is to be known, and what will be known, when that which is perfect is come, and the veil shall be rent. When we would speak of God, we speak confusedly and with great uncertainty, and are soon at a loss, and run a-ground, not for want of matter, but for want of words. As we must always begin with fear and trembling, lest we speak amiss, (*De Deo etiam vera dicere periculosum est—Even while affirming what is true concerning God, we incur risk,*) so we must conclude with shame and blushing, for having spoken no better. Elihu himself had, for his part, spoken well on God's behalf, and yet is far from expecting a fee, or thinking that God was beholden to him for it, or that he was fit to be standing counsel for him, that (1.) He is even ashamed of what he has said; not of the cause, but of his own management of it. *Shall it be told him that I speak?* Shall it be reported to him as a meritorious piece of service, worthy his notice? By no means, let it never be spoken of, for he fears that the subject has suffered by his undertaking it, as a fine face is wronged by a bad painter, and his performance is so far from meriting thanks, that it needs pardon. When we have done all we can for God, we must acknowledge that we are unprofitable servants, and have nothing at all to boast of. He is afraid of saying any more. *If a man speak,* if he undertake to plead, for God, much more, if he offers to plead against him, *surely he shall be swallowed up.* If he speak presumptuously, God's wrath shall soon consume him; but if ever so well, he will soon lose himself in the mystery, and be overpowered by the divine lustre. Astonishment will strike him blind and dumb.

21. And now men see not the bright light which is in the clouds: but the wind passeth, and cleanseth them. 22. Fair weather cometh out of the north: with God is terrible majesty. 23. Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict. 24. Men do therefore fear him: he respecteth not any that are wise of heart.

Elihu here concludes his discourse with some short, but great, sayings concerning the glory of God, as that which he was himself possessed, and desired to possess others, with a holy awe of. He speaks concisely, and in haste, because, it should seem, he perceived that God was about to take the work into his own hands.

1. He observes, that God, who has said that he will dwell in the thick darkness, and make that his pavilion, (2 Chron. 6. 1. Ps. 18. 11.) is in that awful chariot advancing toward them, as if he were preparing his throne for judgment, surrounded with clouds and darkness, Ps. 97. 2. to v. 9. He saw the cloud, with a whirlwind in the bosom of it, coming out of the south; but now it hung so thick, so black, over their heads, that they could none of them see the bright light, which just before was in the clouds. The light of the sun was now eclipsed, this reminded him of the darkness, by reason of which he could not speak, (v. 19.) and made him afraid to go on, v. 20. Thus the disciples feared when

they entered into a cloud, Luke, 9. 34. Yet he looks to the north, and sees it clear that way, which gives him hope that the clouds are not gathering for a deluge; they are covered, but not surrounded, with them. He expects that the wind will pass, (so it may be read,) and cleanse them; such a wind as passed over the earth, to clear it from the waters of Noah's flood; (Gen. 8. 1.) in token of the return of God's favour; and then *fair weather will come out of the north*, (v. 22.) and all will be well. God will not always frown, nor contend for ever.

2. He hastens to conclude, now that God is about to speak; and therefore delivers much in a few words, as the sum of all that he had been discoursing of, which, if duly considered, would not only clench the nail he had been driving, but make way for what God would say.

(1.) That *with God is terrible majesty*. He is a God of glory, and such transcendent perfection as cannot but strike an awe upon all his attendants, and a terror upon all his adversaries. With God is *terrible praise*; so some; for he is *fearful in praises*, Exod. 15. 11.

(2.) That when we speak touching the Almighty, we must own that *we cannot find him out*; our finite understandings cannot comprehend his infinite perfections. Can we put the sea into an egg-shell? We cannot trace the steps he takes in his providence. *His way is in the sea*.

(3.) That *he is excellent in power*. It is the excellency of his power, that he can do whatever he pleases, in heaven and earth. The universal extent and irresistible force of his power, are the excellency of it; no creature has an arm like him, so long, so strong.

(4.) That *he is no less excellent in wisdom and righteousness; in judgment and plenty of justice*; else there would be little excellency in his power. We may be sure that he who can do every thing, will do every thing for the best, for he is infinitely wise; and will not in any thing do wrong, for he is infinitely just. When he executes judgments upon sinners, yet there is plenty of justice in it, and he inflicts not more than they deserve.

(5.) That *he will not afflict*, that is, he will not afflict willingly; it is no pleasure to him to grieve the children of men, much less his own children. He never afflicts but when there is cause, and when there is need, and he does not overburthen us with affliction, but considers our frame. Some read it thus: "The Almighty, whom we cannot find out, is great in power, but he will not afflict in judgment, and with him is plenty of justice, nor is he extreme to mark what we do amiss."

(6.) He values not the censures of those that are wise in their own conceit; *He respecteth them not*, v. 24. He will not alter his counsels to oblige them, nor can those that prescribe to him prevail with him to do as they would have him do. He regards the prayer of the humble, but not the policies of the crafty. No, the foolishness of God is wiser than men, 1 Cor. 1. 25.

Lastly, From all this it is easy to infer, that, since God is great, he is greatly to be feared; nay, because he is gracious, and will not afflict, men do therefore fear him, for there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared, Ps. 130. 4. It is the duty and interest of all men to fear God. Men shall fear him; so some. Sooner or later, they shall fear him. They that will not fear the Lord and his goodness, shall for ever tremble under the pourings out of the vials of his wrath.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

In most disputes, the strife is, who shall have the last word. Job's friends had, in this controversy, tamely yielded it to Job, and then he to Elihu. But, after all the wranglings of the counsel at bar, the Judge upon the bench must have the last word; so God had here, and so he will have in every controversy, for every man's judgment proceeds from him, and by his definitive sentence every man must stand or fall, and every cause be won or lost. Job had often appealed to God, and had talked boldly how he would order his cause before him, and as a prince would he go near unto him; but when God took the throne, Job had nothing to say in his own defence, but was silent before him. It is not so easy a matter as some think it, to contest with the Almighty. Job's friends had sometimes appealed to God too; Oh that God would speak! ch. 11. 5. And now, at length, God does speak, when

Job, by Elihu's clear and close arguings, was mollified a little, and mortified, and so prepared to hear what God had to say. It is the office of ministers to prepare the way of the Lord. That which the great God designs in this discourse, is, to humble Job, and bring him to repent of, and to recant, his passionate, indecent, expressions concerning God's providential dealings with him; and this he does by calling upon Job to compare God's eternity with his own time, God's omniscience with his own ignorance, and God's omnipotence with his own impotency. I. He begins with an awakening challenge and demand in general, v. 2, 3. II. He proceeds in divers particular instances and proofs of Job's utter inability to contend with God, because of his ignorance and weakness; for, 1. He knew nothing of the founding of the earth, v. 4. 7. 2. Nothing of the limiting of the sea, v. 8. 11. 3. Nothing of the morning-light, v. 12. 15. 4. Nothing of the dark recesses of the sea and earth, v. 16. 21. 5. Nothing of the springs in the clouds, (v. 22. 27.) nor the secret counsels by which they are directed. 6. He could do nothing toward the production of the rain, or frost, or lightning; (v. 28. 30, 31, 35, 37, 39.) nothing toward the directing of the stars and their influences; (v. 31. 33.) nothing toward the making of his own soul, v. 36. And, lastly, he could not provide for the lions and the ravens, v. 39. 41. If, in these ordinary works of nature, Job was puzzled, how durst he pretend to dive into the counsels of God's government, and to judge of them? In this, (as Bishop Patrick observes,) God takes up the argument begun by Elihu, (who came nearest to the truth,) and prosecutes it in inimitable words, excelling his, and all other men's, in the loftiness of the style, as much as thunder does a whisper.

1. **T**HEN the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, 2. Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? 3. Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

Let us observe here,

1. Who speaks; The Lord Jehovah, not a created angel, but the Eternal Word himself, the second person in the blessed Trinity, for it is he by whom the worlds were made, and that was no other than the Son of God. The same speaks here that afterward spake from mount Sinai. Here he begins with the creation of the world, there with the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, and from both is inferred the necessity of our subjection to him. Elihu had said, *God speaks to men, and they do not perceive it*; (ch. 33. 14.) but this they could not but perceive, and yet we have a *more sure word of prophecy*, 2 Pet. 1. 19.

2. When he spake; *Then*: when they had all had their saying, and yet had not gained their point, then it was time for God to interpose, whose judgment is according to truth. When we know not who is in the right, and perhaps are doubtful whether we ourselves are, this may satisfy us, That God will determine shortly *in the valley of decision*, Joel. 3. 14. Job had silenced his three friends, and yet could not convince them of his integrity in the main; Elihu had silenced Job, and yet could not bring him to acknowledge his mismanagement of this dispute; but now God comes, and does both; convinces Job, first, of his unadvised speaking, and makes him cry, *Peccavi—I have done wrong*; and, having humbled him, he puts honour upon him, by convincing his three friends that they had done him wrong. These two things God will, sooner or later, do for his people; he will shew them their faults, that they may be themselves ashamed of them, and he will shew others their righteousness, and bring it forth as the light, that they may be ashamed of their unjust censures of them.

3. How he spake; *Out of the whirlwind*, the rolling and involving cloud, which Elihu took notice of, ch. 37. 1, 2, 9. A whirlwind prefaced Ezekiel's vision, (Ezek. 1. 4.) and Elijah's, 1 Kings, 19. 11. God is said to have *his way in the whirlwind*, (Nah. 1. 3.) and, to shew that even the stormy wind fulfils his word, here it was made the vehicle of it. This shews what a mighty voice God's is, that it was not lost, but perfectly audible, even in the noise of a whirlwind. Thus God designed to startle Job, and to command his attention. Sometimes God answers his own people in terrible corrections, as out of the whirlwind, but always in righteousness.

4. To whom he spake; He answered Job, directed his speech to him, to convince him of what was amiss, before he cleared him from the unjust aspersions cast upon him. It is God only that can

effectually convince of sin; and those shall so be humbled, whom he designs to exalt. Those that desire to hear from God, as Job did, shall certainly hear from him at length.

5. What he said; We may conjecture that Elihu, or some other of the auditory, wrote down *verbatim* what was delivered out of the whirlwind, for we find, (Rev. 10. 4.) that, when the thunders uttered their voices, John was prepared to write. Or, if it was not written then, yet, the penman of the book being inspired by the Holy Ghost, we are sure that we have here a very true and exact report of what was said; *The Spirit* (says Christ) *shall bring to your remembrance*, as he did here, *what I have said to you*.

The preface is very searching.

(1.) God charges him with ignorance and presumption in what he had said; (v. 2.) "Who is this that talks at this rate? Is it Job? What, a man? That weak, foolish, despicable creature—shall he pretend to prescribe to me what I must do, or to quarrel with me for what I have done? Is it Job? What! my servant Job, a perfect and an upright man? Can he so far forget himself, and act unlike himself? Who, where, is he *that darkens counsel thus by words without knowledge*? Let him shew his face if he dare, and stand to what he has said." Note, Darkening the counsels of God's wisdom with our folly, is a great affront and provocation to God. Concerning God's counsels, we must own that we are without knowledge. They are a deep which we cannot fathom; we are quite out of our element, out of our aim, when we pretend to account for them. Yet we are too apt to talk of them as if we understood them, with a great deal of niceness and boldness: but, alas! we do but darken them, instead of explaining them; we confound and perplex ourselves and one another, when we dispute of the order of God's decrees, and the designs, and reasons, and methods, of his operations of providence and grace. A humble faith and sincere obedience shall see further and better into the secret of the Lord, than all the philosophy of their schools, and the searches of science so called. This first word which God spake is the more observable, because Job, in his repentance, fastens upon it as that which succeeded to humble him, *ch. 42. 3*. This he repeated and echoed to, as the arrow that stuck fast in him; "I am the fool that have darkened counsel." There was some colour to have turned it upon *Elihu*, as if God meant *him*, for he spake last, and was speaking when the whirlwind began; but Job applied it to himself, as it becomes us to do, when faithful reproofs are given, and not (as most do) to billet them upon other people.

(2.) He challenges him to give such proofs of his knowledge as would serve to justify his inquiries into the divine counsels; (v. 3.) "Gird up now thy loins like a stout man; prepare thyself for the encounter; I will demand of thee, will put some questions to thee; and answer me, if thou canst, before I answer thine." Those that go about to call God to an account, must expect to be catechised and called to an account themselves, that they may be made sensible of their ignorance and arrogance. God here puts Job in mind of what he had said, (*ch. 13. 22.*) *Call thou, and I will answer*: "Now make thy words good."

4. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding.

5. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

6. Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner-stone thereof?

7. When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

8. Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb?

9. When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling-band for it,

10. And brake up for it my decreed

place, and set bars and doors, 11. And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?

For the humbling of Job, God here shews him his ignorance, even concerning the earth and the sea. Though so near, though so bulky, yet he could give no account of their origination; much less of heaven above or hell beneath, which are at such a distance, or of the several parts of matter which are so minute, and then, least of all, of the divine counsels.

I. Concerning the founding of the earth. If he have such a mighty insight, as he pretends to have, into the counsels of God, let him give some account of the earth he goes upon, which is given to the children of men.

1. Let him tell where he was when this lower world was made, and whether he was advising or assisting in that wonderful work; (v. 4.) "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Thy pretensions are high; canst thou pretend to this? Wast thou present when the world was made?" See here, (1.) The greatness and glory of God; *I laid the foundations of the earth*. This proves him to be the only living and true God, and a God of power, (Isa. 40. 21. Jer. 10. 11, 12.) and encourages us to trust in him at all times, Isa. 51. 13, 16. (2.) The meanness and contemptibleness of man; "Where wast thou then? Thou that hast made such a figure among the children of the east, and settest up for an oracle, and a judge of the divine counsels, where wast thou when the foundations of the earth were laid?" So far were we from having any hand in the creation of the world, which might entitle us to a dominion in it, or so much as being witnesses of it, by which we might have gained an insight into it, that we were not then in being. The first man was not, much less were we. It is the honour of Christ that he was present when this was done; (Prov. 8. 22, &c. John. 1. 1, 2.) but *we are of yesterday, and know nothing*. Let us not, therefore, find fault with the works of God, nor prescribe to him. He did not consult us in making the world, and yet it is well made; why should we expect, then, that he should take his measures from us in governing it?

2. Let him describe how this world was made, and give a particular account of the manner in which this strong and stately edifice was formed and erected; "Declare, if thou hast so much understanding as thou fanciest thyself to have, what were the advances of that work?" Those that pretend to have understanding above others, ought to give proof of it; shew me thy faith by thy works, thy knowledge by thy words. Let Job declare, if he can,

(1.) How the world came to be so finely framed, with so much exactness, and such an admirable symmetry and proportion of all the parts of it; (v. 5.) "Stand forth, and tell who laid the measures thereof, and stretched out the line upon it. Wast thou the architect that formed the model, and then drew the dimensions by rule according to it? The vast bulk of the earth is moulded as regularly as if it had been done by line and measure; but who can describe how it was cast into this figure? Who can determine its circumference and diameter, and all the lines that are drawn on the terrestrial globe? It is to this day a dispute whether the earth stands still or turns round;* how then can we determine by what measures it was first formed?

(2.) How it came to be so firmly fixed. Though it is hung upon nothing, yet it is established, that it cannot be moved; but who can tell upon what the foundations of it are fastened, that it may not sink with its own weight, or who laid the corner-stone thereof, that the parts of it may not fall asunder? v. 6. *What God does, it shall be for ever*; (Eccl. 3. 14.) and therefore, as we cannot find fault with God's work, so we need not be in fear concerning it; it will last, and answer the end, the works of his providence, as well as the work of creation; the measures of neither can ever be broken; and the work of redemption is no less firm, of which Christ himself is both the Foundation and the Corner-stone. The church stands as fast as the earth.

* Such a dispute, in the present day, scarcely exists, even among the vulgar.—Ed.

3. Let him repeat, if he can, the songs of praise which were sung at that solemnity; (v. 7.) *when the morning-stars sang together*, the blessed angels, (the First-born of the Father of light,) who, in the morning of time, shone bright as the morning-star, going immediately before the light which God commanded to shine out of darkness upon the seeds of this lower world, the earth, which was without form and void. They were *the sons of God*, who *shouted for joy*, when they saw the foundations of the earth laid, because, though it was not made for them, but for the children of men, and though it would increase their work and service, yet they knew that the Eternal Wisdom and Word, whom they were to worship, (Heb. 1. 6.) would *rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth*, and that much of his *delight would be in the sons of men*, Prov. 8. 31. The angels are called *the sons of God*, because they bear much of his image, are with him in his house above, and serve him as a son does his father. Now observe here, (1.) The glory of God, as the Creator of the world, is to be celebrated with joy and triumph by all his reasonable creatures; for they are qualified and appointed to be the collectors of his praises from the inferior creatures, who can praise him merely as objects that exemplify his workmanship. (2.) The work of angels is to praise God; the more we abound in holy, humble, thankful, joyful praise, the more we do the will of God as they do it; and whereas we are so barren and defective in praising God, it is a comfort to think that they are doing it in a better manner. (3.) They were unanimous in singing God's praises: they sang together with one accord, and there was no jar in their harmony. The sweetest concerts are in praising God. (4.) They all did it, even those who afterward fell, and left their first estate; even those who have praised God may, by the deceitful power of sin, be brought to blaspheme him, and yet God will be eternally praised.

II. Concerning the limiting of the sea to the place appointed for it, v. 8, &c. This refers to the third day's work, when God said, (Gen. 1. 9.) *Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and it was so*.

1. Out of the great deep or chaos, in which earth and water were intermixed, in obedience to the divine command, the waters *brake forth like a child out of the teeming womb*, v. 8. Then the waters that had covered the deep, and stood above the mountains, retired with precipitation; at *God's rebuke they fled*, Ps. 104. 6, 7.

2. This new-born babe is clothed and swaddled, v. 9. *The cloud is made the garment thereof*, with which it is covered, and *thick darkness* (that is, shores vastly remote and distant from one another, and quite in the dark one to another) is a *swaddling-band for it*. See with what ease the great God manages the raging sea; notwithstanding the violence of its tides, and the strength of its billows, he manages it as the nurse does the child in swaddling-clothes. It is not said, He made *rocks and mountains* its swaddling-bands, but *clouds and darkness*; something that we are not aware of, and would think least likely for such a purpose.

3. There is a cradle, too, provided for this babe; *I brake up for it my decreed place*, v. 10. Vallies were sunk for it in the earth, capacious enough to receive it, and there it is laid to sleep; if it be sometimes tossed with winds, that (as Bishop Patrick observes) is but the rocking of the cradle, which makes it sleep the faster. As for the sea, so for every one of us, there is a decreed place; for he that determined the times before appointed, determined also the bounds of our habitation.

4. This babe being made unruly and dangerous by the sin of man, which was the original of all unquietness and danger in this lower world, there is also a prison provided for it; *bars and doors are set*, v. 10. And it is said to it, by way of check to its insolence, *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further*. The sea is God's, for he made it, he restrains it; he says to it, *Here shall thy proud waves be stayed*, v. 11. This may be considered as an act of God's power over the sea; though it is so vast a body, and though its motion is sometimes extremely violent, yet God has it under check; its waves rise no higher, its tides roll no further, than God permits; and it is mentioned as a reason why we should stand in awe of God, (Jer. 5. 22.) and yet why we should encourage ourselves in him; for he that stops the noise of the sea, even the

noise of her waves, can, when he pleases, still the tumult of the people, Ps. 65. 7. It is also to be looked upon as an act of God's mercy to the world of mankind, and an instance of his patience toward that provoking race; though he could easily cover the earth again with the waters of the sea, (and, methinks, every flowing tide twice a-day threatens us, and shews what the sea could do, and would do, if God would give it leave,) yet he restrains them, being not willing that any should perish, and having reserved the world that now is, unto fire, 2 Pet. 3. 7.

12. Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the day-spring to know his place; 13. That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it? 14. It is turned as clay to the seal, and they stand as a garment. 15. And from the wicked their light is withholden, and the high arm shall be broken. 16. Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth? 17. Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? 18. Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? declare, if thou knowest it all. 19. Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof, 20. That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths to the house thereof? 21. Knowest thou it, because thou wast then born? or because the number of thy days is great? 22. Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, 23. Which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war? 24. By what way is the light parted, which scattereth the east-wind upon the earth?

The Lord here proceeds to ask Job many confounding questions, to convince him of his ignorance, and so to shame him for his folly in prescribing to God. If we will but try ourselves with such interrogatories as these, we shall soon be brought to own that what we know is nothing in comparison with what we know not.

Job is here challenged to give an account of six things.

1. Of the springs of the morning, the day-spring from on high, v. 12..15. As there is no visible being of which we may be more firmly assured that it is, so there is none which we are more puzzled in describing, nor more doubtful in determining what it is, than the light. We welcome the morning, and are glad of the day-spring; but, 1. It is not commanded since our days, but what it is, it was long before we were born, so that it was neither made by us, nor designed primarily for us, but we take it as we find it, and as the many generations had it that went before us. The day-spring knew its place before we knew our's, for we are but of yesterday. 2. It was not we, it was not any man, that commanded the morning-light at first, or appointed the place of its springing up and shining forth, or the time of it. The constant and regular succession of day and night, was no contrivance of our's, it is the glory of God that it shews, and his handy-work, not our's, Ps. 19. 1, 2. 3. It is quite out of our power to alter this course; "*Hast thou countermanded the morning since thy days?* Hast thou at any time raised the morning light sooner than its appointed time, to serve thy purpose, when thou hast waited for the morning; or ordered the day-spring for thy convenience to any other place than its own? No, never. Why then wilt thou pretend to direct the divine counsels, or expect to have the methods of Providence altered in favour of thee?" We may as soon break the covenant of the day and of the night, as

any part of God's covenant with his people, and particularly that, *I will chasten them with the rod of men.* 4. It is God that has appointed the day-spring to visit the earth, and diffuses the morning-light through the air, which receives it as readily as the clay does the seal, (v. 14.) immediately admitting the impressions of it, so as of a sudden to be all over enlightened by it, as the seal stamps its image on the wax; and *they stand as a garment*, or as if they were clothed with a garment. The earth puts on a new face every morning, and dresses itself as we do, puts on light as a garment, and is then to be seen. 5. This is made a terror to evil-doers. Nothing is more comfortable to mankind than the light of the morning; it is pleasant to the eyes, it is serviceable to life and the business of it, and the favour of it is universally extended, for *it takes hold of the ends of the earth*; and we should dwell, in our hymns to the light, on its advantages to the earth; but God here observes how unwelcome it is to those that do evil, and therefore hate the light. God makes the light a minister of his justice, as well as of his mercy; it is designed to *shake the wicked out of the earth*, and for that purpose *it takes hold of the ends of it*, as we take hold of the ends of a garment to shake the dust and moths out of it. Job had observed what a terror the morning-light is to criminals, because it discovers them, (ch. 24. 13, &c.) and God here seconds the observation, and asks him, whether the world was indebted to him for that kindness? No, the great Judge of the world sends forth the beams of the morning-light, as his messengers to detect criminals, that they may not only be defeated in their purposes, and put to shame, but that they may be brought to condign punishment, (v. 15.) that their light may be withheld from them, that is, that they may lose their comfort, their confidence, their liberties, their lives, and that their high arm, which they have lifted up against God and man, may be broken, and they deprived of their power to do mischief. Whether what is here said of the morning-light, was designed to represent, as in a figure, the light of the gospel of Christ, and to give a type of it, I will not say; but I am sure it may serve to put us in mind of the encomiums given to the gospel just at the rising of its morning-star, by Zecharias, (Luke, 1. 78.) *By the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high has visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness*, whose hearts are turned to it *as clay to the seal*, 2 Cor. 4. 6. The virgin Mary too, (Luke, 1. 51.) shews that God, in his gospel, has *shewed strength with his arm, scattered the proud, and put down the mighty*, by that light which he designed to shake the wicked, to shake wickedness itself out of the earth, and break its high arm.

II. Of the springs of the sea; (v. 16.) "*Hast thou entered into them, or hast thou walked in the search of the depth?*" Knowest thou what lies in the bottom of the sea, the treasures there hid in the sands? Or canst thou give an account of the rise and original of the waters of the sea? Vapours are continually exhaled out of the sea. Dost thou know how the recruits are raised, by which it is continually supplied? Rivers are constantly poured into the sea. Dost thou know how they are continually discharged, so as not to overflow the earth? Art thou acquainted with the secret subterraneous passages by which the waters circulate?" God's way, in the government of the world, is said to be *in the sea*, and *in the great waters*, (Ps. 77. 19.) intimating that it is hid from us, and not to be pried into by us.

III. Of the gates of death; *Have those been open to thee?* v. 16. Death is a grand secret. 1. We know not beforehand when and how, and by what means, we or others shall be brought to death; by what road we must go the way whence we shall not return; what disease or what disaster will be the door to let us into the house appointed for all living; *Man knows not his time.* 2. We cannot describe what death is, how the knot is untied between body and soul, nor how the *spirit of a man goes upward*, (Eccl. 3. 21.) to be we know not what, and live we know not how, as Mr. Norris expresses it; with what dreadful curiosity (says he) does the soul launch out into the vast ocean of eternity, and resign to an untried abyss! Let us make it sure that the gates of heaven shall be opened to us on the other side death, and then we need not fear the opening of the gates of death, though it is a way we

are to go but once. 3. We have no correspondence at all with separate souls, nor any acquaintance with their state. It is an unknown, undiscovered, region to which they are removed, we can neither hear from them, nor send to them. While we are here in a world of sense, we speak of the world of spirits, as blind men do of colours, and when we remove thither, shall be amazed to find how much we are mistaken.

IV. Of the breadth of the earth; (v. 18.) *Hast thou perceived that?* The knowledge of this might seem most level to him, and within his reach; yet he is challenged to declare this, if he can. We have our residence on the earth, God has given it to the children of men; but who ever surveyed it, or could give an account of the number of its acres? It is but a point to the universe; yet, small as it is, we cannot be exact in declaring the dimensions of it. Job had never sailed round the world, nor any before him; so little did men know the breadth of the earth, that it was but a few ages ago that the vast continent of America was discovered, which had, time out of mind, lain hid. The divine perfection is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea; it is therefore presumption for us, who perceive not the breadth of the earth, to dive into the depth of God's counsels.

V. Of the place and way of light and darkness. Of the *day-spring* he had spoken before, (v. 12.) and he returns to speak of it again; (v. 19.) *Where is the way where light dwells?* And again, (v. 24.) *By what way is the light parted?* He challenges him to describe,

1. How the light and darkness were at first made; when God, in the beginning, first spread darkness upon the face of the deep, and afterward commanded the light to shine out of darkness, by that mighty word, *Let there be light*, was Job a witness to the order, to the operation? can he tell where the fountains of light and darkness are, and where those mighty princes keep their courts distinct, while in one world they rule alternately? Though we long ever so much either for the shining forth of the morning, or the shadows of the evening, we know not whither to send, or go, to fetch them, nor can tell *the paths to the house thereof*, v. 20. We were not then born, nor is the number of our days so great, that we can describe the birth of that first-born of the visible creation, v. 21. Shall we then undertake to discourse of God's counsels, which were from eternity, or to find out the paths to the house thereof, to solicit for the alteration of them? God glories in it, that he forms the light and creates the darkness; and, if we must take those as we find them, take those as they come, and quarrel with neither, but make the best of both, then we must, in like manner, accommodate ourselves to the peace and the evil which God likewise created. Isa. 45. 7.

2. How they still keep their turns interchangeably. It is God that *makes the outgoings of the morning and of the evening to rejoice*; (Ps. 65. 8.) for it is his order, and no order of our's, that is executed by the outgoings of the morning-light, and the darkness of the night. We cannot so much as tell whence they come, or whither they go, (v. 24.) *By what way is the light parted* in the morning, when, in an instant, it shoots itself into all the parts of the air above the horizon, as if the morning-light flew upon the wings of an east-wind, so swiftly, so strongly, is it carried, scattering the darkness of the night, as the east-wind does the clouds? Hence we read of the *wings of the morning*, (Ps. 139. 9.) on which the light is conveyed to the *utmost parts of the sea*, and *scattered like an east-wind upon the earth*. It is a marvellous change, that passes over us every morning by the return of the light, and every evening by the return of the darkness; but we expect them, and so they are no surprise or uneasiness to us. If we would, in like manner, count upon changes in our outward condition, we should neither in the brightest noon count upon perpetual day, nor in the darkest midnight despair of the return of the morning. God has set the one over against the other, like the day and night; and so must we, Eccl. 7. 14.

VI. Of the *treasures of the snow and hail*; (v. 22, 23.) "*Hast thou entered into those, and taken a view of them?*" In the clouds the snow and hail are generated, and thence they come in such abundance, that one would think there were treasures of them laid

up in store there, whereas indeed they are produced *extempore*, as I may say, and *pro re nata*—on the occasion. Sometimes they come so opportunely, to serve the purposes of Providence, in God's fighting for his people, and against his and their enemies, that one would think they were laid up as magazines, or stores of arms, ammunition, and provisions, against the time of trouble, the day of battle and war; when God will either contend with the world in general, as in the deluge, when the windows of heaven were opened, and the waters fetched out of these treasures to drown a wicked world, that waged war with Heaven, or with some particular persons or parties, as when God out of these treasures fetched great hail-stones wherewith to fight against the Canaanites, Josh. 10. 11. See what folly it is to strive against God, who is thus prepared for battle and war, and how much it is our interest to make our peace with him, and to keep ourselves in his love! God can fight as effectually with snow and hail, if he pleases, as with thunder and lightning, or the sword of an angel.

25. Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder; 26. To cause it to rain on the earth, *where no man is*; on the wilderness, wherein *there is no man*; 27. To satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth? 28. Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? 29. Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? 30. The waters are hid as *with a stone*, and the face of the deep is frozen. 31. Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? 32. Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? 33. Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth? 34. Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee? 35. Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, *Here we are*? 36. Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts, or who hath given understanding to the heart? 37. Who can number the clouds in wisdom? or who can stay the bottles of heaven, 38. When the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together? 39. Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion? or fill the appetite of the young lions, 40. When they couch in *their dens*, and abide in the covert to lie in wait? 41. Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat.

Hitherto, God had put such questions to Job, as were proper to convince him of his ignorance and short-sightedness. Now, he comes, in the same manner, to shew his impotency and weakness. As it is but little that he knows, and therefore he ought not to arraign the divine counsels, so it is but little that he can do, and therefore he ought not to oppose the proceedings of Providence. Let him consider what great things God does, and try whether he can do the like, or whether he thinks himself an equal match for him.

I. God has thunder, and lightning, and rain, and frost, at command, but Job has not, and therefore let him not dare to compare with God, or to contest with him. Nothing is more uncertain than what weather it shall be, nor more out of our reach to

appoint; it shall be what weather pleases God, not what pleases us, unless, as becomes us, whatever pleases God, pleases us. Concerning this, observe here,

1. How great God is. (1.) He has a sovereign dominion over the waters, has appointed them their course, even then when they seem to overflow, and to be from under his check, v. 25. He has *divided a water-course*, directs the rain where to fall, even when the shower is most violent, with as much certainty as if it were conveyed by canals or conduit-pipes. Thus the hearts of kings are said to be *in God's hand*; and, as the rains, those rivers of God, he turns them whithersoever he will. Every drop goes as it is directed. God has sworn, *that the waters of Noah shall no more return to cover the earth*; and we see that he is able to make good what he has promised, for he has the rain in a watercourse. (2.) He has dominion over the lightning and the thunder, which go not at random, but in the way that he directs them. They are mentioned here, because he *prepares the lightnings for the rain*, Ps. 135. 7. Let not those that fear God, be afraid of the lightning or the thunder, for they are not blind bullets, but go the way that God himself directs them, who means no hurt to them. (3.) In directing the course of the rain, he does not neglect the wilderness, the desert land, (v. 26, 27.) *where no man is*: [1.] No man to be employed in taking care of the productions. God's providence reaches further than man's industry; if he had not more kindness for many of the inferior creatures than man has, it would go ill with them. God can make the earth fruitful, without any art or pains of our's; (Gen. 2. 5, 6.) when *there was not a man to till the ground*, yet there went up a mist, and watered it. But we cannot make it fruitful without God, it is he that gives the increase. [2.] Where there is no man to be provided for, or to take the benefit of the fruits that are produced. Though God does with very peculiar favour visit and regard man, yet he does not overlook the inferior creatures, but causes *the bud of the tender herb to spring forth for food for all flesh*, as well as *for the service of man*. Even the wild asses shall have their thirst quenched, Ps. 104. 11. God has enough for all, and wonderfully provides even for those creatures that man neither has service from, nor makes provision for. (4.) He is, in a sense, *the Father of the rain*, v. 28. It has no other father. He produces it by his power, he governs and directs it, and makes what use he pleases of it. Even the small drops of the dew he distils upon the earth, as the God of nature, and, as the God of grace, rains righteousness upon us, and is himself as the dew unto Israel; see Hos. 14. 5, 6. Mic. 5. 7. (5.) The ice and the frost, by which the waters are congealed and the earth incrustated, are produced by his providence, v. 29, 30. These are very common things, which lessens the strangeness of them. But, considering what a change is made by them in a very little time, how the waters are hid as with a stone, as with a grave-stone, laid upon them; (so thick, so strong, is the ice that covers them, and the face even of the deep is sometimes frozen;) we may well ask, "Out of whose womb came the ice? What created power could produce such a wonderful work?" No power but that of the Creator himself. Frost and snow come from him, and therefore should lead our thoughts and meditations to him who doeth such great things, past finding out. And we shall the more easily bear the inconveniencies of winter weather, if we learn to make this good use of it.

2. Observe, How weak man is; can he do such things as these? Could Job? No, v. 34, 35. (1.) He cannot command one shower of rain for the relief of himself or his friends; "*Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, those bottles of heaven, that abundance of waters may cover thee*, to water thy fields when they are dry and parched?" If we lift up our voice to God, to pray for rain, we may have it; (Zech. 10. 1.) but if we lift up our voice to the clouds, to demand it, they will soon tell us they are not at our beck, and we shall go without it, Jer. 14. 22. The heavens will not hear the earth, unless God hear them, Hos. 2. 21. See what poor, indigent, depending, creatures we are; we cannot do without rain, nor can we have it when we will. (2.) He cannot commission one flash of lightning, if he had a mind to make use of it for the terror of his enemies: (v. 35.) "*Canst thou send lightnings, that*

they may go on thine errand, and do the execution thou wishest for? Will they come at thy call, and say unto thee, Here we are?" No, the ministers of God's wrath will not be ministers of our's. Why should they, since the *wrath of man works not the righteousness of God?* See Luke, 9. 55.

II. God has the stars of heaven under his command and cognizance; we have not. Our meditations are now to rise higher, far above the clouds, to the glorious lights above. He mentions, not the planets, which move in lower orbs, but the fixed stars, which are much higher. It is supposed that they have an influence upon this earth, notwithstanding their vast distance; not upon the minds of men, or the events of providence, (men's fate is not determined by their stars,) but upon the ordinary course of nature; they are set for signs and seasons, for days and years, Gen. 1. 14. And if the stars have such a dominion over this earth, (v. 33.) though they have their place in the heavens, and are but mere matter, much more has He who is their Maker, and our's, and who is an Eternal Mind. Now see how weak we are, 1. We cannot alter the influences of the stars, (v. 31.) not their's that are instrumental to produce the pleasures of the spring; *Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades?*—the seven stars, that constellation which lies in so small a compass, (none in less,) and yet sheds very benign influences upon the earth. Nor can we alter their's that introduce the rigour of the winter; *Canst thou loose the bands of Orion?*—that magnificent constellation which makes so great a figure, (none greater,) and dispenses rough and displeasing influences, which we cannot controul or repel. Both summer and winter will have their course; God can change them when he pleases, can make the spring cold, and so bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, and the winter warm, and so loose the bands of Orion; but we cannot. 2. It is not in our power to order the motions of the stars, nor are we intrusted with the conduct of them. God, who *calls the stars by their names*, (Ps. 147. 4.) calls them forth in their respective seasons, appoints them the time of their rising and setting; but this is not in our province, we cannot bring forth *Mazzaroth*—the stars in the southern signs, nor guide *Arcturus*—those in the northern, v. 32. God can bring forth the stars to battle, (as he did when in their courses they fought against Sisera,) and guide them in the attacks they are ordered to make; but man cannot do so. 3. We are not only unconcerned in the government of the stars, (the government they are under, and the government they are intrusted with, for they both rule and are ruled,) but utterly unacquainted with it; we *know not the ordinances of heaven*, v. 33. So far are we from being able to change them, that we can give no account of them: they are a secret to us. Shall we then pretend to know God's counsels, and the reasons of them? If it were left to us to set the dominion of the stars upon the earth, we should soon be at a loss. Shall we then teach God how to govern the world?

III. God is the Author and Giver, the Father and Fountain, of all wisdom and understanding, v. 36. The souls of men are nobler and more excellent beings than the stars of heaven themselves, and shine brighter. The powers and faculties of reason with which man is endued, and the wonderful performances of thought, brings him into some alliance to the blessed angels; and whence comes this light, but from the Father of lights? Who else has put wisdom into the inward parts of man, and given understanding to the heart? 1. The rational soul itself, and its capacities, come from him as the God of nature, for he forms the spirit of man within him. We did not make our own souls, nor can we describe how they act, or how they are united to our bodies. He only, that made them, knows them, and knows how to manage them. He fashioneth men's hearts alike in some things, and yet unlike in others. 2. True wisdom, with its furniture and improvement, comes from him as the God of grace, and the Father of every good and perfect gift. Shall we pretend to be wiser than God, who have all our wisdom from him? Nay, shall we pretend to be wise above our sphere, and beyond the limits which he that gave us our understanding sets to it? He designed we should with it serve God, and do our duty, but never intended we should with it set up for directors of the stars or the lightning.

IV. God has the clouds under his cognizance and government,

but so have not we, v. 37. Can any man, with all his wisdom, undertake to number the clouds? or (as it may be read) to declare and describe the nature of them? Though they are near us, in our own atmosphere, yet we know little more of them than of the stars which are at so great a distance. And when the clouds have poured down rain in abundance, so that *the dust grows into solid mire, and the clods cleave fast together*, (v. 38.) *who can stay the bottles of heaven?* Who can stop them, that it may not always rain? The power and goodness of God are *herein* to be acknowledged, that he gives the earth rain enough, but does not surfeit it; softens it, but does not drown it; makes it fit for the plough, but not unfit for the seed. As we cannot command a shower of rain, so we cannot command a fair day, without God; so necessary, so constant, is our dependence upon him.

V. God provides food for the inferior creatures, and it is by his providence, not by any care or pains of our's, that they are fed. The following chapter is wholly taken up with the instances of God's power and goodness about animals; and therefore some transfer to it the three last verses of this chapter, which speak of the provision made,

1. For the *lions*; (v. 39, 40.) "Thou dost not pretend that the clouds and stars have any dependence upon thee, for they are above thee; but, on the earth, thou thinkest thyself paramount, let us try that then; *Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion?* Thou vauest thyself upon thy possessions of cattle which thou wast once owner of, the oxen, and asses, and camels, that were fed at thy crib. But wilt thou undertake the maintenance of the lions, and the young lions, when they couch in their dens, waiting for a prey? No, thou needest not do it, they can shift for themselves without thee: thou canst not do it, for thou hast not wherewithal to satisfy them: thou darest not do it; shouldest thou come to feed them, they would be upon thee. But I do it." See the all-sufficiency of the Divine Providence: it has wherewithal to satisfy the desire of every living thing, even the most ravenous. See the bounty of the Divine Providence, that, wherever it has given life, will give livelihood, even to those creatures that are not only not serviceable, but dangerous, to man. And see its sovereignty, that it suffers some creatures to be killed for the support of other creatures: the harmless sheep are torn to pieces, to fill the appetite of the young lions, who yet sometimes are made to lack and suffer hunger, to punish them for their cruelty, while those that fear God want no good thing.

2. For the *young ravens*, v. 41. As ravenous beasts, so ravenous birds, are fed by the Divine Providence. Who but God provides for the raven his food? Man does not, he takes care only of those creatures that are, or may be, useful to him. But God has a regard to all the works of his hands, even the meanest and least valuable. The ravens, young ones, are in a special manner necessitous, and God supplies them, Ps. 147. 9. God's feeding the fowls, especially these fowls, (Matth. 6. 26.) is an encouragement to us to trust him for our daily bread. See here, (1.) What distress the young ravens are often in; they wander for lack of meat. The old ones, they say, neglect them, and do not provide for them as other birds do for their young: and indeed those that are ravenous to others, are commonly barbarous to their own, and unnatural. (2.) What they are supposed to do in that distress; they cry, for they are noisy, clamorous, creatures, and this is interpreted a crying to God. It being the distress of nature, it is looked upon as directed to the God of nature. The putting of so favourable a construction as this upon the cries of the young ravens, may encourage us in our prayers, though we can but cry, *Abba, Father*. (3.) What God does for them; some way or other, he provides for them, so that they grow up, and come to maturity. And he that takes this care of the young ravens, certainly will not be wanting to his people, or their's. This being but one instance of many of the divine compassion, may give us occasion to think how much good our God does, every day, beyond what we are aware of.

CHAP. XXXIX.

God proceeds here to shew Job what little reason he had to charge him with unkindness, who was so compassionate to the inferior creatures, and took such a

tender care of them; or to boast of himself, and his own good deeds before God, which were nothing to the divine mercies. He shews him also what great reason he had to be humble, who knew so little of the nature of the creatures about him, and had so little influence upon them, and to submit to that God on whom they all depend. He discourses particularly, I. Concerning the wild goats and the hinds, v. 1..4. II. Concerning the wild ass, v. 5..8. III. Concerning the unicorn, v. 9..12. IV. Concerning the peacock, v. 13. V. Concerning the ostrich, v. 13..18. VI. Concerning the horse, v. 19..25. VII. Concerning the hawk and the eagle, v. 26..30.

1. **K**NOWEST thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve? 2. Canst thou number the months that they fulfil? or knowest thou the time when they bring forth? 3. They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones, they cast out their sorrows. 4. Their young ones are in good liking, they grow up with corn; they go forth, and return not unto them. 5. Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? 6. Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. 7. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. 8. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing. 9. Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib? 10. Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the vallies after thee? 11. Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him? 12. Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn?

God here shews Job what little acquaintance he had with the untamed creatures that run wild in the deserts, and live at large, but are the care of the Divine Providence. As,

I. The wild goats and the hinds. That which is taken notice of concerning them, is, the bringing forth, and bringing up, of their young ones. For as every individual is fed, so every species of animals is preserved, by the care of the Divine Providence, and, for aught we know, none extinct to this day. Observe here,

1. Concerning the production of their young. (1.) Man is wholly ignorant of the time when they bring forth, v. 1, 2. Shall we pretend to tell what is in the womb of Providence, or what a day will bring forth, who know not the time of the pregnancy of a hind or a wild goat? (2.) Though they bring forth their young with a great deal of difficulty and sorrow, and have no assistance from man, yet, by the good providence of God, their young ones are safely produced, and their sorrows cast out and forgotten, v. 3. Some think it is intimated, (Ps. 29. 9.) that God by thunder helps the hinds in calving. Let it be observed, for the comfort of women in labour, that God helps even the hinds to bring forth their young; and shall he not much more succour them, and save them in child-bearing, who are his children in covenant with him?

2. Concerning the growth of their young; (v. 4.) *They are in good liking*; though they are brought forth in sorrow, after their dams have suckled them a while, they shift for themselves in the corn-fields, and are no more burthensome to them, which is an example to children, when they are grown up, not to be always hanging upon their parents, and craving from them, but to put forth themselves to get their own livelihood, and to requite their parents.

II. The wild ass; a creature we frequently read of in scripture; some say, untameable. Man is said to be born as the wild ass's colt, so hard to be governed. Three things Providence has allotted to the wild ass. 1. An unbounded liberty; (v. 5.) *Who, but God,*

has sent out the wild ass free? He has given a disposition to it, and therefore a dispensation for it. The tame ass is bound to labour, the wild ass has no bonds on him. Note, Freedom from service, and liberty to range at pleasure, are but the privileges of a wild ass. It is a pity that any of the children of men should covet it, or value themselves on it. It is better to labour and be good for something, than ramble and be good for nothing. But if, among men, Providence sets some at liberty, and suffers them to live at ease, while others are doomed to servitude, we must not marvel at the matter, it is so among the brute-creatures. 2. An uninclosed lodging; (v. 6.) *whose house I have made the wilderness*, where he has room enough to traverse his ways, and snuff up the wind at his pleasure, as the wild ass is said to do, (Jer. 2. 24.) as if he were to live upon the air, for it is the barren land that is his dwelling. Observe, The tame ass, that labours, and is serviceable to man, has his master's crib to go to, both for shelter and food, and lives in a fruitful land: but the wild ass, that will have his liberty, must have it in a barren land. He that will not labour, let him not eat. He that will, shall eat the labour of his hands, and have also to give to him that needs. Jacob, the shepherd, has good red pottage to spare, when Esau, a sportsman, was ready to perish for hunger. A further description of the liberty and livelihood of the wild ass we have, v. 7, 8. (1.) He has no owner, nor will he be in subjection: *he scorns the multitude of the city*. If they attempt to take him, and, in order to that, surround him with a multitude, he will soon get clear of them, and the crying of the driver is nothing to him. He laughs at those that live in the tumult and bustle of cities, (so Bishop Patrick,) thinking himself happier in the wilderness; and opinion is the rate of things. (2.) Having no owner, he has no feeder, nor is any provision made for him, but he must shift for himself; the range of the mountains is his pasture, and a bare pasture it is; there he searches after here and there a green thing, as he can find it and pick it up; whereas the labouring asses have green things in plenty, without their searching for them. From the untameableness of this and other creatures, we may infer how unfit we are to give law to Providence, who cannot give law even to a wild ass's colt.

III. The unicorn; *Rhem*; a strong creature, (Numb. 23. 22.) a stately proud creature, Ps. 92. 10. He is able to serve, but not willing; and God here challenges Job to force him to it. Job expected every thing should be just as he would have it. "Since thou dost pretend" (says God) "to bring every thing beneath thy sway, begin with the unicorn, and try thy skill upon him. Now that thine oxen and asses are all gone, try whether he will be willing to serve thee in their stead, (v. 9.) and whether he will take up with the provision thou usest to make for them. *Will he abide by thy crib?* No," 1. "Thou canst not tame him, nor bind him with his band, nor set him to draw the harrow," (v. 10.) There are creatures that are willing to serve man, and seem to take a pleasure in it, and to have a love for their masters; but there are such as will never be brought to it; and it is the effect of sin: man is revolted from his subjection to his Maker, and is therefore justly punished with the revolt of the inferior creatures from their subjection to him; and yet, as an instance of God's good-will to man, there are some that are still serviceable to him. Though the wild bull (which some think is meant here by the unicorn) will not serve man, nor submit to his band in the furrows, yet there are tame bullocks that will, and other animals that are not *feræ naturæ*—of a wild nature, in whom man may have a property, for whom he provides, and to whose service he is entitled. *Lord, what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him?* 2. "Thou darest not trust him; though his strength is great, yet thou wilt not leave thy labour to him, as thou dost with thine asses or oxen, whom a little child may lead or drive, leaving to them all the pains. Thou wilt never depend upon the wild bull, as likely to come to thy harvest-work, much less to go through it, to bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn," v. 11, 12. And, because he will not serve about the corn, he is not fed so well as the tame ox, whose mouth was not to be muzzled in treading out the corn; but therefore he will not draw the plough, because he that made him ever designed him for it. A disposition to labour is as much the

gift of God as an ability for it; and it is a great mercy, if, where God gives strength for service, he gives a heart; it is what we should pray for, and reason ourselves into, which the brutes cannot do; for, as among beasts, so among men, those may justly be reckoned wild and abandoned to the deserts, who have no mind either to take pains, or to do good.

13. *Gavest thou* the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? 14. Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, 15. And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. 16. She is hardened against her young ones, as though *they were* not her's: her labour is in vain without fear; 17. Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding. 18. What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider.

The ostrich is a wonderful animal, a very large bird, but it never flies. Some have called it a *winged camel*. God here gives an account of it, and observes,

I. Something that it has in common with the peacock, that is, beautiful feathers; (v. 13.) *Gavest thou proud wings unto the peacocks?* So some read it. Fine feathers make proud birds. The peacock is an emblem of pride; when he struts, and shews his fine feathers, Solomon, in all his glory, is not arrayed like him. The ostrich too has goodly feathers, and yet is a foolish bird; for wisdom does not always go along with beauty and gaiety. Other birds do not envy the peacock or the ostrich their gaudy colours, nor complain for want of them; why then should we repine, if we see others wear better clothes than we can afford to wear? God gives his gifts variously, and those gifts are not always the most valuable, that make the finest shew. Who would not rather have the voice of the nightingale, than the tail of the peacock, the eye of the eagle, and her soaring wing, and the natural affection of the stork, than the beautiful wings and feathers of the ostrich, which can never rise above the earth, and is without natural affection?

II. Something that is peculiar to itself,

1. Carelessness of her young. It is well that this is peculiar to herself, for it is a very bad character. Observe, (1.) How she exposes her eggs; she does not retire to some private place, and make a nest there, as the sparrows and swallows do, (Ps. 84. 3.) and there lay eggs and her young. Most birds, as well as other animals, are strangely guided by natural instinct in providing for the preservation of their young. But the ostrich is a monster in nature, for she drops her eggs any where upon the ground, and takes no care to hatch them. If the sand and the sun will hatch them, well and good, they may for her, for she will not warm them, v. 14. Nay, she takes no care to preserve them, the foot of the traveller may crush them, and the wild beast break them, v. 15. But how then are any young ones brought forth, and whence is it that the species is not perished? We must suppose, either that God, by a special providence, with the heat of the sun and the sand (so some think) hatches the neglected eggs of the ostrich, as he feeds the neglected young ones of the raven; or that, though the ostrich *often* leaves her eggs thus, yet not *always*. (2.) The reason why she does thus expose her eggs; it is, [1.] For want of natural affection; (v. 16.) *She is hardened against her young ones.* To be hardened against any is unamiable, even in a brute-creature, much more in a rational creature that boasts of humanity; especially to be hardened against young ones, that cannot help themselves, and therefore merit compassion, that give no provocation, and therefore merit no hard usage: but it is worst of all for her to be hardened against her own young ones, as though they were not her's, whereas, really, they are parts of herself. Her labour in laying her eggs, is in vain, and all lost, because she has not that fear and tender concern for them, that she should have. Those are most likely to lose their labour, that are least in fear of losing it. [2.] For want of

wisdom; (v. 17.) *God has deprived her of wisdom.* This intimates, that the art which other animals have to nourish and preserve their young, is God's gift, and that, where it is not, God denies it, that, by the folly of the ostrich, as well as by the wisdom of the ant, we may learn to be wise; for, *First*, As careless as the ostrich is of her eggs, many people are of their own souls; they make no provision for them, no proper nest in which they may be safe, they leave them exposed to Satan and his temptations; a certain evidence that they are deprived of wisdom. *Secondly*, So careless are many parents of their children; some, of their bodies, not providing for their own house, their own bowels, and therefore worse than infidels, and as bad as the ostrich; but many more are thus careless of their children's souls, take no care of their education, send them abroad into the world untaught, unarmed, forgetting what corruption there is in the world through lust, which will certainly crush them. Thus their labour in rearing them comes to be in vain; it were better for their country that they had never been born. *Thirdly*, So careless are too many ministers of their people, with whom they should reside; but they leave them in the earth, and forget how busy Satan is to sow tares while men sleep. They overlook those whom they should oversee, and are really hardened against them.

2. Care of herself. She leaves her eggs in danger, but, if she herself be in danger, no creature shall strive better to get out of the way of it than the ostrich, v. 18. Then she lifts up her wings on high, (the strength of which then stands her in better stead than their beauty,) and, with the help of them, runs so fast, that a horseman, at full speed, cannot overtake her; *She scorneth the horse and his rider.* Those that are least under the law of natural affection, often contend most for the law of self-preservation. Let not the rider be proud of the swiftness of his horse, when such an animal as the ostrich shall out-run him.

19. Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? 20. Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible. 21. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in *his* strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. 22. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. 23. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. 24. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that *it is* the sound of the trumpet. 25. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

God, having displayed his own power in those creatures that are strong, and despise man, here shews it in one scarcely inferior to any of them in strength, and yet very tame, and serviceable to man, and that is, the *horse*; especially, *the horse that is prepared against the day of battle*, and is serviceable to man at a time when he has more than ordinary occasion for his service. It seems there was, in Job's country, a noble generous breed of horses. Job, it is probable, kept many, though they are not mentioned among his possessions; cattle for use in husbandry being there valued more than those for state and war, which alone horses were then reserved for; and they were not then put to such mean services as with us they are commonly put to. Concerning the great horse, that stately beast, it is here observed,

1. That he has a great deal of strength and spirit; (v. 19.) *Hast thou given the horse strength?* He uses his strength for man, but has it not from him: God gave it him, who is the Fountain of all the powers of nature, and yet he himself *delights not in the strength of the horse*, (Ps. 147. 10.) but has told us that *a horse is a vain thing for safety*, Ps. 33. 17. For running, drawing, and carrying,

no creature that is ordinarily in the service of man, has so much strength as the horse has, nor is of so stout and bold a spirit; not to be made afraid as a grasshopper, but daring and forward to face danger. It is a mercy to man to have such a servant, which, though very strong, submits to the management of a child, and rebels not against his owner: but let not the strength of a horse be trusted to, Hos. 14, 3. Ps. 20. 7. Isa. 31. 1, 3.

2. That his neck and nostrils look great; his neck is clothed with a large flowing mane, which makes him formidable, and is an ornament to him. The glory of his nostrils, when he snorts, flings up his head, and throws foam about, is terrible. Perhaps there might be, at that time, and in that country, a more stately breed of horses than any we have now.

3. That he is very fierce and furious in battle, and charges with an undaunted courage, though he pushes on in imminent danger of his life. (1.) See how frolicsome he is; (v. 21.) *He paws in the valley*, scarcely knowing what ground he stands upon. He is proud of his strength, and he has much more reason to be so as using his strength in the service of man, and under his direction, than the wild ass that uses it in contempt of man, and in a revolt from him, v. 8. (2.) See how forward he is to engage; he goes on to meet the armed men, animated, not by the goodness of the cause, or the prospect of honour, but only by the sound of the trumpet, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting of the soldiers, which are as bellows to the fire of his innate courage, and make him spring forward with the utmost eagerness, as if he cried, *Ha, ha*, v. 25. How wonderfully are the brute-creatures fitted for, and inclined to, the services for which they were designed. (3.) See how fearless he is, how he despises death, and the most threatening dangers; (v. 22.) *He mocks at fear*, and makes a jest of it; slash at him with a sword, rattle the quiver, brandish the spear, to drive him back, he will not retreat, but press forward, and even inspires courage into his rider. (4.) See how furious he is; he curvets and prances, and runs on with so much violence and heat against the enemy, that one would think he even *swallowed the ground with fierceness and rage*, v. 24. High mettle is the praise of a horse rather than of a man, whom fierceness and rage ill become. This description of the war-horse will help to explain that character which is given of presumptuous sinners; (Jer. 8. 6.) *Every one turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle*. When a man's heart is fully set in him to do evil, and he is carried on in a wicked way by the violence of inordinate appetites and passions, there is no making him afraid of the wrath of God, and the fatal consequences of sin. Let his own conscience set before him the curse of the law, the death, that is, the wages, of sin, and all the terrors of the Almighty, in battle-array; he mocks at this fear, and is not affrighted, neither turns he back from the flaming sword of the cherubim. Let ministers lift up their voice like a trumpet, to proclaim the wrath of God against him, *he believes not that it is the sound of the trumpet*, nor that God and his heralds are in earnest with him; but what will be in the end hereof it is easy to foresee.

26. Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south? 27. Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? 28. She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. 29. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. 30. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she.

The birds of the air are proofs of the wonderful power and providence of God, as well as the beasts of the earth; God here specifies two stately ones.

1. The hawk, a noble bird, of great strength and sagacity, and yet a bird of prey, v. 26. This bird is here taken notice of for her flight, which is swift and strong, and especially for the

course she steers toward the south, whither she follows the sun in winter, out of the colder countries in the north, especially when she is to cast her plumes, and renew them. This is her wisdom, and it was God that gave her this wisdom, not man. Perhaps the extraordinary wisdom of the hawk's flight after her prey, was not used then for men's diversion and recreation, as it has been since. It is pity that the reclaimed hawk, which is taught to fly at man's command, and to make him sport, should at any time be abused to the dishonour of God, since it is from God that she receives that wisdom which makes her flight entertaining and serviceable.

2. The eagle, a royal bird, and yet a bird of prey too, the permission of which, nay, the giving of power to which, may help to reconcile us to the prosperity of oppressors among men. The eagle is here taken notice of, (1.) For the height of her flight; no bird soars so high, has so strong a wing, nor can so well bear the light of the sun; "*Doth she mount at thy command?*" (v. 27.) Is it by any strength she has from thee; or dost thou direct her flight? No, it is by the natural power and instinct God has given her, that she will soar out of thy sight, much more out of thy call." (2.) For the strength of her nest; her house is her castle and strong-hold; she makes it on high and on the rock, *the crag of the rock*, (v. 28.) which sets her and her young out of the reach of danger. Secure sinners think themselves as safe in their sins as the eagle in her nest on high, in the *clefts of the rock*; (Jer. 49. 16.) *But I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord*. The higher bad men sit above the resentments of the earth, the nearer they ought to think themselves to the vengeance of Heaven. (3.) For her quicksightedness; (v. 29.) *Her eyes behold afar off*, not upward, but downward, in quest of her prey. In this, she is an emblem of a hypocrite, who, while in the profession of religion, he seems to rise toward heaven, keeps his eye and heart upon the prey on earth, some temporal advantage, some widow's house or other, that he hopes to devour, under pretence of devotion. (4.) For the way she has of maintaining herself and her young; she preys upon living animals, which she seizes and tears to pieces, and then carries to her young ones, who are taught to *suck up blood*; they do it by instinct, and know no better; but for men that have reason and conscience, to thirst after blood, is what could scarcely be believed, if there had not been, in every age, wretched instances of it. She also preys upon the dead bodies of men; *where the slain are, there is she*. These birds of prey (in another sense than the horse, v. 25.) *smell the battle afar off*. Therefore, when a great slaughter is to be made among the enemies of the church, the fowls are invited to *the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of kings and captains*, Rev. 19. 17, 18. Our Saviour refers to this instinct of the eagle, (Matth. 24. 28.) *Whosoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together*. Every creature will make toward that which is its proper food; for he that provides them their food, has implanted in them that inclination. These, and many such instances of natural power and sagacity in the inferior creatures, which we cannot account for, oblige us to confess our own weakness and ignorance, and to give glory to God as the Fountain of all being, power, wisdom, and perfection.

CHAP. XL.

Many humbling confounding questions God had put to Job, in the foregoing chapter; now, in this chapter, I. He demands an answer to them, v. 1, 2. II. Job submits in a humble silence, v. 3, 5. III. God proceeds to reason with him, for his conviction of the infinite distance and disproportion between him and God, and that he was by no means an equal match for him. He challenges him, (v. 6, 7.) to vie with him, if he durst, for justice, (v. 8.) power, (v. 9.) majesty, (v. 10.) and dominion over the proud; (v. 11, 14.) and he gives an instance of his power in one particular animal, here called Behemoth, v. 15, 21.

1. **M**OREOVER the LORD answered Job, and said, 2. Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it. 3. Then Job answered

the LORD. and said. 4. Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. 5. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.

Here is,

I. A humbling challenge which God gave to Job. After he had heaped up many hard questions upon him, to shew him, by his manifest ignorance in the works of nature, what an incompetent judge he was of the methods and designs of Providence, he clenches the nail with one demand more, which stands by itself here as the application of the whole. It should seem, God paused a while, as Elihu had done, to give Job time to say what he had to say, or to think of what God had said; but Job was in such confusion, that he remained silent, and therefore God here put him upon replying, v. 1, 2. This is not said to be spoken out of the whirlwind, as before; and therefore some think God said it in a still small voice, which wrought more upon Job than the whirlwind did, as upon Elijah, 1 Kings, 19. 12, 13. *My doctrine shall drop as the rain*, and then it does wonders. Though Job had not spoken any thing, yet God is said to answer him; for he knows men's thoughts, and can return a suitable answer to their silence. Here,

1. God puts a convincing question to him; "*Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty, instruct him?* Shall he pretend to dictate to God's wisdom, or prescribe to his will? Shall God receive instruction from every peevish complainer, and change the measures he has taken, to please him?" It is a question with disdain; *Shall any teach God knowledge?* ch. 21. 22. It is intimated, that those who quarrel with God, do, in effect, go about to teach him how to mend his work. For if we contend with men like ourselves, as not having done well, we ought to instruct them how to do better; but is it a thing to be suffered, that any man should teach his Maker? He that contends with God, is justly looked upon as his enemy; and shall he pretend so far to have prevailed in the contest, as to prescribe to him? We are ignorant and short-sighted, but before him all things are naked and open; we are foolish, but his wisdom is infinite; we are depending creatures, but he is the Sovereign Creator; and shall we pretend to instruct him? Some read it, *Is it any wisdom to contend with the Almighty?* The answer is easy; No, it is the greatest folly in the world. Is it wisdom to contend with him whom it will certainly be our ruin to oppose, and unspeakably our interest to submit to?

2. He demands a speedy reply to it; "*He that reproaches God, let him answer* this question to his own conscience, and answer it thus, *Far be it from me to contend with the Almighty, or to instruct him.* Let him answer all those questions which I have put, if he can. Let him answer for his presumption and insolence, answer it at God's bar, to his confusion." Those have high thoughts of themselves, and mean thoughts of God, who reprove any thing he says or does.

II. Job's humble submission thereupon. Now Job came to himself, and began to melt into godly sorrow; when his friends reasoned with him, he did not yield; but the voice of the Lord is powerful. *When the Spirit of truth is come, he shall convince.* They had condemned him for a wicked man, Elihu himself had been very sharp upon him, (ch. 34. 7, 8, 37.) but God had not given him such hard words. We may sometimes have reason to expect better treatment from God, and a more candid construction of what we do, than we meet with from our friends. This the good man is here overcome by, and yields himself a conquered captive to the grace of God. 1. He owns himself an offender, and has nothing to say in his own justification, (v. 4.) "*Behold, I am vile*; not only mean and contemptible, but vile and abominable, in my own eyes." He is now sensible that he has sinned, and therefore calls himself *vile*. Sin debases us, and penitents abase themselves, reproach themselves, are ashamed, yea, even confounded. "I have acted undutifully to my Father,

ungratefully to my Benefactor, unwisely for myself; and therefore I am vile." Job now vilifies himself as much as ever he had justified and magnified himself: repentance changes men's opinion of themselves. Job had been too bold in demanding a conference with God, and thought he could make his part good with him; but now he is convinced of his error, and owns himself utterly unable to stand before God, or to produce any thing worth his notice, the veriest dunghill worm that ever crawled upon God's ground. While his friends talked with him, he answered them, for he thought himself as good as they; but when God talked with him, he had nothing to say; for, in comparison with him, he sees himself nothing, less than nothing, worse than nothing, vanity and vileness itself; and, therefore, *What shall I answer thee?* God demanded an answer, v. 2. Here he gives the reason of his silence; it was not because he was sullen, but because he was convinced he had been in the wrong. Those that are truly sensible of their own sinfulness and vileness, dare not justify themselves before God, but are ashamed that ever they entertained such a thought, and, in token of their shame, lay their hand upon their mouth.

2. He promises not to offend any more as he had done; for Elihu had told him this was meet to be said unto God. When we have spoken amiss, we must repent of it, and not repeat nor stand to it. He enjoins himself silence; (v. 4.) "*I will lay my hand upon my mouth*, will keep that as with a bridle, to suppress all passionate thoughts which may arise in my mind, and keep them from breaking out in intemperate speeches." It is bad to think amiss, but it is much worse to speak amiss, for that is an allowance of the evil thought, and gives it an *imprimatur*—a sanction; it is publishing the seditious libel; and, therefore, *if thou hast thought evil, lay thy hand upon thy mouth*, and let it go no further, (Prov. 30. 32.) and that will be an evidence for thee, that that which thou thoughtest, thou allowest not. Job had suffered his evil thoughts to vent themselves; "*Once have I spoken amiss, yea twice*," that is, "divers times, in one discourse and in another; but I have done, I will not answer, I will not stand to what I have said, nor say it again, I will proceed no further." Observe here what true repentance is. (1.) It is to rectify our errors, and the false principles we went upon, in doing as we did. What we have long, and often, and vigorously, maintained, we must retract, once, yea twice, as soon as we are convinced that it is a mistake, not adhere to it any longer, but take shame to ourselves for holding it so long. (2.) It is to return from every by-path, and to proceed not one step further in it; "*I will not add*," so the word is; "*I will never indulge my passion so much again, nor give myself such a liberty of speech, will never say as I have said, nor do as I have done.*" Till it comes to this, we come short of repentance. Further observe, Those who dispute with God, will be silenced at last. Job had been very bold and forward in demanding a conference with God, and talked very boldly, how plain he would make his case, and how sure he was that he should be justified; *as a prince he would go near unto him*, (ch. 31. 37.) he would *come even to his seat*; (ch. 23. 3.) but he has soon enough of it, he lets fall his plea, and will not answer; "Lord, the wisdom and right are all on thy side, and I have done foolishly and wickedly in questioning it."

6. Then answered the LORD unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said, 7. Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. 8. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? 9. Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him? 10. Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty. 11. Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath: and behold every one that is proud, and abase him. 12. Look on every one that is proud,

and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. 13. Hide them in the dust together; and bind their faces in secret. 14. Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee.

Job was greatly humbled for what God had already said, but not sufficiently; brought low, but not low enough; and therefore God here proceeds to reason with him, in the same manner and to the same purport as before, v. 6. Observe, 1. Those who duly receive what they have heard from God, and profit by it, shall hear more from him. 2. Those who are truly convinced of sin, and penitent for it, yet have need to be more thoroughly convinced, and to be made more deeply penitent. Those who are under convictions, who have their sins set in order before their eyes, and their hearts broken for them, must learn from this instance not to catch at comfort too soon; it will be everlasting when it comes, and therefore it is necessary that we be prepared for it by deep humiliation, that the wound be searched to the bottom, and not skinned over, and that we do not make more haste out of our convictions than good speed. When our hearts begin to melt and relent within us, let those considerations be dwelt upon and pursued, which will help to make a thorough effectual thaw of it.

God begins with a challenge, (v. 7.) as before; (ch. 38. 3.) "*Gird up thy loins now like a man*; if thou hast the courage and confidence thou hast pretended to, shew it now; but thou wilt soon be made to see and own thyself no match for me." This is that which every proud heart must be brought to at last, either by its repentance, or by its ruin; and thus low must every mountain and hill be, sooner or later, brought. We must acknowledge,

I. That we cannot vie with God for justice; that the Lord is righteous and holy in his dealings with us, but that we are unrighteous and unholy in our conduct toward him; we have a great deal to blame ourselves for, but nothing to blame him for; (v. 8.) "*Wilt thou disannul my judgment*? Wilt thou take exception to what I say and do, and bring a writ of error, to reverse the judgment I have given as erroneous and unjust?" Many of Job's complaints had too much of a tendency this way; *I cry out of wrong, say she, but I am not heard*; but such language as this is by no means to be suffered. God's judgment cannot, must not, be disannulled, for we are sure it is according to truth, and therefore it is a great piece of impudence and iniquity in us to call it in question. "*Wilt thou*," says God, "*condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous*? Must my honour suffer for the support of thy reputation? Must I be charged as dealing unjustly with thee, because thou canst not otherwise clear thyself from the censures thou liest under?" Our duty is to condemn ourselves, that God may be righteous. David is *therefore* ready to own the evil he has done in God's sight, that *God may be justified, when he speaks, and clear when he judges*, Ps. 51. 4. See Neh. 9. 33. Dan. 9. 7. But those are very proud, and very ignorant both of God and themselves, who, to clear themselves, will condemn God; and the day is coming, when, if the mistake be not rectified in time by repentance, the eternal judgment will be both the confutation of the plea, and the confusion of the prisoner; for the heavens shall declare God's righteousness, and all the world shall become guilty before him.

II. That we cannot vie with God for power; and therefore, as it is great impiety, so it is great impudence, to contest with him, and we go as much against our interest, as we do against reason and right; (v. 9.) "*Hast thou an arm like God, equal to his in length and strength*? Or canst thou thunder with a voice like him, as he did, (ch. 37. 1, 2.) or does now, out of the whirlwind?" To convince Job that he was not so able as he thought himself, to contest with God, he shews him, 1. That he could never fight it out with him, nor carry his cause by force of arms. Sometimes, among men, controversies have been decided by battle, and the victorious champion is adjudged to have the right on his side; but it be put upon that issue between God and man, man would

certainly go by the worse, for all the force he could raise against the Almighty, would be but like briars and thorns before a consuming fire, Isa. 27. 4. "*Hast thou, a poor weak worm of the earth, an arm comparable to his, who upholds all things*?" The power of creatures, even of angels themselves, is derived from God, limited by him, and dependent on him; but the power of God is original, independent, and unlimited. He can do every thing without us, we can do nothing without him, and therefore we have not an arm like God. 2. That he could never talk it out with him, nor carry his cause by noise and big words, which sometimes among men go a great way toward the gaining of a point; "*Canst thou thunder with a voice like him*? No, his voice will soon drown thine, and one of his thunders will overpower and overrule all thy whispers." Man cannot speak so convincingly, so powerfully, nor with such a commanding conquering force, as God can, who speaks, and it is done. His creating voice is called his *thunder*; (Ps. 104. 7.) so is that voice of his, with which he terrifies and discomfits his enemies; (1 Sam. 2. 10.) *Out of heaven shall he thunder upon them*. The wrath of a king may sometimes be like the roaring of a lion, but can never pretend to imitate God's thunder.

III. That we cannot vie with God for beauty and majesty; (v. 10.) "*If thou wilt enter into a comparison with him, and appear more amiable, put on thy best attire*; *Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency*. Appear in all the martial, in all the royal pomp thou hast, make the best of every thing that will set thee off, array thyself with glory and beauty, such as may awe thine enemies, and charm thy friends; but what is it all to the divine majesty and beauty? No more than the light of a glow-worm to that of the sun, when he goes forth in his strength." God decks himself with such majesty and glory as are the terror of devils, and all the powers of darkness, and make them tremble; he arrays himself with such glory and beauty, as are the wonder of angels, and all the saints in light, and make them rejoice. David could dwell all his days in God's house, to behold the beauty of the Lord. But, in comparison with this, what is all the majesty and excellency by which princes think to make themselves feared, and all the glory and beauty by which lovers think to make themselves beloved? If Job think, in contending with God, to carry the day by looking great, and making a figure, he is quite mistaken; *The sun shall be ashamed, and the moon confounded, when God shines forth*.

IV. That we cannot vie with God for dominion over the proud, v. 11. 14. Here the cause is put upon this short issue; if Job can humble and abase proud tyrants and oppressors as easily and effectually as God can, it shall be acknowledged that he has some colour to compare with God. Observe here,

1. The justice Job is here challenged to do, and that is, to bring the proud low, with a look; if Job will pretend to be a rival with God, especially if he pretend to be a judge of his actions, he must be able to do this.

(1.) It is here supposed that God can do it, and will do it, himself, else he would not have put it thus upon Job. By this, God proves himself to be God, that he resisted the proud, sat Judge upon them, and is able to bring them to ruin. Observe here, [1.] That proud people are wicked people, and pride is at the bottom of a great deal of wickedness that is in this world, both toward God and man. [2.] Proud people will certainly be abased and brought low, for pride goes before destruction. If they bend not, they will break; if they humble not themselves by true repentance, God will humble them, to their everlasting confusion. *The wicked will be trodden down in their place*, that is, Wherever they are found, though they pretend to have a place of their own, and to have taken root in it, yet even there they shall be trodden down, and all the wealth, and power, and interest, which their place entitles them to, will not be their security. [3.] The wrath of God, scattered among the proud, will humble them, and break them, and bring them down. If he casts abroad the rage of his wrath, as he will do at the great day, and sometimes does in this life, the stoutest heart cannot hold out against him; who knows the power of his anger? [4.] God can, and does, easily

abase proud tyrants; he can look upon them, and bring them low, can overwhelm them with shame, and fear, and utter ruin, by one angry look, as he can, by a gracious look, revive the hearts of the contrite ones. [5.] He can, and will, at last, do it effectually, (v. 13.) not only bring them to the dust, from which they might hope to arise, but hide them in the dust, like the proud Egyptian whom Moses slew, and *hid in the sand*, (Exod. 2. 12.) that is, They shall be brought not only to death, but to the grave, that pit out of which there is no return. They were proud of the figure they made, but they shall be buried in oblivion, and be no more remembered than those that are hid in the dust; out of sight, and out of mind. They were linked in leagues and confederacies to do mischief, and are now bound in bundles; they are hid together, not their rest, but their *shame together is in the dust*, ch. 17. 16. Nay, they are treated as malefactors, who, when condemned, had their faces covered, as Haman's was; he *binds their faces in secret*; they are treated as dead men; Lazarus, in the grave, had his face bound about. So complete will the victory be that God will gain, at last, over proud sinners that set themselves in opposition to him. Now by this he proves himself to be God. Does he thus hate proud men? Then he is holy. Will he thus punish them? Then he is the just Judge of the world. Can he thus humble them? Then he is the Lord Almighty. When he had abased proud Pharaoh, and hid him in the sand of the Red-sea, Jethro inferred, that doubtless *the Lord is greater than all gods*, for wherein the proud enemies of his Israel dealt proudly, he was above them, he was too hard for them, Exod. 18. 11. See Rev. 19. 1, 2.

(2.) It is here proposed to Job to do it. He had been passionately quarrelling with God and his providence, casting abroad the rage of his wrath toward heaven, as if he thought thereby to bring God himself to his mind; "Come," says God, "try thy hand first upon proud men, and thou wilt soon see how little they value the rage of thy wrath; and shall I then regard it, or be moved by it?" Job had complained of the prosperity and power of tyrants and oppressors, and was ready to charge God with mal-administration for suffering it; but he ought not to find fault, except he could mend. If God, and he only, has power enough to humble and bring down proud men, no doubt he has wisdom enough to know when and how to do it, and it is not for us to prescribe to him, or to teach him how to govern the world; unless we had an arm like God, we must not think to take his work out of his hands.

2. The justice which is here promised, shall be done him, if he can perform such mighty works as these; (v. 14.) "*Then will I also confess unto thee, that thy right hand is sufficient to save thee*, though, after all, it would be too weak to contend with me." It is the innate pride and ambition of man, that he would be his own saviour, would have his own hands sufficient for him, and be independent; but it is presumption to pretend to it; our own hands cannot save us by recommending us to God's grace, much less by rescuing us from his justice; unless we could by our own power humble our enemies, we cannot pretend by our own power to save ourselves; but if we could, God himself would confess it. He never did, nor ever will, defraud any man of his just praise, nor deny him the honour he has merited. But since we cannot do this, we must confess unto him, that our own hands cannot save us, and therefore into his hand we must commit ourselves.

15. Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox. 16. Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly. 17. He moveth his tail like a cedar: the sinews of his stones are wrapt together. 18. His bones are as strong pieces of brass; his bones are like bars of iron. 19. He is the chief of the ways of God: he that made him, can make his sword to approach unto him. 20. Surely the

mountains bring him forth food, where all the beasts of the field play. 21. He lieth under the shady trees, in the covert of the reed, and fens. 22. The shady trees cover him *with* their shadow; the willows of the brook compass him about. 23. Behold, he drinketh up a river, and hasteth not: he trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth. 24. He taketh it with his eyes: *his* nose pierceth through snares.

God, for the further proving of his own power, and disproving of Job's pretensions, concludes his discourse with the description of two vast animals, far exceeding man in bulk and strength; one he calls *behemoth*, the other, *leviathan*. In these verses, we have the former described. "*Behold now behemoth*, and consider whether thou art able to contend with him who made that beast, and gave him all the power he has, and whether it is not thy wisdom rather to submit to him, and make thy peace with him."

Behemoth signifies beasts in general, but must here be meant of some one particular species. Some understand it of the *bull*; others of an amphibious animal, well-known (they say) in Egypt, called the *river-horse*, (*Hippopotamus*,) living among the fish in the river Nile, but coming out to feed upon the earth. But I confess I see no reason to depart from the ancient and most generally received opinion, that it is the elephant that is here described, which is a very strong stately creature, of very large stature above any other, and of wonderful sagacity, and of so great a reputation in the animal-kingdom, that, among so many four-footed beasts as we have had the natural history of, (ch. 38. and 39.) we can scarcely suppose this should be omitted.

Observe,

1. The description here given of the *behemoth*. 1. His body is very strong, and well-built; *His strength is in his loins*, v. 16. His bones, compared with those of other creatures, are like bars of iron, v. 18. His back-bone is so strong, that, though his tail be not large, yet he moves it like a cedar, with a commanding force, v. 17. Some understand it of the trunk of the elephant, for the word signifies any extreme part, and in that there is indeed a wonderful strength; so strong is the elephant in his back and loins, and the sinews of his thighs, that he will carry a large wooden tower, and a great number of fighting men in it. No animal whatsoever comes near the elephant for strength of body, which is the main thing insisted on in this description.

2. He feeds on the productions of the earth, and does not prey upon other animals, he *eats grass as an ox*, (v. 15.) the *mountains bring forth food*, (v. 20.) and the beasts of the field do not tremble before him, nor flee from him, as from a lion, but they play about him, knowing they are in no danger from him. This may give us occasion, (1.) To acknowledge the goodness of God, in ordering it so, that a creature of such bulk, which requires so much food, should not feed upon flesh, (for then multitudes must die, to keep him alive,) but should be content with the grass of the field, to prevent such destruction of lives as otherwise must have ensued. (2.) To commend living upon herbs and fruits, without flesh, according to the original appointment of man's food, Gen. 1. 29. Even the strength of an elephant, as of a horse and an ox, may be supported without flesh; and why not that of a man? Though, therefore, we use the liberty God has allowed us, yet be not among riotous eaters of flesh, Prov. 23. 20. (3.) To command a quiet and peaceable life. Who would not rather, like the elephant, have his neighbours easy and pleasant about him, than, like the lion, have them all afraid of him?

3. He lodges under the shady trees, (v. 21.) which cover him with their shadow, (v. 22.) where he has a free and open air to breathe in, while lions, which live by prey, when they would repose themselves, are obliged to retire into a close and dark den, to live therein, and to abide in the covert of that, ch. 38. 40. They who are a terror to others, cannot but be sometimes a terror to themselves too; but they will be easy, who will let others be easy

about them; and the reed and fens, and the willows of the brook, though a very weak and slender fortification, yet are sufficient for the defence and security of those who *therefore* dread no harm, because they design none.

4. That he is a very great and greedy drinker, not of wine and strong drink, (to be greedy of that is peculiar to man, who by his drunkenness makes a beast of himself,) but of fair water. (1.) His size is prodigious, and therefore he must have supply accordingly, v. 23. He drinks so much, that one would think he could drink up a river, if you would give him time, and not hasten him. Or, when he drinks, he hasteth not, as those do that drink in fear; he is confident of his own strength and safety, and therefore makes no haste when he drinks, no more haste than good speed. (2.) His eye anticipates more than he can take; for, when he is very thirsty, having been long kept without water, *he trusts that he can drink up Jordan in his mouth, and even takes it with his eyes, v. 24.* As a covetous man causes his eyes to fly upon the wealth of this world, which he is greedy of, so this great beast is said to snatch, or draw up, even a river with his eyes. (3.) His nose has in it strength enough for both; for when he goes greedily to drink with it, he pierces through snares or nets, which perhaps are laid in the waters to catch fish. He makes nothing of the difficulties that lie in his way, so great is his strength, and so eager his appetite.

II. The use that is to be made of this description. We have taken a view of this mountain of a beast, this overgrown animal, which is here set before us, not merely as a show, (as sometimes it is in our country,) to satisfy our curiosity and to amuse us, but as an argument with us to humble ourselves before the great God; for,

1. He made this vast animal, which is so fearfully and wonderfully made; it is the work of his hands, the contrivance of his wisdom, the production of his power; it is *behemoth which I made, v. 15.* Whatever strength this, or any other creature, has, it is derived from God, who therefore must be acknowledged to have all power originally and infinitely in himself, and such an arm as it is not for us to contest with. This beast is here called *the chief, in its kind, of the ways of God; (v. 19.)* an eminent instance of the Creator's power and wisdom. They that will peruse the accounts given by historians of the elephant, will find that his capacities approach nearer to those of reason, than the capacities of any other brute-creature whatsoever, and therefore he is fitly called *the chief of the ways of God, in the inferior part of the creation no creature below man being preferable to him.*

2. He made him with man, as he made other four-footed beasts; on the same day with man, (Gen. 1. 25, 26.) whereas the fish and fowl were made the day before; he made him, to live and move on the same earth, in the same element, and therefore man and beast are said to be jointly preserved by Divine Providence, as fellow-commoners; (Ps. 36. 6.) "*It is behemoth which I made with thee; I made that beast as well as thee, and he does not quarrel with me; why then dost thou? Why shouldst thou demand peculiar favours, because I made thee, (ch. 10. 9.)* when I made the *behemoth* likewise with thee? I made thee as well as that beast, and therefore can as easily manage thee at pleasure as that beast, and will do it, whether thou refuse or whether thou choose. I made him with thee, that thou mayest look upon him, and receive instruction." We need not go far for proofs and instances of God's almighty power and sovereign dominion; they are near us, they are with us, they are under our eye, wherever we are.

3. *He that made him, can make his sword to approach to him, (v. 19.)* that is, The same hand that made him, notwithstanding his great bulk and strength, can unmake him again at pleasure, and kill an elephant as easily as a worm or a fly, without any difficulty, and without the imputation either of waste or wrong. God, that gave to all the creatures their being, may take away the being he gave; for may he not do what he will with his own? And he can do it; he that has power to create with a word, no doubt, has power to destroy with a word, and can as easily speak the creature into nothing, as at first, he spake it out of nothing. The *bhe-*

moth perhaps is here intended (as well as the *leviathan* afterward) to represent those proud tyrants and oppressors, whom God had just now challenged Job to abase and bring down. They think themselves as well fortified against the judgments of God, as the elephant with his bones of brass and iron; but he that made the soul of man knows all the avenues to it, and can make the sword of justice, his wrath, to approach to it, and touch it in the most tender and sensible part. He that framed the engine, and put the parts of it together, knows how to take it in pieces. Woe to him therefore that strives with his Maker, for he that made, has therefore power to make him miserable, and will not make him happy, unless he will be ruled by him.

CHAP. XLI.

The description here given of the *leviathan*, a very large, strong, formidable, fish, or water-animal, is designed yet further to convince Job of his own impotency, and of God's omnipotence, that he might be humbled for his folly in making so bold with him as he had done. I. To convince Job of his own weakness, he is here challenged to subdue and tame this *leviathan*, if he could, and make himself master of him, (v. 1. 9.) which because he cannot do, he must own himself utterly unable to stand before the great God, v. 10. II. To convince Job of God's power and terrible majesty, divers particular instances are here given of the strength and terror of the *leviathan*, which is no more than what God has given him, nor more than he has under his check, v. 11, 12. The face of the *leviathan* is here described to be terrible; (v. 13, 14.) his scales close, (v. 15. 17.) his breath and noesings sparkling, (v. 18. 21.) his flesh firm, (v. 22. 24.) his strength and spirit, when he is attacked, insuperable, (v. 25. 30.) his motions turbulent, and disturbing to the waters; (v. 31, 32.) so that, upon the whole, he is a very terrible creature, and man is no match for him, v. 33, 34.

1. **C**ANST thou draw out *leviathan* with an hook? or his tongue with a cord *which* thou lettest down? 2. Canst thou put an hook into his nose? or bore his jaw through with a thorn? 3. Will he make many supplications unto thee? will he speak soft *words* unto thee? 4. Will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant for ever? 5. Wilt thou play with him as *with* a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens? 6. Shall thy companions make a banquet of him? shall they part him among the merchants? 7. Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? or his head with fish-spears? 8. Lay thine hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more. 9. Behold, the hope of him is in vain: shall not *one* be cast down even at the sight of him? 10. None *is so* fierce, that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me?

Whether this *leviathan* be a *whale* or a *crocodile*, is a great dispute among the learned, which I will not undertake to determine; some of the particulars agree more easily to the one, others to the other; both are very strong and fierce, and the power of the Creator appears in them. The ingenious Sir Richard Blackmore, though he admits the more received opinion concerning the *bhe-moth*, that that must be meant of the *elephant*, yet agrees with the learned Bochart's notion of the *leviathan*, that it is the *crocodile* which was so well known in the river of Egypt. I confess that that which inclines me rather to understand it of the whale, is, not only because it is much larger, and a nobler animal, but because, in the history of the Creation, there is such an express notice taken of it, as is not of any other species of animals whatsoever; (Gen. 1. 21.) *God created great whales*; by which it appears, not only that whales were well known in those parts, in Moses's time, who lived a little after Job, but that the creation of whales was generally looked upon as a most illustrious proof of the eternal power and godhead of the Creator: and we may conjecture that this was the reason (for otherwise it seems unaccount-

able) why Moses there so particularly mentions the creation of the whales, because God had so lately, in this discourse with Job, more largely insisted upon the bulk and strength of that creature than of any other, as the proof of his power; and the *leviathan* is here spoken of as an inhabitant of the sea, (v.31.) which the crocodile is not; and (Ps. 104. 25, 26.) *There, in the great and wide sea, is that leviathan.*

Here, in these verses,

1. He shews how unable Job was to master the *leviathan*. (1.) That he could not catch him, as a little fish, with angling, v.1, 2. He had no bait wherewith to deceive him, no hook wherewith to catch him, no fish-line wherewith to draw him out of the water, nor a thorn to run through his gills, on which to carry him home. (2.) That he could not make him his prisoner, nor force him to cry for quarter, or surrender himself at discretion, v.3, 4. "He knows his own strength too well to make many supplications to thee, and to make a covenant with thee to be thy servant, on condition thou wilt save his life." (3.) That he could not entice him into a cage, and keep him there as a bird for the children to play with, v.5. There are creatures so little, so weak, as to be easily restrained thus, and triumphed over; but the *leviathan* is none of those, he is made to be the terror, not the sport and diversion, of mankind. (4.) That he could not have him served up to his table; he and his companions could not make a banquet of him; his flesh is too strong to be fit for food, and if it were not, he is not easily caught. (5.) That they could not enrich themselves with the spoil of him; *Shall they part him among the merchants*, the bones to one, the oil to another? If they can catch him, they will; but it is probable that the art of fishing for whales was not brought to perfection then, as it has been since. (6.) That they could not destroy him, could not *fill his head with fish-spears*, v.7. He kept out of the reach of their instruments of slaughter, or, if they touched him, they could not touch him to the quick. (7.) That it was to no purpose to attempt it; *The hope of taking him is in vain*, v.9. If men go about to seize him, so formidable is he, that the very sight of him will appal them, and make a stout man ready to faint away; *Shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?* And will not that deter the pursuers from their attempt? Job is bid, at his peril, to *lay his hand upon him*. (v.8.) "Touch him if thou dare, remember the battle, how unable thou art to encounter such a force, and what is therefore likely to be the issue of the battle, and do no more, but desist from the attempt." It is good to remember the battle before we engage in a war, and put off the harness in time, if we foresee it will be to no purpose to gird it on. Job is hereby admonished not to proceed in his controversy with God, but to make his peace with him, remembering what the battle will certainly end in, if he come to an engagement. See Isa. 27. 4, 5.

2. Thence he infers how unable he was to contend with the Almighty. *None is so fierce*, none so fool-hardy, as to *stir up the leviathan*, (v.10.) it being known that he will certainly be too hard for them; and *who then is able to stand before God*, either to impeach and arraign his proceeding, or to out-face the power of his wrath? If the inferior creatures that are put under the feet of man, and over whom he has dominion, keep us in awe thus, how terrible must the majesty of our great Lord be, who has a sovereign dominion over us, and against whom man has been so long in rebellion! *Who can stand before him when once he is angry?*

11. Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? *Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine.* 12. I will not conceal his parts, nor his power, nor his comely proportion. 13. Who can discover the face of his garment? or who can come to him with his double bridle? 14. Who can open the doors of his face? his teeth are terrible round about. 15. *His scales are his pride*, shut up together as with a close seal. 16. One is so near

to another, that no air can come between them. 17. They are joined one to another, they stick together, that they cannot be sundered. 18. By his neesings a light doth shine, and his eyes are like the eye-lids of the morning. 19. Out of his mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire leap out. 20. Out of his nostrils goeth smoke, as out of a seething pot or caldron. 21. His breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth out of his mouth. 22. In his neck remaineth strength, and sorrow is turned into joy before him. 23. The flakes of his flesh are joined together: they are firm in themselves; they cannot be moved. 24. His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the nether mill stone. 25. When he raiseth up himself, the mighty are afraid: by reason of breakings they purify themselves. 26. The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. 27. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. 28. The arrow cannot make him flee: sling-stones are turned with him into stubble. 29. Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear. 30. Sharp stones are under him: he spreadeth sharp pointed things upon the mire. 31. He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment. 32. He maketh a path to shine after him; one would think the deep to be hoary. 33. Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear. 34. He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.

God, having in the foregoing verses shewed Job how unable he was to deal with the *leviathan*, here sets forth his own power in that massy mighty creature. Here is,

I. God's sovereign dominion and independency laid down, v.11. 1. That he is indebted to none of his creatures. If any pretend he is indebted to them, let them make their demand and prove their debt, and they shall receive it in full, and not by composition; "Who has prevented me?" that is, "Who has laid any obligations upon me, by any service they have done me? Who can pretend to be before-hand with me? If any were, I would not long be behind-hand with them, I would soon repay them." The apostle quotes this, for the silencing of all flesh in God's presence; (Rom. 11. 35.) *Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?* As God does not inflict upon us the evils we have deserved, so he does bestow upon us the favours we have not deserved. 2. That he is the rightful Lord and Owner of all the creatures; "Whatsoever is under the whole heavens, animate or inanimate, is mine, (and particularly this *leviathan*;) at my command and disposal; what I have an incontestable property in, and dominion over." All is his, we are his, all we have and do, and therefore we cannot make God our Debtor; but of *thine own, Lord, have we given thee*. All is his, and therefore, if he were indebted to any, he has wherewithal to repay them; the debt is in good hands. All is his, and therefore he needs not our services, nor can he be benefited by them. *If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof*, Ps. 50. 12.

II. The proof and illustration of it, from the wonderful structure of the *leviathan*, v.12. The parts of his body, the power he exerts, especially when he is set upon, and the comely proportion of the whole of him, are what God will not conceal, and therefore what we must observe and acknowledge the power of God in.

Though he is a creature of monstrous bulk, yet there is in him a comely proportion. In our eye, beauty lies in little, (*Inest sua gratia parvis—Little things have a gracefulness all their own,*) because we ourselves are little; but, in God's eye, even the *leviathan* is comely; and if he pronounce even the *whale*, even the *crocodile*, so, it is not for us to say of any of the works of his hands, that they are ugly or ill-favoured; it is enough to say so, as we have cause, of our own works. God here goes about to give us an anatomical view (as it were) of the *leviathan*; for his works appear most beautiful and excellent, and his wisdom and power appear most in them, when they are taken in pieces, and viewed in their several parts and proportions.

1. The *leviathan*, even *prima facie*—at first sight, appears formidable and inaccessible, v. 13, 14. Who dares come so near him, while he is alive, as to discover or take a distinct view of the face of the garment, the skin with which he is clothed as with a garment; so near him, as to bridle him like a horse, and so lead him away; so near him, as to be within reach of his jaws, which are like a double bridle? Who will venture to look into his mouth, as we do into a horse's mouth? He that opens the doors of his face, will see his teeth terrible round about, strong and sharp, and fitted to devour; it would make a man tremble to think of having a leg or an arm between them.

2. His scales are his beauty and strength, and therefore his pride, v. 15..17. The *crocodile* is indeed remarkable for his scales; if we understand it of the *whale*, we must understand by these shields, (for so the word is,) the several coats of his skin; or there might be *whales* in that country with scales. That which is remarkable concerning the scales, is, that they stick so close together, by which he is not only kept warm, for no air can pierce him, but kept safe, for no sword can pierce him, through those scales. Fishes, that live in the water, are fortified accordingly by the wisdom of Providence, which gives clothes as it gives cold.

3. He scatters terror with his very breath and looks; if he sneeze or spout by water, it is like a light shining, either with the froth, or the light of the sun shining through it, v. 18. The eyes of the *whale* are reported to shine in the night-time, like a flame, or, as here, like the eye-lids of the morning; the same they say of the *crocodile*. The breath of this creature is so hot and fiery, from the great natural heat within, that burning lamps and sparks of fire, smoke and a flame, are said to go out of his mouth, even such as one would think sufficient to set coals on fire, v. 19..21. Probably, these hyperbolical expressions are used concerning the *leviathan*, to intimate the power and terror of the wrath of God, for that is it which all this is designed to convince us of; fire out of his mouth devours, Ps. 18. 7, 8. The breath of the Almighty, like a stream of brimstone, kindles Tophet, and will for ever keep it burning, Isa. 30. 33. The wicked one shall be consumed with the breath of his mouth, 2 Thess. 2. 8.

4. He is of invincible strength and most terrible fierceness, so that he frightens all that come in his way, but is not himself frightened by any. Take a view of his neck, and there remains strength, v. 22. His head and his body are well-set together; sorrow rejoices, or rides in triumph, before him, for he makes terrible work wherever he comes. Or, Those storms which are the sorrow of others, are his joy; what is tossing to others, is dancing to him. His flesh is well-knit, v. 23. The flakes of it are joined so closely together, and are so firm, that it is hard to pierce it; he is as if he were all bone; his flesh is of brass, which Job had complained his was not, ch. 6. 12. His heart is as firm as a stone, v. 24. He has spirit equal to his bodily strength, and, though he is bulky, he is sprightly, and not unwieldy; as his flesh and skin cannot be pierced, so his courage cannot be daunted; but, on the contrary, he daunts all he meets, and puts them into a consternation; (v. 25.) When he raises up himself like a moving mountain in the great waters, even the mighty are afraid lest he overturn their ships, or do them some other mischief: by reason of the breakings he makes in the water, which threaten death, they purify themselves, confess their sins, betake themselves to their prayers, and get ready for death. We read (ch. 3. 8.) of those who, when they raise up a *leviathan*, are in such a fright, that

they curse the day. It was a fear which, it seems, used to drive some to their curses, and others to their prayers; for as now, so then there were seafaring men of different characters, and on whom the terrors of the sea have contrary effects; but all agree there is a great fright among them when the *leviathan* raises up himself.

5. All the instruments of slaughter that are used against him, do him no hurt, and therefore are no terror to him, v. 26..29. The sword and the spear, which wound nigh at hand, are nothing to him, the darts, arrows, and sling-stones, which wound at a distance, do him no damage; nature has so well armed him against them all. The defensive weapons which men use when they engage with the *leviathan*, as the habergeon, or breast-plate, often serve men no more than their offensive weapons; iron and brass are to him as straw and rotten wood, and he laughs at them. It is the picture of a hard-hearted sinner, that despises the terrors of the Almighty, and laughs at all the threatenings of his word. The *leviathan* so little dreads the weapons that are used against him, that, to shew how hardy he is, he chooses to lie on the sharp stones, the sharp pointed things, (v. 30.) and lies as easy there, as if he lay on the soft mire. Those that would endure hardness, must inure themselves to it.

6. His very motion in the water troubles it, and puts it into a ferment, v. 31, 32. When he rolls and tosses, and makes a stir in the water, or is in pursuit of his prey, he makes the deep to boil like a pot, he raises a great froth and foam upon the water, such as is upon a boiling pot, especially a pot of boiling ointment; and he makes a path to shine after him, which even a ship in the midst of the sea does not, Prov. 30. 19. One may trace the *leviathan* under water by the bubbles on the surface; and yet who can take that advantage against him in pursuing him? Men track hares in the snow and kill them, but he that tracks the *leviathan* dares not come near him.

Lastly, Having given this particular account of his parts, and his power, and his comely proportion, he concludes with four things in general concerning this animal, v. 33, 34. (1.) That he is a non-such among the inferior creatures; Upon earth there is not his like, no creature in this world is comparable to him for strength and terror; or, the earth is here distinguished from the sea; His dominion is not upon the earth, so some, but in the waters; none of all the savage creatures upon earth come near him for bulk and strength, and it is well for man that he is confined to the waters, and there has a watch set upon him, (ch. 7. 12.) by the Divine Providence, for if such a terrible creature were allowed to roam and ravage upon this earth, it would be an unsafe and uncomfortable habitation for the children of men, for whom it is intended. (2.) That he is more bold and daring than any other creature whatsoever; He is made without fear: the creatures are as they are made; the *leviathan* has courage in his constitution, nothing can frighten him; other creatures, quite contrary, seem as much designed for flying as this for fighting; among men, some are in their natural temper bold, others are timorous. (3.) That he is himself very proud; though lodged in the deep, yet he beholds all high things: the rolling waves, the impending rocks, the hovering clouds, and the ships under sail with top and top-gallant, this mighty animal beholds with contempt, for he does not think they either lessen him or threaten him. Those that are great, are apt to be scornful. (4.) That he is a king over all the children of pride, that is, He is the proudest of all proud ones. He has more to be proud of (so Mr. Carvill expounds it) than the proudest people in the world have; and so it is a mortification to the haughtiness and lofty looks of men. Whatever bodily accomplishments men are proud of, and puffed up with, the *leviathan* excels them, and is a king over them. Some read it, so as to understand it of God; He that beholds all high things, even he, is King over all the children of pride; he can tame the behemoth, (ch. 40. 19.) and the *leviathan*, big as they are, and stout-hearted as they are. This discourse, concerning those two animals, was brought in to prove that it is God only who can look upon proud men and abase them, bring them low and tread them down, and hide them in the dust; (ch. 40. 11..13.) and so it concludes with a *Quod erat demonstrandum*—Which was to be demonstrated; there is one that beholds all high things, and, wherein men deal proudly, is above them; he is King over all the children

of pride, whether brutal or rational, and can make them all either bend, or break, before him; (Isa. 2. 11.) *The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and thus the Lord alone shall be exalted.*

CHAP. XLII.

Solomon says, Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof, Eccl. 7. 8. It was so here in the story of Job; at evening-time it was light. Three things we have met with in this book, which, I confess, have troubled me much; but we find all the three grievances redressed, thoroughly redressed, in this chapter, every thing set to rights. 1. It has been a great trouble to us, to see such a holy man as Job was, so fretful and peevish, and uneasy to himself, and especially to hear him quarrel with God, and speak indecently to him; but, though he thus fell, he is not utterly cast down, for here he recovers his temper, comes to himself, and to his right mind again, by repentance, is sorry for what he has said amiss, unsays it, and humbles himself before God, v. 1. .6. 11. It has been likewise a great trouble to us, to see Job and his friends so much at variance, not only differing in their opinions, but giving one another a great many hard words, and passing severe censures one upon another, though they were all very wise and good men; but here we have this grievance redressed likewise, the differences between them happily adjusted, the quarrel taken up, all the peevish reflections they had cast upon one another forgiven and forgotten, and all joining in sacrifices and prayers, mutually accepted of God, v. 7. .9. 11. It has troubled us, to see a man of such eminent piety and usefulness as Job was, so grievously afflicted, so pained, so sick, so poor, so reproached, so slighted, and made the very centre of all the calamities of human life; but here we have this grievance redressed too; Job healed of all his ailments, more honoured and beloved than ever, enriched with an estate double to what he had before, surrounded with all the comforts of life, and as great an instance of prosperity as ever he had been of affliction and patience, v. 10. .17. All this is written for our learning, that we, under these and the like discouragements that we meet with, through patience and comfort of this scripture, may have hope.

1. **THEN** Job answered the LORD, and said, 2. I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. 3. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. 4. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. 5. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. 6. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

The words of Job justifying himself, were ended, ch. 31. 40. After that, he said no more to that purport: the words of Job judging and condemning himself, began, ch. 40. 4, 5. Here he goes on with words to the same purport; though his patience had not its perfect work, his repentance for his impatience had. He is here thoroughly humbled for his folly and unadvised speaking, and it was forgiven him. Good men will see and own their faults at last, though it may be some difficulty to bring them to it. Then when God had said all that to him concerning his own greatness and power appearing in the creatures, then Job answered the LORD, (v. 1.) not by way of contradiction, he had promised not so to answer again, (ch. 40. 5.) but by way of submission; and thus we must all answer the calls of God.

I. He subscribes to the truth of God's unlimited power, knowledge, and dominion, to prove which was the scope of God's discourse out of the whirlwind, v. 2. Corrupt passions and practices arise either from some corrupt principles, or from the neglect and disbelief of the principles of truth; and therefore true repentance begins in the acknowledgment of the truth, 2 Tim. 2. 25. Job here owns his judgment convinced of the greatness, glory, and perfection, of God, from which would follow the conviction of his conscience concerning his own folly, in speaking irreverently to him. 1. He owns that God can do every thing. What can be too hard for him that made *behemoth* and *leviathan*, and manages both as he pleases? He knew this before, and had himself discoursed very well upon the subject, but now he knew it with application; God had spoken it once, and then he heard it twice, that

power belongs to God; and therefore it is the greatest madness and presumption imaginable to contend with him. "Thou canst do every thing, and therefore canst raise me out of this low condition, which I have so often foolishly despaired of as impossible; I now believe thou art able to do this." 2. That no thought can be withholden from him, that is, (1.) There is no thought of our's that he can be hindered from the knowledge of. Not a fretful, discontented, unbelieving, thought is in our minds at any time, but God is a Witness to it: it is in vain to contest with him, for we cannot hide our counsels and projects from him; and if he discover them, he can defeat them. (2.) There is no thought of his that he can be hindered from the execution of; Whatever the Lord pleased, that did he. Job had said this passionately, complaining of it; (ch. 23. 13.) *What his soul desireth, that he doeth*; now he says, with pleasure and satisfaction, that *God's counsels shall stand*. If God's thoughts concerning us be thoughts of good, to give us an unexpected end, he cannot be withheld from accomplishing his gracious purposes, whatever difficulties may seem to lie in the way.

II. He owns himself to be guilty of that which God had charged him with in the beginning of his discourse; (v. 3.) "Lord, the first word thou saidst, was, *Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?* There needed no more; that word convinced me; I own, *I am the man* that has been so foolish. That word reached my conscience, and set my sin in order before me; it is too plain to be denied, too bad to be excused; *I have hid counsel without knowledge*; I have ignorantly overlooked the counsels and designs of God in afflicting me, and therefore have quarrelled with God, and insisted too much upon my own justification; Therefore I uttered that I understood not," that is, "I have passed a judgment upon the dispensations of Providence, though I was utterly a stranger to the reasons of them." Here, 1. He owns himself ignorant of the divine counsels; and so we are all. God's judgments are a great deep, which we cannot fathom, much less find out the springs of. We see what God does, but we neither know why he does it, what he is driving at, nor what he will bring it to; these are things too wonderful for us, out of our sight to discover, out of our reach to alter, and out of our jurisdiction to judge of; they are things which we know not, it is quite above our capacity to pass a verdict upon them: the reason why we quarrel with Providence is, because we do not understand it; and we must be content to be in the dark about it, until the mystery of God shall be finished. 2. He owns himself imprudent and presumptuous, in undertaking to discourse of that which he did not understand, and to arraign that which he could not judge of. *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame to him*. We wrong ourselves, as well as the cause which we undertake to determine, while we are no competent judges of it.

III. He will not answer, but he will make supplication to his Judge, as he had said; (ch. 9. 15.) "*Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak*, (v. 4.) not speak either as plaintiff or defendant, (ch. 13. 22.) but as a humble petitioner; not as one that will undertake to teach and prescribe, but as one that desires to learn, and is willing to be prescribed to. Lord, put no more hard questions to me, for I am not able to answer thee one of a thousand of those which thou hast put; but give me leave to ask instruction from thee, and do not deny it me, do not upbraid me with my folly and self-sufficiency," Jam. 1. 5. Now he is brought to the prayer Elihu taught him, *That which I see not, teach thou me*.

IV. He puts himself into the posture of a penitent, and therein goes upon a right principle. In true repentance there must be not only conviction of sin, but contrition and godly sorrow for it, sorrowing according to God, 2 Cor. 7. 9. Such was Job's sorrow for his sins.

1. Job had an eye to God in his repentance, thought highly of him, and went upon that as the principle of it; (v. 5.) "*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear* many a time from my teachers, when I was young; from my friends, now of late; I have known something of thy greatness, and power, and sovereign dominion; and yet was not brought, by what I heard, to submit myself to thee as I ought; the notions I had of these things, served me only to talk of, and had not a due influence upon my mind:

but now thou hast by immediate revelation discovered thyself to me in thy glorious majesty; *now mine eyes see thee*, now I feel the power of those truths which before I had only the notion of, and therefore now I repent, and unsay what I have foolishly said." Note, (1.) It is a great mercy to have a good education, and to know the things of God by the instructions of his word and ministers; *faith comes by hearing*, and then it is most likely to come, when we hear attentively, and with the *hearing of the ear*. (2.) When the understanding is enlightened by the Spirit of grace, our knowledge of divine things as far exceeds what we had before, as that by ocular demonstration exceeds that by report and common fame. By the teachings of men God *reveals his Son to us*; but by the teachings of his Spirit he *reveals his Son in us*, (Gal. 1. 16.) and so *changes us into the same image*, 2 Cor. 3. 18. (3.) God is pleased sometimes to manifest himself most fully to his people by the rebukes of his word and providence; "Now that I have been afflicted, now that I have been told of my faults, now mine eye sees thee. *The rod and reproof give wisdom. Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest and teachest.*"

2. Job had an eye to himself in his repentance, thought hardly of himself, and thereby expressed his sorrow for his sins; (v. 6.) *Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* Observe, (1.) It concerns us to be deeply humbled for the sins we are convinced of, and not to rest in a slight superficial displeasure against ourselves for them. Even good people, that have no gross enormities to repent of, must be greatly afflicted in soul for the workings and breakings out of pride, passion, peevishness, and discontent, and all their hasty unadvised speeches; for these we must be pricked to the heart, and be in bitterness. Till the enemy be effectually humbled, the peace will be insecure. (2.) Outward expressions of godly sorrow well become penitents; Job repented in dust and ashes. These, without an inward change, do but mock God; but where they come from sincere contrition of soul, the sinner by them gives glory to God, takes shame to himself, and may be instrumental to bring others to repentance. Job's *afflictions* had brought him to the ashes, (ch. 2. 8.) he *sat down among the ashes*; but now his *sins* brought him thither. True penitents mourn for their sins as heartily as ever they did for any outward afflictions; and are in bitterness, as for an only son or a first-born, for they are brought to see more evils in their sins than in their troubles. (3.) Self-loathing is evermore the companion of true repentance; (Ezek. 6. 9.) *They shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed.* We must not only be angry at ourselves for the wrong and damage we have by sin done to our own souls, but must abhor ourselves, as having by sin made ourselves odious to the pure and holy God, who cannot endure to look upon iniquity. If sin be truly an abomination to us, sin in ourselves will especially be so; the nearer it is to us, the more loathsome it will be. (4.) The more we see of the glory and majesty of God, and the more we see of the vileness and odiousness of sin, and of ourselves because of sin, the more we shall abase and abhor ourselves for it. "Now mine eye sees what a God he is, whom I have offended, the brightness of that majesty which by wilful sin I have spit in the face of, the tenderness of that mercy which I have spurned at the bowels of; now I see what a just and holy God he is, whose wrath I have incurred; wherefore I abhor myself, *Woe is me, for I am undone,*" Isa. 6. 5. God had challenged Job to look upon proud men and abase them; "I cannot," says Job, "pretend to it; I have enough to do to get my own proud heart humbled, to abase that and bring that low." Let us leave it to God to govern the world, and make it our care, in the strength of his grace, to govern ourselves and our own hearts well.

7. And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me *the thing that is right*, as my servant Job hath. 8. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job,

and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you *after your folly*, in that ye have not spoken of me *the thing which is right*, like my servant Job. 9. So Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job.

Job, in his discourses, had complained very much of the censures of his friends, and their hard usage of him, and had appealed to God as Judge between him and them, and thought it hard, that judgment was not immediately given upon the appeal. While God was catechising Job out of the whirlwind, one would have thought that he only was in the wrong, and that the cause would certainly go against him; but here, to our great surprise, we find it quite otherwise, and the definitive sentence given in Job's favour. Wherefore judge nothing before the time. Those who are truly righteous before God, may have their righteousness clouded and eclipsed by great and uncommon afflictions, by the severe censures of men, by their own frailties and foolish passions, by the sharp reproofs of the word and conscience, and the deep humiliation of their own spirits under the sense of God's terrors; and yet, in due time, these clouds shall all blow over, and God will *bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noon-day*, Ps. 37. 6. He cleared Job's righteousness here, because he, like an honest man, held it fast, and would not let it go. We have here,

I. Judgment given against Job's three friends, upon the controversy between them and Job. Elihu is not censured here, for he distinguished himself from the rest in the management of the dispute, and acted, not as a party, but as a moderator; and moderation will have its praise with God, whether it have with men or no. In the judgment here given, Job is magnified, and his three friends mortified. While we were examining the discourses on both sides, we could not discern, and therefore durst not determine, who was in the right; something of truth we thought they both had on their side, but we could not cleave the hair between them; nor would we, for all the world, have been to give the decisive sentence upon the case, lest we should have determined wrong: but it is well that the judgment is the Lord's, and we are sure that his judgment is according to truth; to it we will refer ourselves, and by it we will abide.

Now, in the judgment here given,

1. Job is greatly magnified, and comes off with honour. He was but one against three, a beggar against three princes, and yet, having God on his side, he needed not fear the result, though thousands set themselves against him. Observe here,

(1.) When God appeared for him; *After the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, v. 7.* After he had convinced and humbled him, and brought him to repentance, for what he had said amiss, then he owned him in what he had said well, comforted him, and put honour upon him; not till then, for we are not ready for God's approbation till we judge and condemn ourselves; but then he thus pleaded his cause, for he that has torn, will heal us, he that *has smitten, will bind us.* The Comforter shall convince, John, 16. 8. See in what method we are to expect divine acceptance; we must first be humbled under divine rebukes. After God, by speaking these words, had caused grief, he returned and had compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies; for he will not contend for ever, but will debate in measure, and stay his rough wind in the day of his east wind. Now that Job had humbled himself, God exalted him. True penitents shall find favour with God, and what they have said and done amiss, shall no more be mentioned against them. Then God is well-pleased with us, when we are brought to abhor ourselves.

(2.) How he appeared for him. It is taken for granted that all his offences are forgiven, for if he be dignified, as we find he is here, *no doubt he is justified.* Job had sometimes intimated with great as-

surance, that God would clear him at last, and he was not made ashamed of the hope.

[1.] God calls him again and again *his servant Job*; four times in two verses, and he seems to take a pleasure in calling him so, as before his troubles, (ch. 1.8.) "*Hast thou considered my servant Job?* Though he is poor and despised, he is my servant, and as dear to me as when he was in prosperity; though he has his faults, and has appeared to be a man subject to like passions as others; though he has contended with me, has gone about to disannul my judgment, and has darkened counsel by words without knowledge; yet he sees his error, and retracts it, and therefore he is my servant Job still." If we still hold fast the integrity and fidelity of servants to God, as Job did, though we may for a time be deprived of the credit and comfort of the relation, we shall be restored to it at last, as he was. The Devil had undertaken to prove Job a hypocrite, and his three friends had condemned him as a wicked man; but God will confess those whom he accepts, and will not suffer them to be run down by the malice of hell or earth. If God says, *Well done, good and faithful servant*, it is of little consequence who says otherwise.

[2.] He owns that he had *spoken of him the thing that was right*, beyond what his antagonists had done; he had given a much better account of the Divine Providence, than they had done. They had wronged God, by making prosperity a mark of the true church, and affliction a certain indication of God's wrath; but Job had done him right, by maintaining that God's love and hatred are to be judged of by what is in men, not by what is before them, Eccl. 9. 1. Observe, *1st*, Those do the most justice to God and his providence, who have an eye to the rewards and punishments of another world more than to those of this, and with the prospect of those solve the difficulties of the present administration. Job had referred things to the future judgment, and the future state, more than his friends had done, and therefore he spake of God that which was right, better than his friends had done. *Secondly*, Though Job had spoken some things amiss, even concerning God, whom he made too bold with, yet he is commended for what he spake that was right. We must not only not reject that which is true and good, but must not deny it its due praise, though there appear in it a mixture of human frailty and infirmity. *Thirdly*, Job was in the right, and his friends in the wrong, and yet he was in pain, and they at ease; a plain evidence that we cannot judge of men and their sentiments by looking in their faces or purses; He only can do it infallibly, who sees men's hearts.

[3.] He will pass his word for Job, that, notwithstanding all the wrong his friends had done him, he is so good a man, and of such a humble tender forgiving spirit, that he will very readily pray for them, and use his interest in heaven on their behalf. "My servant Job will pray for you, I know he will. I have pardoned him, and he has the comfort of it, and therefore he will pardon you."

[4.] He appoints him to be the priest of this congregation, and promises to accept him and his mediation for his friends. "Take your sacrifices to my servant Job, for him will I accept." Those whom God washes from their sins, he makes to himself kings and priests. True penitents shall not only find favour as petitioners for themselves, but be accepted as intercessors for others also. It was a great honour that God hereby put upon Job, in appointing him to offer sacrifice for his friends, as formerly he used to do for his own children, ch. 1. 5. And a happy presage it was of his restoration to his prosperity again, and indeed a good step towards it, that he was thus restored to the priesthood. Thus he became a type of Christ, through whom alone we and our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God; see 1 Pet. 2. 5. "Go to my servant Job, to my servant Jesus," (from whom for a time he hid his face,) "put your sacrifices into his hand, make use of him as your Advocate, for him will I accept, but, out of him, you must expect to be dealt with according to your folly." And as Job prayed and offered sacrifice for those that had grieved and wounded his spirit, so Christ prayed and died for his persecutors, and ever lives, *making intercession for the transgressors*.

2. Job's friends are greatly mortified. They were good men and belonged to God, and therefore he would not let them lie still

in their mistake any more than Job, but, having humbled him by a discourse out of the whirlwind, he takes another course to humble them. Job, who was dearest to him, was first chidden, but the rest in their turn. When they heard Job talked to, it is probable they flattered themselves with a conceit that they were in the right, and Job in all the fault, but God soon took them to task, and made them know the contrary. In most disputes and controversies, there is something amiss on both sides, either in the merits of the cause, or in the management, or in both; and it is fit that both sides should be told of it, and made to see their errors. God addresses this to Eliphaz, not only as the senior, but as the ringleader in the attack made upon Job. Now,

(1.) God tells them plainly, they had *not spoken of him the thing that was right, like Job*, that is, they had censured and condemned Job, upon a false hypothesis, had represented God fighting against Job as an Enemy, when really he was only trying him as a Friend; and this was not right. Those do not say well of God, who represent his fatherly chastisements of his own children as judicial punishments, and who cut them off from his favour upon the account of them. Note, It is a dangerous thing to judge uncharitably of the spiritual and eternal state of others, for, in so doing, we may perhaps condemn those whom God has accepted, which is a great provocation to him, it is offending his little ones; and he takes himself to be wronged in all the wrongs that are done to them.

(2.) He assures them he was angry with them; *My wrath is kindled against thee and thy two friends*. God is very angry with those who despise and reproach their brethren, who insult over them, and judge hardly of them, either for their calamities, or for their infirmities. Though they were wise and good men, yet, when they spake amiss, God was angry with them, and let them know it.

(3.) He requires from them a sacrifice, to make atonement for what they had said amiss: they must bring each of them seven bullocks, and each of them seven rams, to be offered up to God for a burnt-offering; for it should seem, that, before the law of Moses, all sacrifices, even those of atonement, were wholly burnt, and therefore were so called. They thought they had spoken wonderfully well, and that God was beholden to them for pleading his cause, and owed them a good reward for it; but they are told, that, on the contrary, he is displeased with them, requires from them a sacrifice, and threatens, that, otherwise, he will deal with them after their folly. God is often angry at that in us, which we are ourselves proud of, and sees much amiss in that which we think was done well.

(4.) He orders them to go to Job, and beg of him to offer their sacrifices, and pray for them, otherwise they should not be accepted. By this, God designed, [1.] To humble them and lay them low. They thought that they only were the favourites of Heaven, and that Job had no interest there; but God gives them to understand that he had a better interest there than they had, and stood fairer for God's acceptance than they did. The day may come, when those who despise and censure God's people will court their favour, and be *made to know that God has loved them*, Rev. 3. 9. The foolish virgins will beg oil of the wise. [2.] To oblige them to make their peace with Job, as the condition of their making their peace with God. *If thy brother has sought against thee*, (as Job had a great deal against them,) *first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift*. Satisfaction must first be made for wrong done, according as the nature of the thing requires, before we can hope to obtain from God the forgiveness of sin. See how thoroughly God espoused the cause of his servant Job, and engaged in it; God will not be reconciled to those that have offended him, till they have first begged his pardon, and he be reconciled to them. Job and his friends had differed in their opinion about many things, and been too keen in their reflections one upon another, but now they were to be made friends; in order to that, they are not to argue the matter over again, and try to give it a new turn, (that might be endless,) but they must agree in a sacrifice and a prayer, and that must reconcile them: they must unite in affection and devotion, when they could not concur in the same sentiments. Those who differ in judgment about lesser things, yet are one in Christ the great Sacrifice, and meet

at the same throne of grace, and therefore ought to love and bear with one another. Once more, observe, When God was angry with Job's friends, he did himself put them in a way to make their peace with him. Our quarrels with God always begin on our part, but the reconciliation begins on his.

II. The acquiescence of Job's friends in this judgment given, *v. 9.* They were good men, and, as soon as they understood what the mind of the Lord was, they did as he commanded them, and that speedily and without gainsaying, though it was against flesh and blood to court him thus whom they had condemned. Note, Those who would be reconciled to God, must carefully use the prescribed means and methods of reconciliation. Peace with God is to be had only in his own way, and upon his own terms, and they will never seem hard to those who know how to value the privilege, but they will be glad of it upon any terms, though ever so humbling. Job's friends had all joined in accusing Job, and now they join in begging his pardon; those that have sinned together, should repent together. They that appeal to God, as both Job and his friends had often done, must resolve to stand by his award, whether pleasing or displeasing to their own mind. And they that conscientiously observe God's commands, need not doubt of his favour; *The Lord also accepted Job*, and his friends, in answer to his prayer. It is not said, He accepted *them*, (though that is implied,) but, He accepted *Job*, for them; so he has *made us accepted in the Beloved*, Eph. 1. 6. *Matth. 3. 17.* Job did not insult over his friends, upon the testimony God had given concerning him, and the submission they were obliged to make to him; but, God being graciously reconciled to him, he was easily reconciled to them, and then God accepted him. This is that we should aim at in all our prayers and services, to be accepted of the Lord; this must be the top of our ambition, not to have praise of men, but to please God.

10. And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. 11. Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an ear-ring of gold. 12. So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses. 13. He had also seven sons and three daughters. 14. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. 15. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. 16. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, *even* four generations. 17. So Job died, *being* old and full of days.

Ye have heard of the patience of Job, (says the apostle, *Jam. 5. 11.*) and have seen the end of the Lord, that is, what end the Lord, at length, put to his troubles. In the beginning of this book, we had Job's patience under his troubles, for an example; here, in the close, for our encouragement to follow that example, we have the happy issue of his troubles, and the prosperous condition to which he was restored after them, which confirms us in counting them happy which endure. Perhaps, too, the extraordi-

nary prosperity which Job was crowned with after his afflictions, was intended to be to us Christians a type and figure of the glory and happiness of heaven, which the afflictions of this present time are working for us, and in which they will issue at last; this will be more than double to all the delights and satisfactions we now enjoy, as Job's after-prosperity was to his former, though then he was the greatest of all the men of the east. He that rightly endures temptation, when he is tried, shall receive a *crown of life*, (*Jam. 1. 12.*) as Job, when he was tried, received all the wealth, and honour, and comfort, which here we have an account of.

I. God returned in ways of mercy to him; and his thoughts concerning him were *thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give the expected (nay the unexpected) end*, *Jer. 29. 11.* His troubles began in Satan's malice, which God restrained; his restoration began in God's mercy, which Satan could not oppose. Job's sorest complaint, and indeed the sorrowful accent of all his complaints, on which he laid the greatest emphasis, was, that God appeared against him: but now God plainly appeared for him, and *watched over him to build and to plant, like as he had* (at least, in his apprehension) *watched over him to pluck up and to throw down*, *Jer. 31. 28.* This put a new face upon his affairs immediately, and every thing now looked as pleasing and promising, as, before, it had looked gloomy and frightful. 1. God *turned his captivity*, that is, he redressed his grievances, and took away all the causes of his complaints; he *loosed him from the bond with which Satan had now, for a great while, bound him*, and delivered him out of those cruel hands into which he had delivered him. We may suppose that now all his bodily pains and distempers were healed, so suddenly, and so thoroughly, that the cure was next to miraculous; *His flesh became fresher than a child's, and he returned to the days of his youth*; what was more, he felt a very great alteration in his mind; it was calm and easy, and the tumult was all over, his disquieting thoughts were all vanished, his fears silenced, and the consolations of God were now as much the delight of his soul, as his terrors had been its burthen. The tide thus turned, and his troubles began to ebb as fast as they had flowed, just then *when he was praying for his friends*, praying over his sacrifice which he offered for them. Mercy did not return, when he was disputing with his friends, no, not though he had right on his side, but when he was praying for them; for God is better served and pleased with our warm devotions than with our warm disputations. When Job completed his repentance by this instance of his *forgiving men their trespasses*, then God completed his remission by *turning his captivity*. Note, We are really doing our business, when we are *praying for our friends*, if we pray in a right manner, for in those prayers there is not only faith, but love. Christ has taught us to *pray with, and for, others*, in teaching us to say, *Our Father*; and in seeking mercy for others, we may find mercy ourselves. Our Lord Jesus has his exaltation and dominion there, where he *ever lives making intercession*. Some, by the turning of Job's captivity, understand the restitution which the Sabeans and Chaldeans made of the cattle which they had taken from him, God wonderfully inclining them to do it; and with these he began the world again. Probably, it was so; those spoilers had *swallowed down his riches*, but they were forced to *vomit them up again*, *ch. 20. 15.* But I rather understand this more generally of the turn now given. 2. God doubled his possessions; *Also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before*. It is probable that he did at first, by some way or other, intimate to him, that it was his gracious purpose, by degrees, in due time, to bring him to such a height of prosperity, that he should have twice as much as ever he had, for the encouraging of his hope and the quickening of his industry, and that it might appear that this wonderful increase was a special token of God's favour. And it may be considered as intended, (1.) To balance his losses: he suffered for the glory of God, and therefore God made it up to him with advantage, and allowed him more than interest upon interest. God will take care that none shall lose by him. (2.) To recompense his patience and his confidence in God, which (notwithstanding the workings of corruption) he did not cast away, but still held fast, and that is it which has a *great recompence of reward*, *Heb. 10. 35.* Job's friends had often put their severe censure of Job upon this issue, *If thou wert pure*

and upright, surely now he would awake for thee, *ch. 8. 6.* But he does not awake for thee, therefore thou art not upright: "Well," says God, "though your argument be not conclusive, I will, even by that, demonstrate the integrity of my servant Job; his latter end shall greatly increase, and by that it shall appear, since you will have it so, that it was not for any injustice in his hands, that he suffered the loss of all things." Now it appeared that Job had reason to bless God for taking away, (as he did, *ch. 1. 21.*) since it made so good a return.

II. His old acquaintance, neighbours, and relations, were very kind to him, *v. 11.* They had been estranged from him, and it was not the least of the grievances of his afflicted state; he bitterly complained of their unkindness, *ch. 19. 13, &c.* But now they visited him, with all possible expressions of affection and respect. 1. They put honour upon him, in coming to dine with him as formerly, (but we may suppose) privately bringing their entertainment along with them, so that he had the reputation of feasting them without the expense. 2. They sympathized with him, and shewed a tender concern for him, such as becomes brethren. They bemoaned him, when they talked over the calamities of his afflicted state; and comforted him, when they took notice of God's gracious returns to him. They wept for his griefs, and rejoiced in his joys, and proved not such miserable comforters as his three friends; that, at first, were so forward and officious to attend him. These were not such great men, nor such learned and eloquent men as those, but they proved much more skilful and kind in comforting Job. God sometimes chooses the foolish and weak things of the world, as for conviction, so for comfort. 3. They made a collection among them for the repair of his losses, and the setting of him up again: they did not think it enough to say, *Be warmed, Be filled*, but gave him such things as would be of use to him, *Jam. 2. 16.* Every one gave him a piece of money, some more, it is likely, and some less, according to their ability, and every one an ear-ring of gold, (an ornament much used money by the children of the east,) which would be as good as to him; this was a superfluity which they could well spare, and the rule is, That our abundance must be a supply to our brethren's necessity. But why did Job's relations now, at length, shew this kindness to him? (1.) God put it in their hearts to do so; and every creature is that to us that he makes it to be. Job had acknowledged God in their estrangement from him, for which he now rewarded him in turning them to him again. (2.) Perhaps some of them withdrew from him because they thought him a hypocrite, but, now that his integrity was made manifest, they returned to him, and to communion with him again. When God was friendly to him, they were all willing to be friendly too, *Ps. 119. 74, 79.* Others of them, it may be, withdrew, because he was poor, and sore, and a rueful spectacle, but now that he began to recover, they were willing to renew their acquaintance with him. Swallow-friends, that are gone in winter, will return in the spring, though their friendship is of little value. (3.) Perhaps the rebuke which God had given to Eliphaz and the other two, for their unkindness to Job, awakened the rest of his friends to return to their duty. Reproofs to others we should thus take as admonitions and instructions to us. 4. *Job prayed for his friends*, and then they flocked about him, overcome by his kindness, and every one desiring an interest in his prayers. The more we pray for our friends and relations, the more comfort we may expect in them.

III. His estate strangely increased, by the blessing of God upon the little that his friends gave him. He thankfully received their courtesy, and did not think it below him to have his estate repaired by contributions; he did not, on the one hand, urge his friends to raise money for him, he acquits himself from that, (*ch. 6. 22.*) *Did I say, Bring unto me or give me a reward of your substance?* Yet what they brought, he thankfully accepted, and did not upbraid them with their former unkindnesses, nor ask them why they did not do this sooner; he was neither so covetous and griping as to ask their charity, nor so proud and ill-natured as to refuse it, when they offered it; and being in so good a temper, God gave him that which was far better than their money and ear-rings, and that was, *his blessing, v. 12.* The Lord comforted him now, according to

the days wherein he had afflicted him, and blessed his latter end more than his beginning. Observe, 1. *The blessing of the Lord makes rich*; it is he that gives us power to get wealth, and gives success in honest endeavours. Those therefore that would thrive, must have an eye to God's blessing, and never go out of it, no, not into the warm sun; and those that have thriven, must not sacrifice to their own net, but acknowledge their obligations to God for his blessing. 2. That blessing can make very rich, and sometimes makes good people so. Those that are become rich by getting, think they can easily make themselves very rich by saving; but as those that have little, must depend upon God to make it much, so those that have much, must depend upon God to make it more and to double it; else *ye have sown much, and bring in little, Hag. 1. 6.* 3. The last days of a good man sometimes prove his best days, his last works his best works, his last comforts his best comforts; for his path, like that of the morning-light, shines more and more to the perfect day. Of a wicked man it is said, *His last state is worse than his first, (Luke, 11. 26.)* but of the upright man, *His end is peace*; and sometimes the nearer it is, the clearer are the views of it. In respect of outward prosperity, God is pleased sometimes to make the latter end of a good man's life more comfortable than the former part of it has been, and strangely to outdo the expectations of his afflicted people, who thought they should never have lived to see better days, that we may not despair even in the depths of adversity; we know not what good times we may yet be reserved for in our latter end. *Non si male nunc, et olim sic erit—It may be well with us, though now it is otherwise.* Job, in his affliction, had wished to be as in months past, as rich as he had been before, and quite despaired of that; but God is often better to us than our own fears, nay, than our own wishes, for Job's possessions were doubled to him; the number of his cattle, his sheep and camels, his oxen and she-asses, is just double here to what it was, *ch. 1. 3.* This is a remarkable instance of the extent of the Divine Providence to things that seem minute, as this, of the exact number of a man's cattle; as also of the harmony of Providence, and the reference of one event to another; for *known unto God are all his works, from the beginning to the end.* Job's other possessions, no doubt, were increased in proportion to his cattle, lands, money, and servants, &c. So that if before he was the greatest of all the men of the east, what was he now?

IV. His family was built up again, and he had great comfort in his children, *v. 13. 15.* The last of his afflictions that are recorded, (*ch. 1.*) and the most grievous, was, the death of all his children at once; his friends upbraided him with it, (*ch. 8. 4.*) but God repaired even that breach in process of time, either by the same wife, or, she being dead, by another. 1. The number of his children was the same as before, *seven sons and three daughters.* Some give this reason why they were not doubled as his cattle were, because his children that were dead, were not lost, but gone before to a better world; and therefore if he have but the same number of them, they may be reckoned doubled, for he has two fleeces of children, (as I may say,) *Mahanaim—Two hosts*, one in heaven, the other on earth, and in both he is rich. 2. The names of his daughters are here registered, (*v. 14.*) because, in the significations of them, they seemed designed to perpetuate the remembrance of God's great goodness to him in the surprising change of his condition; he called the first *Jemima, The day*, (whence perhaps *Diana* had her name,) because of the shining forth of his prosperity after a dark night of affliction. The next *Kezia*, a spice of a very fragrant smell, because (says Bishop Patrick) God had healed his ulcers. The third *Keren-happuch*, that is, *Plenty restored*, or *A horn of paint*; because (says he) God had wiped away the tears which fouled his face, *ch. 16. 16.* Concerning these daughters we are here told, *v. 15.* (1.) That God adorned them with great beauty, *no women so fair as the daughters of Job.* In the Old Testament we often find women praised for their beauty, as Sarah, Rebekah, and many others; but we never find any women in the New Testament, whose beauty is in the least taken notice of, no not the Virgin Mary herself, because the beauty of holiness is that which is brought to a much clearer light by the gospel. (2.) That their father (God enabling him to do it) supplied them

with great fortunes. *He gave them inheritance among their brethren*, and did not turn them off with small portions, as most did. It is probable that they had some extraordinary personal merit, which Job had an eye to in the extraordinary favour he shewed them. Perhaps they excelled their brethren in wisdom and piety; and therefore, that they might continue in his family, to be a stay and blessing to it, he made them co-heirs with their brethren.

V. His life was long. What age he was, when his troubles came, we are no where told; but here we are told he lived 140 years; whence some conjecture that he was 70 when he was in his troubles, and that so his age was doubled, as his other possessions.

1. He lived to have much of the comfort of this life, for he saw

his posterity to the fourth generation, v. 16. Though his children were not doubled to him, yet, in his children's children, (and those are the crown of old men,) they were more than doubled. As God appointed to Adam another seed instead of that which was slain, (Gen. 4. 25.) so he did to Job with advantage. God has ways to repair the losses, and balance the griefs, of those who are written childless, as Job was, when he had buried all his children.

2. He lived till he was satisfied, for he died full of days, satisfied with living in this world, and willing to leave it; not peevishly so, as in the days of his affliction, but piously so, and thus, as Eliphaz had encouraged him to hope, *he came to his grave like a shock of corn in his season.*

AN

E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH

Practical Observations.

OF THE BOOK OF

P S A L M S.

We have now before us one of the choicest and most excellent parts of all the Old Testament; nay, so much is there in it of CHRIST and his gospel, as well as of GOD and his law, that it has been called *the abstract, or summary, of both Testaments*. The History of Israel, which we were long upon, led us to camps and council-boards, and there entertained and instructed us in the knowledge of GOD. The book of Job brought us into the schools, and treated us with profitable disputations concerning GOD and his providence; but this book brings us into the sanctuary, draws us off from converse with men, with the politicians, philosophers, or disputers, of this world, and directs us into communion with GOD, by solacing and reposing our souls in him, lifting up, and letting out, our hearts toward him. Thus may we be in the mount with GOD; and we understand not ourselves, if we say not, *It is good to be here.*

Let us consider,

I. The title of this book. It is called, 1. *The Psalms*; under that title it is referred to, Luke, 24. 44. The Hebrew calls it *Tehillim*, which properly signifies *Psalms of praise*; because many of them are such: but *Psalms* is a more general word, meaning all metrical compositions fitted to be sung, which may as well be historical, doctrinal, or supplicatory, as laudatory. Though singing be properly the voice of joy, yet the intention of songs is of a much greater latitude, to assist the memory, and both to express and to excite all the other affections, as well as this of joy. The priests had a mournful muse as well as joyful ones; and the divine institution of singing psalms is thus largely displayed; for we are directed, not only to praise GOD, but to teach and admonish ourselves and one another *in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs*, Col. 3. 16. 2. It is called the *Book of Psalms*; so it is quoted by St. Peter, Acts, 1. 20. It is a collection of psalms, of all the psalms that were divinely inspired, which, though composed at several times and upon several occasions, are here put together without any reference to, or dependence

PSALMS.

upon, one another; thus they were preserved from being scattered and lost, and laid in so much greater readiness for the service of the church. See what a good Master we serve, and what pleasantness there is in wisdom's ways, when we are not only commanded to sing at our work, and have cause enough given us to do so, but have words also put in our mouths, and songs prepared to our hands.

II. The Author of this book. It is, no doubt, derived originally from the Blessed Spirit. They are spiritual songs, words which the Holy Ghost taught. The penman of most of them was David, the son of Jesse, who is therefore called the *sweet psalmist of Israel*, 2Sam.23.1. Some that have not his name in their titles, yet are expressly ascribed to him elsewhere; as Ps.2. (Acts,4.25.) and Ps.96,105, (1Chron.16.) One psalm is expressly said to be *the prayer of Moses*; (Ps.90.) and that some of the psalms were penned by Asaph, is intimated, 2Chron.29,30. where they are said to *praise the Lord in the words of David, and Asaph*, who is there called a *seer* or *prophet*. Some of the psalms seem to have been penned long after; as Ps.137. at the time of the captivity in Babylon; but the far greater part of them were certainly penned by David himself, whose genius lay toward poetry and music, and who was raised up, qualified, and animated, for the establishing of the ordinance of singing psalms in the church of GOD, as Moses and Aaron were, in their day, for the settling of the ordinances of sacrifice; their's is superseded, but his remains, and will to the end of time, when it shall be swallowed up in the songs of eternity. Herein David was a type of CHRIST, who descended from him, not from Moses, because he came to take away sacrifice, (the family of Moses was soon lost and extinct,) but to establish and perpetuate joy and praise; for of the family of David in CHRIST there shall be no end.

III. The scope of it. It is manifestly intended, 1. To assist the exercises of natural religion, and to kindle in the souls of men those devout affections which we owe to GOD as our Creator, Owner, Ruler, and Benefactor. The book of Job helps to prove our first principles of the divine perfections and providence; but this helps to improve them in prayers and praises, and professions of desire toward him, dependence on him, and an entire devotedness and resignation to him. Other parts of scripture shew that GOD is infinitely above man, and his sovereign LORD; but this shews us that he may, notwithstanding, be conversed with by us sinful worms of the earth; and there are ways in which, if it be not our own fault, we may keep up communion with him in all the various conditions of human life. 2. To advance the excellencies of revealed religion, and, in the most pleasing powerful manner, to recommend it to the world. There is indeed little or nothing, in all the book of *Psalms*, of the ceremonial law. Though sacrifice and offering were yet to continue many ages, yet they are here represented as things which GOD did not desire, (Ps.40.6.—51.16.) as things comparatively little, and which, in time, were to vanish away. But the word and law of GOD, those parts of it which are moral, and of perpetual obligation, are here, all along, magnified and made honourable, no where more. And CHRIST, the Crown and Centre of revealed religion, the Foundation, Corner, and Top-stone, of that blessed building, is here clearly spoken of in type and prophecy; both his sufferings and the glory that should follow, and the kingdom that he should set up in the world, which GOD's covenant with David, concerning his kingdom, was to have its accomplishment in. What a high value does this book put upon the word of GOD, his statutes and judgments, his covenant, and the great and precious promises of it; and how does it recommend them to us as our guide and stay, and our heritage for ever!

IV. The use of it. All scripture, being given by inspiration of GOD, is profitable to convey divine light into our understandings; but this book is of singular use with that to convey divine life and power, and a holy warmth, into our affections. There is no one book of scripture that is more helpful to the devotions of the saints than this, and it has been so in all ages of the church, ever since it was written, and the several parts of it delivered to the chief musician, for the service of the church. 1. It is of use to be sung. Further than David's psalms we *may* go, but we *need* not, for hymns and spiritual songs. What the rules of the Hebrew metre were, even the learned are not certain. But these psalms ought to be rendered according to the metre of every language, at least, so as that they may be sung for the edification of the church. And methinks it is a great comfort to us, when we are singing David's psalms, that we are offering the very same praises to GOD, that were offered him in the days of David and the other godly kings of Judah. So rich, so well made, are these divine poems, that they can never be exhausted, can never be worn thread-bare. 2. It is of use to be read and opened by the ministers of CHRIST, as containing great and excellent truths, and rules concerning good and evil. Our Lord JESUS expounded the psalms to his disciples, the gospel psalms, and opened their understandings (for he had the key of David) to understand them, Luke,24.44. 3. It is of use to be read and meditated upon by all good people. It is a full fountain, out of which we may all be drawing water with joy. The Psalmist's experiences are of great use for our direction, caution, and encouragement. In telling us, as he often does, what passed between God and his soul, he lets us know what we may expect from GOD, and what he will expect, and require, and graciously accept, from us. David was a man after God's own heart, and therefore those who find themselves in some measure according to his heart, have reason to hope that they are renewed by the grace of GOD, after the image of GOD, and may have much comfort in the testimony of their consciences for them, that they can heartily say *Amen* to David's prayers and praises. 4. Even the Psalmist's expressions too are of great use; and by them the Spirit helps our praying infirmities, because we know not what to pray for as we ought. In all our approaches to GOD, as well as in our first returns to GOD, we are directed to *take with us words*, (Hos.14.2.) these words, words which the Holy Ghost teaches. If we make David's psalms familiar to us, as we to do, whatever errand we have at the throne of grace, by way of confession, petition, or thanksgiving, we may from thence be assisted in the delivery of it; whatever devout affection is working in us, holy desire or hope, sorrow or joy, we may there find apt words wherewith to clothe it; sound speech which cannot be condemned. It will be good to collect the most proper and lively expressions of devotion, which we find here, and to methodize them, and reduce them to the several heads of prayer, that they may be the more ready to us. Or, we may take sometimes one choice psalm, and sometimes another, and pray it over, that is, enlarge upon each verse in our own thoughts, and offer up our meditations to God, as they arise from the expressions we find there. The learned Dr. Hammond, in his preface to his paraphrase on the *Psalms*, (sect.29.) says, "That going over a few psalms with these interpositions of mental devotion, suggested, animated, and maintained, by the native life and vigour which is in the psalms, is much to be preferred before the saying over of the whole Psalter, since nothing is more fit to be averted in religious offices, than their degenerating into heartless, dispirited,

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"recitations." If, as St. Austin advises, we form our spirit by the affection of the psalm, we may then be sure of acceptance with GOD, in using the language of it. Nor is it only our devotion, and the affections of our mind, that the book of Psalms assists, teaching us how to offer praise so as to glorify GOD, but it is also a directory to the actions of our lives, and teaches us how to *order our conversation aright, so as that, in the end, we may see the salvation of GOD*, Ps. 50. 23. The Psalms were thus serviceable to the Old-Testament Church, but to us Christians they may be of more use than they could be to them who lived before the coming of CHRIST; for, as Moses's sacrifices, so David's songs, are expounded and made more intelligible by the the gospel of CHRIST, which lets us within the veil; so that, if to David's prayers and praises we add St. Paul's prayers in his Epistles, and the new songs in the Revelation, we shall be thoroughly furnished for this good work; for the scripture, perfected, makes the man of GOD perfect.

As to the division of this book, we need not be solicitous; there is no connexion (or very seldom) between one psalm and another, nor any reason discernible for the placing of them in the order wherein we here find them; but it seems to be ancient, for that which is now the second psalm, was so in the Apostles' time, Acts, 13. 33. The vulgar Latin joins the 9th and 10th together; all popish authors quote by that, so that thenceforward, throughout the book, their number is one short of our's; our 11, is their 10; our 119, their 118. But then they divide the 147th into two, and so make up the number of 150. Some have endeavoured to reduce the psalms to proper heads, according to the matter of them, but there is often such a variety of matter in one and the same psalm, that it cannot be done with any certainty; but the seven penitential psalms have been in a particular manner singled out by the devotions of many. They are reckoned to be the 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. The psalms were divided into five books, each concluding with *Amen, Amen, or Hallelujah*; the first ending with Ps. 41, the second with Ps. 72, the third with Ps. 89, the fourth with Ps. 106, the fifth with Ps. 150. Others divide them into three fifties; others into sixty parts, two for every day of the month, one for the morning, the other for the evening. Let good Christians divide them for themselves, so as may best increase their acquaintance with them, that they may have them at hand upon all occasions, and may sing them in the spirit and with the understanding.

PSALMS, I.

The Happy Man.

PSALM I.

This is a psalm of instruction concerning good and evil, setting before us life and death, the blessing and the curse, that we may take the right way which leads to happiness, and avoid that which will certainly end in our misery and ruin. The different character and condition of godly people and wicked people, those that serve God and those that serve him not, is here plainly stated in a few words; so that every man, if he will be faithful to himself, may here see his own face, and then read his own doom. That division of the children of men into saints and sinners, righteous and unrighteous, the children of God and the children of the wicked one, as it is ancient, ever since the struggle began between sin and grace, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, so it is lasting, and will survive all other divisions and subdivisions of men into high and low, rich and poor, bond and free; for by this, men's everlasting state will be determined, and the distinction will last as long as heaven and hell. This psalm shews us, I. The holiness and happiness of a godly man, v. 1. 3. II. The sinfulness and misery of a wicked man, v. 4, 5. III. The ground and reason of both, v. 6. Whoever collected the psalms of David, (probably it was Ezra,) with good reason put this psalm first, as a preface to the rest, because it is absolutely necessary, to the acceptance of our devotions, that we be righteous before God, (for it is only the prayer of the upright that is his delight,) and, therefore, that we be right in our notions of blessedness, and in our choice of the way that leads to it. Those are not fit to put up good prayers, who do not walk in good ways.

1. **BLESSED** is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

The psalmist begins with the character and condition of a

godly man, that those may first take the comfort of that, to whom it belongs. Here is,

I. A description given of the godly man's spirit and way, by which we are to try ourselves. The Lord knows them that are his by name, but we must know them by their character; for that is agreeable to a state of probation, that we may study to answer to the character, which is indeed both the command of the law, which we are bound in duty to obey, and the condition of the promise, which we are bound in interest to fulfil. The character of a good man is here given by the rules he chooses to walk by, and to take his measures from. What we take at our setting out, and at every turn, for the guide of our conversation, whether the course of this world, or the word of God, is of material consequence. An error in the choice of our standard and leader, is original and fatal; but if we be right here, we are in a fair way to do well.

1. A godly man, that he may avoid the evil, utterly renounces the conduct, of evil-doers, and will not be led by them; (v. 1.) *He walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, &c.* This part of his character is put first, because those that will keep the commandments of their God, must say to evil-doers, *Depart from us*; (119. 115.) and departing from evil, is that in which wisdom begins. (1.) He sees evil-doers round about him, the world is full of them, they walk on every side; they are here described by three characters, *ungodly, sinners, and scornful*. See by what steps men arrive at the height of impiety: *Nemo repente fit turpissimus—None reach the height of vice at once*. They are *ungodly* first, casting off the fear of God, and living in the neglect of their duty to him: but they rest not there; when the services of religion are laid aside, they come to be *sinners*, they break out into open rebellion against God, and engage in the service of sin and Satan; omissions make way for commissions; and by these the heart is so hardened, that, at length, they come to be *scorners*, they openly defy all that is sacred, scoff at religion, and make a jest of sin. Thus is the way of iniquity down hill; the bad grow

worse, sinners themselves become tempters to others, and advocates for Baal. The word which we translate *ungodly*, signifies such as are unsettled, aim at no certain end, and walk by no certain rule, but are at the command of every lust, and at the beck of every temptation. The word for *sinners* signifies such as are determined for the practice of sin, and set it up as their trade. The *scornful* are those that set *their mouths against the heavens*. These the good man sees with a sad heart, they are a constant vexation to his righteous soul. But, (2.) He shuns them wherever he sees them. He does not do as they do; and, that he may not, he does not converse familiarly with them. [1.] He does *not walk in the counsel of the ungodly*; he is not present at their councils, nor does he advise with them; though they are ever so witty, and subtle, and learned, if they are ungodly, they shall not be the men of his council; he does not consent to them, nor *say as they say*; (Luke, 23. 51.) he does not take his measures from their principles, nor act according to the advice which they give and take. The ungodly are forward to give their advice against religion, and it is managed so artfully, that we have reason to think ourselves happy if we escape being tainted and ensnared by it. [2.] He *stands not in the way of sinners*; he avoids doing as they do; their way shall not be his way, he will not come into it, much less will he continue in it, as the sinner does, who *sets himself in a way that is not good*, 36. 4. He avoids (as much as may be) being where they are: that he may not imitate them, he will not associate with them, nor choose them for his companions. He does not stand in their way, to be picked up by them, (Prov. 7. 8.) but keeps as far from them as from a place or person infected with the plague, for fear of the contagion, Prov. 4. 14, 15. He that would be kept from harm, must keep out of harm's way. [3.] He *sits not in the seat of the scornful*; he does not repose himself with those that sit down secure in their wickedness, and please themselves with the searedness of their own consciences; he does not associate with those that sit in close cabal, to find out ways and means for the support and advancement of the Devil's kingdom, or that sit in open judgment, magisterially to condemn the generation of the righteous. The seat of the drunkards is the *seat of the scornful*, 69. 12. Happy is the man that never sits in it, Hos. 7. 5.

2. A godly man, that he may do that which is good, and cleave to it, submits to the direction of the word of God, and makes that familiar to him, v. 2. This is that which keeps him out of the way of the ungodly, and fortifies him against their temptations; *By the words of thy lips I have kept me from the path of the deceiver*, 17. 4. We need not court the fellowship of sinners, either for pleasure or for improvement, while we have fellowship with the word of God, and with God himself in and by his word; *When thou wakest, it shall talk with thee*, Prov. 6. 22. We may judge of our spiritual state by asking, "What is the law of God to us? What account do we make of it? What place has it in us?" See here, (1.) The entire affection which a good man has for the law of God; his delight is in it. He delights in it, though it be a law, a yoke, because it is the law of God, which is holy, just, and good, which he freely consents to, and so delights in, *after the inner man*, Rom. 7. 16, 22. All who are well-pleased that there is a God, must be well-pleased that there is a Bible, a revelation of God, of his will, and of the only way to happiness in him. (2.) The intimate acquaintance which a good man keeps up with the word of God; *in that law doth he meditate day and night*; by this it appears that his delight is in it, for what we love, we love to think of, 119. 97. To meditate in God's word, is to discourse with ourselves concerning the great things contained in it, with a close application of mind, a fixedness of thought, till we be suitably affected with those things, and experience the favour and power of them in our hearts. This we must do, *day and night*; we must have a constant habitual regard to the word of God, as the rule of our actions and the spring of our comforts, and we must have it in our thoughts, accordingly, upon every occasion that occurs, whether night or day. No time is amiss for meditating on the word of God, nor any time unseasonable for those visits. We must not only set ourselves to meditate on God's

word, morning and evening, at the entrance of the day and of the night; but these thoughts should be interwoven with the business and converse of every day, and with the repose and slumbers of every night; *When I awake, I am still with thee*.

II. An assurance given of the godly man's happiness, with which we should encourage ourselves to answer the character of such.

1. In general, he is *blessed*, v. 1. God blesses him, and that blessing will make him happy. Blessednesses are to him blessings of all kinds, of the upper and nether springs, enough to make him completely happy; none of the ingredients of happiness shall be wanting to him. When he undertakes to describe a blessed man, he describes a good man; for, after all, those only are happy, truly happy, that are holy, truly holy, and we are more concerned to know the way to blessedness than to know wherein blessedness will consist. Nay, goodness and holiness are not only the way to happiness, (Rev. 22. 14.) but happiness itself; supposing there were not another life after this, yet that man is a happy man that keeps in the way of his duty.

2. His blessedness is here illustrated by a similitude; (v. 3.) *He shall be like a tree*, fruitful and flourishing. This is the effect, (1.) Of his pious practice; he meditates in the law of God, turns that *in succum et sanguinem—into juice and blood*, and that makes him like a tree. The more we converse with the word of God, the better furnished we are for every good word and work. Or, (2.) Of the promised blessing; he is blessed of the Lord, and therefore *he shall be like a tree*. The divine blessing produces real effects. It is the happiness of a godly man, [1.] That he is planted by the grace of God: these trees were by nature wild olives, and will continue so till they are grafted anew, and so planted by a power from above. Never any good tree grew of itself, it is *the planting of the Lord*, and therefore he must in it be glorified; (Isa. 61. 3.) *The trees of the Lord are full of sap*. [2.] That he is placed by the means of grace; here called *the rivers of water*, those rivers which *make glad the city of our God*; (36. 4.) from these a good man receives supplies of strength and vigour, but in secret undiscerned ways. [3.] That his practices shall be fruit, amounting to a good account, Phil. 4. 17. To those whom God first blessed, he said, *Be fruitful*; (Gen. 1. 22.) and still the comfort and honour of fruitfulness are a recompence for the labour of it. It is expected from those who enjoy the mercies of grace, that, both in the temper of their minds, and in the tenor of their lives, they comply with the intentions of that grace, and then they bring forth fruit. And, be it observed to the praise of the great Dresser of the vineyard, they bring forth their fruit, (that which is required of them,) in due season, when it is most beautiful and most useful; improving every opportunity of doing good, and doing it in its proper time. [4.] That his profession shall be preserved from blemish and decay; *His leaf also shall not wither*. Even the *leaf* of those who bring forth only the leaves of profession, without any good fruit, will wither, and they shall be as much ashamed of their profession as ever they were proud of it; but if the word of God rule in the heart, that will keep the profession green, both to our comfort and to our credit; the laurels, thus won, shall never wither. [5.] That prosperity shall attend him, wherever he goes, soul-prosperity. Whatever he does in conformity to the law, it shall prosper and succeed to his mind, or above his hope.

In singing these verses, being duly affected with the malignant and dangerous nature of sin, and transcendent excellencies of the divine law, and the power and efficacy of God's grace, from which our fruit is found, we must teach and admonish ourselves, and one another, to watch against sin and all approaches toward it, to converse much with the word of God, and abound in the fruit of righteousness: and, in praying over them, we must seek to God for his grace, both to fortify us against every evil word and work, and to furnish us for every good word and work.

4. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor

sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous : but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Here is,

1. The description of the ungodly given, v. 4. (1.) In general; they are the reverse of the righteous, both in character and condition; *they are not so*. The LXX emphatically repeat this, *not so* the ungodly, they are *not so*; they are led by the counsel of the wicked, in the way of sinners, to the seat of the scornful; they have no delight in the law of God, nor ever think of it; they bring forth no fruit, but grapes of Sodom; they cumber the ground. (2.) In particular; whereas the righteous are like useful, fruitful, trees, *they are like the chaff which the wind drives away*, the very lightest of the chaff, the dust, which the owner of the floor desires to have driven away, as not capable of being put to any use. Would you value them? would you weigh them? They are like chaff, of no worth at all in God's account, how highly soever they may value themselves. Would you know the temper of their minds? They are light and vain, they have no substance in them, no solidity; they are easily driven to and fro by every wind and temptation, and have no steadfastness. Would you know their end? The wrath of God will drive them away in their wickedness, as the wind does the chaff, which is never gathered or looked after more. The chaff may be, for a while, among the wheat; but He is coming, *whose fan is in his hand*, and who will *thoroughly purge his floor*. They that by their own sin and folly make themselves as chaff, will be found so before the whirlwind and fire of divine wrath, (35. 5.) so unable to stand before it, or to escape it, Isa. 17. 13.

2. The doom of the ungodly read, v. 5. (1.) They will be cast, up in their trial, as traitors convicted; *they shall not stand in the judgment*; they shall be found guilty, shall hang down the head with shame and confusion, and all their pleas and excuses will be overruled as frivolous. There is a judgment to come, in which every man's present character and work, though ever so artfully concealed and disguised, shall be truly and perfectly discovered, and appear in their own colours, and every man's future state will be, by an irreversible sentence, determined for eternity. The ungodly must appear in that judgment, to receive according to the things done in the body; they may hope to come off, nay, to come off with honour, but their hope will deceive them; *they shall not stand in the judgment*; so plain will the evidence be against them, and so just and impartial will the judgment be upon it. (2.) They will be for ever shut out from the society of the blessed; they shall not stand *in the congregation of the righteous*; in the judgment, so some, in that court wherein the saints, as assessors with Christ, shall judge the world, those holy myriads with which he shall come to execute judgment upon all, Jude, 14. 1 Cor. 6. 2. Or, in heaven; there will be seen, shortly, a general assembly of the church of the first-born, a congregation of the righteous, of all the saints, and none but saints, and saints made perfect, such a congregation of them as never was in this world, 2 Thess. 2. 1. The wicked shall not have a place in that congregation. Into the new Jerusalem none unclean or unsanctified shall enter; they shall see the righteous enter into the kingdom, and themselves, to their everlasting vexation, thrust out, Luke, 13. 27. The wicked and profane, in this world, ridiculed the righteous and their congregation, despised them, and cared not for their company; justly, therefore, will they be for ever separated from them. Hypocrites, in this world, under the disguise of a plausible profession, may thrust themselves into the congregation of the righteous, and remain undisturbed and undiscovered there; but Christ cannot be imposed upon, though his ministers may; the day is coming when he will separate *between the sheep and the goats, the tares and the wheat*; see Matth. 13. 41, 49. That great day, so the Chaldee here calls it, will be a day of discovery, a day of distinction, and a day of final division. Then you shall return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, which here it is sometimes hard to do, Mal. 3. 18.

3. The reason rendered of this different state of the godly and

wicked, v. 6. (1.) God must have all the glory of the prosperity and happiness of the righteous. They are blessed, because *the Lord knows their way*; he chose them into it, inclined them to choose it, leads and guides them in it, and orders all their steps. (2.) Sinners must bear all the blame of their own destruction. Therefore the ungodly perish, because the very way in which they have chosen and resolved to walk, leads directly to destruction; it naturally tends towards ruin, and therefore must necessarily end in it. Or, we may take it thus, The Lord approves of, and is well-pleased with, the way of the righteous, and therefore, under the influence of his gracious smiles, it shall prosper, and end well; but he is angry at the way of the wicked, all they do is offensive to him, and therefore it shall perish, and they in it. It is certain that every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord, and it is well or ill with us, and is likely to be so to all eternity, according as we are or are not accepted of God. Let this support the drooping spirits of the righteous, that the Lord knows their way, knows their hearts, (Jer. 12. 3.) knows their secret devotions, (Matth. 6. 6.) knows their character, how much soever it is blackened and blemished by the reproaches of men, and will shortly make them and their way manifest before the world, to their immortal joy and honour. Let this cast a damp upon the security and jollity of sinners, that their way, though pleasant now, will perish at last.

In singing these verses, and praying over them, let us possess ourselves with a holy dread of the wicked man's portion, and deprecate it with a firm and lively expectation of the judgment to come, and stir up ourselves to prepare for it, and with a holy care to approve ourselves to God in every thing, entreating his favour with our whole hearts

PSALM II.

As the foregoing psalm was moral, and shewed us our duty, so this is evangelical, and shews us our Saviour. Under the type of David's kingdom, which was of divine appointment, met with much opposition, but prevailed at last, the kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, is prophesied of, which is the primary intention and scope of the psalm; and I think there is less in it of the type, and more of the anti-type, than in any of the gospel-psalms, for there is nothing in it but what is applicable to Christ, but some things that are not at all applicable to David; (v. 6. 7.) Thou art my Son, (v. 8.) I will give thee the uttermost parts of the earth, and, (v. 12.) Kiss the Son. It is interpreted of Christ, Acts, 4. 27.—13. 33. Heb. 1. 5. The holy Ghost here foretells, I. The opposition that should be given to the kingdom of the Messiah, v. 1. 3. II. The baffling and chastising of that opposition, v. 4, 5. III. The setting up of the kingdom of Christ, notwithstanding that opposition, v. 6. IV. The confirmation and establishment of it, v. 7. V. A promise of the enlargement and success of it, v. 8, 9. VI. A call and exhortation to kings and princes to yield themselves the willing subjects of this kingdom, v. 10. 12. Or thus: We have here, 1. Threatenings denounced against the adversaries of Christ's kingdom, v. 1. 6. 2. Promises made to Christ himself, the Head of this kingdom, v. 7. 9. 3. Counsel given to all to espouse the interests of this kingdom, v. 10. 12. This psalm, as the former, is very fitly prefixed to this book of devotions, because, as it is necessary to our acceptance with God that we should be subject to the precepts of his law, so it is likewise that we should be subject to the grace of his gospel, and come to him in the name of a Mediator.

1. **W**HY do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? 2. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his Anointed, saying, 3. Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. 4. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. 5. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. 6. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

We have here a very great struggle about the kingdom of Christ, hell and heaven contesting it; the seat of the war is this earth, where Satan has long had an usurped kingdom, and exer-

cise'd dominion to that degree, that he has been called *The prince of the power of the very air we breathe in, and The god of the world we live in*. He knows very well, that, as the Messiah's kingdom rises and gets ground, his falls and loses ground; and therefore, though it will be set up certainly, it shall not be set up tamely. Observe here,

1. The mighty opposition that would be given to the Messiah and his kingdom, to his holy religion, and all the interests of it, v. 1. 3. One would have expected that so great a blessing to this world should have been universally welcomed and embraced, and that every sheaf should immediately have bowed to that of the Messiah, and all the crowns and sceptres on earth should have been laid at his feet; but it proves quite contrary. Never were the notions of any set of philosophers, though ever so absurd, nor the powers of any prince or state, though ever so tyrannical, opposed with so much violence as the doctrine and government of Christ. A sign that it was from heaven, for the opposition was plainly from hell originally.

1. We are here told who would appear as adversaries to Christ, and the Devil's instruments in this opposition to his kingdom. Princes and people, court and country, have sometimes separate interests, but here they are united against Christ; not the mighty only, but the mob, the *heathen*, the *people*, numbers of them, communities of them; though usually fond of liberty, yet they were averse to the liberty Christ came to procure and proclaim. Not the mob only, but the mighty, (among whom one might have expected more sense and consideration,) appear violent against Christ; though his kingdom is not of this world, nor intended to weaken their interests, but very likely, if they pleased, to strengthen them, yet the kings of the earth and rulers are up in arms immediately. See the effects of the old enmity in the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman, and how general and malignant the corruption of mankind is. See how formidable the enemies of the church are; they are numerous, they are potent. The unbelieving Jews* are here called *heathen*, so wretchedly were they degenerated from the faith and holiness of their ancestors; they stirred up the heathen, the Gentiles, to persecute the Christians. As the Philistines and their lords, Saul and his courtiers, the disaffected party and their ringleaders, opposed David's coming to the crown; so Herod and Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jews, did their utmost against Christ and his interest in men, Acts, 4. 27.

2. Who is it that they quarrel with, and muster up all their forces against; it is *against the Lord, and against his Anointed*, against all religion in general, and the Christian religion in particular. It is certain that all who are enemies to Christ, whatever they pretend, are enemies to God himself; they *have hated both me and my Father*, John, 15. 24. The great Author of our holy religion is here called *the Lord's Anointed, or Messiah, or Christ*, in allusion to the anointing of David to be king: he is both authorized and qualified to be the church's Head and King, is duly invested in the office, and every way fitted for it; yet there are those that are against him; nay, *therefore* they are against him, because they are impatient of God's authority, envious at Christ's advancement, and have a rooted enmity to the Spirit of holiness.

3. The opposition they give is here described; (1.) It is a most spiteful and malicious opposition. They *rage* and *fret*, they gnash their teeth, for vexation at the setting up of Christ's kingdom; it creates them the utmost uneasiness, and fills them with indignation, so that they have no enjoyment of themselves; see Luke, 13. 14. John, 11. 47. Acts, 5. 17, 33—19. 28. Idolaters raged at the discovery of their folly, the chief priests and Pharisees at the eclipsing of their glory and the shaking of their usurped dominion. They that did evil raged at the light. (2.) It is a deliberate and politic opposition. They *imagine*, or meditate; they contrive means to suppress the rising interests of Christ's kingdom, and are very confident of the success of their contrivances; they promise themselves that they shall run down religion, and carry the day.

(3.) It is a resolute and obstinate opposition. They *set themselves*, set their faces as a flint, and their hearts as an adamant, in defiance of reason and conscience, and all the terrors of the Lord; they are proud and daring, like the Babel-builders, and will persist in their resolution, come what will. (4.) It is a combined and confederate opposition. They *take counsel together*, to assist and animate one another in this opposition; they carry their resolutions *nemine contradicente—unanimously*, that they will push on the unholy war against the Messiah with the utmost vigour: and, thereupon, councils are called, cabals are formed, and all their wits are at work, to find out ways and means for the preventing of the establishment of Christ's kingdom, 83. 5.

4. We are here told what it is they are exasperated at, and what they aim at in this opposition; (v. 3.) *Let us break their bands asunder*. They will not be under any government; they are children of Belial, that cannot endure the yoke, at least the yoke of the Lord and his Anointed. They will be content to entertain such notions of the kingdom of God and the Messiah as will serve them to dispute of, and to support their own dominion with: if the Lord and his Anointed will make them rich and great in the world, they will bid them welcome; but if they will restrain their corrupt appetites and passions, regulate and reform their hearts and lives, and bring them under the government of a pure and heavenly religion, truly then *they will not have this man to reign over them*, Luke, 19. 14. Christ has *bands and cords* for us; they that will be saved by him must be ruled by him; but they are cords of a man, agreeable to right reason, and bands of love, conducive to our true interest: and yet against those the quarrel is. Why do men oppose religion, but because they are impatient of its restraints and obligations? They would break asunder the bands of conscience they are under, and the cords of God's commandments, by which they are called to tie themselves out from all sin, and to tie themselves up to all duty; they will not receive, but cast them away as far from them as they can.

5. They are here reasoned with concerning it, v. 1. Why do they do this? (1.) They can shew no good cause for opposing so just, holy, and gracious a government, which will not interfere with the secular powers, nor introduce any dangerous principles hurtful to kings or provinces; but, on the contrary, if universally received, would bring a heaven upon earth. (2.) They can hope for no good success in opposing so powerful a kingdom, with which they are utterly unable to contend. It is a vain thing; when they have done their worst, Christ will have a church in the world, and that church shall be glorious and triumphant; it is *built upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. The moon walks in brightness, though the dogs bark at it.

II. The mighty conquest gained over all this threatening opposition. If heaven and earth be the combatants, it is easy to foretell which will be the conqueror. They that make this mighty struggle are the people of the earth, and the kings of the earth, who, being of the earth, are earthy; but He whom they contest with is one that *sits in the heavens*, v. 4. He is in the heaven, a place of such a vast prospect, that he can oversee them all, and all their projects; and such is his power, that he can overcome them all, and all their attempts: he sits there, as one easy and at rest, out of the reach of all their impotent menaces and attempts. There he sits as Judge in all the affairs of the children of men, perfectly secure of the full accomplishment of all his own purposes and designs, in spite of all opposition, 29. 10. The perfect repose of the Eternal Mind may be our comfort under all the disquietments of our mind. We are tossed on earth and in the sea, but he sits in the heavens, where he has prepared his throne for judgment; and therefore,

1. The attempts of Christ's enemies are easily ridiculed; God *laughs* at them as a company of fools. He has them, and all their attempts, in derision, and therefore *the virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised them*, Isa. 37. 22. Sinners' follies are the just sport of

* By the *heathen*, it is more probable we are to understand the *Gentiles* exclusively.—ED.

God's infinite wisdom and power; and those attempts of the kingdom of Satan, which in our eyes are formidable, in his are despicable. Sometimes God is said to *awake*, and *arise*, and *stir up himself*, for the vanquishing of his enemies; here he is said to *sit still* and do it; for the utmost operations of God's omnipotence create no difficulty at all, nor the least disturbance to his eternal rest.

2. They are *justly punished*, v. 5. Though God despises them as impotent, yet he does not therefore wink at them, but is justly displeased with them as impudent and impious, and will make the most daring sinners to know that he is so, and to tremble before him. (1.) Their sin is a provocation to him; he is wroth, he is sorely displeased. We cannot expect that God should be reconciled to us, or well-pleased in us, but in and through the Anointed; and therefore, if we affront and reject him, we sin against the remedy, and forfeit the benefit of his interposition between us and God. (2.) His anger will be a vexation to them; if he but speak to them in his wrath, even the breath of his mouth will be their confusion, slaughter, and consumption, Isa. 11. 4. 2 Thess. 2. 8. He speaks, and it is done; he speaks in wrath, and sinners are undone: as a word made us, so a word can unmake us again; *Who knows the power of his anger?* The enemies rage, but cannot vex God. God sits still, and yet vexes them, puts them into a consternation, (as the word is,) and brings them to their wit's end: his setting up this kingdom of his Son, in spite of them, is the greatest vexation to them that can be. They were vexations to Christ's good subjects; but the day is coming when vexations shall be recompensed to them.

3. They are certainly defeated, and all their counsels turned headlong; (v. 6.) *Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.* David was advanced to the throne, and became master of the strong hold of Zion, notwithstanding the disturbance given him by the malcontents in his kingdom, and particularly the affronts he received from the garrison of Zion, who taunted him with their blind and their lame, their maimed soldiers, 2 Sam. 5. 6. The Lord Jesus is exalted to the right hand of the Father, has all power both in heaven and in earth, and is Head over all things to the church, notwithstanding the restless endeavours of his enemies to hinder his advancement. (1.) Jesus Christ is a King, and is invested by him who is the Fountain of power with the dignity and authority of a sovereign Prince, in the kingdom both of providence and grace. (2.) God is pleased to call him *his* King, because he is appointed by him, and entrusted for him with the sole administration of government and judgment. He is his King, for he is dear to the Father, and one in whom he is well-pleased. (3.) Christ took not this honour to himself, but was called to it, and he that called him owns him; *I have set him*; his commandment, his commission, he received from the Father. (4.) Being called to this honour, he was confirmed in it; high places (we say) are slippery places, but Christ, being raised, is fixed; *"I have set him, I have settled him."* (5.) He is set upon *Zion*, the hill of God's holiness, a type of the gospel-church, for on that the temple was built, for the sake of which the whole mount was called *holy*. Christ's throne is set up in his church, that is, in the hearts of all believers, and in the societies they form. The evangelical law of Christ is said to *go forth from Zion*, (Isa. 2. 3. Mic. 4. 2.) and therefore that is spoken of as the head-quarters of this General, the royal seat of this Prince, in whom the children of men shall be joyful.

We are to sing these verses with a holy exultation, triumphing over all the enemies of Christ's kingdom, (not doubting but they will all of them be quickly made his footstool, and triumphing in Jesus Christ as the great Trustee of power; and we are to pray, in firm belief of the assurance here given; "Father in heaven, *Thy kingdom come*; let thy Son's kingdom come."

7. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, *Thou art my Son*; this day have I begotten thee. 8. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utter-

most parts of the earth for thy possession. 9. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

We have heard what the kings of the earth have to say against Christ's kingdom, and have heard it gainsaid by him that sits in heaven; let us now hear what the Messiah himself has to say for his kingdom, to make good his claims; it is what all the powers on earth cannot gainsay.

1. The kingdom of the Messiah is founded upon a decree, an eternal decree, of God the Father. It was not a sudden resolve, it was not the trial of an experiment, but the result of the counsels of the divine wisdom, and the determinations of the divine will, before all worlds, neither of which can be altered. The *precept* or *statute*, so some read it; the *covenant* or *compact*, so others; the federal transactions between the Father and the Son concerning man's redemption, represented by the covenant of royalty made with David and his seed, 89. 3. This our Lord Jesus often referred himself to, as that which, all along in his undertaking, he governed himself by; *This is the will of him that sent me*, John, 6. 40. *This commandment have I received of my Father*, John, 10. 18.—14. 31.

II. There is a declaration of that decree, as far as is necessary for the satisfaction of all those who are called and commanded to yield themselves subjects to this king, and to leave them inexcusable, who will not have him to reign over them. The decree was secret, it was what the Father said to the Son, when he possessed him in the beginning of his way, before his works of old; but it is declared by a faithful Witness, who had lain in the bosom of the Father from eternity, and came into the world as the Prophet of the church, to declare him, John, 1. 18. The Fountain of all being is, without doubt, the Fountain of all power; and it is by, from, and under him, that the Messiah claims a right to rule, from what Jehovah said to him, by whose word all things were made and are governed. Christ here makes out a twofold title to his kingdom.

1. A title by inheritance; (v. 7.) *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.* This scripture the apostle quotes, (Heb. 1. 5.) to prove, not only that Christ has a more excellent name than the angels, but that he *obtained it by inheritance*, v. 4. He is the Son of God, not by adoption, but his begotten Son, the only begotten of the Father, John, 1. 14. And the Father owns him, and will have this declared to the world, as the reason why he is constituted King upon the holy hill of Zion; he is therefore unquestionably entitled to, and perfectly qualified for, that great trust. He is the Son of God, and therefore of the same nature with the Father, has in him all the fulness of the Godhead, infinite wisdom, power, and holiness. The supreme government of the church is too high an honour, and too hard an undertaking, for any mere creature; none can be fit for it but him who is *one with the Father*, and was *from eternity by him*, as *one brought up with him*, thoroughly apprized of all his counsels, Prov. 8. 30. He is the Son of God, and therefore dear to him, his beloved Son, in whom he is well-pleased; and upon this account we are to receive him as a King; for because *the Father loveth the Son, he hath given all things into his hand*, John, 3. 35.—5. 20. Being a Son, he is Heir of all things, and the Father having made the worlds by him, it is easy to infer thence, that by him also he governs them; for he is the eternal Wisdom and the eternal Word. If God hath said unto him, "*Thou art my Son*," it becomes each of us to say to him, "*Thou art my Lord, my Sovereign.*" Further, to satisfy us that his kingdom is well-grounded upon his sonship, we are here told what his sonship is grounded on; *This day have I begotten thee*; which refers both to his eternal generation itself, for it is quoted, (Heb. 1. 5.) to prove that he is the *Brightness of his Father's glory, and the express Image of his person*, (v. 3.) and to the evidence and demonstration given of it by his resurrection from the dead, for to that also it is expressly applied by the apostle; (Acts, 13. 33.) *He hath raised up Jesus again, as it is written,*

Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. It was by the resurrection from the dead, that sign of the prophet Jonas, which was to be the most convincing of all, that he was *declared to be the Son of God with power*, Rom. 1. 4. Christ is said to be the *first-gotten and first-born, from the dead*, Rev. 1. 5. Col. 1. 18. Immediately after his resurrection, he entered upon the administration of his mediatorial kingdom; it was then that he said, *All power is given unto me*, and to that especially he had an eye when he taught his disciples to pray, *Thy kingdom come*.

2. A title by agreement, v. 8, 9. The agreement is, in short, this; the Son must undertake the office of an Intercessor, and, upon that condition, he shall have the honour and power of a universal Monarch; see Isa. 53. 12. *Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, because he made intercession for the transgressors: he shall be a Priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both*, Zech. 6. 13.

(1.) The Son must ask. This supposes his putting himself voluntarily into a state of inferiority to the Father, by taking upon him the human nature; for, as God, he was equal in power and glory with the Father, and had nothing to ask. It supposes the making of a satisfaction, by the virtue of which, the intercession must be made, and the paying of a price, on which this large demand was to be grounded; see John, 17. 4, 5. The Son, in asking the heathen for his inheritance, aims, not only at his own honour, but at their happiness in him; so that he intercedes for them, ever lives to do so, and is therefore able to save to the uttermost.

(2.) The Father will grant more than to the half of the kingdom, even to the kingdom itself. It is here promised him, [1.] That his government shall be universal; he shall have the heathen for his inheritance; not the Jews only, to whose nation the church had been long confined, but the Gentiles also; those in the uttermost parts of the earth, (as this nation of our's,) shall be his possession, and he shall have multitudes of willing loyal subjects among them. Baptized Christians are the possession of the Lord Jesus; they are to him for a name and a praise, God the Father gives them to him, when by his Spirit and grace he works upon them to submit their necks to the yoke of the Lord Jesus. This is, in part, fulfilled; a great part of the Gentile world received the gospel, when it was first preached, and Christ's throne was set up there where Satan's seat had long been. But it is to be yet further accomplished, when the *kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ*, Rev. 11. 15. *Who shall live when God doeth this!* [2.] That it shall be victorious; *Thou shalt break them*, those of them that oppose thy kingdom, *with a rod of iron*, v. 9. This was, in part, fulfilled, when the nation of the Jews, those that persisted in unbelief and enmity to Christ's gospel, were destroyed by the Roman power, which was represented, (Dan. 2. 40.) by feet of iron, as here by a rod of iron. It had a further accomplishment in the destruction of the Pagan powers, when the Christian religion came to be established; but it will not be completely fulfilled, till all opposing rule, principality, and power, shall be finally put down, 1 Cor. 15. 24. See 110. 5, 6. Observe, How powerful Christ is, and how weak the enemies of his kingdom are before him; he has a rod of iron wherewith to crush them that will not submit to his golden sceptre; they are but like a potter's vessel before him; suddenly, easily, and irreparably, dashed in pieces by him; see Rev. 2. 27. "Thou shalt do it; thou shalt have leave to do it." Nations shall be ruined, rather than the gospel-church shall not be built and established; *I have loved thee, therefore will I give men for thee*, Isa. 43. 4. "Thou shalt have power to do it; none shall be able to stand before thee, thou shalt do it effectually." They that will not bow, shall break.

In singing this, and praying it over, we must give glory to Christ as the eternal Son of God, and our rightful Lord, and must take comfort from this promise, and plead it with God, that the kingdom of Christ shall be enlarged and established, and shall triumph over all opposition.

10. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. 11. Serve the

LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

We have here the practical application of this gospel-doctrine, concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, by way of exhortation to the kings and judges of the earth. They hear that it is in vain to oppose Christ's government; let them therefore be so wise for themselves, as to submit to it. He that has power to destroy them, shews that he has no pleasure in their destruction, for he puts them into a way to make themselves happy, v. 10. Those that would be wise, must be instructed; and those are truly wise, that receive instruction from the word of God. Kings and judges stand upon a level with common persons before God; and it is as necessary for them to be religious as for any others. They that give law and judgment to others, must receive it from Christ; and it will be their wisdom. What is said to them, is said to all, and is required of every one of us; only it is directed to kings and judges, because of the influence which their example will have upon their inferiors, and because they were men of rank and power, that opposed the setting up of Christ's kingdom, v. 2. We are exhorted,

I. To reverence God, and to stand in awe of him, v. 11. This is the great duty of natural religion. God is great, and infinitely above us, just and holy, and provoked against us, and therefore we ought to fear him and tremble before him; yet he is our Lord and Master, and we are bound to serve him, our Friend and Benefactor, and we have reason to rejoice in him; and these are very well consistent with each other; for, 1. We must serve God in all ordinances of worship, and all instances of a godly conversation, but with a holy fear, a jealousy over ourselves, and a reverence of him. Even kings themselves, whom others serve and fear, must serve and fear God; there is the same infinite distance between them and God, that there is between the meanest of their subjects and him. 2. We must rejoice in God; in subordination to him, we may rejoice in other things, but still with a holy trembling, as those that know what a glorious and jealous God he is, whose eye is always upon us; our salvation must be wrought out *with fear and trembling*, Phil. 2. 12. We ought to rejoice in the setting up of the kingdom of Christ, but rejoice with trembling, with a holy awe of him, a holy fear for ourselves, lest we come short, and a tender concern for the many precious souls to whom his gospel and kingdom are a savour of death unto death. Whatever we rejoice in, in this world, it must always be with trembling, lest we grow vain in our joy, and be puffed up with the things we rejoice in, and because of the uncertainty of them, and the damp which by a thousand accidents may soon be cast upon our joy. *To rejoice with trembling, is to rejoice as though we rejoice not*, 1 Cor. 7. 30.

II. To welcome Jesus Christ, and to submit to him, v. 12. This is the great duty of the Christian religion; it is that which is required of all, even kings and judges, and it is our wisdom and interest to do it. Observe here,

1. The command given for this purpose; *Kiss the Son*. Christ is called the Son, because so he was declared, (v. 7.) *Thou art my Son*. He is the Son of God by eternal generation, and, upon that account, he is to be adored by us. He is the Son of man, the Mediator, (John, 5. 27.) and, upon that account, to be received and submitted to; he is called the Son, to include both, as God is often called emphatically the Father, because he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him our Father, and we must have an eye to him under both considerations. Our duty to Christ is here expressed figuratively, *Kiss the Son*: not with a betraying kiss, as Judas kissed him, and as all hypocrites, who pretend to honour him, but really affront him; but with a believing kiss. (1.) With a kiss of agreement and reconciliation; Kiss, and be friends, as Jacob and Esau; let the quarrel between us and God terminate, let the acts of hostility cease, and let us be at peace with God in Christ, who is our Peace. (2.) With a kiss

of adoration and religious worship; they that worshipped idols kissed them, 1 Kings, 19. 18. Hos. 13. 2. Let us study how to do honour to the Lord Jesus, and to give unto him the glory due unto his name. *He is thy Lord, and worship thou him*, 45. 11. We must worship the Lamb, as well as him that sits on the throne, Rev. 5. 9. . 13. (3.) With a kiss of affection and sincere love; "*Kiss the Son*"; enter into a covenant of friendship with him, and let him be very dear and precious to you; love him above all, love him in sincerity, love him much, as she did to whom much was forgiven, and, in token of it, kissed his feet," Luke, 7. 38. (4.) With a kiss of allegiance and loyalty, as Samuel kissed Saul, 1 Sam. 10. 1. "Swear fealty and homage to him, submit to his government, take his yoke upon you, and give up yourselves to be governed by his laws, disposed of by his providence, and entirely devoted to his interest.

2. The reasons to enforce this command; they are taken from our own interest, which God, in his gospel, shews a concern for. Consider,

(1.) The certain ruin we run upon, if we refuse and reject Christ; "*Kiss the Son*"; for it is at your peril if you do not." [1.] "It will be a great provocation to him; do it, *lest he be angry*." The Father is angry already, the Son is the Mediator that undertakes to make peace; if we slight him, the *Father's wrath abides upon us*, (John, 3. 36.) and not only so, but there is an addition of the Son's wrath too, to whom nothing is more displeasing than to have the offers of his grace slighted, and the designs of it frustrated. The Son can be angry, though a Lamb; he is the Lion of the tribe of Judah; and the wrath of this King, this King of kings, will be as the roaring of a lion, and will drive even mighty men and chief captains to seek in vain for shelter in rocks and mountains, Rev. 6. 16. If the Son be angry, who shall intercede for us? There remains no more sacrifice, no other name, by which we can be saved. Unbelief is a sin against the remedy. [2.] It will be utter destruction to yourselves; *lest ye perish from the way*, or in the way, so some. "*In the way of your sins, and from the way of your vain hopes; lest your way perish*," (as 1. 6.) "*lest you prove to have missed the way to happiness*. Christ is the way; take heed lest ye be cut off from him as your way to God." It intimates that they were, or, at least, thought themselves, in the way; but, by neglecting Christ, they perished from it, which aggravates their ruin, that they go to hell from the way to heaven; are not far from the kingdom of God, and yet never arrive there.

(2.) The happiness we are sure of, if we yield ourselves to Christ. When his wrath is kindled, though *but a little*, the least spark of that fire is enough to make the proudest sinner miserable, if it fasten upon his conscience; for it will burn to the lowest hell: one would think it should therefore follow, "When his wrath is kindled, woe be to those that despise him;" but the psalmist startles at the thought, and blesses those that escape such a doom. They that trust in him, and so kiss him, are truly happy; but they will especially appear to be so, when the wrath of Christ is kindled against others. Blessed will they be in the day of wrath, who, by trusting in Christ, have made him their Refuge and Patron; when the hearts of others fail them for fear, they shall lift up their heads with joy; and then those who now despise Christ and his followers, will be forced to say, to their own greater confusion, "Now we see that blessed are all they, and they only, that trust in him."

In singing this, and praying it over, we should have our hearts not only filled with a holy awe of God, but borne up with a cheerful confidence in Christ, in whose mediation we may comfort and encourage ourselves and one another; *We are the circumcision, that rejoice in Christ Jesus*.

PSALM III.

now driven out from his palace, from the royal city, from the holy city, by his rebellious son Absalom, I. Complains to God of his enemies, v. 1, 2. II. Confides in God, and encourages himself in him as his God, notwithstanding, v. 3. III. Recollects the satisfaction he had in the gracious answers God gave to his prayers, and his experience of his goodness to him, v. 4, 5. IV. Triumphs over his fears, (v. 6.) and over his enemies, whom he prays against, v. 7. V. Gives God the glory, and takes to himself the comfort, of the divine blessing and salvation, which are sure to all the people of God, v. 8. Those speak best of the truths of God, who speak experimentally; so David here speaks of the power and goodness of God, and of the safety and tranquillity of the godly.

A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

1. **L**ORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me. 2. Many *there be* which say of my soul, *There is no help for him in God*. Selah. 3. But thou, O LORD, *art* a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

The title of this psalm, and many others, is as a key hung ready at the door to open it, and let us into the entertainments of it; when we know upon what occasion a psalm was penned, we know the better how to expound it. This was composed, or, at least, the substance of it was meditated and digested in David's thoughts, and offered up to God, when he fled from Absalom his son, who formed a conspiracy against him, to take away, not his crown only, but his life; we have the story, 2 Sam. 15, &c. 1. David was now in great grief; when, in his flight, he went up the mount of Olives, he wept greatly, with his head covered, and marching bare-foot; yet *then* he composed this comfortable psalm. He wept and prayed, wept and sung, wept and believed; this was sowing in tears. Is any afflicted? Let him pray; nay, let him sing psalms, let him sing this psalm. Is any afflicted with undutiful disobedient children? David was; and yet that did not hinder his joy in God, nor put him out of tune for holy songs. 2. He was now in great danger, the plot against him was laid deep, the party that sought his ruin was very formidable, and his own son at the head of them, so that his affairs seemed to be at the last extremity; yet *then* he kept hold of his interest in God, and improved that. Perils and frights should drive us to God, not drive us from him. 3. He had now a great deal of provocation given him by those from whom he had reason to expect better things; from his son, whom he had been indulgent of; from his subjects, whom he had been so great a blessing to; this he could not but resent, and it was enough to break in upon any man's temper; yet he was so far from any indecent expressions of passion and indignation, that he had calmness enough for those acts of devotion, which require the greatest fixedness and freedom of thought. The sedateness of his mind was evinced by the Spirit's coming upon him; for the Spirit chooses to move upon the still waters. Let no unkindness, no not of a child, or a friend, ever be laid so much to heart as to disfit us for communion with God. 4. He was now suffering for his sin in the matter of Uriah; this was the evil, which, for that sin, God threatened to *raise up against him out of his own house*; (2 Sam. 12. 11.) which, no doubt, he observed, and took occasion thence to renew his repentance for it. Yet he did not *therefore* cast away his confidence in the divine power and goodness, nor despair of succour. Even our sorrow for sin must not hinder either our joy in God, or our hope in God. 5. He seemed cowardly in fleeing from Absalom, and quitting his royal city, before he had had one struggle for it; and yet, by this psalm, it appears that he was full of true courage arising from his faith in God. True Christian fortitude consists more in a gracious security and serenity of mind, in patient bearing, and patient waiting, than in daring enterprises with sword in hand.

In these three verses, he applies himself to God. Whither else should we go but to him, when any thing grieves us or frightens us? David was now at a distance from his own closet, and from the courts of God's house, where he used to pray; and yet he could find a way open heaven-ward. Wherever we are,

As the foregoing psalm, in the type of David in preferment, shewed us the royal dignity of the Redeemer; so this, by the example of David in distress, shews us the peace and holy security of the redeemed: how safe they really are, and think themselves to be, under the divine protection. David, being

we may have access to God, and may draw nigh to him, whither-soever we are driven. David, in his flight, attends his God,

I. With a representation of his distress, v. 1, 2. He looks round, and takes, as it were, a view of his enemies' camp, or receives information of their designs against him, which he brings to God, not to his own council-board. Two things he complains of concerning his enemies.

1. That they were very many; *Lord, how are they increased!* Beyond what they were at first, and beyond whatever he thought they would have been. Absalom's faction, like a snow-ball, strangely gathered in its motion. He speaks of it as one amazed; and well he might, that a people he had so many ways obliged, should almost generally rebel against him, and choose for their head such a foolish and giddy young man as Absalom was. How slippery and deceitful are the many! And how little fidelity and constancy is to be found among men! David had had the hearts of his subjects, as much as ever any king had, and yet now, of a sudden, he had lost them. As people must not trust too much to princes, (146. 3.) so princes must not build too much upon their interest in the people. Christ, the Son of David, had many enemies, when a great multitude came to seize him, when the crowd cried, *Crucify him, Crucify him*. How were they then increased that troubled him! Even good people must not think it strange, if the stream be against them, and the powers that threaten them grow more and more formidable.

2. That they were very malicious; they rose up against him, they aimed to trouble him; but that was not all, they said of his soul, *There is no help for him in God*. That is, (1.) They put a spiteful and invidious construction upon his troubles, as Job's friends did upon his; concluding that, because his servants and subjects forsook him thus, and did not help him, God had deserted him, and abandoned his cause, and he was therefore to be looked on, or rather to be looked off, as a hypocrite, and a wicked man. (2.) They blasphemously reflected upon God as unable to relieve him; "His danger is so great, that God himself cannot help him." It is strange that so great unbelief should be found in any, especially in many, in Israel, as to think any party of men too strong for Omnipotence to deal with. (3.) They endeavoured to shake his confidence in God, and drive him to despair of relief from him. "They have said it to my soul;" so it may be read; compare 11. 1.—42. 10. This grieved him worst of all, that they had so bad an opinion of him, as to think it possible to take him off from that foundation. The mere temptation was a buffeting to him, *a thorn in his flesh*, nay, *a sword in his bones*. Note, A child of God startles at the very thought of despairing of help in God; you cannot vex him with any thing so much, as if you offer to persuade him, *There is no help for him in God*. David comes to God, and tells him what his enemies said of him, as Hezekiah spread Rabshakeh's blasphemous letter before the Lord. "They say, *There is no help for me in thee*: but, Lord, if it be so, I am undone. They say to my soul, *There is no salvation*" (for so the word is) "*for him in God*; but, Lord, do thou say unto my soul, *I am thy salvation*," (35. 3.) and that shall satisfy me, and, in due time, silence them." To this complaint he adds *Selah*, which occurs about 70 times in the book of psalms. Some refer it to the music with which, in David's time, the psalms were sung; others to the sense, and that it is a note commanding a solemn pause. *Selah*, *Mark that*, or, "*Stop there*, and consider a little." As here, they say, *There is no help for him in God, Selah*. "Take time for such a thought as this, *Get thee behind me, Satan; The Lord rebuke thee!* Away with such a vile suggestion!"

II. With a profession of his dependence upon God, v. 3. An active believer, the more he is beaten off from God, either by the rebukes of Providence, or the reproaches of enemies, the faster hold he will take of him, and the closer will he cleave to him; so David here, when his enemies said, *There is no help for him in God*, cries out with so much the more assurance, "*But thou, O Lord, art a Shield for me*; let them say what they will, I am sure thou wilt never desert me, and I am resolved I will never distrust thee." See what God is to his people, what he will be,

what they have found him, what David found in him. 1. Safety; "*Thou art a Shield for me, a Shield about me*," so some, "to secure me on all sides, since my enemies surrounded me." Not only *my Shield*, (Gen. 15. 1.) which denotes an interest in the divine protection; but a shield *for me*, which denotes the present benefit and advantage of that protection. 2. Honour; *Thou art my Glory*. Those whom God owns for his are not only safe and easy, but really look great, and have true honour put upon them, far above that which the great ones of the earth are proud of. David was now in disgrace, the crown was fallen from his head; but he will not think the worse of himself, while he has God for his Glory, Isa. 60. 19. "*Thou art my Glory*; thy glory I reckon mine;" (so some); "this is what I aim at, and am ambitious of, whatever my lot is, and whatever becomes of my honour—that I may be to my God for a name and a praise." 3. Joy and deliverance; *Thou art the Lifter up of my head*; thou wilt lift up my head out of my troubles, and restore me to my dignity again, in due time; however, thou wilt lift up my head *under* my troubles, so that I shall not droop nor be discouraged, nor shall my spirits fail." If, in the worst of times, God's people can lift up their heads with joy, knowing that all shall work for good to them, they will own it is God that is the Lifter up of their head, that gives them both *cause* to rejoice, and *hearts* to rejoice.

In singing this, and praying it over, we should possess ourselves with an apprehension of the danger we are in from the multitude and malice of our spiritual enemies, who seek the ruin of our souls by driving us from our God, and we should concern ourselves in the distresses and dangers of the church of God, which is every where spoken against, every where fought against; but, in reference to both, we should encourage ourselves in our God, who owns and protects, and will, in due time, crown his own interest, both in the world, and in the hearts of his people.

4. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. *Selah*. 5. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me. 6. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set *themselves* against me round about. 7. Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies *upon* the cheek-bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. 8. Salvation *belongeth* unto the LORD: thy blessing *is* upon thy people. *Selah*.

David, having stirred up himself by the irritations of his enemies to take hold on God as his God, and so gained comfort, in looking upward, when, if he looked round about him, nothing appeared but what was discouraging, here looks back with pleasing reflections upon the benefit he had derived from trusting in God, and looks forward with pleasing expectations of a very bright and happy issue, to which the dark dispensation he was now under would shortly be brought.

I. See with what comfort he looks back upon the communion he had had with God, and the communications of his favour to him, either in some former troubles he had been in, and, through God's goodness, got through, or, in this, hitherto. David had been exercised with many difficulties, often oppressed and brought very low; but still he had found God all-sufficient.

He now remembered with pleasure,

1. That his troubles had always brought him to his knees, and that, in all his difficulties and dangers, he had been enabled to acknowledge God, and to lift up his heart to him, and his voice too; (this will be a comfortable reflection, when we are in trouble;) *I cried unto God with my voice*. Care and grief do us good and no hurt, when they set us a-praying, and engage us, not only to speak to God, but to cry to him, as those that are in earnest. And though God understands the language of the heart, when the voice is not heard, (1 Sam. 1. 13.) and values not the hypocritical prayers of those who *cause their voice to be heard on high*, (Isa. 58. 4.)

vox et præterea nihil—mere sound, yet, when the earnestness of the voice comes from the fervency of the heart, it shall be taken notice of, in the account, that we cried unto God with our voice.

2. That he had always found God ready to answer his prayers; *He heard me out of his holy hill*, from heaven, the high and holy place; from the ark on mount Zion, whence he used to give answers to those that sought to him. David had ordered Zadok to *carry back the ark into the city*, when he was flying from Absalom, (2 Sam. 15. 25.) knowing that God was not tied, no, not to the ark of his presence, and that, notwithstanding the distance of place, he could by faith receive answers of peace from the holy hill; nothing can fix a gulf between the communications of God's grace towards us, and the operations of his grace in us; between his favour and our faith. The ark of the covenant was in mount Zion, and all the answers to our prayers come from the promises of that covenant; Christ was *set King upon the holy hill of Zion*; (2. 6.) and it is through him whom the Father hears always, that our prayers are heard.

3. That he had always been very safe, and very easy, under the divine protection; (v. 5.) "*I laid me down and slept*, composed and quiet; and awaked refreshed, for the Lord sustained me." (1.) This is applicable to the common mercies of every night, which we ought to give thanks for alone, and with our families, every morning. Many have not where to lay their head, (but wander in deserts,) or, if they have, dare not lie down, for fear of the enemy; but we have laid us down in peace. Many lie down, and cannot sleep, but are full of tossings to and fro till the dawning of the day, through pain of body, or anguish of mind, or the continual alarms of fear in the night; but we lie down, and sleep in safety, though incapable of doing any thing then for our own preservation. Many lie down, and sleep, and never wake again, they sleep the sleep of death, as the first-born of the Egyptians; but we lie down, and sleep, and awake again to the light and comfort of another day; and whence is it, but because the Lord has sustained us with sleep as with food? We have been safe under his protection, and easy in the arms of his good providence. (2.) It seems here to be meant of the wonderful quietness and calmness of David's spirit, in the midst of his dangers. Having by prayer committed himself and his cause to God, and being sure of his protection, his heart was fixed, and he was easy. The undutifulness of his son, the disloyalty of his subjects, the treachery of many of his friends, the hazard of his person, the fatigues of his march, and the uncertainty of the event, never deprived him of an hour's sleep, nor gave any disturbance to his repose; for the Lord, by his grace and the consolations of his Spirit, powerfully sustained him, and made him easy. It is a great mercy, when we are in trouble, to have our minds stayed upon God, so as never either to eat or sleep with trembling and astonishment. (3.) Some of the ancients apply it to the resurrection of Christ; in his sufferings, he offered up strong cries, and was heard; and therefore, though he laid him down, and slept the sleep of death, yet he awaked the third day, for the Lord sustained him, that he should not see corruption.

4. That God had often broken the power, and restrained the malice, of his enemies; had *smitten them upon the cheek-bone*, (v. 7.) had silenced them, and spoiled their speaking, blemished them, and put them to shame, smitten them on the cheek reproachfully; had disabled them to do the mischief they intended; for he had broken their teeth. Saul and the Philistines, who were sometimes ready to swallow him up, could not effect what they designed. The teeth that are gnashed or sharpened against God's people, shall be broken. When, at any time, the power of the church's enemies seems threatening, it is good to remember how often God has broken it; and we are sure that his arm is not shortened. He can stop their mouths, and tie their hands.

II. See with what confidence he looks forward to the dangers he had yet in prospect. Having put himself under God's protection, and often found the benefit of it,

1. His fears were all stilled and silenced, v. 6. With what a holy bravery does he bid defiance to the impotent menaces and attempts of his enemies! "*I will not be afraid of ten thousands of*

people, that, either in a foreign invasion, or an intestine rebellion, set themselves, encamp, against me round about." No man seemed less safe; (his enemies are numerous, *ten thousands*; they are spiteful and resolute, "They have set themselves against me; nay, they have prevailed far, and seemed to have gained their point; for they are against me round about on every side, thousands against one;") and yet no man was more secure; "I will not be afraid, for all this; they cannot hurt me, and therefore they shall not frighten me; whatever prudent methods I take for my own preservation, I will not disquiet myself, distrust my God, nor doubt of a good issue at last." When David, in his flight from Absalom, bade Zadok carry back the ark, he spake doubtfully of the issue of his present troubles, and concluded, like an humble penitent, *Here I am, let him do to me what seemeth him good*, 2 Sam. 15. 26. But now, like a strong believer, he speaks confidently, and has no fear concerning the event. Note, A cheerful resignation to God is the way to obtain a cheerful satisfaction and confidence in God.

2. His prayers were quickened and encouraged, v. 7. He believed God was his Saviour, and yet prays; nay, he *therefore prays, Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God*. Promises of salvation do not supersede, but engage, our petitions for it. He will for this be inquired of.

3. His faith became triumphant. He began the psalm with complaints of the strength and malice of his enemies; but concludes it with exultation in the power and grace of his God, and now sees *more with him than against him*, v. 8. Two great truths he here builds his confidence upon, and fetches comfort from. (1.) That *salvation belongeth unto the Lord*; he has power to save, be the danger ever so great; it is his prerogative to save, when all other helps and succours fail; it is his pleasure, it is his property, it is his promise to those that are his, whose salvation is not of themselves, but of the Lord. Therefore all that have the Lord for their God, according to the tenor of the new covenant, are sure of salvation; for he that is their God, is the God of salvation. (2.) That his blessing is upon his people; he not only has power to save them, but he has assured them of his kind and gracious intentions toward them. He has, in his word, pronounced a blessing upon his people; and we are bound to believe that that blessing does accordingly rest upon them, though there are not the visible effects of it. Hence we may conclude, that God's people, though they may lie under the reproaches and censures of men, are surely blessed of him, who blesses indeed, and therefore can command a blessing.

In singing this, and praying it over, we must own the satisfaction we have had in depending upon God, and committing ourselves to him, and encourage ourselves, and one another, to continue still hoping, and quietly waiting for, the salvation of the Lord.

PSALM IV.

David was a preacher, a royal preacher, as well as Solomon; many of his psalms are doctrinal and practical as well as devotional; the greatest part of this psalm is so, in which Wisdom cries to men, to the sons of men, (as Prov. 8. 4, 5.) to receive instruction. The title does not tell us, as that of the former did, that it was penned on any particular occasion, nor are we to think that all the psalms were occasional, though some were; but that many of them were designed, in general, for the instruction of the people of God, who attended in the courts of his house, the assisting of their devotions, and the directing of their conversations: such a one I take this psalm to be. Let us not make the prophecy of scripture to be of more private interpretation than needs must, 2 Pet. 1. 20. Here, I. David begins with a short prayer; (v. 1.) and that prayer preaches. II. He directs his speech to the children of men, and, 1. In God's name, reproves them for the dishonour they do to God, and the damage they do to their own souls, v. 2. 2. He sets before them the happiness of godly people, for their encouragement to be religious, v. 3. 3. He calls upon them to consider their ways, v. 4. III. He exhorts them to serve God, and trust in him, v. 5. IV. He gives an account of his own experiences of the grace of God working in him, 1. Enabling him to choose God's favour for his felicity, v. 6. 2. Filling his heart with joy therein, v. 7. 3. Quieting his spirit in the assurance of the divine protection he was under, night and day, v. 8.

To the chief musician on Neginoth. A psalm of David.

1. **H**EAR me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer. 2. O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah. 3. But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself; the LORD will hear when I call unto him. 4. Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. 5. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.

The title of the psalm acquaints us, that David, having penned it by divine inspiration for the use of the church, delivered it to the chief musician, or master of the song, who (according to the divine appointment of psalmody made in his time, which he was chiefly instrumental in the establishment of) presided in that service. We have a particular account of the constitution, the modelling of the several classes of singers, each with a chief, and the share each bore in the work, 1 Chron. 25. Some prophesied according to the order of the king, v. 2. Others prophesied with a harp, to give thanks, and to praise the Lord, v. 3. Of others, it is said, that they were to lift up the horn, v. 5. But of them all, that they were for song in the house of the Lord, (v. 6.) and were instructed in the songs of the Lord, v. 7. This psalm was committed to one of the chiefs, to be sung on *Neginoth*—*Stringed instruments*, (Hab. 3. 19.) which were played on with the hand; with music of that kind the choristers were to sing this psalm: and it should seem that then they only sung, not the people; but the New Testament appoints all Christians to sing, (Eph. 5. 19. Col. 3. 16.) from whom it is expected that they do it decently, not artfully; and therefore there is not now so much occasion for musical instruments as there was then; the melody is to be made in the heart.

In these verses,

I. David addresses himself to God, v. 1. Whether the *sons of men*, to whom he is about to speak, will hear, or whether they will forbear, he hopes and prays that God will give him a gracious audience, and an answer of peace; "*Hear me when I call*, and accept my adorations, grant my petitions, and judge upon my appeals; *have mercy upon me, and hear me.*" All the notice God is pleased to take of our prayers, and all the returns he is pleased to make to them, must be ascribed, not to our merit, but purely to his mercy. "*Hear me for thy mercy-sake*," is our best plea. Two things David here pleads further, 1. "*Thou art the God of my righteousness*; not only a righteous God thyself, but the *Author of my righteous dispositions*, who hast by thy grace wrought that good that is in me, hast made me a righteous man; therefore *hear me*, and so attest thine own work in me; thou art also the *Patron of my righteous cause*, the Protector of my wronged innocency, to whom I commit my way, and whom I trust to *bring forth my righteousness as the light.*" When men condemn us unjustly, this is our comfort, *It is God that justifies*; he is the God of a believer's righteousness. 2. "*Thou hast formerly enlarged me when I was in distress*, enlarged my heart in holy joy and comfort under my distresses, enlarged my condition by bringing me out of my distresses; therefore *now, Lord, have mercy upon me, and hear me.*" The experience we have had of God's goodness to us in enlarging us when we have been in distress, is not only a great encouragement to our faith and hope for the future, but a good plea with God in prayer; "*Thou hast; wilt thou not?*" For thou art God, and changest not; thy work is perfect."

II. He addresses himself to the children of men, for the conviction and conversion of those that are yet strangers to God, and that will not have the Messiah, the Son of David, to reign over them.

1. He endeavours to convince them of the folly of their impiety; v. 2.) "*O ye sons of men*," (of great men, so some; men of

high degree, understanding it of the partisans of Saul or Absalom,) "how long will you oppose me and my government, and continue disaffected to it, under the influence of the false and groundless suggestions of those that wish evil to me?" Or, it may be taken more generally; God, by the psalmist, here reasons with sinners to bring them to repentance. "You that go on in the neglect of God and his worship, and in contempt of the kingdom of Christ and his government, consider what you do;" (1.) "You debase yourselves, for you are *sons of men*;" (the word signifies man as a noble creature;) "consider the dignity of your nature, and the excellency of those powers of reason with which you are endued, and do not act thus irrationally, and unbecoming yourselves." Let the *sons of men* consider and shew themselves men. (2.) "You dishonour your Maker, and turn his glory into shame." They may well be taken as God's own words, charging sinners with the wrong they do him in his honour: or, if David's words, glory may be understood of God, whom he called his *Glory*, 3. 3. Idolaters are charged with *changing the glory of God* into shame, Rom. 1. 23. All wilful sinners do so by disobeying the commands of his law, despising the offers of his grace, and giving that affection and service to the creature, which are due to God only. Those that profane God's holy name, that ridicule his word and ordinances, and, while they profess to know him, in works deny him, do what in them lies to *turn his glory into shame*. (3.) "You put a cheat upon yourselves, *you love vanity*, and *seek after leasing*, or *lying*, or that which is a *lie*. You are yourselves vain and lying, and you love to be so." Or, "You set your hearts upon that which will prove, at last, but vanity and a lie;" they that love the world, and seek the things that are beneath, love vanity, and seek lies; as they also do that please themselves with the delights of sense, and portion themselves with the wealth of this world; for these will deceive them, and so ruin them. "How long will you do this? Will you never be wise for yourselves, never consider your duty and interest? *When shall it once be?*" Jer. 13. 27. The God of heaven thinks the time long that sinners persist in dishonouring him, and in deceiving and ruining themselves.

2. He shews them the peculiar favour which God has for good people, the special protection they are under, and the singular privileges to which they are entitled, v. 3. This comes in here, (1.) As a reason why they should not oppose or persecute him that is godly, or think to run him down. It is at their peril, if they *offend one of these little ones*, whom God has *set apart for himself*, Matth. 18. 6. God reckons that those who touch them touch the apple of his eye; and he will make their persecutors to know it sooner or later. They have an interest in heaven, God will hear them, and therefore let none dare to do them any injury, for God will hear their cry, and plead their cause, Exod. 22. 23. It is generally supposed that David speaks of his own designation to the throne; he is the *godly man*, whom *the Lord has set apart* for that honour, and who does not usurp it, or assume it to himself; "The opposition, therefore, you give to him and to his advancement, is very criminal, for therein you fight against God, and it will be vain and ineffectual." God has, in like manner, set apart the Lord Jesus for himself, that Merciful One; and those that attempt to hinder his advancement will certainly be baffled, for the Father hears him always. Or, (2.) As a reason why they should themselves be good, and walk no longer in the counsel of the ungodly; "You have hitherto sought vanity; be truly religious, and you will be truly happy, here and for ever; for," [1.] "God will secure to himself his interest in you." *The Lord has set apart him that is godly*, every particular godly man, for himself, in his eternal choice, in his effectual calling, in the special disposals of his providence, and operations of his grace; they are *purified unto him a peculiar people*. Godly men are God's separated, sealed, ones; he knows them that are his, has set his image and superscription upon them; he distinguishes them with uncommon favours; *They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels. Know this*; let godly people know it, and let them never alienate themselves from him to whom they are thus appropriated; let wicked people know it, and take heed how they hurt those whom God protects. [2.] "God will secure to

you an interest in himself;" this David speaks with application; *The Lord will hear when I call unto him.* We should think ourselves happy, if we had the ear of an earthly prince; and is it not worth while, upon any terms, especially such easy ones, to gain the ear of the King of kings? Let us know this, and forsake lying vanities for our own mercies.

3. He warns them against sin, and exhorts them both to frighten and to reason themselves out of it; (v. 4.) "*Stand in awe and sin not;*" (*Be angry and sin not*, so the LXX, and some think the apostle takes that exhortation from him, Eph. 4. 26.) "*commune with your own hearts.* Be converted; and, in order thereunto, consider and fear." Note, (1.) We must not sin, nor miss our way, and so miss our aim. (2.) One good remedy against sin is to stand in awe. "Be moved," so some, in opposition to carelessness and carnal security. "Always keep up a holy reverence of the glory and majesty of God, and a holy dread of his wrath and curse, and dare not to provoke him." (3.) One good means of preventing sin, and preserving a holy awe, is, to be frequent and serious in *communing with our own hearts*; "*Talk with your hearts*; you have a great deal to say to them, they may be spoken with at any time, let it not be unsaid." A thinking man is in a fair way to be a wise and a good man. "*Commune with your hearts*; examine them by serious self-reflection, that you may acquaint yourselves with them, and amend what is amiss in them; employ them in solemn pious meditations, let your thoughts fasten upon that which is good, and keep close to it. Consider your ways, and observe the directions here given, in order to the doing of this work well and to good purpose." [1.] "Choose a solitary time; do it when you lie awake upon your beds. Before you turn you, to go to sleep at night," (as some of the heathen moralists have directed,) "examine your consciences with respect to what you have done that day, particularly what you have done amiss, that you may repent of it. When you awake in the night, meditate upon God, and the things that belong to your peace." David himself practised what he here counsels others to do; (63. 6.) *I remember thee on my bed*; upon a sick-bed particularly we should consider our ways, and commune with our own hearts about them. [2.] "Compose yourselves into a serious frame; Be still. When you have asked conscience a question, be silent, and wait for an answer; even in unquiet times, keep you spirits calm and quiet."

4. He counsels them to make conscience of their duty; (v. 5.) *Offer to God the sacrifice of righteousness.* We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well. They that were disaffected to David and his government, would soon come to a better temper, and return to their allegiance, if they would but worship God aright: and those that know the concerns that lie between them and God, will be glad of the Mediator, the Son of David. It is required here from every one of us, (1.) That we serve him; "*Offer sacrifices to him*, your own selves first, and your best sacrifices." But they must be *sacrifices of righteousness*, good works; all the fruits of the reigning love of God and our neighbour, and all the instances of a religious conversation, which are better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices. "Let all your devotions come from an upright heart; let all your alms be sacrifices of righteousness." The sacrifices of the unrighteous, God will not accept, they are an abomination, Isa. 1. 11, &c. (2.) That we confide in him. "First make conscience of offering the sacrifices of righteousness, and then you are welcome to put your trust in the Lord. Serve God without any diffidence of him, or any fear of losing by him. Honour him, by trusting in him only, and not in your wealth, or in an arm of flesh; trust in his providence, and lean not to your own understanding; trust in his grace, and go not about to establish your own righteousness or sufficiency."

In singing these verses, we must preach to ourselves the doctrine of the provoking nature of sin, the lying vanity of the world, and the unspeakable happiness of God's people; and we must press upon ourselves the duties of fearing God, conversing with our own hearts, and offering spiritual sacrifices; in praying over these verses, we must beg of God grace thus to think, and thus to do.

6. *There be many that say, Who will shew us*

any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. 7. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time *that* their corn and their wine increased. 8. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, LORD only makest me dwell in safety.

We have here,

I. The foolish wish of worldly people; *There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Who will make us to see good?* What good they meant, is intimated, v. 7. It was the increase of their corn and wine; all they desired was plenty of the wealth of this world, that they might enjoy abundance of the delights of sense. Thus far they are right, that they are desirous of good, and solicitous about it; but there are these things amiss in this wish, 1. They inquire, in general, "*Who will make us happy?*" but do not apply themselves to God, who alone can; and so they expose themselves to be ill-advised, and shew they would rather be beholden to any than to God, for they would willingly live without him. 2. They inquire for good that may be seen, seeming good, sensible good; and they shew no concerning the good things that are out of sight, and are the objects of faith only. The source of idolatry was a desire of gods that they might see, therefore they worshipped the sun; but, as we must be taught to worship an unseen God, so to seek an unseen good, 2 Cor. 4. 18. We look, with an eye of faith, further than we can see with an eye of sense. 3. They inquire for *any* good, not for the chief good; all they want is outward good, present good, partial good, good meat, good drink, a good trade, and a good estate; and what are all these worth, without a good God, and a good heart? Any good will serve the turn of most men, but a gracious soul will not be put off so. This way, this wish, of carnal worldlings is their folly, and yet many *there be* that join in it; their doom will be accordingly; "*Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, the penny thou didst agree for.*"

II. The wise choice which godly people make. David, and the pious few that adhered to him, dissented from that wish, and joined in this prayer, *LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.* 1. He disagrees from the vote of the many; God had set him apart for himself by distinguishing favours, and therefore he sets himself apart by a distinguishing character. "They are for any good, for worldly good, but so am not I; I will not say as they say; any good will not serve my turn; the wealth of the world will never make a portion for my soul, and therefore I cannot take up with it." 2. He and his friends agree in their choice of God's favour as their felicity, that is it which, in their account, is better than life and all the comforts of life.

(1.) That is it which they most earnestly desire and seek after; this is the breathing of their souls, "*LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us*"; most are for other things, but we are for this." Good people, as they are distinguished by their practices, so they are by their prayers, not the length and language of them, but the faith and fervency of them; they whom God has set apart, have a prayer by themselves, which, though others may speak the words of it, they only offer up in sincerity; and this is a prayer which they all say *Amen* to; "*LORD, let us have thy favour, and let us know that we have it, and we desire no more; that is enough to make us happy.* LORD, be at peace with us, accept of us, manifest thyself to us, let us be satisfied of thy loving-kindness, and we will be satisfied *with it.*" Observe, Though David speaks of himself only, in the 7th and 8th verses, he speaks, in this prayer, for others also, "*upon us,*" as Christ taught us to pray, "*Our Father.*" All the saints come to the throne of grace on the same errand, and in this they are one, they all desire God's favour as their chief good. We should beg it for others as well as for ourselves, for in God's favour there is enough for us all, and we shall have never the less for others sharing in what we have.

(2.) That is it in which, above any thing, they rejoice; (v. 7.) "*Thou hast hereby often put gladness into my heart; not only*

supported and refreshed me, but filled me with joy unspeakable; and therefore that is it which I will still pursue, which I will seek after all the days of my life." When God puts grace in the heart, he puts gladness in the heart; nor is any joy comparable to that which gracious souls have in the communications of the divine favour, no, not the joy of harvest, of a plentiful harvest, when the corn and wine increase. This is gladness in the heart, inward, solid, substantial, joy. The mirth of worldly people is but a flash, a shadow; *even in laughter their heart is sorrowful*, Prov. 14. 13. "Thou hast given gladness in my heart; so the word is. True joy is God's gift, *not as the world giveth*, John, 14. 27. The saints have no reason to envy carnal worldlings their mirth and joy, but should pity them rather, for they may know better, and will not.

(3.) That is it which they entirely confide in, and in that confidence they are always easy, v. 8. He had laid him down, and slept, (3. 5.) and so he will still; "*I will lay me down* (having the assurance of thy favour) *in peace*, and with as much pleasure as those whose corn and wine increase, and who lie down as Boaz did in his threshing-floor, at the end of the heap of corn, to sleep there when *his heart was merry*; (Ruth, 3. 7.) *for thou only makest me to dwell in safety*. Though I am alone, yet I am not alone, for God is with me; though I have no guards to attend me, the Lord alone is sufficient to protect me; he can do it himself when all other defences fail." If he have the light of God's countenance, [1.] He can enjoy himself. His soul returns to God, and reposes itself in him as its Rest, and so he lays him down, and sleeps in peace. He has what he would have, and is sure that nothing can come amiss to him. (2.) He fears no disturbance from his enemies, sleeps quiet, and is very secure, because God himself has undertaken to keep him safe. When he comes to sleep the sleep of death, and to lie down in the grave, to make his bed in the darkness, he will then, with good old Simeon, *depart in peace*, (Luke, 2. 29.) being assured that God will receive his soul, to be safe with himself, and that his body also shall be made to dwell in safety in the grave. (3.) He commits all his affairs to God, and contentedly leaves the issue of them with him. It is said of the husbandman, that, having *cast his seed into the ground, he sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed springs and grows up, he knows not how*, Mark, 4. 26, 27. So a good man, having, by faith and prayer, cast his care upon God, sleeps and rests night and day, and is very easy, leaving it to his God to perform all things for him, and prepared to welcome his holy will.

In singing these verses, and praying over them, let us, with a holy contempt of the wealth and pleasure of this world, as insufficient to make us happy, earnestly seek the favour of God, and pleasingly solace ourselves in that favour; and, with a holy indifferency about the issue of all our worldly concerns, let us commit ourselves and all our affairs to the conduct and custody of the Divine Providence, and be satisfied that all shall be made to work for good to us, if we keep ourselves in the love of God.

PSALM V.

This psalm is a prayer, a solemn address to God, at a time when the psalmist was brought into distress by the malice of his enemies; many such times passed over David, nay, there was scarcely any time of his life to which this psalm may not be accommodated; for in this he was a type of Christ, that he was continually beset with enemies; and his powerful and prevalent appeals to God, when he was so beset, pointed at Christ's dependence on his Father, and triumphs over the powers of darkness, in the midst of his sufferings. In this psalm, I. David settles a correspondence between his soul and God, promising to pray, and promising himself that God would certainly hear him, v. 1. 3. II. He gives to God the glory, and takes to himself the comfort, of God's holiness, v. 4. 6. III. He declares his resolution to keep close to the public worship of God, v. 7. IV. He prayed, 1. For himself, that God would guide him, v. 8. 2. Against his enemies, that God would destroy them, v. 9, 10. 3. For all the people of God, that God would give them joy, and keep them safe, v. 11, 12. And this is all of great use to direct us in prayer.

To the chief musician upon Nehiloth. A psalm of David.

1. **G**IVE ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. 2. Harken unto the voice

of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. 3. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up. 4. For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. 5. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. 6. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.

The title of this psalm has nothing in it peculiar, but that it is said to be upon *Nehiloth*, a word no where else used. It is conjectured, (and it is but a conjecture,) that it signifies *wind-instruments*, with which this psalm was sung, as *Neginoth* was supposed to signify the *stringed-instruments*.

In these verses, David had an eye to God,

I. As a prayer-hearing God; such he has always been, ever since men began to call upon the name of the Lord, and yet is still as ready to hear prayer as ever. Observe how David here styles him, *O Lord*; (v. 1, 3.) *Jehovah*, a self-existent, self-sufficient, Being, whom we are bound to adore, and, "*my King and my God*, (v. 2.) whom I have avouched for my God, to whom I have sworn allegiance, and under whose protection I have put myself as my King." We believe that the God we pray to is a King and a God, King of kings, and God of gods; but that is not enough, the most commanding encouraging principle of prayer, and the most powerful prevailing plea in prayer, is, to look upon him as *our King and our God*, whom we lie under peculiar obligations to, and whom we have peculiar expectations from. Now observe,

1. What David here prays for, which may encourage our faith and hopes, in all our addresses to God. If we pray fervently, and in faith, we have reason to hope, (1.) That God will take cognizance of our case, the representation we make of it, and the requests we make upon it; for so he prays here; *Give ear to my words, O Lord*. Though God is in heaven, he has an ear open to his people's prayers, and it is not heavy, that he cannot hear. Men, perhaps, will not, or cannot, hear us; our enemies are so haughty, that they will not, our friends at such a distance, that they cannot; but God, though high, though in heaven, can, and will. (2.) That he will take it into his wise and compassionate consideration, and will not slight it, or turn it off with a cursory answer; for so he prays, *Consider my meditation*. David's prayers were not his words only, but his meditations; as meditation is the best preparative for prayer, so prayer is the best issue of meditation. Meditation and prayer should go together, 19. 14. It is when we thus consider our prayers, and then only, that we may expect that God will consider them, and take that to his heart which comes from our's. (3.) That he will, in due time, return a gracious answer of peace: for so he prays, (v. 2.) *Hearken to the voice of my cry*. His prayer was a *cry*, it was the *voice of his cry*, which denotes fervency of affection, and importunity of expression; such effectual fervent prayers of a righteous man avail much, and do wonders.

2. What David here promises, as the condition on his part to be performed, fulfilled, and kept, that he might obtain this gracious acceptance; this may guide and govern us in our addresses to God, that we may present them aright, for we ask, and have not, if we ask amiss.

Four things David here promises, and so must we.

(1.) That he will pray, that he will make conscience of it, and make a business of it; *unto thee will I pray*. "Others live without prayer, but I will pray." Kings on their own thrones (so David was) must be beggars at God's throne. "Others pray to strange gods, and expect relief from them, but to thee, to thee only, will I pray." The assurances God has given us of his readiness to hear prayer, should confirm our resolution to and die praying.

(2.) That he will pray *in the morning*; his praying voice shall be heard then, and then shall his prayer be directed, that shall be the date of his letters to heaven; "Morning, and evening, and at noon, will I pray, nay, seven times a day, will I praise thee;" but certainly, morning-prayer is especially our duty; we are the fittest for prayer, when we are in the most fresh, and lively, and composed, frame, got clear of the slumbers of the night, revived by them, and not yet filled with the business of the day. We have then most need of prayer, considering the dangers and temptations of the day to which we are exposed, and against which we are concerned, by faith and prayer, to fetch in fresh supplies of grace.

(3.) That he will have his eye single, and his heart intent, in the duty; *I will direct my prayer*, as a marksman directs his arrow to the white; with such a fixedness and steadiness of mind should we address ourselves to God. Or, as we direct a letter to a friend at such a place, so must we direct our prayers to God as our Father in heaven; and let us always send them by the Lord Jesus, the great Mediator, and then they will be sure not to miscarry. All our prayers must be directed to God; his honour and glory must be aimed at as our highest end, in all our prayers; let our first petition be, *Hallowed, Glorified, be thy name*; and then we may be sure of the same gracious answer to it that was given to Christ himself, *I have glorified it, and I will glorify it yet again*.

(4.) That he will patiently wait for an answer of peace; "I will look up; will look after my prayers, and *hear what God the Lord will speak*, (85. 8. Hab. 2. 1.) that, if he grant what I asked, I may be thankful, if he deny, I may be patient, if he defer, I may continue to pray and wait, and may not faint." We must look up, or look out, as he that has shot an arrow looks to see how near it has come to the mark. We lose much of the comfort of our prayers, for want of observing the returns of them. Thus praying, thus waiting, as the lame man looked steadfastly on Peter and John, (Acts. 3. 4.) we may expect that God will give ear to our words, and consider them, and to him we may refer ourselves, as David here, who does not pray, "Lord, do this, or the other, for me;" but, "Hearken to me, consider my case, and do in it as seemeth good unto thee."

II. As a sin-hating God, v. 4. 6. David takes notice of this, 1. As a warning to himself, and all other praying people, to remember that, as the God with whom we have to do is gracious and merciful, so he is pure and holy; though he is ready to hear prayer, yet, if we regard iniquity in our heart, he will not hear our prayers, 66. 18. 2. As an encouragement to his prayers against his enemies; they were wicked men, and therefore enemies to God, and such as he had no pleasure in. See here,

(1.) The holiness of God's nature; when he says, *Thou art not a God that has pleasure in wickedness*, he means, "Thou art a God that hates it, as directly contrary to thine infinite purity and rectitude, and holy will." Though the workers of iniquity prosper, let none thence infer, that God has pleasure in wickedness, no not in that by which men pretend to honour him, as those do that hate their brethren, and cast them out, and say, *Let the Lord be glorified*. God has no pleasure in wickedness, though covered with a cloak of religion. Let those, therefore, who delight in sin, know that God has no delight in them; nor let any say, when he is tempted, *I am tempted of God*, for God is not the Author of sin, neither shall evil dwell with him; it shall not always be countenanced, and suffered to prosper. Dr. Hammond thinks this refers to that law of Moses, which would not permit strangers, who persisted in their idolatry, to dwell in the land of Israel.

(2.) The justice of his government; The foolish shall not stand in his sight, shall not be smiled upon by him, nor admitted to attend upon him, nor shall they be acquitted in the judgment of the great day. The workers of iniquity are very foolish. Sin is folly, and sinners are the greatest of all fools; not fools of God's making, those are to be pitied, he hates nothing that he has made, but fools of their own making, and those he hates. Wicked people hate God, justly therefore are they hated of him, and it will

be their endless misery and ruin. "Those whom thou hatest, thou shalt destroy; particularly two sorts of sinners, who are here marked for destruction. [1.] Those that are fools, that speak leasing or lying, and that are deceitful. There is a particular emphasis laid on these sinners, (Rev. 21. 8.) *All liars*, and (ch. 22. 15.) *Whosoever loves and makes a lie*; nothing is more contrary than this, and therefore nothing more hateful, to the God of truth. [2.] Those that are cruel; *Thou wilt abhor the bloody man*; for inhumanity is no less contrary, no less hateful, to the God of mercy, whom mercy pleases. Liars and murderers are in a particular manner said to resemble the Devil, and to be his children, and therefore it may well be expected that God should abhor them. These were the characters of David's enemies; and such as these are still the enemies of Christ and his church, men perfectly lost to all virtue and honour; the worse they are, the surer we may be of their ruin in due time.

In singing these verses, and praying them over, we must engage and stir up ourselves to the duty of prayer, and encourage ourselves in it, because we shall not seek the Lord in vain; and must express our detestation of sin, and our awful expectation of that day of Christ's appearing, which will be the day of the perdition of ungodly men.

7. But as for me, I will come *into thy house* in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple. 8. Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness, because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face. 9. For *there is no faithfulness in their mouth*; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue. 10. Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee. 11. But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. 12. For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as *with a shield*.

In these verses, David gives three characters; of himself, of his enemies, and of all the people of God; and subjoins a prayer to each of them.

I. He gives an account of himself, and prays for himself, v. 7, 8. 1. He is steadfastly resolved to keep close to God and to his worship. Sinners go away from God, and so make themselves odious to his holiness, and obnoxious to his justice; "*But as for me, that shall not keep me from thee*." God's holiness and justice are so far from being a terror to the upright in heart, to drive them from God, that they are rather by them invited to cleave to him. David resolves, (1.) To worship God, to pay his homage to him, and give unto God the glory due unto his name. (2.) To worship him publicly; "*I will come into thy house*, the courts of thy house, to worship there with other thy faithful worshippers." David was much in secret worship, prayed often alone, (v. 2, 3.) and yet was very constant and devout in his attendance on the sanctuary. The duties of the closet are designed to prepare us for, not excuse us from, public ordinances. (3.) To worship him reverently, and with a due sense of the infinite distance there is between God and man; "*In thy fear will I worship*, with a holy awe of God upon my spirit," Heb. 12. 28. God is greatly to be feared by all his worshippers. (4.) To take his encouragement, in worship, from God himself only. [1.] From his infinite mercy: it is in the *multitude* of God's mercy, (the inexhaustible treasures of mercy that are in God, and the innumerable proofs and instances of it which we receive from him,) that David confides, and not in any merit or righteousness of his

own, in his approaches to God. The mercy of God should ever be the foundation both of our hopes, and of our joy, in every thing wherein we have to do with him. [2.] From the instituted medium of worship, which was then the temple, here called *the temple of his holiness*, as a type of Christ, the great and only Mediator, who sanctifies the service, as the temple sanctified the gold, and to whom we must have an eye in all our devotions, as they then had to the temple. 2. He earnestly prays that God, by his grace, would guide and preserve him always in the way of his duty; (v.8.) *Lead me in thy righteousness, because of mine enemies*, Hebr. "*because of those which observe me*, which watch for my halting, and seek occasion against me." See here, (1.) The good use which David made of the malice of his enemies against him; the more curious they were in spying faults in him, that they might have whereof to accuse him, the more cautious he was to avoid sin and all appearances of it, and the more solicitous to be always found in the good way of God and duty. Thus, by wisdom and grace, good may come out of evil. (2.) The right course which David took for the baffling of those who sought occasion against him: he committed himself to a divine guidance, begged of God, both by his providence and by his grace, to direct him in the right way, and keep him from turning aside out of it, at any time, in any instance whatsoever, that the most critical and captions of his enemies, like Daniel's, might find no occasion against him. The way of our duty is here called *God's way and his righteousness*, because he prescribes to us by his just and holy laws, which if we sincerely set before us as our rule, we may in faith beg of God to direct us in all particular cases. How this prayer of David's was answered to him, see 1 Sam. 18. 14, 15.

II. He gives an account of his enemies, and prays against them, v. 9, 10. 1. If his account of them be true, as, no doubt, it is, they have a very bad character; and if they had not been bad men indeed, they could not have been enemies to a man after God's own heart. He had spoken (v.6.) of God's hating the bloody and deceitful man; "Now, Lord," says he, "that is the character of my enemies: they are deceitful, there is no trusting them, for there is no faithfulness in their mouth." They thought it was no sin to tell a deliberate lie, if it might but blemish David, and make him odious; "*Lord lead me*," says he, (v.8.) "for such as these, are the men I have to do with, against whose slanders innocency itself is no security. Do they speak fair? Do they talk of peace and friendship? *They flatter with their tongues*; it is designed to cover their malice, and to gain their point the more securely. Whatever they pretend of religion or friendship, two sacred things, they are true to neither, their inward part is wickedness itself, it is very wickedness. They are likewise bloody, for *their throat is an open sepulchre*, cruel as the grave, gaping to devour and to swallow up; insatiable as the grave, which never says, "*It is enough*," Prov. 30. 15, 16. This is quoted, (Rom. 3. 13.) to shew the general corruption of mankind, for they are all naturally prone to malice, Tit. 3. 3. The grave is opened for them all, and yet they are as open graves to one another. 2. If his prayer against them be heard, as, no doubt, it is, they are in a bad condition. As men are, and do, so they must expect to fare. He prays to God to destroy them, according to what he had said, (v.6.) "*Thou shalt destroy men of this character*." *So let them fall*; and sinners would soon throw themselves into ruin, if they were let alone. The psalmist prays that God would cast them out of his protection and favour, out of the heritage of the Lord, out of the land of the living; and woe to those whom God casts out. They have by their sins deserved destruction; there is enough to justify God in their utter rejection; "*Cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions* by which they have filled up the measure of their iniquity, and are become ripe for ruin." Persecuting God's servants, fills the measure as soon as any thing, 1 Thess. 2. 15, 16. Nay, they may be easily made to *fall by their own counsels*; that which they do, to secure themselves, and do mischief to others, by the over-ruling providence of God, may be made a means of their destruction, 7. 15—9. 15. He pleads, "*They have rebelled against thee*: had they been only *nine enemies*, I could safely have forgiven them; but they are rebels against God, his crown

and dignity: they oppose his government, and will not repent, to give him glory, and therefore I plainly foresee their ruin." His prayer for their destruction comes not from a spirit of revenge, but from a spirit of prophecy, by which he foretold, That all who rebel against God will certainly be destroyed by their own counsels. It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble his people, as we are told it is, (2 Thess. 1. 6.) we pray it may be done, whenever we pray, *Father, thy will be done*.

III. He gives an account of the people of God, and prays for them, concluding with an assurance of their bliss, which he doubted not of his own interest in. Observe,

1. The description he gives of God's people. They are the righteous; (v.12.) for they put their trust in God, are well-assured of his power and all-sufficiency, venture their all upon his promise, and are confident of his protection in the way of their duty; and they love his name, are well-pleased with all that by which God has made himself known, and take delight in their acquaintance with him. This is true and pure religion, to live a life of complacency in God, and dependence on him.

2. His prayer for them; "*Let them rejoice*; let them have cause to rejoice, and hearts to rejoice; fill them with joy, with great joy and unspeakable; let them shout for joy, with constant joy and perpetual, let them ever shout for joy, with holy joy, and that which terminates in God; *let them be joyful in thee*, in thy favour, in thy salvation; not in any creature. Let them rejoice because thou coverest them, or overshadowest them, dwellest among them." Perhaps it is an allusion to the pillar of cloud and fire, which was to Israel a visible token of God's special presence with them, and the special protection they were under. Let us learn of David to pray, not for ourselves only, but for others; for all good people, for all that trust in God, and love his name, though not in every thing of our mind, or in our interest. Let all that are entitled to God's promises, have a share in our prayers; grace be with all that love Christ in sincerity. This is to concur with God.

3. His comfort concerning them, v. 12. Therefore he takes them into his prayers, because they are God's peculiar people; therefore he doubts not but his prayers shall be heard, and they shall always rejoice; for, (1.) They are happy in the assurance of God's blessing; *Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous*; wilt command a blessing upon them. Thou hast in thy word pronounced them blessed, and therefore wilt make them truly so. *Those whom thou blessest, they are blessed indeed*. (2.) "They are safe under the protection of thy favour; with that thou wilt crown him," so some read it; "it is his honour, it will be to him a diadem of beauty, and make him truly great: with that thou wilt compass him, wilt surround him on every side as with a shield." A shield, in war, guards only one side, but the favour of God is to the saints a defence on every side; like the hedge about Job, round about, so that, while they keep themselves under the divine protection, they are entirely safe, and ought to be entirely satisfied.

In singing these verses, and praying them over, we must by faith put ourselves under God's guidance and care, and then please ourselves with his mercy and grace, and with the prospect of God's triumphs, at last, over all his enemies, and his people's triumphs in him and in his salvation.

PSALM VI.

David was a weeping prophet as well as Jeremiah, and this psalm is one of his lamentations: either it was penned in a time, or, at least, calculated for a time, of great trouble, both outward and inward. Is any afflicted? Is any sick? Let him sing this psalm. The method of this psalm is very observable, and what we shall often meet with. He begins with doleful complaints, but ends with joyful praises; like Hannah, who went to prayer with a sorrowful spirit, but, when she had prayed, went her way, and her countenance was no more sad. Three things the psalmist is here complaining of; I. Sickness of body. II. Trouble of mind, arising from the sense of sin, the meritorious cause of pain and sickness. III. The insults of his enemies, upon occasion of both. Now here, 1. He pours out his complaints before God, deprecates his wrath, and begs earnestly for the return of his favour, v. 1. 7. 2. He assures himself of an answer of peace, shortly, to his full satisfaction, v. 8. 10. This psalm is like the look of Job.

To the chief musician on Neginoth upon Sheminith. A psalm of David.

1. **O** LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. 2. Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I *am* weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed. 3. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long? 4. Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake. 5. For in death *there is* no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks? 6. I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. 7. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.

These verses speak the language of a heart truly humbled under humbling providences, of a broken and contrite spirit under great afflictions, sent on purpose to awaken conscience, and mortify corruption. Those heap up wrath, who cry not when God binds them; but those are getting ready for mercy, who, under God's rebukes, sow in tears, as David does here.

Let us observe here,

I. The representation he makes to God of his grievances; he pours out his complaint before him: whither else should a child go with his complaints, but to his father? 1. He complains of bodily pain and sickness; (v. 2.) *My bones are vexed*: his bones and his flesh, like Job's, were touched. Though David was a king, yet he was sick and pained; his imperial crown would not keep his head from aching. Great men are men, and subject to the common calamities of human life. Though David was a stout man, a man of war from his youth, yet that will not secure him from distempers, which will soon make even the strong men to bow themselves. Though David was a good man, yet neither will his goodness keep him in health; *Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick*. Let this help to reconcile us to pain and sickness, that it has been the lot of some of the best saints, and that we are directed and encouraged, by their example, to shew before God our trouble in that case, who is *for the body*, and takes cognizance of its ailments. 2. He complains of inward trouble; *My soul is also sore vexed*; and that is much more grievous than the vexation of the bones. *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity*, if that be in good plight; but, if that be wounded, the grievance is intolerable. David's sickness brought his sin to his remembrance, and he looked upon it as a token of God's displeasure against him; that was the vexation of his soul, that made him cry, *I am weak, heal me*. It is a sad thing for a man to have his bones and his soul vexed at the same time; but this has been sometimes the lot of God's own people: nay, and this completed this complicated trouble, that it was continued upon them a great while, which is here intimated in that expostulation, (v. 3.) *Thou, O Lord, how long?* To the living God we must, at such a time, apply ourselves, who is the only Physician both of body and mind, and not to the Assyrians, not to the god of Ekron.

II. The impression which his troubles made upon him. They lay very heavy; he groaned till he was weary, wept till he made his bed to swim, and *watered his couch*; (v. 6.) wept till he had almost wept his eyes out; (v. 7.) *Mine eye is consumed because of grief*. David had more courage and consideration than to mourn thus for any outward affliction; but, when sin sat heavy upon his conscience, and he was made to possess his iniquities, when his soul was wounded with the sense of God's wrath, and his withdrawals from him, then he takes on thus, and mourns in secret, and even his soul refuses to be comforted. This not only kept his eyes waking, but kept his eyes weeping. Note, 1. It has often been the lot of the best men to be men of sorrows; our Lord Jesus himself was so: our way lies through a vale of tears, and we

must accommodate ourselves to the temper of the climate. 2. It well becomes the greatest spirits to be tender, and to relent, under the tokens of God's displeasure. David, who could face Goliath himself, and many another threatening enemy, with an undaunted bravery, yet melts into tears at the remembrance of sin, and under the apprehensions of divine wrath; and it is no diminution at all to his character. 3. True penitents weep in their retirements. The Pharisees disguised their faces, that they might appear unto men to mourn; but David mourns in the night upon the bed where he lay, communing with his own heart, and no eye was a witness to his grief, but the eye of Him who is all eye. Peter went out, covered his face, and wept. 4. Sorrow for sin ought to be great sorrow; so David's was; he wept so bitterly, so abundantly, that he watered his couch. 5. The triumphs of wicked men, in the sorrows of the saints, add very much to their grief. David's eye waxed old, because of his enemies, who rejoiced in his afflictions, and put bad constructions upon his tears. In this great sorrow, David was a type of Christ, who often wept, and who cried out, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful*, Heb. 5. 7.

III. The petitions which he offers up to God, in this sorrowful and distressed state. 1. That which he dreads as the greatest evil, is, the anger of God. This was the wormwood and the gall in the affliction and the misery; it was the infusion of this that made it indeed a bitter cup; and therefore he prays, (v. 1.) *O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger*, though I have deserved it, *neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure*. He does not pray, "Lord, rebuke me not; Lord, chasten me not;" for, as many as God loves, he rebukes and chastens, as a father the son in whom he delights. He can bear the rebuke and chastening well enough, if God, at the same time, lift up the light of his countenance upon him, and by his Spirit make him to hear the joy and gladness of his loving-kindness; the affliction of his body will be tolerable, if he have but comfort in his soul. No matter though sickness make his *bones* ache, if God's wrath do not make his *heart* ache; therefore his prayer is, "*Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath*; let me not lie under the impressions of that, for that will sink me." Herein David was a type of Christ, whose sorest complaint, in his sufferings, was, of the trouble of his soul, and of the suspension of his Father's smiles. He never so much as whispered a complaint of the rage of his enemies, "Why do they crucify me?" or the unkindness of his friends, "Why do they desert me?" But he *cried with a loud voice*, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Let us thus deprecate the wrath of God more than any outward trouble whatsoever, and always take heed of treasuring up wrath against a day of affliction. 2. That which he desires as the greatest good, and which would be to him the restoration of all good, is, the favour and grace of God. He prays, (1.) That God would pity him, and look upon him with compassion; he thinks himself very miserable, and misery is the proper object of mercy. Hence he prays, "*Have mercy upon me, O Lord*; in wrath, remember mercy, and deal not with me in strict justice." (2.) That God would pardon his sins; for that is the proper act of mercy, and is often chiefly intended in that petition, *Have mercy upon me*. (3.) That God would put forth his power for his relief: *Lord, heal me*, (v. 2.) *Save me*, (v. 4.) speak the word, and I shall be whole, and all will be well." (4.) That he would be at peace with him; "*Return, O Lord*, receive me into thy favour again, and be reconciled to me. Thou hast seemed to depart from me, and neglect me, nay, to set thyself at a distance, as one angry; but now, Lord, return, and shew thyself nigh to me." (5.) That he would especially preserve the inward man, and the interests of that, whatever becomes of the body; "*O Lord, deliver my soul from sinning, from sinking, from perishing for ever*." It is an unspeakable privilege, that we have a God to go to in our afflictions, and it is our duty to go to him, and thus to wrestle with him, and we shall not *seek* in vain.

IV. The pleas with which he enforces his petitions; not to move God, (he knows our cause, and the true merits of it, better than we can state it,) but to move himself. 1. He pleads his own misery, and that his misery had continued long; "*I am weak, I am troubled, sore troubled*; O Lord, *how long shall I*

be so?" 2. He pleads God's mercy; thence we take some of our best encouragements in prayer; *Save me, for thy mercies' sake.* 3. He pleads God's glory; (v. 5.) "*For in death there is no remembrance of thee.*" Lord, if thou deliver me and comfort me, I will not only give thee thanks for my deliverance, and stir up others to join with me in these thanksgivings, but I will spend the new life thou shalt intrust me with, in thy service, and to thy glory; and, all the remainder of my days, I will preserve a grateful remembrance of thy favours to me, and be quickened thereby in all instances of service to thee: but if I die, I shall be cut short of that opportunity of honouring thee, and doing good to others; for in the grave, who will give thee thanks?" Not but that separate souls live and act, and the souls of the faithful joyfully remember God, and give thanks to him. But, (1.) In the second death, (which, perhaps, David, being now troubled in soul under the wrath of God, had some dreadful apprehensions of,) there is no pleasing remembrance of God; devils and damned spirits blaspheme him, and do not praise him. "Lord, let me not lie always under *this* wrath, for that is *Sheol*, it is *Hell* itself, and lays me under an everlasting disability to praise thee." They that sincerely seek God's glory, and desire and delight to praise him, may pray, in faith, "Lord, send me not to that dreadful place, where there is no devout remembrance of thee, nor any thanks given to thee." (2.) Even the death of the body puts an end to our opportunity and capacity of glorifying God in this world, and serving the interests of his kingdom among men, by opposing the powers of darkness, and bringing many on this earth to know God, and devote themselves to him. Some have maintained, that the joys of the saints in heaven are more desirable, infinitely more so, than the comforts of saints on earth; yet the services of saints on earth, especially such eminent ones as David was, are more laudable, and redound more to the glory of the divine grace, than the services of the saints in heaven, who are not employed in maintaining the war against sin and Satan, nor in edifying the body of Christ. Courtiers in the royal presence are most happy, but soldiers in the field are more useful; and therefore we may, with good reason, pray, that, if it be the will of God, and he has any further work for us or our friends to do in this world, he will yet spare us, or them, to serve him. To depart and be with Christ, is most happy for the saints themselves; but for them to abide in the flesh, is more profitable for the church. This, David had an eye to, when he pleaded this, *In the grave, who shall give thee thanks?* 30. 9.—88. 10.—115. 17. Isa. 38. 18. And this, Christ had an eye to, when he said, *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world.*

We should sing these verses with a deep sense of the terrors of God's wrath, which we should therefore dread and deprecate above any thing; and with thankfulness, if this be not our condition, and compassion to those who are thus afflicted: if we be thus troubled, let it comfort us, that our case is not without precedent, nor, if we humble ourselves and pray, as David did, shall it be long without redress.

8. Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. 9. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer. 10. Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore-vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly.

What a sudden change is here for the better! He that was groaning, and weeping, and giving up all for gone, (v. 6, 7.) here looks, and speaks, very pleasantly. Having made his requests known to God, and lodged his case with him, he is very confident the issue will be good, and his sorrow turned into joy.

1. He distinguishes himself from the wicked and ungodly, and fortifies himself against their insults; (v. 8.) *Depart from me, all workers of iniquity.* When he was in the depth of his distress, (1.) He was afraid that God's wrath against him would give him his portion with the workers of iniquity; but now that this cloud

of melancholy was blown over, he is assured that his soul shall not be gathered with sinners, for they are not his people: he began to suspect himself to be one of them, because of the heavy pressures of God's wrath upon him; but now that all his fears are silenced, he bids them depart, knowing that his lot is among the chosen. (2.) The workers of iniquity had teased him, and taunted him, and asked him, "Where was thy God?" triumphing in his despondency and despair; but now he had wherewith to answer them that reproached him, for God was about to return in mercy to him, had now comforted his spirit, and would shortly complete his deliverance. (3.) Perhaps they had tempted him to do as they did, to quit his religion, and betake himself for ease to the pleasures of sin. But now, "Depart from me, I will never lend an ear to your counsel; you would have had me to curse God and die, but I will bless him and live." This good use we should make of God's mercies to us, we should thereby have our resolution strengthened never to have any thing more to do with sin and sinners. David was a king, and he takes this occasion to renew his purpose of using his power for the suppression of sin, and the reformation of manners, 75. 4.—101. 3. When God has done great things for us, that should put us upon studying what we shall do for him. Our Lord Jesus seems to borrow these words from the mouth of his father David, when, having all judgment committed to him, he shall say, *Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity,* (Luke, 13. 27.) and so teaches us to say so now, 119. 115.

2. He assures himself that God was, and would be, propitious to him, notwithstanding the present intimations of wrath which he was under. (1.) He is confident of a gracious answer to this prayer which he is now making. While he is yet speaking, he is aware that God hears, (as Isa. 65. 24. Dan. 9. 20.) and therefore speaks of it as a thing done, and repeats it with an air of triumph, "*The Lord hath heard,*" and again, "*The Lord hath heard.*" By the workings of God's grace upon his heart, he knew his prayer was graciously accepted, and therefore did not doubt but it would, in due time, be effectually answered. His tears had a voice, a loud voice, in the ears of the God of mercy; *The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping*; silent tears are not speechless ones: his prayers were cries to God; "*The Lord has heard the voice of my supplication,* has put his *Fiat—Let it be done,* to my petitions, and so it will appear shortly." (2.) Thence he infers the like favourable audience of all his other prayers; "*He has heard the voice of my supplication,* and therefore he will receive my prayer; for he gives, and does not upbraid with former grants."

3. He either prays for the conversion, or predicts the destruction, of his enemies and persecutors, v. 10. (1.) It may very well be taken as a prayer for their conversion; "*Let them all be ashamed of the opposition they have given me, and the censures they have passed upon me. Let them be (as all true penitents are) vexed at themselves for their own folly; let them return to a better temper and disposition of mind, and let them be ashamed of what they have done against me, and take shame to themselves.*" (2.) If they be not converted, it is a prediction of their confusion and ruin. *They shall be ashamed and sore-vexed,* (so it may be read,) and that justly; they rejoiced that David was vexed, (v. 2, 3.) and therefore, as usually, it returns upon themselves, they also shall be sore-vexed. They that will not give glory to God, shall have their faces filled with everlasting shame.

In singing this, and praying over it, we must give glory to God, as a God ready to hear prayer, must own his goodness to us in hearing our prayers, and must encourage ourselves to wait upon him, and to trust in him, in the greatest straits and difficulties.

PSALM VII.

It appears by the title, that this psalm was penned with reference to the malicious imputations that David was unjustly laid under by some of his enemies. Being thus wronged, I. He applies himself to God for favour, v. 1, 2. II. He appeals to God concerning his innocency as to those things whereof he was accused, v. 3, 5. III. He prays to God to plead his cause, and judge for him against his persecutors, v. 6, 9. IV. He expresses his confidence in God, that he would do so, and would return the mischief upon the head of those

that designed it against him, v. 10. 16. V. He promises to give God the glory of his deliverance, v. 17. In this, David was a type of Christ, who was himself, and still is, in his members, thus injured, but will certainly be righted at last.

Shiggaion of David, which he sang unto the Lord, concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite.

1. **O** LORD my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me: 2. Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while *there is none to deliver.* 3. O LORD my God, if I have done this; if there be iniquity in my hands; 4. If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me; (yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy:) 5. Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honour in the dust. Selah. 6. Arise, O LORD, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies: and awake for me to the judgment *that thou hast commanded.* 7. So shall the congregation of the people compass thee about: for their sakes therefore return thou on high. 8. The LORD shall judge the people: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity *that is in me.* 9. Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.

Shiggaion is a song or psalm; the word is used so only here and Hab. 3. 1. A wandering song, so some: the matter and composition of the several parts being different, but artificially put together. A charming song, so others; very delightful. David not only penned it, but sang it himself in a devout religious manner unto the Lord, concerning the words or affairs of Cush the Benjamite, that is, of Saul himself, whose barbarous usage of David bespoke him rather a Cushite, or Ethiopian, than a true-born Israelite. Or, more likely, it was some kinsman of Saul, named Cush, who was an inveterate enemy to David, misrepresented him to Saul as a traitor, and (which was unnecessary) exasperated Saul against him; one of those children of men, children of Belial indeed, whom David complains of, (1 Sam. 26. 19.) that made mischief between him and Saul. David, thus basely abused, has recourse to the Lord: the injuries men do us, should drive us to God, for to him we may commit our cause. Nay, he sings to the Lord, his spirit was not ruffled by it, nor cast down, but so composed and cheerful, that he was still in tune for sacred songs, and it did not occasion one jarring string in his harp. Thus let the injuries we receive from men, instead of provoking our passions, kindle and excite our devotions. In these verses,

I. He puts himself under God's protection, and flies to him for succour and shelter; (v. 1.) "*Lord, save me, and deliver me from the power and malice of all them that persecute me, that they may not have their will against me.*" He pleads, 1. His relation to God. "Thou art my God, and, therefore, whither else should I go but to thee? Thou art my God, and therefore my Shield; (Gen. 15. 1.) my God, and therefore I am one of thy servants, who may expect to be protected." 2. His confidence in God; "Lord, save me, for I depend upon thee; in thee do I put my trust, and not in any arm of flesh." Men of honour will not fail those that repose a trust in them, especially if they themselves have encouraged them to do so: which is our case. 3. The rage and malice of his enemies, and the imminent danger he was in of being swallowed up by them; "Lord, save me, or I am gone:

he will tear my soul like a lion tearing his prey;" with so much pride, and pleasure, and power, so easily, so cruelly. St. Paul compares Nero to a lion, (2 Tim. 4. 17.) as David here compares Saul. 4. The failure of all other helpers; "Lord, be thou pleased to deliver me, for otherwise *there is none to deliver,*" v. 2. It is the glory of God to help the helpless.

II. He makes a solemn protestation of his innocency, as to those things whereof he was accused, and by a dreadful imprecation appeals to God, the Searcher of hearts, concerning it, v. 3. 5. Observe, in general, 1. When we are falsely accused by men, it is a great comfort, if our own consciences acquit us.

————— Hic murus aeneus esto,
Nil conscire sibi.

Be this thy brazen bulwark of defence,
Still to preserve thy conscious innocence.

Happy indeed, when not only they cannot prove their calumnies, (Acts, 24. 13.) but when our hearts can disprove them, to our own satisfaction. 2. God is the Patron of wronged innocency. David had no court on earth to appeal to; his prince, who should have righted him, was his sworn enemy; but he had the court of heaven to fly to, and a righteous Judge there, whom he could call his God. And here see,

(1.) What the indictment is, which he pleads not guilty to. He was charged with a traitorous design against Saul's crown and life, that he compassed and imagined to depose and murder him, and, in order to that, levied war against him. This he utterly denies: he never did this, there was no iniquity of this kind in his hand, (v. 3.) he abhorred the thought of it. He never rewarded evil to Saul, when he was at peace with him, nor to any other, v. 4. Nay, as some think it should be rendered, he never rendered evil for evil, never did them mischief that had injured him.

(2.) What evidence he produces of his innocency: it is hard to prove a negative, and yet this was a negative which David could produce very good proof of; (v. 4.) *I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy.* By this it appeared, beyond contradiction, that David had no design against Saul's life—that, once and again, Providence so ordered it, that Saul lay at his mercy, and there were those about him, that would soon have dispatched him, but David generously and conscientiously prevented it, when he cut off his skirt, (1 Sam. 24. 4.) and afterward, when he took away his spear, (1 Sam. 26. 12.) to attest for him what he could have done. Saul himself owned both these to be undeniable proofs of David's integrity and good affection to him. If we render good for evil, and deny ourselves the gratifications of our passion, it may turn to us for a testimony, more than we think of, another day.

(3.) What doom he would submit to, if he were guilty; (v. 5) *Let the enemy persecute my soul to the death; and my good name when I am gone, let him lay my honour in the dust.* This intimates, [1.] That, if he had been indeed injurious to others, he had reason to expect that they would repay him in the same coin. He that has his hand against every man, must count upon it that every man's hand will be against him. [2.] That, in that case, he could not with any confidence go to God, and beg of him to deliver him, or plead his cause. It is a presumptuous, dangerous, thing for any that are guilty, and suffer justly, to appeal to God, as if they were innocent, and suffered wrongfully; such must humble themselves, and accept the punishment of their iniquity, and not expect that the righteous God will patronise their unrighteousness. [3.] That he was abundantly satisfied in himself, concerning his innocency; it is natural to us to wish well to ourselves; and therefore, a curse to ourselves, if we swear falsely, has been thought as awful a form of swearing as any other. With such an oath, or imprecation, David here ratifies the protestation of his innocency, which yet will not justify us in doing the like for every light and trivial cause; for the occasion here was important.

III. Having this testimony of his conscience concerning his innocency, he humbly prays to God to appear for him against his persecutors, and backs every petition with a proper plea, as one that knew how to order his cause before God.

1. He prays that God would manifest his wrath against his enemies, and pleads their wrath against him; "Lord, they are unjustly angry at me, be thou justly angry with them, and let them know that thou art so, v. 6. *In thine anger lift up thyself to the seat of judgment, and make thy power and justice conspicuous, because of the rage, the furies, the outrages, (the word is plural,) of mine enemies.*" Those need not fear men's wrath against them, who have God's wrath for them. *Who knows the power of his anger?*

2. He prays that God would plead his cause; Awake for me to judgment; let my cause have a hearing to *the judgment which thou hast commanded*. That speaks, (1.) The divine power; as he blesses effectually, and is therefore said to *command the blessing*, so he judges effectually, and is therefore said to *command the judgment*, which is such as none can countermand; for it certainly carries execution along with it. (2.) The divine purpose and promise; "It is the judgment which thou hast determined to pass upon all the enemies of thy people. Thou hast commanded the princes and judges of the earth to right the injured, and vindicate the oppressed; Lord, awaken thyself to that judgment." He that loves righteousness, and requires it in others, will, no doubt, execute it himself. Though he seem to connive at wrong, as one asleep, he will awake in due time, (78. 65.) and will make it to appear that the delays were no neglects. He prays, (v. 7.) "*Return thou on high, maintain thine own authority, resume thy royal throne of which they have despised the sovereignty, and the judgment-seat of which they have despised the sentence. Return on high, visibly, and in the sight of all, that it may be universally acknowledged that Heaven itself owns and pleads David's cause.*" Some make this to point at the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, who, when he returned to heaven, (returned on high in his exalted state,) had all judgment committed to him. Or, it may refer to his second coming, when he shall return on high to this world, to execute judgment upon all. This return his injured people wait for, and pray for, and to it they appeal from the unjust censures of men. He prays again, (v. 8.) "*Judge me, judge for me, give sentence on my side.*"

To enforce this suit, [1.] He pleads that his cause was now brought into the proper court; *The Lord shall judge the people*, v. 8. It is his place; it is his promise. *God is the judge*; "Therefore, Lord, judge me." He is the Judge of all the earth, and therefore, no doubt, he shall do right, and all will be obliged to acquiesce in his judgment. [2.] He insists upon his integrity as to all the matters in variance between him and Saul, and desires only to be judged, in this matter, according to his righteousness, and the sincerity of his heart in all the steps he had taken toward his preferment. [3.] He foretells that it would be much for the glory of God, and the edification and comfort of his people, if God would appear for him; "*So shall the congregation of the people compass thee about*; therefore do it for their sakes, that they may attend thee with their praises and services in the courts of thine house." *First*, They will do it of their own accord. God's appearing on David's behalf, and fulfilling his promise to him, would be such an instance of his righteousness, goodness, and faithfulness, as would greatly enlarge the hearts of all his faithful worshippers, and fill their mouths with praise. David was the darling of his country, especially of all the good people in it; and therefore when they saw him in a fair way to the throne, they would greatly rejoice, and give thanks to God; crowds of them would attend his footstool with their praises for such a blessing to their land. *Secondly*, If David come into power, as God had promised him, he will take care to bring people to church, by his influence upon them, and the ark shall not be neglected, as it was in the days of Saul, 1 Chron. 13. 3.

3. He prays, in general, for the conversion of sinners, and the establishment of saints; (v. 9.) "*O let the wickedness, not only of my wicked enemies, but of all the wicked, come to an end; but establish the just.*" Here are two things which every one of us must desire, and may hope for. (1.) The period of sin; that it may be brought to an end in ourselves and others. When corruption is mortified, when every wicked way and thought are forsaken,

and the stream which ran violently toward the world and the flesh, is driven back, and runs toward God and heaven, then the wickedness of the wicked comes to an end. When there is a general reformation of manners, when atheists and profane are convinced and converted, when a stop is put to the spreading of the infection of sin, so that evil men proceed no further, their folly being made manifest; when the wicked designs of the church's enemies are baffled, and their power broken, and the man of sin is destroyed; then *the wickedness of the wicked comes to an end*. And this is that which all that love God, and, for his sake, hate evil, desire and pray for. (2.) The perpetuity of righteousness; *but establish the just*. As we pray that bad may be made good, so we pray that the good may be made better, that they may not be seduced by the wiles of the wicked, nor shocked by their malice; that they may be confirmed in their choice of the ways of God, and in their resolution to persevere therein; may be firm to the interests of God and religion, and zealous in their endeavours to bring *the wickedness of the wicked to an end*. His plea to enforce this petition is, *For the righteous God trieth the hearts and the reins*; and therefore he knows the secret wickedness of the wicked, and knows how to bring it to an end: and the secret sincerity of the just he is witness to, and has secret ways of establishing.

As far as we have the testimony of an unbiassed conscience for us, that in any instance we are wronged and injuriously reflected on, we may, in singing these verses, lodge our appeal with the righteous God, and be assured that he will own our righteous cause, and will one day, in the last day at furthest, bring forth our integrity as the light.

10. My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart. 11. God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. 12. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. 13. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors. 14. Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. 15. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. 16. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate. 17. I will praise the LORD according to his righteousness; and will sing praise to the name of the LORD most high.

David, having lodged his appeal with God by prayer and a solemn profession of his integrity, in the former part of the psalm, in this latter part does, as it were, take out judgment upon the appeal, by faith in the word of God, and the assurance it gives of the happiness and safety of the righteous, and the certain destruction of wicked people that continue impenitent.

1. David is confident that he shall find God his powerful Protector and Saviour, and the Patron of his oppressed innocence; (v. 10.) "*My defence is of God*. Not only, God is my Defender, and I shall find him so, but I look for defence and safety in no other; my hope for shelter in a time of danger is placed in God alone; if I have defence, it must be of God." *My shield is upon God*, so some read it; there is that in God which gives an assurance of protection to all that are his. His name is a strong tower, Prov. 18. 10. Two things David builds this confidence upon. 1. The particular favour God has for all that are sincere; *He saves the upright in heart*, saves them with an everlasting salvation, and therefore will preserve them to his heavenly kingdom; he saves them out of their present troubles, as far as is good for them, their integrity and uprightness will preserve them. The upright in heart are safe, and ought to think themselves so, under the divine pro-

tection. 2. The general respect he has for justice and equity; *God judgeth the righteous*; he owns every righteous cause, and will maintain it in every righteous man, and will protect him. *God is a righteous Judge*, so some read it, who not only doeth righteousness himself, but will take care that righteousness be done by the children of men, and will avenge and punish all unrighteousness.

11. He is no less confident of the destruction of all his wicked persecutors, even as many of them as would not *repent, to give glory to God*. He reads their doom here, for their good, if possible, that they might cease from their enmity; or, however, for his own comfort, that he might not be afraid of them, nor aggrieved at their prosperity and success for a time. He goes into the sanctuary of God, and there understands, 1. That they are children of wrath; they are not to be envied, for God is angry with them, is *angry with the wicked every day*. They are every day doing that which is provoking to him, and he resents it, and treasures it up *against the day of wrath*. As his mercies are new every morning toward his people, so his anger is new every morning against the wicked, upon the fresh occasions given for it by their renewed transgressions. God is angry with the wicked, even in the merriest and most prosperous of their days, even in the days of their devotion: for if they be suffered to prosper, it is in wrath; if they pray, their very prayers are an abomination. The wrath of God abides upon them, (John, 3. 36.) and continual additions are made to it. 2. That they are children of death, as all the children of wrath are; sons of perdition, marked out for ruin. See their destruction:

(1.) God will destroy them; the destruction they are reserved for is, *destruction from the Almighty*, which ought to be a terror to every one of us, for it comes from the *wrath of God*, v. 13, 14. It is here intimated, [1.] That the destruction of sinners may be prevented by their conversion, for it is threatened, with that proviso; If he turn not from his evil way, if he do not let fall his enmity against the people of God, then let him expect it will be his ruin; but if he turn, it is implied that his sins shall be pardoned, and all shall be well. Thus even the threatenings of wrath are introduced with a gracious implication of mercy, enough to justify God for ever in the destruction of them that perish; they might have turned, and lived, but they chose rather to go on and die, and their blood is therefore upon their own heads. [2.] That if it be not thus prevented by the conversion of the sinner, it will be prepared for him by the justice of God. In general, (v. 13.) *He has prepared for him the instruments of death*, of all that death which is the wages of sin. If God will slay, he will not want instruments of death for any creature; even the least and weakest may be made so when he pleases. *First*, Here is variety of instruments, all which breathe threatenings and slaughter. Here is a sword which wounds and kills at hand, a bow and arrows which wound and kill at a distance, those who think to get out of the reach of God's vindictive justice. If the sinner *flies from the iron weapon*, yet the *bow of steel shall strike him through*, Job, 20. 24. *Secondly*, These instruments of death are all said to be *made ready*; God has them not to seek, but always at hand; *judgments are prepared for scorners*; *Tophet is prepared of old*. *Thirdly*, While God is preparing his instruments of death, he gives the sinners timely warning of their danger, and space to repent and prevent it. He is slow to punish, and *long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish*. *Fourthly*, The longer the destruction is delayed to give time for repentance, the sorer will it be, and the heavier will it fall, and lie for ever, if that time be not so improved, while God is waiting; the sword is in the whetting, and the bow in the drawing. *Fifthly*, The destruction of impenitent sinners, though it come slowly, yet comes surely; for it is *ordained*, they are of old ordained to it. *Sixthly*, Of all sinners, persecutors are set up as the fairest marks of divine wrath; against them, more than any other, God has ordained his arrows. They set God at defiance, but cannot set themselves out of the reach of his judgments.

(2.) They will *destroy themselves*, v. 14. 16. The sinner is here described as taking a great deal of pains to ruin himself, more

pains to damn his soul than, if directed aright, would save it. [1.] It is described by the pains of a labouring woman that brings forth a false conception, v. 14. The sinner's head with its politics conceives mischief, contrives it with a great deal of art, lays the plot deep, and keeps it close; the sinner's heart with its passions travails with iniquity, and is in pain to be delivered of the malicious projects it is hatching against the people of God. But what does it come to when it comes to the birth? It is falsehood, it is a cheat upon himself, it is a lie in his right hand; he cannot compass what he intended; nor, if he gain his point, will he gain the satisfaction he promised himself; he brings forth *wind*, (Isa. 26. 18.) *stubble*, (Isa. 33. 11.) *death*, (James, 1. 15.) that is, *falsehood*. [2.] By the pains of a labouring man, that works hard to dig a pit, and then falls into it, and perishes in it. *First*, This is true, in a sense, of all sinners; they prepare destruction for themselves, by preparing themselves for destruction; loading themselves with guilt, and submitting themselves to their corruptions. *Secondly*, It is often remarkably true of those who contrive mischief against the people of God, or against their neighbours; by the righteous hand of God it is made to *return upon their own heads*; what they designed for the shame and destruction of others proves to be their own confusion.

—Nec lex est justior ulla,
Quàm, Necis artifices arte perire suâ.—

There is not a juster law than, That the author of a murderous contrivance should perish by it. Some apply it to Saul, who fell upon his sword.

In singing this psalm, we must do as David here does; (v. 17.) *praise the Lord according to his righteousness*; give him the glory of that gracious protection under which he takes his afflicted people, and of that just vengeance with which he will pursue them that afflict them; thus we must sing to the praise of the Lord most high, who, when his enemies deal proudly, shews that he is above them.

PSALM VIII.

This psalm is a solemn meditation on, and adoration of, the glory and greatness of God, of which we are all concerned to think highly and honourably. It begins and ends with the same acknowledgment of the transcendent excellency of God's name. It is proposed for proof, (v. 1.) That God's name is excellent in all the earth! And then it is repeated, as proved, (with a quod erat demonstrandum—which was to be demonstrated,) in the last verse. For the proof of God's glory, he gives instances of his goodness to man; for God's goodness is his glory. God is to be glorified, I. For making known himself and his great name to us, v. 1. II. For making use of the weakest of the children of men, by them to serve his own purposes, v. 2. III. For making even the heavenly bodies useful to man, v. 3, 4. IV. For making him to have dominion over the creatures in this lower world, and thereby placing him but little lower than the angels, v. 5. 8. This psalm is, in the New Testament, applied to Christ, and the work of our redemption which he wrought out; the honour given by the children of men to him, (v. 2. Matt. 21. 16.) and the honour put upon the children of men by him, both in his humiliation, when he was made little lower than the angels, and in his exaltation, when he was crowned with glory and honour, v. 5, 6. Heb. 2. 6. 8. 1 Cor. 15. 27. When we are observing the glory of God in the kingdom of nature and Providence, we should be led by that, and through that, to the contemplation of his glory in the kingdom of grace.

To the chief musician upon Gittith. A psalm of David.

1. **O** LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. 2. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

The psalmist here sets himself to give to God the glory due to his name. Dr. Hammond grounds a conjecture upon the title of this psalm, concerning the occasion of penning it. It is said to be upon *Gittith*, which is generally taken for the tune, or musical instrument, with which this psalm was to be sung; but he renders it upon the *Gittite*, that is, *Goliath the Gittite*, whom he vanquished and slew; (1 Sam. 17.) that enemy was stilled by

him who was, in comparison, but a babe and a suckling. The conjecture would be probable enough, but that we find two other psalms with the same title, 81, 84.

Two things David here admires,

1. How plainly God displays his glory himself, v. 1. He addresses himself to God with all humility and reverence, as the Lord, and his people's Lord; *O Lord our Lord*. If we believe that God is the Lord, we must avouch and acknowledge him to be our's. He is our's, for he made us, protects us, and takes special care of us. He must be our's, for we are bound to obey him, and submit to him; we must own the relation, not only when we come to pray to God, as a plea with him to shew us mercy, but when we come to praise him, as an argument with ourselves to give him glory: and we shall never think we can do that with affection enough, if we consider,

1. How bright God's glory shines even in this lower world; *How excellent is his name in all the earth!* The works of creation and Providence evince and proclaim to all the world, that there is an infinite Being, the Fountain of all being, power, and perfection, the sovereign Ruler, powerful Protector, and bountiful Benefactor, of all the creatures. How great, how illustrious, how magnificent, is his name in all the earth! The light of it shines in men's faces every where; (Rom. 1. 20.) if they shut their eyes against it, that is their fault. There is no speech or language, but the voice of God's name either is heard in it, or may be. But this looks further, to the gospel of Christ, by which the name of God, as it is notified by divine revelation, which, before, was great in *Israel* only, came to be so in all the earth, the utmost ends of which have thus been made to see *God's great salvation*, Mark, 16. 15, 16.

2. How much brighter it shines in the upper world; *Thou hast set thy glory above the heavens*. (1.) God is infinitely more glorious and excellent than the noblest of creatures, and those that shine brightest. (2.) Whereas we on this earth only hear God's excellent name, and praise that, the angels and blessed spirits above see his glory, and praise that, and yet he is exalted far above even their blessing and praise. (3.) In the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the right hand of God, who is the Brightness of his Father's glory, and the express Image of his person, God set his glory above the heavens, far above all principalities and powers.

II. How powerfully he discovers it by the weakest of his creatures; (v. 2.) *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength*, or perfected praise, the praise of thy strength, Matth. 21. 16. This bespeaks the glory of God, 1. In the kingdom of nature. The care God takes of little children, (when they first come into the world, the most helpless of all animals,) the special protection they are under, and the provision nature has made for them, ought to be acknowledged by every one of us, to the glory of God, as a great instance of his power and goodness; and the more sensibly, because we have all had the benefit of it, for to this we owe it, that we *did not from the womb*, that the knees then prevented us, *and the breasts, that we should suck*. "This is such an instance of thy goodness, as may for ever put to silence the enemies of thy glory, who say, There is no God." 2. In the kingdom of Providence; in the government of this lower world he makes use of the children of men, some that know him, and others that do not, (Isa. 45. 4.) and these such as have been babes and sucklings; nay, sometimes he is pleased to serve his own purposes by the ministry of such as are still, in wisdom and strength, little better than babes and sucklings. 3. In the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of the Messiah. It is here foretold, that, by the apostles, who were looked upon but as babes, *unlearned and ignorant men*, (Acts, 4. 13.) mean and despicable, and *by the foolishness of their preaching*, the Devil's kingdom should be thrown down, as Jericho's walls were by the sound of rams'-horns. The gospel is called *the arm of the Lord*, and *the rod of his strength*; this was ordained to work wonders, not out of the mouth of philosophers or orators, politicians or statesmen, but of a company of poor fishermen, who lay under the greatest external disadvantages; yea we hear children crying, *Hosanna to*

the Son of David, when the chief priests and Pharisees owned him not, but despised and rejected him; to that therefore our Saviour applies this, (Matth. 21. 16.) and by it stilled the enemy. Sometimes the grace of God appears wonderfully in young children, and he *teaches them knowledge, and makes them to understand doctrine, who are but newly weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts*, Isa. 28. 9. Sometimes the power of God brings to pass great things in his church by very weak and unlikely instruments; and confounds the noble, wise, and mighty, by the base, and weak, and foolish, things of the world, that no flesh might glory in his presence, but the excellency of the power might the more evidently appear to be of God, and not of man, 1 Cor. 1. 27, 28. This he does, because of his enemies, because they are insolent and haughty, that he may still them, may put them to silence, and put them to shame, and so be justly avenged on the avengers; see Acts, 4. 14.—6. 10. The Devil is the great enemy and avenger, and by the preaching of the gospel he was, in a great measure, stilled, his oracles were silenced, the advocates of his cause were confounded, and unclean spirits themselves not suffered to speak.

In singing this, let us give God the glory of his great name, and of the great things he has done by the power of his gospel, in the chariot of which the exalted Redeemer rides forth, conquering and to conquer, and ought to be attended, not only with our praises, but with our best wishes. Praise is perfected, God is in the highest degree glorified, when strength is ordained out of the mouth of babes and sucklings.

3. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; 4. What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? 5. For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. 6. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all *things* under his feet: 7. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field: 8. The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, *and whatsoever* passeth through the paths of the seas. 9. O LORD our Lord, how excellent *is* thy name in all the earth!

David here goes on to magnify the honour of God, by recounting the honours he has put upon man, especially the man Christ Jesus. The condescensions of the divine grace call for our praises as much as the elevations of the divine glory; how God has condescended in favour to man, the psalmist here observes with wonder and thankfulness, and recommends it to our thoughts. See here,

I. What it is that leads him to admire the condescending favour of God to man; it is his consideration of the lustre and influence of the heavenly bodies, which are within the view of sense; (v. 3.) *I consider thy heavens*, and there, particularly, *the moon and the stars*. But why does he not take notice of the sun, which much exceeds them all? Probably because it was in a night-walk, by moonlight, that he entertained and instructed himself with this meditation, when the sun was not within view, but only the moon and the stars, which, though they are not altogether so serviceable to man as the sun is, yet are no less demonstrations of the wisdom, power, and goodness, of the Creator. Observe, 1. It is our duty to consider the heavens. We see them, we cannot but see them; by this, among other things, man is distinguished from the beasts, that, while *they* are so framed as to look downward to the earth, man is made erect to look upward toward heaven; *Os homini sublime dedit, calumque tueri jussit—To man he gave an erect countenance, and bade him gaze on the heavens*, that thus he may be directed to set his affections on things above; for what we see has not its due influence upon us, unless we consider it. 2. We

must always consider the heavens as God's heavens; not only as all the world is his, even the earth and the fulness thereof, but in a more peculiar manner; *The heavens, even the heavens, are the Lord's*, (115. 16.) they are the place of the residence of his glory, and we are taught to call him *Our Father in heaven*. 3. They are *therefore* his, because they are the work of his fingers; he made them, he made them easily; the stretching out of the heavens needed not any outstretched arm, it was done with a word; he made them with very great curiosity and fineness, like a nice piece of work which the artist makes with his fingers. 4. Even the lesser lights, the moon and stars, shew the glory and power of the Father of lights, and furnish us with matter for praise. 5. The heavenly bodies are not only the creatures of the divine power, but subject to the divine government; God not only made them, but ordained them; and the ordinances of heaven can never be altered. But how does this come in here, to magnify God's favour to man?

(1.) When we consider how the glory of God shines in the upper world, we may well wonder that he should take cognizance of such a mean creature as man; that he who resides in that bright and blessed part of the creation, and governs it, should humble himself to behold the things done upon this earth; see 113. 5, 6. (2.) When we consider of what great use the heavens are to men on earth, and how the lights of heaven are *divided unto all nations*, (Deut. 4. 19. Gen. 1. 15.) we may well say, "*Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst settle the ordinances of heaven, with an eye to him and to his benefit, and that his comfort and convenience should be so much consulted in the making of the lights of heaven, and directing their motions!*"

II. How he expresses this admiration; (v. 4.) "*Lord, what is man! (Enosh, sinful, weak, miserable, man, a creature so forgetful of thee, and his duty to thee,) that thou art thus mindful of him; that thou takest cognizance of him, and of his actions and affairs; that, in the making of the world, thou hadst a respect to him! What is the son of man, that thou visitest him; that thou not only feedest him and clothest him, protectest him and providest for him, in common with other creatures, but visitest him, as one friend visits another, art pleased to converse with him, and concern thyself for him! What is man, (so mean a creature,) that he should be thus honoured, (so sinful a creature,) that he should be thus countenanced and favoured!*" Now this refers,

1. To mankind in general. Though man is a worm, and the son of man is a worm, (Job, 25. 6.) yet God puts a respect upon him, and shews him abundance of kindness; man is, above all the creatures in this lower world, the favourite and darling of Providence. For,

(1.) He is of a very honourable rank of beings. We may be sure he takes place of all the inhabitants of this lower world, for he is made but a *little lower than the angels*, (v. 5.) lower indeed, because by his body he is allied to the earth, and to the beasts that perish, and yet by his soul, which is spiritual and immortal, he is so near akin to the holy angels, that he may be truly said to be but a *little lower than they*, and is in order next to them. He is but for a little while lower than the angels, while his great soul is cooped up in a house of clay, but the children of the resurrection shall be *ισάγγελοι*—*angels' peers*, (Luke, 20. 36.) and no longer lower than they.

(2.) He is endued with noble faculties and capacities; *Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour*; he that gave him his being has distinguished him, and qualified him for a dominion over the inferior creatures; for, having *made him wiser than the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of heaven*, (Job, 35. 11.) he has made him fit to rule them, and it is fit that they should be ruled by him. Man's reason is his crown of glory; let him not profane that crown by disturbing the use of it, nor forfeit that crown by acting contrary to its dictates.

(3.) He is invested with a sovereign dominion over the inferior creatures, under God, and is constituted their lord. He that made them, and knows them, and whose own they are, has *made man to have dominion over them*, v. 6. His charter, by which he holds this royalty, bears equal date with his creation, (Gen. 1. 28.)

and was renewed after the flood, Gen. 9. 2. God has put all things under man's feet, that he might serve himself, not only of the labour, but of the productions and lives, of the inferior creatures; they are all delivered into his hand, nay, they are all *put under his feet*. He specifies some of the inferior animals; (v. 7, 8.) not only sheep and oxen, which man takes care of and provides for, but the beasts of the field, as well as those of the flood, yea, and those creatures which are most at a distance from man, as the fowl of the air, yea, and the fish of the sea, which live in another element, and pass unseen through the paths of the seas. Man has arts to take these; though many of them are much stronger, and many of them are much swifter, than he, yet, one way or other, he is too hard for them, Jam. 3. 7. *Every kind of beasts, and birds, and things in the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed*; he has likewise liberty to use them as he has occasion; *Rise, Peter, kill and eat*, Acts, 10. 13. Every time we partake of fish or of fowl, we realize this dominion which man has over the works of God's hands; and it is a reason for our subjection to God, our chief Lord, and to his dominion over us.

2. But this refers, in a particular manner, to Jesus Christ; of him we are taught to expound it, (Heb. 2. 6. . 8.) where the apostle, to prove the sovereign dominion of Christ, both in heaven and in earth, shews that he is that man, that son of man, here spoken of, whom God has *crowned with glory and honour*, and made to *have dominion over the works of his hands*. And it is certain that the greatest favour that ever was shewed to the human race, and the greatest honour that ever was put upon the human nature, were exemplified in the incarnation and exaltation of the Lord Jesus; these far exceed the favours and honours done us by creation and providence, though they also are great, and far more than we deserve.

We have reason humbly to value ourselves by it, and thankfully to admire the grace of God in it,

(1.) That Jesus Christ assumed the nature of man, and in that nature humbled himself. He became the *Son of man*, a partaker of flesh and blood; being so, God visited him; which some apply to his sufferings for us, for it is said, (Heb. 2. 9.) *For the suffering of death, a visitation in wrath, he was crowned with glory and honour*. God visited him; having laid upon him the iniquity of us all, he reckoned with him for it, visited him with a rod and with stripes, that we by them might be healed. He was, *for a little while*, (so the apostle interprets it,) made lower than the angels, when he took upon him the form of a servant, and made himself of no reputation.

(2.) That, in that nature, he is exalted to be Lord of all. God the Father exalted him, because he had humbled himself; *crowned him with glory and honour*, the glory which he had with him before the worlds were; set him at his own right hand; constituted him not only the *Head of the church*, but *Head over all things to the church*; and gave all things into his hand, intrusted him with the administration of the kingdom of providence, in conjunction with, and subserviency to, the kingdom of grace. All the creatures are put under his feet; and, even in the days of his flesh, he gave some specimens of his power over them, as when he commanded the winds and the seas, and appointed a fish to pay his tribute.

With good reason, therefore, does the psalmist conclude as he began, *Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth*, which has been honoured with the presence of the Redeemer, and is still enlightened by his gospel, and governed by his wisdom and power! In singing this, and praying it over, though we must not forget to acknowledge, with suitable affections, God's common favours to mankind, particularly in the serviceableness of the inferior creatures to us, yet we must especially set ourselves to give glory to our Lord Jesus, by confessing that he is Lord, submitting to him as our Lord, and waiting till we see all things put under him, and all his enemies made his footstool.

PSALM IX.

In this psalm, I. David praises God for pleading his cause, and giving him victory over his enemies and the enemies of his country, (v. 1. . 6.) and calls upon others to join with him in his songs of praise, v. 11, 12. II. He prayeth

to God, that he might have still further occasion to praise him, for his own deliverances, and the confusion of his enemies, v. 13, 14, 19, 20. III. He triumphs in the assurance he had of God's judging the world, (v. 7, 8.) protecting his oppressed people, (v. 9, 10, 18.) and bringing his and their implacable enemies to ruin, v. 15, 17. This is very applicable to the kingdom of the Messiah, the enemies of which have been, in part, destroyed already, and shall be yet more and more, till they all be made his footstool; which we are to assure ourselves of, that God may have the glory, and we may take the comfort.

To the chief musician upon Muth-labben. A psalm of David.

1. **I** WILL praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. 2. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. 3. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence. 4. For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne, judging right. 5. Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever. 6. O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end; and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them. 7. But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. 8. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness. 9. The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. 10. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.

The title of this psalm gives a very uncertain sound concerning the occasion of penning it. It is upon *Muth-labben*, which some make to refer to the death of Goliath, others of Nabal, others of Absalom; but I incline to think it signifies only some tune, or musical instrument, to which this psalm was intended to be sung; and that the enemies he is here triumphing in the defeat of, are the Philistines, and the other neighbouring nations that opposed his settlement in the throne; whom he contested with, and subdued, in the beginning of his reign, 2 Sam. 5, 8.

In these verses,

1. David excites and engages himself to praise God for his mercies, and the great things he had of late done for him and his government, v. 1, 2. Note, 1. God expects suitable returns of praise from those for whom he has done marvellous works. 2. If we would praise God acceptably, we must praise him in sincerity, with our hearts, and not only with our lips, and be lively and fervent in the duty, with our whole heart. 3. When we give thanks for some one particular mercy, we should take occasion thence to remember former mercies, and so to shew forth all his marvellous works. 4. Holy joy is the life of thankful praise, as thankful praise is the language of holy joy; *I will be glad and rejoice in thee*. 5. Whatever occurs to make us glad, our joy must pass through it, and terminate in God only; *I will be glad and rejoice in thee*, not in the gift so much as in the Giver. 6. Joy and praise are properly expressed by singing psalms. 7. When God has shewed himself to be above the proud enemies of the church, we must take occasion thence to give glory to him as the Most High. 8. The triumphs of the Redeemer ought to be the triumphs of the redeemed; see Rev. 12. 10.—19. 5—15. 3, 4.

II. He acknowledges the almighty power of God, as that which the strongest and stoutest of his enemies were no way able to contest with, or stand before, v. 3. But, 1. They are forced to turn back; their policy and their courage fail them, so that they cannot, they dare not, push forward in their enterprises, but retire with precipitation. 2. When once they turn back, they

fall and perish; even their retreat will be their ruin, and they will save themselves no more by flying than by fighting. If Haman begin to fall before Mordecai, he is a lost man, and shall prevail no more; see Esth. 6. 13. 3. The presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power, are sufficient for the destruction of his and his people's enemies. That is easily done, which a man does with his very presence; with *that*, God confounds his enemies, such a presence has he. This was fulfilled, when our Lord Jesus, with one word, *I am he*, made his enemies to *fall back at his presence*; (John, 18. 6.) he could, at the same time, have made them perish. 4. When the enemies of God's church are put to confusion, we must ascribe it to the power, not of instruments, but of his presence, and give him all the glory.

III. He gives to God the glory of his righteousness, in his appearing on his behalf; (v. 4.) "*Thou hast maintained my right and my cause*, my righteous cause; when that came on, thou satest in the throne, judging right. Observe, 1. God sits in the throne of judgment; to him it belongs to decide controversies, to determine appeals, to right the injured, and to punish the injurious; for he has said, *Vengeance is mine*. 2. We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth, and that with him there is no unrighteousness. Far be it from God, that he should pervert justice. If there seems to us to be some irregularity in the present decisions of Providence, yet these, instead of shaking our belief of God's justice, may serve to strengthen our belief of the judgment to come, which will set all to rights. 3. Whoever disown and desert a just and injured cause, we may be sure that the righteous God will maintain it, and plead it with jealousy, and will never suffer it to be run down.

IV. He records, with joy, the triumphs of the God of heaven over all the powers of hell, and attends those triumphs with his praises, v. 5. By three steps the power and justice of God had proceeded against the heathen, and wicked people, who were enemies to the king God had lately set up upon his holy hill of Zion. 1. He had checked them; "*Thou hast rebuked the heathen*; hast given them real proofs of thy displeasure against them." This he did, before he destroyed them, that they might have taken warning by the rebukes of Providence, and so have prevented their own destruction. (2.) He had cut them off; *Thou hast destroyed the wicked*. The wicked are marked for destruction, and some are made monuments of God's vindictive justice, and destructive power, in this world. (3.) He had buried them in oblivion and perpetual infamy; had put out their name for ever, that they should never be remembered with any respect.

V. He exults over the enemy whom God thus appears against; (v. 6.) *Thou hast destroyed cities*. Either, "Thou, O enemy, hast destroyed our cities, at least, in intention and imagination;" or, "Thou, O God, hast destroyed their cities by the desolation brought upon their country." It may be taken either way; for the psalmist will have the enemy to know, 1. That their destruction is just; and that God was but reckoning with them for all the mischief which they had done, and designed, against his people. The malicious and vexatious neighbours of Israel, as the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Syrians, had made incursions upon them, (when there was no king in Israel to fight their battles,) and destroyed their cities, and done what they could to make their memorial perish with them; but now the wheel was turned upon them, their destructions of Israel were come to a perpetual end, they shall now cease to spoil, and must themselves be spoiled, Isa. 33. 1. 2. That it is total and final, such a destruction as should make a perpetual end of them, so that the very memorial of their cities should perish with them. So devouring a thing is time, and, much more, such desolations do the righteous judgments of God make upon sinners, that great and populous cities have been reduced to such ruins, that their very memorial is perished, and those who have sought them could not find where they stood; but we look for a city that has stronger foundations.

VI. He comforts himself, and others, in God, and pleases himself with the thoughts of him.

1. With the thoughts of his eternity. On this earth we see

nothing durable, even strong cities are buried in rubbish, and forgotten; *but the Lord shall endure for ever, v. 7.* There is no change of his being; his felicity, power, and perfection, are out of the reach of all the combined forces of hell and earth; they may put an end to our liberties, our privileges, our lives, but our God is still the same, and sits even upon the floods, unshaken, undisturbed, 29. 10.—93. 2.

2. With the thoughts of his sovereignty both in government and judgment; *He has prepared his throne*, has fixed it by his infinite wisdom, has fixed it by his immutable counsel. It is the great support and comfort of good people, when the power of the church's enemies is threatening, and the posture of its affairs melancholy and perplexed, that God now rules the world, and will shortly judge the world.

3. With the thoughts of his justice and righteousness in all the administrations of his government. He does all, every day, he will do all, at the last day, according to the eternal, unalterable, rules of equity; (v. 8.) *He shall judge the world*, all persons and all controversies, shall minister judgment to the people, shall determine their lot both in this and in the future state, in righteousness and in uprightness, so that there shall not be the least colour of exception against it.

4. With the thoughts of that peculiar favour which God bears to his own people, and the special protection which he takes them under. The Lord, who endures for ever, is their everlasting Strength and Protection; he that judges the world, will be sure to judge for them, when at any time they are injured or distressed; (v. 9.) *He will be a refuge for the oppressed*; a high place, a strong place, for the oppressed, in time of trouble. It is the lot of God's people to be oppressed in this world, and to have treble times appointed to them; perhaps God may not immediately appear for them as their Deliverer and Avenger; but, in the midst of their distresses, they may by faith fly to him as their Refuge, and may depend upon his power and promise for their safety, so that no real hart shall be done them.

5. With the thoughts of that sweet satisfaction and repose of mind which they have, that make God their Refuge; (v. 10.) *"They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee*, as I have done;" (for the grace of God is the same in all the saints,) "and then they will find, as I have found, that thou dost not forsake them that seek thee;" for the favour of God is the same towards all the saints. Note, (1.) The better God is known, the more he is trusted. Those who know him to be a God of infinite wisdom, will trust him *further than they can see him*; (Job, 35. 14.) those who know him to be a God of almighty power, will trust him when creature-confidences fail, and they have nothing else to trust to, (2 Chr. 20. 12.) and those who know him to be a God of infinite grace and goodness, will trust him, *though he slay them*; Job, 13. 15. Those who know him to be a God of inviolable truth and faithfulness, will rejoice in his word of promise, and rest upon that, though the performance be deferred, and intermediate providences seem to contradict it. Those who know him to be the Father of spirits, and an everlasting Father, will trust him with their souls as their main care, and trust in him at all times, even to the end. (2.) The more God is trusted, the more he is sought unto. If we trust God, we shall seek him by faithful and fervent prayer, and by a constant care to approve ourselves to him in the whole course of our conversation. (3.) God never did, nor ever will, disown or desert any that duly seek to him, and trust in him. Though he afflict them, he does not leave them comfortless; though he seem to forsake them for a while, yet he will gather them with everlasting mercies.

11. Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion; declare among the people his doings.

12. When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble. 13. Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble *which I suffer* of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death:

14. That I may shew forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion; I will rejoice in thy salvation. 15. The heathen are sunk down in the pit *that they made*: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. 16. The LORD is known *by the judgment which* he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgsaion. Selah. 17. The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and all the nations that forget God*. 18. For the needy shall not alway be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall *not* perish for ever. 19. Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight. 20. Put them in fear, O LORD: *that the nations may know themselves to be but men*. Selah.

In these verses,

I. David, having praised God himself, calls upon and invites others to praise him likewise, v. 11. Those who believe God is greatly to be praised, not only desire to do that work better themselves, but desire that others also may join with them in it, and would gladly be instrumental to bring them to it; *Sing praises to the Lord which dwelleth in Zion*. As the special residence of his glory is in heaven, so the special residence of his grace is in his church, of which Zion was a type: there he meets his people with his promises and graces, and there he expects they should meet him with their praises and services. In all our praises, we should have an eye to God as dwelling in Zion, in a special manner present in the assemblies of his people, as their Protector and Patron. He resolved himself to shew forth God's marvellous works, (v. 1.) and here he calls upon others to declare among the people his doings: he commands his own subjects to do it, for the honour of God, of their country, and of their holy religion; he counsels his neighbours to do it; to sing praises, not, as hitherto, to their false gods, but to Jehovah who dwelleth in Zion, to the God of Israel, and to own among the heathen, that the Lord has *done great things for his people Israel*, 126. 3, 4. Let them particularly take notice of the justice of God in avenging the blood of his people Israel on the Philistines, and their other wicked neighbours, who had, in making war upon them, used them barbarously, and given them no quarter, v. 12. When God comes to make inquisition for blood by his judgments on earth, before he comes to do it by the judgment of the great day, he remembers them, remembers every drop of the innocent blood which they have shed, and will return it sevenfold upon the head of the blood-thirsty; he will give them blood to drink, for they are worthy. This assurance he might well build upon that word, (Dent. 32. 43.) *He will avenge the blood of his servants*. Note, There is a day coming, when God will make inquisition for blood, when he will discover what has been shed secretly, and avenge what has been shed unjustly; see Isa. 26. 21. Jer. 51. 35. In that day, it will appear how precious the blood of God's people is to him, (72. 14.) when it must all be accounted for. It will then appear that he has not forgotten the cry of the humble, neither the cry of their blood, nor the cry of their prayers, but that both are sealed up among his treasures.

II. David, having praised God for former mercies and deliverances, earnestly prays that God would still appear for him; for he sees not yet all things put under him. He prays, 1. That God would be compassionate to him; (v. 13.) *"Have mercy upon me, who, having misery only, and no merit, to speak for me, must depend upon mere mercy for relief."* 2. That he would be concerned for him; he is not particular in his request, lest he should seem to prescribe to God; but refers himself to the wisdom and will of God, in this modest request; "Lord, consider my trouble, and do for me as thou thinkest fit." He pleads, (1.) The malice of his enemies, the trouble which he suffered of them that hated

him; and hatred is a cruel passion. (2.) The experience he had had of divine succours, and the expectation he now had of the continuance of them, as the necessity of his case required; "*O thou that liftest me up*, that canst do it, that hast done it, that wilt do it, whose prerogative it is to lift up thy people *from the gates of death*." We are never brought so low, so near to death, but God can raise us up. If he has saved us from spiritual and eternal death, we may thence take encouragement to hope, that in all our distresses he will be a very present help to us. (3.) His sincere purpose to praise God, when his victories should be completed; (v. 14.) "Lord, save me; not that I may have the comfort and credit of it, but that thou mayest have the glory, *that I may shew forth all thy praise*, and that publicly, *in the gates of the daughter of Zion*;" there God was said to dwell, (v. 11.) and there David would attend him, with joy in God's salvation, typical of the great salvation which was to be wrought out by the Son of David.

II. David by faith foresees and foretells the certain ruin of all wicked people, both in this world and in that to come. 1. In this world, v. 15, 16. God executes judgment upon them, when the measure of their iniquities is full, and does it so, as, (1.) To put shame upon them, and make their fall inglorious; for they sink into the pit which they themselves digged, (7. 15.) they are taken in the net which they themselves laid for the insnaring of God's people, and they are snared in the work of their own hands. In all the struggles David had with the Philistines, they were the aggressors, 2 Sam. 5. 17, 22. And other nations were subdued by those wars in which they embroiled themselves. The overruling providence of God frequently so orders it, that their persecutors and oppressors are brought to ruin by those very projects which they intended to be destructive to the people of God. Drunkards kill themselves; prodigals beggar themselves; the contentious bring mischief upon themselves; and thus men's sins may be read in their punishment, and it becomes visible to all, that the destruction of sinners is not only meritoriously, but efficiently, of themselves, which will fill them with the utmost confusion. (2.) So as to get honour to himself; *The Lord is known*, he makes himself known, by these judgments which he executes. It is known that there is a God who judges in the earth; that he is a righteous God, and one that hates sin, and will punish it. In these judgments, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. The psalmist, therefore, adds here, a note extraordinary, commanding special regard, *Higgaion*; it is a thing to be carefully observed and meditated upon. What we see of present judgments, and what we believe of the judgment to come, ought to be the subject of our frequent and serious meditations. 2. In the other world; (v. 17.) *The wicked shall be turned into hell*, as captives into the prison-house, even all the nations that forget God. Note, (1.) Forgetfulness of God is the cause of all the wickedness of the wicked. (2.) There are nations of those that forget God, multitudes that live without God in the world, many great and many mighty nations, that never regard him, nor desire the knowledge of his ways. (3.) Hell will, at last, be the portion of such, a state of everlasting misery and torment; *Sheol*, a pit of destruction, in which they and all their comforts will be for ever lost and buried. Though there be nations of them, yet they shall be turned into hell, like sheep into the slaughter-house; (49. 14.) and their being so numerous, will neither be any security or ease to them, nor any loss to God, or the least impeachment of his goodness.

IV. David encourages the people of God to wait for his salvation, though it should be long deferred, v. 18. The needy may think themselves, and others may think them, forgotten for a while, and their expectation of help from God may seem to have perished, and to have been for ever frustrated; but he that believes does not make haste; the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak: we may build upon it as undoubtedly true, that God's people, God's elect, shall not always be forgotten, nor shall they be disappointed of their hopes from the promise. God will not only remember them, at last, but will make it appear that he never did forget them; it is impossible he should, though a woman may forget her sucking child.

V. He concludes with prayer, that God would humble the pride, break the power, and blast the projects, of all the wicked enemies of his church; "*Arise, O Lord*, (v. 19.) stir up thyself, exert thy power, take thy seat, and deal with all these proud and daring enemies of thy name, and cause, and people." 1. "Lord, restrain them, and set bounds to their malice. *Let not man prevail*, consult thine own honour, and let not weak and mortal men prevail against the kingdom and interest of the almighty and immortal God. *Shall mortal man be too hard for God, too strong for his Maker?*" 2. "Lord, reckon with them, *let the heathen be judged in thy sight*, let them be plainly called to an account for all the dishonour done to thee, and the mischief done to thy people." Impenitent sinners will be punished in God's sight; and, when their day of grace is over, the bowels even of infinite mercy will not relent toward them, Rev. 14. 10. 3. *Put them in fear, O Lord*; (v. 20.) strike a terror upon them, make them afraid with thy judgments. God knows how to make the strongest and stoutest of men to tremble, and to flee when none pursues; and thereby he makes them know and own that they are but men; they are but weak men, unable to stand before the holy God; sinful men, the guilt of whose consciences makes them subject to alarms. Note, It is a very desirable thing, much for the glory of God, and the peace and welfare of the universe, that men should know, and consider, themselves to be but men, depending creatures, mutable, mortal, and accountable.

In singing this, we must give to God the glory of his justice, in pleading his people's cause against his and their enemies, and encourage ourselves to wait for the year of the redeemed and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion, even the final destruction of all anti-christian powers and factions, to which many of the ancients apply this psalm.

PSALM X.

The Septuagint translation joins this psalm with the ninth, and makes them but one; but the Hebrew makes it a distinct psalm; the scope and style are certainly different. In this psalm, I. David complains of the wickedness of the wicked, describes the dreadful pitch of impiety, at which they were arrived, (to the great dishonour of God, and the prejudice of his church and people,) and notices the delay of God's appearing against them, v. 1. 11. II. He prays to God to appear against them for the relief of his people, and comforts himself with hopes that he would do so in due time, v. 12. 18.

1. **W**HY standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble? 2. The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. 3. For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth. 4. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. 5. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. 6. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. 7. His mouth is full of cursing, and deceit, and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. 8. He sitteth in the lurking-places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. 9. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. 10. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. 11. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it.

David, in these verses, discovers,

I. A very great affection to God and his favour; for, in the time of trouble, that which he complains of most feelingly, is, God's withdrawing his gracious presence; (v. 1.) "*Why standest thou afar off*, as one unconcerned in the indignities done to thy name, and the injuries done to thy people?" Note, God's withdrawals are very grievous to his people at any time, but especially in times of trouble. Outward deliverance is afar off, and is hidden from us, and then we think God is afar off, and we therefore want inward comfort; but that is our own fault, it is because we judge by outward appearance, we stand afar off from God by our unbelief, and then we complain that God stands afar off from us.

II. A very great indignation against sin, the sins that made the time perilous, 2 Tim. 3. 1. He beholds the transgressors, and is grieved, is amazed, and brings to his heavenly Father their evil report: not in a way of vain-glory, boasting before God that he was not as *these publicans*, (Luke, 18. 11.) much less venting any personal resentments, piques, or passions, of his own; but as one that laid to heart that which is offensive to God, and all good men, and earnestly desired a reformation of manners. Passionate and satirical invectives against bad men do more hurt than good; if we will speak of their badness, let it be to God in prayer, for he alone can make them better.

This long representation of the wickedness of the wicked, is here summed up in the first words of it, (v. 2.) *The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor*; where two things are laid to their charge, pride and persecution; the former the cause of the latter. Proud men will have all about them to be of their mind, of their religion, to say as they say, to submit to their dominion, and acquiesce in their dictates; and those that either eclipse them, or will not yield to them, they malign, and hate with an inveterate hatred. Tyranny, both in state and church, owes its original to pride. The psalmist, having begun this description, presently inserts a short prayer, a prayer in a parenthesis, which is an advantage, and no prejudice to the sense; *Let them be taken*, as proud people often are, *in the devices that they have imagined*, v. 2. Let their counsels be turned headlong, and let them fall headlong by them.

These two heads of the charge are here enlarged upon.

1. They are proud, very proud, and extremely conceited of themselves; justly, therefore, did he wonder that God did not speedily appear against them for he hates pride, and resists the proud.

(1.) The sinner proudly glories in his power and success. He *boasts of his heart's desire*, boasts that he can do what he pleases, (as if God himself could not controul him,) and that he has all he wished for, and has carried his point. Ephraim said, *I am become rich, I have found me out substance*, Hos. 12. 8. "Now, Lord, is it for thy glory to suffer a sinful man thus to pretend to the sovereignty and felicity of a God?"

(2.) He proudly contradicts the judgment of God, which, we are sure, is according to truth; for he *blesses the covetous, whom the Lord abhors*. See how God and men differ in their sentiments of persons; God abhors covetous worldlings, who make money their god, and idolize it; he looks upon them as his enemies, and will have no communion with them; *The friendship of the world is enmity to God*. But proud persecutors bless them, and approve their sayings, 49. 13. They applaud them as wise, whom God pronounces foolish; (Luke, 12. 20.) they justify them as innocent, whom God condemns as deeply guilty before him; and they admire them as happy in having their portion in this life, whom God declares, upon that account, truly miserable; *Thou, in thy lifetime, receivest thy good things*.

(3.) He proudly casts off the thoughts of God, and all dependence upon him, and devotion to him; (v. 4.) the wicked, *through the pride of his countenance*, that pride of his heart which appears in his very countenance, (Prov. 6. 17.) *will not seek after God*; nor entertain the thoughts of him; *God is not in all his thoughts*, not in any of them. *All his thoughts are, that there is no God*. See here, [1.] The nature of impiety and irreligion; it is, *not seeking after God*, and *not having him in our thoughts*. No inquiry is made after him, (Job, 35. 10. Jer. 2. 6.) there is no

desire toward him, no communion with him, and a secret wish to have no dependence upon him, and not to be beholden to him. Wicked people will not seek after God, that is, will not call upon him; they live without prayer, and that is living without God. They have many thoughts, many projects and devices, but *no eye to God* in any of them, no submission to his will, nor aim at his glory. [2.] The cause of this impiety and irreligion; and that is pride. Men will not seek after God, because they think they have no need of him, their own hands are sufficient for them; they think it a thing below them to be religious, because religious people are few, and mean, and despised, and the restraints of religion will be a disparagement to them.

(4.) He proudly makes light of God's commandments and judgments; (v. 5.) *His ways are always grievous*; he is very daring and resolute in his sinful courses, he will have his way, though ever so tiresome to himself, and vexatious to others; he travails with pain in his wicked courses, and yet his pride makes him wilful and obstinate in them. God's judgments (what he commands, and what he threatens for the breach of his commands) are *far above out of his sight*; he is not sensible of his duty by the law of God, nor of his danger by the wrath and curse of God. Tell him of God's authority over him, he turns it off with this, that he never saw God, and therefore does not know that there is a God; he is *in the height of heaven*, and *Que supra nos nihil ad nos*—*We have nothing to do with things above us*. Tell him of God's judgments, which will be executed upon those that go on still in their trespasses, and he will not be convinced that there is any reality in them; they are *far above out of his sight*, and therefore he thinks they are mere bugbears.

(5.) He proudly despises all his enemies, and looks upon them with the utmost disdain; he puffs at them whom God is preparing to be a scourge and ruin to him, as if he could baffle them all, and was able to make his part good with them. But as it is impolitic to despise an enemy, so it is impious to despise any instrument of God's wrath.

(6.) He proudly sets trouble at defiance, and is confident of the continuance of his own prosperity; (v. 6.) *He hath said in his heart*, and pleased himself with the thought, *I shall not be moved*; my goods are laid up for many years, and *I shall never be in adversity*: like Babylon, that said, *I shall be a lady for ever*, Isa. 47. 7. Rev. 18. 7. Those are nearest ruin, who thus set it furthest from them.

2. They are persecutors, cruel persecutors: for the gratifying of their pride and covetousness, and, in opposition to God and religion, they are very oppressive to all within their reach. Observe, concerning these persecutors:

(1.) That they are very bitter and malicious; (v. 7.) *His mouth is full of cursing*. Those he cannot do a real mischief to, yet he will spit his venom at, and breathe out the slaughter which he cannot execute. Thus have God's faithful worshippers been anathematized, and cursed, with bell, book, and candle. Where there is a heart full of malice, there is commonly a mouth full of curses.

(2.) That they are very false and treacherous. There is mischief designed, but it is hid under the tongue, not to be discerned, for his mouth is full of deceit and vanity; he has learned of the Devil to deceive, and so to destroy; with this his hatred is covered, Prov. 26. 26. He cares not what lies he tells, nor what oaths he breaks, nor what arts of dissimulation he uses to compass his ends.

(3.) That they are very cunning and crafty in carrying on their designs. They have ways and means to concert what they intend, that they may the more effectually accomplish it. Like Esau, that cunning hunter, *he sits in the lurking places, in the secret places*, and his eyes are privily set to do mischief; (v. 8.) not because he is ashamed of what he does, (if he blushed, there were some hopes he would repent,) nor because he is afraid of the wrath of God, for he imagines God will never call him to an account, (v. 11.) but because he is afraid, lest the discovery of his designs should be the breaking of them. Perhaps it refers particularly to robbers and highwaymen, who lie in wait for honest travellers, to make a prey of them and what they have.

4.) That they are very cruel and barbarous. Their malice is against the innocent, who never provoked them; against the poor, who cannot resist them; and over whom it will be no glory to triumph. Those are perfectly lost to all honesty and honour, against whose mischievous designs neither innocence nor poverty will be any man's security. Those that have power, ought to protect the innocent, and provide for the poor; yet he will be the destroyer of those whose guardian he ought to be. And what do they aim at? It is to *catch the poor, and draw them into their net*, get them into their power, not to strip them only, but to murder them; they hunt for the precious life. They are God's poor people that they are persecuting, against whom they bear a mortal hatred, for his sake whose they are, and whose image they bear, and therefore they lie in wait to murder them: he lies in wait as a lion that thirsts after blood, and feeds with pleasure upon the prey. The Devil, whose agent he is, is compared to a roaring lion, that seeks not *what*, but *whom*, he may devour.

(5.) That they are base and hypocritical; (v. 10.) He *crouches, and humbles himself*, as beasts of prey do, that they may get their prey within their reach. This intimates, that the sordid spirits of persecutors and oppressors will stoop to any thing, though ever so mean, for the compassing of their wicked designs; witness the scandalous practices of Saul, when he hunted David. It intimates likewise, that they cover their malicious designs with the pretence of meekness and humility, and kindness to those they design the greatest mischief to; they seem to humble themselves, as if to take cognizance of the poor, and concern themselves in their concerns, when it is in order to make them fall, to make a prey of them.

(6.) That they are very impious and atheistical, v. 11. They could not thus break through all the laws of justice and goodness toward man, if they had not first shaken off all sense of religion, and risen up in rebellion against the light of its most sacred and self-evident principles; *He hath said in his heart, God has forgotten.* When his own conscience rebuked him for his wickedness, and threatened him with the consequences of it, and asked, how he would answer it to the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, he turned it off with this, *God has forsaken the earth*, Ezek. 8. 12.—9. 9. This is a blasphemous reproach, [1.] Upon God's omniscience and providence, as if he could not, or did not, see what men do in this lower world. [2.] Upon his holiness and the rectitude of his nature, as if, though he did see, yet he did not dislike, but was willing to connive at, the most unnatural and inhuman villanies. [3.] Upon his justice and the equity of his government, as if, though he did see and dislike the wickedness of the wicked, yet he would never reckon with them, nor punish them for it, either because he could not, or durst not, or was not inclined to it. Let those that suffer by proud oppressors, hope that God will, in due time, appear for them; for those that are abusive to them, are abusive to God Almighty too.

In singing this, and praying it over, we should have our hearts much affected with a holy indignation at the wickedness of the oppressors, a tender compassion for the oppressed, and a pious zeal for the glory and honour of God, with a firm belief that he will, in due time, right the injured, and reckon with the injurious.

12. Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble. 13. Wherefore doth the wicked condemn God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it. 14. Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless. 15. Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none. 16. The Lord is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land. 17. LORD,

thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear: 18. To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.

David here, upon the foregoing representation of the inhumanity and impiety of the oppressors, grounds an address to God: Wherein observe,

I. What he prays for; 1. That God would himself appear; (v. 12.) "*Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand*, manifest thy presence and providence in the affairs of this lower world. *Arise, O Lord*, to the confusion of those who say that thou hidest thy face. Manifest thy power, exert it for the maintaining of thine own cause, lift up thine hand to give a fatal blow to these oppressors; let thine everlasting arm be made bare." 2. That he would appear for his people; "*Forget not the humble, the afflicted*, that are poor, that are made poorer, and are poor in spirit. Their oppressors, in their presumption, say that thou hast forgotten them; and they, in their despair, are ready to say the same, Lord, make it to appear that they are both mistaken." 3. That he would appear against their persecutors, v. 15. (1.) That he would disable them to do any further mischief; *Break thou the arm of the wicked*, take away his power, *that the hypocrite reign not, lest the people be ensnared*, Job, 34. 30. We read of oppressors whose dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged, (Dan. 7. 12.) that they might have time to repent. (2.) That he would deal with them for the mischief they had done; "Seek out his wickedness; let that be all brought to light, which he thought should for ever lie undiscovered; let that be all brought to account, which he thought should for ever go unpunished; bring it out till thou find none, till none of his evil deeds remain unreckoned for, none of his evil designs undefeated, and none of his partisans undestroyed."

II. What he pleads, for the encouraging of his own faith in these petitions.

1. He pleads the great affronts which these proud oppressors put upon God himself; "Lord, it is thine own cause that we beg thou wouldest appear in, the enemies have made it so, and therefore it is not for thy glory to let them go unpunished;" (v. 13.) *Wherefore do the wicked condemn God?* He does so; for he says, "*Thou wilt not require it*; thou wilt never call us to an account for what we do;" than which they could not put a greater indignity upon the righteous God. The psalmist here speaks with astonishment, (1.) At the wickedness of the wicked; "Why do they speak so impiously, why so absurdly?" It is a great trouble to good men, to think what contempt is cast upon the holy God by the sin of sinners, upon his precepts, his promises, his threatenings, his favours, his judgments; all are despised and made light of. *Wherefore do the wicked thus condemn God?* It is because they do not know him. (2.) At the patience and forbearance of God toward them; "Why are they suffered thus to condemn God? Why does he not immediately vindicate himself, and take vengeance on them?" It is because the day of reckoning is yet to come, when the measure of their iniquity is full.

2. He pleads the notice God took of the impiety and iniquity of these oppressors; (v. 14.) "Do the persecutors encourage themselves with a groundless fancy, that thou wilt never see it? Let the persecuted encourage themselves with a well-grounded faith, not only that thou hast seen it, but that thou dost behold it, even all the mischief that is done by the hands, and all the spite and malice that lurk in the hearts, of these oppressors; it is all known to thee, and observed by thee; nay, not only thou hast seen it, and dost behold it, but thou wilt requite it, wilt recompense it into their bosoms, by thy just and avenging hand."

3. He pleads the dependence which the oppressed had upon him; "*The poor commits himself unto thee*, each of them does so, I among the rest. They rely on thee, as their Patron and Protector, they refer themselves to thee as their Judge, in whose determination they acquiesce, and at whose disposal they are

willing to be. *They leave themselves with thee,*" (so some read it), "not prescribing, but subscribing, to thy wisdom and will. They thus give thee honour, as much as their oppressors dishonour thee. They are thy willing subjects, and put themselves under thy protection; therefore protect them."

4. He pleads the relation in which God is pleased to stand to us. (1.) As a great God, he is *King for ever and ever*, v. 16. And it is the office of a king to administer justice for the restraint and terror of evil-doers, and the protection and praise of them that do well. To whom should the injured subjects appeal, but to the sovereign? *Help, my Lord, O King; Avenge me of mine adversary.* "Lord, let all that pay homage and tribute to thee as their King, have the benefit of thy government, and find thee their Refuge. Thou art an everlasting King, which no earthly prince is, and therefore canst and wilt, by an eternal judgment, dispense rewards and punishments in an everlasting state, when time shall be no more; and to that judgment the poor refer themselves." (2.) As a good God; he is the Helper of the fatherless, (v. 14.) of those who have no one else to help them, and have many to injure them. He has appointed kings to defend the poor and fatherless, (82. 3.) and therefore much more will he do it himself; for he has taken it among the titles of his honour, to be a Father to the fatherless, (68. 5.) a Helper of the helpless.

5. He pleads the experience which God's church and people had had of God's readiness to appear for them. (1.) He had dispersed and extirpated their enemies; (v. 16.) *The heathen are perished out of his land;* the remainders of the Canaanites, the seven devoted nations, which have long been as thorns in the eyes, and goads in the sides, of Israel, are now, at length, utterly rooted out; and that is an encouragement to us to hope that God will, in like manner, break the arm of the oppressive Israelites, that were, in some respects, worse than heathens. (2.) He had heard and answered their prayers; (v. 17.) "Lord, thou hast many a time heard the desire of the humble, and never saidst to a distressed supplicant, *Seek, in vain.* Why may not we hope for the continuance and repetition of the wonders, the favours, which our fathers told us of?"

6. He pleads their expectations from God, pursuant to their experience of him; "Thou hast heard, therefore thou wilt cause thine ear to hear, as 6. 9. Thou art the same, and thy power, and promise, and relation, to thy people the same; and the work and workings of grace are the same in them; why therefore may we not hope that he who has been, will still be, will ever be, a God hearing prayer?" But observe, (1.) In what method God hears prayer. He first prepares the heart of his people, and then gives them an answer of peace; nor may we expect his gracious answer, but in this way; so that God's working upon us, is the best earnest of his working for us. He prepares the heart for prayer, by kindling holy desires, and strengthening our most holy faith, fixing the thoughts, and raising the affections, and then he graciously accepts the prayer; he prepares the heart for the mercy itself that is wanting and prayed for; makes us fit to receive it, and use it well, and then gives it in to us. The preparation of the heart is from the Lord, and we must seek unto him for it, (Prov. 16. 1.) and take that as a leading favour. (2.) What he will do, in answer to prayer, v. 18. [1.] He will plead the cause of the persecuted; will judge the fatherless and oppressed, will judge for them, clear up their innocence, restore their comforts, and recompense them for all the loss and damage they have sustained. [2.] He will put an end to the fury of the persecutors. Hitherto they shall come, but no further; here shall the proud waves of their malice be stayed; an effectual course shall be taken that the man of the earth may no more oppress. See how light the psalmist now makes of the power of that proud persecutor, whom he had been describing in this psalm, and how slightly he speaks of him, now that he had been considering God's sovereignty. First, He is but a man of the earth, a man out of the earth, so the word is; sprung out of the earth, and therefore mean, and weak, and hastening to the earth again. Why then should we be afraid of the fury of the oppressor, when he is but *man that shall die, a*

son of man that shall be as grass? Isa. 51. 12. He that protects us, is the Lord of heaven; he that persecutes us, but a man of the earth. Secondly, God has him in a chain, and can easily restrain the remainder of his wrath, so that he cannot do what he would. When God speaks the word, Satan shall by his instruments no more deceive, (Rev. 20. 3.) no more oppress.

In singing these verses, we must commit religion's just, but injured, cause to God, as those that are heartily concerned for its honour and interests, believing that he will, in due time, plead it with jealousy.

PSALM XI.

In this psalm we have David's struggle with, and triumph over, a strong temptation to distrust God, and betake himself to indirect means for his own safety in a time of danger. It is supposed to have been penned when he began to feel the resentments of Saul's envy, and had had the javelin thrown at him once and again. He was then advised to run his country; "No," says he, "I trust in God, and therefore will keep my ground." Observe, I. How he represents the temptation, and perhaps parleys with it, v. 1..3. II. How he answers it, and puts it to silence, with the consideration of God's dominion and providence, (v. 4.) his favour to the righteous, and the wrath which the wicked are reserved for, v. 5..7. In time of public fears, when the insults of the church's enemies are daring and threatening, it will be profitable to meditate on this psalm.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **I**N the LORD put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? 2. For, lo, the wicked bend *their* bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart. 3. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Here is,

1. David's fixed resolution to make God his confidence; *In the Lord put I my trust*, v. 1. Those that truly fear God, and serve him, are welcome to put their trust in him, and shall not be made ashamed of their doing so. And it is the character of the saints, who have taken God for their God, that they make him their Hope: even when they have other things to stay themselves upon, yet they do not, they dare not, stay upon them, but on God only; gold is not their hope, nor horses and chariots their confidence, but God only: and therefore, when second causes frown, yet their hopes do not fail them, because the First Cause is still the same, is ever so. The psalmist, before he gives an account of the temptation he was in to distrust God, records his resolution to trust in him, as that which he was resolved to live and die by.

2. His resentment of a temptation to the contrary; "How say ye to my soul, which has thus returned to God as its Rest, and reposes in him, *Flee as a bird to your mountain?* to be safe there out of the reach of the fowler." This may be taken, either,

(1.) As the serious advice of his timorous friends; so many understand it, and with great probability. Some, that were hearty well-wishers to David, when they saw how much Saul was exasperated against him, and how maliciously he sought his life, pressed him by all means to flee for the same to some place of shelter, and not to depend too much upon the anointing he had received, which, they thought, was more likely to occasion the loss of his head than to save it. That which grieved him in this motion, was, not that to flee now would savour of cowardice, and ill become a soldier, but that it would savour of unbelief, and would ill become a saint, who had so often said, *In the Lord put I my trust*. Taking it thus, the two following verses contain the reason with which these faint-hearted friends of David backed this advice. They would have him flee, [1.] Because he could not be safe where he was; (v. 2.) "Observe," say they, "how the wicked bend their bow; Saul and his instruments aim at thy life, and the uprightness of thine heart will not be thy security." See what an enmity there is in the wicked against the upright, in the seed of the serpent against the seed of

the woman; what pains they take, what preparations they make, to do them a mischief; *they privily shoot at them, or in darkness*, that they may not see the evil designed, to avoid it, nor others, to prevent it; no, nor God himself, to punish it. [2.] Because he could be no longer useful where he was; "For," say they, "if the foundations be destroyed," (as they were by Saul's mal-administration,) "if the civil state and government be unhinged and all out of course," (75. 3.—82. 5.) "what canst thou do with thy righteousness to redress the grievances? Alas, it is to no purpose to attempt the saving of a kingdom so wretchedly shattered; whatever the righteous can do, signifies nothing." *Abi in cellam, et dic, Miserece mei, Domine—Away to thy cell, and there cry, Pity me, O Lord.* Many are hindered from doing the service they might do to the public, in difficult times, by a despair of success.

(2.) It may be taken as a taunt wherewith his enemies bantered him, upbraiding him with the professions he used to make of confidence in God, and scornfully bidding him try what stead that would stand him in now. "You say, God is your Mountain; flee to him now, and see what the better you will be." Thus they endeavoured to shame the counsel of the poor, saying, *There is no help for them in God*, 14. 6.—3. 2. The confidence and comfort which the saints have in God, when all the hopes and joys in the creature fail them, are a riddle to a carnal world, and are ridiculed accordingly.

Taking it thus, the two following verses are David's answer to this sarcasm. In which, [1.] He complains of the malice of those who did thus abuse him; (v. 2.) *They bend their bow, and make ready their arrows*; and we are told, (64. 3.) what they are, even bitter words, such words as these, by which they endeavour to discourage hope in God, which David felt as a sword in his bones. [2.] He resists the temptation with a gracious abhorrence, v. 3. He looks upon this suggestion as striking at the foundations which every Israelite builds upon; "If you destroy the foundations, if you take good people off from their hope in God, if you can persuade them that their religion is a cheat and a jest, and can banter them out of that, you ruin them, and break their hearts indeed, and make them of all men the most miserable." The principles of religion are the foundations on which the faith and hope of the righteous are built. These we are concerned, in interest, as well as duty, to hold fast against all temptations to infidelity; for if these be destroyed, if we let these go, *What can the righteous do?* Good people would be undone, if they had not a God to go to, a God to trust to, and a future bliss to hope for.

4. The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eye-lids try, the children of men. 5. The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. 6. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: *this shall be the portion of their cup.* 7. For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.

The shaking of a tree (they say) makes it take the deeper and faster root. The attempt of David's enemies to discourage his confidence in God, engages him to cleave so much the closer to his first principles, and to review them, which he here does, abundantly to his own satisfaction, and the silencing of all temptations to infidelity. That which was shocking to his faith, and has been so to the faith of many, was, the prosperity of wicked people in their wicked ways, and the straits and distresses which the best men are sometimes reduced to; hence such an evil thought as this, was apt to arise, *Surely it is vain to serve God*, and we may call the proud happy; but, in order to stille and shame all such thoughts, we are here called to consider,

1. That there is a God, a God in heaven; *The Lord is in his holy temple above*: there he is out of our sight, but we are not out of his. Let not the enemies of the saints insult over them, as if

they were at a loss, and at their wit's end: no, they have a God, and they know where to find him, and how to direct their prayer unto him, as their Father in heaven. Or, He is in his holy temple, that is, in his church; he is a God in covenant and communion with his people, through a Mediator, of whom the temple was a type. We need not say, "Who shall go up to heaven, to fetch us thence a God to trust to?" No, the Word is nigh us, and God in the Word; his Spirit is in his saints, those living temples, and the Lord is that Spirit.

2. That this God governs the world; the Lord has not only his residence, but his throne, in heaven, and he has *set the dominion thereof in the earth*; (Job, 38. 33.) for, *having prepared his throne in the heavens, his kingdom ruleth over all*, 103. 19. Hence *the heavens are said to rule*, Dan. 4. 26. Let us by faith see God on his throne, on his throne of glory, infinitely transcending the splendour and majesty of earthly princes; on his throne of government, giving law, giving motion, and giving aim, to all the creatures; on his throne of judgment, rendering to every man according to his works; and on his throne of grace, to which his people may come boldly for mercy and grace; we shall then see no reason to be discouraged by the pride and power of oppressors, or any of the afflictions that attend the righteous.

3. That this God perfectly knows every man's true character; *His eyes behold, his eye-lids try, the children of men*; he not only sees them, but he sees through them; not only knows all they say and do, but knows what they think, what they design, and how they really stand affected, whatever they pretend. We may know what men *seem* to be, but he knows what they *are*, as the refiner knows what the value of the gold is, when he has tried it. God is said to try *with his eyes*, and *his eye-lids*, because he knows men, not as earthly princes know men, by report and representation, but by his own strict inspection, which cannot err, or be imposed upon. This may comfort us when we are deceived in men, even in men that we think we have tried, that God's judgment of men, we are sure, is according to truth.

4. That, if he afflict good people, it is for their trial, and therefore for their good, v. 5. The Lord tries all the children of men, that he may do them justice; but he tries the righteous, that he may *do them good in their latter end*, Deut. 8. 16. Let not that therefore shake our foundations, or discourage our hope and trust in God.

5. That, however persecutors and oppressors may prosper and prevail a while, they now lie under, and will for ever perish under, the wrath of God.

(1.) He is a holy God, and therefore hates them, and cannot endure to look upon them; *The wicked, and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth*; for nothing is more contrary to the rectitude and goodness of his nature. Their prosperity is so far from being an evidence of God's love, that their abuse of it does certainly make them the objects of his hatred. He that hates nothing that he has made, yet hates those who have thus ill-made themselves. Dr. Hammond offers another reading of this verse; *The Lord trieth the righteous and the wicked*; (distinguishes infallibly between them, which is more than we can do;) and *he that loveth violence hateth his own soul*, that is, persecutors bring certain ruin upon themselves, (Prov. 8. 36.) as follows here.

(2.) He is a righteous Judge, and therefore he will punish them, v. 6. Their punishment will be, [1.] Inevitable; *Upon the wicked he shall rain snares*. Here is a double metaphor, to denote the unavoidableness of the punishment of wicked men. It shall be rained upon them from heaven, (Job, 20. 23.) against which there is no fence, and from which there is no escape; see Josh. 10. 11. 1 Sam. 2. 10. It shall surprise them, as a sudden shower sometimes surprises the traveller in a summer's day. It shall be as snares upon them, to hold them fast, and keep them prisoners, till the day of reckoning comes. [2.] Very terrible; it is *fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest*, which plainly alludes to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and very fitly, for that destruction was intended for a figure of *the vengeance of eternal fire*, Jude, 7. The fire of God's wrath, fastening upon the brimstone of their own guilt, will burn certainly and furiously, will burn to the

lowest hell, and to the utmost line of eternity. What a horrible tempest are the wicked hurried away in, at death! What a lake of fire and brimstone must they make their bed in for ever, in the congregation of the dead and damned! That is it that is here meant; that is it that shall be the portion of their cup, the heritage appointed them by the Almighty, and allotted to them, Job, 20. 29. This is the cup of trembling, which shall be put into their hands, which they must *drink the dregs of*, 75. 8. Every man has the portion of his cup assigned him. They who choose the Lord for the Portion of their cup, shall have what they choose, and be for ever happy in their choice, (16. 5.) but they who reject his grace, shall be made to drink the cup of his fury, Jer. 25. 15. Isa. 51. 17. Hab. 2. 16.

6. That, though honest good people may be run down, and trampled upon, yet God does and will own them, and favour them, and smile upon them, and that is the reason why God will severely reckon with persecutors and oppressors, because those whom they oppress and persecute are dear to him; so that, whosoever toucheth them, *toucheth the apple of his eye*, v. 7. (1.) He loves them, and the work of his own grace in them. He is himself a righteous God, and therefore loves righteousness wherever he finds it, and pleads the cause of the righteous that are injured and oppressed; he delights to execute judgment for them, 103. 6. We must herein be followers of God, must love righteousness as he does, that we may keep ourselves always in his love. (2.) He looks graciously upon them; *His countenance doth behold the upright*; he is not only at peace with them, but well-pleased in them, and he comforts them, and puts gladness into their hearts, by letting them know that he is so. He, like a tender Father, looks upon them with pleasure, and they, like dutiful children, are pleased and abundantly satisfied with his smiles. They walk in the light of the Lord.

In singing this psalm, we must encourage and engage ourselves to trust in God at all times, must depend upon him to protect our innocence, and make us happy, must dread his frowns as worse than death, and desire his favour as better than life.

PSALM XII.

It is supposed that David penned this psalm, in Saul's reign, when there was a general decay of honesty and piety both in court and country, which he here complains of to God, and very feelingly, for he himself suffered by the treachery of his false friends, and the insolence of his sworn enemies. I. He begs help of God, because there were none among men whom he durst trust, v. 1, 2. II. He foretells the destruction of his proud and threatening enemies, v. 3, 4. III. He assures himself and others, that, how ill soever things went now, (v. 8.) God would preserve and secure to himself his own people, (v. 5, 7.) and would certainly make good his promises to them, v. 6. Whether this psalm was penned in Saul's reign or no, it is certainly calculated for a bad reign; and perhaps David, in spirit, foresaw that some of his successors would bring things to as bad a pass as is here described, and treasured up this psalm for the use of the church then. O tempora, O mores!—Oh the times and the manners!

To the chief musician upon Sheminih. A psalm of David.

1. **H**ELP, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. 2. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: *with* flattering lips, *and* with a double heart do they speak. 3. The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, *and* the tongue that speaketh proud things: 4. Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips *are* our own: who *is* lord over us? 5. For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set *him* in safety *from him that* puffeth at him. 6. The words of the LORD *are* pure words: *as* silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. 7. Thou shalt keep

them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. 8. The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.

This psalm furnishes us with good thoughts for bad times, in which, though the prudent will keep silent, (Amos, 5. 13.) because a man may be made an offender for a word, yet a man may comfort himself, in such a day, with such suitable meditations and prayers as are here got ready to our hand.

I. Let us see here, what it is that makes the times bad, and when they may be said to be so. Ask the children of this world, what it is, in their account, that makes the times bad; they will tell you, Scarcity of money, decay of trade, and the desolations of war, make the times bad; but the scripture lays the badness of the times upon causes of another nature; (2 Tim. 3. 1.) *Perilous times shall come*, for iniquity shall abound; and that is the thing David here complains of.

1. When there is a general decay of piety and honesty among men, the times are then truly bad; (v. 1.) *When the godly man ceases, and the faithful fail*. Observe how these two characters are here put together, the *godly* and the *faithful*. As there is no true policy, so there is no true piety, without honesty. Godly men are *faithful* men, *fast* men, so they have sometimes been called; their word is as confirming as their oath, as binding as their bond; they make conscience of being true both to God and man. They are here said to *cease and fail*, either by death, or by desertion, or by both. Those that were godly and faithful were taken away, and those that were left were sadly degenerated, and were not what they had been; so that there were few or no good people, that were Israelites indeed, to be met with. Perhaps he means, that there were no godly faithful men among Saul's courtiers; if he means there were few or none in Israel, we hope he was under the same mistake that Elijah was, who thought he only was left alone, when God had 7000 who kept their integrity; (Rom. 11. 3.) or he means that there were few in comparison; there was a general decay of religion and virtue: the times are bad, very bad, when it is so; not a man to be found, that executes judgment, Jer. 5. 1.

2. When dissimulation and flattery have corrupted and debauched all conversation, then the times are very bad; (v. 2.) when men are generally so profligate, that they make no conscience of a lie, are so spiteful as to design against their neighbours the worst of mischiefs, and yet so base as to cover the design with the most specious and plausible pretences, and professions of friendship. Thus they speak vanity, (falsehood and a lie,) every one to his neighbour; with flattering lips and a double heart they will kiss and kill, (as Joab did Abner and Amasa in David's own time,) smile in your face, and cut your throat. This is the Devil's image complete, a complication of malice and falsehood. The times are bad indeed, when there is no such thing as sincerity to be met with; when an honest man knows not whom to believe, nor whom to trust, nor dares put confidence in a friend, in a guide, Mic. 7. 5, 6. Jer. 9. 4, 5. Woe to those who help to make the times thus perilous.

3. When the enemies of God, and religion, and religious people, are impudent and daring, and threaten to run down all that is just and sacred, then the times are very bad; when proud sinners are arrived at such a pitch of impiety as to say, "With our tongue will we prevail against the cause of virtue, our lips are our own, and we may say what we will; *who is lord over us*, either to restrain us, or to call us to an account?" v. 4. This bespeaks, (1.) A proud conceit of themselves, and confidence in themselves, as if the point were indeed gained by eating forbidden fruit, and they were as gods, independent and self-sufficient; infallible in their knowledge of good and evil, and therefore fit to be oracles; irresistible in their power, and therefore fit to be lawgivers, that could prevail with their tongues, and, like God himself, speak and secure its being done. (2.) An insolent contempt of God's dominion, as if he had no propriety in them: *Our lips are our own*—an unjust pretension, for who made man's mouth, in whose hand is his

breath, and whose is the air he breathes in. Their language would intimate that he has no authority either to command them, or to judge them; *Who is lord over us?* Like Pharaoh. Exod. 5. 2. This is as absurd and unreasonable as the former, for He in whom we live, and move, and have our being, must needs be, by an indisputable title, Lord over us.

4. When the poor and needy are oppressed, and abused, and puffed at, then the times are very bad: this is implied, (v. 5.) where God himself takes notice of the oppression of the poor, and the sighing of the needy; they are oppressed because they are poor, have all manner of wrong done them, merely because they are not in a capacity to right themselves. Being thus oppressed, they dare not speak for themselves, lest their defence should be made their offence; but they sigh, secretly, bemoaning their calamities, and pouring out their souls in sighs before God. If their oppressors be spoken to on their behalf, they puff at them, make light of their own sin, and the misery of the poor, and lay neither to heart; see 10. 5.

5. When wickedness abounds, and goes barefaced, under the protection and countenance of those in authority, then the times are very bad, v. 7. When the vilest men are exalted to places of trust and power, who, instead of putting the laws in execution against vice and injustice, and punishing the wicked according to their merits, patronise and protect them, give them countenance, and support their reputation, by their own example; then the wicked walk on every side, they swarm in all places, and go up and down seeking to deceive, debauch, and destroy, others: they are neither afraid nor ashamed to discover themselves; they declare their sin as Sodom, and there is none to check or controul them. Bad men are base men, the vilest of men, and they are so, though they are ever so highly exalted in this world. Antiochus the illustrious, the scripture calls *a vile person*, Dan. 11. 21. But it is bad with a kingdom, when such are preferred; no marvel if wickedness then grows impudent and insolent. *When the wicked bear rule, the people mourn.*

II. Let us now see what good things we are here furnished with for such bad times; and what times we may yet be reserved for, we cannot tell.

When times are thus bad, it is comfortable to think,

1. That we have a God to go to, from whom we may ask and expect the redress of all our grievances. This he begins with; (v. 1.) *"Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth.* All other helps and helpers fail; even the godly and faithful, who should lend a helping hand to support the dying cause of religion, they are gone, and therefore whither shall we seek but to thee?" Note, When godly faithful people cease and fail, it is time to cry, *Help, Lord!* The abounding of iniquity threatens a deluge. "Help, Lord, help the virtuous; few seek to hold fast their integrity, and to stand in the gap: help to save thine own interest in the world from sinking. *It is time for thee, Lord, to work.*"

2. That God will certainly reckon with false and proud men, and will punish and restrain their insolence. They are above the controul of men, and set them at defiance. Men cannot discover the falsehood of flatterers; nor humble the haughtiness of those that speak proud things; but the righteous God will cut off all flattering lips, that give the traitor's kiss, and speak words softer than oil, when war is in the heart; he will pluck out *the tongue that speaks proud things* against God and religion, v. 3. Some translate it as a prayer, "May God cut off those false and spiteful lips;" *Let lying lips be put to silence.*

3. That God will, in due time, work deliverance for his oppressed people, and shelter them from the malicious designs of their persecutors; (v. 5.) *Now will I arise, saith the Lord.* This promise of God, which David here delivered by the spirit of prophecy, is an answer to that petition which he put up to God by the spirit of prayer, "Help, Lord," says he; "I will," says God: "here I am, with seasonable and effectual help." (1.) It is seasonable, in the fittest time. [1.] When the oppressors are in the height of their pride and insolence, when they say, *Who is lord over us?* then is God's time to let them know, to their cost, that he is above them. [2.] When the oppressed are in the depth of their distress

and despondency; when they are sighing like Israel in Egypt, by reason of the cruel bondage, then is God's time to appear for them, as for Israel, when they were most dejected, and Pharaoh was most elevated; *Now will I arise.* Note, There is a time fixed for the rescue of oppressed innocency; that time will come, and we may be sure it is of all other the fittest time, 102. 13. It is effectual; *I will set him in safety*, or in salvation; not only protect him, but restore him to his former prosperity, will *bring him out into a wealthy place*; (66. 12.) so that, upon the whole, he shall lose nothing by his sufferings.

4. That, though men are false, God is faithful; though they are not to be trusted, God is. They speak vanity and flattery, but *the words of the Lord are pure words*, (v. 6.) not only all true, but all pure, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, or a crucible. It denotes, (1.) The sincerity of God's word; every thing is really as it is there represented, and not otherwise; it does not jest with us, nor impose upon us, nor has it any other design towards us than our own good. (2.) The preciousness of God's word; it is of great intrinsic value, like silver refined to the highest degree; it has nothing in it to depreciate it. (3.) The many proofs that have been given of its power and truth; it has been often tried, all the saints in all ages have trusted it, and so, tried it and it never deceived them, or frustrated their expectation; but they have all set to their seal that God's word is true, with an *Experto crede*—*Trust one that has made trial*; they have found it so. Probably, this refers especially to these premises of succouring and relieving the poor and oppressed. Their friends put them in hopes that they will do something for them, and yet prove a broken reed; but the words of God are what we may rely upon; the less confidence is to be put in men's words, let us with the more assurance trust in God's word.

5. That God must secure his chosen remnant to himself, how bad soever the times are; (v. 7.) *Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.* This intimates, that, as long as the world stands, there will be a generation of proud and wicked men in it, more or less, who will threaten by their wretched arts to ruin religion, by *wearing out the saints of the most High*, Dan. 7. 25. But let God alone to maintain his own interest, and to preserve his own people. He will keep them from this generation, (1.) From being debauched by them and drawn away from God, from mingling with them and learning their works; in times of general apostasy, the Lord knows them that are his, and they shall be enabled to keep their integrity. (2.) From being destroyed and rooted out by them; the church is built upon a rock, and so well fortified, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. In the worst of times, God has his remnant, and in every age will reserve to himself a holy seed, and preserve that to his heavenly kingdom.

In singing this psalm, and praying it over, we must bewail the general corruption of manners, thank God that things are not worse than they are, but pray and hope that they will be better in God's due time.

PSALM XIII.

This psalm is the deserted soul's case and cure. Whether it was penned upon any particular occasion, does not appear, but, in general, I. David sadly complains that God had long withdrawn from him, and delayed to relieve him, v. 1, 2. II. He earnestly prays to God to consider his case, and comfort him, v. 3, 4. III. He assures himself of an answer of peace, and therefore concludes the psalm with joy and triumph, because he concludes his deliverance to be as good as wrought, v. 5, 6.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **H**OW long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? 2. How long shall I take counsel in my soul, *having* sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? 3. Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; 4. Lest mine enemy

say, I have prevailed against him; *and* those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. 5. But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. 6. I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

David, in affliction, is here pouring out his soul before God; his address is short, but the method is very observable, and of use for direction and encouragement.

I. His troubles extort complaints; (v. 1, 2.) and the afflicted have liberty to *pour out their complaint before the Lord*, 102. title. It is some ease to a troubled spirit, to give vent to its griefs, especially to give vent to them at the throne of grace, where we are sure to find one who is afflicted in the afflictions of his people, and is troubled with the feeling of their infirmities; thither we have boldness of access by faith, and there we have freedom of speech, *παρρησία*. Observe here,

1. What David complains of.

(1.) God's unkindness; so he construed it, and it was his infirmity. He thought God had forgotten him, had forgotten his promises to him, his covenant with him, his former loving-kindness which he had shewed him, and which he took to be an earnest of further mercy; had forgotten that there was such a man in the world, who needed and expected relief and succour from him. Thus Zion said, *My God has forgotten me*; (Isa. 49. 14.) Israel said, *My way is hid from the Lord*, Isa. 40. 27. Not that any good man can doubt the omniscience, goodness, and faithfulness, of God; but it is a peevish expression of prevailing fear, which yet, when it arises from a high esteem and earnest desire of God's favour, though it be indecent and culpable, shall be passed by and pardoned, for the second thought will retract it, and repent of it. God hid his face from him, so that he wanted that inward comfort in God which he used to have, and herein was a type of Christ upon the cross, crying out, *My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* God sometimes hides his face from his own children, and leaves them in the dark concerning their interest in him: and this they lay to heart more than any outward trouble whatsoever.

(2.) His own uneasiness. [1.] He was racked with care that filled his head; *I take counsel in my soul*; "I am at a loss, and am *inops consilii*—have no friend to advise with, that I can put any confidence in, and therefore am myself continually projecting what to do to help myself; but none of my projects are likely to take effect, so that I am at my wit's end, and in a continual agitation." Anxious cares are heavy burthens with which good people often load themselves more than they need. [2.] He was overwhelmed with sorrow that filled his heart; *I have sorrow in my heart daily*. He had a constant disposition to sorrow, and it preyed upon his spirits; not only in the night, when he was silent and solitary, but by day too, when lighter griefs are diverted and dissipated by conversation and business; nay, every day brought with it fresh occasions of grief; *the clouds returned after the rain*. The bread of sorrows is sometimes the saint's daily bread; our Master himself was a Man of sorrows.

(3.) His enemies' insolence, which added to his grief. Saul his great enemy, and others under him, were exalted over him, triumphed in his distress, pleased themselves with his grief, and promised themselves a complete victory over him. This he complained of as reflecting dishonour upon God, and his power and promise.

2. How he expostulates with God hereupon; "How long shall it be thus?" And, "Shall it be thus for ever?" Long afflictions try our patience, and often tire it. It is a common temptation, when trouble lasts long, to think it will last always; despondency then turns into despair, and those that have long been without joy, begin, at last, to be without hope; "Lord, tell me how long thou wilt hide thy face, and assure me that it shall not be for ever, but that thou wilt return, at length, in mercy to me, and then I shall the more easily bear my present troubles."

II. His complaints stir up his prayers, v. 3, 4. We should never allow ourselves to make any complaints but what are fit to

be offered up to God, and what drive us to our knees. Observe here,

1. What his petitions are; *Consider my case, hear my complaints, and lighten mine eyes*. (1.) "Strengthen my faith;" for faith is the eye of the soul, with which it sees above, and sees through, the things of sense. "Lord, enable me to look beyond my present troubles, and to foresee a happy issue of them." (2.) "Guide my way, enable me to look about me, that I may avoid the snares which are laid for me." (3.) "Refresh my soul with the joy of thy salvation." That which revives the drooping spirits, is said to *enlighten the eyes*, 1 Sam. 14. 27. Ezra, 9. 8. "Lord, scatter the cloud of melancholy which darkens my eyes, and let my countenance be made pleasant."

2. What his pleas are. He mentions his relation to God and interest in him; *O Lord my God*; and insists upon the greatness of the peril, which called for speedy relief and succour. If his eyes were not lightened quickly, (1.) He concludes that he must perish; "I shall sleep the sleep of death, I cannot live under the weight of all this care and grief." Nothing is more killing to a soul than the want of God's favour, nothing more reviving than the return of it. (2.) That then his enemies would triumph; "Lest mine enemy say, So would I have it; lest Saul, lest Satan, be gratified in my fall." It would gratify the pride of his enemy; he will say, "I have prevailed, I have gotten the day, and been too hard for him and his God;" it would gratify the malice of his enemies; They will rejoice when I am moved. And will it be for God's honour to suffer them thus to trample upon all that is sacred both in heaven and earth?

III. His prayers are soon turned into praises; (v. 5, 6.) But *my heart shall rejoice, and I will sing to the Lord*. What a surprising change is here in a few lines! In the beginning of the psalm, we have him drooping, trembling, and ready to sink into melancholy and despair; but, in the close of it, rejoicing in God, and elevated and enlarged in his praises. See the power of faith, the power of prayer, and how good it is to draw near to God. If we bring our cares and griefs to the throne of grace, and leave them there, we may go away like Hannah, and our countenance will be no more sad, 1 Sam. 1. 18. And here observe the method of his comfort.

1. God's mercy is the support of his faith. "My case is bad enough, and I am ready to think it deplorable, till I consider the infinite goodness of God; finding I have that to trust to, I am comforted, though I have no merit of my own. In former distresses, I have trusted in the mercy of God, and I never found that it failed me; his mercy has in due time relieved me, and my confidence in it has in the mean time supported me. Even in the depth of this distress, when God hid his face from me, when without were fightings, and within were fears, yet I trusted in the mercy of God; and that was as an anchor in a storm, by the help of which, though I was tossed, I was not overset." And still *I do trust in thy mercy*; so some read it. "I refer myself to that, with an assurance that it will do well for me at last." This he pleads with God, knowing what pleasure he takes in those that *hope in his mercy*, 147. 11.

2. His faith in God's mercy filled his heart with joy in his salvation; for joy and peace come by believing, Rom. 15. 13. *Believing, ye rejoice*, 1 Pet. 1. 8. Having put his trust in the mercy of God, he is fully assured of salvation, and that his heart, which was now daily grieving, should rejoice in that salvation. Though weeping endure long, joy will return.

3. His joy in God's salvation would fill his mouth with songs of praise; (v. 6.) "I will sing unto the Lord, sing in remembrance of what he has done formerly; though I should never recover the peace I have had, I will die blessing God that ever I had it; he has dealt bountifully with me formerly, and he shall have the glory of that, however he is pleased to deal with me now. I will sing in hope of what he will do for me at last; being confident that all will end well, will end everlastingly well. But he speaks of it as a thing past; *He has dealt bountifully with me*; because by faith he had received the earnest of the salvation, and he was as confident of it as if it had been done already

In singing this psalm, and praying it over, if we have not the

same complaints to make that David had, we must thank God that we have not, dread and deprecate his withdrawals, sympathize with those that are troubled in mind, and encourage ourselves in our most holy faith and joy.

PSALM XIV.

It does not appear upon what occasion this psalm was penned, nor whether upon any particular occasion. Some say, David penned it when Saul persecuted him; others, when Absalom rebelled against him. But they are mere conjectures, which have not certainly enough to warrant us to expound the psalm by them. The apostle, in quoting part of this psalm, (Rom. 3. 10, &c.) to prove that Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, (v. 9.) and that all the world is guilty before God, (v. 19.) leads us to understand it, in general, as a description of the depravity of the human nature, the sinfulness of the sin we are conceived and born in, and the deplorable corruption of a great part of mankind, even of the world that lies in wickedness, 1 John, 5. 19. But as in those psalms which are designed to discover our remedy in Christ, there is commonly an allusion to David himself, yea, and some passages that are to be understood primarily of him, as in 2, 16, 22, and others; so in this psalm, which is designed to discover our wound by sin, there is an allusion to David's enemies and persecutors, and the other oppressors of good men at that time, to whom some passages have an immediate reference. In all the psalms from the 3d to this, (except the 8th.) David had been complaining of those that hated and persecuted him, insulted him and abused him; now here he traces all those bitter streams to the fountain, the general corruption of nature, and sees that not his enemies only, but all the children of men, were thus corrupted. Here is, I. A charge exhibited against a wicked world, v. 1. II. The proof of the charge, v. 2, 3. III. A serious expostulation with sinners, especially with persecutors, upon it, v. 4. 6. IV. A believing prayer for the salvation of Israel, and a joyful expectation of it, v. 7.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **T**HE fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.* They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, *there is none that doeth good.*
2. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and seek God.*
3. They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy: *there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

If we apply our hearts, as Solomon did, (Ecc. 7. 25.) to search out the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness, these verses will assist us in the search, and will shew us that sin is exceeding sinful. Sin is the disease of mankind, and it appears here to be malignant and epidemical.

1. See how malignant it is, (v. 1.) in two things,

(1.) The contempt it puts upon the honour of God; for there is something of practical atheism at the bottom of all sin; *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.* We are sometimes tempted to think, "Surely there never was so much atheism and profaneness as there is in our days;" but we see the former days were no better; even in David's time there were those who had arrived at such a height of impiety, as to deny the very being of a God, and the first and self-evident principles of religion. Observe, [1.] The sinner here described; he is one that *saith in his heart, There is no God;* he is an atheist. There is no *Elohim*, no Judge or Governor of the world, no Providence presiding over the affairs of men. They cannot doubt of the being of God, but will question his dominion. He says this *in his heart*; it is not his judgment, but his imagination. He cannot satisfy himself that there is none, but he wishes there were none, and pleases himself with the fancy, that it is possible there may be none; he cannot be *sure* there is one, and therefore he is willing to *think there is none.* He dares not speak it out, lest he be confuted, and so undeceived, but he whispers it secretly *in his heart*, for the silencing of the clamours of his conscience, and the imboldening of himself in his evil ways. [2.] The character of this sinner; he is a fool, he is simple and unwise; and this is an evidence of it: he is wicked and profane; and this is the cause of it. Note, Atheistical thoughts are very foolish wicked thoughts, and they are at the bottom of a great deal of the wickedness that is in this world. The word of God is

a *discerner of these thoughts*, and puts a just brand on him that harbours them. *Nabal is his name, and folly is with him;* for he thinks against the clearest light, against his own knowledge and convictions, and the common sentiments of all the wise and sober part of mankind. No man will say, *There is no God*, till he is so hardened in sin, that it is become his interest that there should be none to call him to an account.

(2.) The disgrace and debasement it puts upon the nature of man. Sinners are corrupt, quite degenerated from what man was in his innocent estate; *They are become filthy*, (v. 3.) putrid. All their faculties are so disordered, that they are become odious to their Maker, and utterly incapable of answering the ends of their creation. They are corrupt indeed; for, [1.] They do no good, but are the unprofitable burthens of the earth; they do God no service, bring him no honour, nor do themselves any real kindness. [2.] They do a great deal of hurt; they have *done abominable works*, for such all sinful works are; sin is an abomination to God, it is that *abominable thing which he hates*, (Jer. 44. 4.) and, sooner or later, it will be so to the sinner, it will be *found to be hateful*, (36. 2.) an *abomination of desolation*, making desolate, Matth. 24. 15. This follows upon their saying, *There is no God*: for they that *profess they know God, but in works deny him, are abominable, and to every good work reprobate*, Tit. 1. 16.

2. See how epidemical this disease is; it has infected the whole race of mankind. To prove this, God himself is here brought in for a Witness, and he is an Eye-Witness, v. 2, 3. Observe, (1.) His inquiry; *The Lord looked down from heaven*, a place of prospect, which commands this lower world; thence, with an all-seeing eye, he took a view of all *the children of men*, and the question was, *Whether there were any among them that did understand themselves aright, their duty and interests, and did seek God, and set him before them.* He that made this search was not only one that could find out a good man, if he was to be found, though ever so obscure; but one that would be glad to find out one, and would be sure to take notice of him, as of Noah in the old world. (2.) The result of this inquiry, v. 3. Upon search, upon his search, it appeared, *They are all gone aside*, the apostacy is universal, *there is none that doeth good, no, not one.* Till the free and mighty grace of God has wrought a change, whatever good is in any of the children of men, or is done by them, it is not of themselves, it is God's work in them. When God had made the world, he looked upon his own work, and *all was very good*; (Gen. 1. 31.) but, some time after, he looked upon man's work, and, behold, all was *very bad*, (Gen. 6. 5.) every operation of the thought of man's heart was evil, only evil, and that continually. They are gone aside from the right way of their duty, the way that leads to happiness, and are turned into the paths of the destroyer. In singing this, let us lament the corruption of our own nature, and see what need we have of the grace of God; and since that which is born of the flesh is flesh, let us not marvel that we are told we must be born again.

4. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people *as they eat bread*, and call not upon the LORD?
5. There were they in great fear: for God *is* in the generation of the righteous.
6. Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD *is* his refuge.
7. Oh that the salvation of Israel *were* come out of Zion! When the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, *and Israel shall be glad.*

In these verses, the psalmist endeavours,

1. To convince sinners of the evil and danger of the way they are in, how secure sinner they are in that way. Three things he shews them, which, it may be, they are not very willing to see, their wickedness, their folly, and their danger, while they are apt to believe themselves very wise, and good, and safe. See here, (1.) Their wickedness; this is described in four instances. [1.] *They are themselves workers of iniquity*; they design it, they practice it,

and take as much pleasure in it as ever any man did in his business. [2.] They eat up God's people with as much greediness as they eat bread; such an innate and inveterate enmity they have to them, and so heartily do they desire their ruin, because they really hate God, whose people they are. It is meat and drink to persecutors, to be doing mischief; it is as agreeable to them as their necessary food. They eat up God's people easily, daily, securely, without either check of conscience when they do it, or remorse of conscience when they have done it; as Joseph's brethren cast him into a pit, and then sat down to eat bread, Gen. 37. 24, 25. See Mic. 3. 2, 3. [3.] They call not upon the Lord. Note, Those that care not for God's people, for God's poor, care not for God himself, but live in contempt of him. The reason why people run into all manner of wickedness, even the worst, is, because they do not call upon God for his grace. What good can be expected from those that live without prayer? [4.] They shame the counsel of the poor, and upbraid them with making God their Refuge, as David's enemies upbraided him, 11. 1. Note, Those are very wicked indeed, and have a great deal to answer for, who not only shake off religion, and live without it themselves, but say and do what they can to put others out of conceit with it, that are well-inclined; with the duties of it, as if they were mean, melancholy, and unprofitable; and with the privileges of it, as if they were insufficient to make a man safe and happy. Those that banter religion and religious people, will find, to their cost, it is ill jesting with edged-tools, and dangerous persecuting those that make God their Refuge. *Be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong.* He shews them, (2.) Their folly; *They have no knowledge*; this is obvious, for if they had any knowledge of God, if they did rightly understand themselves, and would but consider things as men, they would not be so abusive and barbarous as they are to the people of God. (3.) Their danger; (v. 5.) *There were they in great fear*; there, where they ate up God's people, their own consciences condemned what they did, and filled them with secret terrors: they sweetly sucked the blood of the saints, but in their bowels it is turned, and become the gall of asps. Many instances there have been of proud and cruel persecutors, who have been made like Pashur, *Magor-missabib*—*Terrors to themselves*, and all about them. They that will not fear God, perhaps may be made to fear at the shaking of a leaf.

2. He endeavours to comfort the people of God, (1.) With what they have; they have God's presence; (v. 5.) *He is in the generation of the righteous*; they have his protection; (v. 6.) *The Lord is their Refuge*. This is as much their security, as it is the terror of their enemies, who may jeer them for their confidence in God, but cannot jeer them out of it. In the judgment-day, it will add to the terror and confusion of sinners, to see God own the generation of the righteous, which they have hated and bantered. (2.) With what they hope for; and that is the *salvation of Israel*, v. 7. When David was driven out by Absalom and his rebellious accomplices, he comforted himself with an assurance, that God would in due time turn again his captivity, to the joy of all his good subjects. But surely this pleasing prospect looks further. He had, in the beginning of the psalm, lamented the general corruption of mankind; and, in the melancholy view of that, wishes for the salvation, which, in the fulness of time, was to come out of Zion, salvation from sin, that great salvation which should be wrought out by the Redeemer, who was expected to come to Zion; to turn away ungodliness from Jacob, Rom. 11. 26. The world is bad; Oh that the Messiah would come and change its character! There is a universal corruption; Oh for the times of reformation! Those will be as joyful times as these are melancholy ones. Then shall God turn again the captivity of his people; for the Redeemer shall ascend up on high, and lead captivity captive, and Jacob shall then rejoice. The triumphs of Zion's King will be the joys of Zion's children. The second coming of Christ, finally to extinguish the dominion of sin and Satan, will be the completing of this salvation, which is the hope, and will be the joy, of every Israelite indeed; with the assurance of that, we should, in singing this, comfort ourselves, and one another, with reference to the present sins of sinners, and sufferings of saints

PSALM XV.

The scope of this short but excellent psalm, is, to shew us the way to heaven, and to convince us, that, if we would be happy, we must be holy and honest. Christ, who is himself the Way, and in whom we must walk as our Way, has also shewed us the same way that is here prescribed; (Matth. 19. 17.) If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. In this psalm, I. By the question, (v. 1.) we are directed and excited to inquire the way. II. By the answer to that question, in the rest of the psalm, we are directed where to walk, v. 2. 5. III. By the assurance given in the close of the psalm, of the safety and happiness of those who answer these characters, we are encouraged to walk in that way, v. 5.

A psalm of David.

1. **L**ORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? 2. He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. 3. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. 4. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD; he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. 5. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things, shall never be moved.

Here is,

I. A very serious and weighty question concerning the characters of a citizen of Zion; (v. 1.) "*Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?*" Let me know who shall go to heaven." Not, who by name (in this way, the Lord only knows them that are his) but who by description; "What kind of people are they whom thou wilt own, and crown with distinguishing and everlasting favours?" This supposes that it is a great privilege to be a citizen of Zion, an unspeakable honour and advantage; that all are not thus privileged, but a remnant only; and that men are not entitled to this privilege by their birth and blood; all shall not abide in God's tabernacle, that have Abraham to their father, but, according as men's hearts and lives are, accordingly will their lot be. It concerns us all to put this question to ourselves, *Lord, what shall I be, and do, that I may abide in thy tabernacle?* Luke, 18. 18. Acts, 16. 30.

1. Observe whom this inquiry is addressed to; to God himself. Note, Those that would find the way to heaven, must look up to God, must take direction from his word, and beg direction from his Spirit. It is fit he himself should give laws to his servants, and appoint the conditions of his favours, and tell who are his, and who not.

2. How it is expressed in Old Testament language. (1.) By the *tabernacle* we may understand the church militant, typified by Moses's tabernacle, fitted to a wilderness-state, mean and moveable. There God manifests himself, and there he meets his people, as of old in the tabernacle of the testimony, the tabernacle of meeting. Who shall dwell in this tabernacle? Who shall be accounted a true living member of God's church, admitted among the spiritual priests to lodge in the courts of this tabernacle? We are concerned to inquire this, because many pretend to a place in this tabernacle, who really have no part nor lot in the matter. (2.) By the *holy hill* we may understand the church triumphant, alluding to mount Zion, on which the temple was to be built by Solomon. It is the happiness of glorified saints, that they dwell in that holy hill; they are at home there, they shall be for ever there. It concerns us to know who shall dwell there, that we make it sure to ourselves, that we shall have a place among them, and may then take the comfort of it, and rejoice in prospect of that holy hill.

II. A very plain and particular answer to this question. Those that desire to know their duty, with a resolution to do it, will

find the scripture a very faithful director, and conscience a faithful monitor. Let us see then the particular characters of a citizen of Zion.

1. He is one that is sincere and entire in his religion; *He walketh uprightly*, according to the condition of the covenant, (Gen. 17. 1.) "*Walk before me, and be thou perfect*," (it is the same word that is here used,) "and then thou shalt find me a God all-sufficient." He is really what he professes to be, is sound at heart, and can approve himself to God, in his integrity, in all he does; his conversation is uniform, and he is of a piece with himself, and endeavours to stand complete in all the will of God. His eye perhaps is weak, but it is single; he has his spots indeed, but he does not paint; an *Israelite indeed in whom is no guile*, John, 1. 47. 2 Cor. 1. 12. I know no religion but sincerity.

2. He is one that is conscientiously honest and just in all his dealings, faithful and fair to all with whom he has to do. *He worketh righteousness*; he walks in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord, and takes care to give all their due; is just both to God and man; and, in speaking to both, he speaks that which is *the truth in his heart*; his prayers, professions, and promises, to God, come not out of feigned lips, nor dares he tell a lie, or so much as equivocate, in his converse or commerce with men. He walks by the rules of righteousness and truth, and scorns and abhors the gains of injustice and fraud; he reckons that that cannot be a good bargain, nor a saving one, which is made with a lie, and that he who wrongs his neighbour, though ever so plausibly, will prove, in the end, to have done the greatest injury to himself.

3. He is one that contrives to do all the good he can to his neighbours; but is very careful to do hurt to no man, and is, in a particular manner, tender of his neighbour's reputation, v. 3. He does no evil at all to his neighbour, willingly or designedly, nothing to offend or grieve his spirit, nothing to prejudice the health or ease of his body, nothing to injure him in his estate or secular interests, in his family or relations; but walks by that golden rule of equity, To do as he would be done by. He is especially careful not to injure his neighbour in his good name, though many, who would not otherwise wrong their neighbours, make nothing of that; if any man, in this matter, bridles not his tongue, his religion is vain. He knows the worth of a good name, and therefore he backbites not, defames no man, speaks evil of no man, makes not others' faults the subject of his common talk, much less of his sport and ridicule, nor speaks of them with pleasure, nor at all but for edification; he makes the best of every body, and the worst of nobody. He does not take up a reproach, he neither raises it, nor receives it; he gives no credit nor countenance to a calumny, but frowns upon a backbiting tongue, and so silences it, Prov. 25. 23. If an ill-natured character of his neighbour be given him, or an ill-natured story be told him, he will disprove it, if he can; if not, it shall die with him, and go no further. His charity will *cover a multitude of sins*.

4. He is one that values men by their virtue and piety, and not by the figure they make in the world, v. 5. (1.) He thinks the better of no man's wickedness, for his pomp and grandeur; *In his eyes, a vile person is contemned*. Wicked people are vile people, worthless and good for nothing; so the word signifies. As dross, as chaff, and as salt that has lost its savour, they are vile in their choices, (Jer. 2. 13.) in their practices, Isa. 32. 6. For this, wise and good men condemn them, not denying them civil honour and respect as men, as men in authority and power perhaps, (1 Pet. 2. 17. Rom. 13. 7.) but, in their judgment of them, agreeing with the word of God. They are so far from envying them, that they pity them, despising their gains, (Isa. 33. 15.) as turning to no account; their dainties, (141. 4.) their pleasures, (Heb. 11. 24, 25.) as sapsless and insipid. They despise their society; (119. 115. 2 Kings, 3. 14.) they despise their taunts and threats, and are not moved by them, nor disturbed at them; they despise the feeble efforts of their impotent malice, (2. 1, 4.) and will shortly triumph in their fall, 52. 6, 7. God despises them, and they are of his mind. (2.) He thinks the worse of no man's piety, for his poverty and meanness, *but he knows them*

that fear the Lord. He reckons that serious piety, wherever it is found, puts an honour upon a man, and makes his face to shine, more than wealth, or wit, or a great name among men, does, or can. He honours such, he esteems them very highly in love, desires their friendship and conversation, and an interest in their prayers, is glad of an opportunity to shew them respect, or do them a good office, pleads their cause, and speaks of them with veneration, rejoices when they prosper, grieves when they are removed, and their memory, when they are gone, is precious with him. By this, we may judge of ourselves in some measure, What rules do we go by in judging of others?

5. He is one that always prefers a good conscience before any secular interest or advantage whatsoever; for if he has promised, upon oath, to do any thing, though afterward it appear much to his damage and prejudice in his worldly estate, yet he adheres to it, and changes not, v. 4. See how weak-sighted and short-sighted even wise and good men may be; they may swear to their own hurt, which they were not aware of when they took the oath: but see how strong the obligation of an oath is, that a man must rather suffer loss to himself and his family, than wrong his neighbour by breaking his oath. An oath is a sacred thing, which we must not think to play fast and loose with.

6. He is one that will not increase his estate by any unjust practices, v. 5. (1.) Not by extortion; *He putteth not out his money to usury*, that he may live at ease upon the labours of others, while he is in a capacity for improving it by his own industry. Not that it is any breach of the law of justice or charity, for the lender to share in the profit which the borrower makes of his money, any more than for the owner of the land to demand rent from the occupant, money being, by art and labour, as improvable as land. But a citizen of Zion will freely lend to the poor, according to his ability, and not be rigorous and severe in recovering his right from those that are reduced by Providence. (2.) Not by bribery; He will not take a reward against the innocent; if he be any way employed in the administration of public justice, he will not, for any gain, or hope of it, to himself, do any thing to the prejudice of a righteous cause.

III. The psalm concludes with a ratification of this character of the citizen of Zion; He is like Zion-hill itself, which cannot be moved, but abides for ever, 125. 1. Every true living member of the church, like the church itself, is built upon a Rock, which the gates of hell cannot prevail against. *He that doeth these things, shall never be moved*; shall not be moved *for ever*, so the word is. The grace of God shall always be sufficient for him, to preserve him safe and blameless to the heavenly kingdom; temptations shall not overcome him, troubles shall not overwhelm him, nothing shall rob him of his present peace, or his future bliss.

In singing this psalm, we must teach and admonish ourselves, and one another, to answer the characters here given of the citizen of Zion, that we may never be moved from God's tabernacle on earth, and may arrive, at last, at that holy hill, where we shall be for ever out of the reach of temptation and danger.

PSALM XVI.

This psalm has something of David in it, but much more of Christ. It begins with such expressions of devotion as may be applied to Christ; but concludes with such confidence of a resurrection, (and so timely a one as to prevent corruption,) as must be applied to Christ, to him only, and cannot be understood of David, as both St. Peter and St. Paul have observed, Acts, 2. 24.—13. 36. For David died, and was buried, and saw corruption. I. David speaks of himself as a member of Christ, and so he speaks the language of all good Christians, professing his confidence in God; (v. 1.) his consent to him; (v. 2.) his affection to the people of God; (v. 3.) his adherence to the true worship of God; (v. 4.) and his entire complacency and satisfaction in God, and the interest he had in him, v. 5. 7. II. He speaks of himself as a type of Christ, and so he speaks the language of Christ himself, to whom all the rest of the psalm is expressly, and at large, applied, Acts, 2. 25, &c. David speaks concerning him, (not concerning himself,) I foresaw the Lord always before my face, &c. And this he spake, being a prophet, v. 30, 31. He spake, 1. Of the special presence of God with the Redeemer, in his services and sufferings, v. 8. 2. Of the prospect which the Redeemer had of his own resurrection, and the glory that should follow, which carried him cheerfully through his undertaking, v. 9. 11.

Michtam of David.

1. **P**RESERVE me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust. 2. *O my soul*, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my LORD: my goodness extendeth not to thee; 3. *But* to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight. 4. Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips. 5. The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. 6. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. 7. I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night-seasons.

This psalm is entitled *Michtam*, which some translate a *golden* psalm, a very precious one, more to be valued by us than gold, yea than much fine gold; because it speaks so plainly of Christ and his resurrection, who is the true Treasure hid in the field of the Old Testament.

I. David here flies to God's protection with a cheerful believing confidence in it; (v. 1.) "*Preserve me, O God*, from the deaths, and especially from the sins, to which I am continually exposed; for in thee, and in thee only, do I put my trust." Those that by faith commit themselves to the divine care, and submit themselves to the divine guidance, have reason to hope for the benefit of both. This is applicable to Christ, who prayed, *Father, save me from this hour*, and trusted in God that he would deliver him.

II. He recognizes his solemn dedication of himself to God, as his God; (v. 2.) "*O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord*, and therefore thou mayest venture to trust him." Note, 1. It is the duty and interest of every one of us to acknowledge the Lord for our Lord, to subject ourselves to him, and then to stay ourselves upon him. *Adonai* signifies *My Sayer*, the Strength of my heart. 2. This must be done with our souls. "*O my soul, thou hast said it.*" Covenanting with God must be heart-work; all that is within us must be employed therein, and engaged thereby. 3. Those who have avouched the Lord for their Lord, should be often putting themselves in mind of what they have done. "*Hast thou said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord?*" Say it again then, stand to it, abide by it, and never unsay it. Hast thou said it? Take the comfort of it, and live up to it. He is thy Lord, and worship thou him, and let thine eye be ever toward him."

III. He devotes himself to the honour of God, in the service of the saints; (v. 2, 3.) *My goodness extends not to thee, but to the saints.* Observe, 1. Those that have taken the Lord for their Lord, must, like him, be good, and do good; we do not expect happiness without goodness. 2. Whatever good there is in us, or is done by us, we must humbly acknowledge that it extends not to God; so that we cannot pretend to merit any thing by it. God has no need of our services, he is not benefited by them, nor can they add any thing to his infinite perfection and blessedness. The wisest, and best, and most useful men in the world, cannot be profitable to God, Job, 22. 2.—35. 7. God is infinitely above us, and happy without us, and whatever good we do, it is all from him; so that we are indebted to him, not he to us: David owns it, (1 Chron. 29. 14.) *Of thine own have we given thee.* 3. If God be our's, we must, for his sake, extend our goodness to those that are his, to the saints in the earth; for what is done to them, he is pleased to take as done to himself, having constituted them his receivers. Note, (1.) There are saints in the earth; and saints on earth we must all be, or we shall never be saints in heaven. Those that are renewed by the grace of God, and devoted to the glory of God, are saints on earth. (2.) The saints

in the earth are excellent ones, great, mighty, magnificent, ones, and yet some of them so poor in the world, that they needed to have David's goodness extended to them. God makes them excellent by the grace he gives them. *The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour*, and then he accounts them excellent; they are precious in his sight and honourable, they are his jewels, his peculiar treasure. Their God is their Glory, and a Diadem of beauty to them. (3.) All that have taken the Lord for their God, delight in his saints as excellent ones, because they bear his image, and because he loves them. David, though a king, was a *companion of all that feared God*, (119. 63.) even the meanest, which was a sign that his delight was in them. (4.) It is not enough for us to delight in the saints, but, as there is occasion, our goodness must extend to them; we must be ready to shew them the kindness they need, distribute to their necessities, and abound in the labour of love to them. This is applicable to Christ. The salvation he wrought out for us was no gain to God, for our ruin would have been no loss to him; but the goodness and benefit of it extend to us men, in whom he delighted, Prov. 8. 31. *For their sakes*, says he, *I sanctify myself*, John, 17. 19. Christ delights even in the saints on earth, notwithstanding their weaknesses and manifold infirmities, which is a good reason why we should.

IV. He disclaims the worship of all false gods, and all communion with their worshippers, v. 4. Where, 1. He reads the doom of idolaters, who hasten after another god, being mad upon their idols, and pursuing them as eagerly as if they were afraid they would escape from them; their sorrows shall be multiplied, both by the judgments they bring upon themselves from the true God whom they forsake, and by the disappointment they will meet with in the false gods they embrace. They that multiply gods, multiply griefs, to themselves, for whoever thinks one God too little, will find two too many, and yet hundreds not enough. 2. He declares his resolution to have no fellowship with them, nor with their unfruitful works of darkness; "*Their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer*, not only because the gods they are offered to, are a lie, but because the offerings themselves are barbarous." At God's altar, because the blood made atonement, the drinking of it was most strictly prohibited, and the drink-offerings were of wine; but the Devil prescribed to his worshippers to drink of the blood of the sacrifices, to teach them cruelty. "I will have nothing to do" (says David) "with those bloody deities, nor so much as take their names into my lips with any delight in them, or respect to them." Thus must we hate idols and idolatry with a perfect hatred. Some make this also applicable to Christ and his undertaking, shewing the nature of the sacrifice he offered: it was not the blood of bulls and goats, which was offered according to the law, (that was never named, nor did he ever make any mention of it,) but his own blood; shewing also the multiplied sorrows of the unbelieving Jews, who hastened after another king, Caesar, and are still hastening after another Messiah, whom they in vain look for.

V. He repeats the solemn choice he had made of God for his Portion and Happiness, (v. 5.) takes to himself the comfort of the choice, (v. 6.) and gives God the glory of it, v. 7. This is very much the language of a devout and pious soul in its gracious exercises.

1. Choosing the Lord for its Portion and Happiness. "Most men take the world for their chief good, and place their felicity in the enjoyments of it; but this I say, *The Lord is the Portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup*; the Portion I make choice of, and will gladly take up with, how poor soever my condition is in this world. Let me have the love and favour of God, and be accepted of him; let me have the comfort of communion with God, and satisfaction in the communications of his graces and comforts; let me have an interest in his promises, and a title by promise to everlasting life and happiness in the future state; and I have enough, I need no more, I desire no more, to complete my felicity." Would we do well and wisely for ourselves, we must take God, in Christ, to be, (1.) The Portion of our inheritance in the other world, heaven is an inheritance, God himself is the

inheritance of the saints there, whose everlasting bliss is to enjoy him. We must take that for our inheritance, our home, our rest, our lasting, everlasting, good, and look upon this world to be no more our's, than the country through which our road lies, when we are in a journey. (2.) The Portion of our cup in this world, with which we are nourished and refreshed, and kept from fainting. Those have not God for their's, who do not reckon his comforts the most reviving cordials, acquaint themselves with them, and make use of them as sufficient to balance all the grievances of this present time, and to sweeten the most bitter cup of affliction.

2. Confiding in him for the securing of this portion; "*Thou maintainest my lot.*" Thou that hast by promise made over thyself to me, to be mine, wilt graciously make good what thou hast promised, and never leave me to myself to forfeit this happiness, nor leave it in the power of mine enemies to rob me of it. Nothing shall pluck me out of thine hands, nor separate me from thy love, and the sure mercies of David." The saints and their bliss are kept by the power of God.

3. Rejoicing in this portion, and taking a complacency in it; (v. 6.) *The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places*; those have reason to say so, that have God for their Portion, they have a worthy Portion, a goodly Heritage. What can they have better? What can they desire more? *Return unto thy Rest, O my soul,* and look no further. Note, Gracious persons, though they still covet more of God, never covet more than God; but, being satisfied of his loving-kindness, are abundantly satisfied with it, and envy not any their carnal mirth, and sensual pleasures and delights, but account themselves truly happy in what they have, and doubt not but to be completely happy in what they hope for. Those whose lot is cast, as David's was, in a land of light, in a valley of vision, where God is known and worshipped, have, upon that account, reason to say, *The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places*; much more those who have not only the means, but the end, not only Immanuel's land, but Immanuel's love.

4. Giving thanks to God for it, and for grace to make this wise and happy choice; (v. 7.) "*I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel,*" this counsel, to take him for my Portion and Happiness." So ignorant and foolish are we, that, if we be left to ourselves, our hearts will follow our eyes, and we shall choose our own delusions, and forsake our own mercies for lying vanities; and therefore, if we have indeed taken God for our Portion, and preferred spiritual and eternal blessings before those that are sensible and temporal, we must thankfully acknowledge the power and goodness of divine grace, directing and enabling us to make that choice. If we have the pleasure of it, let God have the praises of it.

5. Making a good use of it. God having given him counsel by his word and Spirit, his own *reins* also (his own thoughts) instructed him in the night-season; when he was silent and solitary, and retired from the world, then his own conscience (which is called the *reins*, Jer. 17. 10.) not only reflected with comfort upon the choice he had made, but instructed or admonished him concerning the duties arising out of this choice, catechized him, and engaged and quickened him to live as one that had God for his Portion, by faith to live upon him and to him. Those who have God for their Portion, and who will be faithful to him, must give their own consciences leave to deal thus faithfully and plainly with them.

All this may be applied to Christ, who made the Lord his Portion, and was pleased with that Portion, made his Father's glory his highest end, and made it his meat and drink to seek that, and to do his will, and delighted to prosecute his undertaking, pursuant to his Father's counsel, depending upon him to maintain his lot, and to carry him through his undertaking. We may also apply it to ourselves, in singing it, renewing our choice of God as our's, with a holy complacency and satisfaction.

8. I have set the LORD always before me: because *he is* at my right hand, I shall not be moved. 9. Therefore my heart is glad, and my

glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.

10. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

11. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.

All these verses are quoted by St. Peter in his first sermon, after the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost; (Acts, 2. 25..26.) and he tells us expressly, that David in them speaks concerning Christ, and particularly of his resurrection. Something we may allow here of the workings of David's own pious and devout affections toward God, depending upon his grace to perfect every thing that concerned him, and looking for the blessed hope, and a happy state, on the other side death, in the enjoyment of God; but in these holy elevations toward God and heaven he was carried by the spirit of prophecy, quite beyond the consideration of himself and his own ease, to foretell the glory of the Messiah, in such expressions as were peculiar to that, and could not be understood of himself. The New Testament furnishes us with a key to let us into the mystery of these lines.

1. These verses must certainly be applied to Christ; of him speaks the prophet this, as did many of the Old Testament prophets, who testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, (1 Pet. 1. 11.) and that is the subject of this prophecy here. It is foretold (as he himself shewed concerning this, no doubt, among other prophecies in this psalm, Luke, 24. 44, 46.) that *Christ should suffer, and rise from the dead*, 1 Cor. 15. 3, 4.

1. That he should suffer and die. This is implied here, when he says, (v. 8.) *I shall not be moved*; he supposed that he should be struck at, and have a dreadful shock given him, as he had in his agony, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, and he prayed that the cup might pass from him. When he says, "*My flesh shall rest,*" it is implied, that he must put off the body, and therefore must go through the pains of death. It is likewise plainly intimated, that his soul must go into a state of separation from the body, and that his body, so deserted, would be in imminent danger of seeing corruption; that he should not only die, but be buried, and abide for some time under the power of death.

2. That he should be wonderfully borne up by the divine power, in suffering and dying. (1.) That he should not be moved, not driven off, from his undertaking, nor sink under the weight of it; that he should not fail, nor be discouraged, (Isa. 42. 4.) but should proceed and persevere in it, till he could say, *It is finished*. Though the service was hard, and the encounter hot, and he trod the wine-press alone, yet he was not moved, did not give up the cause, but set his face as a flint, Isa. 50. 7..9. *Here am I, let these go their way.* Nay, (2.) That his heart should rejoice, and his glory be glad; that he should go on with his undertaking, not only resolutely, but cheerfully, and with unspeakable pleasure and satisfaction; witness that saying, (John, 17. 11.) *Now I am no more in the world, but I come to thee*; and that, (John, 18. 11.) *The cup that my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?* and many the like. By his glory is meant his tongue, as appears, Acts, 2. 26. For our tongue is our glory, and never more so, than when it is employed in glorifying God.

Now there were three things which bore him up, and carried him on thus cheerfully. [1.] The respect he had to his Father's will and glory in what he did; *I have set the Lord always before me*. He still had an eye to his Father's commandment, (John, 10. 18.—14. 31.) the will of him that sent him. He aimed at his Father's honour, and the restoring of the interests of his kingdom among men, and this kept him from being moved by the difficulties he met with; for he always did those things that pleased his Father. [2.] The assurance he had of his Father's presence with him in his sufferings; *He is at my right hand*; a present Help to me, nigh at hand in the time of need. *He is near that justifieth me*; (Isa. 50. 8.) he is at my right hand, to direct and strengthen it, and hold it up, 89. 21. When he was in

his agony, an angel was sent from heaven, to strengthen him, Luke, 22. 43. To this the victories and triumphs of the cross were all owing; it was the Lord at his right hand, that *struck through kings*, 110. 5. Isa. 42. 1, 2. [3.] The prospect he had of a glorious issue of his sufferings. It was *for the joy set before him*, that he *endured the cross*, Heb. 12. 2. He rested in hope, and that made his rest glorious, Isa. 11. 10. He knew he should be justified in the Spirit by his resurrection, and straightway glorified. See John, 13. 31, 32.

3. That he should be brought through his sufferings, and brought from under the power of death by a glorious resurrection. (1.) That his soul should not be left in hell, his human spirit should not be long left, as other men's spirits are, in a state of separation from the body, but should, in a little time, return and be re-united to it, never to part again. (2.) That, being God's Holy One in a peculiar manner, sanctified to the work of redemption, and perfectly free from sin, he should not see corruption, nor feel it. This implies, that he should not only be raised from the grave, but raised so soon, that his dead body should not so much as begin to corrupt, which, in the course of nature, it would have done, if it had not been raised the third day. We, who have so much corruption in our souls, must expect that our bodies also will corrupt; (Job, 24. 19.) But that Holy One of God, who knew no sin, saw no corruption. Under the law, it was strictly ordered, that those parts of the sacrifices, which were not burnt upon the altar, should by no means be kept till the third day, lest they should putrify, (Lev. 7. 15, 18.) which perhaps pointed at Christ's rising the third day, that he might not see corruption—neither was a bone of him broken.

4. That he should be abundantly recompensed for his sufferings, with the joy set before him, v. 11. He was well-assured, (1.) That he should not miss of his glory; "Thou wilt shew me the path of life, and lead me to that life through this darksome valley." In confidence of this, when he gave up the ghost, he said, *Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit*; and, a little before, *Father, glorify me with thine own self*. (2.) That he should be received into the presence of God, to sit at his right hand. His being admitted into God's presence, would be the acceptance of his service; and his being set at his right hand, the recompence of it. (3.) Thus, as a reward for the sorrows he underwent for our redemption, he should have a fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore; not only the glory he had with God, as God, before all worlds, but the joy and pleasure of a Mediator, in seeing his seed, and the success and prosperity of his undertaking, Isa. 53. 10, 11.

II. Christ being the Head of the body, the church, these verses may, for the most part, be applied to all good Christians, who are guided and animated by the Spirit of Christ; and, in singing them, when we have first given glory to Christ, in whom, to our everlasting comfort, they have had their accomplishment, we may then encourage and edify ourselves and one another with them, and may hence learn,

1. That it is our wisdom and duty to set the Lord always before us, and to see him continually at our right hand, wherever we are, to eye him as our Chief Good and Highest End, our Owner, Ruler, and Judge, our gracious Benefactor, our sure Guide and strict Observer; and, while we do thus, we shall not be moved either from our duty or from our comfort. Blessed Paul set the Lord before him, when, though bonds and afflictions did abide him, he could bravely say, *None of these things move me*, Acts, 20. 24.

2. That, if our eyes be ever toward God, our hearts and tongues may ever rejoice in him; it is our own fault if they do not. If the heart rejoice in God, out of the abundance of that let the mouth speak, to his glory, and the edification of others.

3. That dying Christians, as well as a dying Christ, may cheerfully put off the body, in a believing expectation of a joyful resurrection; *My flesh also shall rest in hope*. Our bodies have little rest in this world, but in the grave they shall rest as in their beds, Isa. 57. 2. We have little to hope for from this life, but we shall rest in hope of a better life; we may put off the body

in that hope. Death *destroys the hope of man*, (Job, 14. 19.) but not the hope of a good Christian, Prov. 14. 32. He has hope in his death, living hopes in dying moments, hopes that the body shall not be left for ever in the grave, but, though it sees corruption for a time, it shall, at the end of the time, be raised to immortality. Christ's resurrection is an earnest of ours, if we be his.

4. That those who live piously, with God in their eye, may die comfortably, with heaven in their eye. In this world, sorrow is our lot, but in heaven there is joy; all our joys here are empty and defective, but in heaven there is a fulness of joy; our pleasures here are transient and momentary, and such is the nature of them, that it is not fit they should last long; but those at God's right hand are pleasures for evermore; for they are the pleasures of immortal souls, in the immediate vision and fruition of an eternal God.

PSALM XVII.

David, being in great distress and danger by the malice of his enemies, does, in this psalm, by prayer address himself to God, his tried Refuge, and seeks shelter in him. I. He appeals to God concerning his integrity, v. 1. 4. II. He prays to God still to be upheld in his integrity, and preserved from the malice of his enemies, v. 5. 8, 13. III. He gives a character of his enemies, using that as a plea with God for his preservation, v. 9. 12, 11. IV. He comforts himself with the hopes of his future happiness, v. 15. Some make him, in this, a type of Christ, who was perfectly innocent, and yet was hated and persecuted; but, like David, committed himself and his cause to him that judgeth righteously.

A Prayer of David.

1. **H**EAR the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, *that goeth not out of feigned lips*. 2. Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal. 3. Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, *and shalt find nothing*; I am purposed *that my youth shall not transgress*. 4. Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer. 5. Hold up my goings in thy paths, *that my footsteps slip not*. 6. I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, *and hear my speech*. 7. Shew thy marvellous loving-kindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee, from those that rise up against them.

This psalm is a prayer. As there is a time to weep, and a time to rejoice, so there is a time for praise, and a time for prayer. David was now persecuted, probably, by Saul, who hunted him like a partridge on the mountains; without were fightings, within were fears, and both urged him as a supplicant to the throne of mercy.

He addresses himself to God in these verses, both by way of appeal, (*Hear the right, O Lord*; let my righteous cause have hearing before thy tribunal, and give judgment upon it,) and, by way of petition, *Give ear unto my prayer*, (v. 1.) and again, (v. 6.) *Incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech*; not that God needs to be thus pressed with our importunity, but he gives us leave thus to express our earnest desire of his gracious answers to our prayers. These things he pleads with God, for audience, 1. That he was sincere, and did not dissemble with God in his prayer; *it goeth not out of feigned lips*. He meant as he spake, and the feelings of his mind agreed with the expressions of his mouth. Feigned prayers are fruitless; but if our hearts lead our prayers, God will meet them with his favour. 2. That he had been used to pray at other times, and it was not his distress and danger that now first brought him to his duty; "*I have called*

upon thee formerly, (v.6.) therefore, Lord, hear me now." It will be a great comfort to us, if trouble, when it comes, finds the wheels of prayer a-going, for then may we come with the more boldness to the throne of grace. Tradesmen are willing to oblige those that have been long their customers. 3. That he was encouraged by his faith to expect God would take notice of his prayers; "I know thou wilt hear me, and therefore, O God, *incline thine ear to me.*" Our believing dependence upon God is a good plea to enforce our desires toward him. Let us now see,

I. What his appeal is; and there observe,

1. What the court is, to the cognizance and determination of which he makes his appeal; it is the court of heaven. "Lord, do thou hear the right, for Saul is so passionate, so prejudiced, he will not hear it. Lord, *let my sentence come forth from thy presence,* v.2. Men sentence me to be pursued and cut off as an evil-doer. Lord, I appeal from them to thee." This he did in a public remonstrance before Saul's face, (1 Sam. 24. 12.) *The Lord judge between me and thee;* and he repeats it here in his private devotions. Note, (1.) The equity and extent of God's government and judgment are a very great support to injured innocence. If we are blackened, and abused, and misrepresented, by unrighteous men, it is our comfort that we have a righteous God to go to, who will take our part, who is the Patron of the oppressed, whose judgment is according to truth, by the discoveries of which, every person and every cause will appear in a true light, stripped of all false colours, and by the decisions of which, all unrighteous dooms will be reversed, and to every man will be rendered according to his work. (2.) Sincerity dreads no scrutiny, no not that of God himself, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace. *Let thine eyes behold the things that are equal.* God's omniscience is as much the joy of the upright, as it is the terror of the hypocrites; and is particularly comfortable to those who are falsely accused, and in any wise have wrong done them.

2. What the evidence is, by which he hopes to make good his appeal; it is the trial God had made of him, (v.3.) *Thou hast proved mine heart.* God's sentence is therefore right, because he always proceeds upon his knowledge, which is more certain and infallible than that which men attain to by the closest views and the strictest searches. He knew God had tried him, (1.) By his own conscience, which is God's deputy in the soul. *The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord,* with this God had searched him, and visited him in the night, when he *communed with his own heart upon his bed.* He had submitted to the search, and had seriously reviewed the actions of his life, to discover what was amiss, but could find nothing of that which his enemies charged him with. (2.) By providence. God had tried him by the fair opportunity he had, once and again, to kill Saul; he had tried him by the malice of Saul, the treachery of his friends, and the many provocations that were given him; so that, if he had been the man he was represented to be, it would have appeared; but, upon all these trials, there was nothing found against him, no proof at all of the things whereof they accused him.

God tried his heart, and could witness to the integrity of that; but, for the further proof of his integrity, he himself takes notice of two things, concerning which his conscience bore him record. [1.] That he had a fixed resolution against all sins of the tongue; "I am purposed and fully determined, in the strength of God's grace, that my mouth shall not transgress." He does not say, "I hope that it will not," or, "I wish that it may not," but, "I am fully purposed that it shall not;" with this bridle he kept his mouth, 39.1. Note, Constant resolution and watchfulness against sins of the tongue, will be a good evidence of our integrity; *If any offend not in word, the same is a perfect man,* Jam. 3.2. He does not say, "My mouth never shall transgress," (for in many things we all offend,) but, "I am purposed that it shall not;" and he that searches the heart, knows whether the purpose be sincere. [2.] That he had been as careful to refrain from sinful actions, as from sinful words; (v.4.) "Concerning the common works of men, the actions and affairs of human life, I have, by the direction of thy word, *kept me from the paths of the destroyer.*" Some understand it particularly, that he had not been

himself a destroyer of Saul, when it lay in his power, nor had he permitted others to be so, but said to Abishai, *Destroy him not,* 1 Sam. 26.9. But it may be taken more generally; he kept himself from all evil works, and endeavoured, according to the duty of his place, to keep others from them too. Note, *First,* The ways of sin are paths of the destroyer, of the Devil, whose name is *Abaddon* and *Apollyon*, a destroyer, who ruins souls by decoying them into the paths of sin. *Secondly,* It concerns us all to keep out of the paths of the destroyer, for if we walk in those ways that lead to destruction, we must thank ourselves if destruction and misery be our portion at last. *Thirdly,* It is by the word of God, as our guide and rule, that we must keep out of the paths of the destroyer, by observing its directions and admonitions, 119.9. *Fourthly,* If we carefully avoid all the paths of sin, it will be very comfortable in the reflection, when we are in trouble. If we *keep ourselves, that the wicked one touch us not* with his temptations, (1 John, 5. 18.) we may hope he shall not be able to touch us with his terrors.

II. What his petition is; it is, in short, this, That he might experience the good work of God in him, as an evidence of, and qualification for, the good will of God toward him: this is grace and peace from God the Father.

1. He prays for the work of God's grace in him; (v.5.) "*Hold up my goings in thy paths.* Lord, I have, by thy grace, kept me from the paths of the destroyer; by the same grace, let me be kept in thy paths; let me not only be restrained from doing that which is evil, but quickened to abound always in that which is good. Let my goings be held in thy paths, that I may not turn back from them, nor turn aside out of them; let them be held up in thy paths, that I may not stumble, and fall into sin, that I may not trifle, and neglect my duty. Lord, as thou hast kept me hitherto, so keep me still." Those that are, through grace, going in God's paths, have need to pray, and do pray, that their goings may be held up in those paths; for we stand no longer than he is pleased to hold us, we go no further than he is pleased to lead us, bear us up, and carry us. David had been kept in the way of his duty hitherto, and yet he does not think that that would be his security for the future, and therefore prays, "Lord, still hold me up." Those that would proceed and persevere in the way of God, must, by faith and prayer, fetch in daily fresh supplies of grace and strength from him. David was sensible that his way was slippery, that he himself was weak, and not so well fixed and furnished as he should be; that there were those who watched for his halting, and would improve the least slip against him, and therefore he prays, "Lord, hold me up, that my foot slip not; that I may never say or do any thing that looks either dishonest, or distrustful of thee, and thy providence, and promise."

2. He prays for the tokens of God's favour to him, v.7. Observe here, (1.) How he eyes God, as the Protector and Saviour of his people, so he calls him, and thence he takes his encouragement in prayer; *O thou that savest by thy right hand* (by thine own power, and needest not the agency of any other) *them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them.* It is the character of God's people, that they trust in him; he is pleased to make them confident, for his secret is with the righteous; and they make him their Trust, for to him they commit themselves. Those that trust in God, have many enemies, many that rise up against them, and seek their ruin; but they have one Friend that is able to deal with them all, and if he be for them, no matter who is against them. He reckons it his honour to be their Saviour. His almighty power is engaged for them, and they have all found him ready to save them. The margin reads it, *O thou that savest them which trust in thee, from those that rise up against thy right hand.* Those that are enemies to the saints, are rebels against God and his right hand, and therefore, no doubt, he will, in due time, appear against them. (2.) What he expects and desires from God; *Show thy marvellous loving-kindness.* The word signifies, [1.] Distinguishing favours. "Set apart thy loving-kindnesses for me, put me not off with common mercies, but be gracious to me, as thou usest to do to those who

love thy name." [2.] Wonderful favours. "O make thy loving-kindness admirable; Lord, testify thy favour to me in such a way, that I and others may wonder at it." God's loving-kindness is marvellous, for the freeness and fulness of it; in some instances, it appears, in a special manner, marvellous, (118.23.) and it will certainly appear so in the salvation of the saints, when Christ shall come to be glorified in the saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.

8. Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings, 9. From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about. 10. They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. 11. They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; 12. Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places. 13. Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: 14. From men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. 15. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

We may observe, in these verses,

I. What David prays for. Being compassed about with enemies that sought his life, he prays to God to preserve him safe, through all their attempts against him, to the crown to which he was anointed. This prayer is both a prediction of the preservation of Christ, through all the hardships and difficulties of his humiliation, to the glories and joys of his exalted state, and a pattern to Christians to commit the keeping of their souls to God, trusting him to preserve them to his heavenly kingdom. He prays,

1. That he himself might be protected; (v.8.) "Keep me safe, hide me close, where I may not be found, where I may not be come at. Deliver my soul, not only my mortal life from death, but my immortal spirit from sin." Those who put themselves under God's protection, may in faith implore the benefit of it. He prays that God would keep him, (1.) With as much care as a man keeps the apple of his eye with, which nature has wonderfully fenced, and teaches us to guard. If we keep God's law as the apple of our eye, (Prov.7.2.) we may expect that God will so keep us; for it is said concerning his people, that whoso touches them, touches the apple of his eye, Zech.2.8. (2.) With as much tenderness as the hen gathers her young ones under her wings with; Christ uses the similitude, Matth.23.37. "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings, where I may be both safe and warm." Or, perhaps, it rather alludes to the wings of the cherubim shadowing the mercy-seat; "Let me be taken under the protection of that glorious grace which is peculiar to God's Israel." What David here prays for, was performed to the Son of David our Lord Jesus, of whom it is said, (Isa.49.2.) that God hid him in the shadow of his hand, hid him as a polished shaft in his quiver. David further prays, "Lord, keep me from the wicked, from men of the world." [1.] "From being, and doing, like them, from walking in their counsel, and standing in their way, and eating of their dainties." [2.] "From being destroyed and run down by them. Let them not have their will against me, let them not triumph over me."

2. That all the designs of his enemies, to bring him either into sin or into trouble, might be defeated; (v.13.) "Arise, O Lord, appear for me, disappoint him, and cast him down in his own

eyes by the disappointment." While Saul persecuted David, how often did he miss his prey, then when he thought he had him sure! And how were Christ's enemies disappointed by his resurrection, who thought they had gained their point when they had put him to death!

II. What he pleads, for the encouraging of his own faith in these petitions, and his hope of speeding. He pleads,

1. The malice and wickedness of his enemies; "They are such as are not fit to be countenanced, such as, if I be not delivered from them by the special care of God himself, will be my ruin. Lord, see what wicked men they are that oppress me, and waste me, and run me down." (1.) "They are very spiteful and malicious; they are my deadly enemies, that thirst after my blood, my heart's blood; enemies against the soul, so the word is. David's enemies did what they could to drive him to sin, and drive him away from God, they bade him go serve other gods; (1 Sam. 26. 19.) and therefore he had reason to pray against them. Note, Those are our worst enemies, and we ought so to account them, that are enemies to our souls. (2.) "They are very secure and sensual, insolent and haughty, v.10. They are inclosed in their own fat, wrap themselves, hug themselves, in their own honour, and power, and plenty, and then make light of God, and set his judgments at defiance, 73.7. Job, 15.27. They wallow in pleasure, and promise themselves that to-morrow shall be as this day. And therefore with their mouth they speak proudly, glorying in themselves, blaspheming God, trampling upon his people, and insulting them." See Rev. 13.5,6. "Lord, are not such men as these fit to be mortified and humbled, and made to know themselves? Will it not be for thy glory to look upon these proud men and abase them?" (3.) "They are restless and unwearied in their attempts against me; they compass me about, v.9. They have now in a manner gained their point, they have surrounded us, they have compassed us in our steps, they track us wherever we go, follow us as close as the hound does the hare, and take all advantages against us, being both too many, and too quick, for us. And yet they pretend to look another way, and set their eyes bowing down to the earth, as if they were meditating, retired into themselves, and thinking of something else;" or, (as some think,) "They are watchful and intent upon it, to do us a mischief; they are down-looking, and never slip an opportunity of compassing their design." (4.) The ring-leader of them, (that was Saul,) is in a special manner bloody and barbarous, politic, and projecting, (v.12.) like a lion that lives by prey, and is therefore greedy of it. It is as much the meat and drink of a wicked man to do mischief, as it is of a good man to do good. He is like a young lion lurking in secret places, disguising his cruel designs. This is fitly applied to Saul, who sought David on the rocks of the wild goats, (1 Sam. 24.2.) and in the wilderness of Ziph, (ch.26.2.) where lions used to lurk for their prey.

2. The power God had over them, to controul and restrain them. He pleads, (1.) "Lord, they are thy sword; and will any father suffer his sword to be drawn against his own children?" As this is a reason why we should patiently bear the injuries of men, that they are but the instruments of the trouble, (it comes originally from God, to whose will we are bound to submit,) so it is an encouragement to us to hope both that their wrath shall praise him, and that the remainder thereof he will restrain, that they are God's sword, which he can manage as he pleases, which cannot move without him, and which he will sheathe when he has done his work with it. (2.) "They are thy hand, by which thou dost chastise thy people, and make them feel thy displeasure." He therefore expects deliverance from God's hand, because from God's hand the trouble came. *Una eademque manus vulnus openque tulit—The same hand wounds and heals.* There is no flying from God's hand, but by flying to it. It is very comfortable, when we are in fear of the power of man, to see it dependent upon, and in subjection to, the power of God; see Isa.10.6, 7, 15.

3. Their outward prosperity; (v.14.) "Lord, appear against them, for, (1.) "They are entirely devoted to the world, and care not for thee and thy favour. They are men of the world, actuated

by the spirit of the world, walking according to the course of this world, in love with the wealth and pleasure of this world, eager in the pursuits of it, making them their business, and at ease in the enjoyments of it, making them their bliss. They have their portion in this life; they look upon the good things of this world as the best things, and sufficient to make them happy, and they choose them accordingly, place their felicity in them, and aim at them as their chief good; they rest satisfied with them, their souls take ease in them, and they look no further, nor are in any care to provide for another life. These things are their consolation, (Luke, 6. 24.) *their good things*, (Luke, 16. 25.) *their reward*, (Matth. 20. 13.) "Now, Lord, shall men of this character be supported and countenanced against those who honour thee by preferring thy favour before all the wealth in this world, and taking thee for their portion?" 16. 5. (2.) They have abundance of the world, [1.] They have enlarged appetites, and a great deal wherewith to satisfy them; *their bellies thou fillest with hid treasures*. The things of this world are called *treasures*, because they are so accounted; otherwise, to a soul, and in comparison with eternal blessings, they are but trash. They are hid in the several parts of the creation, and hid in the sovereign disposals of Providence. They are God's hid treasures, for the earth is his, and the fulness thereof, though the men of the world think it is their own, and forget God's property in it. They that fare deliciously every day, have their *bellies filled with these hid treasures*; and they will but *fill the belly*, (1 Cor. 6. 13.) they will not fill the soul, they are not bread for that, nor can they satisfy, Isa. 55. 2. They are husks, and ashes, and wind; and yet most men, having no care for their souls, but all for their bellies, take up with them. [2.] They have numerous families, and a great deal to leave to them. They are full of children, and yet their pasture is not overstocked; they have enough for them all, and *leave the rest of their substance to their babes*, to their grand-children; and this is their heaven, it is their bliss, it is their all. "Lord," said David, "*deliver me from them*; let me not have my portion with them. Deliver me from their designs against me; for, they having so much wealth and power, I am not able to deal with them unless the Lord be on my side."

4. He pleads his own dependence upon God as his Portion and Happiness. "They have their portion in this life, but as for me, (v. 15.) I am none of them, I have but little of the world; *Nec habeo, nec careo, nec curo—I neither have, nor need, nor care for*. It is the vision and fruition of God that I place my happiness in, that is it I hope for, and comfort myself with the hopes of, and thereby distinguish myself from those who have their portion in this life." Beholding God's face with satisfaction, may be considered, (1.) As our duty and comfort in this world. We must, in righteousness, clothed with Christ's righteousness, having a good heart and a good life, by faith behold God's face, and set him always before us; entertain ourselves from day to day with the contemplation of the beauty of the Lord; and, when we awake every morning, we must be satisfied with his likeness set before us in his world, and with his likeness stamped upon us by his renewing grace. Our experience of God's favour to us, and our conformity to him, should yield us more satisfaction than they have whose belly is filled with the delights of sense. (2.) As our recompense and happiness in the other world; with the prospect of that he concluded the foregoing psalm, and so this. That happiness is prepared and designed only for the righteous that are justified and sanctified: they shall be put in possession of it when they awake, when the soul awakes, at death, out of its slumber in the body, and when the body awakes, at the resurrection, out of its slumber in the grave. That blessedness will consist in three things. [1.] The immediate vision of God and his glory; *I shall behold thy face*; not, as in this world, through a glass darkly; the knowledge of God will there be perfected and the enlarged intellect filled with it. [2.] The participation of his likeness; our holiness will there be perfect. This results from the former; (1 John, 3. 2.) *When he shall appear, we shall therefore be like him, for we shall see him as he is*. [3.] A complete and full satisfaction resulting from all this; *I shall be satisfied*,

abundantly satisfied with it. There is no satisfaction for a soul but in God, and in his face and likeness, his good will towards us, and his good work in us; and even that satisfaction will not be perfect till we come to heaven.

PSALM XVIII.

This psalm we met with before in the history of David's life, 2 Sam. 22. That was the first edition of it, here we have it revised, altered a little, and fitted for the service of the church. It is David's thanksgiving for the many deliverances God had wrought for him; these he desired always to preserve fresh in his own memory, and to diffuse and entail the knowledge of them. It is an admirable composition. The poetry is very fine, the images bold, the expressions lofty, and every word proper and significant; but the pious far exceeds the poetry. Holy faith, and love, and joy, and praise, and hope, are here lively, active, and upon the wing. I. He triumphs in God, v. 1. 3. II. He magnifies the deliverances God had wrought for him, v. 4. 19. III. He takes the comfort of his integrity, which God had thereby cleared up, v. 20. 28. IV. He gives to God the glory of all his achievements, v. 29. 42. V. He encourages himself with the expectation of what God would further do for him and his, v. 43. 50.

To the chief musician, *A psalm of David*, the servant of the LORD, who spake unto the LORD the words of this song, in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul: and he said,

1. **I** WILL love thee, O LORD, my strength. 2. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust: my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, *and* my high tower. 3. I will call upon the LORD, *who is* worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. 4. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. 5. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. 6. In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, *even* into his ears. 7. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. 8. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. 9. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness *was* under his feet. 10. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. 11. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him *were* dark waters *and* thick clouds of the skies. 12. At the brightness *that was* before him his thick clouds passed, hail-stones and coals of fire. 13. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail-stones and coals of fire. 14. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. 15. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered, at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. 16. He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. 17. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me; for they were too strong

for me. 18. They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. 19. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.

The title gives us the occasion of penning this psalm; we had it before, (2Sam. 22. 1.) only here we are told, that the psalm was delivered *To the chief musician*, or precentor, in the temple-songs. Note, The private compositions of good men, designed by them for their own use, may be serviceable to the public, that others may not only borrow light from their candle, but heat from their fire. Examples sometimes teach better than rules. And David is here called *the servant of the Lord*, as Moses was, not only as every good man is God's servant, but because, with his sceptre, with his sword, and with his pen, he greatly promoted the interests of God's kingdom in Israel. It was more his honour, that he was a servant of the Lord, than that he was king of a great kingdom; and so he himself accounted it, (116. 16.) *O Lord, truly I am thy servant*. In these verses,

I. He triumphs in God and his relation to him. The first words of the psalm, *I will love thee, O Lord, my Strength*, are here prefixed as the scope and contents of the whole. Love to God is the first and great commandment of the law, because it is the principle of all our acceptable praise and obedience; and this use we should make of all the mercies God bestows upon us, our hearts should thereby be enlarged in love to him. This he requires, and will accept; and we are very ungrateful if we grudge him so poor a return. An interest in the person loved, is the lover's delight; this string, therefore, he touches, and on this he harps with much pleasure; (v. 2.) "The Lord, Jehovah, is my God;" and then, "He is my Rock, my Fortress, all that I need, and can desire in my present distress." For there is that in God, which is suited to all the exigencies and occasions of his people that trust in him. "He is my Rock, and Strength, and Fortress;" that is, (1.) "I have found him so in the greatest dangers and difficulties." (2.) "I have chosen him to be so, disclaiming all others, and depending upon him alone to protect me." Those that truly love God, may thus triumph in him as their's, and may with confidence call upon him, v. 3. This further use we should make of our deliverances, we must not only love God the better, but love prayer the better; *call upon him as long as we live*, especially in time of trouble, with an assurance, that so we shall be saved; for thus it is written, *Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*, Acts. 2. 21.

II. He sets himself to magnify the deliverances God had wrought for him, that he might be the more affected in his returns of praise. It is good for us to observe all the circumstances of a mercy, which magnify the power of God and his goodness to us in it.

1. The more imminent and threatening the danger was, out of which we were delivered, the greater is the mercy of the deliverance. David now remembered how the forces of his enemies poured in upon him, which he calls *the floods of Belial*, shoals of the children of Belial, lively to overpower him with numbers; they surrounded him, compassed him about; they surprised him, and by that means were very near seizing him, their snares prevented him; and when without were fightings, within were fears and sorrows, v. 4, 5. His spirit was overwhelmed, and he looked upon himself as a lost man; see 116. 3.

2. The more earnest we have been with God for deliverance, and the more direct answer it is to our prayers, the more we are obliged to be thankful. David's deliverances were so, v. 6. David was found a praying man, and God was found a prayer-hearing God. If we pray as he did, we shall speed as he did. Though distress drive us to prayer, God will not therefore be deaf to us; nay, being a God of pity, he will be the more ready to succour us.

3. The more wonderful God's appearances are in any deliverance, the greater it is: such were the deliverances wrought for David, in which God's manifestation of his presence and glorious attributes is most magnificently described, v. 7, &c. Little appeared

of man, but much of God, in these deliverances. (1.) He appeared a God of almighty power; for he made the earth shake and tremble, and moved even the *foundations of the hills*, (v. 7.) as of old at mount Sinai. When the men of the earth were struck with fear, then the earth might be said to *tremble*; when the great men of the earth were put into confusion, then the hills moved. (2.) He shewed his anger and displeasure against the enemies and persecutors of his people. He was wroth, v. 7. His wrath smoked, it burned, it was fire, it was devouring fire, (v. 8.) and coals were kindled by it. Those that by their own sins make themselves as coals, that is, fuel to this fire, will be consumed by it. He that ordains his arrows against the persecutors, sends them forth when he pleases, and they are sure to hit the mark, and do execution; for those arrows are lightnings, v. 14. (3.) He shewed his readiness to plead his people's cause, and work deliverance for them; for he rode upon a cherub, and did fly, for the maintaining of right and the relieving of his distressed servants, v. 10. No opposition, no obstruction, can be given to him, *who rides upon the wings of the wind, who rides on the heavens, for the help of his people, and, in his excellency, on the skies*. (4.) He shewed his condescension, in taking cognizance of David's case; *he bowed the heavens and came down*; (v. 9.) did not send an angel, but came himself, as one afflicted in the afflictions of his people. (5.) He wrapped himself in darkness, and yet commanded light to shine out of darkness for his people, Isa. 45. 15. He is a God that hideth himself; for he *made darkness his pavilion*, v. 11. His glory is invisible, his counsels are unsearchable, and his proceedings unaccountable, and so, as to us, clouds and darkness are round about him; we know not the way that he takes, even when he is coming towards us in ways of mercy; but when his designs are secret, they are kind; for though he hide himself, he is the God of Israel, the Saviour. And, *at his brightness, the thick clouds pass*; (v. 12.) comfort returns, the face of affairs is changed, and that which was gloomy and threatening becomes serene and pleasant.

4. The greater the difficulties are that lie in the way of deliverance, the more glorious the deliverance is. For the rescuing of David, the waters were to be divided till the very channels were seen; the earth was to be cloven till the very foundations of it were discovered, v. 15. There were waters deep and many, waters out of which he was to be drawn, (v. 16.) as Moses, who had his name from being drawn out of the water literally, as David was figuratively. His enemies were strong, and they hated him; had he been left to himself, they had been too strong for him, v. 17. And they were too quick for him; for they *prevented him in the day of his calamity*, v. 18. But, in the midst of his troubles, the Lord was his Stay, so that he did not sink. Note, God will not only deliver his people out of their troubles in due time, but he will sustain them and bear them up under their troubles, in the mean time.

5. That which especially magnified the deliverance, was, that his comfort was the fruit of it, and God's favour was the root and fountain of it. (1.) It was an introduction to his preferment, v. 19. "He brought me forth also out of my straits into a large place, where I had room, not only to turn, but to thrive, in." (2.) It was a token of God's favour to him, and that made it doubly sweet; "He delivered me, because he delighted in me, not for my merit, but for his own grace and good-will." Compare this with 2Sam. 15. 26. *If he thus say, I have no delight in thee, here I am*. We owe our salvation, that great deliverance, to the delight God had in the Son of David, in whom he has declared himself to be well-pleased.

In singing this, we must triumph in God, and trust in him; and we may apply it to Christ the Son of David; the sorrows of death surrounded him, in his distress he prayed, (Heb. 5. 7.) God made the earth to shake and tremble, and the rocks to cleave, and brought him out, in his resurrection, into a large place, because he delighted in him and in his undertaking.

20. The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my

nands hath he recompensed me. 21. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. 22. For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. 23. I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. 24. Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight. 25. With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; 26. With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward. 27. For thou wilt save the afflicted people; but wilt bring down high looks. 28. For thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness.

Here,

1. David reflects, with comfort, upon his own integrity, and rejoices in the testimony of his conscience, that he had had his conversation in godly sincerity, and not with fleshly wisdom, 2 Cor. 1. 12. His deliverances were an evidence of this, and this was the great comfort of his deliverances. His enemies had misrepresented him, and perhaps, when his troubles continued long, he began to suspect himself; but, when God visibly took his part, he had both the credit and the comfort of his righteousness. (1.) His deliverances cleared his innocency before men, and acquitted him from those crimes which he was falsely accused of. This he calls *rewards him according to his righteousness*, (v. 20, 24.) determining the controversy between him and his enemies, according to the justice of his cause, and the cleanness of his hands, from that sedition, treason, and rebellion, with which he was charged. He had often appealed to God concerning his innocency; and now God had given judgment upon the appeal, (as he always will,) according to equity. (2.) They confirmed the testimony of his own conscience for him, which he here reviews with a great deal of pleasure, v. 21. .23. His own heart knows, and is ready to attest it, [1.] That he had kept firm to his duty, and had not departed, not wickedly, not wilfully departed, from his God. They that forsake the ways of the Lord do, in effect, depart from their God, and it is a wicked thing to do so. But though we are conscious to ourselves of many a stumble, and many a false step taken, yet, if we recover ourselves by repentance, and go on in the way of our duty, it shall not be construed into a departure, for it is not a wicked departure, from our God. [2.] That he had kept his eye upon the rule of God's commands; (v. 22.) "*All his judgments were before me*; and I had a respect to them all, despised none as little, disliked none as hard; but made it my care and business to conform to them all. His statutes I did not put away from me, out of my sight, out of my mind, but kept my eye always upon them, and did not as those who, because they would quit the ways of the Lord, desire not the knowledge of those ways." [3.] That he had kept himself from his iniquity, and thereby had approved himself upright before God. Constant care to abstain from that sin, whatever it be, which most easily besets us, and to mortify the habit of it, will be a good evidence for us, that we are upright before God. As David's deliverances cleared his integrity, so did the exaltation of Christ clear his, and for ever roll away the reproach that was cast upon him; and therefore he is said to be *justified in the Spirit*, 1 Tim. 3. 16.

2. He takes occasion thence to lay down the rules of God's government and judgment, that we may know not only what God expects from us, but what we may expect from him, v. 25, 26. (1.) Those that shew mercy to others, (even they need mercy, and cannot depend upon the merit, no not of their works of mercy,) shall find mercy with God, Matth. 5. 7. (2.) Those that are faith-

ful to their covenants with God, and the relations wherein they stand to him, shall find him all that to them which he has promised to be. Wherever God finds an upright man, he will be found an upright God. (3.) Those that serve God with a pure conscience, shall find that the words of the Lord are pure words, very sure to be depended on, and very sweet to be delighted in. (4.) Those that resist God, and walk contrary to him, shall find that he will resist them, and walk contrary to them, Lev. 26. 21, 24.

3. Hence he speaks comfort to the humble; "*Thou wilt save the afflicted people*, that are wronged and bear it patiently:' but he speaks terror to the proud; "*Thou wilt bring down high looks*, that aim high, and expect great things for themselves, and look with scorn and disdain upon the poor and pious:" and he speaks encouragement to himself; "*Thou wilt light my candle*; thou wilt revive and comfort my sorrowful spirit, and not leave me melancholy; thou wilt recover me out of my troubles, and restore me to peace and prosperity; thou wilt make my honour bright, which is now eclipsed; thou wilt guide my way, and make it plain before me, that I may avoid the snares laid for me; thou wilt light my candle to work by, and give me an opportunity of serving thee, and the interests of thy kingdom among men."

Let those that walk in darkness, and labour under many discouragements, in singing these verses, encourage themselves, that God himself will be a Light to them.

29. For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall. 30. *As for God*, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. 31. For who is God save the LORD? or who is a rock save our God? 32. *It is God* that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. 33. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. 34. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. 35. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. 36. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip. 37. I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed. 38. I have wounded them, that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet. 39. For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. 40. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me. 41. They cried, but *there was* none to save them: even unto the LORD, but he answered them not. 42. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind: I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets. 43. Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. 44. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me. 45. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places. 46. The LORD liveth, and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. 47. *It is God*

that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me. 48. He delivereth me from mine enemies : yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me : thou hast delivered me from the violent man. 49. Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. 50. Great deliverance giveth he to his king ; and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore.

In these verses,

I. David looks back, with thankfulness, upon the great things which God had done for him ; he had not only wrought deliverance for him, but had given him victory and success, and made him triumph over those who thought to have triumphed over him. When we set ourselves to praise God for one mercy, we must be led by that to observe the many more with which we have been compassed about, and followed, all our days. Many things had contributed to David's advancement, and he owns the hand of God in them all, to teach us to do likewise, in reviewing the several steps by which we have risen to our prosperity. 1. God had given him all his skill and understanding in military affairs, which he was not bred up to, nor designed for ; his genius leading him more to music and poetry, and a contemplative life ; *He teaches my hands to war*, v. 34. 2. God had given him bodily strength to go through the business and fatigue of war ; God *girded him with strength*, (v. 32, 39.) to that degree, that he could break even a bow of steel, v. 34. What service God designs men for, he will be sure to fit them for. 3. God had likewise given him great swiftness, not to flee from the enemies, but to fly upon them ; (v. 33.) *He makes my feet like hinds' feet*, v. 36. "*Thou hast enlarged my steps under me ;* but" (whereas those that take large steps, are apt to tread awry) "*my feet did not slip.*" He was so swift that he pursued his enemies and overtook them, v. 37. 4. God had made him very bold and daring in his enterprises, and given him spirit proportionable to his strength. If a troop stood in his way, he made nothing of running through them ; if a wall, he made nothing of leaping over it ; (v. 29.) if ramparts and bulwarks, he soon mounted them ; and, by divine assistance, set his feet upon the high places of the enemy, v. 33. 5. God had protected him, and kept him safe, in the midst of the greatest perils ; many a time he put his life in his hand, and yet it was wonderfully preserved ; "*Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation*, (v. 35.) and that has compassed me on every side : by that I have been delivered from the strivings of the people who aimed at my destruction, (v. 43.) particularly from the violent man," (v. 48.) Saul, who more than once threw a javelin at him. 6. God had prospered and succeeded him in his designs ; he it was that made his way perfect, (v. 32.) and it was his right-hand, that held him up, v. 35. 7. God had given him victory over his enemies, the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and all that fought against Israel : those especially he means, yet not excluding the house of Saul, which opposed his coming to the crown, and the partisans of Absalom and Sheba, who would have deposed him. He enlarges much upon the goodness of God to him in defeating his enemies, attributing his victories, not to his own sword or bow, or the valour of his mighty men, but to the favour of God ; I pursued them, (v. 37.) I wounded them, (v. 38.) *for thou hast girded me with strength*, (v. 39.) else I could not have done it. All the praise is ascribed to God ; *Thou hast subdued them under me*, v. 39. *Thou hast given me their necks*, (v. 40.) not only to trample upon them, (as Josh. 10. 24.) but to cut them off. Even those who hated David whom God loved, and were enemies to the Israel of God, in their distress, cried unto the Lord, but in vain, he answered them not. How could they expect he should, when it was he whom they fought against ? And when he disowned them, (as he will all those that act against his people,) no other succours could stand them in stead ; *There was none to save them*, v. 41. Those whom God has abandoned are easily vanquished ; *Then did I beat them small*

as the dust, v. 42. But those whose cause is just he avenges, (v. 47.) and those whom he favours will certainly be *lifted up above those that rise up against them*, v. 48. 8. God had raised him to the throne, and not only delivered him and kept him alive, but dignified him and made him great ; (v. 35.) *Thy gentleness has increased me : thy discipline and instruction ;* so some. The good lessons David learned in his affliction prepared him for the dignity and power that were intended him ; and the lessening of him helped very much to greatness him. God made him not only a great conqueror, but a great ruler ; *Thou hast made me the head of the heathen ;* (v. 43.) all the neighbouring nations were tributaries to him. See 2 Sam. 8. 6, 11. In all this, David was a type of Christ, whom the Father brought safely through his conflicts with the powers of darkness, and made victorious over them, and gave to be Head over all things to his church, which is his body.

II. David looks up, with humble and reverent adorations of the divine glory and perfection ; when God had, by his providence, magnified him, he endeavours, with his praises, to magnify God, to bless him and exalt him, v. 46. He gives honour to him, 1. As a living God ; *The Lord liveth*, v. 46. We had our lives at first from, and we owe the continuance of them to, that God who has life in himself, and is therefore fitly called *the living God*. The gods of the heathen were dead gods ; the best friends we have among men are dying friends ; but God lives, lives for ever, and will not fail those that trust in him, but, because he lives, they shall live also ; for he is their Life. 2. As a finishing God ; As for God, he is not only perfect himself, but *his way is perfect*, v. 30. He is known by his name *Jehovah*, (Exod. 6. 3.) a God performing and perfecting what he begins, in providence as well as creation, Gen. 2. 1. If it was God that made David's way perfect, (v. 32.) much more is his own so. There is no flaw in God's works, nor any fault to be found with what he does, Eccl. 3. 14. And what he undertakes he will go through with, whatever difficulties lie in the way ; what God begins to build, he is able to finish. 3. As a faithful God ; *The word of the Lord is tried*. "*I have tried it*," (says David,) "*and it has not failed me.*" All the saints, in all ages, have tried it, and it never failed any that trusted in it. It is tried as silver is tried, refined from all such mixture and alloy as lessen the value of men's words. David, in God's providences concerning him, takes notice of the performance of his promises to him, which, as it puts sweetness into the providence, so it puts honour upon the promise. 4. As the Protector and Defender of his people. David had found him so to him ; "*He is the God of my salvation*, (v. 46.) by whose power and grace I am, and hope to be, saved ; but not of mine only ; he is *a Buckler to all those that trust in him ;* (v. 30.) he shelters and protects them all, is both able and ready to do so." 5. As a non-such in all this ; (v. 31.) There is a God, and who is God, save Jehovah ? That God is a Rock, for the support and shelter of his faithful worshippers ; and who is a Rock, save our God ? Thus he not only gives glory to God, but encourages his own faith in him. Note, (1.) Whoever pretend to be deities, it is certain that there is no God, save the Lord ; all others are counterfeits, Isa. 44. 8. Jer. 10. 10. (2.) Whoever pretend to be our felicities, there is no Rock, save our God ; none that we can depend upon to make us happy.

III. David looks forward, with a believing hope that God would still do him good. He promises himself, 1. That his enemies should be completely subdued, and that those of them that yet remained should be made his footstool. That his government should be extensive, so that even a people whom he had not known should serve him, v. 43. That his conquests, and, consequently, his acquiesces, should be easy ; *As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me*, v. 44. And that his enemies should be convinced that it was to no purpose to oppose him ; even those that are retired to their fastnesses shall not trust to them, but be afraid out of their close places, having seen so much of David's wisdom, courage, and success. Thus the Son of David, though he sees not yet all things put under him, yet knows he shall reign till all opposing rule, principality, and power, shall be quite put down. 2. That his seed should be for ever continued in the Messiah, who, he foresaw, should come from his loins, v. 50. He shews mercy to

his anointed, his Messiah, to David himself, the anointed of the God of Jacob in the type, and to his seed for evermore. *He saith not unto seeds, as of many, but to his Seed, as of one, that is Christ*, Gal. 3. 16. It is he only that shall reign for ever, and of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end. Christ is called *David*, Hos. 3. 5. God has called him *his King*, 2. 6. Great deliverance God does give, and will give, to him, and to his church and people, here called *his seed for evermore*.

In singing these verses, we must give God the glory of the victories of Christ and his church hitherto, and of all the deliverances and advancements of the gospel-kingdom; and encourage ourselves and one another with with an assurance, that the church militant will be shortly triumphant, will be eternally so.

PSALM XIX.

There are two excellent books which the great God has published for the instruction and edification of the children of men; this psalm treats of them both, and recommends them both to our diligent study. I. The book of the creatures, in which we may easily read the power and Godhead of the Creator, v. 1..6. II. The book of the scriptures, which makes known to us the will of God concerning our duty. He shews the excellency and usefulness of that book, (v. 7..11.) and then teaches us how to improve it, v. 12..14.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **T**HE heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. 2. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. 3. *There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.* 4. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, 5. Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. 6. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

From the things that are seen every day by all the world, the psalmist, in these verses, leads us to the consideration of the invisible things of God, whose being appears incontestably evident, and whose glory shines transcendently bright, in the visible heavens, the structure and beauty of them, and the order and influence of the heavenly bodies. This instance of the divine power serves not only to shew the folly of atheists, who see there is a heaven, and yet say, "There is no God;" who see the effect, and yet say, "There is no cause;" but to shew the folly of idolaters also, and the vanity of their imagination, who, though the heavens declare the glory of God, yet gave that glory to the lights of heaven, which those very lights directed them to give to God only, the Father of lights. Now observe here,

I. What that is which the creatures notify to us: they are many ways useful and serviceable to us, but in nothing so much as in this, that they declare the glory of God, by shewing his handy-works, v. 1. They plainly speak themselves to be God's handy-works; for they could not exist from eternity, all succession and motion must have had a beginning; they could not make themselves, that is a contradiction; they could not be produced by a casual hit of atoms, that is an absurdity, fit rather to be bantered than reasoned with: therefore they must have a Creator, who can be no other than an Eternal Mind, infinitely wise, powerful, and good. Thus it appears they are God's works, the *work of his fingers*, (8. 3.) and therefore they declare his glory. From the excellency of the work, we may easily infer the infinite perfection of its great Author. From the brightness of the heavens, we may collect that the Creator is Light; their vastness of extent bespeaks his immensity; their height his transcendency and sovereignty; their influence upon this earth, his dominion and providence, and universal beneficence:

and all declare his almighty power, by which they were at first made, and continue to this day, according to the ordinances that were then settled.

II. What are some of those things which notify this?

1. The heavens and the firmament: the vast expanse of air and ether, and the spheres of the planets, and fixed stars. Man has this advantage above the beasts, in the structure of his body, that, whereas they are made to look downward, as their spirits must go, he is made erect, to look upward, because upward his spirit must shortly go, and his thoughts should now rise.

2. The constant and regular succession of day and night; (v. 2.) *Day unto day, and night unto night*, speak the glory of that God who first divided between the light and the darkness, and has, from the beginning to this day, preserved that established order without variation, according to God's covenant with Noah, (Gen. 8. 22.) that, *while the earth remains, day and night shall not cease*; to which covenant of providence, the covenant of grace is compared for its stability, Jer. 33. 20.—31. 35. The counterchanging of day and night, in so exact a method, is a great instance of the power of God, and calls us to observe, that, as in the kingdom of nature, so in that of providence, *he forms the light, and creates the darkness*, (Isa. 45. 7.) and sets the one over-against the other. It is likewise an instance of his goodness to man; for he *makes the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice*, 65. 8. He not only glorifies himself, but gratifies us, by this constant revolution; for, as the light of the morning befriends the business of the day, so the shadows of the evening befriend the repose of the night; every day and every night speak the goodness of God, and when they have finished their testimony, leave it to the next day, to the next night, to say the same.

3. The light and influence of the sun, do, in a special manner, declare the glory of God; for, of all the heavenly bodies, that is the most conspicuous in itself, and most useful to this lower world, which would be all dungeon, and all desert, without it. It is not an improbable conjecture, that David penned this psalm when he had the rising sun in view, and from the brightness of it took occasion to declare the glory of God. Concerning the sun, observe here, (1.) The place appointed him: in the heavens God has set a tabernacle for the sun. The heavenly bodies are called *hosts of heaven*, and therefore are fitly said to *dwell in tents*, as soldiers in their encampments: the sun is said to have a *tabernacle* set him, not only because he is in continual motion, and never has a fixed residence, but because the mansion he has will, at the end of time, be taken down like a tent, when the heavens shall be rolled together like a scroll, and the sun shall be turned into darkness. (2.) The course assigned him: that glorious creature was not made to be idle, but his going forth (at least, as it appears to our eye) is from one point of the heavens, and his circuit thence to the opposite point, and thence (to complete his diurnal revolution) to the same point again; and this with such steadiness and constancy, that we can certainly foretell the hour and the minute at which the sun will rise at such a place, any day to come. (3.) The brightness wherein he appears: he is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, richly dressed up and adorned, as fine as hands can make him, looking pleasantly himself, and making all about him pleasant; for the *friend of the bridegroom rejoices greatly to hear the bridegroom's voice*, John, 3. 29. (4.) The cheerfulness wherewith he makes his tour: though it seems a vast round which he has to walk, and he has not a moment's rest, yet, in obedience to the law of his creation, and for the service of man, he not only does it, but does it with a great deal of pleasure, and *rejoices as a strong man to run a race*. With such satisfaction did Christ, the Sun of righteousness, finish the work that was given him to do. (5.) His universal influence on this earth: there is nothing hid from the heat thereof, no not metals in the bowels of the earth, which the sun has an influence upon.

III. To whom this declaration is made of the glory of God; it is made to all parts of the world; (v. 3, 4.) *There is no speech nor language*, (no nation, for the nations were divided *after their tongues*, Gen. 10. 31, 32.) where their voice is not heard. *Their line is gone through all the earth*, (the equinoctial line suppose,) and

with it, *their words to the end of the world*, proclaiming the eternal power of the God of nature. v. 4. The apostle uses this as a reason why the Jews should not be angry with him and others for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, because God had already made himself known to the Gentile world by the works of creation, and left not himself without witness among them, (Rom. 10. 18.) so that they were without excuse, if they were idolaters, Rom. 1. 20, 21. And those were without blame, who, by preaching the gospel to them, endeavoured to turn them from their idolatry. If God used these means to prevent their apostacy, and they proved ineffectual, the apostles did well to use other means to recover them from it. They have no speech or language, (so some read it,) and yet their voice is heard. All people may hear these natural immortal preachers speak to them, in their own tongue, the wonderful works of God.

In singing these verses, we must give God the glory of all the comfort and benefit we have by the lights of heaven, still looking above and beyond them to the Sun of righteousness.

7. The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. 10. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb. 11. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. 12. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. 13. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. 14. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

God's glory, that is, his goodness to man, appears much in the works of creation, but much more in and by divine revelation. The holy scripture, as it is a rule both of our duty to God and of our expectation from him, is of much greater use and benefit to us than day or night, than the air we breathe in, or the light of the sun. The discoveries made of God by his works might have served, if man had retained his integrity; but, to recover him out of his fallen state, another course must be taken; that must be done by the word of God. And here,

I. The psalmist gives an account of the excellent properties and uses of the word of God, in six sentences, (v. 7. 9.) in each of which the name *Jehovah* is repeated; and no vain repetition, for the law has its authority and all its excellency from the Law-Maker. Here are six several titles of the word of God, to take in the whole of divine revelation, precepts, and promises, and especially the gospel. Here are several good properties of it, which prove its divine original, which recommend it to our affection, and which extol it above all other laws whatsoever; and here are several good effects of the law upon the minds of men, which shew what it is designed for, what use we are to make of it, and how wonderful the efficacy of divine grace is, going along with it, and working by it.

1. *The law of the Lord is perfect*; it is perfectly free from all corruption, perfectly filled with all good, and perfectly fitted for the end for which it is designed; it will make the man of God perfect, 2 Tim. 3. 17. Nothing is to be added to it, or taken from

it. It is of use to convert the soul, to bring us back to ourselves, to our God, to our duty; for it shews us our sinfulness and misery in our departures from God, and the indispensable necessity of our return to him.

2. *The testimony of the Lord* (which witnesses for him to us) is *sure*, incontestably and inviolably sure, what we may give credit to, may rely upon, and may be confident it will not deceive us. It is a sure discovery of divine truth, a sure direction in the way of duty. It is a sure fountain of living comforts, and a sure foundation of lasting hopes. It is of use to make us wise, wise to salvation, 2 Tim. 3. 15. It will give us an insight into things divine, and a foresight of things to come. It will employ us in the best work, and secure to us our true interests. It will make even the simple, poor contrivers as they may be for the present world, wise for their souls and eternity. Those that are humbly simple, sensible of their own folly, and willing to be taught, those shall be made wise by the word of God, 25. 9.

3. *The statutes of the Lord* (enacted by his authority, and binding on all wherever they come) are *right*, exactly agreeing with the eternal rules and principles of good and evil, that is, with the right reason of man, and the right counsels of God. All God's precepts, concerning all things, are right, (119. 128.) just as they should be; and they will set us to rights, if we receive them, and submit to them; and, because they are right, they rejoice the heart. The law, as we see it in the hands of Christ, gives cause for joy; and, when it is written in our hearts, it lays a foundation for lasting joy, by restoring us to our right mind.

4. *The commandment of the Lord is pure*; it is clear without darkness, it is clean, without dross and defilement. It is itself purified from all alloy, and is purifying to those that receive and embrace it. It is the ordinary means which the Spirit uses in enlightening the eyes; it brings us to a sight and sense of our sin and misery, and directs us in the way of duty.

5. *The fear of the Lord* (true religion and godliness, prescribed in the word, reigning in the heart, and practised in the life) is *clean*, clean itself, and will make us clean; (John, 15. 3.) it will cleanse our way, 119. 9. And it endureth for ever; it is of perpetual obligation, and can never be repealed; the ceremonial law is long since done away, but the law concerning the fear of God is ever the same. Time will not alter the nature of moral good and evil.

6. *The judgments of the Lord* (all his precepts, which are framed in infinite wisdom) are *true*; they are grounded upon the most sacred and unquestionable truths; they are *righteous*, all consonant to natural equity; and they are so *altogether*, there is no unrighteousness in any of them, but they are all of a piece.

II. He expresses the great value he had for the word of God, and the great advantage he had, and hoped to have, from it, v. 10, 11.

1. See how highly he prized the commandments of God; it is the character of all good people, that they prefer their religion and the word of God, (1.) Far before all the wealth of the world; it is more desirable than *gold*, than *fine gold*, than *much fine gold*. Gold is of the earth, earthly; but grace is the image of the heavenly. Gold is only for the body, and the concerns of time; but grace is for the soul, and the concerns of eternity. (2.) Far before all the pleasures and delights of sense. The word of God, received by faith, is sweet to the soul, sweeter than honey and the honey-comb. The pleasures of sense are the delight of brutes, and therefore debase the great soul of man; the pleasures of religion are the delight of angels, and exalt the soul. The pleasures of sense are deceitful, will soon surfeit, and yet never satisfy; but those of religion are substantial and satisfying, and there is no danger of exceeding in them.

2. See what use he made of the precepts of God's word; *By them is thy servant warned*. The word of God is a word of warning to the children of men; it warns us of the duty we are to do, the dangers we are to avoid, and the deluge we are to prepare for, Ezek. 3. 17.—33. 7. It warns the wicked not to go on in his wicked way, and warns the righteous not to turn from his good way. All that are indeed God's servants take this warning.

3. See what advantage he promised himself by his obedience to

God's precepts; *In keeping of them there is great reward.* Those who make conscience of their duty, will not only be no losers by it, but unspeakable gainers. There is a reward, not only *after* keeping, but *in* keeping, God's commandments; a present great reward of obedience in obedience. Religion is health and honour, it is peace and pleasure; it will make our comforts sweet, and our crosses easy, life truly valuable, and death itself truly desirable.

III. He draws some good inferences from this pious meditation upon the excellency of the word of God. Such thoughts as these should excite in us devout affections, and then they are to good purpose.

1. He takes occasion hence to make a penitent reflection upon his sins; for *by the law is the knowledge of sin.* "Is the commandment thus holy, just, and good? Then *who can understand his errors?* I cannot, whoever can." From the rectitude of the divine law he learns to call his sins his errors; if the commandment be true and righteous, every transgression of the commandment is an error, as grounded upon a mistake; every wicked practice takes rise from some corrupt principle; it is a deviation from the rule we are to work by, the way we are to walk in. From the extent, and strictness, and spiritual nature, of the divine law, he learns that his sins are so many, that he cannot understand the number of them, and so exceeding sinful, that he cannot understand the heinousness and malignity of them. We are guilty of many sins, which, through our carelessness and partiality to ourselves, we are not aware of: many we have been guilty of, which we have forgotten; so that when we have been ever so particular in the confession of sin, we must conclude with an *et cætera*—and *such like*: for God knows a great deal more evil of us, than we do of ourselves. In many things we all offend, and who can tell how often he offends? It is well that we are under grace, and not under the law, else we were undone.

2. He takes occasion hence to pray against sin; all the discoveries of sin made us by the law, should drive us to the throne of grace, there to pray, as David does here,

(1.) For mercy to pardon; finding himself unable to specify all the particulars of his transgressions, he cries out, *Lord, cleanse me from my secret faults*; not secret to God, so none are, nor only such as are secret to the world, but such as were hid from his own observation of himself. The best of men have reason to suspect themselves guilty of many secret faults, and to pray to God to cleanse them from that guilt, and not to lay it to their charge; for even our sins of infirmity and inadvertency, and our secret sins, would be our ruin, if God should deal with us according to the desert of them. Even secret faults are defiling, and render us unfit for communion with God; but when they are pardoned, we are cleansed from them, 1 John, 1. 7.

(2.) For grace to help in time of need; having prayed that his sins of infirmity might be pardoned, he prays that presumptuous sins might be prevented, v. 13. All that truly repent of their sins, and have them pardoned, are in care not to relapse into sin, nor to return again to folly, as appears by their prayers which concur with David's here. Where observe, [1.] His petition; "Keep me from ever being guilty of a wilful presumptuous sin." We ought to pray that we may be kept from sins of infirmity, but especially from presumptuous sins, which most offend God, and wound conscience, which wither our comforts, and shock our hopes. "However, let none such have dominion over me, let me not be at the command of any such sin, nor be enslaved by it." [2.] His plea; "So shall I be upright; I shall appear upright; I shall preserve the evidence and comfort of my uprightness; and I shall be *innocent from the great transgression*;" so he calls a presumptuous sin, because no sacrifice was accepted for it, Numb. 15. 23. . 30. Note, *First*, Presumptuous sins are very heinous and dangerous: those that sin against the habitual convictions and actual admonitions of their own consciences, in contempt and defiance of the law and its sanctions, that sin with a high hand, sin presumptuously, and it is a great transgression. *Secondly*, Even good men ought to be jealous of themselves, and afraid of sinning presumptuously, yea, though through the grace of God they have hitherto been kept from them. Let none be high-minded, but

fear. *Thirdly*, Being so much exposed, we have great need to pray to God, when we are pushing forward toward a presumptuous sin, to keep us back from it, either by his providence preventing the temptation, or by his grace giving us victory over it.

3. He takes occasion humbly to beg the divine acceptance of those his pious thoughts and affections, v. 14. Observe the connexion of this with what goes before. He prays to God to keep him from sin, and then begs he would accept his performances, for if we favour our sins, we cannot expect God should *favour us* or *our services*, 66. 18. Observe, (1.) What his services were; *the words of his mouth, and the meditations of his heart*, his holy affections offered up to God. The pious meditations of the heart must not be smothered, but expressed in the words of our mouth, for God's glory, and the edification of others; and the words of our mouth in prayer and praise must not be formal, but arising from the meditation of the heart, 45. 1. (2.) What was his care concerning these services; that they might be acceptable with God—else what do they avail us? Gracious souls must have all they aim at, if they be accepted of God, for that is their bliss. (3.) What encouragement he had to hope for this; because God was his Strength and his Redeemer. If we seek assistance from God as our Strength in our religious duties, we may hope to find acceptance with God of our duties; for by his strength we have power with him.

In singing this, we should get our hearts much affected with the excellency of the word of God, and delivered into it; we should be much affected with the evil of sin, the danger we are in of it, and the danger we are in by it, and we should fetch in help from heaven against it.

PSALM XX.

It is the will of God that prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings, should be made, in a special manner, for kings, and all in authority. This psalm is a prayer, and the next a thanksgiving, for the king. David was a martial prince, much in war. Either this psalm was penned upon occasion of some particular expedition of his, or, in general, as a form to be used in the daily service of the church for him. In this psalm, we may observe, 1. What it is they beg of God for the king, v. 1. . 4. 11. With what assurance they beg it. The people triumph; (v. 5.) The prince; (v. 6.) Both together; (v. 7, 8.) and so he concludes with a prayer to God for audience, v. 9. In this, David may well be looked upon as a type of Christ, to whose kingdom, and its interests among men, the church was, in every age, a hearty well-wisher.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **T**HE LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee. 2. Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion. 3. Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice. Selah. 4. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel. 5. We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up *our* banners: the LORD fulfil all thy petitions.

This prayer for David is entitled, *a psalm of David*; nor was it any absurdity at all for him, who was divinely inspired, to draw up a directory, or form of prayer, to be used in the congregation for himself, and those in authority under him; nay, it is very proper for those who desire the prayers of their friends, to tell them particularly what they would have to be asked of God for them. Note, Even great and good men, and those that know well how to pray for themselves, must not despise, but earnestly desire, the prayers of others for them, even those that are their inferiors in all respects. Paul often begged of his friends to pray for him. Magistrates, and those in power, ought to esteem praying people, and encourage them to reckon them their strength, (Zech. 12. 5, 10.) and to do what they can for them, that they may have an interest in their prayers, and may do nothing to forfeit it. Now observe here,

I. What it is that they are taught to ask of God for the king.

1. That God would answer his prayers; *The Lord hear thee in*

the day of trouble, (v. 1.) and *the Lord fulfil all thy petitions*, v. 5. Note, (1.) Even the greatest of men may be much in trouble. It was often a day of trouble with David himself, of disappointment and distress, of treading down, and of perplexity. Neither the crown on his head, nor the grace in his heart, would exempt him from trouble. (2.) Even the greatest of men must be much in prayer. David, though a man of business, a man of war, was constant to his devotions; though he had prophets, and priests, and many good people, among his subjects, to pray for him, he did not think that excused him from praying for himself. Let none expect benefit by the prayers of the church, or of their ministers, or friends for them, who are capable of praying for themselves, and yet neglect it. The prayers of others for us must be desired, not to supersede, but to second, or own for ourselves. Happy the people that have praying princes, to whose prayers they may thus say, *Amen*.

2. That God would protect his person, and preserve his life, in the perils of war; "*The name of the God of Jacob defend thee*, and set thee out of the reach of thine enemies." (1.) "Let God by his providence keep thee safe, even the God who preserved Jacob in the days of his trouble." David had mighty men for his guards, but he commits himself, and his people commit him, to the care of the almighty God. (2.) "Let God by his grace keep thee easy from the fear of evil;" (Prov. 18. 10.) *The name of the Lord is a strong tower*, into which the righteous run by faith, and are safe; let David be enabled to shelter himself in that strong tower, as he has done many a time.

3. That God would enable him to go on in his undertakings for the public good; that, in the day of battle, he would *send him help out of the sanctuary, and strength out of Zion*, not from common providence, but from the ark of the covenant, and the peculiar favour God bears to his chosen people Israel. That he would help him, in performance of the promises, and in answer to the prayers, made in the sanctuary. Mercies out of the sanctuary are the sweetest mercies, such as are the tokens of God's peculiar love; the blessing of God, even our own God. Strength out of Zion is spiritual strength, strength in the soul, in the inward man, and that is it we should most desire, both for ourselves and others, in services and sufferings.

4. That God would testify his gracious acceptance of the sacrifices he offered with his prayers, according to the law of that time, before he went out on this dangerous expedition; *The Lord remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt-sacrifices*, (v. 3.) or turn them to ashes; that is, "The Lord give thee the victory and success which thou didst by prayer with sacrifices ask of him, and thereby give as full proof of his acceptance of the sacrifice, as ever he did by kindling it with fire from heaven." By this we may now know that God accepts our spiritual sacrifices, if by his Spirit he kindles in our souls a holy fire of pious and divine affection, and with that makes our hearts burn within us.

5. That God would crown all his enterprises and noble designs for the public welfare with the desired success; (v. 4.) *The Lord grant thee according to thine own heart*. This they might in faith pray for, because they knew David was a man after God's own heart, and would design nothing but what was pleasing to him. Those who make it their business to glorify God, may expect that God will, one way or other, gratify them; and they who walk in his counsel may promise themselves that he will fulfil their's; *Thou shalt devise a thing, and it shall be established unto thee*.

II. What confidence they had of an answer of peace to these petitions for themselves and their good king; (v. 5.) "*We will rejoice in thy salvation*. We, that are subjects, will rejoice in the preservation and prosperity of our prince;" or rather, "In thy salvation, O God, in thy power and promise to save, will we rejoice, that is it which we depend upon now, and which, in the issue, we shall have occasion greatly to rejoice in." Those that have their eye still upon the salvation of the Lord, shall have their hearts filled with the joy of that salvation; *In the name of our God will we set up our banners*. 1. "We will wage war in his name, we will see that our cause be good, and make his glory our end in every expedition; we will ask counsel at his mouth, and

take him along with us; we will follow his direction, implore his aid, and depend upon it, and refer the issue to him." David went against Goliath in the name of the Lord of hosts, 1 Sam. 17. 45. (2.) "We will celebrate our victories in his name. When we lift up our banners in triumph, and set up our trophies, it shall be in the name of our God; he shall have all the glory of our success, and no instrument shall have any part of the honour that is due to him."

In singing this, we ought to offer up to God our hearty good wishes to the good government we are under, and to the prosperity of it. But we may look further; these prayers for David are prophecies concerning Christ the Son of David, and in him they were abundantly answered; he undertook the work of our redemption, and made war upon the powers of darkness; in the day of trouble, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, the Lord heard him in that he feared; (Heb. 5. 7.) *sent him help out of the sanctuary*, sent an angel from heaven to strengthen him, took cognizance of his offering, when he made his soul an offering for sin, and accepted his burnt-sacrifice, turned it to ashes; the fire that should have fastened upon the sinner, fastening upon the sacrifice, with which God was well-pleased. And he granted him according to his own heart, made him to see of the travail of his soul, to his satisfaction, prospered his good pleasure in his hand, fulfilled all his petitions for himself and us; for, him the Father heareth always, and his intercession is ever prevailing.

6. Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. 7. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. 8. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright. 9. Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call.

Here is,

I. Holy David himself triumphing in the interest he had in the prayers of good people; (v. 6.) "*Now know I* (I, that pen the psalm, know it) *that the Lord saveth his anointed*, because he hath stirred up the hearts of the seed of Jacob to pray for him." Note, It bodes well to any prince and people, and may justly be taken as a happy presage, when God pours upon them a spirit of prayer. If he see us seeking him, he will be found of us; if he cause us to hope in his word, he will establish his word to us. Now that so many, who have an interest in heaven, are praying for him, he doubts not but that God will hear him, and grant him an answer of peace; which will, 1. Take its rise from above; he will hear him from his holy heaven, of which the sanctuary was a type, (Heb. 9. 23.) from the throne he hath prepared in heaven, of which the mercy-seat was a type. 2. It shall take its effect here below. *He will hear him with the saving strength of his right hand*; he will give a real answer to his prayers, and the prayers of his friends for him, not by letter, or by word of mouth, but, which is much better, by his right hand, by the saving strength of his right hand. He will make it to appear that he hears him, by what he does for him.

II. His people triumphing in God and their relation to him, and his revelation of himself to them, by which they distinguish themselves from those that live without God in the world. 1. See the difference between worldly people and godly people, in their confidences, v. 7. The children of this world trust in second causes, and think all is well, if those do but smile upon them; they trust in chariots and in horses, and the more of them they can bring into the field, the more sure they are of success in their wars; probably, David has here an eye to the Syrians, whose forces consisted much of chariots and horsemen, as we find in the history of David's victories over them, 2 Sam. 8. 4.—10. 18. "But," say the Israelites, "we neither have chariots and horses to trust to, nor do we want them, nor, if we had them, would we build our

hopes of success upon that; but we will remember, and rely upon, the name of the Lord our God, upon the relation we stand in to him as the Lord our God, and the knowledge we have of him by his name," that is, all that whereby he makes himself known; this we will remember, and upon every remembrance of it will be encouraged. Note, Those who make God and his name their praise, may make God and his name their trust. 2. See the difference in the issue of their confidences, and by that we are to judge of the wisdom of the choice; things are as they prove; see who will be ashamed of their confidence, and who not, v. 8. "They that trust in their chariots and horses, are brought down and fallen, and their chariots and horses were so far from saving them, that they helped to sink them, and made them the easier and the richer prey to the conqueror, 2Sam. 8. 4. But we that trust in the name of the Lord our God, not only stand upright, and keep our ground, but are risen, and have got ground against the enemy, and have triumphed over them." Note, A believing obedient trust in God, and his name, is the surest way both to preferment and to establishment, to rise and to stand upright, and this will stand us in stead, when creature-confidences fail those that depend upon them.

III. They conclude their prayer for the king with a *Hosanna*, "Save now, we beseech thee, O Lord?" v. 9. As we read this verse, it may be taken as a prayer that God would not only bless the king, "Save, Lord, give him success;" but that he would make him a blessing to them, "Let the king hear us, when we call to him for justice and mercy." Those that would have good of their magistrates, must thus pray for them, for they, as all other creatures, are that to us, (and no more,) that God makes them to be. Or, it may refer to the Messiah, that King, that King of kings; let him hear us when we call; let him come to us, according to the promise, in the time appointed; let him, as the great Master of requests, receive all our petitions, and present them to his Father. But many interpreters give another reading of this verse, by altering the pause, *Lord, save the king, and hear us when we call*; and so it is a summary of the whole psalm, and is taken into our English Liturgy. *O Lord, save the king, and mercifully hear us, when we call upon thee*.

In singing these verses, we should encourage ourselves to trust in God, and stir up ourselves to pray earnestly, as we are in duty bound, for those in authority over us, that, under them, we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.

PSALM XXI.

As the foregoing psalm was a prayer for the king, that God would protect and prosper him; so this is a thanksgiving for the success God had blessed him with. Those whom we have prayed for, we ought to give thanks for, and particularly for kings, in whose prosperity we share. They are here taught, 1. To congratulate him on his victories, and the honour he had achieved, v. 1. . 6. 11. To confide in the power of God for the completing of the ruin of the enemies of his kingdom. v. 7. . 13. In this, there is an eye to the Messiah, the Prince, and the Glory of his kingdom; for to him divers passages in this psalm are more applicable than to David himself.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **T**HE king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! 2. Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Selah. 3. For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness: thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head. 4. He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever. 5. His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him. 6. For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance.

David here speaks for himself in the first place, professing that his joy was in God's strength, and in his salvation, and not in the

strength or success of his armies. He also directs his subjects herein to rejoice with him, and to give God all the glory of the victories he had obtained; and all, with an eye to Christ, of whose triumphs over the powers of darkness David's victories were but shadows.

1. They here congratulate the king on his joys, and concur with him in them; (v. 1.) "The king rejoices, he uses to rejoice in thy strength, and so do we; what pleases the king, pleases us," 2Sam. 3. 36. Happy the people, the character of whose king it is, that he makes God's strength his confidence, and God's salvation his joy; that is pleased with all the advancements of God's kingdom, and trusts God to bear him out in all he does for the service of it. Our Lord Jesus, in his great undertaking, relied upon help from Heaven, and pleased himself with the prospect of that great salvation which he was thereby to work out.

2. They give God all the praise of those things, which were the matter of their king's rejoicing.

(1.) That God had heard his prayers; (v. 2.) *Thou hast given him his heart's desire*, (and there is no prayer accepted, but what is the heart's desire,) the very thing they begged of God for him, 20. 4. Note, God's gracious returns of prayer do, in a special manner, require our humble returns of praise. When God gives to Christ the heathen for his inheritance, gives him to see his seed, and accepts his intercession for all believers, he gives him his heart's desire.

(2.) That God had surprised him with favours, and much outdone his expectations; (v. 3.) *Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness*. All our blessings are blessings of goodness, and are owing, not at all to any merit of our's, but purely, and only, to God's goodness. But the psalmist here reckons it, in a special manner, obliging, that these blessings were given in a preventing way; this fixed his eye, enlarged his soul, and endeared his God, as one expresses it. When God's blessings come sooner, and prove richer, than we imagine, when they are given before we prayed for them, before we were ready for them, nay, when we feared the contrary; then it may be truly said, that he prevented us with them. Nothing, indeed, prevented Christ, but to mankind never was any favour more preventing than our redemption by Christ, and all the blessed fruits of his mediation.

(3.) That God had advanced him to the highest honour, and the most extensive power; "Thou hast set a crown of pure gold upon his head, and kept it there, when his enemies attempted to throw it off." Note, Crowns are at God's disposal; no head wears them but God sets them there whether in judgment to his land, or for mercy, the event will shew. On the head of Christ God never set a crown of gold, but of thorns first, and then of glory.

(4.) That God had assured him of the perpetuity of his kingdom, and therein had done more for him than he was able either to ask or think; (v. 4.) "When he went forth upon a perilous expedition, he asked his life of thee, which he then put into his hand, and thou not only gavest him that, but withal gavest him length of days for ever and ever; didst not only prolong his life far beyond his expectation, but didst assure him of a blessed immortality in a future state, and of the continuance of his kingdom in the Messiah that should come of his loins." See how God's grants often exceed our petitions and hopes, and infer thence, how rich he is in mercy to those that call upon him. See also, and rejoice in, the length of the days of Christ's kingdom. He was dead indeed, that we might live through him; but he is alive, and lives for evermore, and of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end; and because he thus lives, we shall thus live also.

(5.) That God had advanced him to the highest honour and dignity; (v. 5.) "His glory is great, far transcending that of all the neighbouring princes, in the salvation thou hast wrought for him and by him." The glory which every good man is ambitious of, is, to see the salvation of the Lord; *honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him*, as a burthen which he must bear, as a charge which he must account for. Jesus Christ received from God the Father honour and glory, (2 Pet. 1. 17.) the glory which he had with him before the worlds were, John, 17. 5. And on him is laid the charge of universal government, and to him all power in heaven and earth is committed.

(6.) That God had given him the satisfaction of being the channel of all bliss to mankind; (v. 6.) "*Thou hast set him to be blessings for ever,*" (so the margin reads it,) "*thou hast made him to be a universal, everlasting, blessing to the world, in whom the families of the earth are, and shall be, blessed; and so thou hast made him exceeding glad with the countenance thou hast given to his undertaking, and to him in the prosecution of it.*" See how the spirit of prophecy gradually rises here to that which is peculiar to Christ, for none besides is blessed for ever, much less a blessing for ever to that eminency that the expression denotes: and of him it is said, that God made him full of joy with his countenance.

In singing this, we should rejoice in his joy, and triumph in his exaltation.

7. For the king trusteth in the LORD, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved. 8. Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. 9. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them. 10. Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men. 11. For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, *which they are not able to perform.* 12. Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back, *when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them.* 13. Be thou exalted, LORD, in thine own strength: so will we sing and praise thy power.

The psalmist, having taught his people to look back with joy and praise on what God had done for him and them, here teaches them to look forward with faith, and hope, and prayer, upon what God would further do for them; *The king rejoices in God,* (v. 1.) and therefore we will be thankful; *the king trusteth in God,* (v. 7.) therefore will we be encouraged. The joy and confidence of Christ our King, is the ground of all our joy and confidence.

1. They are confident of the stability of David's kingdom; *Through the mercy of the Most High,* and not through his own merit or strength, *he shall not be moved.* His prosperous state shall not be disturbed, his faith and hope in God, who is the Stay of his spirit, shall not be shaken. The mercy of the Most High, the divine goodness, power and dominion, is enough to secure our happiness, and therefore our trust in that mercy should be enough to silence all our fears. God being at Christ's right hand in his sufferings, (16. 8.) and he being at God's right hand in his glory, we may be sure he shall not, he cannot, be moved, but continues ever.

2. They are confident of the destruction of all the impenitent, implacable, enemies of David's kingdom. The success with which God had blessed David's arms hitherto, was an earnest of the rest which God would give him from all his enemies round about; and a type of the total overthrow of all Christ's enemies, that would not have him to reign over them. Observe, (1.) The description of his enemies. They are such as hate him, v. 8. They hated David, because God had set him apart for himself; hated Christ, because they hated the light; but both were hated without any just cause, and in both God was hated, John 15. 23, 25. (2.) The designs of his enemies; (v. 11.) *They intended evil against thee, and imagined a mischievous device;* they pretended to fight against David only, but their enmity was against God himself. They that aimed to un-king David, aimed, in effect, to un-God

Jehovah. What is devised and designed against religion, and against the instruments God raises up to support and advance it, is very evil and mischievous, and God takes it as devised and designed against himself, and will so reckon for it. (3.) The disappointment of them; "They devise what they are *not able to perform,*" v. 11. Their malice is impotent, and they *imagine a vain thing,* 2. 1. (4.) The discovery of them; (v. 8.) "*Thy hand shall find them out,* though ever so artfully disguised by the pretences and professions of friendship; though mingled with the faithful subjects of this kingdom, and hardly to be distinguished from them; though flying from justice, and absconding in their close places; yet thy hand shall find them out wherever they are." There is no escaping God's avenging eye, no going out of the reach of his hand; rocks and mountains will be no better shelter at last, than fig-leaves were at first. (5.) The destruction of them; it will be an utter destruction, (Luke, 19, 27.) they shall be swallowed up and devoured, v. 9. Hell, the portion of all Christ's enemies, is the complete misery both of body and soul. *Their fruit and their seed shall be destroyed,* v. 10. The enemies of God's kingdom, in every age, shall fall under the same doom, and the whole generation of them will at last be rooted out, and all opposing rule, principality, and power, shall be put down. The arrows of God's wrath shall confound them and put them to flight, being levelled at the face of them, (v. 12.) That will be the lot of daring enemies that face God. The fire of God's wrath will consume them; (v. 9.) they shall not only be cast into a furnace of fire, (Matth. 13. 42.) but he shall make them themselves as a fiery oven or furnace; they shall be their own tormentors, the reflections and terrors of their own consciences will be their hell. Those that might have had Christ to rule and save them, but rejected him and fought against him, shall find that even the remembrance of that will be enough to make them, to eternity, a fiery oven to themselves; it is the worm that dies not.

3. In this confidence, they beg of God that he would still appear for his anointed, (v. 13.) that he would act for him in his own strength, by the immediate operations of his power as Lord of hosts, and Father of spirits, making little use of means and instruments. And, (1.) Hereby he could exalt himself, and glorify his own name. "We have but little strength, and are not so active for thee as we should be, which is our shame; Lord, take the work into thine own hands, do it without us, and it will be thy glory." (2.) Hereupon, they would exalt him; "So will we sing, and praise thy power, the more triumphantly." The less God has of our service when a deliverance is in the working, the more he must have of our praises when it is wrought without us.

PSALM XXII.

The Spirit of Christ, which was in the prophets, testifies in this psalm, as clearly and fully as any where else in all the Old Testament, the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow; (1 Pet. 1. 11.) of him, no doubt, David here speaks, and not of himself, or any other man. Much of it is expressly applied to Christ in the New Testament, all of it may be applied to him, and some of it must be understood of him only. The providences of God concerning David were so very extraordinary, that we may suppose there were some wise and good men, who then could not but look upon him as a figure of him that was to come. But the composition of his psalms especially, in which he found himself wonderfully carried out by the spirit of prophecy, far beyond his own thought and intention, was (we may suppose) an abundant satisfaction to himself, that he was not only a father of the Messiah, but a figure of him. In this psalm, he speaks, I. Of the humiliation of Christ; (v. 1. .21.) where David, as a type of Christ, complains of the very calamitous condition he was in, upon many accounts. 1. He complains, and mixes comforts with his complaints; complains, v. 1, 2. but comforts himself, v. 3. .5. complains again, v. 6. .8. but comforts himself again, v. 9, 10. 2. He complains, and mixes prayers with his complaints; complains of the power and rage of his enemies; (v. 12, 13, 16, 18.) of his own bodily weakness and decay, v. 14, 15, 17. But prays that God would not be far from him, v. 11, 19. That he would save and deliver him, v. 19. .21. II. Of the exaltation of Christ, that his undertaking should be for the glory of God, (v. 22. .25.) for the salvation and joy of his people, (v. 26. .29.) and for the perpetuating of his own kingdom, v. 30, 31. In singing this psalm, we must keep our thoughts fixed upon Christ, and be so affected with his sufferings, as to experience the fellowship of them, and so affected with his grace, as to experience the power and influence of it.

To the chief musician upon Ajeleth Shahar. A psalm of David.

1. **MY** God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?* 2. O my God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not; and in the night-season, and am not silent. 3. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. 4. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. 5. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. 6. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. 7. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 8. He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. 9. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. 10. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.

Some think they find Christ in the title of the psalm upon *Ajeleth Shahar*—*The hind of the morning*; Christ is as the swift hind upon the mountains of spices, (Cant. 8.14.) as the loving hind and the pleasant roe, to all believers; (Prov. 5.19.) he giveth goodly words like Naphtali, who is compared to a *hind let loose*, Gen. 49.21. He is the Hind of the morning, marked out by the counsels of God from eternity, to be run down by those dogs that compassed him, v.16. But others think it denotes only the tune to which the psalm was set.

In these verses, we have,

I. A sad complaint of God's withdrawals, v.1,2. This may be applied to David, or any other child of God, in the want of the tokens of his favour, pressed with the burthen of his displeasure, roaring under it, as one overwhelmed with grief and terror, crying earnestly for relief, and, in this case, apprehending himself forsaken of God, unhelped, unheard, yet calling him, again and again, "My God," and continuing to cry day and night to him, and earnestly desiring his gracious returns. Note. 1. Spiritual deserts are the saints' sorest afflictions; when their evidences are clouded, divine consolations suspended, their communion with God interrupted, and the terrors of God set in array against them, how sad are their spirits, and how sapless all their comforts! 2. Even their complaint of these burthens is a good sign of spiritual life, and spiritual senses exercised. To cry out, "My God, why am I sick? why am I poor?" would give cause to suspect discontent and worldliness. But, *Why hast thou forsaken me?* is the language of a heart binding up its happiness in God's favour. 3. When we are lamenting God's withdrawals, yet still we must call him our God, and continue to call upon him as our's. When we want the faith of assurance, we must live by a faith of adherence; "However it be, yet God is good, and he is mine; though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; though he do not answer me immediately, I will continue praying and waiting; though he be silent, I will not be silent."

But it must be applied to Christ; for, in the first words of this complaint, he poured out his soul before God when he was upon the cross; (Matth. 27.46.) probably he proceeded to the following words, and, some think, repeated the whole psalm, if not aloud, (because they cavilled at the first words,) yet to himself. Note, (1.) Christ, in his sufferings, cried earnestly to his Father, for his favour and presence with him; he cried in the day-time upon the cross, and in the night-season when he was in his agony in the garden; he offered up strong crying and tears to him that

was able to save him, and with some fear too, Heb. 5.7. (2.) Yet God forsook him, was far from helping him, and did not hear him, and this was it which he complains of more than all his sufferings. God delivered him into the hands of his enemies; it was by his determinate counsel that he was crucified and slain, and he did not give insensible comforts; but Christ having made himself sin for us, in conformity thereunto, the Father laid him under the present impressions of his wrath and displeasure against sin. It pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief, Isa. 53.10. But even then he kept fast hold of his relation to his Father as his God, by whom he was now employed, whom he was now serving, and with whom he should shortly be glorified.

II. Encouragement taken, in reference hereunto, v.3..5. Though God did not hear him, did not help him, yet, 1. He will think well of God; "*But thou art holy*, not unjust, untrue, or unkind, in any of thy dispensations; though thou dost not immediately come in to the relief of thine afflicted people, yet thou lovest them, art true to thy covenant with them, and dost not countenance the iniquity of their persecutors, Hab. 1.13. And as thou art infinitely pure and upright thyself, so thou delightest in the services of thine upright people; *Thou inhabitest the praises of Israel*, thou art pleased to manifest thy glory, and grace, and special presence, with thy people, in the sanctuary where they attend thee with their praises; there thou art always ready to receive their homage, and of the tabernacle of meeting hast said, *This is my rest for ever*." This bespeaks God's wonderful condescension to his faithful worshippers—that, though he is attended with the praises of angels, yet he is pleased to inhabit the praises of Israel. And it may comfort us in all our complaints—that, though God seem, for a while, to turn a deaf ear to them, yet he is so pleased with his people's praises, that he will, in due time, give them cause to change their note; *Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him*. Our Lord Jesus, in his sufferings, had an eye to the holiness of God, to preserve and advance the honour of that, and of his grace in inhabiting the praises of Israel, notwithstanding the iniquities of their holy things. 2. He will take comfort from the experiences which the saints in former ages had of the benefit of faith and prayer; (v.4,5.) "*Our fathers trusted in thee, cried unto thee, and thou didst deliver them*"; therefore thou wilt, in due time, deliver me, for never any that hoped in thee were made ashamed of their hope; never any that sought thee, sought thee in vain. And thou art still the same in thyself, and the same to thy people, that ever thou wast. They were our fathers, and thy people are *beloved for the fathers' sake*," Rom. 11.28. The entail of the covenant is designed for the support of the seed of the faithful. He that was our fathers' God must be our's, and therefore will be our's. Our Lord Jesus, in his sufferings, supported himself with this—that all the fathers who were types of him in his sufferings, Noah, Joseph, David, Jonah, and others, were, in due time, delivered, and were types of his exaltation too; therefore he knew *he also should not be confounded* Isa. 50.7.

III. The complaint renewed of another grievance, and that is, the contempt and reproach of men. This complaint is by no means so bitter as that before of God's withdrawals; but as that touches a gracious soul, so this a generous soul, in a very tender part, v.6..8. Our fathers were honoured, the patriarchs in their day, first or last, appeared great in the eye of the world, Abraham, Moses, David; but Christ is a worm, and no man. It was great condescension that he became man, a step downward, that is, and will be, the wonder of angels; yet, as if it were too much, too great, to be a man, he becomes a worm, and no man. He was *Adam—a mean man*, and *Enosh—a man of sorrows*, but *lo Ish—not a considerable man*; for he took upon him the form of a servant, and *his visage was marred more than any man's*, Isa. 52.14. Man, at the best, is a worm; but he became a worm, and no man. If he had not made himself a worm, he could not have been trampled upon as he was. The word signifies such a worm as was used in dying scarlet or purple; whence some make it an allusion to his bloody sufferings. See what abuses were put upon him; 1. He was reproached as a bad man, as a blasphemer, a

sabbath-breaker, a wine-bibber, a false prophet, an enemy to Cæsar, a confederate with the prince of the devils. 2. He was despised of the people, as a mean contemptible man, not worth taking notice of; his country in no repute, his relations poor mechanics, his followers none of the rulers, or the Pharisees, but the mob. 3. He was ridiculed as a foolish man, and one that not only deceived others, but himself too. They that saw him hanging on the cross laughed him to scorn. So far were they from pitying him, or concerning themselves for him, that they added to his afflictions, with all the gestures and expressions of insolence, upbraiding him with his fall; they make mouths at him, make merry over him, and make a jest of his sufferings; they shoot out the lip, they shake their head, saying, This was he that said he *trusted God would deliver him; now let him deliver him.* David was sometimes taunted for his confidence in God; but in the sufferings of Christ this was literally and exactly fulfilled; those very gestures were used by those that reviled him; (Matth. 27. 39.) they wagged their heads, nay, and so far did their malice make them forget themselves, that they used the very words, (v. 43.) *He trusted in God, let him deliver him.* Our Lord Jesus, having undertaken to satisfy for the dishonour we had done to God by our sins, did it by submitting to the lowest possible instance of ignominy and disgrace.

IV. Encouragement taken as to this also; (v. 9, 10.) Men despise me; *but thou art he that took me out of the womb.* David and other good men have often, for direction to us, encouraged themselves with this, that God was not only the *God of their fathers*, as before, (v. 4.) but the God of their infancy, who began by times to take care of them, as soon as they had a being, and therefore, they hope, will never cast them off. He that did so well for us in that helpless, useless, state, will not leave us, when he has reared us and nursed us up into some capacity of serving him. See the early instances of God's providential care for us, 1. In the birth; *He took us also out of the womb*, else we had died there, or been stifled in the birth. Every man's particular time begins with this pregnant proof of God's providence, as time, in general, began with the creation, that pregnant proof of his being. 2. At the breast; "*Then didst thou make me hope;*" that is, "thou didst that for me, in providing sustenance for me, and protecting me from the dangers to which I was exposed, which encourages me to hope in thee all my days." The blessings of the breasts, as they crown the blessings of the womb, so they are earnest of the blessings of our whole lives; surely he that fed us then, will never starve us, Job. 3. 12. 3. In our early dedication to him; *I was cast upon thee from the womb.* Which perhaps refers to his circumcision on the eighth day; he was then by his parents committed and given up to God as his God in covenant; for circumcision was a seal of the covenant; and this encouraged him to trust in God. Those have reason to think themselves safe, who were so soon, so solemnly, *gathered under the wings of the divine majesty.* 4. In the experience we have had of God's goodness to us all along ever since, drawn out in a constant, uninterrupted, series of preservations and supplies; *Thou art my God*; providing for me, and watching over me for good, *from my mother's belly*, from my coming into the world, unto this day. And if, as soon as we became capable of exercising reason, we put our confidence in God, and committed ourselves and our way to him, we need not doubt but he will always remember the *kindness of our youth, and the love of our espousals*, Jer. 2. 2. This is applicable to our Lord Jesus, over whose incarnation and birth the Divine Providence watched with a peculiar care, when he was born in a stable, laid in a manger, and immediately exposed to the malice of Herod, and forced to flee into Egypt; *when he was a child, God loved him, and called him thence*, (Hos. 11. 1.) and the remembrance of this comforted him in his sufferings; men reproached him, and discouraged his confidence in God; but God had honoured him, and encouraged his confidence in him.

11. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. 12. Many bulls have com-

passed me: strong *bulls* of Bashan have beset me round. 13. They gaped upon me *with* their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. 14. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. 15. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. 16. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. 17. I may tell all my bones: they look *and* stare upon me. 18. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. 19. But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. 20. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. 21. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.

In these verses, we have Christ suffering, and Christ praying: by which we are directed to look for crosses, and to look up to God under them.

I. Here is Christ suffering: David indeed was often in trouble, and beset with enemies; but many of the particulars here specified are such as were never true of David, and therefore must be appropriated to Christ in the depth of his humiliation.

1. He is here deserted by his friends; trouble and distress are near, and there is none to help, none to uphold, v. 11. He trod the wine-press alone; for all his disciples forsook him, and fled. It is God's honour to help, when all other helps and succours fail.

2. He is here insulted and surrounded by his enemies, such as were of a higher rank, who, for their strength and fury, are compared to *bulls, strong bulls of Bashan*, (v. 12.) fat and fed to the full, haughty and sour; such were the chief priests and elders that persecuted Christ; and others of a lower rank, who are compared to dogs, (v. 16.) filthy and greedy, and unwearied in running him down. There is an assembly of the wicked plotting against him; (v. 16.) for the chief priests sat in council, to consult of ways and means to take Christ. These enemies were numerous and unanimous; "Many, and those of different and clashing interests among themselves, as Herod and Pilate, have agreed to compass me. They have carried their plot far, and seem to have gained their point, for they have beset me round, v. 12. They have inclosed me, v. 16. They are formidable and threatening: (v. 13.) *They gaped upon me with their mouths*, to shew me that they would swallow me up; and this, with as much strength and fierceness as a roaring ravening lion leaps upon his prey."

3. He is here crucified; the very manner of his death is described, though never in use among the Jews; *They pierced my hands and my feet*, (v. 16.) which were nailed to the accursed tree, and the whole body left so to hang, the effect of which must needs be the most exquisite pain and torture. There is no one passage, in all the Old Testament, which the Jews have so industriously corrupted as this, because it is such an eminent prediction of the death of Christ, and was so exactly fulfilled.

4. He is here dying, (v. 14, 15.) dying in pain and anguish, because he was to satisfy for sin, which brought in pain, and for which we must otherwise have lain in everlasting anguish. Here is, (1.) The dissolution of the whole frame of his body; *I am poured out like water*, weak as water, and yielding to the power of death, emptying himself of all the supports of his human nature. (2.) The dislocation of his bones; care was taken that not one of them should be broken, (John, 19. 36.) but they were all out of joint by the violent stretching of his body upon the cross as upon

a rack. Or it may denote the fear that seized him in his agony in the garden, when he began to be sore amazed; the effect of which perhaps was, (as sometimes it has been of great fear, Dan. 5. 6.) that the *joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another*. His bones were put out of joint, that he might put the whole creation into joint again, which sin had put out of joint, and might make our broken bones to rejoice. (3.) The colligation of his spirits; *My heart is like wax*, melted to receive the impressions of God's wrath against the sins he undertook to satisfy for; melting away like the vitals of a dying man; as this satisfied for the hardness of our hearts, so the consideration of it should help to soften them. When Job speaks of his inward trouble, he says, *The Almighty makes my heart soft*; (Job, 23. 16.) and see Ps. 68. 2. (4.) The failing of his natural force; *My strength is dried up*; so that he became parched and brittle like a potsherd, the radical moisture being wasted by the fire of divine wrath preying upon his spirits. Who then can stand before God's anger? or who knows the power of it? *If this were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* (5.) The clamminess of his mouth, a usual symptom of approaching death; *My tongue cleaveth to my jaws*; this was fulfilled both in his thirst upon the cross, (John, 19. 28.) and in his silence under his sufferings; for, as a sheep before the shears is dumb, so he opened not his mouth, nor objected against any thing done to him. (6.) His giving up the ghost; *"Thou hast brought me to the dust of death: I am just ready to drop into the grave;"* for nothing less would satisfy divine justice. The life of the sinner was forfeited, and therefore the life of the Sacrifice must be the ransom for it. The sentence of death passed upon Adam was thus expressed: *Unto dust thou shalt return*. And therefore Christ, having an eye to that sentence in his obedience to death, here uses a like expression; *Thou hast brought me to the dust of death*.

5. He was stripped; the shame of nakedness was the immediate consequence of sin; and therefore our Lord Jesus was stripped of his clothes when he was crucified, that he might clothe us with the robe of his righteousness, and that the shame of our nakedness might not appear. Now here we are told, (1.) How his body looked when it was thus stripped; *I may tell all my bones*, v. 17. His blessed body was lean and emaciated with labour, grief, and fasting, during the whole course of his ministry, which made him look as if he was near 50 years old, when he was yet but 33; as we find, John, 8. 57. His wrinkles now witnessed for him that he was far from being what he was called, *a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber*. Or, his bones might be numbered, because his body was distended upon the cross, which made it easy to count his ribs. *They look and stare upon me*; my bones do, being distorted, and having no flesh to cover them, as Job says; (*ch. 16. 8.*) *My leanness, rising up in me, beareth witness to my face*. Or, "The standers by, the passers by, are amazed to see my bones start out thus; and, instead of pitying me, are pleased even with such a rueful spectacle." (2.) What they did with his clothes, which they took from him; (v. 18.) *They part my garments among them*, to every soldier a part, and *upon my vesture*, the seamless coat, do they *cast lots*. This very circumstance was exactly fulfilled, John, 19. 23, 24. And though it was no great instance of Christ's suffering, yet it is a great instance of the fulfilling of the scripture in him. Thus it was written, and therefore thus it behoved Christ to suffer. Let this, therefore, confirm our faith in him as the true Messiah, and inflame our love to him as the best of friends, who loved us, and suffered all this for us.

II. Here is Christ praying, and with that supporting himself under the burthen of his sufferings; Christ, in his agony, prayed, prayed earnestly, prayed that the cup might pass from him; when the prince of this world with his terrors set upon him, *gaped upon him as a roaring lion*, he fell upon the ground, and prayed. And of that David's praying here was a type. He calls God his *Strength*, v. 19. When we cannot rejoice in God as our Song, yet let us stay ourselves upon him as our Strength; and take the comfort of spiritual supports, when we cannot come at spiritual delights. He prays, 1. That God would be with him, and not set himself at a distance from him; *Be not thou far from me*, (v. 11.) and again,

v. 19. "Whoever stands aloof from my sore, Lord, do not thou." The nearness of trouble should quicken us to draw near to God, and then we may hope that he will draw near to us. 2. That he would help him, and make haste to help him; help him to bear up under his troubles, that he might not fail nor be discouraged, that he might neither shrink from his undertaking, nor sink under it. And the Father *heard him in that he feared*, (Heb. 5. 7.) and enabled him to go through with his work. 3. That he would deliver him, and save him, v. 20, 21. (1.) Observe what the jewel is which he is in care for, "The safety of my soul, my darling, let that be redeemed from the power of the grave, (49. 15.) Father, into thy hands I commit that, to be conveyed safe to paradise." The psalmist here calls his soul his *darling, his only one*, so the word is; "*My soul is my only one*. I have but one soul to take care of, and therefore the greater is my shame if I neglect it; and the greater will the loss be if I let it perish. Being my only one, it ought to be my darling, for the eternal welfare of which I ought to be deeply concerned. I do not use my soul as my darling, unless I take care to preserve it from every thing that would hurt it, and to provide all necessities for it, and be entirely tender of its welfare." (2.) Observe what the danger is from which he prays to be delivered, from the sword, the flaming sword of divine wrath, which turns every way. This he dreaded more than any thing, Gen. 3. 24. God's anger was the wormwood and the gall in the bitter cup that was put into his hands; "O deliver my soul from that. Lord, though I lose my life, let me not lose thy love. Save me from the power of the dog, and from the lion's mouth." This seems to be meant of Satan, that old enemy who bruised the heel of the seed of the woman, the prince of this world, with whom he was to engage in close combat, and whom he saw coming, John, 14. 30. "Lord, save me from being overpowered by his terrors." He pleads, "Thou hast formerly *heard me from the horns of the unicorn*," that is, "saved me from him, in answer to my prayer." This may refer to the victory Christ had obtained over Satan and his temptations, (Matth. 4.) when the Devil left him for a season, (Luke, 4. 13.) but now returned in another manner to attack him with his terrors. "Lord, thou gavest me the victory then, give it me now, that I may spoil principalities and powers, and *cast out the prince of this world*." Has God delivered us *from the horns of the unicorn*, that we be not tossed? Let that encourage us to hope that we shall be delivered from the lion's mouth, that we be not torn. He that has delivered, doth, and will. This prayer of Christ, no doubt, was answered, for the Father heard him always. And though he did not deliver him from death, yet he suffered him not to see corruption, but, the third day, raised him out of the dust of death, which was a greater instance of God's favour to him than if he had helped him down from the cross; for that would have hindered his undertaking, whereas his resurrection crowned it.

In singing this, we should meditate on the sufferings and resurrection of Christ, till we experience in our own souls the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

22. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. 23. Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. 24. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. 25. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. 26. The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever. 27. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the

nations shall worship before thee. 28. For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations. 29. All *they that be* fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him, and none can keep alive his own soul. 30. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the LORD for a generation. 31. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done *this*.

The same that began the psalm complaining, who was no other than Christ in his humiliation, ends it here triumphing, and it can be no other than Christ in his exaltation. And as the first words of the complaint were used by Christ himself upon the cross, so the first words of the triumph are expressly applied to him, (Heb. 2. 12.) and are made his own words; *I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee*. The certain prospect which Christ had of the joy set before him, not only gave him a satisfactory answer to his prayers, but turned his complaints into praises; he saw of the travail of his soul, and was well satisfied: witness that triumphant word wherewith he breathed his last; *It is finished*.

Five things are here spoken of, the view of which were the satisfaction and triumph of Christ in his sufferings.

I. That he should have a church in the world, and that those that were given him from eternity should, in the fulness of time, be gathered in to him. This is implied here; that he should see *his seed*, Isa. 53. 10. It pleased him to think, 1. That by the declaring of God's name, by the preaching of the everlasting gospel in its plainness and purity, many should be effectually called to him, and to God by him. And, for this end, ministers should be employed to publish this doctrine to the world, who should be so much his messengers and his voice, that their doing it should be accounted his doing it; their word is his, and by them he declares God's name. 2. That those who are thus called in, should be brought into a very near and dear relation to him as his brethren; for he is not only not ashamed, but greatly well pleased, to call them so; not the believing Jews only, his countrymen, but those of the Gentiles also, who became fellow-heirs and of the same body, Heb. 2. 11. Christ is our elder Brother, who takes care of us, and makes provision for us, and expects that our desire should be toward him, and that we should be willing that he should rule over us. 3. That these his brethren should be incorporated into a congregation, a great congregation; such is the universal church, the whole family that is named from him, into which all the *children of God that were scattered abroad are collected*, and in which they are united; (John, 11. 52. Eph. 1. 10.) and that they should also be incorporated into lesser societies, members of that great body, many religious assemblies for divine worship, on which the face of Christianity should appear, and in which the interests of it should be supported and advanced. 4. That these should be accounted the seed of Jacob and Israel, v. 23. That on them, though Gentiles, the blessing of Abraham might come, (Gal. 3. 14.) and to them might pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenant, and the service of God, as much as ever it did to *Israel according to the flesh*, Rom. 9. 4. Heb. 8. 10. The gospel-church is called *the Israel of God*, Gal. 6. 16.

II. That God should be greatly honoured and glorified in him by that church. His Father's glory was that which he had in his eye throughout his whole undertaking, (John, 17. 4.) particularly in his sufferings, which he entered upon with this solemn request, *Father, glorify thy name*, John, 12. 27, 28. He foresees with pleasure,

1. That God would be glorified by the church that should be gathered to him; and that for this end they should be called and gathered in, that they might be unto God *for a name and a praise*. Christ by his ministers will declare God's name to his brethren, as

God's mouth to them, and then by them, as the mouth of the congregation to God, will God's name be praised. All that fear the Lord, will praise him, (v. 23.) even every Israelite indeed. See 118. 2. . 4.—135. 19, 20. The business of Christians, particularly in their solemn religious assemblies, is, to praise and glorify God, with a holy awe and reverence of his majesty; and therefore they that are here called upon to praise God, are called upon to fear him.

2. That God would be glorified in the Redeemer and in his undertaking. Therefore Christ is said to *praise God in the church*, not only because he is the Master of the assemblies in which God is praised, and the Mediator of all the praises that are offered up to God, but because he is the Matter of the church's praise. See Eph. 3. 21. All our praises must centre in the work of redemption, and a great deal of reason we have to be thankful, (1.) That Jesus Christ was owned by his Father in his undertaking, notwithstanding the apprehension he was some times under that his Father had forsaken him; (v. 24.) *For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted One*, that is, of the suffering Redeemer; but has graciously accepted it as a full satisfaction for sin, and a valuable consideration on which to ground the grant of eternal life to all believers. Though it was offered for us poor sinners, he did not despise or abhor it for our sakes, nor did he turn his face from him that offered it, as Saul was angry with his own son, because he interceded for David, whom he looked upon as his enemy. But when he cried unto him, when his blood cried for peace and pardon for us, he heard him. This, as it is the matter of our rejoicing, ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving. Those who have thought their prayers slighted and unheard, if they continue to pray and wait, will find they have not sought in vain. (2.) That he himself will go on with his undertaking, and complete it. Christ says, *I will pay my vows*, v. 25. Having engaged to bring many sons to glory, he will perform his engagement to the utmost, and will lose none.

III. That all humble gracious souls should have a full satisfaction and happiness in him, v. 26. It comforted the Lord Jesus in his sufferings, that in and through him all true believers should have everlasting consolation. 1. The poor in spirit shall be rich in blessings, spiritual blessings; the hungry shall be filled with good things. Christ's sacrifice being accepted, the saints shall feast upon the sacrifice, as, under the law, upon the peace-offerings, and so partake of the altar; *The meek shall eat and be satisfied*; eat of the bread of life, feed with an appetite upon the doctrine of Christ's mediation, which is meat and drink to the soul that knows its own nature and ease. They that hunger and thirst after righteousness in Christ, shall have all they can desire to satisfy them and make them easy, and shall not labour, as they have done, for that which satisfies not. 2. They that are much in praying, shall be much in thanksgiving; *They shall praise the Lord, that seek him*, because through Christ they are sure of finding him; in the hopes of which they have reason to praise him, even while they are seeking him; and the more earnest they are in seeking him, the more will their hearts be enlarged in his praises when they have found him. 3. The souls that are devoted to him shall be for ever happy with him; *Your heart shall live for ever*. Yours that are meek, that are satisfied in Christ, that continue to seek God; whatever becomes of your bodies, *your hearts shall live for ever*; the graces and comforts you have shall be perfected in everlasting life. Christ has said, *Because I live, ye shall live also*; (John, 14. 19.) and, therefore, that life shall be as sure, and as long, as his."

IV. That the church of Christ, and with it the kingdom of God among men, should extend itself to all corners of the earth, and should take in all sorts of people.

1. That it should reach far, v. 27, 28. That, whereas the Jews had long been the only professing people of God, now, all the ends of the world should come into the church, and, the partition-wall being taken down, the Gentiles should be taken in. It is here prophesied, (1.) That they should be converted, they shall *remember, and turn to the Lord*. Note, Serious reflection is the first step, and a good step it is, toward true conversion. We must consider, and turn. The prodigal came first to himself, and then

to his father. (2.) That then they should be admitted into communion with God, and with the assemblies that serve him; *They shall worship before thee, for in every place incense shall be offered to God*, Mal. 1. 11. Isa. 66. 23. Those that turn to God will make conscience of worshipping before him. And good reason there is why all the kindreds of the nations should do homage to God, for, (v. 28.) *The kingdom is the Lord's; his, and his only, is the universal monarchy.* [1.] The kingdom of nature is the Lord Jehovah's, and his providence rules among the nations, and upon that account we are bound to worship him. So that the design of the Christian religion is to revive natural religion, and its principles and laws. Christ died to bring us to God, the God that made us, from whom we had revolted, and to reduce us to our native allegiance. [2.] The kingdom of grace is the Lord Christ's, and he, as Mediator, is appointed Governor among the nations; Head over all things to his church. Let every tongue therefore confess that he is Lord.

2. That it should include many of different ranks, v. 29. High and low, rich and poor, bond and free, meet in Christ. (1.) Christ shall have the homage of many of the great ones, they that be fat upon the earth, that live in pomp and power, they shall eat and worship; even they that fare deliciously, when they have eaten and are full, shall bless the Lord their God for their plenty and prosperity. (2.) The poor also shall receive his gospel. Those that go down to the dust, that sit in the dust, (113. 7.) that can scarcely keep life and soul together, they shall bow before the Lord Jesus, who reckons it his honour to be the poor man's King, (72. 12.) and whose protection does, in a special manner, draw their allegiance. Or this may be understood, in general, of dying men, whether poor or rich. See then what is our condition—we are going down to the dust to which we are sentenced, and where shortly we must make our bed. Nor can we keep alive our own souls; we cannot secure our own natural life long, nor can we be the authors of our own spiritual and eternal life. It is therefore our great interest, as well as duty, to bow before the Lord Jesus, to give up ourselves to him to be his subjects and worshippers; for this is the only way, and it is a sure way, to secure our happiness when we go down to the dust. Seeing we cannot keep alive our own souls, it is our wisdom, by an obedient faith, to commit our souls to Jesus Christ, who is able to save them, and keep them alive, for ever.

V. That the church of Christ, and with it the kingdom of God among men, shall continue to the end, through all the ages of time. Mankind is kept up in a succession of generations; so that there is always a generation passing away, and a generation coming up. Now, as Christ shall have honour from that which is passing away and leaving the world, (v. 29. they that go down to the dust shall bow before him, and it is good to die bowing before Christ; blessed are the dead who thus die in the Lord,) so he shall have honour from that which is rising up, and setting out, in the world, v. 30. Observe,

1. Their application to Christ; *A seed shall serve him*, shall keep up the solemn worship of him, and profess and practise obedience to him as their Master and Lord. Note, God will have a church in the world, to the end of time; and, in order to that, there shall be a succession of professing Christians and gospel-ministers, from generation to generation. *A seed shall serve him*; there shall be a remnant, more or less, to whom shall pertain the service of God, and to whom God will give grace to serve him: perhaps not the seed of the same persons, for grace does not run in a blood; he does not say *their* seed, but *a* seed; perhaps but few, yet enough to preserve the entail.

2. Christ's acknowledgment of them; *They shall be accounted to him for a generation*; he will be the same to them that he was to those who went before them; his kindness to his friends shall not die with them, but shall be drawn out to their heirs and successors, and instead of the fathers shall be the children, whom all shall acknowledge to be *a seed that the Lord hath blessed*, Isa. 61. 9.—65. 23. The generation of the righteous, God will graciously own as his treasure, his children.

3. Their agency for him; (v. 31.) *They shall come, shall rise up*

in their day, not only to keep up the virtue of the generation that is past, and to do the work of their own generation, but to serve the honour of Christ, and the welfare of souls, in the generations to come; they shall transmit to them the gospel of Christ (that sacred deposit) pure and entire, even to a people that shall be born hereafter; to them they shall declare two things, (1.) That there is an everlasting righteousness, which Jesus Christ has brought in. This righteousness of his, and not any of our own, they shall declare to be the foundation of all our hopes, and the fountain of all our joys. See Rom. 1. 16, 17. (2.) That the work of our redemption, by Christ, is the Lord's own doing, (118. 23.) and no contrivance of ours. We must declare to our children, that God has done this; it is his wisdom in a mystery, it is his arm revealed.

In singing this, we must triumph in the name of Christ, as above every name; must give him honour ourselves; rejoice in the honours others do him, and in the assurance we have that there shall be a people praising him on earth, when we are praising him in heaven.

PSALM XXIII.

Many of David's psalms are full of complaints, but this is full of comforts, and the expressions of delight in God's great goodness, and dependence upon him. It is a psalm which has been sung by good Christians, and will be while the world stands, with a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction. I. The psalmist here claims relation to God as his Shepherd, v. 1. II. He recounts his experience of the kind things God had done for him as his Shepherd, v. 2, 3, 5. III. Hence he infers, That he should want no good; (v. 1.) That he needed to fear no evil; (v. 4.) That God would never leave or forsake him in a way of mercy; and therefore he resolves never to leave or forsake God in a way of duty, v. 6. In this, he has certainly an eye, not only to the blessings of God's providence, which made his outward condition prosperous, but to the communications of God's grace, received by a lively faith, and returned in a warm devotion, which filled his soul with joy unspeakable. And as in the foregoing psalm he represented Christ dying for his sheep, so here he represents Christians receiving the benefit of all the care and tenderness of that great and good Shepherd.

A psalm of David.

1. **T**HE LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

From three very comfortable premises, David, in this psalm, draws three very comfortable conclusions, and teaches us to do so too. We are saved by hope, and therefore that hope will not make us ashamed, because it is well-grounded. It is the duty of Christians to encourage themselves in the Lord their God; and we are here directed to take that encouragement both from the relation wherein he stands to us, and from the experience we have had of his goodness, according to that relation.

I. From God's being his Shepherd, he infers that he shall not want any thing that is good for him, v. 1. See here,

1. The great care that God takes of believers; he is their Shepherd, and they may call him so. Time was, when David was himself a shepherd; he was taken from following the ewes great with young, (78. 70, 71.) and so he knew by experience the cares and tender affections of a good shepherd toward his flock. He remembered what need they had of a shepherd, and what a kindness it was to them to have one that was skilful and faithful: he once ventured his life to rescue a lamb. By this therefore he

illustrates God's care of his people; and to this our Saviour seems to refer, when he says, *I am the Shepherd of the sheep; the good Shepherd*, John, 10. 11. He that is the Shepherd of Israel, of the whole church in general, (80. 1.) is the Shepherd of every particular believer; the meanest is not below his cognizance, Isa. 40. 11. He takes them into his fold, and then takes care of them, protects them, and provides for them, with more care and constancy than a shepherd can, that makes it his business to keep the flock. If God be as a Shepherd to us, we must be as sheep, inoffensive, meek, and quiet, silent before the shearers, nay, and before the butcher too, useful and sociable; we must know the Shepherd's voice, and follow him.

2. The great confidence which believers have in God; "If the Lord is my Shepherd, my Feeder, I may conclude I shall not want any thing that is really necessary and good for me." If David penned this psalm before his coming to the crown, though destined to it, he had as much reason to fear wanting as any man. Once he sent his men a-begging for him to Nabal, and another time went himself a-begging to Ahimelech; and yet, when he considers that God is his Shepherd, he can boldly say, *I shall not want*. Let not those fear starving that are at God's finding, and have him for their Feeder. More is implied than is expressed; not only, *I shall not want*, but, "I shall be supplied with whatever I need; and if I have not every thing I desire, I may conclude it is either not fit for me, or not good for me, or I shall have it in due time."

II. From his performing the office of a good Shepherd to him, he infers that he needs not fear any evil in the greatest dangers and difficulties he could be in, v. 2. . 4. He experiences the benefit of God's presence with him, and care of him now, and therefore expects the benefit of them when he most needs it. See here,

1. The comforts of a living saint; God is his Shepherd, and his God: all-sufficient to all intents and purposes; David found him so, and so have we. See the happiness of the saints, as the sheep of God's pasture.

(1.) They are well-pleased, well-laid; *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures*. We have the supports and comforts of this life from God's good hand, our daily bread from him as our Father. The greatest abundance is but a dry pasture to a wicked man, who relishes that only in it which pleases the senses; but to a godly man, who tastes the goodness of God in all his enjoyments, and by faith relishes that, though he has but little of the world, it is a green pasture, 37. 16. Prov. 15. 16, 17. God's ordinances are the green pastures in which food is provided for all believers; the word of life is the nourishment of the new man. It is milk for babes, pasture for the sheep, never barren, never eaten bare, never parched, but always a green pasture for faith to feed in. God makes his saints to lie down; he gives them quiet and contentment in their own minds, whatever their lot is; their souls dwell at ease in him, and that makes every pasture green. Are we blessed with the green pastures of the ordinances? Let us not think it enough to pass through them, but let us lie down in them, abide in them: this is my rest for ever. It is by a constancy of the means of grace that the soul is fed.

(2.) They are well-guided, well-led; the Shepherd of Israel guides Joseph like a flock; and every believer is under the same guidance. *He leadeth me beside the still waters*. Those that feed on God's goodness must follow his direction; he leads them by his providence, by his word, by his Spirit; disposes their affairs for the best, according to his counsel; disposes their affections and actions according to his command; directs their eye, their way, and their heart, into his love. The still waters, by which he leads them, yield them, not only a pleasant prospect, but many a cooling draught, many a reviving cordial, when they are thirsty and weary. God provides for his people, not only food and rest, but refreshment also and pleasure. The consolations of God, the joys of the Holy Ghost, are these still waters by which the saints are led; streams which flow from the fountain of living waters, and make glad the city of our God. God leads his people, not to the standing waters which corrupt and gather filth, nor to the troubled sea, nor to the rapid rolling floods, but to the silent purling waters; for the still, but running, waters, agree best with those spirits that flow out

toward God, and yet do it silently. The divine guidance they are under is stripped of its metaphor, (v. 3.) *He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness*, in the way of my duty; in that he instructs me by his word, and directs me by conscience and providence. These are the paths in which all the saints desire to be led and kept, and never to turn aside out of them. And those only are led by the still waters of comfort that walk in the paths of righteousness. The way of duty is the truly pleasant way. It is the work of righteousness that is peace. In these paths we cannot walk, unless God both lead us into them, and lead us in them.

(3.) They are well-helped when any thing ails them; *He restoreth my soul*, [1.] "He reduces me when I wander." No creature will lose itself sooner than a sheep, so apt it is to go astray, and then so unapt to find the way back. The best saints are sensible of their proneness to *go astray like lost sheep*; (119. 176.) they miss their way, and turn aside into by-paths; but when God shews them their error, gives them repentance, and brings them back to their duty again, he restores the soul; and if he did not do so, they would wander endlessly, and be undone. When, after one sin, David's heart smote him, and, after another, Nathan was sent to tell him, *Thou art the man*, God restored his soul. Though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it. [2.] "He recovers me when I am sick, and revives me when I am faint, and so restores the soul which was ready to depart." He is the Lord our God that heals us, Exod. 15. 26. Many a time we had fainted, unless we had believed; and it was the good Shepherd that kept us from fainting.

2. See here the courage of a dying saint; (v. 4.) "Having had such experience of God's goodness to me all my days, in six troubles and in seven, I will never distrust him, no, not in the last extremity; the rather, because all he has done for me hitherto, was not for any merit or desert of mine, but purely for his name's sake, in pursuance of his word, in performance of his promise, and for the glory of his own attributes, and relations to his people. That name therefore shall still be my strong tower, and shall assure me, that he who has led me, and fed me, all my life long, will not leave me at last."

Here is, (1.) Imminent danger supposed; "*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*, though I am in peril of death, though in the midst of dangers, deep as a valley, dark as a shadow, and dreadful as death itself;" or rather, "though I am under the arrests of death, have received the sentence of death within myself, and have all the reason in the world to look upon myself as a dying man, yet I am easy." Those that are sick, those that are old, have reason to look upon themselves as in the valley of the shadow of death. Here is one word indeed which sounds terrible; it is *death*, which we must all count upon; there is no discharge in that war. But, even in the supposition of the distress, there are four words which lessen the terror. It is death indeed that is before us; but, [1.] It is but the *shadow* of death, there is no substantial evil in it; the shadow of a serpent will not sting, nor the shadow of a sword kill. [2.] It is the *valley* of the shadow, deep indeed, and dark, and dirty; but the vallies are fruitful, and so is death itself fruitful of comforts to God's people. [3.] It is but a *walk* in this valley, a gentle pleasant walk: the wicked are chased out of the world, and their souls are required; but the saints take a walk to another world as cheerfully as they take their leave of this. [4.] It is a walk *through* it; they shall not be lost in this valley, but get safe to the mountain of spices on the other side of it.

(2.) This danger made light of, and triumphed over, upon good grounds. Death is a king of terrors, but not to the sheep of Christ; they tremble at it no more than sheep do that are appointed for the slaughter. "Even in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, none of these things move me." Note, A child of God may meet the messengers of death, and receive its summons with a holy security and serenity of mind. The sucking child may play upon the hole of this asp; and the weaned child, that, through grace, is weaned from this world, may put his hand upon this cockatrice's den, bidding a holy defiance to death, as Paul, *O death, where is thy sting?* And there is ground enough for

this confidence, [1.] Because there is no evil in it to a child of God; death cannot separate us from the love of God, and therefore it can do us no real harm; it kills the body, but cannot touch the soul. Why should it be dreadful, when there is nothing in it hurtful? [2.] Because the saints have God's gracious presence with them in their dying moments; he is then at their right hand, and therefore why should they be moved? The good Shepherd will not only conduct, but convoy, his sheep through this valley, where they are in danger of being set upon by the beasts of prey, the evening-wolves: he will not only convoy them, but comfort them then when they need most comfort. His presence shall comfort them; *Thou art with me*. His Word and Spirit shall comfort them; his *rod and staff*, alluding to the shepherd's crook, or the rod under which the sheep passed when they were counted, (Lev. 27. 32.) or the staff with which the shepherds drove away the dogs that would scatter or worry the sheep. It is a comfort to the saints, when they come to die, that God takes cognizance of them; (he knows them that are his;) that he will rebuke the enemy; that he will guide them with his rod, and sustain them with his staff. The gospel is called *the rod of Christ's strength*; (110. 2.) and there is enough in that to comfort the saints when they come to die, and underneath them are the everlasting arms.

III. From the good gifts of God's bounty to him now, he infers the constancy and perpetuity of his mercy, v. 5, 6. Where we may observe,

1. How highly he magnifies God's gracious vouchsafements to him; (v. 5.) "*Thou preparest a table before me*; thou hast provided for me all things pertaining both to life and godliness, all things requisite both for body and soul, for time and eternity;" such a bountiful Benefactor is God to all his people; and it becomes them abundantly to utter his great goodness, as David here, who acknowledges, (1.) That he had food convenient; a table spread, a cup filled, meat for his hunger, drink for his thirst. (2.) That he had it carefully and readily provided for him; his table was not spread with any thing that came next to hand; but prepared, and prepared *before him*. (3.) That he was not stinted, was not straitened, but had abundance; "*My cup runs over*: enough for myself, and my friends too." (4.) That he had not only for necessity, but for ornament and delight; *Thou anointest my head with oil*. Samuel anointed him king, which was a certain pledge of further favour; but this is rather an instance of the plenty with which God had blessed him, or an allusion to the extraordinary entertainment of special friends, whose heads they anointed with oil, Luke, 7. 46. Nay, some think, he still looks upon himself as a sheep, but such a one as the *poor man's ewe-lamb*, (2 Sam. 12. 3.) that did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom; not only thus nobly, but thus tenderly, are the children of God looked after. Plentiful provision is made for their bodies, for their souls; for the life that now is, and for that which is to come. If Providence do not bestow upon us thus plentifully for our natural life, it is our own fault if it be not made up to us in spiritual blessings.

2. How confidently he counts upon the continuance of God's favours; (v. 6.) he had said, (v. 1.) *I shall not want*; but now he speaks more positively, more comprehensively; *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*. His hope rises, and his faith is strengthened, by being exercised. Observe, (1.) What he promises himself—goodness and mercy, all the streams of it, flowing from the fountain; pardoning mercy, protecting mercy, sustaining, supplying, mercy. (2.) The manner of the conveyance of it; It shall *follow me*, as the water out of the rock followed the camp of Israel through the wilderness; it shall follow into all places and all conditions, shall be always ready. (3.) The continuance of it; It shall follow me *all my life long*, even to the last; for whom God loves, he loves to the end. (4.) The constancy of it; *All the days of my life*, as duly as the day comes; it shall be new every morning, (Lam. 3. 22, 23.) like the manna that was given to the Israelites daily. (5.) The certainty of it; *Surely it shall*. It is as sure as the promise of the God of truth can make it; and we know whom we have believed. (6.) Here is a prospect of the perfection of bliss in the future state. So *some take*

the latter clause; "Goodness and mercy having followed me all the days of my life on this earth, when that is ended, I shall remove to a better world, to dwell in *the house of the Lord for ever*, in our Father's house above, where there are many mansions. *With what I have, I am pleased much; with what I hope for, more.*" All this, and heaven too! Then we serve a good Master.

3. How resolutely he determines to cleave to God and to his duty. We read the last clause as David's covenant with God; "*I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*, (as long as I live,) and I will praise him while I have any being." We must dwell in his house as servants, that desired to have their ears bored to his door-post, to serve him for ever. If God's goodness to us be like the morning-light, which shines more and more to the perfect day; let not our's to him be like the morning-cloud, and the early dew that passeth away. Those that would be satisfied with the fatness of God's house, must keep close to the duties of it.

PSALM XXIV.

This psalm is concerning the kingdom of Jesus Christ; 1. His providential kingdom, by which he rules the world, v. 1, 2. II. The kingdom of his grace, by which he rules in his church. 1. Concerning the subjects of that kingdom; their character, (v. 4, 6.) their charter, v. 5. 2. Concerning the King of that kingdom; and a summons to all to give him admission, v. 7. 10. It is supposed that the psalm was penned upon occasion of David's bringing up the ark to the place prepared for it; and that the intention of it, was, to lead the people above the pomp of external ceremonies to a holy life and faith in Christ, of whom the ark was a type.

A psalm of David.

1. **T**HE earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. 2. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

Here is, 1. God's absolute propriety in this part of the creation, where our lot is cast, v. 1. We are not to think that the heavens, even the heavens only, are the Lord's, and the numerous and bright inhabitants of the upper world, and that this earth, being so small and inconsiderable a part of the creation, and at such a distance from the royal palace above, is neglected, and that he claims no interest in it. No, even the earth is his, and this lower world; and though he has prepared the throne of his glory in the heavens, yet his kingdom rules over all, and even the worms of this earth are not below his cognizance, nor from under his dominion.

(1.) When God gave the earth to the children of men, he still reserved to himself the property, and only let it out to them as tenants, or usufructuaries; *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*; the mines that are lodged in the bowels of it, even the richest; the fruits it produces; all the beasts of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills; our lands and houses, and all the improvements that are made of this earth by the skill and industry of man, are all his. These indeed, in the kingdom of grace, are justly looked upon as emptiness; for they are vanity of vanities, nothing to a soul; but, in the kingdom of providence, they are fulness. *The earth is full of God's riches, so is the great and wide sea also*. All the parts and regions of the earth are the Lord's, all under his eye, all in his hand; so that, wherever a child of God goes, he may comfort himself with this, that he does not go off his Father's ground. That which falls to our share of the earth and its productions, is but lent to us, it is the Lord's; what is our own against all the world, is not so against his claims. That which is most remote from us, as that which passes through the paths of the sea, or is hid in the bottom of it, is the Lord's, and he knows where to find it.

(2.) The habitable part of this earth (Prov. 8. 34.) is his in a special manner; *the world, and they that dwell therein*. We ourselves are not our own, our bodies, our souls, are not. All souls are mine, says God; for he is the Former of our bodies, and the Father of our spirits. Our tongues are not our own, they are to be at his service. Even those of the children of men are his, that

know him not, nor own their relation to him. Now this comes in here, to shew that though God is graciously pleased to accept the devotions and services of his peculiar chosen people, (v. 3. . 5.) it is not because he needs them, or can be benefited by them, for the earth is his, and all in it, Exod. 19. 5. Ps. 50. 12. It is likewise to be applied to the dominion Christ has, as Mediator, over the utmost parts of the earth, which are given him for his possession: the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand, power over all flesh. The apostle quotes this scripture twice together in his discourse about things offered to idols, 1 Cor. 10. 26, 28. If it be sold in the shambles, eat it, and ask no questions, for the earth is the Lord's, it is God's good creature, and you have a right to it; but if one tell you it was offered to an idol, forbear, *for the earth is the Lord's*, and there is enough besides. This is a good reason why we should be content with our allotment in this world, and not envy others theirs; *the earth is the Lord's*, and may he not do what he will with his own, and give to some more of it, to others less, as it pleases him?

2. The ground of this propriety; the earth is his by an indisputable title, *for he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods, v. 2.* It is his: for, (1.) He made it, formed it, founded it, and fitted it for the use of man. The matter is his, for he made it out of nothing; the form is his, for he made it according to the eternal counsels and ideas of his own mind. He made it himself, he made it for himself; so that he is sole, entire, and absolute, Owner, and none can let us a title to any part, but by, from, and under, him; see 89. 11, 12. (2.) He made it so as no one else could; it is the creature of Omnipotence, for it is founded upon the seas, upon the floods; a weak and unstable foundation (one would think) to build the earth upon, and yet, if Almighty power pleases, it shall serve to bear the weight of this earth. The waters which at first covered the earth, and rendered it unfit to be a habitation for man, were ordered under it, that the dry land might appear, and so they are as a foundation to it; see 104. 8, 9. (3.) He continues it, he has established it, fixed it, so that, though one generation passes, and another comes, the earth abides, Eccl. 1. 4. And his providence is a continued creation, 119. 90. The founding of the earth upon the floods, should remind us how slippery and uncertain all earthly things are; their foundation is not only sand, but water; it is therefore our folly to build upon them.

3. Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? and who shall stand in his holy place? 4. He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. 5. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. 6. *This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.*

From this world, and the fulness thereof, the psalmist's meditations rise, of a sudden, to the great things of another world, the foundation of which is not on the seas, nor on the floods. The things of this world God has given to the children of men, and we are much indebted to his providence for them; but they will not make a portion for us. And therefore,

I. Here is an inquiry after better things, v. 3. This earth is God's footstool; but, if we had ever so much of it, we must be here but a while, must shortly go hence, and *Who then shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?* Who shall go to heaven hereafter, and, as an earnest of that, shall have communion with God in holy ordinances now? A soul that knows and considers its own nature, original, and immortality, when it has viewed the earth and the fulness thereof, will sit down unsatisfied; there is not found among all the creatures a help meet for man, and therefore it will think of ascending toward God, toward heaven; will ask, • What shall I do to rise to that high place, that hill, where the Lord dwells, and manifests himself, that I may be acquainted with him; and to abide in that happy, holy, place, where he

meets his people, and makes them holy and happy? What shall I do that I may be of those whom God owns for his peculiar people, and who are his in another manner than the earth is his and its fulness? This question is much the same with that, 15. 1. The hill of Zion, on which the temple was built, typified the church, both visible and invisible. When the people attended the ark to its holy place, David puts them in mind, that these were but patterns of heavenly things, and therefore that by them they should be led to consider the heavenly things themselves.

II. An answer to this inquiry; in which we have,

1. The properties of God's peculiar people, who shall have communion with him in grace and glory.

(1.) They are such as keep themselves from all the gross acts of sin. They have clean hands; not spotted with the pollutions of the world and the flesh. None that were ceremonially unclean might enter into the mountain of the temple, which signified that cleanness of conversation which is required in all those that have fellowship with God. The hands, lifted up in prayer, must be pure hands, no blot of unjust gain cleaving to them, nor any thing else that defiles the man, and is offensive to the holy God.

(2.) They are such as make conscience of being really, that is, of being inwardly, as good as they seem to be outwardly; they have pure hearts. We make nothing of our religion, if we do not make heart-work of it. It is not enough that our hands be clean before men, but we must also wash our hearts from wickedness, and not allow ourselves in any secret heart-impurities, which are open before the eye of God. Yet in vain do those pretend to have pure and good hearts, whose hands are defiled with the acts of sin. This is a pure heart, which is sincere and without guile in covenanting with God, which is carefully guarded, that the wicked one, the unclean spirit, touch it not, which is purified by faith, and conformed to the image and will of God; see Matth. 5. 8.

(3.) They are such as do not set their affections upon the things of this world; as do not lift up their souls unto vanity, whose hearts are not carried out inordinately toward the wealth of the world, the praise of men, or the delights of sense; who do not choose these things for their portion, nor reach forth after them, because they believe them to be vanity, uncertain and unsatisfying.

(4.) They are such as deal honestly both with God and man. In their covenant with God, and their contracts with men, they have not sworn deceitfully, nor broken their promises, violated their engagements, or taken any false oath. Those that have no regard to the obligations of truth, or the honour of God's name, are unfit for a place in God's holy hill.

(5.) They are a praying people; (v. 6.) *This is the generation of them that seek him.* In every age there is a remnant of such as these, men of this character, who are *accounted to the Lord for a generation*, 22. 30. And they are such as seek God, *that seek thy face, O Jacob*. [1.] They join themselves to God, to seek him; not only in earnest prayer, but in serious endeavours to obtain his favour, and keep themselves in his love; who, having made it the top of their happiness, make it the top of their ambition, to be accepted of him, and therefore take care and pains to approve themselves to him. It is to the hill of the Lord that we must ascend, and, the way being up-hill, we have need to put forth ourselves to the utmost, as those that seek diligently. [2.] They join themselves to the people of God, to seek God with them; being brought into communion with God, they come into the communion of saints; conforming to the patterns of the saints that are gone before, so some understand this; they seek God's face, as Jacob, (so some,) who was *therefore* surnamed *Israel*, because he wrestled with God and prevailed, sought him and found him; and, associating with the saints of their own day, they shall court the favour of God's church, (Rev. 3. 9.) shall be glad of an acquaintance with God's people, (Zech. 8. 23.) shall incorporate themselves with them, and, when they *subscribe with their hands to the Lord*, shall *call themselves by the name of Jacob*, Isa. 44. 5. As soon as ever Paul was converted, he *joined himself to the disciples*, Acts, 9. 26. They shall seek God's face in Jacob,

(so some,) in the assemblies of his people; *Thy face, O God of Jacob*; so our margin supplies it, and makes it easy. As all believers are the spiritual seed of Abraham, so all that strive in prayer are the spiritual seed of Jacob, to whom God never said, *Seek ye me in vain*.

2. The privileges of God's peculiar people, v. 5. They shall be made truly and for ever happy. (1.) They shall be blessed: they shall receive the blessing from the Lord, all the fruits and gifts of God's favour, according to his promise; and those whom God blesses are blessed indeed, for it is his prerogative to command the blessing. (2.) They shall be justified, and sanctified. These are the spiritual blessings in heavenly things, which they shall receive, even righteousness, the very thing they hunger and thirst after, Matth. 5. 6. Righteousness is blessedness, and it is from God only that we must expect it, for we have no righteousness of our own. They shall receive the reward of their righteousness, (so some,) *the crown of righteousness which the righteous Judge shall give*, 2 Tim. 4. 8. (3.) They shall be saved; for God himself will be the God of their salvation. Note, Where God gives righteousness, he certainly designs salvation. Those that are made meet for heaven, shall be brought safe to heaven, and then they will find what they have been seeking, to their endless satisfaction.

7. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 8. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. 9. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 10. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.

What is spoken once, is spoken a second time, in these verses; such repetitions are usual in songs, and have much beauty in them. Here is, 1. Entrance once and again demanded for the King of glory; the doors and gates are to be thrown open, thrown wide open, to give him admission, for behold, he stands at the door, and knocks, ready to come in. 2. Inquiry once and again made concerning this mighty Prince, in whose name entrance is demanded; *Who is this King of glory?* As, when any knock at our door, it is common to ask, *Who is there?* 3. Satisfaction once and again given concerning the royal Person that makes the demand; *It is the Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle, the Lord of hosts*, v. 8, 10. Now,

(1.) This splendid entry here described, it is probable, refers to the solemn bringing in of the ark into the tent David pitched for it, or the temple Solomon built for it; for when David prepared materials for the building of it, it was proper for him to prepare a psalm for the dedication of it. The porters are called upon to open the doors, and they are called *everlasting doors*, because much more durable than the door of the tabernacle, which was but a curtain. They are taught to ask, *Who is this King of glory?* And they that bare the ark are taught to answer, in the language before us, and very fitly, because the ark was a symbol or token of God's presence, Josh. 3. 11. Or, it may be taken as a poetical figure designed to represent the subject more affectingly. God, in his word and ordinances, is thus to be welcomed by us. [1.] With great readiness; the door and gates must be thrown open to him. Let the word of the Lord come into the innermost and uppermost place in our souls; and, if we had 600 necks, we should bow them all to the authority of it. [2.] With all reverence, remembering how great a God he is, with whom we have to do, in all our approaches to him.

(2.) Doubtless, it points at Christ, of whom the ark, with the mercy-seat, was a type.

[1.] We may apply it to the ascension of Christ into heaven, and the welcome given to him there. When he had finished his work on earth, he ascended *in the clouds of heaven*, Dan. 7. 13, 14. The gates of heaven must then be opened to him, those doors

that may be truly called *everlasting*, which had been shut against us, to keep the way of the tree of life, Gen. 3. 24. Our Redeemer found them shut, but, having by his blood made atonement for sin, and gained a title to *enter into the holy place*, (Heb. 9. 12.) as one having authority, he demanded entrance, not for himself only, but for us; for, as the Forerunner, he is for us entered, and has *opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers*. The keys not only of hell and death, but of heaven and life, must be put into his hand. His approach being very magnificent, the angels are brought in asking, *Who is this King of glory?* For angels keep the gates of the New Jerusalem, Rev. 21. 12. When the First-begotten was brought into the upper world, the angels were to worship him; (Heb. 1. 6.) and, accordingly, they here ask, with wonder, "Who is he? This that cometh *with dyed garments from Bozrah*? (Isa. 63. 1..3.) for he appears in that word *as a Lamb that had been slain*." It is answered, that he is strong and mighty, mighty in battle to save his people, and subdue his and their enemies.

[2.] We may apply it to Christ's entrance into the souls of men by his word and Spirit, that they may be his temples. Christ's presence in them is like that of the ark in the temple, it sanctifies them. *Behold, he stands at the door and knocks*, Rev. 3. 20. It is required, that the gates and doors of the heart be opened to him; not only as admission is given to a guest, but as possession is delivered to the rightful owner, after the title has been contested. This is the gospel call and demand; that we let Jesus Christ, the King of glory, come into our souls, and welcome him with hosannas, *Blessed is he that cometh*. That we may do this aright, we are concerned to ask, *Who this King of glory is?* To acquaint ourselves with him whom we are to believe in, and to love above all. And the answer is ready; He is *Jehovah*, and will be *Jehovah our righteousness*, an all-sufficient Saviour to us, if we give him entrance and entertainment. He is *strong and mighty*, and *the Lord of hosts*; and therefore it is at our peril if we deny him entrance; for he is able to avenge the affront; he can force his way, and can break those in pieces, with his iron rod, that will not submit to his golden sceptre.

In singing this, let our hearts cheerfully answer to this call, as it is in the first words of the next psalm, *Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul*.

PSALM XXV.

This psalm is full of devout affection to God; the out-goings of holy desires toward his favour and grace, and the lively actings of faith in his promises. We may learn out of it, I. What it is to pray, v. 1, 15. II. What we must pray for; the pardon of sin; (v. 6, 7, 18.) direction in the way of duty; (v. 4, 5.) the favour of God; (v. 16.) deliverance out of our troubles; (v. 17, 18.) preservation from our enemies; (v. 20, 21.) and the salvation of the church of God, v. 22. III. What we may plead in prayer; our confidence in God; (v. 2, 3, 5, 20, 21.) our distress, and the malice of our enemies; (v. 17, 19.) our sincerity, v. 21. IV. What precious promises we have to encourage us in prayer; of guidance and instruction, (v. 8, 9, 12.) the benefit of the covenant; (v. 10.) and the pleasure of communion with God, v. 13, 14. It is easy to apply the several passages of this psalm to ourselves in the singing of it; for we have often troubles, and always sins, to complain of, at the throne of grace.

A psalm of David.

1. **U**NTO thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. 2. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me. 3. Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause. 4. Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. 5. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. 6. Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy loving-kindnesses; for they have been ever of old. 7. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O LORD.

Here we have David's professions of desire toward God, and dependence on him. He often begins his psalms with such professions; not to move God, but to move himself, and to engage himself to answer those professions.

1. He professes his desire towards God; *Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul, v.1.* In the foregoing psalm, (v.4.) it was made the character of a good man, that he *has not lift up his soul to vanity*; and a call was given to the everlasting gates to lift up their heads for the *King of glory to come in, v.1.* To which character, to which call, David here answers, "Lord, I lift up my soul, not to vanity, but to thee." Note, In worshipping God, we must lift up our souls to him. Prayer is the ascent of the soul to God; God must be eyed, and the soul employed. *Sursum corda—Up with your hearts*, was anciently used as a call to devotion. With a holy contempt of the world and the things of it, by a fixed thought and active faith, we must set God before us, and let out our desires toward him as the Fountain of our happiness.

2. He professes his dependence upon God, and begs for the benefit and comfort of that dependence; (v.2.) *O my God, I trust in thee.* His conscience witnessed for him, that he had no confidence in himself or in any creature, and that he had no diffidence of God, or of his power or promise. He pleases himself with this profession of faith in God. Having put his trust in God, he is easy, is well-satisfied, and quiet from the fear of evil; and he pleads it with God, whose honour it is to help those that honour him by trusting in him. What men put a confidence in, is either their joy or their shame, according as it proves. Now David here, under the direction of faith, prays earnestly, (1.) That shame might not be his lot; "*Let me not be ashamed of my confidence in thee*; let me not be shaken from it by any prevailing fears, and let me not be, in the issue, disappointed of what I depend upon thee for; but, Lord, *keep what I have committed unto thee.*" Note, If we make our confidence in God our stay, it shall not be our shame; and if we triumph in him, our enemies shall not triumph over us, as they would, if we should now sink under our fears, or should, in the issue, come short of our hopes. (2.) That it might not be the lot of any that trusted in God. All the saints have obtained a like precious faith; and therefore, doubtless, it will be alike successful in the issue. Thus the communion of saints is kept up, even by their praying one for another. True saints will make supplication for all saints. It is certain that none who, by a believing attendance, wait on God, and, by a believing hope, wait for him, shall be made ashamed of it. (3.) That it might be the lot of the transgressors; *Let them be ashamed, that transgress without cause, or vainly*, as the word is. [1.] Upon no provocation; they revolt from God and their duty, from David and his government, (so some,) without any occasion given them, not being able to pretend any iniquity they have found in God, or that in any thing he has wearied them. The weaker the temptation is, by which men are drawn to sin, the stronger the corruption is, by which they are driven to it. Those are the worst transgressors that sin for sinning-sake. [2.] To no purpose. They know their attempts against God are fruitless; they imagine a vain thing, and therefore they will soon be ashamed of them.

3. He begs direction from God in the way of his duty, v.4, 5. Once again, he here prays to God to teach him. He was a knowing man himself, but the most intelligent, the most observant, both need and desire to be taught of God; from him we must be ever learning. Observe, (1.) What he desired to learn; "Teach me, not fine words or fine notions, but thy ways, thy paths, thy truth. The ways in which thou walkest toward me, which are *all mercy and truth, (v.10.)* and the ways in which thou wouldest have me to walk towards thee." Those are best taught who understand their duty, and know *the good things they should do*, Eccl. 2. 3. The *paths* of the Lord, and his *truth*, are the same; divine laws are all founded upon divine truths. The way of God's precepts is the way of truth, 119. 30. Christ is both the Way and the Truth, and therefore we must learn Christ.

(2.) What he desires of God, in order to this. [1.] That he would enlighten his understanding concerning his duty; "Shew me thy way, and so teach me." In doubtful cases, we should pray earnestly, that God would make it plain to us what he would have us to do. [2.] That he would incline his will to it, and strengthen him in it; "Lead me, and so teach me." Not only as we lead one that is dim-sighted, to keep him from missing his way, but as we lead one that is sick, and feeble, and faint, to help him forward in the way, and to keep him from fainting and falling. We go no further in the way to heaven, than God is pleased to lead us, and to hold us up. (3.) What he pleads, [1.] His great expectation from God; *Thou art the God of my salvation.* Note, Those that choose the salvation of God as their end, and make him the God of their salvation, may come boldly to him for direction in the way that leads to that end. If God save us, he will teach us, and lead us. He that gives salvation, will give instruction. [2.] His constant attendance on God; *On thee do I wait all the day.* Whence should a servant expect direction what to do, but from his own master, on whom he waits all the day? If we sincerely desire to know our duty, with a resolution to do it, we need not question but that God will direct us in it.

4. He appeals to God's infinite mercy, and casts himself upon that, not pretending to any merit of his own; (v.6.) "*Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies*, and, for the sake of those mercies, lead me, and teach me; for they have been ever of old;" (1.) "Thou always wast a merciful God; it is thy name, it is thy nature and property to shew mercy." (2.) "Thy counsels and designs of mercy were from everlasting; the vessels of mercy were, before all worlds, ordained to glory." (3.) "The instances of thy mercy to the church in general, and to me in particular, were early and ancient, and constant hitherto; they began of old, and never ceased. Thou hast taught me from my youth up, teach me now."

5. He is in a special manner earnest for the pardon of his sins; (v.7.) "*O remember not the sins of my youth.* Lord, remember thy mercies, (v.6.) which speak for me, and not my sins, which speak against me." Here is, (1.) An implicit confession of sin; he specifies particularly the sins of his youth. Note, Our youthful faults and follies should be matter of our repentance and humiliation long after, because time does not wear out the guilt of sin. Old people should mourn for the sinful mirth, and be in pain for the sinful pleasures, of their youth. He aggravates his sins, calling them his *transgressions*; and the more holy, just, and good, the law is, which sin is the transgression of, the more exceeding sinful it ought to appear to us. (2.) An express petition for mercy; [1.] That he might be acquitted from guilt; "*Remember not the sins of my youth*; remember them not against me, lay them not to my charge, enter not into judgment with me for them." When God pardons sin, he is said to *remember it no more*, which denotes a plenary remission, he forgives, and forgets. [2.] That he might be accepted in God's sight; "Remember thou me; think on me for good, and come in seasonably for my succour." We need desire no more to make us happy, than for God to remember us with favour. His plea is, "according to thy mercy, and for thy goodness-sake." Note, It is God's goodness, and not our's; his mercy, and not our own merit, that must be our plea for the pardon of sin, and all the good we stand in need of. This plea we must always rely upon, as those that are sensible of our poverty and unworthiness, and as those that are satisfied of the riches of God's mercy and grace.

8. Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. 9. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. 10. All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. 11. For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great. 12. What

man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way *that* he shall choose. 13. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. 14. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.

God's promises are here mixed with David's prayers. Many petitions there were in the former part of the psalm, and many in the latter; and here, in the middle of the psalm, he meditates upon the promises, and by a lively faith sucks, and is satisfied, from these breasts of consolation; for the promises of God are not only the best foundation of prayer, telling us what to pray for, and encouraging our faith and hope in prayer; but they are a present answer to prayer. Let the prayer be made according to the promise, and then the promise may be read as a return to the prayer; and we are to believe the prayer is heard, because the promise will be performed. But, in the midst of the promises, we find one petition which seems to come in somewhat abruptly, and should have followed upon v. 7. It is that, (v. 11.) *Pardon mine iniquity*. But prayers for the pardon of sin are never impertinent; we mingle sin with all our actions, and therefore should mingle such prayers with all our devotions. He enforces this petition with a double plea. The former is very natural; "*For thy name's sake, pardon mine iniquity*, because thou hast proclaimed thy name gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, for thy glory-sake, for thy promise-sake, for thine own sake," Isa. 43. 25. But the latter is very surprising; "*Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great*; and the greater it is, the more will divine mercy be magnified in the forgiveness of it." It is the glory of a great God to forgive great sins, to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin, Exod. 34. 7. "It is great, and therefore I am undone, for ever undone, if infinite mercy do not interpose for the pardon of it. It is great; I see it to be so." The more we see of the heinousness of our sins, the better qualified we are to find mercy with God. When we confess sin, we must aggravate it.

Let us now take a view of the great and precious promises which we have in these verses, and observe,

I. To whom these promises belong, and who may expect the benefit of them. We are all sinners; and can we hope for any advantage by them? Yes, (v. 8.) He will teach sinners, though they be sinners; for Christ came into the world to save sinners, and, in order to that, to teach sinners, to call sinners to repentance.

These promises are sure to those who, though they have been sinners, have gone astray, yet now keep God's word. To such, 1. As keep his covenant and his testimonies, (v. 10.) as take his precepts for their rule, and his promises for their portion; as, having taken God to be to them a God, live upon that, and, having given up themselves to be to him a people, live up to that. Though, through the infirmity of the flesh, they sometimes break the command, yet, by a sincere repentance, when at any time they do amiss, and a constant adherence by faith to God as their God, they keep the covenant, and do not break that. 2. To such as fear him, (v. 12.) and again, (v. 14.) as stand in awe of his majesty, and worship him with reverence, submit to his authority, and obey him with cheerfulness, dread his wrath, and are afraid of offending him.

II. Upon what these promises are grounded, and what encouragement we have to build upon them. Here are two things which ratify and confirm all the promises.

1. The perfections of God's nature. We value the promise by the character of him that makes it; we may therefore depend upon God's promises, for good and upright is the Lord, and therefore he will be as good as his word. He is so kind that he cannot deceive us, so true that he cannot break his promise. *Faithful is he who hath promised*, who also will do it. He was good in making the promise, and therefore will be upright in performing it.

2. The agreeableness of all he says and does, with the

perfections of his nature; (v. 10.) *All the paths of the Lord*; that is, all his promises, and all his providences, are mercy and truth; they are, like himself, good and upright. All God's dealings with his people are according to the mercy of his purposes, and the truth of his promises; all he does comes from love, covenant-love; and they may see in it his mercy displayed, and his word fulfilled. What a rich satisfaction may this be to good people, that, whatever afflictions they are exercised with, *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth*, and so it will appear when they come to their journey's end.

III. What these promises are.

1. That God will instruct and direct them in the way of their duty. This is most insisted upon, because it is an answer to David's prayers; (v. 4, 5.) *Shew me thy ways, and lead me*. We should fix our thoughts, and act our faith, most on those promises which suit our present case. (1.) He will teach sinners in the way, because they are sinners, and therefore need teaching; when they see themselves sinners, and desire teaching, then he will teach them the way of reconciliation to God, the way to a well-grounded peace of conscience, and the way to eternal life. He does, by his gospel, make known this way to all, and, by his Spirit, open the understanding, and guide penitent sinners that inquire after it. The Devil leads men blindfold to hell, but God enlightens men's eyes, sets things before them in a true light, and so leads them to heaven. (2.) The meek will he guide, the meek will he teach, those that are humble and low in their own eyes, that are distrustful of themselves, desirous to be taught, and honestly resolved to follow the divine guidance; *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears*. These he will guide in judgment, that is, by the rule of the written word; he will guide them in that which is practical, which relates to sin and duty; so that they may keep conscience void of offence; and he will do it judiciously, (so some,) that is, he will suit his conduct to their case; he will teach sinners with wisdom, tenderness, and compassion, and as they are able to bear. He will teach them his way. All good people make God's way their way, and desire to be taught that; and those that do so shall be taught and led in that way. (3.) *Him that feareth the Lord, he will teach in the way that he shall choose*; either in the way that God shall choose, or that the good man shall choose. It comes all to one, for he that fears the Lord chooses the things that please him. If we choose the right way, he that directed our choice will direct our steps, and will lead us in it. If we choose wisely, God will give us grace to walk wisely.

2. That God will make them easy; (v. 13.) *His soul shall dwell at ease, shall lodge in goodness*, marg. With respect to those that devote themselves to the fear of God, and give up themselves to be taught of God, it is their own fault, if they be not easy. The soul that is sanctified by the grace of God, and, much more, that is comforted by the peace of God, dwells at ease. Even when the body is sick, and lies in pain, yet the soul may dwell at ease in God, may return to him, and repose in him, as its rest. Many things occur to make us uneasy, but there is enough in the covenant of grace to balance them all, and to make us easy.

3. That he will give to them and theirs' as much of this world as is good for them; *His seed shall inherit the earth*. Next to our care concerning our souls, is our care concerning our seed, and God has a blessing in store for the generation of the upright. They that fear God shall inherit the earth, shall have a competency in it, and the comfort of it; and their children shall fare the better for their prayers, when they are gone.

4. That God will admit them into the secret of communion with himself; (v. 14.) *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him*. They understand his word, for if any man do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, John, 7. 17. They that receive the truth in the love of it, and experience the power of it, best understand the mystery of it. They know the meaning of his providence, and what God is doing with them, better than others. *Shall I hide from Abraham the things that I do?* Gen. 18. 17. He calls them not servants, but friends, as

he called Abraham. They know by experience the blessings of the covenant, and the pleasure of that fellowship which gracious souls have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. This honour have all his saints.

15. Mine eyes *are* ever toward the LORD; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net. 16. Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I *am* desolate and afflicted. 17. The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses. 18. Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins. 19. Consider mine enemies; for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred. 20. O keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in thee. 21. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee. 22. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

David, encouraged by the promises he had been meditating upon, here renews his addresses to God, and concludes the psalm, as he began, with the professions of dependence upon God and desire toward him.

I. He lays open before God the calamitous condition he was in. His feet were in the net, held fast and entangled, so that he could not extricate himself out of his difficulties, *v. 15.* He was *desolate and afflicted, v. 16.* It is common for those that are afflicted to be desolate; their friends desert them then, and they are themselves disposed to sit alone, and keep silence, *Lam. 3. 28.* David calls himself *desolate and solitary*, because he depended not upon his servants and soldiers, but relied as entirely upon God as if he had no prospect at all of help and succour from any creature. Being in distress, in many distresses, *the troubles of his heart were enlarged; (v. 17.)* he grew more and more melancholy, and troubled in mind. Sense of sin afflicted him more than any thing else: that was it that brake and wounded his spirit, and made his outward troubles lie heavy upon him. He was in affliction and pain, *v. 18.* His enemies, that persecuted him, were many and malicious, they hated him; and very barbarous, it was with a cruel hatred that they hated him, *v. 19.* Such were Christ's enemies, and the persecutors of his church.

II. He expressed the dependence he had upon God in these distresses; (*v. 15.*) *Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord.* Idolaters were for gods that they could see with their bodily eyes, and they had their eyes ever toward their idols, *Isa. 17. 7, 8.* But it is an eye of faith that we must have toward God, who is a Spirit, *Zech. 9. 1.* Our meditation of him must be sweet, and we must always set him before us: in all our ways, we must acknowledge him, and do all to his glory. Thus we must live a life of communion with God, not only in ordinances, but in providences, not only in the acts of devotion, but in the whole course of our conversation. David had the comfort of this, in his affliction; for, because his eyes were ever toward the Lord, he doubted not but he would pluck his feet out of the net; that he would deliver him from the corruptions of his own heart, (so some,) from the designs of his enemies against him, so others. Those that have their eye ever toward God, shall not have their feet long in the net. He repeats his profession of dependence upon God; (*v. 20.*) *Let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in thee;* and of expectation from him, *I wait on thee, v. 21.* It is good thus to hope, and quietly to wait, for the salvation of the Lord.

III. He prays earnestly to God for relief and succour.

1. For himself; see how he begs, (*1.*) For the remission of sin; (*v. 18.*) *Forgive all my sins.* Those were his heaviest burthens, and which brought upon him all his other burthens. He had begged (*v. 7.*) for the pardon of the sins of his youth, and (*v. 11.*) for the pardon of some one particular iniquity that was remarkably

great, which, some think, was his sin in the matter of Uriah. But here he prays, Lord, *forgive all, take away all iniquity.* It is observable, that, as to his affliction, he asks for no more than God's regard to it; "*Look upon my affliction and my pain,* and do with it as thou pleasest." But, as to his sin, he asks for no less than a pardon, *Forgive all my sins.* When at any time we are in trouble, we should be more concerned about our sins, to get them pardoned, than about our afflictions, to get them removed. Yet he prays, (*2.*) For the redress of his grievances. His mind was troubled for God's withdrawals from him, and under the sense he had of his displeasure against him for his sin; and therefore he prays, (*v. 16.*) *Turn thee unto me.* And if God turn to us, no matter who turns from us. His condition was troubled, and, in reference to that, he prays, "*O bring thou me out of my distresses.* I see no way of deliverance open; but thou canst either find one, or make one." His enemies were spiteful; and, in reference to that, he prays, "*O keep my soul from falling into their hands, or else deliver me out of their hands.*"

Four things he mentions by way of plea, to enforce these petitions; and refers himself and them to God's consideration. [1.] He pleads God's mercy; *Have mercy upon me.* Men of the greatest merits were undone, if they had not to do with a God of infinite mercies. [2.] He pleads his own misery, the distress he was in, his affliction and pain, especially the troubles of his heart; all which made him the proper object of divine mercy. [3.] He pleads the iniquity of his enemies; "Lord, consider them, how cruel they are, and deliver me out of their hands." [4.] He pleads his own integrity, *v. 21.* Though he had owned himself guilty before God, and had confessed his sins against him; yet, as to his enemies, he had the testimony of his conscience, that he had done them no wrong; which was his comfort, when they hated him with cruel hatred; and he prays that this might preserve him. This intimates that he did not expect to be safe, any longer than he continued in his integrity and uprightness; and that, while he did continue in it, he did not doubt of being safe. Sincerity will be our best security in the worst of times. Integrity and uprightness will be a man's preservation more than the wealth and honour of the world can be; this will preserve us to the heavenly kingdom. We should therefore pray to God to preserve us in our integrity, and then be assured that that will preserve us.

2. For the church of God; (*v. 22.*) *Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.* David was now in trouble himself, but he thinks it not strange, since trouble is the lot of all God's Israel. Why should any one member fare better than the whole body? David's troubles were enlarged, and very earnest he was with God to deliver him, yet he forgets not the distresses of God's church; for when we have ever so much business of our own at the throne of grace, we must still remember to pray for the public. Good men have little comfort in their own safety, while the church is in distress and danger. This prayer is a prophecy, that God would, at length, give David rest, and therewith give Israel rest from all their enemies round about. It is a prophecy of the sending of the Messiah in due time to *redeem Israel from his iniquities*, (*130. 8.*) and so to redeem them from their troubles. It refers also to the happiness of the future state. In heaven, and in heaven only, will God's Israel be perfectly redeemed from all troubles.

PSALM XXVI.

Holy David is, in this psalm, putting himself upon a solemn trial, not by God and his country, but by God and his own conscience; to both which he appeals touching his integrity, (v. 1, 2.) for the proof of which, he alleges, I. His constant regard to God and his grace, v. 3. II. His rooted antipathy to sin and sinners, v. 4, 5. III. His sincere affection to the ordinances of God, and his care about them, v. 6, 8. Having thus proved his integrity, I. He deprecates the doom of the wicked, v. 9, 10. 2. He casts himself upon the mercy and grace of God; with a resolution to hold fast his integrity, and his hope in God, v. 11, 12. In singing this psalm, we must teach and admonish ourselves, and one another, what we must be, and do, that we may have the favour of God, and comfort in our own consciences; and comfort ourselves with it, as David does, if we can say, that in any measure we have, through grace, answered to these characters. The learned Amyraldus, in his argument of this psalm, suggests, that David is here, by the spirit of prophecy,

carried out to speak of himself as a type of Christ, of whom what he here says of his spotless innocence, was fully and eminently true, and of him only, and to him we may apply it in singing this psalm. We are complete in him.

A Psalm of David.

1. **J**UDGE me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity; I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide. 2. Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. 3. For thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth. 4. I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. 5. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked.

It is probable that David penned this psalm when he was persecuted by Saul and his party, who, to give some colour to their unjust rage, represented him as a very bad man, and falsely accused him of many high crimes and misdemeanors, dressed him up in the skins of wild beasts, that they might bait him. Innocency itself is no fence to the name, though it is to the bosom, against the darts of calumny. Herein he was a type of Christ, who was made a reproach of men, and foretold to his followers, that they also must have all manner of evil said against them falsely. Now see what David does in this case,

I. He appeals to God's righteous sentence; (v.1.) "*Judge me, O God; be thou Judge between me and my accusers, between the persecutor and the poor prisoner; bring me off with honour, and put them to shame that falsely accuse me.*" Saul, who was himself supreme judge in Israel, was his adversary, so that, in a controversy with him, he could appeal to no other than to God himself. As to his offences against God, he prays, *Lord, enter not into judgment with me*; (143.2.) *Remember not my transgressions*; (25.7.) there he appeals to God's mercy; but as to his offences against Saul, he appeals to God's justice, and begs of him to judge for him, as, 43.1. Or thus; he cannot justify himself against the charge of sin, he owns his iniquity is great, and he is undone if God, in his infinite mercy, do not forgive him; but he can justify himself against the charge of hypocrisy, and has reason to hope, that, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, he is one of those that may expect to find favour with God. Thus holy Job often owns he has sinned, and yet he holds fast his integrity. Note, It is a comfort to those who are falsely accused, that there is a righteous God, who, sooner or later, will clear up their innocence, and a comfort to all who are sincere in religion, that God himself is a Witness to their sincerity.

II. He submits to his unerring search; (v.2.) *Examine me, O Lord, and prove me*, as gold is proved, whether it be standard. God knows every man's true character, for he knows the thoughts and intents of the heart, and sees through every disguise. David prays, *Lord, examine me*; which intimates that he was well-pleased that God did know him, and truly desirous that he would discover him to himself, and discover him to all the world. So sincere was he in his devotion to his God, and his loyalty to his prince, (in both which he was suspected to be a pretender,) that he wished he had a window in his bosom, that whoever would, might look into his heart.

III. He solemnly protests his sincerity; (v.1.) "*I have walked in mine integrity*; my conversation has agreed with my profession, and one part of it has been of a piece with another." It is in vain to boast of our integrity, unless we can make it out, that, by the grace of God, we have walked in our integrity, and that our conversation in the world has been in simplicity and godly sincerity.

He produces here several proofs of his integrity, which encouraged him to trust in the Lord as his righteous Judge, who would patronise and plead his righteous cause, with an assurance that he should come off with reputation, (*Therefore I shall not slide*,) and that they should not prevail, who consulted to cast him down from his excellency, to shake his faith, blemish his name, and prevent his coming to the crown, 62.4. They that are sincere in religion may trust in God, that they shall not slide, that they shall not apostatize from their religion.

1. He had a constant regard to God and to his grace, v.3. (1.) He aimed at God's favour as his end, and chief good; *Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes*. This will be a good evidence of our sincerity, if what we do in religion, we do from a principle of love to God, and good thoughts of him as the best of beings, and the best of friends and benefactors, and from a grateful sense of God's goodness to us in particular, which we have had experience of all our days. If we set God's loving-kindness before us as our pattern, to which we endeavour to conform ourselves, being followers of him that is good in his goodness; (1Pet. 3.13.) if we set it before us as our great engagement and encouragement to our duty, and are afraid of doing any thing to forfeit God's favour, and in care by all means to keep ourselves in his love; this will not only be a good evidence of our integrity, but will have a great influence upon our perseverance in it. (2.) He governed himself by the word of God as his rule. "*I have walked in thy truth*, according to thy law, for thy law is truth." Note, Those only may expect the benefit of God's loving-kindness, that live up to his truths, and his laws that are grounded upon them. Some understand it of his conforming himself to God's example in truth and faithfulness, as well as in goodness and loving-kindness. Those certainly walk well, that are followers of God as dear children.

2. He had no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, nor with the workers of those works, v.4,5. By this it appeared he was truly loyal to his prince, that he never associated with those that were disaffected to his government, with any of those *sons of Belial that despised him*, 1Sam.10.27. He was in none of their cabals, nor joined with them in any of their intrigues; he cursed not the king, no not in his heart. And this also was an evidence of his faithfulness to his God, that he never associated with those who, he had any reason to think, were disaffected to religion, or were open enemies, or false friends, to its interests. Note, Great care to avoid bad company, is both a good evidence of our integrity, and a good means to preserve us in it. Now observe here, (1.) That this part of his protestation looks both backward upon the care he had hitherto taken in this matter, and forward upon the care he would still take. "*I have not sat with them, and I will not go in with them.*" Note, Our good practices hitherto, are then evidences of our integrity, when they are accompanied with resolutions, in God's strength, to persevere in them to the end, and not to draw back; and our good resolutions for the future we may then take the comfort of, when they are the continuation of our good practices hitherto. (2.) That David shunned the company, not only of wicked persons, but of vain persons, that were wholly addicted to mirth and gaiety, and had nothing solid or serious in them. The company of such may perhaps be the more pernicious of the two to a good man, because he will not be so ready to stand upon his guard against the contagion of vanity, as against that of downright wickedness. (3.) That the company of dissemblers is as dangerous company as any other, and as much to be shunned, in prudence as well as piety. Evil-doers pretend friendship to those whom they would decoy into their snares, but they *dissemble; when they speak fair, believe them not*. (4.) Though sometimes he could not avoid being in the company of bad people, yet he would not *go in with them*, he would not choose such for his companions, nor seek an opportunity of acquaintance and converse with them; he might fall in with them, but he would not, by appointment and assignation, go in with them: or, if he happened to be with them, he would not sit with them, he would not continue with them; he would be in their company no longer than his business made it necessary: he would not concur with them, not say as they said, nor do as they did, as they that *sit in the seat of the scornful*, 1.1. He would not sit in counsel with them, upon ways and means to do mischief, nor sit in judgment with them, to condemn the generation of the righteous. (5.) We must not only in our practice avoid bad company, but in our principles and affections we must have an aversion to it. David here says, not only "*I have shunned it*," but "*I have hated it*," 139.21. (6.) The congregation of evil doers, the club, the confederacy of them, is in a special manner hateful to good people. *I have hated ecclesiam malignantium*—

the church of the malignant; so the vulgar Latin reads it. As good men, in concert, make one another better, and are enabled to do so much the more good, so bad men, in combination, make one another worse, and do so much the more mischief. In all this, David was a type of Christ, who, though he received sinners, and ate with them, to instruct them and do them good, yet, otherwise, was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, particularly from the Pharisees, those dissemblers; thus too David was an example to Christians, when they join themselves to Christ, to *save themselves from this untoward generation*, Acts, 2. 40.

6. I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD: 7. That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. 8. LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth. 9. Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men: 10. In whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. 11. But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me. 12. My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the LORD.

In these verses,

I. David produces a further evidence of his integrity, which was the sincere affection he had to the ordinances of God, and the constant care he took about them, and the pleasure he took in them. Hypocrites and dissemblers may indeed be found attending on God's ordinances, as the proud Pharisee went up to the temple to pray with the penitent publican; but it is a good sign of sincerity, if we attend upon them, as David here tells us he did, v. 6. .8.

1. He was very careful and conscientious in his preparation for holy ordinances. *I will wash mine hands in innocency*. He not only refrained from the society of sinners, but kept himself clean from the pollutions of sin, and this with an eye to the place he had among those that compassed God's altar. "I will wash, and so will I compass the altar, knowing that otherwise I shall not be welcome." This is like that, (1 Cor. 11. 28.) *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat*; so prepared. This denotes, (1.) Habitual preparation; "*I will wash my hands in innocency*, I will carefully watch against all sin, and keep my conscience pure from those dead works which defile it, and forbid my drawing nigh to God." See 24. 3, 4. (2.) Actual preparation; it alludes to the ceremony of the priests' washing, when they went in to minister, Exod. 30. 20, 21. Though David was no priest, yet, as every worshipper ought, he would look to the substance of that which the priests were enjoined the shadow of. In our preparations for solemn ordinances, we must not only be able to clear ourselves from the charge of reigning infidelity and hypocrisy, and to protest our innocency of that, (which was signified by *washing the hands*, Deut. 21. 6.) but we must take pains to cleanse ourselves from the spots of remaining iniquity, by renewing our repentance, and making a fresh application of the blood of Christ to our consciences, for the purifying and pacifying of them. He that is washed, that is, in a justified state, has need thus to *wash his feet*, (John, 13. 10.) to wash his hands, to wash them in innocency; he that is penitent, is *pene innocens*—almost innocent; and he that is pardoned, is so far innocent, that his sins shall not be mentioned against him.

2. He was very diligent and serious in his attendance upon them; *I will compass thine altar*; alluding to the custom of the priests, who, while the sacrifice was in offering, walked round the altar, and, probably, the offerers likewise did so at some distance, denoting a diligent regard to what was done, and a dutiful attendance in the service. "*I will compass it*; I will be among the crowds that do compass it, among the thickest of them." David, a man of honour, a man of business, a man of war, thought it

not below him to attend with the multitude on God's altars, and could find time for that attendance. Note, (1.) All God's people will be sure to wait on God's altar, in obedience to his commands, and in pursuance of his favour. Christ is our Altar, not as the altar in the Jewish church, which was fed by them, but an altar that we eat of, and *live upon*, Heb. 13. 10. (2.) It is a pleasant sight to see God's altar compassed, and to see ourselves among them that compass it.

3. In all his attendance on God's ordinances, he aimed at the glory of God, and was much in the thankful praise and adoration of him. He had an eye to the place of worship, as the place where God's honour dwelt, (v. 8.) and therefore made it his business there to honour God, and to give him the glory due to his name; to publish with the voice of thanksgiving all God's wondrous works. God's gracious works, which call for our thanksgiving, are all wondrous works, which call for our admiration. We ought to publish them, and tell of them, for his glory, and the excitement of others to praise him; and we ought to do it with the voice of thanksgiving, as those that are sensible of our obligations, by all ways possible, to acknowledge with gratitude the favours we have received from God.

4. He did this with delight, and from a principle of true affection to God and his institutions. Touching this, he appeals to God, "Lord thou knowest how dearly *I have loved the habitation of thy house*, (v. 8.) the tabernacle where thou art pleased to manifest thy residence among thy people, and receive their homage, the place where thine honour dwells." David was sometimes forced by persecution into the countries of idolaters, and was hindered from attending God's altars, which perhaps his persecutors, that laid him under that restraint, did themselves upbraid him with as his crime. See 1 Sam. 20. 27. "But, Lord," says he, "though I cannot come to the habitation of thine house, I love it, my heart is there, and it is my greatest trouble that I am not there." Note, All that truly love God, truly love the ordinances of God, and therefore love them, because in them he manifests his honour, and they have an opportunity of honouring him. Our Lord Jesus loved his Father's honour, and made it his business to glorify him; he loved the habitation of his house, his church among men, loved it, and gave himself for it, that he might build and consecrate it. Those who love communion with God, and delight in approaching to him, find it to be a constant pleasure, a comfortable evidence of their integrity, and a comfortable earnest of their endless felicity.

II. David, having given proofs of his integrity, earnestly prays, with a humble confidence toward God, (such as they have whose hearts condemn them not,) that he might not fall under the doom of the wicked; (v. 9, 10.) *Gather not my soul with sinners*. Here, 1. David describes these sinners, whom he looked upon to be in a miserable condition, so miserable, that he could not wish the worst enemy he had in the world to be in a worse. "They are bloody men, that thirst after blood, and lie under a great deal of the guilt of blood. They do mischief, and mischief is always in their hands. Though they get by their wickedness, (for their right hand is full of bribes which they have taken to pervert justice,) yet that will make their case never the better; for *what is a man profited, if he gain the world, and lose his soul?*" 2. He dreads having his lot with them; he never loved them, nor associated with them, in this world, and therefore could in faith pray that he might not have his lot with them in the other world. Our souls must shortly be gathered, to return to God that gave them, and will call for them again. See Job, 34. 14. It concerns us to consider whether our souls will then be gathered with saints or with sinners; whether bound in the bundle of life with the Lord for ever, as the souls of the faithful are, (1 Sam. 25. 29.) or bound in the bundle of tares for the fire, Matth. 13. 30. Death gathers us to our people, to those that are our people while we live, whom we choose to associate with, and with whom we cast in our lot, to those death will gather us, and with them we must take our lot, to eternity. Balaam desired to die the death of the righteous. David dreaded dying the death of the wicked; so that both sides are of that mind, which if we be of, and will live up to it, we are happy for ever. Those that will not be companions with sinners

in their mirth, nor eat of their dainties, may in faith pray not to be companions with them in their misery, nor to drink of their cup, their cup of trembling.

III. David, with a holy humble confidence, commits himself to the grace of God, v. 11, 12. 1. He promises that by the grace of God he would persevere in his duty: "*As for me, whatever others do, I will walk in mine integrity.*" Note, When the testimony of our consciences for us, that we have walked in our integrity, is comfortable to us, that should confirm our resolutions to continue therein. 2. He prays for the divine grace, both to enable him to do so, and to give him the comfort of it; "Redeem me out of the hands of my enemies, and be merciful to me, living and dying." Be we ever so confident of our integrity, yet still we must rely upon God's mercy, and the great redemption Christ has wrought out, and pray for the benefit of them. 3. He pleases himself with his steadiness; "*My foot stands in an even place,* where I shall not stumble, and whence I shall not fall." This he speaks, as one that found his resolutions fixed for God and godliness, not to be shaken by the temptations of the world; and his comforts firm in God and his grace, not to be disturbed by the crosses and troubles of the world. 4. He promises himself that he should yet have occasion to praise the Lord; that he should be furnished with matter for praise, that he should have a heart for praises; and that though he was now perhaps banished from public ordinances, yet he should again have an opportunity of blessing God in the congregation of his people. Those that hate the congregation of evil-doers shall be joined to the congregation of the righteous, and join with them in praising God; and it is pleasant doing that in good company; the more the better, it is the more like heaven.

PSALM XXVII.

Some think David penned this psalm, before his coming to the throne, when he was in the midst of his troubles, and, perhaps, upon occasion of the death of his parents; but the Jews think he penned it, when he was old, upon occasion of the wonderful deliverance he had from the sword of the giant, when Abishai succoured him, (2 Sam. 21. 16, 17.) and his people, thereupon, resolved he should never venture his life again in battle, lest he should quench the light of Israel. Perhaps it was not penned upon any particular occasion; but it is very expressive of the pious and devout affections with which gracious souls are carried out toward God at all times, especially in times of trouble. Here is, I. The courage and holy bravery of his faith, v. 1. 3. II. The complacency he took in communion with God, and the benefit he experienced by it, v. 4. 6. III. His desire toward God, and his favour and grace, v. 7. 9, 11, 12. IV. His expectations from God, and the encouragement he gives to others to hope in him, v. 10, 13, 14. And let our hearts be thus affected in singing this psalm.

A psalm of David.

1. **THE LORD** is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When the wicked, *even* mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. 3. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this *will I be* confident. 4. One *thing* have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. 5. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. 6. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.

We may observe here,

I. With what a lively faith David triumphs in God, glories in his holy name, and in the interest he had in him. 1. *The Lord is my light*, David's subjects called him *the light of Israel*, 2 Sam. 21. 17. And he was indeed a burning and a shining Light: but he owns that he shone, as the moon does, with a borrowed light; what light God darted upon him, reflected upon them; *The Lord is my Light*. God is a Light to his people, to shew them the way when they are in doubt, to comfort and rejoice their hearts when they are in sorrow. It is in his light that they now walk on in their way, and in his light they hope to see light for ever. 2. "He is my Salvation, in whom I am safe, and by whom I shall be saved." 3. "He is *the Strength of my life*; not only the Protector of my exposed life, who keeps me from being slain, but the Strength of my frail, weak, life, who keeps me from fainting, sinking, and dying away." God, who is a believer's Light, is the Strength of his life; not only by whom, but in whom, he lives and moves. In God therefore let us strengthen ourselves.

II. With what an undaunted courage he triumphs over his enemies; no fortitude like that of faith. If God be for him, who can be against him? *Whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid?* If Omnipotence be his guard, he has no cause to fear; if he knows it to be so, he has no disposition to fear. If God be his Light, he fears no shades; if God be his Salvation, he fears no colours. He triumphs over his enemies that were already routed, v. 2. His enemies came upon him, to eat up his flesh; aiming at no less, and assured of that; but they fell; not, "He smote them, and they fell," but, "They stumbled and fell;" they were so confounded and weakened, that they could not go on with their enterprise. Thus they that came to take Christ, with a word's speaking, were made to stagger, and fall to the ground, John, 18. 6. The ruin of some of the enemies of God's people is an earnest of the complete conquest of them all. And therefore, these being fallen, he is fearless of the rest; "Though they be numerous, a host of them; though they be daring, and their attempts threatening; though they encamp against me, an army against one man; though they wage war upon me, yet my heart shall not fear. Hosts cannot hurt us, if the Lord of hosts protect us; nay, in this assurance that God is for me, *I will be confident.*" Two things he will be confident of; 1. That he shall be safe; "If God is my Salvation, in the time of trouble he shall hide me; he shall set me out of danger and above the fear of it." God will not only find out a shelter for his people in distress, as he did, (Jer. 36. 26.) but he will himself be their Hiding-Place, Ps. 32. 7. His providence shall, it may be, keep them safe; however, his grace shall make them easy. His name is the strong tower into which by faith they run, Prov. 18. 10. "He shall hide me, not in the strong holds of En-gedi, (1 Sam. 23. 29.) but in the secret of his tabernacle." The gracious presence of God, his power, his promise, his readiness to hear prayer, the witness of his Spirit in the hearts of his people; these are the secret of his tabernacle, and in these the saints find cause for that holy security and serenity of mind in which they dwell at ease. This sets them upon a rock which will not sink under them, but on which they find firm footing for their hopes; nay, it sets them up upon a rock on high, where the raging, threatening, billows of a stormy sea cannot touch them; it is a rock that is *higher than we*, 61. 2. 2. That he shall be victorious; (v. 6.) "*Now shall my head be lifted up above mine enemies*; not only so as that they cannot reach it with their darts, but so as that I shall be exalted to bear rule over them." David here, by faith in the promise of God, triumphs before the victory, and is as sure, not only of the laurel, but of the crown, as if it were already upon his head.

III. With what a gracious earnestness he prays for a constant communion with God in holy ordinances, v. 4. It greatly encouraged his confidence in God, that he was conscious to himself of an entire affection to God and to his ordinances, and that he was in his element, when in the way of his duty, and in the way of increasing his acquaintance with him. If our hearts can witness for us, that we delight in God above any creature, that may

encourage us to depend upon him: for it is a sign we are of those whom he protects as his own. Or it may be taken thus. He desired to dwell in the house of the Lord, that there he might be safe from the enemies that surrounded him. Finding himself surrounded by threatening hosts, he does not say, "*One thing have I desired*, in order to my safety, that I may have my army augmented to such a number," or that I may be master of such a city or such a castle; but "*that I may dwell in the house of the Lord*, and then I am well."

Observe, 1. What it is he desires; *to dwell in the house of the Lord*. In the courts of God's house the priests had their lodgings, and David wished he had been one of them. Disdainfully as some look upon God's ministers, one of the greatest and best of kings that ever was, would gladly have taken his lot, have taken his lodging, among them. Or rather, he desires that he might duly and constantly attend on the public service of God, with other faithful Israelites, according as the duty of every day required. *Therefore* he longed to see an end of the wars in which he was now engaged; not that he might live at ease in his own palace, but that he have might leisure and liberty for that constant attendance in God's courts. Thus Hezekiah, a genuine son of David, wished for the recovery of his health, not that he might go up to the thrones of judgment, but that he might *go up to the house of the Lord*, Isa. 38. 22. Note, All God's children desire to dwell in God's house; where should they dwell else? Not to sojourn there as a wayfaring man, that turns aside to tarry but for a night; or to dwell there for a time only, as the servant that abides not in the house for ever; but to dwell there all the days of their life; for there the son abides ever. Do we hope that the praising of God will be the blessedness of our eternity? Surely then we ought to make it the business of our time.

2. How earnestly he covets this; "*This is the one thing I have desired of the Lord*, and which I will seek after." If he were to ask but one thing of God, this should be it; for this he had at heart more than any thing. He desired it as a good thing; he desired it of the Lord as his gift, and a token of his favour. And, having fixed his desire upon this as the one thing needful, he sought after it; he continued to pray for it, and contrived his affairs so as that he might have this liberty and opportunity. Note, They that truly desire communion with God, will set themselves with all diligence to seek after it, Prov. 18. 1.

3. What he had in his eye in it; he would dwell in God's house, not for the plenty of good entertainment that was there, in the feasts upon the sacrifices, nor for the music and good singing that were there, but *but to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple*. He desired to attend in God's courts, (1.) That he might have the pleasure of meditating upon God. He knew something of the beauty of the Lord, the infinite and transcendent amiableness of the Divine Being, and his perfections; his holiness is his beauty; (110.3.) his goodness is his beauty, Zech. 9. 17. The harmony of all his attributes is the beauty of his nature. With an eye of faith and holy love, we with pleasure behold this beauty, and observe more and more in it, that is amiable, that is admirable. When, with fixedness of thought, and a holy flame of devout affections, we contemplate God's glorious excellencies, and entertain ourselves with the tokens of his peculiar favour to us, this is that view of the beauty of the Lord which David here covets; and it is to be had in his ordinances, for there he manifests himself. (2.) That he might have the satisfaction of being instructed in his duty; for concerning this he would *inquire in God's temple*; *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* For the sake of these two things, he desired that one thing, *to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life*; for blessed are they that do so, they will be still praising him, (84. 4.) both in speaking to him, and in hearing from him. Mary's sitting at Christ's feet to hear his word, Christ calls the one thing needful, and the good part.

4. What advantage he promised himself, could he but have a place in God's house; (1.) There he should be quiet and easy; there troubles would not find him, for he should be hid in secret;

there troubles would not reach him, for he should be set on high, v. 5. Joash, one of David's seed, was hid in the house of the Lord six years, and there, not only preserved from the sword, but reserved to the crown, 2 Kings, 11. 3. The temple was thought a safe place for Nehemiah to abscond in, Neh. 6. 10. But the safety of believers is not in the walls of the temple, but in the God of the temple, and their comfort in communion with him. (2.) There he should be pleasant and cheerful; there he would offer sacrifice of joy, v. 6. For God's work is its own wages; there *he would sing, yea, he would sing praises to the Lord*. Note, Whatever is the matter of our joy, ought to be the matter of our praise. And when we attend upon God in holy ordinances, we ought to be much in joy and praise. It is for the glory of our God, that we should sing in his ways: and whenever God lifts us up above our enemies, we ought to exalt him in our praises. *Thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph*, 2 Cor. 2. 14.

7. Hear, O LORD, *when I cry with my voice*: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. 8. *When thou saidst*, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek. 9. Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. 10. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up. 11. Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. 12. Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty. 13. *I had fainted*, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. 14. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

David, in these verses, expresses,

1. His desire toward God, in many petitions. If he cannot now go up to the house of the Lord; yet, wherever he is, he can find a way to the throne of grace by prayer.

1. He humbly bespeaks, because he firmly believes he shall have, a gracious audience; "*Hear, O Lord, when I cry*, not only with my heart, but, as one in earnest, with my voice too." He bespeaks also an answer of peace, which he expects, not from his own merit, but God's goodness; *Have mercy upon me, and answer me*, v. 7. If we pray and believe, God will graciously hear and answer.

2. He takes hold of the kind invitation God had given him to this duty, v. 8. It is presumption for us to come into the presence of the King of kings, uncalled, nor can we draw near with any assurance, unless he *hold forth to us the golden sceptre*. David therefore, going to pray, fastens, in his thoughts, upon the call God had given him to the throne of his grace, and reverently touches, as it were, the top of the golden sceptre which was thereby held out to him. *My heart said unto thee*, (so it begins in the original,) or *of thee*, *Seek ye my face*; he first revolved that, and preached that over again to himself; (and that is the best preaching, it is hearing twice what God speaks once;) *thou saidst*, (so it may be supplied,) *Seek ye my face*; and then he returns what he had so meditated upon, in this pious resolution, *Thy face, Lord, will I seek*. Observe here, (1.) The true nature of religious worship, it is seeking the face of God; this it is in God's precept, *Seek ye my face*. He would have us seek him for himself, and make his favour our chief good; and this it is in the saint's purpose and desire, "*Thy face, Lord, will I seek*; and nothing less will I take up with." The opening of his hand will satisfy the desire of other living things; (145. 16.) but it is only the shining of his face, that will satisfy the desire of a living soul, 4. 6, 7.

(2.) The kind invitation of a gracious God to this duty; *Thou saidst, Seek ye my face*; it is not only a permission, but a precept; and his commanding us to seek, implies a promise of finding; for he is too kind to say, *Seek ye me, in vain*. God calls us to seek his face, in our conversion to him and in our converse with him. He calls us, by the whispers of his Spirit to and with our spirits, to seek his face; he calls us, by his word, by the stated returns of opportunities for his worship, and by special providences, merciful and afflictive. When we are foolishly making our court to lying vanities, God is, in love to us, calling us in him to seek our own mercies. (3.) The ready compliance of a gracious soul with this invitation; the call is immediately returned; *My heart answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek*. The call was general, "Seek ye my face;" but, like David, we must apply it to ourselves, "*I will seek it*." The word does us no good, when we transfer it to others, and do not ourselves accept the exhortation. The call was, *Seek ye my face*; the answer is express, *Thy face, Lord, will I seek*; like that, (Jer. 3. 22.) *Behold, we come unto thee*. A gracious heart readily echoes to the call of a gracious God, being made willing in the day of his power.

3. He is very particular in his requests.

(1.) For the favour of God, that he might not be shut out from that; (v. 9.) "*Thy face, Lord, will I seek*, in obedience to thy command; therefore *hide not thy face from me*; let me never want the reviving sense of thy favour; love me, and let me know that thou lovest me; *put not thy servant away in anger*." He owns he had deserved God's displeasure, but begs that, however God might correct him, he would not cast him away from his presence; for what is hell, but that?

(2.) For the continuance of his presence with him; "Thou hast been my Help formerly, and *thou art the God of my salvation*; and therefore whither shall I go but to thee? *Oh leave me not, neither forsake me*; withdraw not the operations of thy power from me, for then I am helpless; withdraw not the tokens of thy good-will to me, for then I am comfortless."

(3.) For the benefit of a divine guidance; (v. 11.) "*Teach me thy way, O Lord*; give me to understand the meaning of thy providences toward me, and make them plain to me. And give me to know my duty in every doubtful case, that I may not mistake it, but may walk rightly, and that I may not do it with hesitation, but may walk surely." It is not policy, but plainness, that is, downright honesty, that will direct us into, and keep us in, the way of our duty. He begs to be guided in a plain path, because of his *enemies*; or, as the margin reads it, his *observers*. His enemies watched for his halting, that they might find occasion against him. Saul eyed David, 1 Sam. 18. 9. This quickened him to pray, "Lord, lead me in a plain path, that they may have nothing ill, or nothing that looks ill, to lay to my charge."

(4.) For the benefit of a divine protection; (v. 12.) "*Deliver me not over to the will of mine enemies*. Lord, let them not gain their point, for it aims at my life, and no less, and in such a way as that I have no fence against them, but thy power over their consciences; for *false witnesses are risen up against me*, that aim further than to take away my reputation or estate, for they breathe out cruelty, it is the blood, the precious blood, they thirst after." Herein, David was a type of Christ; for false witnesses rose up against him, and such as breathed out cruelty; but though he was delivered into their wicked hands, he was not delivered over to their will, for they could not prevent his exaltation.

II. He expresses his dependence upon God.

1. That he would help and succour him when all other helps and succours failed him; (v. 10.) "*When my father and my mother forsake me*, the nearest and dearest friends I have in the world, from whom I may expect most relief, and with most reason, when they either die, or are at a distance from me, or are disabled to help me in the time of need, or are unkind to me or unmindful of me, and will not help me when I am as helpless as ever poor orphan was, that was left fatherless and motherless, then I know *the Lord will take me up*, as a poor wandering sheep is taken up, and saved from perishing." His time to help those that trust in him, is, when all other helpers fail, when it is most for his honour

and their comfort; with him the fatherless find mercy. This promise has often been fulfilled in the letter of it. Forsaken orphans have been taken under the especial care of the Divine Providence, which has raised up relief and friends for them, in a way that one would not have expected. God is a surer and better Friend than our earthly parents are, or can be.

2. That in due time he should see the displays of his goodness, v. 13. He believed he should *see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*; if he had not done so, he should have fainted under his afflictions. Even the best saints are subject to faint, when their troubles become grievous and tedious; their spirits are overwhelmed, and their flesh and heart fail; but then faith is a sovereign cordial, it keeps them from desponding under their burthen, and from despairing of relief, keeps them hoping, and praying, and waiting, and keeps up in them good thoughts of God, and the comfortable enjoyment of themselves. But what was it, the belief of which kept David from fainting?—*That he should see the goodness of the Lord*, which now seemed at a distance. They that walk by faith in the goodness of the Lord, shall in due time walk in the sight of that goodness. This he hopes to see in the land of the living, that is, (1.) In this world, that he should outlive his troubles, and not perish under them. It is his comfort, not so much that he shall see the land of the living, as that he shall see the goodness of God in it; for that is the comfort of all creature-comforts to a gracious soul. (2.) In the land of Canaan, and in Jerusalem, where the lively oracles were; in comparison with the heathen that were dead in sin, the land of Israel might fitly be called *the land of the living*; there God was known, and there David hoped to see his goodness; see 2 Sam. 15. 25, 26. Or, (3.) In heaven. It is that land alone that may truly be called *the land of the living*, where there is no more death; this earth is the land of the dying. There is nothing like the believing hope of eternal life, the foresights of that glory, and foretastes of those pleasures, to keep us from fainting under all the calamities of this present time.

3. That in the mean time he should be strengthened to bear up under his burthens; (v. 14.) whether he says it to himself, or to his friends, it comes all to one, this is that which encourages him. He shall strengthen thy heart, shall sustain the spirit, and then the spirit shall sustain the infirmity. In that strength, (1.) Keep close to God and to your duty. Wait on the Lord by faith, and prayer, and a humble resignation to his will, *I say, on the Lord*; whatever you do, grow not remiss in your attendance upon God. (2.) Keep up your spirits in the midst of the greatest dangers and difficulties. *Be of good courage*; let your hearts be fixed, trusting in God, and your minds stayed upon him, and then let none of these things move you. They that wait upon the Lord have reason to be of good courage.

PSALM XXVIII.

The former part of this psalm is the prayer of a saint militant, and now in distress, (v. 1. .3.) to which is added the doom of God's implacable enemies, v. 4, 5. The latter part of the psalm is the thanksgiving of a saint triumphant, and delivered out of his distresses, (v. 6. .8.) to which is added a prophetic prayer for all God's faithful loyal subjects, v. 9. So that it is hard to say which of these two conditions David was in, when he penned it. Some think he was now in trouble seeking God, but, at the same time, preparing to praise him for his deliverance, and by faith giving him thanks for it, before it was wrought. Others think he was now in triumph, but remembered, and recorded for his own and others' benefit, the prayers he made when he was in affliction, that the mercy might relish the better, when it appeared to be an answer to them.

A psalm of David.

1. **U**NTO thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit. 2. Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle. 3. Draw me not away with the

wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, which speak peace to their neighbours, but mischief is in their hearts. 4. Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert. 5. Because they regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.

In these verses, David is very earnest in prayer.

I. He prays that God would graciously hear and answer him, now that, in his distress, he called upon him, v. 1, 2. Observe his faith in prayer; *O Lord, my Rock*; denoting his belief of God's power, "He is a Rock;" and his dependence upon that power, "He is *my* Rock, on whom I build my hope." Observe his fervency in prayer; *"To thee will I cry*, as one in earnest, being ready to sink, unless thou come in with seasonable succour." And observe how solicitous he is to obtain an answer; "Be not silent to me, as one angry at my prayers; (80.4.) Lord, speak to me, answer me *with good words and comfortable words*; (Zech. 1. 13.) though the thing I pray for be not given me, yet let God speak to me joy and gladness, and make me to hear it. Lord, speak for me, in answer to my prayers; plead my cause, command deliverances for me, and thus hear and answer the voice of my supplications."

Two things he pleads; 1. The sad despair he should be in, if God slighted him; "If thou be silent to me, and I have not the tokens of thy favour, I am like them that go down into the pit—I am a dead man, lost and undone; if God be not my Friend, appear not to me, and appear not for me, my hope and my help are perished." Nothing can be so cutting, so killing, to a gracious soul, as the want of God's favour, and the sense of his displeasure. *I shall be like them that go down to hell*; (so some understand it;) for what is the misery of the damned, but this, that God is for ever silent to them, and deaf to their cry? Those are in some measure qualified for God's favour, and may expect it, who are thus possessed with a dread of his wrath, and to whom his frowns are worse than death. 2. The good hopes he had, that God would favour him; *I lift up my hands towards thy holy oracle*; which denotes, not only an earnest desire, but an earnest expectation, thence to receive an answer of peace. The most holy place within the veil, is here, as elsewhere, called *the oracle*; there the ark and the mercy-seat were, there God was said to *dwell between the cherubims*, and thence he spake to his people, Numb. 7. 89. That was a type of Christ, and it is to him that we must lift up our eyes and hands, for through him all good comes from God to us. It was also a figure of heaven; (Heb. 9. 24.) and from God, as our Father in heaven, we are taught to expect an answer to our prayers. The scriptures are called *the oracles of God*, and to them we must have an eye, in our prayers and expectations. There is the word on which God hath caused and encouraged us to hope.

II. He deprecates the doom of wicked people, as before; (26.9.) "*Gather not my soul with sinners. Lord, I attend thy holy oracle, draw me not away from that, with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity*;" (v. 3.) 1. "Save me from being entangled in the snares they have laid for me; they flatter and cajole me, and speak peace to me, but they have a design upon me, for mischief is in their heart, they aim to disturb me, nay, to destroy me. Lord, suffer me not to be drawn away and ruined by their cursed plots; for they have, can have, no power, no success, against me, except it be given them from above." 2. "Save me from being infected with their sins, and from doing as they do. Let me not be drawn away by their fallacious arguments, or their allurements, from thy holy oracle, (where I desire to dwell all the days of my life,) to practise any wicked works;" see 141. 4. "Lord, never leave me to myself, to use such arts of deceit and treachery for my safety, as they use for my ruin. Let no event of providence be an invincible temptation to me, to draw me either

into the imitation, or into the interest, of wicked people." Good men dread the way of sinners; the best are sensible of the danger they are in of being drawn aside into it; and therefore we should all pray earnestly to God for his grace to keep us in our integrity. 3. "Save me from being involved in their doom; let not me be led forth with the workers of iniquity, for I am none of them that speak peace, while war is in their hearts." Note, Those that are careful not to partake with sinners in their sins, have reason to hope that they shall not partake with them in their plagues, Rev. 18. 4.

III. He imprecates the just judgments of God upon the workers of iniquity; (v. 4.) *Give them according to their deeds*. This is not the language of passion or revenge, nor is it inconsistent with the duty of praying for our enemies. But, 1. Thus he would shew how far he was from complying with the workers of iniquity, and with what good reason he had begged not to be drawn away with them, because he was convinced that they could not be made more miserable than to be dealt with according to their deeds. 2. Thus he would express his zeal for the honour of God's justice in governing the world; "Lord, they think all well that they do, and justify themselves in their wicked practices; Lord, *give them after the work of their hands*, and so undeceive those about them, who think there is no harm in what they do, because it goes unpunished," 94. 1, 2. 3. This prayer is a prophecy, that God will, sooner or later, render to all impenitent sinners according to their deserts. If what has been done amiss be not undone by repentance, there will certainly come a reckoning day, when God will render to every man who persists in his evil deeds, according to them. It is a prophecy particularly of the destruction of destroyers; "*They speak peace to their neighbours, but mischief is in their hearts*; Lord, *give them according to their deeds*, let the spoilers be spoiled, and let them be treacherously dealt with, who have thus dealt treacherously;" see Isa. 33. 1. Rev. 18. 6.—13. 10. Observe, He foretells that God will reward them, not only according to their deeds, but according to the wickedness of their endeavours; for sinners shall be reckoned with, not only for the mischief they have done, but for the mischief they would have done, which they designed, and did what they could to effect. And if God go by this rule, in dealing with the wicked, surely he will do so, in dealing with the righteous, and will reward them, not only for the good they have done, but for the good they have endeavoured to do, though they could not compass it.

IV. He foretells their destruction, for their contempt of God and his hand; (v. 5.) "*Because they regard not the works of the Lord*, and the operations of his hands, by which he manifests himself and speaks to the children of men; he shall destroy them in this world and in the other, and not build them up." Note, A stupid regardlessness of the works of God is the cause of the sin of sinners, and so becomes the cause of their ruin. Why do men question the being or attributes of God, but because they do not duly regard his handy-works, which declare his glory, and in which the invisible things of him are clearly seen? Why do men forget God, and live without him, nay, affront God, and live in rebellion against him, but because they consider not the instances of that wrath of his which is revealed *from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*? Why do the enemies of God's people hate and persecute them, and devise mischief against them, but because they regard not the works God has wrought for his church, by which he has made it appear how dear it is to him? See Isa. 5. 12.

In singing this, we must arm ourselves against all temptations to join with the workers of iniquity, and animate ourselves against all the troubles we may be threatened with by the workers of iniquity.

6. Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications. 7. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him. 8. The LORD is their strength, and he is the saving

strength of his anointed. 9. Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever.

In these verses,

I. David gives God thanks for the answer given to his prayers, as affectionately as, a few verses before, he had begged it, v. 6. *Blessed be the Lord.* How soon are the saints' sorrow turned into songs, and their prayers into praises! It was in faith that David prayed, (v. 2.) *Hear the voice of my supplications*; and by the same faith he gives thanks, (v. 6.) that *God had heard the voice of his supplications*. Note, 1. They that pray in faith may rejoice in hope. "He hath heard me, (graciously accepted me,) and I am as sure of a real answer as if I had it already." 2. What we win by prayer, we must wear with praise; has God heard our supplications? Let us then bless his name.

II. He encourages himself to hope in God for the perfecting of every thing that concerned him; having given to God the glory of his grace, (v. 6.) he is humbly bold to take the comfort of it, v. 7. This is the method of attaining peace: let it begin with praise that it is attainable. Let us first bless God, and then bless ourselves. Observe, 1. His dependence upon God; "The Lord is my Strength, to support me, and carry me on, though all my services and sufferings. He is my Shield, to protect me from all the malicious designs of my enemies against me. I have chosen him to be so, I have always found him so, and I expect he will still be so." 2. His experience of the benefit of that dependence; "My heart trusted in him, and in his power and promise; and it has not been in vain to do so, for I am helped, I have been often helped; not only God has given to me, in his due time, the help I trusted to him for, but my very trust in him has helped me, in the mean time, and kept me from fainting," 27. 13. The very actings of faith are present aids to a drooping spirit, and often help it at a dead lift. 3. His improvement of this experience. He had the pleasure of it; *therefore my heart greatly rejoices*. The joy of a believer is seated in the heart, while, in the laughter of the fool, the heart is sorrowful. It is great joy, joy unspeakable, and full of glory. The heart that truly believes shall in due time greatly rejoice; it is joy and peace in believing that we are to expect. God shall have the praise of it; when *my heart greatly rejoices, with my song will I praise him*. Thus must we express our gratitude, it is the least we can do; and others will hereby be invited and encouraged to trust in him too.

III. He pleases himself with the interest which all good people, through Christ, have in God; (v. 8.) "*The Lord is their Strength*; not mine only, but the Strength of every believer." Note, The saints rejoice in their friends' comforts as well as their own; for as we have not the less benefit from the light of the sun, so neither from the light of God's countenance, for others' sharing therein; for we are sure there is enough for all, and enough for each. This is our communion with all saints, that God is their Strength and our's; Christ their Lord and our's, 1 Cor. 1. 2. He is their Strength, the Strength of all Israel, because he is the saving Strength of his anointed, that is, 1. Of David in the type. God, in strengthening him that was their king, and fought their battles, strengthened the whole kingdom. He calls himself *God's anointed*, because it was the unction he had received, that exposed him to the envy of his enemies, and therefore entitled him to the divine protection. 2. Of Christ, his Anointed, his Messiah, in the anti-type. God was his saving Strength, qualified him for his undertaking, and carried him through it; see 89. 21. Isa. 49. 5.—50. 7, 9. And so he becomes their Strength, the Strength of all the saints; he strengthened him that is the church's Head, and from him diffuses strength to all the members; has commanded his strength, and so *strengthens what he has wrought for us*, 68. 28.—80. 17, 18.

IV. He concludes with a short, but comprehensive, prayer for the church of God, v. 9. He prays for Israel, not as his people, "*save my people, and bless mine inheritance*," though they were *no*, but, "*thine*." God's interest in them, lay nearer his heart

than his own; *We are thy people*, is a good plea, Isa. 64. 9.—63. 19. *I am thine, save me*. God's people are his inheritance, dear to him, and precious in his eyes; what little glory he has from this world, he has from them. *The Lord's portion is his people*. That which he begs of God for them, is, 1. That he would save them from their enemies, and the dangers they were exposed to. 2. That he would bless them with all good, flowing from his favour, in performance of his promise, and amounting to a happiness for them. 3. That he would feed them; bless them with plenty, and especially the plenty of his ordinances, which are food to the soul. *Rule them*; so the magin. "Direct their counsels and actions aright, and overrule their affairs for good. Feed them and rule them; set pastors, set rulers, over them, that shall do their office with wisdom and understanding." 4. That he would lift them up for ever; lift them up out of their troubles and distresses; and do this, not only for those of that age, but for his people in every age to come, even to the end. "Lift them up into thy glorious kingdom, lift them up as high as heaven." There, and there only, will the saints be lifted up for ever, never more to sink, or be depressed. Observe, Those, and those only, whom God feeds and rules, who are willing to be taught, and guided, and governed, by him, shall be saved, and blessed, and lifted up for ever.

PSALM XXIX.

It is the probable conjecture of some very good interpreters, that David penned this psalm upon occasion, and just at the time, of a great storm of thunder, lightning, and rain; as the eighth psalm was his meditation in a moon-shine night, and the nineteenth in a sun-shine morning. It is good to take occasion, from the sensible operations of God's power in the kingdom of nature, to give glory to him. So composed was David, and so cheerful, even in a dreadful tempest, when others trembled, that then he penned this psalm; for, though the earth be removed, yet will we not fear. I. He calls upon the great ones of the world to give glory to God, v. 1, 2. II. To convince them of the greatness of that God whom they were to adore, he takes notice of his power and terror in the thunder, and lightning, and thunder-showers; (v. 3. 9.) his sovereign dominion over the world; (v. 10.) and his special favour to his church, v. 11. Great and high thoughts of God should fill us, in singing this psalm.

A Psalm of David.

1. **G**IVE unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. 2. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. 3. The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. 4. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. 5. The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. 6. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. 7. The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire. 8. The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness; the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. 9. The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory. 10. The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever. 11. The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.

In this psalm, we have,

I. A demand of the homage of the great men of the earth to be paid to the great God. Every clap of thunder David interpreted as a call to himself, and other princes, to give glory to the great God. Observe, 1. Who they are, that are called to this duty;

"O ye mighty, (v. 1.) ye sons of the mighty, who have power, and on whom that power is devolved by succession and inheritance, who have royal blood running in your veins." It is much for the honour of the great God, that the great men of this world should pay their homage to him; and they are bound to do it, not only because, high as they are, he is infinitely above them, and therefore they must vail to him, but because they have their power from him, and are to use it for him, and this tribute of acknowledgement they owe to him for it. 2. How often this call is repeated; *Give unto the Lord*, and again, and a third time, *Give unto the Lord*. This intimates, that the mighty men are backward to this duty, and are with difficulty persuaded to it; but that it is of great consequence to the interests of God's kingdom among men, that princes should heartily espouse them. Jerusalem flourishes, when the *kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it*, Rev. 21. 24. 3. What they are called to; to give unto the Lord; not as if he needed any thing, or could be benefited by any gifts of our's, or as if we had any thing to give him that is not his own already; *Who hath first given to him?* But the recognition of his glory, and of his dominion over us, he is pleased to interpret as a gift to him; "*Give unto the Lord your own selves*, in the first place, and then your services; *give unto the Lord glory and strength*, acknowledge his glory and strength, and give praise to him as a God of infinite majesty, and irresistible power; and what glory and strength he has, by his providence, intrusted you with, offer it to him, to be used for his honour in his service. Give him your crowns, let them be laid at his feet; give him your sceptres, your swords, your keys; put all into his hand, that you, in the use of them, may be to him for a name and a praise." Princes value themselves by their glory and strength; these they must ascribe to God, owning him to be infinitely more glorious and powerful than they.

This demand of homage from the mighty, may be looked upon as directed either to the grandees of David's own kingdom, the peers of the realm, the princes of the tribes, (and it is to excite them to a more diligent and constant attendance at God's altars, in which he had observed them very remiss,) or to the neighbouring kings, whom he by his sword had made tributaries to Israel, and now would persuade to become tributaries to the God of Israel. Crowned heads must bow before the King of kings. What is here said to the mighty, is said to all, *Worship God*; it is the sum and substance of the everlasting gospel, Rev. 14. 6, 7. Now we have here, (1.) The nature of religious worship; it is *giving to the Lord the glory due to his name*, v. 2. God's name is that whereby he has made himself known. There is a glory due to his name; it is impossible that we should give him all the glory due to his name; when we have said and done our best for the honour of God's name, still we come infinitely short of the merit of the subject; but, when we answer that revelation which he has made of himself with suitable affections and adorations, then we give him some of that glory which is due to his name. If we would, in hearing and praying, and other acts of devotion, receive grace from God, we must make it our business to give glory to God. (2.) The rule of the performance of religious exercises; *Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness*; which denotes, [1.] The Object of our worship; the glorious Majesty of God is called *the beauty of holiness*, 2 Chron. 20. 21. In the worship of God, we must have an eye to his beauty, and adore him, not only as infinitely awful, and therefore to be feared above all, but as infinitely amiable, and therefore to be loved and delighted in above all; especially we must have an eye to the beauty of his holiness; this the angels fasten upon in their praises, Rev. 4. 8. Or, [2.] The place of worship. The sanctuary then was the *beauty of holiness*, 48. 1, 2. Jer. 17. 12. The beauty of the sanctuary was, the exact agreement of the worship there performed, with the divine appointment—the pattern in the mount. Now, under the gospel, solemn assemblies of Christians (which purity is the beauty of) are the places where God is to be worshipped. Or, [3.] The manner of worship. We must be holy in all our religious performances, devoted to God, and to his will and glory. There is a beauty in holiness, and it is that which puts an acceptable beauty upon all the acts of worship.

II. Good reason given for this demand. We shall see ourselves

bound to give glory to God, if we consider, 1. His sufficiency in himself, intimated in his name *Jehovah, I am that I am*; which repeated here no less than eighteen times in this short psalm, twice in every verse but three, and once in two of those three; I do not recollect that there is the like in all the book of psalms. Let the mighty ones of the earth know him by this name, and give him the glory due to it. 2. His sovereignty over all things. Let those that rule over men, know there is a God that rules over them, that rules over all. The psalmist here sets forth God's dominion.

(1.) In the kingdom of nature. In the wonderful effects of natural causes, and the operations of the powers of nature, we ought to take notice of God's glory and strength, which we are called upon to ascribe to him; in the thunder, and lightning, and rain, we may see,

[1.] His glory. It is the God of glory that thunders, v. 3. It is God that thunders, it is the *noise of his voice*, (Job, 37. 2.) and it speaks him a God of glory; so awful is the sound of the thunder, and so bright the flash of its companion, the lightning; to the hearing and to the sight nothing is more affecting than these, as if by those two learning senses God would give such proofs of his glory to the minds of men, as should leave the most stupid inexcusable. Some observe, that there were then some particular reasons why thunder should be called *the voice of the Lord*; not only because it comes from above, is not under the direction or foresight of any man, speaks loud, and reaches far, but because God often spake in thunder, particularly at mount Sinai, and by thunder discomfited the enemies of Israel. To speak it the voice of the God of glory, it is here said to be *upon the waters*, upon many waters; (v. 3.) it reaches over the vast ocean, the waters under the firmament; it rattles among the thick clouds, the waters above the firmament. Every one that hears the thunder, (his ears being made to tingle with it,) will own that *the voice of the Lord is full of majesty*, (29. 4.) enough to make the highest humble—for none can *thunder with a voice like him*, and the proudest tremble—for if his voice be so terrible, what is his arm? Every time we hear it thunder, let our hearts be thereby filled with great, and high, and honourable, thoughts of God, in the holy adorings and admirings of whom the power of godliness does so much consist. O Lord our God, thou art very great!

[2.] His power; (v. 4.) *The voice of the Lord is powerful*, as appears by the effects of it; for it works wonders; they that write natural histories relate the prodigious effects of thunder and lightning, even out of the ordinary course of natural causes, which must be resolved into the omnipotence of the God of nature. First, Trees have been rent and split by thunderbolts; (v. 5, 6.) *The voice of the Lord*, in the thunder, often brake the cedars, even those of Lebanon, the strongest, the stateliest. Some understand it of the violent winds which shook the cedars, and sometimes tore off their aspiring tops. Earthquakes also shook the ground itself, on which the trees grew, and made Lebanon and Sirion to dance; the wilderness of Kadesh also was in like manner shaken, (v. 8.) the trees by winds, the ground by earthquakes, and both by thunders, of which I incline rather to understand it. The learned Dr. Hammond understands it of the consternation and conquest of the neighbouring kingdoms that warred with Israel, and opposed David; as the Syrians, whose country lay near the forest of Lebanon, the Amorites that bordered on mount Hermon, and the Moabites and Ammonites that lay about the wilderness of Kadesh. Secondly, Fires have been kindled by lightnings, and houses and churches thereby consumed; hence we read of hot thunderbolts; (78. 48.) accordingly, the voice of the Lord, in the thunder, is here said to *divide the flames of fire*, (v. 7.) to scatter them upon the earth, as God sees fit to direct them, and do execution by them. Thirdly, The terror of thunder makes the hinds to calve sooner, and some think more easily, than otherwise they would. The hind is a timorous creature, and much affected with the noise of thunder; and no marvel, when sometimes proud and stout men have been made to tremble at it. The emperor Caligula would hide himself under his bed when it thundered. Horace the poet owns that he was reclaimed from atheism by the terror of thunder and lightning, which he describes somewhat like this here—

lib. 1. ode 34. The thunder is said here to *discover the forest*, that is, it so terrifies the wild beasts of the forest, that they quit the dens and thickets in which they hid themselves, and so are discovered. Or it throws down the trees, and so discovers the ground that was shaded by them. Whenever it thunders, let us think of this psalm; and whenever we sing this psalm, let us think of the dreadful thunder-claps we have sometimes heard, and thus bring God's word and his works together, that by both we may be directed and quickened to give unto him the glory due unto his name; and let us bless him that there is another voice of his beside this dreadful one, by which God now speaks to us, even the still small voice of his gospel, the terror of which shall not make us afraid.

(2.) In the *kingdom of providence*, v. 10. God is to be praised as the Governor of the world of mankind. He *sits upon the flood, he sits King for ever*. He not only sits at rest in the enjoyment of himself, but he sits as King in the throne which he has *prepared in the heavens*, (103. 19.) where he takes cognizance of, and gives orders about, all the affairs of the children of men, and does all according to his will, according to the counsel of his will. Observe, [1.] The power of his kingdom; *He sits upon the flood*. As he has founded the earth, so he has founded his own throne, upon the floods, 24. 2. The ebbings and flowings of this lower world, and the tosses and revolutions of the affairs in it, give not the least shake to the repose or to the counsels of the Eternal Mind. The opposition of his enemies is compared to the floods, (93. 3, 4.) but the Lord sits upon it; he crushes it, conquers it, and completes his own purposes, in despite of all the devices that are in men's hearts. The word here translated *the flood*, is never used but concerning Noah's flood, and therefore some think that it is which is here spoken of. God did sit upon that flood, as a Judge executing the sentence of his justice upon the world of the ungodly, that was swept away by it. And he still sits upon the flood, restraining the waters of Noah, that they turn not again to cover the earth, according to his promise never to *destroy the earth any more by a flood*, Gen. 9. 11. Isa. 54. 9. [2.] The perpetuity of his kingdom; *He sits King for ever*; no period can, or shall, be put to his government. The administration of his kingdom is consonant to his counsels from eternity, and pursuant to his designs for eternity.

(3.) In the *kingdom of grace*; here his glory shines brightest, [1.] In the adorations he receives from the subjects of that kingdom, v. 9. *In his temple*, where his people attend his discoveries of himself and his mind, and attend him with their praises, there does *every one speak of his glory*; in the world, every man sees it, or, at least, *may behold it afar off*: (Job, 36. 25.) but it is only in the temple, in the church, that it is spoken of to his honour. *All his works do praise him*, they minister matter for praise; but his saints only do bless him, and speak of his glory in his works, 145. 10. [2.] In the favours he bestows upon the subjects of that kingdom, v. 11. *First*, He will enable them for his service; *He will give strength to his people*, to fortify them against every evil work, and to furnish them for every good work; out of weakness they shall be made strong; nay, he will perfect strength in weakness. *Secondly*, He will encourage them in his service; *He will bless his people with peace*. Peace is a blessing of inestimable value, which God designs for all his people. *The work of righteousness is peace: great peace have they that love thy law*; but much more the crown of righteousness: the end of the righteous is peace, it is endless peace. When the thunder of God's wrath shall make sinners tremble, the saints shall lift up their heads with joy.

PSALM XXX.

This is a psalm of thanksgiving for the great deliverances which God had wrought for David, penned upon occasion of the dedicating of his house of cedar, and sung in that pious solemnity, though there is not any thing in it that has particular reference to that occasion. Some collect, from divers passages in the psalm itself, that it was penned upon his recovery from a dangerous fit of sickness, which might happen to be about the time of the dedication of his house. I. He here praises God for the deliverances he had wrought for him, v. 1. .3. II. He calls upon others to praise him too, and encourages them to trust in him, v. 4, 5. III. He blames himself for his former security, v. 6, 7. IV. He recollects the prayers and complaints he had made in his

distress, v. 8. .10. With them he stirs up himself to be very thankful to God for the present comfortable change, v. 11, 12. In singing this psalm, we ought to remember with thankfulness any like deliverances wrought for us, for which we must stir up ourselves to praise him, and by which we must be engaged to depend upon him.

A psalm and song, at the dedication of the house of David.

1. **I** WILL extol thee, O LORD; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. 2. O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. 3. O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. 4. Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. 5. For his anger *endureth but a moment*; in his favour *is life*: weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh in the morning*.

It was the laudable practice of the pious Jews, and, though not expressly appointed, yet allowed and accepted, when they had built a new house, to *dedicate it to God*, Deut. 20. 5. David did so, when his house was built, and he took possession of it; (2 Sam. 5. 11.) for royal palaces do as much need God's protection, and are as much bound to be at his service, as ordinary houses. Note, The houses we dwell in should, at our first entrance upon them, be dedicated to God, as little sanctuaries. We must solemnly commit ourselves, our families, and all our family affairs, to God's guidance and care; must pray for his presence and blessing, must devote ourselves, and all our's, to his glory, and must resolve both that we will put away iniquity far from our tabernacles, and that we and our houses will serve the Lord, both in the duties of family worship, and in all instances of gospel obedience. Some conjecture that this psalm was sung at the re-dedication of David's house, after he had been driven out of it by Absalom, who had defiled it with his incest, and that it is a thanksgiving for the crushing of that dangerous rebellion.

In these verses,

1. David does himself give God thanks for the great deliverances he had wrought for him; (v. 1.) *"I will extol thee, O Lord; I will exalt thy name, will praise thee as One high and lifted up. I will do what I can to advance the interests of thy kingdom among men. I will extol thee, for thou hast lifted me up, not only up out of the pit in which I was sinking, but up to the throne of Israel."* He *raiseth up the poor out of the dust*. In consideration of the great things God has done to exalt us, both by his providence and by his grace, we are bound, in gratitude, to do all we can to extol his name, though the most we can do is but little.

Three things magnify David's deliverance:

1. That it was the defeat of his enemies. They were not suffered to triumph over him, as they would have done, (though it is a barbarous thing,) if he had died of this sickness, or perished in this distress: see 41. 11.

2. That it was an answer to his prayers; (v. 2.) *"I cried unto thee"*. All the expressions of the sense we have of our troubles should be directed to God, and every cry be a cry to him; giving way, in this manner, to our grief, will ease a burthened spirit. *"I cried to thee, and thou hast not only heard me, but healed me, healed the distempered body, healed the disturbed and disquieted mind, healed the disordered, distracted, affairs of the kingdom."* It is what God glories in, *I am the Lord that healeth thee*, (Exod. 15. 26.) and we must give him the glory of it.

3. That it was the saving of his life; for he was brought to the last extremity, dropping into the grave, and ready to go down into the pit, and yet rescued, and kept alive, v. 3. The more imminent our dangers have been, the more eminent our deliverances have been, the more comfortable are they to ourselves, and the more illustrious proofs of the power and goodness of God. A life from the dead ought to be spent in extolling the God of our life.

II. He calls upon others to join with him in praise, not only for the particular favours God had bestowed upon him, but for the general tokens of his good-will to all his saints; (v. 4.) *Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his.* All that are truly saints, he owns for his; there is a remnant of such in this world, and from them it is expected that they sing unto him; for they are created, and sanctified, made, and made saints, that they be to him for a name and a praise. His saints in heaven sing to him; why should not those on earth be doing the same work, as well as they can, in concert with them?

1. They believe him to be a God of unspotted purity; and therefore let them sing to him; "Let them *give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness*; let them praise his holy name, for holiness is his memorial throughout all generations." God is a holy God; his holiness is his glory; that is the attribute which the holy angels, in their praises, fasten most upon, Isa. 6. 3. Rev. 4. 8. We ought to be much in the mention and remembrance of God's holiness; and holy souls can give thanks at the mention of God's holiness. It is matter of joy to the saints, that God is a holy God; for then they hope he will make them holy, more holy. None of all God's perfections carries in it more terror to the wicked, or more comfort to the godly, than his holiness. It is a good sign that we are in some measure partakers of his holiness, if we can heartily rejoice and give thanks at the remembrance of it.

2. They have experienced him to be a God gracious and merciful; and therefore let them sing to him.

(1.) We have found his frowns very short; though we have deserved they should have been everlasting, and that he should have been angry with us till he had consumed us, and should never have been reconciled, yet *his anger endureth but for a moment*, v. 5. When we offend him, he is angry; but, as he is slow to anger, and not soon provoked, so, when he is angry, upon our repentance and humiliation, his anger is soon turned away, and he is willing to be at peace with us. If he hide his face from his own children, and suspend the wonted tokens of his favour, it is but in a little wrath, and for a small moment; but he will *gather them with everlasting kindness*, Isa. 54. 7, 8. If weeping endure for a night, and it be a wearisome night, yet, as sure as the light of the morning returns after the darkness of the night, so sure will joy and comfort return in a short time, in due time, to the people of God; for the covenant of grace is as firm as the covenant of the day. This word has often been fulfilled to us in the letter; weeping has endured for a night, but the grief has been soon over, and the grievance gone. Observe, As long as God's anger continues, so long the saints' weeping continues; but if that be but for a moment, the affliction is but for a moment, and when the light of God's countenance is restored, the affliction is easily pronounced light and momentary.

(2.) We have found his smiles very sweet; *In his favour is life*, all good. The return of his favour to an afflicted soul, is as life from the dead; nothing can be more reviving. Our happiness is bound up in God's favour; if we have that, we have enough, whatever else we want. It is the life of the soul, it is spiritual life, the earnest of life eternal.

6. And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. 7. LORD, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled. 8. I cried to thee, O LORD; and unto the LORD I made supplication. 9. What profit *is there* in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth? 10. Hear, O LORD, and have mercy upon me: LORD, be thou my helper. 11. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; 12. To

the end that *my glory may sing praise to thee*, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.

We have, in these verses, an account of three several states that David was in successively, and of the workings of his heart toward God in each of those estates—what he said and did, and how his heart stood affected; in the first of which we may see what we are too apt to be, and in the other two what we should be.

1. He had long enjoyed prosperity, and then he grew secure, and over-confident of the continuance of it; (v. 6, 7.) "*In my prosperity*, when I was in health of body, and God had *given me rest from all mine enemies*, I said *I shall never be moved*; I never thought either of having my body distempered, or my government disturbed, nor had any apprehensions of danger upon any account." Such complete victories had he obtained over those that opposed him, and such a confirmed interest had he in the hearts of his people, such a firmness of mind, and such a strong constitution of body, that he thought his prosperity fixed like a mountain; yet this he ascribes, not to his own wisdom or fortitude, but to the divine goodness; *Thou, through thy favour, hast made my mountain to stand strong*, v. 7. He does not look upon it as his *heaven*, (as worldly people do, who make their prosperity their felicity,) only his *mountain*; it is earth still, only raised a little higher than the common level; this he thought, by the favour of God, would be perpetuated to him; imagining, perhaps, that, having had so many troubles in the beginning of his days, he had had his whole share, and should have none in his latter end; or that God, who had given him such tokens of his favour, would never frown upon him. Note, 1. We are very apt to dream, when things are well with us, that they will always be so, and never otherwise; *To-morrow shall be as this day*. As if we should think, when the weather is once fair, that it will be ever fair; whereas nothing is more certain than that it will change. 2. When we see ourselves deceived in our expectations, it becomes us to reflect, with shame, upon our security, as our folly, as David does here, that we may be wiser another time, and may rejoice in our prosperity as though we rejoiced not, because the fashion of it passes away.

II. On a sudden, he fell into trouble, and then he prayed to God, and pleaded earnestly for relief and succour. 1. His mountain was shaken, and he with it; it proved, when he grew secure, that he was least safe; "*Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled*, in mind, body, or estate." In every change of his condition, he still kept his eye upon God, and as he ascribed his prosperity to God's favour, so, in his adversity, he observed the hiding of God's face to be the cause of it. If God hide his face, a good man is certainly troubled, though no other calamity befall him; when the sun sets, night certainly follows, and the moon and all the stars cannot make day. 2. When his mountain was shaken, he lifted up his eyes above the hills. Prayer is a salve for every sore; he made use of it accordingly. *Is any afflicted?* is any troubled? *let him pray*. Though God hid his face from him, yet he prayed. If God, in wisdom and justice, turn from us, yet it will be in us the greatest folly and injustice imaginable, if we turn from him. No, let us learn to *pray in the dark*; (v. 8.) *I cried to thee, O Lord*. It seems, God's withdrawals made his prayers the more vehement. We are here told, for it seems he kept account of it, (1.) What he pleaded; (v. 9.) That God would be no gainer by his death; *What profit is there in my blood?* implying, that he would willingly die, if he could thereby do any real service to God, or his country, (Phil. 2. 17.) but he saw not what good could be done by his dying in the bed of sickness, as might be, if he had died in the bed of honour. "Lord," says he, "wilt thou sell one of thine own people for nought, and not increase thy wealth by the price?" 44. 12. Nay, that, in his honour, God would seem to be a Loser by his death; *Shall the dust praise thee?* The sanctified spirit, which returns to God, shall praise him, shall be still praising him; but the dust, which returns to the earth, shall not praise him, nor declare his

truth. The services of God's house cannot be performed by the dust; it cannot praise him; there is none of that device or working in the grave, for it is the land of silence. The promises of God's covenant cannot be performed to the dust. "Lord," says David, "if I die now, what will become of the promise made to me? Who shall declare the truth of that?" The best pleas in prayer are those that are taken from God's honour; and then we ask aright for life, when we have that in view, that we may live and praise him. (2.) What he prayed for; (v. 10.) he prayed for mercy to pardon; (*Have mercy upon me;*) and for grace to help in time of need; *Lord, be thou my Helper.* On these two errands we also may come boldly to the throne of grace, Heb. 4. 16.

III. In due time, God delivered him out of his troubles, and restored him to his former prosperity. His prayers were answered, and his *mourning was turned into dancing*, v. 11. God's anger now endured but for a moment, and David's weeping but for a night. The sackcloth with which, in a humble compliance with the Divine Providence, he had clad himself, was loosed; his griefs were balanced; his fears were silenced; his comforts returned; and he was girded with gladness: joy was made his ornament, was made his strength, and seemed to cleave to him, as the girdle cleaves to the loins of a man. As David's plunge into trouble from the height of prosperity, and then when he least expected it, teaches us to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, because we know not how near trouble may be; so his sudden return to a prosperous condition teaches us to weep as though we wept not, because we know not how soon the storm may become a calm, and the formidable blast may become a favourable gale.

But what temper of mind was he in, upon this happy change of the face of his affairs? What does he say now? He tells us, v. 12. 1. His complaints were turned into praises. He looked upon it that God girded him with gladness, to the end that he might be the *sweet psalmist of Israel*; (2 Sam. 23. 1.) that his *glory might sing praise to God*, that is, his tongue; for our tongue is our glory, and never more so than when it is employed in praising God; or his soul; for that is our glory above the beasts, that must be employed in blessing the Lord, and with that we must make melody to him, in singing psalms. They that are kept from being silent in the pit, must not be silent in the land of the living, but fervent, and constant, and public, in praising God. 2. These praises were likely to be everlasting; *I will give thanks unto thee for ever.* This bespeaks a gracious resolution that he would persevere to the end in praising God, and a gracious hope that he should never want fresh matter for praise, and that he should shortly be there where this would be the everlasting work. Blessed are they that dwell in God's house, they will be still praising him. Thus must we learn to accommodate ourselves to the various providences of God that concern us; to want and to abound, to sing of mercy and judgment, and to sing unto God for both.

PSALM XXXI.

It is probable that David penned this psalm when he was persecuted by Saul; some passages in it agree particularly to the narrow escape he had at Keilah, (1 Sam. 23. 13.) then in the wilderness of Maon, when Saul marched on one side of the hill, and he on the other, and, soon after, in the cave in the wilderness of Engedi; but that it was penned upon any of those occasions we are not told. It is a mixture of prayers and praises, and professions of confidence in God, all which do well together, and are helpful to one another. I. David professeth his cheerful confidence in God, and, in that confidence, prays for deliverance out of his present troubles, v. 1. .8. II. He complains of the very deplorable condition he was in, and, in the sense of his calamities, still prays that God would graciously appear for him against his persecutors, v. 9. .18. III. He concludes the psalm with praise and triumph, giving glory to God, and encouraging himself and others to trust in him, v. 19. .21.

To the chief musician. A Psalm of David.

1. **I**N thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. 2. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver

me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. 3. For thou *art* my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. 4. Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou *art* my strength. 5. Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth. 6. I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD. 7. I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities; 8. And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room.

Faith and prayer must go together. He that believes, let him pray; *I believe, therefore have I spoken*: and he that prays, let him believe, for the prayer of faith is the prevailing prayer. We have both here.

I. David, in distress, is very earnest with God in prayer, for succour and relief. This eases a burthened spirit, fetches in promised mercies, and wonderfully supports and comforts the soul, in the expectation of them. He prays, 1. That God would deliver him, (v. 1.) that his life might be preserved from the malice of his enemies, and that an end might be put to their persecutions of him. That God, not only in mercy, but in righteousness, would deliver him, as a righteous Judge betwixt him and his unrighteous persecutors; that he would bow down his ear to his petitions, to his appeals, and deliver him, v. 2. It is condescension in God to take cognizance of the case of the greatest and best of men; he humbles himself to do it. The psalmist prays also that he would deliver him speedily, lest, if the deliverance were long deferred, his faith should fail. 2. That if he did not immediately deliver him out of his troubles, yet he would protect and shelter him in his troubles; "*Be thou my strong Rock*, immovable, impregnable, as a fastness framed by nature, and my House of defence, a fortress framed by art, and all to save me." Thus may we pray that God's providence would secure to us our lives and comforts, and that by his grace we may be enabled to think ourselves safe in him, Prov. 18. 10. 3. That, his case having much in it of difficulty, both in respect of duty, and in respect of providence, he might be under the divine guidance; "*Lord, lead me and guide me*;" (v. 3.) so order my steps, so order my spirit, that I may never do any thing unlawful and unjustifiable, against my conscience; or unwise and indiscreet, against my interest." They that resolve to follow God's direction, may in faith pray for it. 4. That, his enemies being very crafty, as well as very spiteful, God would frustrate and baffle their designs against him; (v. 4.) "*Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me*, and keep me from the sin, the trouble, the death, they aim to entrap me in."

II. In this prayer, he gives glory to God, by a repeated profession of his confidence in him, and dependence on him. This encouraged his prayers, and qualified him for the mercies he prayed for; (v. 1.) "*In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust*, and not in myself, or any sufficiency of my own, or in any creature; *let me never be ashamed*, let me not be disappointed of any of that good which thou hast promised me, and which therefore I have promised myself in thee.

1. He had chosen God for his Protector, and God had, by his promise, undertaken to be so; (v. 3.) "*Thou art my Rock and my Fortress*, by thy covenant with me, and my believing consent to that covenant; therefore *be my strong Rock*," v. 2. They that have in sincerity avouched the Lord for their's, may expect the benefit of his being so; for God's relations to us carry with them both name and thing. *Thou art my Strength*, v. 4. If God be our Strength, we may hope that he will both put his strength in us, and put forth his strength for us.

2. He gave up his soul in a special manner to him; (v. 5.) *Into thine hands I commit my spirit.* (1.) If David here looks upon himself as a dying man, by these words he resigns his departing soul to God, who gave it, and to whom, at death, the spirit returns. "Men can but kill the body, but I trust in God to *redeem my soul from the power of the grave,*" 49. 15. He is willing to die, if God will have it so; but let my soul *fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great.* With these words, our Lord Jesus yielded up the ghost upon the cross, and made his soul an offering, a free-will offering, for sin, voluntarily laying down his life a ransom. By Stephen's example we are taught, in our dying moments, to eye Christ at God's right hand, and to commit our spirits to him; *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.* But, (2.) David is here to be looked upon as a man in distress and trouble. And, [1.] His great care is about his soul, his spirit, his better part. Note, Our outward afflictions should increase our concern for our souls. Many think that while they are perplexed about their worldly affairs, and Providence multiplies their cares about them, they may be excused if they neglect their souls; whereas the greater hazard our lives and secular interests lie at, the more we are concerned to look to our souls, that, though the outward man perish, the inward man may suffer no damage, (2 Cor. 4. 16.) and that we may keep possession of our souls, when we can keep possession of nothing else, Luke, 21. 19. [2.] He thinks the best he can do for his soul is, to commit it into the hand of God, and lodge that great trust with him. He had prayed, (v. 4.) to be plucked out of the net of outward trouble, but, as not insisting upon that, God's will be done, he immediately lets fall that petition, and commits the spirit, the inward man, into God's hand; "Lord, however it goes with me, as to my body, let it go well with my soul." Note, It is the wisdom and duty of every one of us, solemnly to commit our spirits into the hands of God, to be sanctified by his grace, devoted to his honour, employed in his service, and fitted for his kingdom. That which encourages us to commit our spirits into the hand of God, is, that he has not only created, but redeemed them; the particular redemptions of the Old Testament church, and the Old Testament saints, were typical of our redemption by Jesus Christ, Gen. 48. 16. The redemption of the soul is so precious, that it must have ceased for ever, if Christ had not undertaken it; but, by redeeming our souls, he has not only acquired an additional right and title to them, which obliges us to commit them to him as his own, but has shewed the extraordinary kindness and concern he has for them, which encourages us to commit them to him, to be preserved to his heavenly kingdom; (2 Tim. 1. 12.) "*Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth;* redeemed me according to a promise which thou wilt be true to."

III. He disclaimed all confederacy with those that made an arm of flesh their confidence; (v. 6.) *I have hated them that regard lying vanities;* idolaters, (so some,) who expect aid from false gods, which are vanity and a lie; astrologers, and those that give heed to them, so others. David abhorred the use of enchantments and divinations; he consulted not, nor ever took notice of, the flight of birds or entrails of beasts, good omens or bad omens; they are lying vanities, and he not only did not regard them himself, but hated the wickedness of those that did; he trusted in God only, and not in any creature; his interest in the court or country, his retreats or strongholds, even Goliath's sword itself—these were lying vanities, which he could not depend upon, but trusted in the Lord only. See 40. 4. Jer. 17. 5.

IV. He comforted himself with his hope in God, and made himself, not only easy, but cheerful, with it, v. 7. Having relied on God's mercy, he will be glad and rejoice in it; and those know not how to value their hope in God, who cannot find joy enough in that hope to balance their grievances, and silence their griefs.

V. He encouraged himself in this hope, with the experiences he had had, of late, and formerly, of God's goodness to him, which he mentions, to the glory of God; he that has delivered, doth, and will. 1. God had taken notice of his afflictions, and all the circumstances of them; "*Thou hast considered my trouble,*

with wisdom to suit relief to it, with condescension and compassion regarding the low estate of thy servant." 2. He had observed the temper of his spirit, and the workings of his heart under his afflictions; "*Thou hast known my soul in adversities,* with a tender concern and care for it." God's eye is upon our souls, when we are in trouble, to see whether they be humbled for sin, submissive to the will of God, and bettered by the affliction. If the soul, when cast down under affliction, has been lifted up to him in true devotion, he knows it. 3. He had rescued him out of the hands of Saul, when he had him safe enough in Keilah; (1 Sam. 23. 7.) "*Thou hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy,* but set me at liberty, in a large room, where I may shift for my own safety," v. 8. Christ's using these words, (v. 5.) upon the cross, may warrant us to apply all this to Christ, who trusted in his Father, and was supported and delivered by him, and (because he humbled himself) highly exalted, which it is proper to think of, when we sing these verses, as also therein to acknowledge the experience we have had of God's gracious presence with us in our troubles, and to encourage ourselves to trust in him for the future.

9. Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. 10. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. 11. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me. 12. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel. 13. For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. 14. But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God. 15. My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. 16. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake. 17. Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave. 18. Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.

In the foregoing verses, David had appealed to God's righteousness, and pleaded his relation to him, and dependence on him; here he appeals to his mercy, and pleads the greatness of his own misery, which made his case the proper object of that mercy. Observe,

I. The complaint he makes of his trouble and distress; (v. 9.) "*Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble,* and need thy mercy." The remembrance he makes of his condition is not much unlike some even of Job's complaints.

1. His troubles had fixed a very deep impression upon his mind, and made him a man of sorrows. So great was his grief, that his very soul was consumed with it, and his life spent with it, and he was continually sighing, v. 9, 10. Herein he was a type of Christ, who was intimately acquainted with grief, and often in tears. We may guess by David's complexion, which was ruddy and sanguine, by his genius for music, and by his daring enterprises in his early days, that his natural disposition was both cheerful and firm, that he was apt to be cheerful, and not to lay trouble to his heart; yet here we see what he is brought to: he has al-

most wept out his eyes, and sighed away his breath. Let those that are airy and gay take heed of running into extremes, and never set sorrow at defiance; God can find out ways to make them melancholy, if they will not otherwise learn to be serious.

2. His body was affected with the sorrows of his mind; (v. 10.) *My strength fails, my bones are consumed, and all because of mine iniquity.* As to Saul, and the quarrel he had with him, he could confidently insist upon his righteousness; but as it was an affliction God laid upon him, he owns he had deserved it, and freely confesses his iniquity to have been the procuring cause of all his trouble; and the sense of sin touched him to the quick, and wasted him more than all his calamities.

3. His friends were unkind, and became shy of him; he was a *fear to his acquaintance*, when they saw him, they *fled from him*, v. 11. They durst not harbour him, nor give him any assistance, not shew him any countenance, not so much as to be seen in his company, for fear of being brought into trouble by it, now that Saul had proclaimed him a traitor, and out-lawed him. They saw how dear Abimelech the priest had paid for aiding and abetting him, though ignorantly; and therefore, though they could not but own he had a great deal of wrong done him, yet they had not the courage to appear for him. He was forgotten by them, *as a dead man out of mind*, (v. 12.) and looked upon with contempt as a broken vessel. They that shewed him all possible respect, when he was in honour at court, now that he was fallen into disgrace, though unjustly, were strange to him. Such swallow-friends the world is full of, that are gone in winter. Let those that fall on the losing side, not think it strange, if they be thus deserted, but make sure a Friend in heaven, that will not fail them, and make use of him.

4. His enemies were unjust in their censures of him; they would not have persecuted him as they did, if they had not first represented him as a bad man; he was a *reproach among all his enemies*, but especially *among his neighbours*, v. 11. Those that had been the witnesses of his integrity, and could not but be convinced in their consciences that he was an honest man, were the most forward to represent him quite otherwise, that they might curry favour with Saul. Thus he had the slander of many; every one had a stone to throw at him, because fear was on every side; they durst not do otherwise, for he that would not join with his neighbours to abuse David, was looked upon as disaffected to Saul. Thus the best of men have been ranked with the worst characters by those that resolved to give them the worst treatment.

5. His life was aimed at, and he went in continual peril of it. That fear was on every side, and he knew that, whatever counsel his enemies took against him, the design was not to take away his liberty, but to take away his life, (v. 13.) a life so valuable, so useful, to the good services of which all Israel owed so much, and which was never forfeited. Thus, in all the plots of the Pharisees and Herodians against Christ, still the design was to take away his life; such are the enmity and cruelty of the serpent's seed.

II. His confidence in God, in the midst of these troubles; every thing looked black and dismal round about him, and threatened to drive him to despair; *"But I trusted in thee, O Lord,* (v. 14.) and that kept me from sinking." His enemies robbed him of his reputation among men, but they could not rob him of his comfort in God, because they could not drive him from his confidence in God. Two things he comforted himself with in his straits, and he went to God, and pleaded them with him; 1. *"Thou art my God; I have chosen thee for mine, and thou hast promised to be mine;"* and if he be our's, and we can by faith call him so, it is enough, when we can call nothing else our's. *"Thou art my God; and therefore to whom shall I go for relief, but to thee?"* They need not be straitened in their prayers, who can plead this; for if God undertake to be our God, he will do that for us, which will answer the compass and vast extent of that engagement. 2. *My times are in thy hand.* Join this with the former, and it makes the comfort complete. If God have our times in his hand, he can help us; and if he be our God, he *will* help us; and then what can discourage us? It is a great support to those who have God for their God, that their times are in his hand; and he will be *sure* to

order and dispose of them for the best to all those who commit their spirits also into his hand, to suit them to their times, as David here, v. 5. The time of life is in God's hands, to lengthen or shorten, imbitter or sweeten, as he pleases, according to the counsel of his will. Our times, all events that concern us, and the timing of them, these are at God's disposal; they are not in our own hands, for the way of man is not in himself, not in our friends' hands, nor in our enemies' hands, but in God's; *every man's judgment proceedeth from him.* David does not, in his prayers, prescribe to God, but subscribe to him; "Lord, my times are in thy hand, and I am well pleased that they are so, they could not be in a better hand; thy will be done."

III. His petitions to God; in this faith and confidence,

1. He prays that God would deliver him out of the hand of his enemies, (v. 15.) and save him; (v. 16.) and this, for his mercies' sake, and not for any merit of his own. Our *opportunities* are in God's hand, (so some read it,) and therefore he knows how to choose the best and fittest time for our deliverance, and we must be willing to wait that time. When David had Saul at his mercy in the cave, those about him said, *"This is the time in which God will deliver thee,"* 1 Sam. 24. 4. "No," says David, "the time is not come for my deliverance, till it can be wrought without sin; and I will wait for that time; for it is God's time, and that is the best time."

2. That God would give him the comfort of his favour in the mean time; (v. 16.) *"Make thy face to shine upon thy servant;* let me have the comfortable tokens and evidences of thy favour to me, and that shall put gladness in my heart in the midst of all my griefs."

3. That his prayers to God might be answered, and his *hopes* in God accomplished; (v. 17.) *"Let me not be ashamed of my hopes and prayers, for I have called upon thee,* who never saidst to thy people, Seek in vain, and hope in vain."

4. That shame and silence might be the portion of wicked people, and particularly of his enemies. They were confident of their success against David, and that they should run him down, and ruin him. "Lord," says he, "let them be made ashamed of that confidence by the disappointment of their expectations." As those that opposed the building of the wall about Jerusalem, when it was finished, were *muck cast down in their own eyes*, Neh. 6. 16. *Let them be silent in the grave.* Note, Death will silence the rage and clamour of cruel persecutors, whom reason would not silence. In the grave, the wicked cease from troubling. Particularly, he prays for, that is, he prophesies, the silencing of those that reproach and calumniate the people of God; (v. 18.) *Let lying lips be put to silence, that speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.* This is a very good prayer, (1.) Which we have often occasion to put up to God; for they that set their mouth against the heavens, commonly revile the heirs of heaven. Religion, and the strict and serious professors of it, are every where spoken against, [1.] With a great deal of malice; they speak *grievous things*, on purpose to vex them, and hoping, with what they say, to do them a real mischief. They speak *hard things*, (so the word is,) which bear hard upon them, and by which they hope to fasten indelible characters of infamy upon them. [2.] With a great deal of falsehood; they are *lying lips*, taught by the father of lies, and serving his interest. [3.] With a great deal of scorn and disdain; they speak *proudly and contemptuously*, as if the righteous, whom God has honoured, were the most despicable people in the world, and not worthy to be set with the dogs of their flock. One would think they thought it no sin to tell a deliberate lie, if it may but serve to expose a good man either to hatred or contempt. *Hear, O our God, for we are despised.* (2.) We may pray it in faith: for these lying lips shall be put to silence. God has many ways of doing it. Sometimes he convinces the consciences of those that reproach his people, and turns their hearts; sometimes by his providence he visibly confutes their calumnies, and brings forth the righteousness of his people as the light. However, there is a day coming, when God will convince ungodly sinners of the falsehood of all the hard *speeches* they have spoken against his people, and will execute

judgment upon them, Jude, 14, 15. Then shall this prayer be fully answered, and to that day we should have an eye in the singing of it; engaging ourselves likewise, by well-doing, if possible, to *silence the ignorance of foolish men*, 1 Pet. 2. 15.

19. *Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!* 20. Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. 21. Blessed *be* the LORD; for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city. 22. For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee. 23. O love the LORD, all ye his saints: *for* the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. 24. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.

We have three things in these verses:

1. The believing acknowledgement which David makes of God's goodness to his people in general, v. 19, 20.

1. God is good to all, but he is, in a special manner, good to Israel. His goodness to them is wonderful, and will be, to eternity, matter of admiration; *Oh how great is thy goodness!* How profound are the counsels of it; how rich are the treasures of it; how free and extensive are the communications of it! Those very persons whom men load with slanders, God loads with benefits and honours. Those who are interested in this goodness, are described to be such as fear God, and trust in him, as stand in awe of his greatness, and rely on his grace. This goodness is said to be *laid up for them, and wrought for them*. (1.) There is goodness laid up for them in the other world, an inheritance *reserved in heaven*; (1 Pet. 1. 4.) and there is a goodness wrought for them in this world, goodness wrought in them. There is enough in God's goodness, both for the portion and inheritance of all his children, when they come to their full age, and for their maintenance and education, during their minority. There is enough in bank, and enough in hand. (2.) This goodness is laid up in his promise for all that fear God, to whom assurance is given that they shall want no good thing. But it is wrought, in the actual performance of the promise, for those that trust in him—that by faith take hold of the promise, put it in suit, and draw out to themselves the benefit and comfort of it. If what is laid up for us in the treasures of the everlasting covenant, be not wrought for us, it is our own fault; because we do not believe. But those that trust in God, as they have the comfort of his goodness in their own bosoms, so they have the credit of it, (and the credit of an estate goes far with some,) it is wrought for them *before the sons of men*; God's goodness to them puts an honour upon them, and rolls away their reproach; *for all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed*, Isa. 61. 9.

2. God preserves man and beast; but he is, in a special manner, the Protector of his own people; (v. 20.) *Thou shalt hide them*. As his goodness is hid and reserved for them, so they are hid and preserved for it. The saints are God's hidden ones. See here, (1.) The danger they are in, which arises from the pride of man, and from the strife of tongues; proud men insult over them, and would trample on them, and tread them down; contentious men pick quarrels with them, and, when tongues are at strife, good people often go by the worst. The pride of men endangers their liberty; the strife of tongues, in perverse disputings, endangers truth. But, (2.) See the defence they are under; *Thou shalt hide*

them in the secret of thy presence; in a pavilion. God's providence shall keep them safe from the malice of their enemies. He has many ways of sheltering them; when Baruch and Jeremiah were sought for, *the Lord hid them*, Jer. 36. 26. God's grace shall keep them safe from the evil of the judgments that are abroad; to them they have no sting; they shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, for there is no anger at them. His comforts shall keep them easy and cheerful; his sanctuary, where they have communion with him, shelters them from the fiery darts of terror and temptation; and the mansions in his house above, shall be shortly, shall be eternally, their hiding place from all danger and fear.

II. The thankful returns which David makes for God's goodness to him in particular, (v. 21, 22.) Having admired God's goodness to all the saints, he here owns how good he had found him.

1. Without were fightings; but God had wonderfully preserved his life; *"He has shewed me his marvellous loving kindness, he has given me an instance of his care of me, and favour to me, beyond what I could have expected."* God's loving kindness to his people, all things considered, is wonderful; but some instances of it, even in this world, are, in a special manner, marvellous in their eyes; as this here, when God preserved David from the sword of Saul, in caves and woods, as safe as if it had been in a strong city. In Keilah, that strong city, God shewed him great mercy, both in making him an instrument to rescue the inhabitants out of the hands of the Philistines, and then in rescuing him from the same men, who would have ungratefully delivered him up into the hand of Saul, 1 Sam. 23. 5, 12. This was marvellous loving kindness indeed, upon which he writes, with wonder and thankfulness, *Blessed be the Lord*. Special preservations call for particular thanksgivings.

2. Within were fears; but God was better to him than his fears, v. 22. He here keeps an account, (1.) Of his own folly, in distrusting God, which he acknowledges to his shame; though he had express promises to build upon, and great experience of God's care concerning him, in many straits, yet he had entertained this hard and jealous thought of God, and could not forbear telling it him to his face, *"I am cut off from before thine eyes; thou hast quite forsaken me, and I must not expect to be looked upon or regarded by thee any more. I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul, and so be cut off before thine eyes, be ruined while thou lookest on,"* 1 Sam. 27. 1. This he said, in his *flight*, (so some read it,) which denotes the distress of his affairs. Saul was just at his back, and ready to seize him, which made the temptation strong; *in my haste*, (so we read it,) which denotes the disturbance and discomposure of his mind, which made the temptation surprising, so that it found him off his guard. Note, It is a common thing to speak amiss, when we speak in haste, and without consideration; but what we speak amiss in haste, we must repent of at leisure, particularly that which we have spoken distrustfully of God. (2.) Of God's wonderful goodness to him notwithstanding; though his faith failed, God's promise did not; *Thou heardest the voice of my supplication*, for all this. He mentions his own unbelief as a foil to God's fidelity, serving to make his loving kindness the more marvellous, the more illustrious. When we have thus distrusted God, he might justly have taken us at our word, and brought our fears upon us, as he did on Israel, Num. 14. 28. Isa. 66. 4. But he has pitied and pardoned us, and our unbelief has not made his promise and grace of none effect; for he knows our frame.

III. The exhortation and encouragement which he, hereupon, gives to all the saints, v. 23, 24.

1. He would have them set their love on God; (v. 23.) *O love the Lord, all ye his saints*. Those that have their own hearts full of love to God, cannot but desire that others also may be in love with him; for in his favour there is no need to fear a rival. It is the character of the saints, that they do love God; and yet they must be still called upon to love him, to love him more, and love him better, and give proofs of their love. We must love him, not only for his goodness, because he preserves the faithful, but for his justice, because he plentifully rewards the proud doer, (who

would ruin those whom he preserves,) according to their pride. Some take it in a good sense; he plentifully rewards the magnificent (or excellent) doer, that is daringly good, whose heart, like Jehoshaphat's, is lifted up in the ways of the Lord. He rewards him that does well, but plentifully rewards him that does excellently well.

2. He would have them *set their hope in God*; (v. 24.) "Be of good courage; have a good heart on it, whatever difficulties or dangers you may meet with, the God you trust in shall by that trust strengthen your heart." They that hope in God have reason to be of good courage, and let their hearts be strong, for, as nothing truly evil can befall them, so nothing truly good for them shall be wanting to them.

In singing this, we should animate ourselves, and one another, to proceed and persevere in our Christian course, whatever threatens us, and whoever frowns upon us.

PSALM XXXII.

This psalm, though it speaks not of Christ, as many of the psalms hitherto we have met with have done, has yet a great deal of gospel in it. The apostle tells us, that David, in this psalm, describes the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputes righteousness without works, Rom. 4.6. We have here a summary, I. Of gospel-grace in the pardon of sin; (v. 1, 2.) in divine protection; (v. 7.) and divine guidance, v. 8. II. Of gospel-duty. To confess sin; (v. 3., 5.) to pray; (v. 6.) to govern ourselves well; (v. 9, 10.) and to rejoice in God, v. 11. The way to obtain these privileges, is, to make conscience of these duties, which we ought to think of; of the former for our comfort, of the latter for our quickening, when we sing this psalm. Grotius thinks it was designed to be sung on the day of atonement.

A Psalm of David, Maschil.

1. **BLESSED** is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. 3. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. 4. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. 5. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. 6. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

This psalm is entitled *Maschil*, which some take to be only the name of the tune to which it was set, and was to be sung. But others think it is significant; our margin reads it, *A psalm of David giving instruction*; and there is nothing in which we have more need of instruction than in the nature of true blessedness, wherein it consists, and the way that leads to it—what we must do, that we may be happy. There are divers things in which these verses instruct us. In general, we are here taught, that our happiness consists in the favour and grace of God, and not in the wealth of this world; in spiritual blessings, and not the good things of this world. When David says, (1. 1.) *Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly*, and, (119. 1.) *Blessed are the undefiled in the way*, the meaning is, "This is the character of the blessed man; and he that has not this character, cannot expect to be happy;" but when it is here said, *Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven*, the meaning is, "This is the ground of his blessedness; this is that fundamental privilege from which all the other ingredients of his blessedness flow."

In particular, we are here instructed,

I. Concerning the nature of the pardon of sin; this is that which we all need, and are undone without; we are therefore concerned to be very solicitous and inquisitive about it. 1. It is

the forgiving of transgression. *Sin is the transgression of the law*; upon our repentance, the transgression is forgiven; the obligation to punishment, which we lay under, by virtue of the sentence of the law, is vacated and cancelled; it is lifted off, (so some read it,) that by the pardon of it we may be eased of a burthen, a heavy burthen, like a load on the back, that makes us stoop, or a load on the stomach, that makes us sick, or a load on the spirits, that makes us sink. The remission of sins gives rest and relief to those that were *wearied and heavy-laden*, Matth. 11. 28. 2. It is the covering of sin, as nakedness is covered, that it may not appear to our shame, Rev. 3. 18. One of the first symptoms of guilt in our first parents, was, blushing at their own nakedness. Sin makes us loathsome in the sight of God, and utterly unfit for communion with him, and when conscience is awakened, it makes us loathsome to ourselves too; but when it is pardoned, it is covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness, like the coats of skins wherewith God clothed Adam and Eve, (an emblem of the remission of sins,) so that God is no longer displeased with us, but perfectly reconciled. They are not covered from us; no, *My sin is ever before me*, nor covered from God's omniscience, but from his vindictive justice: when he pardons sin, he *remembers it no more*, he casts it behind his back, it shall be sought for, and not found. The sinner, being thus reconciled to God, begins to be reconciled to himself. 3. It is the not imputing of iniquity, not laying it to the sinner's charge, not proceeding against him for it, according to the strictness of the law, not dealing with him as he deserves. The righteousness of Christ being imputed to us, and we being made the righteousness of God in him, our iniquity is not imputed, God having laid upon him the iniquity of us all, and made him sin for us. Observe, Not to impute iniquity, is God's act, for he is the Judge. *It is God that justifies*.

II. Concerning the character of those whose sins are pardoned, *in whose spirit there is no guile*; he does not say, "There is no guilt," (for who is there that lives, and sins not?) but *no guile*: that does not dissemble with God, in his professions of repentance and faith, and in his prayers for peace or pardon; but, in all these, is sincere, and means as he says; that does not repent, with a purpose to sin again, and then sin, with a purpose to repent again, as a learned interpreter glosses upon it. Those that design honestly, that are really what they profess to be, those are the Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile.

III. Concerning the happiness of a justified state; *Blessednesses are to the man whose iniquity is forgiven*, all manner of blessings, sufficient to make him completely blessed. That is taken away which incurred the curse, and obstructed the blessing; and then God will pour out blessings, till there be no room to receive them. The forgiveness of sin, is that article of the covenant, which is the reason and ground of all the rest; *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness*, Heb. 8. 12.

IV. Concerning the uncomfortable condition of an unhumiliated sinner, that sees his guilt, but is not yet brought to make a penitent confession of it. This David describes very pathetically, from his own sad experience; (v. 3, 4.) *While I kept silence, my bones waxed old*. These may be said to keep silence, who stifle their convictions, who, when they cannot but see the evil of sin, and their danger by reason of it, ease themselves by not thinking of it, and diverting their minds to something else; as Cain to the building of a city; who *cry not when God binds them*; who will not unburthen their consciences by a penitent confession, nor seek for peace, as they ought, by faithful and fervent prayer; and who choose rather to pine away in their iniquities, than to take the method which God has appointed of finding rest for their souls; let such expect that their smothered convictions will be a fire in their bones, and the wounds of sin, not opened, will fester, and grow intolerably painful. If conscience be seared, the case is so much the more dangerous; but if it be startled and awake, it will be heard. The hand of divine wrath will be felt lying heavy upon the soul, and the anguish of the spirit will affect the body; to that degree David experienced it, so that when he was young, his bones waxed old; and even his silence made him roar all the day long, as if he had been under some grievous pain and distemper of

body; when really the cause of all his uneasiness, was, the struggle he felt in his own bosom between his convictions and his corruptions. Note, *He that covers his sin shall not prosper*; some inward trouble is required in repentance, but there is much worse in impenitency.

V. Concerning the true and only way to peace of conscience. We are here taught to confess our sins, that they may be forgiven; to declare them, that we may be justified. This course David took; *I acknowledged my sin unto thee*, and no longer hid mine iniquity, v. 5. Note, Those that would have the comfort of the pardon of their sins, must take shame to themselves by a penitent confession of them. We must confess the fact of sin, and be particular in it; *Thus, and thus have I done*; confess the fault of sin, aggravate it, and lay a load upon ourselves for it; *I have done very wickedly*; confess the justice of the punishment we have been under for it; *The Lord is just in all that is brought upon us*; and that we deserve much worse; *I am no more worthy to be called thy son*. We must confess sin with shame and holy blushing, with fear and holy trembling.

VI. Concerning God's readiness to pardon sin to those who truly repent of it; *"I said, I will confess"*; I sincerely resolved upon it, hesitated no longer, but came to a point, that I would make a free and ingenuous confession of my sins; and immediately *thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin*, and gavest me the comfort of the pardon in mine own conscience; immediately I found rest to my soul." Note, God is more ready to pardon sin, upon our repentance, than we are to repent, in order to the obtaining of pardon. It was with much ado, that David was here brought to confess his sins; he was put to the rack before he was brought to it; (v. 3, 4.) he held out long, and would not surrender till it came to the last extremity; but when he did offer to surrender, see how quickly, how easily, he obtained good terms; *"I did but say, I will confess, and thou forgavest."* Thus the father of the prodigal saw his returning son *when he was yet afar off*, and ran to meet him with the kiss that sealed his pardon. What an encouragement is this to poor penitents; and what an assurance does it give us, that, *if we confess our sins*, we shall find God, not only faithful and just, but gracious and kind, *to forgive us our sins*!

VII. Concerning the good use that we are to make of the experience David had had of God's readiness to forgive his sins; (v. 6.) *For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee*. Note, 1. All godly people are praying people. As soon as ever Paul was converted, *Behold, he prays*, Acts. 9. 11. You may as soon find a living man without breath, as a living Christian without prayer. 2. The instructions given us concerning the happiness of those whose sins are pardoned, and the easiness of obtaining the pardon, should engage and encourage us to pray, and particularly to pray, *God be merciful to us sinners*. For this, shall every one that is well-inclined, be earnest with God in prayer, and *come boldly to the throne of grace*, with hopes to obtain mercy, Heb. 4. 16. 3. Those that would speed in prayer, must seek the Lord in a time when he will be found. When, by his providence, he calls them to seek him, and by his Spirit he stirs them up to seek him, they must *go speedily to seek the Lord*, (Zech. 8. 21.) and lose no time, lest death cut them off, and then it will be too late to seek him, Isa. 55. 6. *Behold, now is the accepted time*, 2 Cor. 6. 2. 4. Those that are sincere and abundant in prayer, will find the benefit of it, when they are in trouble; *Surely in the floods of great waters*, which are very threatening, *they shall not come nigh them*, to terrify them, or create them any uneasiness, much less shall they overwhelm them. Those that have God *nigh unto them in all that which they call upon him for*, as all upright, penitent, praying, people have, are so guarded, so advanced, that no waters, no not great waters, no not floods of them, can come nigh them, to hurt them. As the temptations of the *wicked one touch them not*, (1 John, 5. 18.) so neither do the troubles of this evil world; these fiery darts, of both kinds, drop short of them.

7. Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me out with songs of deliverance. Selah. 8. I will

instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. 9. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. 10. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. 11. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

David is here improving the experience he had had of the comfort of pardoning mercy.

I. He speaks to God, and professes his confidence in him, and expectation from him; (v. 7.) having tasted the sweetness of divine grace to a penitent sinner, he cannot doubt of the continuance of that grace to a praying saint, and that in that grace he should find both safety and joy. 1. Safety; *"Thou art my Hiding-Place"*; when by faith I have recourse to thee, I see all the reason in the world to be easy, and to think myself out of the reach of any real evil. *Thou shalt preserve me from trouble*, from the sting of it, and from the strokes of it, as far as is good for me. *Thou shalt preserve me from such trouble as I was in, while I kept silence*," v. 3. When God has pardoned our sins, if he leave us to ourselves, we shall soon run as far in debt again as ever, and plunge ourselves again into the same gulf; and therefore, when we have received the comfort of our remission, we must fly to the grace of God, to be preserved from returning to folly again, and having our hearts again hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. God keeps his people from trouble, by keeping them from sin. 2. Joy; *"Thou shalt not only deliver me, but compass me about with songs of deliverance"*; which way soever I look, I shall see occasion to rejoice, and to praise God; and my friends also shall compass me about in the great congregation, to join with me in songs of praise: they shall join their songs of deliverance with mine; *as every one that is godly shall pray with me*, so they shall give thanks with me."

II. He turns his speech to the children of men; being himself converted, he does what he can to strengthen his brethren, (Luke, 22. 32. v. 8.) *I will instruct thee*, whoever thou art that desirest instruction, and *teach thee in the way which thou shalt go*. Thus, in another of his penitential psalms, he resolves that, when God had restored to him the joy of his salvation, he would teach transgressors his ways, and do what he could to convert sinners to God, as well as to comfort those that were converted, 51. 12, 13. When Solomon became a penitent, he immediately became a preacher, Eccl. 1. 1. Those are best able to teach others the grace of God, who have themselves had the experience of it: and those who are themselves taught of God, ought to tell others what he has done for their souls, (66. 16.) and so teach them. *I will guide thee with mine eye*. Some apply it to God's conduct and direction. He teaches us by his word, and guides us with his eye, by the secret intimations of his will in the hints and turns of Providence, which he enables his people to understand and take direction from; as a master makes a servant know his mind by a wink of his eye. When Christ turned and looked upon Peter, he guided him with his eye. But it is rather to be taken as David's promise to those who sat under his instruction, his own children and family especially; *"I will counsel thee, mine eyes shall be upon thee"*, (so the margin reads it,) *"I will give thee the best counsel I can, and then observe whether thou takest it or no."* Those that are taught in the word, should be under the constant inspection of those that teach them; spiritual guides must be overseers.

In this application of the foregoing doctrine concerning the blessedness of those whose sins are pardoned, here is a word to sinners, and a word to saints; and this is rightly dividing the word of truth, and giving to each their portion.

1. Here is a word of caution to sinners, and a good reason given for it. (1.) The caution is, not to be unruly and ungovernable;

(v. 9.) *Be ye not as the horse, or the mule, which have no understanding.* When the psalmist would reproach himself for the sins he repented of, he compared himself to a *beast before God*; so *foolish have I been and ignorant*, (73. 22.) and therefore warns others not to be so. It is our honour and happiness, that we have understanding, that we are capable of being governed by reason, and of reasoning with ourselves. Let us therefore use the faculties we have, and act rationally. The horse and mule must be managed with bit and bridle, lest they come near us, to do us a mischief, or (as some read it) that they may come near to us, to do us service, that they *may obey us*, Jam. 3. 3. Let us not be like them; let us not be hurried by appetite and passion, at any time, to go contrary to the dictates of right reason, and to our true interest. If sinners would be governed and determined by these, they would soon become saints, and would not go a step further in their sinful courses; where there is renewing grace, there is no need of the bit and bridle of restraining grace. (2.) The reason for this caution, is, because the way of sin which we would persuade you to forsake, will certainly end in sorrow; (v. 10.) *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked*, which will not only spoil their vain and carnal mirth, and put an end to it, but will make them pay dear for it. Sin will have sorrow, if not repented of, everlasting sorrow. It was part of the sentence, *I will greatly multiply thy sorrows*. "Be wise for yourselves, therefore, and turn from your wickedness, that you may prevent those sorrows, those many sorrows."

2. Here is a word of comfort to saints, and a good reason given for that too. (1.) They are assured that if they will but trust in the Lord, and keep close to him, *mercy shall compass them about on every side*, (v. 10.) so that they shall not depart from God, for that *mercy shall keep them in*, nor shall any real evil break in upon them, for that mercy shall keep it out. (2.) They are therefore commanded to be glad in the Lord, and to rejoice in him, to that degree, as even to *shout for joy*, v. 11. Let them be so transported with this holy joy, as not to be able to contain themselves: and let them affect others with it, that they also may see that a life of communion with God is the most pleasant and comfortable life we can live, in this world. This is that present bliss which the upright in heart, and they only, are entitled to, and qualified for.

PSALM XXXIII.

This is a psalm of praise; it is probable that David was the penman of it, but we are not told so, because God would have us look above the penmen of sacred writ, to that blessed Spirit that moved and guided them. The psalmist, in this psalm, 1. Calls upon the righteous to praise God, v. 1. 3. 11. Furnishes us with matter for praise. We must praise God, 1. For his justice, goodness, and truth, appearing in his word, and in all his works, v. 4, 5. 2. For his power appearing in the work of creation, v. 6. 9. 3. For the sovereignty of his providence in the government of the world, (v. 10, 11.) and again, v. 13. 17. 4. For the peculiar favour which he bears to his own chosen people, which encourages them to trust in him, (v. 12.) and again, v. 18. 22. We need not be at a loss for proper thoughts in singing this psalm, which so naturally speaks the pious affections of a devout soul toward God.

1. **R**EJOICE in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright. 2. Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings. 3. Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise. 4. For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth. 5. He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. 6. By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. 7. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in store-houses. 8. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. 9. For he spake,

and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. 10. The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. 11. The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations

Four things the psalmist expresses in these verses.

1. The great desire he had that God might be praised: he did not think he did it so well himself, but that he wished others also might be employed in this work; the more the better in this concert, it is the more like heaven. 1. Holy joy is the heart and soul of praise, and that is here pressed upon all good people; (v. 1.) *Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous*, so the foregoing psalm concluded, and so this begins; for all our religious exercises should both begin and end with a holy complacency and triumph in God as the best of beings, and best of friends. 2. Thankful praise is the breath and language of holy joy; and that also is here required of us; (v. 2.) "*Praise the Lord*;" speak well of him, and give him the glory due to his name." 3. Religious songs are the proper expressions of thankful praise; those are here required; (v. 3.) "*Sing unto him a new song*, the best you have, not that which, by frequent use, is worn thread-bare; but that which, being new, is most likely to move the affections; a new song for new mercies, and upon every new occasion, for those compassions which are new every morning." Music was then used, by the appointment of David, with the temple songs, that they might be the better sung: and this also is here called for; (v. 2.) *Sing unto him with the psaltery*. Here is, (1.) A good rule for this duty; "Do it skilfully, and with a loud noise; let it have the best both of head and heart; let it be done intelligently, and with a clear head; affectionately, and with a warm heart." (2.) A good reason for this duty; for *praise is comely for the upright*. It is well-pleasing to God; the garments of praise add much to the comeliness which God puts upon his people; and it is an excellent ornament to our profession; *it becomes the upright*, whom God has put so much honour upon, to give honour to him. The upright praise God in a comely manner, for they praise him with their hearts, that is praising him with their glory. Whereas the praises of hypocrites are awkward and uncomely, like a *parable in the mouth of fools*, Prov. 26. 7.

II. The high thoughts he had of God, and of his infinite perfections, v. 4, 5. God makes himself known to us, 1. In his word; here put for all divine revelation, all that which God, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake to the children of men; and that is all right, there is nothing amiss in it: his commands exactly agree with the rules of equity and the eternal reasons of good and evil. His promises all are wise and good, and inviolably sure, and there is no iniquity in his threatenings, but even those are designed for our good, by deterring us from evil. God's word is right, and therefore all our deviations from it are wrong, and we are then in the right when we agree with it. 2. In his works, and those are all done in truth, all according to his counsels, which are called the *scriptures of truth*, Dan. 10. 21. The copy in all God's works agrees exactly with the great original, the plan laid in the Eternal Mind, and varies not in the least jot. God has made it to appear in his works, (1.) That he is a God of inflexible justice. He *loveth righteousness and judgment*. There is nothing but righteousness in the sentence he passes, and judgment in the execution of it. He never did or can do wrong to any of his creatures, but is always ready to right those that are wronged, and does it with delight. He takes pleasure in those that are righteous. He is himself the righteous Lord, and therefore loveth righteousness. (2.) That he is a God of inexhaustible bounty; *the earth is full of his goodness*, that is, of the proofs and instances of it. The benign influences which the earth receives from above, and the fruits it is thereby enabled to produce; the provision that is made both for man and beast, and the common blessings with which all the nations of the earth are blessed, plainly speak that *the earth is full of his goodness*; the darkest,

the coldest, the hottest, and the most dry and desert part of it not excepted: what pity is it that this earth, which is so full of God's goodness, should be so empty of his praises; and that, of the multitudes that live upon his bounty, there are so few that live to his glory!

III. The conviction he was under of the almighty power of God, evidenced in the creation of the world. We believe in God, and therefore we praise him as the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, so we are here taught to praise him.

Observe, 1. How God made the world, and brought all things into being. (1.) How easily: All things were made *by the word of the Lord, and by the breath of his mouth*; Christ is the Word, the Spirit is the Breath, so that God the Father made the world, as he rules it, and redeems it, by his Son and Spirit. He spake, and he commanded, (v. 9.) and that was enough, there needed no more. With men, saying and doing are two things, but it is not so with God; by the Word and Spirit of God, as the world was made, so was man, that little world: God said, "Let us make man," and he breathed into him the breath of life. By the Word and Spirit the church is built, that new world, and grace wrought in the soul, that new man, that new creation. What cannot that Power do, which, with a word, made a world? (2.) How effectually it was done; and it stood fast. What God does, he does to purpose; he does it, and it *stands fast*, v. 9. *Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever*, Eccl. 3. 14. It is by virtue of that command to stand fast, that they *continue to this day according to God's ordinance*, 119. 91.

2. What he made: He made all things, but notice is here taken, (1.) Of *the heavens, and the host of them*, v. 6. The visible heavens, and the sun, moon, and stars, their hosts; the highest heavens, and the angels their hosts. (2.) Of the waters, and the treasures of them, v. 7. The earth was at first covered with the water, and, being heavier, must of course subside and sink under it; but to shew, from the very first, that the God of nature is not tied to the ordinary method of nature, and the usual operations of his powers, with a word's speaking, *he gathered the waters together on a heap*, that the dry land might appear, yet left them not to continue on a heap, but *laid up the depth in store-houses*: not only in the flats where the seas make their beds, and in which they are locked up by the sand on the shore as in store-houses, but in secret subterraneous caverns, where they are hid from the eyes of all living, but were reserved as in a store-house for that day when those fountains of the great deep were to be broken up; and they are still laid up there in store, for what use the great Master of the house knows best.

3. What use is to be made of this, v. 8. *Let all the earth fear the Lord, and stand in awe of him*, that is, let all the children of men worship him, and give glory to him, 95. 5, 6. The everlasting gospel gives this as the reason why we must worship God, because he made the heaven and the earth, and the sea, Rev. 14. 6, 7. Let us all fear him, that is, dread his wrath, and displeasure, and be afraid of having him our enemy, and standing it out against him. Let us not dare to offend him, who, having this power, no doubt, has all power in his hand. It is dangerous being at war with him, who has the host of heaven for his armies, and the depths of the sea for his magazines, and therefore it is wisdom to desire conditions of peace, see Jer. 5. 22.

IV. The satisfaction he had in God's sovereignty and dominion, v. 10, 11. He over-rules all the counsels of men, and makes them, contrary to their intention, serviceable to his counsels. Come and see, with an eye of faith, God in the throne, 1. Frustrating the devices of his enemies. *He bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought*, so that what they imagine against him and his kingdom proves a *rain thing*: (2. 1.) the counsel of Ahithophel is turned into foolishness. Haman's plot baffled; though the design be laid never so deep, and the hopes raised upon it never so high, yet, if God says *it shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass*, it is all to no purpose. 2. Fulfilling his own decrees: *The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever*. It is immutable in itself, *for he is in one mind, and who can turn him?* The execution of it may be opposed, but cannot in the least be obstructed by any created

power. Through all the revolutions of time God never changed his measures, but in every event, even that which to us is most surprising, the eternal counsel of God is fulfilled; nor can any thing prevent its being accomplished in its times. With what pleasure to ourselves may we, in singing this, give praise to God! How easy may this thought make us at all times, that God governs the world, that he did it in infinite wisdom before we were born, and will do it when we are silent in the dust.

12. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance. 13. The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. 14. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. 15. He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works. 16. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. 17. An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. 18. Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; 19. To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. 20. Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield. 21. For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name. 22. Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.

We are here taught to give to God the glory,

I. Of his common providence towards all the children of men. Though he has endued man with understanding and freedom of will, yet he reserves to himself the government of him, and even of those very faculties by which he is qualified to govern himself.

1. The children of men are all under his eye, even their hearts are so; and all the motions and operations of their souls, which none know but they themselves, he knows better than they themselves, v. 13, 14. Though the residence of God's glory is in the highest heavens, yet thence he not only has a prospect of all the earth, but a particular inspection of all the inhabitants of the earth. He not only beholds them, but he *looks upon them*, he looks narrowly upon them, (so the word here used is sometimes rendered,) so narrowly, that not the least thought can escape his observation. Atheists think, that, because he dwells above in heaven, he cannot, or will not, take notice of what is done here in this lower world; but from thence, high as it is, he sees us all, and all persons and things are naked and open before him.

2. Their hearts, as well as their times, are all in his hand; *He fashions their hearts*. He made them at first, formed the spirit of each man within him, then when he brought him into being. Hence he is called *the Father of Spirits*: and this is a good argument to prove that he perfectly knows them; the artist that made the clock can account for the motions of every wheel. David uses this argument, with application to himself, 139. 1, 14. He still moulds the hearts of men, turns them as the rivers of water, which way soever he pleases, to serve his own purposes, darkens or enlightens men's understandings, stiffens or bows their wills, according as he is pleased to make use of them. He that fashions men's hearts fashions them alike; it is in hearts as in faces, though there is a great difference, and such a variety, as that no two faces are exactly of the same features, nor any two hearts exactly of the same temper, yet there is such a similitude, that, in some things, all faces and all hearts agree, *as in water face answers to face*, Prov. 27. 19. *He fashions them together*:

(so some read it;) as the wheels of a watch, though of different shapes, sizes, and motions, are yet all put together, to serve one and the same purpose, so the hearts of men and their dispositions, however varying from each other, and seeming to contradict one another, are yet all over-ruled, to serve the divine purpose, which is one.

3. They, and all they do, are subject to his judgment; *for he considers all their works*, not only knows them, but weighs them, that he may render to every man according to his works, in the day, in the world, of retribution, in the judgment, and to eternity.

4. All the powers of the creature have a dependence upon him, and are of no account, of no avail at all, without him, *v. 16, 17*. It is much for the honour of God, that not only no force can prevail in opposition to him, but that no force can act but in dependence on him, and by a power derived from him.

(1.) The strength of a king is nothing without God; no king is sacred by his royal prerogatives, or the authority with which he is invested; for the powers that are of that kind are ordained of God, and are what he makes them, and no more. David was a king, and a man of war from his youth, and yet acknowledged God only to be his Protector and Saviour.

(2.) The strength of an army is nothing without God. The multitude of a host cannot secure those under whose command they act, unless God make them a security to them. A great army cannot be sure of victory; for, when God pleases, one shall chase a thousand.

(3.) The strength of a giant is nothing without God; a mighty man, such as Goliath was, is not delivered by his much strength, when his day comes to fall; neither the firmness or activity of his body, nor the stoutness or resolution of his mind, will stand him in any stead, any further than God is pleased to give him success. Let not the strong man then glory in his strength, but let us all strengthen ourselves in the Lord our God, go forth, and go on, in his strength.

(4.) The strength of a horse is nothing without God; (*v. 17*). *A horse is a vain thing for safety*. In war, horses were then so highly accounted of, and so much depended on, that God forbade the kings of Israel to *multiply horses*, (*Deut. 17. 16.*) lest they should be tempted to trust to them, and their confidence should thereby be taken off from God. David houghed the horses of the Syrians; (*2 Sam. 8. 4.*) here he houghed all the horses in the world, by pronouncing a horse a vain thing for safety in the day of battle. If the war-horse be unruly, and ill-managed, he may hurry his rider into danger, instead of carrying him out of danger. If he be killed under him, he may be his death, instead of saving his life. It is therefore our interest to make sure God's favour towards us, and then we may be sure of his power engaged for us, and need not fear whatever is against us.

II. We are to give God the glory of his special grace. In the midst of his acknowledgments of God's providence, he pronounces those blessed that have Jehovah for their God, who governs the world, and has wherewithal to help them in every time of need, while they were miserable who had this and the other Baal for their God, which was so far from being able to hear and help them, that it was itself senseless and helpless; (*v. 12.*) *Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord*, even Israel, who had the knowledge of the true God, and were taken into covenant with him, and all others who own God for their's, and are owned by him; for they also, whatever nation they are of, are of the spiritual seed of Abraham. 1. It is their wisdom, that they take the Lord for their God, that they direct their homage and adoration there where it is due, and where the payment of it will not be in vain. 2. It is their happiness, that they are the people whom God has chosen for his own inheritance, whom he is pleased with, and honoured in, and whom he protects and takes care of, whom he cultivates and improves as a man does his inheritance, *Deut. 32. 9*. Now let us observe here, to the honour of divine grace,

(1.) The regard which God has to his people, *v. 18, 19*. God beholds all the sons of men with an eye of observation, but his eye of favour and complacency is upon them that fear him; he

looks upon them with delight, as the father on his children, as the bridegroom on his spouse, *Isa. 62. 5*. While those that depend on arms and armies, on chariots and horses, perish in the disappointment of their expectations, God's people, under his protection, are safe, for he shall deliver their soul from death, when there seems to be but a step between them and it; if he do not deliver the body from temporal death, yet he will deliver the soul from spiritual and eternal death; their souls, whatever happens, shall live and praise him, either in this world, or in a better. From his bounty they shall be supplied with all necessities—he shall keep them alive in famine; when others die for want, they shall live, which makes it a distinguishing mercy. When visible means fail, God will find out some way or other to supply them. He does not say that he will give them abundance, (they have no reason either to desire it, or to expect it,) but he will keep them alive, they shall not starve; and when destroying judgments are abroad, it ought to be reckoned a great favour, for it is a very striking one, and lays us under peculiar obligations, to have our lives given us for a prey. They that have the Lord for their God, shall find him their Help and their Shield, *v. 20*. In their difficulties he will assist them, they shall be helped over them, helped through them; in their dangers he will secure them, so that they shall not receive any real damage.

(2.) The regard which God's people have to him, and which we all ought to have, in consideration of this.

[1.] We must wait for God; we must attend the motions of his providence, and accommodate ourselves to them, and patiently expect the issue of them. Our souls must wait for him; (*v. 20.*) we must not only in word and tongue profess a believing regard to God, but it must be inward and sincere, a secret and silent attendance on him.

[2.] We must rely on God; hope in his mercy, in the goodness of his nature, though we have not an express promise to depend upon. They that fear God and his wrath must hope in God and his mercy; for there is no flying from God, but by flying to him. These pious dispositions will not only consist together, but befriend each other; a holy fear of God, and yet at the same time a hope in his mercy. This is *trusting in his holy name*, (*v. 21.*) in all that whereby he has made known himself to us, for our encouragement to serve him.

[3.] We must *rejoice in God*, *v. 21*. Those do not truly rest in God, or do not know the unspeakable advantage they have by so doing, who do not rejoice in him at all times; because they that hope in God hope for an eternal fulness of joy in his presence.

[4.] We must seek to him for that mercy which we hope in, *v. 22*. Our expectations from God are not to supersede, but to quicken and encourage, our applications to him; he will be sought unto for that which he has promised, and therefore the psalm concludes with a short, but comprehensive, prayer, "*Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us*; let us always have the comfort and benefit of it, not according as we merit from thee, but according as we hope in thee, according to the promise which thou hast in thy word given to us, and according to the faith which thou hast by thy Spirit and grace wrought in us." If, in singing these verses, we put forth a dependence upon God, and let out our desires towards him, we make melody with our hearts to the Lord.

PSALM XXXIV.

This psalm was penned upon a particular occasion, as appears by the title, and yet there is little in it peculiar to that occasion, but that which is general, both by way of thanksgiving to God, and instruction to us. I. He praises God for the experience which he and others had had of his goodness, v. 1. 6. II. He encourages all good people to trust in God, and to seek to him, v. 7. 10. III. He gives good counsel to us all, as unto children, to take heed of sin, and to make conscience of our duty both to God and man, v. 11. 14. IV. To enforce this good counsel, he shews God's favour to the righteous, and his displeasure against the wicked, in which he sets before us good and evil, the blessing and the curse, v. 15. 22. So that, in singing this psalm, we are both to give glory to God, and to teach and admonish ourselves and one another.

A psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.

I WILL bless the LORD at all times: his praise *shall* continually be in my mouth. 2. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear *thereof*, and be glad. 3. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. 4. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. 5. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. 6. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles. 7. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. 8. O taste and see that the LORD *is* good: blessed *is* the man *that* trusteth in him. 9. O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for *there is* no want to them that fear him. 10. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good *thing*.

The title of this psalm tells us both who penned it, and upon what occasion it was penned. David, being forced, by the rage of ul, to leave his country, sought for shelter as near it as he could, the land of the Philistines; there it was soon discovered who he was, and he was brought before the king, who, in the narrative, is called *Achish*, his proper name, here, *Abimelech*, his title; and, lest he should be treated as a spy, or one that came thither upon design, he feigned himself to be a madman, (such there have been in every age, that even by idiots men might be taught to give God thanks for the use of their reason,) that Achish might dismiss him as a contemptible man, rather than take cognizance of him as a dangerous man. And it had the effect he desired; by this stratagem he escaped the hand that otherwise would have handled him roughly. Now, 1. We cannot justify David in this dissimulation. It ill became an honest man to feign himself to be what he was not, and a man of honour to feign himself to be a fool and a madman. If, in sport, we mimic those who have not so good an understanding as we think we have, we forget that God might have made their case our's. 2. Yet we cannot but wonder at the composure of his spirit, and how far he was from any change of that, when he changed his behaviour. Even when he was in that fright, or rather in that danger only, his heart was so fixed, trusting in God, that even then he penned this excellent psalm, which has as much in it of the marks of a calm sedate spirit as any psalm in all the book; and there is something curious too in the composition, for it is what is called an alphabetical psalm, that is, a psalm in which every verse begins with each letter in its order, as it stands in the Hebrew alphabet. Happy they who can thus keep their temper, and keep their graces in exercise, even when they are tempted to change their behaviour.

In this former part of the psalm,

I. David engages and excites himself to praise God. Though it was his fault that he changed his behaviour, yet it was God's mercy that he escaped, and the mercy was so much the greater, in that God did not deal with him according to the desert of his dissimulation, and we must in every thing give thanks. He resolves, 1. That he will praise God constantly; *I will bless the Lord at all times*, upon all occasions. He resolves to keep up stated times for this duty; to lay hold on all opportunities for it, and to renew his praises upon every fresh occurrence that furnished him with matter. If we hope to spend our eternity in praising God, it is fit that we should spend as much as may be of our time in this work. 2. That he will praise him openly; *His praise shall continually be in my mouth*. Thus he would shew how forward he was to own his obligations to the mercy of God, and how desirous to make others also sensible of their's. 3. That he will praise him heartily; *My soul shall make her boast in the Lord, in my rela-*

tion to him, my interest in him, and expectations from him." It is not vain glory to glory in the Lord.

II. He calls upon others to join with him herein. He expects they will; (v. 2.) *"the humble shall hear thereof"*, both of my deliverance and of my thankfulness, and be glad that a good man has so much favour shewed him, and a good God so much honour done him." Those have most comfort in God's mercies, both to others and to themselves, that are humble, and have the least confidence in their own merit and sufficiency. It pleased David to think that God's favours to him would rejoice the heart of every Israelite.

Three things he would have us all to concur with him in.

1. In great and high thoughts of God, which we should express in magnifying him, and exalting his name, v. 3. We cannot make God greater or higher than he is; but, if we adore him as infinitely great, and higher than the highest, he is pleased to reckon this magnifying and exalting him. This we must do together. God's praises sound best in concert, for so we praise him as the angels do in heaven. They that share in God's favour, as all the saints do, should concur in his praises; and we should be as desirous of the assistance of our friends in returning thanks for mercies, as in praying for them.

We have reason to join in thanksgiving to God,

(1.) For his readiness to hear prayer, which all the saints have had the comfort of, for he never said to any of them, *Seek ye me, in vain*. [1.] David, for his part, will give it under his hand, that he has found him a prayer-hearing God; (v. 4.) *"I sought the Lord in my distress, entreated his favour, begged his help, and he heard me, answered my request immediately, and delivered me from all my fears, both from the death I feared, and from the disquietude and disturbance produced by my fear of it."* The former he does by his providence working for us, the latter by his grace working in us, to silence our fears, and still the tumult of the spirits; this latter is the greater mercy of the two, because the thing we fear is our trouble only: but our unbelieving distrustful fear of it is our sin; nay, it is often more our torment too than the thing itself would be, which perhaps would only touch the bone and the flesh, while the fear would prey upon the spirits, and put us out of the possession of our own soul. David's prayers helped to silence his fears; having sought the Lord, and left his case with him, he could with great composure wait the event. "But David was a great and eminent man, we may not expect to be favoured as he was; have any others ever experienced the like benefit by prayer?" Yes, [2.] Many beside him have looked unto God by faith and prayer, and *have been lightened by it*, v. 5. It has wonderfully revived and comforted them; witness Hannah, who, when she had prayed, *went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad*. When we look to the world, we are darkened, we are perplexed, and at a loss; but when we look to God, from him we have the light both of direction and joy, and our way is made both plain and pleasant. These here spoken of, that looked unto God, had their expectations raised, and the event did not frustrate them, their faces were not ashamed of their confidence. But, perhaps, these also were persons of great eminency, like David himself, and, upon that account, were highly favoured; or their numbers made them considerable; nay, [3.] This poor man cried, a single person, meat and inconsiderable, whom no man looked upon with any respect or looked after with any concern; yet he was as welcome to the throne of grace as David, or any of his worthies; the Lord heard him, took cognizance of his case and of his prayers, and *saved him out of all his troubles*, v. 6. God will regard the prayer of the destitute, 102. 17. See Isa. 57. 15.

(2.) For the ministration of the good angels about us; (v. 7.) *The angel of the Lord*, a guard of angels, (so some,) but as unanimous in their service as if they were but one, or a guardian angel, encamps round about them that fear God, as the life-guard about the prince, and delivers them. God makes use of the attendance of the good spirits for the protection of his people from the malice and power of evil spirits; and the holy angels do us more good offices, every day, than we are aware of. Though in

dignity and in capacity of nature they are very much superior to us, though they retain their primitive rectitude, which we have lost, though they have constant employment in the upper world, the employment of praising God, and are entitled to a constant rest and bliss there, yet, in obedience to their Maker, and in love to those that bear his image, they condescend to minister to the saints, and stand up for them against the powers of darkness; they not only visit them, but encamp round about them, acting for their good as really, though not as sensibly, as for Jacob's, (Gen. 32. 1.) and Elisha's 2 Kings, 6. 17. All the glory be to the God of the angels.

2. He would have us to join with him in kind and good thoughts of God; (v. 8.) *O taste, and see, that the Lord is good.* The goodness of God includes both the beauty and amiableness of his being, and the bounty and beneficence of his providence and grace; and, accordingly, (1.) We must taste that he is a bountiful Benefactor, relish the goodness of God in all his gifts to us, and reckon that the savour and sweetness of them. Let God's goodness be rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel. (2.) We must see that he is a beautiful Being, and delight in the contemplation of his infinite perfections. By taste and sight we both make discoveries, and take complacency; taste, and see, God's goodness; take notice of it, and take the comfort of it, 1 Pet. 2. 3. He is good, for he makes all those truly blessed that trust in him; let us, therefore, be so convinced of his goodness, as thereby to be encouraged in the worst of times to trust in him.

3. He would have us join with him in a resolution to seek God and serve him, and continue in his fear; (v. 9.) *O fear the Lord, ye his saints;* when we taste and see that he is good, we must not forget that he is great, and greatly to be feared; nay, even his goodness is the proper object of a filial reverence and awe, *They shall fear the Lord and his goodness,* Hos. 3. 5. *Fear the Lord;* worship him, and make conscience of your duty to him in every thing; not fear him and shun him, but fear him and seek him, (v. 10.) as a people seek unto their God; apply yourselves to him, and portion yourselves in him. To encourage us to fear God and seek him, it is here promised that those that do so, even in this wanting world, shall *want no good thing.* Heb. *They shall not want all good things;* they shall so have of all good things, that they shall have no reason to complain of the want of any. As to the things of the other world, they shall have grace sufficient for the support of the spiritual life, 2 Cor. 12. 9. Ps. 84. 11. And as to this life, they shall have what is necessary to the support of it from the hand of God; as a Father, he will feed them with food convenient; what further comforts they desire, they shall have, as far as Infinite Wisdom sees good, and what they want in one thing shall be made up in another. What God denies them, he will give them grace to be content without, and then they do not want it, Deut. 3. 26. Paul had all, and abounded, because he was content, Phil. 4. 11, 18. Those that live by faith in God's all-sufficiency, want nothing; for in him they have enough. The young lions often lack, and suffer hunger; and they that live upon common providence, as the lions do, shall want that satisfaction which they have that live by faith in the promise. They that trust to themselves, and think their own hands sufficient for them, shall want, for bread is not always to the wise; but verily they shall be fed that trust in God, and desire to be at his finding. They that are ravenous, and prey upon all about them, shall want, but *the meek shall inherit the earth;* they shall not want, who with quietness work, and mind their own business; plain-hearted Jacob has pottage enough, when Esau, the cunning hunter, is ready to perish for hunger.

11. Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD. 12. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? 13. Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. 14. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

15. The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. 16. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. 17. The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. 18. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. 19. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all. 20. He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken. 21. Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. 22. The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.

David, in this latter part of the psalm, undertakes to teach children; though a man of war, and anointed to be king, he did not think it below him; though now he had his head so full of cares, and his hands of business, yet he could find heart and time to give good counsel to young people, from his own experience. It does not appear that he had now any children of his own, at least, any that were grown up to a capacity of being taught; but, by divine inspiration, he instructs the children of his people. Those that were in years would not to be taught by him, though he had offered them his service; (32. 8.) but he has hopes that the tender branches will be more easily bent, and that children and young people will be more tractable; and therefore he calls together a congregation of them; (v. 11.) "Come, ye children, that are now in your learning age, and are now to lay up a stock of knowledge which you must live upon all your days; ye children, that are foolish and ignorant, and need to be taught." Perhaps he intends especially those children whose parents neglected to instruct and catechise them; and it is as great a piece of charity to put those children to school whose parents are not in a capacity to teach them, as to feed those children whose parents have not bread for them. Observe, 1. What he expects from them; "*Hearken unto me,* leave your play, lay by your toys, and hear what I have to say to you; not only give me the hearing, but observe and obey me." 2. What he undertakes to teach them—*The fear of the Lord*, inclusive of all the duties of religion. David was a famous musician, a statesman, a soldier; but he does not say to the children, "I will teach you to play on the harp, or to handle the sword or spear, or to draw the bow; or, I will teach you the maxims of state-policy;" but, I will teach you *the fear of the Lord*, which is better than all the arts and sciences, better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices. That is it which we should be solicitous both to learn ourselves, and to teach our children.

I. He supposes that we all aim to be happy; (v. 12.) *What man is he that desireth life?* that is, (as it follows,) not only to see many days, but to see good comfortable days; *non est vivere, sed valere, vita*—It is not our being, but our well-being, that is entitled to the name of life. It is asked, "Who wishes to live a long and pleasant life?" And it is easily answered, *Who does not?* Surely this must look further than time and this present world; for man's life on earth, at best, consists but of few days, and those full of trouble. What man is he that would be eternally happy; that would see many days, as many as the days of heaven; that would see good in that world where all bliss is in perfection, without the least alloy; who would see that good before him now, by faith and hope, and enjoy it shortly? Who would? Alas, very few have that in their thoughts; most ask, *Who will shew us any good?* But few ask, *What shall we do to inherit eternal life?* This question implies that there are some such.

II. He prescribes the true and only way to happiness, both in this world and that to come, v. 13, 14. Would we pass comfortably through the world, and out of the world, our constant care

must be to keep a good conscience; and, in order to that, 1. We must learn to bridle our tongues, and be careful what we say; that we never speak amiss, to God's dishonour, or our neighbour's prejudice; *Keep thy tongue from evil speaking*, lying and slandering. So great a way does this go in religion, that, *if any offend not in word, the same is a perfect man*; and so little a way does religion go without this, that it is said, respecting him who *bridles not his tongue, His religion is vain*. 2. We must be upright and sincere in every thing we say, and not double-tongued; our words must be the indications of our minds; our lips must be kept from speaking guile either to God or man. 3. We must leave all our sins, and resolve we will have no more to do with them. We must depart from evil, from evil works and evil workers; from the sins others commit, and which we have formerly allowed ourselves in. 4. It is not enough not to do hurt in the world, but we must study to be useful, and live to some purpose. We must not only depart from evil, but we must do good; good for ourselves, especially for our own souls, employing them well, furnishing them with a good treasure, and fitting them for another world; and, as we have ability and opportunity, we must do good to others also. 5. Because nothing is more contrary to that love which never fails, which is the summary both of law and gospel, both of grace and glory, than strife and contention, which bring confusion and every evil work; we must seek peace and pursue it; we must shew a peaceable disposition, study the things that make for peace, do nothing to break the peace, and to make mischief. If peace seem to flee from us, we must pursue it; *follow peace with all men*, spare no pains, no expense, to preserve and recover peace, be willing to deny ourselves a great deal, both in honour and interest, for peace-sake. These excellent directions in the way to life and good, are transcribed into the New Testament, and made part of our gospel-duty, 1 Pet. 3. 10, 11. And perhaps David, in warning us that we speak no guile, reflects upon his own sin, in changing his behaviour. They that truly repent of what they have done amiss, will warn others to take heed of doing likewise.

III. He enforces these directions by setting before us the happiness of the godly in the love and favour of God, and the miserable state of the wicked under his displeasure. Here are life and death, good and evil, the blessing and the curse, plainly stated before us, that we may choose life, and live. See Isa. 3. 10, 11.

1. *Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with them*, however they may bless themselves in their own way.

(1.) God is against them, and then they cannot but be miserable; sad is the case of that man who, by his sin, has made his Maker his Enemy, his Destroyer. *The face of the Lord is against them that do evil*, v. 16. Sometimes God is said to *turn his face from them*, (Jer. 18. 17.) because they have forsaken him; here he is said to *set his face against them*, because they have fought against him; and, most certainly, God is able to out-face the most proud and daring sinners, and can frown them into hell.

(2.) *Ruin is before them*; this will follow, of course, if God be against them, for he is able both to kill, and to cast into hell. [t.] The land of the living shall be no place for them or their's. When God sets his face against them, he shall not only cut them off, but *cut off the remembrance of them*; when they are alive, shall bury them in obscurity, when they are dead, shall bury them in oblivion. He shall root out their posterity, by whom they would be remembered; he shall pour disgrace upon their achievements, which they gloried in, and for which they thought they should have been remembered. It is certain that there is no lasting honour but that which comes from God. [2.] There shall be a sting in their death; *Evil shall slay the wicked*, v. 21. Their death shall be miserable; so it will certainly be, though they die in a bed of down, or in the bed of honour. Death, to them, has a curse in it, and is the king of terrors; to them it is evil, only evil. It is very well observed by Dr. Hammond, that the evil here, which slays the wicked, is the same word, in the singular number, that is used, (v. 19.) for the afflictions of the righteous, to intimate that godly people have many troubles; and yet they do them no hurt, but are made to work for good to them, for God will deliver them out of them all: whereas, wicked people have

fewer troubles; fewer evils befall them, perhaps but one, and yet that one may prove their utter ruin. One trouble, with a curse in it, kills and slays, and does execution; but many, with a blessing in them, are harmless, nay, gainful. [3.] Desolation will be their everlasting portion; they that are wicked themselves, often hate the righteous, name and thing, have an implacable enmity to them and their righteousness; but they shall be desolate, shall be condemned as guilty, and laid waste for ever, shall be for ever forsaken and abandoned of God, and all good angels, and men; and those that are so are desolate indeed.

2. *Yct, say to the righteous, it shall be well with them*; all good people are under God's special favour and protection. We are here assured of that, under a great variety of instances and expressions.

(1.) God takes special notice of good people, and takes notice who have their eyes ever to him, and who make conscience of their duty to him; *The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous*, (v. 15.) to direct and guide them, to protect and keep them. Parents that are very fond of a child, will not let it be out of their sight; none of God's children are ever from under his eye, but on them he looks with a singular complacency, as well as with a watchful and tender concern.

(2.) They are sure of an answer of peace to their prayers. All God's people are a praying people, and they cry in prayer, which denotes great importunity; but is it to any purpose? Yes, [1.] God takes notice of what we say; (v. 17.) *They cry, and the Lord hears them*, and hears them so as to make it appear he has a regard to them. *His ears are open to their prayers*, to receive them all, and to receive them readily and with delight. Though he has been a God hearing prayer, ever since men began to call upon the name of the Lord, yet his ear is not heavy. There is no rhetoric, nothing charming, in a cry, yet God's ears are open to it, as the tender mother's to the cry of her sucking child, which another would take no notice of; *The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth*, v. 17. This intimates that it is the constant practice of good people, when they are in distress, to cry unto God, and it is their constant comfort that God hears them. [2.] He not only takes notice of what we say, but is ready to us for our relief; (v. 18.) *He is nigh to them that are of a broken heart, and saves them*. Note, First, It is the character of the righteous, whose prayers God will hear, that they are of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, that is, humbled for sin, and emptied of self; they are low in their own eyes, and have no confidence in their own merit and sufficiency, but in God only. Secondly, Those who are so have God nigh unto them, to comfort and support them, that the spirit may not be broken, more than is meet, lest it should fail before him. See Isa. 57. 15. Though God is high, and dwells on high, yet he is near to those, who, being of a contrite spirit, know how to value his favour, and will save them from sinking under their burthens; he is near them to good purpose.

(3.) They are taken under the special protection of the divine government; (v. 20.) *He keepeth all his bones*; not only his soul, but his body; not only his body in general, but every bone in it, *not one of them is broken*. He that has a broken heart, shall not have a broken bone; for David himself had found, that, when he had a contrite heart, *the broken bones were made to rejoice*, 51. 8, 17. One would not expect to meet with any thing of Christ here, and yet this scripture is said to be fulfilled in him, (John, 19. 36.) when the soldiers brake the legs of the two thieves that were crucified with him, but did not break his, they being under the protection of this promise, as well as of the type, even the paschal-lamb, *a bone of him shall not be broken*; the promises being made good to Christ, through him, are sure to all the seed. It does not follow but that a good man may have a broken bone; but, by the watchful providence of God concerning him, it is often wonderfully prevented, and the preservation of his bones is the effect of this promise; if he have a broken bone, sooner or later it shall be made whole, at furthest at the resurrection, when that which is sown in weakness, shall be raised in power.

(4.) They are, and shall be, delivered out of their troubles. [1.] It is supposed that they have their share of crosses in this world, perhaps a greater share than others. In the world they

must have tribulation, that they may be conformed both to the will of God, and to the example of Christ; (v. 19.) *Many are the afflictions of the righteous*, witness David and his afflictions, 132. 1. There are those that hate them, (v. 21.) and they are continually aiming to do them a mischief; their God loves them, and therefore corrects them, so that, between the mercy of Heaven, and the malice of hell, the afflictions of the righteous must needs be many. [2.] God has engaged for their deliverance and salvation; *He delivers them out of their troubles*; (v. 17, 19.) he saves them, (v. 18.) so that, though they may fall into trouble, it shall not be their ruin. This promise of their deliverance is explained, v. 22. Whatever troubles befall them, *First*, They shall not hurt their better part. *The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants* from the power of the grave, (49. 15.) and from the sting of every affliction. He keeps them from sinning in their troubles, which is the only thing that would do them a mischief, and keeps them from despair, and from being put out of the possession of their own souls. *Secondly*, They shall not hinder their everlasting bliss; *none of them that trust in him shall be desolate*; they shall not be comfortless, for they shall not be cut off from their communion with God. No man is desolate, but he whom God has forsaken, nor is any man undone till he is in hell. Those that are God's faithful servants, that make it their care to please him, and their business to honour him, and, in doing so, trust him to protect and reward them, and, with good thoughts of him, refer themselves to him, have reason to be easy, whatever befalls them, for they are safe, and shall be happy.

In singing these verses, let us be confirmed in the choice we have made of the ways of God; let us be quickened in his service, and greatly encouraged by the assurances he has given of the particular care he takes of all those that faithfully adhere to him.

PSALM XXXV.

David, in this psalm, appeals to the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, against his enemies, that hated and persecuted him. It is supposed that Saul and his party are the persons he means, for with them he had the greatest struggles.

I. He complains to God of the injuries they did him; they strove with him, fought against him, (v. 1.) persecuted him, (v. 3.) sought his ruin, (v. 4, 7.) accused him falsely, (v. 11.) abused him basely, (v. 15, 16.) and all his friends, (v. 20.) and triumphed over him, v. 21, 25, 26. II. He pleads his own innocency, that he never gave them any provocation, (v. 7, 19.) but, on the contrary, had studied to oblige them, v. 12, 14. III. He prays to God to protect and deliver him; and appear for him; (v. 1, 2.) to comfort him; (v. 3.) to be nigh to him, and rescue him; (v. 17, 22.) to plead his cause; (v. 23, 24.) to defeat all the designs of his enemies against him; (v. 3, 4.) to disappoint their expectations of his fall; (v. 19, 25, 26.) and, lastly, to countenance all his friends, and encourage them, v. 27. IV. He prophesies the destruction of his persecutors, v. 4, 6, 8. V. He promises himself that he shall yet see better days; (v. 9, 10.) and promises God that he will then attend him with his praises, v. 18, 28. In singing this psalm, and praying over it, we must take heed of applying it to any little peevish quarrels and enmities of our own, and of expressing by it any uncharitable revengeful resentments of injuries done to us; for Christ has taught us to forgive our enemies, and not to pray against them, but to pray for them, as he did; but, 1. We may comfort ourselves with the testimony of our consciences, concerning our innocency, with reference to those that are any way injurious to us, and with hopes that God will, in his own way, and time, right us, and, in the mean time, support us. 2. We ought to apply it to the public enemies of Christ, and his kingdom, typified by David and his kingdom, to resent the indignities done to Christ's honour, to pray to God to plead the just and injured cause of Christianity and serious godliness, and to believe that God will, in due time, glorify his own name in the ruin of all the irreconcilable enemies of his church, that will not repent, to give him glory.

A Psalm of David.

1. **P**LEAD my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. 2. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. 3. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. 4. Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and

brought to confusion that devise my hurt. 5. Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the LORD chase them. 6. Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the LORD persecute them. 7. For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul. 8. Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his net that he hath hid catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall. 9. And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in his salvation. 10. All my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?

In these verses, we have,

I. David's representation of his case to God, setting forth the restless rage and malice of his persecutors; he was God's servant, expressly appointed by him to be what he was, followed his guidance, and aimed at his glory in the way of duty, had lived (as St. Paul speaks) *in all good conscience before God unto this day*; and yet there were those that strove with him, that did their utmost to oppose his advancement, and made all the interest they could against him; they fought against him, (v. 1.) not only undermined him closely and secretly, but openly avowed their opposition to him, and set themselves to do him all the mischief they could. They persecuted him with an unwearied enmity, *sought after his soul*, (v. 4.) that is, his life, no less would satisfy their bloody minds; they aimed to disquiet his spirit, and put that into disorder; nor was it a sudden passion against him that they harboured, but inveterate malice; they devised his hurt, laid their heads together, and set their wits on work, not only to do him a mischief, but to find out ways and means to ruin him. They treated him, who was the greatest blessing of his country, as if he had been the curse and plague of it; they hunted him as a dangerous beast of prey, they digged a pit for him, and laid a net in it, that they might have him at their mercy, v. 7. They took a great deal of pains in persecuting him, for they digged a pit, (7. 15.) and very close and crafty they were in carrying on their designs; the old serpent taught them subtlety, they hid their net from David and his friends; but in vain, for they could not hide it from God. And, lastly, he found himself an unequal match for them. His enemy, especially Saul, was too strong for him, (v. 10.) for he had the army at his command, and assumed to himself the sole power of making laws and giving judgment, attainted and condemned whom he pleased, carried not a sceptre, but a javelin, in his hand, to cast at any man that stood in his way; such was the manner of the king, and all about him were compelled to do as he bade them, right or wrong. The king's word is a law, and every thing must be carried with a high hand; he has fields, and vineyards, and preferments, at his disposal, 1 Sam. 22. 7. But David is poor and needy, has nothing to make friends with, and therefore has none to take his part, but men (as we say) of broken fortunes; (1 Sam. 22. 2.) and therefore no marvel that Saul spoiled him of what little he had got, and the interest he had made. If the kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and his Anointed, who can contend with them? Note, It is no new thing for the most righteous men, and the most righteous cause, to meet with many mighty and malicious enemies: Christ himself is striven with, and fought against, and war made upon the holy seed; and we are not to marvel at the matter, it is a fruit of the old enmity in the seed of the serpent, against the seed of the woman.

II. His appeal to God concerning his integrity, and the justice of his cause. If a fellow-subject had wronged him, he might have appealed to his prince, as St. Paul did to Cæsar; but when his prince wronged him, he appealed to his God, who is Prince and

Judge of the kings of the earth; *Plead my cause, O Lord, v. 1.* Note, A righteous cause may, with the greatest satisfaction imaginable, be laid before a righteous God, and referred to him to give judgment upon it; for he perfectly knows the merits of it, holds the balance exactly even, and with him there is no respect of persons. God knew that they were, without cause, his enemies, and that they had, without cause, digged pits for him, *v. 7.* Note, It will be a comfort to us, when men do us wrong, if our consciences can witness for us, that we have never done them any. It was so to St. Paul; (Acts, 25. 10.) *To the Jews have I done no wrong.* We are apt to justify our uneasiness at the injuries men do us by this, That we never gave them any cause to use us so; whereas this should, more than any thing, make us easy, for then we may the more confidently expect that God will plead our cause.

II. His prayer to God to manifest himself both for him, and to him, in this trial. 1. *For him*; he prays that God would fight against his enemies, so as to disable them to hurt him, and defeat their designs against him; (*v. 1.*) that he would take hold of shield and buckler, for the Lord is a Man of war, (Exod. 15. 3.) and that he would stand up for his help, (*v. 2.*) for he had few that would stand up for him, and if he had ever so many, they would stand him in no stead without God: he prays that God would stop their way, that they might not overtake him when he fled from them: this prayer we may put up against our persecutors, that God would restrain them, and stop their way. 2. *To him*; "*Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation*"; let me have inward comfort under all these outward troubles, to support my soul which they strike at. Let God be my salvation, not only my Saviour out of my present troubles, but my everlasting Bliss; let me have that salvation not only which he is the Author of, but which consists in his favour. And let me know it; let me have the comfortable assurance of it in my own breast." If God, by his Spirit, witness to our spirits, that he is our salvation, we have enough, we need desire no more, to make us happy; and this is a powerful support when men persecute us. If God be our Friend, no matter who is our enemy.

IV. His prospect of the destruction of his enemies, which he prays for, not in malice or revenge; we find how patiently he bore Shimei's curses, *So let him curse, for the Lord has bidden him*; and we cannot suppose that he, that was so meek in his conversation, should give vent to any intemperate heat or passion in his devotion; but, by the spirit of prophecy, he foretells the just judgments of God, that would come upon them for their great wickedness, their malice, cruelty, and perfidiousness, and especially their enmity to the counsels of God, the interests of religion, and that reformation which they knew David, if ever he had power in his hand, would be an instrument of. They seemed to be hardened in their sins, and to be of the number of those who have sinned unto death, and are not to be prayed for, Jer. 7. 16.—11. 14.—14. 11. 1 John, 5. 16. As for Saul himself, David, it is probable, knew that God had rejected him, and had forbidden Samuel to mourn for him, 1 Sam. 16. 1. And these predictions look further, and read the doom of the enemies of Christ and his kingdom, as appears by comparing Rom. 11. 9, 10.

He here prays, 1. Against his many enemies; (*v. 4. . 6.*) *Let them be confounded, &c.* Or, as Dr. Hammond reads it, *They shall be confounded, they shall be turned back.* This may be taken as a prayer for their repentance, for all penitents are put to shame for their sins, and turned back from them; or, if they were not brought to repentance, that they might be defeated and disappointed in their designs against him, and so put to shame. But though they should, in some degree, prevail, yet he foresees that it would be to their own ruin at last; they shall be as chaff before the wind, so unable will wicked men be to stand before the judgments of God, and so certainly will they be driven away by them, 1. 4. Their way shall be *dark and slippery, darkness and slipperiness*; (so the margin reads it;) the way of sinners is so, for they walk in darkness, and in continual danger of falling into sin, into hell; and it will prove so at last, *for their foot shall slide in due time*, Deut. 32. 35. But this is not the worst of it; even chaff before the wind, may perhaps be stopped, and find a place of rest, and though the way be dark and slippery, it is possible that a man may keep his footing; but it is

here foretold that the angel of the Lord shall chase them, (*v. 5.*) so that they shall find no rest; shall persecute them, (*v. 6.*) so that they cannot possibly escape the pit of destruction. As God's angels encamp about them that fear him, so they encamp against them that fight against him. They are the ministers of his justice, as well as of his mercy. Those that make God their Enemy make all the holy angels their enemies. 2. He prays against his one mighty enemy; (*v. 8.*) *Let destruction come upon him.* It is probable that he means Saul, who laid snares for him, and aimed at his destruction. David vowed that his hand should not be upon him, he would not be judge in his own cause; but, at the same time, he foretold that *the Lord would smite him*, (1 Sam. 26. 10.) and here, that the net he had hid should catch himself, and into *that very destruction he should fall*; which was remarkably fulfilled in the ruin of Saul, for he had laid a plot to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines, (1 Sam. 18. 25.) that was the net which he hid for him, under pretence of doing him honour, and in that very net was he himself taken, for he fell by the hand of the Philistines, when his day came to fall.

V. His prospect of his own deliverance, which, having committed his cause to God, he did not doubt of, *v. 9, 10.* 1. He hoped that he should have the comfort of it; "*My soul shall be joyful*, not in mine own ease and safety, but in the Lord, and in his favour, in his promise, and in his salvation, according to the promise." Joy in God, and in his salvation, is the only true solid satisfying joy. They whose souls are sorrowful in the Lord, who sow in tears, and sorrow after a godly sort, need not question but that in due time their souls shall be joyful in the Lord, for gladness is sown for them, and they shall at last *enter into the joy of their Lord*. 2. He promised that then God should have the glory of it; (*v. 10.*) *All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee?* (1.) He will praise God with the whole man, with all that is within him, and with all the strength and vigour of his soul, intimated by his bones, which are within the body, and are the strength of it. (2.) He will praise him as one of peerless and unparalleled perfection; we cannot express how great and good God is, and therefore must praise him by acknowledging him to be a none-such; *Lord, who is like unto thee?* No such Patron of oppressed innocence, no such Punisher of triumphant tyranny. The formation of our bones so wonderfully, so curiously, (Ecc. 11. 5. Ps. 139. 16.) the serviceableness of our bones, and the preservation of them, and especially the life which, at the resurrection, shall be breathed upon the dry bones, and make them flourish as an herb, oblige every bone in our bodies, if it could speak, to say, *Lord, who is like unto thee?* and willingly to undergo any services or sufferings for him.

11. False witnesses did rise up: they laid to my charge *things* that I knew not. 12. They rewarded me evil for good, *to the spoiling of my soul*. 13. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing *was* sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. 14. I behaved myself as though *he had been my friend or brother*: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth *for his mother*. 15. But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together; *yea*, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew *it* not; they did *tear me*, and ceased not: 16. With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth.

Two very wicked things David here lays to the charge of his enemies, to make good his appeal to God against them; perjury and ingratitude.

I. Perjury, *v. 11.* When Saul would have David attainted of treason, in order to his being outlawed, perhaps he did it with the formalities of a legal prosecution, produced witnesses which swore

some treasonable words or overt-acts against him, and he being not present to clear himself, (or if he had, it had been all one,) Saul adjudged him a traitor; this he complains of here as the highest piece of injustice imaginable; *False witnesses did rise up*, who would swear any thing; *they laid to my charge things that I knew not*, nor ever thought of. See how much the honours, estates, liberties, and lives, even of the best men, lie at the mercy of the worst, against whose false oaths innocency itself is no fence; and what reason we have to acknowledge, with thankfulness, the hold God has of the consciences even of bad men, to which it is owing, that there is not more mischief done that way than is. This instance of the wrong done to David was typical, and had its accomplishment in the Son of David, against whom false witnesses did arise, Matth. 26. 60. If we be at any time charged with what we are innocent of, let us not think it strange, as though some new thing happened to us; so persecuted they the prophets, even the great Prophet.

11. Ingratitude. Call a man ungrateful, and you can call him no worse; this was the character of David's enemies; (v. 12.) *They rewarded me evil for good*. A great deal of good service he had done to his king, witness his harp, witness Goliath's sword, witness the foreskins of the Philistines; and yet his king vowed his death, and he can no longer dwell in his country. This is *to the spoiling of his soul*; this base unkind usage robs him of his comfort, and cuts him to the heart, more than any thing else.

Nay, he had not only deserved well of the public, but of those particular persons that were now most bitter against him. Probably, it was then well known whom he meant, it may be Saul himself for one, whom he was sent for to attend upon, when he was melancholy and ill, and to whom he was serviceable to drive away the evil spirit, not with his harp, but with his prayers; to others of the courtiers, it is likely, he had shewed his respect, while he lived at court, who now were, of all others, most abusive to him. Herein he was a type of Christ, to whom this wicked world was very ungrateful; (John, 10. 32.) *Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those do you stone me?* David here shews,

1. How tenderly, and with what a cordial affection, he had carried it toward them in their afflictions; (v. 13, 14.) *They were sick*. Note, Even the palaces and courts of princes are not exempt from the jurisdiction of death, and the visitation of sickness. Now, when these people were sick, (1.) David mourned for them, and sympathized with them in their grief. They were not related to him, he was under no obligations to them, he would lose nothing by their death, but perhaps be a gainer by it; and yet he behaved himself as though they had been his nearest relations, purely from a principle of compassion and humanity. David was a man of war, and of a bold stout spirit, and yet was thus susceptible of the impressions of sympathy, forgot the bravery of the hero, and seemed wholly made up of love and pity; it was a rare composition of hardness and tenderness, courage and compassion, in the same breast. Observe, He took on as for a brother or mother, which intimates that it is our duty, and well becomes us, to lay to heart the sickness, and sorrow, and death, of our near relations. Those that do not, are justly stigmatized as without natural affection. (2.) He prayed for them; he discovered not only the tender affection of a man, but the pious affection of a saint. He was concerned for their precious souls, and since he could not otherwise be helpful to them, he helped them with his prayers to God for mercy and grace; and the prayers of one who had so great an interest in heaven, were of more value than perhaps they knew and considered. With his prayers he joined humiliation and self-affliction; both in his diet, he fasted, at least, from pleasant bread, and in his dress, he clothed himself with sackcloth, thus expressing his grief, not only for their affliction, but for their sin; for this was the guise and practice of a penitent. We ought to mourn for the sins of those that do not mourn for them themselves. His fasting also put an edge upon his praying, and was an expression of the fervour of it; he was so intent in his devotions, that he had no appetite to meat, nor would allow himself time for eating: *"My prayer returned into mine own bosom; I had the comfort of having done my*

duty, and of having approved myself a loving neighbour, though I could not thereby win upon them, nor make them my friends." We shall not lose by the good offices we have done to any, how ungrateful soever they are, for our rejoicing will be this, *the testimony of our conscience*.

2. How basely and insolently, and with what a brutish enmity, and worse than brutish, they had carried it toward him; (v. 15, 16.) *In mine adversity, they rejoiced*. When he fell under the frowns of Saul, was banished the court, and persecuted as a criminal, they were pleased, were glad at his calamities, and got together in their drunken clubs, to make themselves and one another merry with the disgrace of this great favourite. Well might he call them *objects*, for nothing could be more vile and sordid, than to triumph in the fall of a man of such unstained honour, and consummate virtue. But this was not all; (1.) They tore him, rent his good name without mercy, said all the ill they could of him, and fastened upon him all the reproach their cursed wit and malice could reach to. (2.) *They gnashed upon him with their teeth*; they never spoke of him but with the greatest indignation imaginable, as those that would have eaten him up, if they could. David was the fool in the play, and his disappointment all the table-talk of the hypocritical mockers at feasts, it was the song of the drunkards, the comedians, who may fitly be called *hypocritical mockers*, (for what does a hypocrite signify, but a stage-player?) and whose comedies, it is likely, were acted at feasts and balls, chose David for their subject, bantered and abused him, while the auditory, in token of their agreement with the plot, hummed, and *gnashed upon him with their teeth*; such has often been the hard fate of the best of men. The apostles were made a spectacle to the world. David was looked upon with ill-will, for no other reason, than because he was caressed by the people. It is a vexation of spirit which attends even a right work, that *for this a man is envied of his neighbour*, Eccl. 4. 4. And *who can stand before envy?* Prov. 27. 4.

17. LORD, how long wilt thou look on? Rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions. 18. I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people. 19. Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me: *neither* let them wink with the eye, that hate me without a cause. 20. For they speak not peace: but they devise deceitful matters against *them that are quiet* in the land. 21. Yea, they opened their mouth wide against me, *and* said, Aha, aha, our eye hath seen it. 22. *This* thou hast seen, O LORD: keep not silence: O LORD, be not far from me. 23. Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, *even* unto my cause, my God and my Lord. 24. Judge me, O LORD my God, according to thy righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me. 25. Let them not say in their hearts, Ah, so would we have it: let them not say, We have swallowed him up. 26. Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together that rejoice at mine hurt: let them be clothed with shame and dishonour that magnify *themselves* against me. 27. Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the LORD be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant. 28. And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness *and* of thy praise all the day long.

In these verses, as before,

drink of the river of thy pleasures. 9. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. 10. O continue thy loving-kindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart. 11. Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me. 12. There are the workers of iniquity fallen: they are cast down, and shall not be able to rise.

David, having looked round with grief upon the wickedness of the wicked, here looks up with comfort upon the goodness of God; a subject as delightful as the former was distasteful, and very proper to be set in the balance against it. Observe,

1. His meditations upon the grace of God. He sees the world polluted, himself endangered, and God dishonoured, by the transgressions of the wicked; but, of a sudden, he turns his eye, and heart, and speech to God; *However it be, yet thou art good.* He here acknowledges,

1. The transcendent perfections of the Divine Nature. Among men, we have often reason to complain, There is *no truth or mercy*, (Hos. 4. 1.) *no judgment nor justice*, Isa. 5. 7. But all these may be found in God, without the least alloy. Whatever is missing, or amiss, in the world, we are sure there is nothing missing, nothing amiss, in him that governs it.

(1.) He is a God of inexhaustible goodness; *Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens.* If men shut up the bowels of their compassions, yet, with God, at the throne of his grace, we shall find mercy. When men are devising mischief against us, God's thoughts concerning us, if we cleave closely to him, are thoughts of good. On earth, we meet with little content, but a great deal of disquiet and disappointment; but in the heavens, where the mercy of God reigns in perfection, and to eternity, there is all satisfaction; there, therefore, if we would be easy, let us have our conversation, and there let us long to be. How bad soever the world is, let us never think the worse of God, or of his government; but, from the abundance of wickedness that is among men, let us take occasion, instead of reflecting upon God's purity, as if he countenanced sin, to admire his patience, that he bears so much with those that so impudently provoke him; nay, and causes his sun to shine, and his rain to fall, upon them. If God's mercy were not in the heavens, infinitely above the mercies of any creature, he would, long ere this, have drowned the world again. See Isa. 55. 8, 9. Hos. 11. 9.

(2.) He is a God of inviolable truth; *Thy faithfulness reaches unto the clouds.* Though God suffers wicked people to do a great deal of mischief, yet he is, and will be, faithful to his threatenings against sin, and there will come a day when he will reckon with them; he is faithful also to his covenant with his people, which cannot be broken, not one jot or tittle of the promises of it defeated by all the malice of earth and hell. This is matter of great comfort to all good people, that, though men are false, God is faithful; men speak vanity, but the words of the Lord are pure words. God's faithfulness reaches so high, that it does not change with the weather, as men's does, for it reaches to the *skies*, so it should be read, (as some think,) above the clouds, and all the changes of the lower region.

(3.) He is a God of incontestable justice and equity; *Thy righteousness is like the great mountains*, so immovable and inflexible itself, and so conspicuous and evident to all the world; for no truth is more certain or more plain than this, That the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and that he never did, nor ever will, do any wrong to any of his creatures. Even *when clouds and darkness are round about him, yet judgment and justice are the inhabitants of his throne*, 97. 2.

(4.) He is a God of unsearchable wisdom and design; "*Thy judgments are a great deep*, not to be fathomed with the line and plummet of any finite understanding." As his power is sovereign, which he owes not any account of to us, so his method is singular

and mysterious, which cannot be accounted for by us; *His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters.* We know that he does all wisely and well, but what he does we know not now, it is time enough to know hereafter.

2. The extensive care and beneficence of the Divine Providence; "*Thou preservest man and beast*, not only protectest them from mischief, but suppliest them with that which is needful for the support of life." The beasts, though not capable of knowing and praising God, are yet graciously provided for; their eyes wait on him, and he gives them their meat in due season. Let us not wonder that God gives food to bad men, for he feeds the brute-creatures; and let us not fear but that he will provide well for good men; he that feeds the young lions will not starve his own children.

3. The peculiar favour of God to the saints. Observe, (1.) Their character; (v. 7.) they are such as are allured, by the *excellency of God's loving-kindness*, to *put their trust under the shadow of his wings*. [1.] God's loving-kindness is precious to them; they relish it, they taste a transcendent sweetness in it, they admire God's beauty and benignity above any thing in this world, nothing so amiable, so desirable. Those know not God, that do not admire his loving-kindness; and those know not themselves that do not earnestly covet it. [2.] They therefore repose an entire confidence in him; they have recourse to him, put themselves under his protection, and then think themselves safe, and find themselves easy, as the chickens under the wings of the hen, Matti. 23. 37. It was the character of proselytes, that they came to *trust under the wings of the God of Israel*; (Ruth, 2. 12.) and what more proper to gather proselytes than the excellency of his loving-kindness? What more powerful to engage our complacency to him and on him? Those that are thus drawn by love, will cleave to him. (2.) Their privilege; happy, thrice happy, the people whose God is the Lord, for in him they have, or may have, or shall have, a complete happiness.

[1.] Their desires shall be answered; (v. 8.) *They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house*; their wants supplied, their cravings gratified, and their capacities filled; in God all-sufficient they shall have enough, all that which an enlightened, enlarged, soul can desire or receive. The gains of the world and the delights of sense will surfeit, but never satisfy, Isa. 55. 2. But the communications of divine favour and grace will satisfy, but never surfeit. A gracious soul, though still desiring more of God, never desires more *than* God. The gifts of Providence so far satisfy them that are content with such things as they have; *I have all, and abound*, Phil. 4. 18. The benefit of holy ordinances is the fatness of God's house, sweet to a sanctified soul, and strengthening to the spiritual and divine life, with this they are abundantly satisfied; they desire nothing more, in this world, than to live a life of communion with God, and to have the comfort of the promises. But the full, the abundant, satisfaction is reserved for the future state, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Every vessel will be full there.

[2.] Their joys shall be constant; *Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.* There are pleasures that are truly divine; "They are thy pleasures; not only which come from thee as the Giver of them, but which terminate in thee as the Matter and Centre of them." Being purely spiritual, they are of the same nature with those of the glorious inhabitants of the upper world, and bear some analogy even to the delights of the Eternal Mind. There is a river of these pleasures, always full, always fresh, always flowing. There is enough for all, enough for each; see 46. 4. The pleasures of sense are putrid puddle-water, those of faith are pure and pleasant, *clear as crystal*, Rev. 22. 1. God has not only provided this river of pleasures, for his people, but he makes them to drink of it; works in them a gracious appetite to these pleasures, and by his Spirit fills their souls with joy and peace in believing. In heaven, they shall be for ever drinking of those *pleasures that are at God's right hand*, satiated with a *fulness of joy*, 16. 11.

[3.] Life and light shall be their everlasting bliss and portion, v. 9. Having God himself for their felicity, *First*, In him they have

a fountain of life, from which those rivers of pleasure flow, v. 8. The God of nature is the Fountain of natural life; in him we live, and move, and have our being; the God of grace is the Fountain of spiritual life. All the strength and comfort of a sanctified soul, all its gracious principles, powers, and performances, are from God; he is the Spring and Author of all its sensations of divine things, and all its motions toward them: he quickens whom he will; and whosoever will, may come, and take from him of the waters of life freely. He is the Fountain of eternal life; the happiness of glorified saints consists in the vision and fruition of him, and in the immediate communications of his love, without interruption or fear of cessation. *Secondly*, In him they have light in perfection, wisdom, knowledge, and joy; all included in this light; *In thy light we shall see light*, that is, 1. "In the knowledge of thee in grace, and the vision of thee in glory, we shall have that which will abundantly suit and satisfy our understandings." That divine light which shines in the scripture, and especially in the face of Christ, the Light of the world, has all truth in it. When we come to see God face to face, within the veil, we shall see light in perfection, we shall know enough then, 1 Cor. 13. 12. 1 John, 3. 2. 2. "In communion with thee now; by the communications of thy grace to us, and the return of our devout affections to thee, and in the fruition of thee shortly in heaven, we shall have a complete felicity and satisfaction. In thy favour we have all the good we can desire." This is a dark world, we see little comfort in it; but in the heavenly light there is true light, and no false light, light that is lasting, and never wastes. In this world, we see God, and enjoy him by creatures and means; but in heaven, *God himself shall be with us*, (Rev. 21. 3.) and we shall see and enjoy him immediately.

II. We have here David's prayers, intercessions, and holy triumphs, grounded upon these meditations.

1. He intercedes for all saints, begging that they may always experience the benefit and comfort of God's favour and grace, v. 10. (1.) The persons he prays for are those that know God, that are acquainted with him, acknowledge him, and avouch him for their's: the upright in heart, that are sincere in their profession of religion, and faithful both to God and man: those that are not upright with God, do not know him as they should. (2.) The blessing he begs for them, is, God's loving-kindness, that is, the tokens of his favour toward them; and his righteousness, that is, the workings of his grace in them; or his loving-kindness and righteousness are his goodness, according to promise; they are mercy and truth. (3.) The manner in which he desires this blessing may be conveyed; *Oh continue it, draw it out*, as the mother draws out her breasts to the child, and then the child draws out the milk from the breasts. Let it be drawn out to a length equal to the line of eternity itself; the happiness of the saints in heaven will be in perfection, and yet in continual progression, as some think; for the fountain there will be always full, and the streams always flowing. *In these is continuance*, Isa. 64. 5.

2. He prays for himself, that he might be preserved in his integrity and comfort; (v. 11.) "*Let not the foot of pride come against me*, to trip up my heels, or trample upon me; and let not the hand of the wicked, which is stretched out against me, prevail to remove me, either from my purity and integrity, by any temptation, or from my peace and comfort, by any trouble." Let not those who fight against God, triumph over those who desire to cleave to him. They that have experienced the pleasure of communion with God, cannot but desire that nothing may ever remove them from him.

3. He rejoices in hope of the downfall of his enemies, in due time; (v. 12.) "There where they thought to have gained the point against me, they are themselves fallen; taken in that snare which they laid for me." There, in the other world, (so some,) there where the saints stand in the judgment, and have a place in God's house, the workers of iniquity are cast in the judgment, are cast down into hell, into the bottomless pit, out of which they shall, assuredly, never be able to rise, from under the insupportable weight of God's wrath and curse. It is true, we are not to rejoice, when any particular enemy of our's falls; but the final overthrow

of all the workers of iniquity, will be the everlasting triumph of glorified saints.

PSALM XXXVII.

This psalm in a sermon, and an excellent useful sermon it is; calculated not (as most of the psalms) for our devotion, but for our conversion; there is nothing in it of prayer or praise, but it is all instruction; it is Maschil—a teaching psalm; it is an exposition of some of the hardest chapters in the book of Providence, the advancement of the wicked, and the disgrace of the righteous, a solution of the difficulties that arise thereupon, and an exhortation to conduct ourselves as becomes us, under such dark dispensations. The work of the prophets, (and David was one,) was to explain the law. Now the law of Moses had promised temporal blessings to the obedient, and denounced temporal miseries against the disobedient, which principally referred to the body of the people, the nation as a nation; for, when they came to be applied to particular persons many instances occurred of sinners in prosperity, and saints in adversity; to reconcile those instances with the word that God had spoken, is the scope of the prophet in this psalm. In which, I. He forbids us to fret at the prosperity of the wicked, in their wicked ways, v. 1, 7, 8. II. He gives very good reasons why we should not fret at it. 1. Because of the scandalous character of the wicked, (v. 12, 14, 21, 32,) notwithstanding their prosperity; and the honourable character of the righteous, v. 21, 26, 30, 31. 2. Because of the destruction and ruin which the wicked are nigh to, (v. 2, 9, 10, 20, 35, 36, 38,) and the salvation and protection which the righteous are sure of, from all the malicious designs of the wicked, v. 13, 15, 17, 28, 33, 39, 40. 3. Because of the particular mercy God has in store for all good people, and the favour he shews them, v. 11, 16, 18, 19, 22, 25, 28, 29, 37. III. He prescribes very good remedies against this sin of envying the prosperity of the wicked, and great encouragement to use those remedies, v. 3, 6, 27, 34. In singing this psalm, we must teach and admonish one another rightly to understand the providence of God, and to accommodate ourselves to it; at all times carefully to do our duty, and then patiently to leave the event with God, and to believe that, how black soever things may look for the present, it shall be well with them that fear God, that fear before him.

A psalm of David.

1. **F**RET not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. 2. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. 3. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. 4. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. 5. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. 6. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.

The instructions here given are very plain; much need not be said for the exposition of them, but there is a deal to be done for the reducing of them to practice, and there they will look best.

I. We are here cautioned against discontent at the prosperity and success of evil-doers; (v. 1, 2.) *Fret not thyself, neither be thou envious*. We may suppose, that David speaks this to himself first, and preaches it to his own heart, (in his communing with that upon his bed,) for the suppressing of those corrupt passions which he found working there, and then leaves it in writing, for instruction to others that might be in the like temptation. That is preached best, and with most probability of success, to others, which is first preached to ourselves. Now, 1. When we look abroad, we see the world full of evil-doers, and workers of iniquity, that flourish and prosper, that have what they will, and do what they will, that live in ease and pomp themselves, and have power in their hands to do mischief to those about them. So it was in David's time; and therefore, if it is so still, let us not marvel at the matter, as though it were some new or strange thing. 2. When we look within, we find ourselves tempted to fret at this, and to be envious against these scandals and burrethens, these blemishes and common nuisances, of this earth. We are apt to fret at God, as if he were unkind to the world, and unkind to his church, in permitting such men to live, and prosper, and prevail,

as they do. We are apt to fret ourselves with vexation at their success in their evil projects; we are apt to envy them the liberty they take in getting wealth, and perhaps by unlawful means, and in the indulgence of their lusts, and to wish that we could shake off the restraints of conscience, and do so too. We are tempted to think them the only happy people, and to incline to imitate them, and to join ourselves with them, that we may share in their gains, and eat of their dainties: and this is that which we are warned against; *Fret not thyself, neither be thou envious*. Fretfulness and envy are sins that are their own punishments, they are the uneasiness of the spirit, and the rottenness of the bones; it is therefore in kindness to ourselves that we are warned against them. Yet that is not all, for, 3. When we look forward with an eye of faith, we shall see no reason to envy wicked people their prosperity, for their ruin is at the door, and they are ripening apace for it, v. 2. They flourish, but as the grass, and as the green herb, which no body envies or frets at. The flourishing of a godly man is like that of a fruitful tree, (1.3.) but that of the wicked man, like grass and herbs, which are very short-lived. (1.) They will soon wither of themselves. Outward prosperity is a fading thing, and so is the life itself, to which it is confined. (2.) They will sooner be cut down by the judgments of God. Their triumphing is short, but their weeping and wailing will be everlasting.

II. We are here counselled to live a life of confidence and complacency in God, and that will keep us from fretting at the prosperity of evil-doers; if we do well for our own souls, we shall see little reason to envy those that do so ill for their's.

Here are three excellent precepts, which we are to be ruled by, and, to enforce them, three precious promises, which we may rely upon.

1. We must make God our Hope in the way of duty, and then we shall have a comfortable subsistence in this world, v. 3. (1.) It is required that we trust in the Lord, and do good, that we confide in God, and conform to him. The life of religion lies much in a believing reliance on God, his favour, his providence, his promise, his grace, and a diligent care to serve him and our generation, according to his will. We must not think to trust in God, and then live as we list; no, it is not trusting God, but tempting him, if we do not make conscience of our duty to him; nor must we think to do good, and then to trust to ourselves, and our own righteousness and strength; no, we must both trust in the Lord, and do good. And then, (2.) It is promised that we shall be provided for in this world; *So shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed*. He does not say, "So shalt thou get preferment, dwell in a palace, and be feasted." This is not necessary; a man's life consists not in the abundance of these things; but, "Thou shalt have a place to live in, and that in the land, in Canaan, the valley of vision, and thou shalt have food convenient for thee." This is more than we deserve, it is as much as a good man will indent for, (Gen. 28. 20.) and it is enough for one that is going to heaven. Thou shalt have a settlement, a quiet settlement, and a maintenance, a comfortable maintenance; *Verily thou shalt be fed*, (some read it,) thou shalt be fed by faith, as the just are said to live by faith, and it is good living, good feeding, upon the promises. "*Verily thou shalt be fed*, as Elijah in the famine, with what is needful for thee." God himself is a Shepherd, a Feeder, to all those that trust in him, 23. 1.

2. We must make God our heart's delight, and then we shall have our heart's desire; (v. 4.) we must not only depend upon God, but solace ourselves in him. We must be well pleased that there is a God, that he is such a one as he has revealed himself to be, and that he is our God in covenant. We must delight ourselves in his beauty, bounty, and benignity; our souls must return to him, and repose in him, as their Rest, and their Portion, for ever. Being satisfied of his loving-kindness, we must be satisfied with it, and make that our exceeding joy, 43. 4. We were commanded (v. 3.) to do good, and then follows this command, to delight in God, which is as much a privilege as a duty. If we make conscience of obedience to God, we may then take the comfort of a complacency in him. And even this pleasant duty of delighting in God, has a promise annexed to it, which is very full and

precious, enough to recompense the hardest services; *He shall give thee the desires of thy heart*. He has not promised to gratify all the appetites of the body, and the humours of the fancy, but to grant all the desires of the heart, all the cravings of the renewed sanctified soul. What is the desire of the heart of a good man? It is this, to know, and love, and live to, God, to please him, and to be pleased in him.

3. We must make God our Guide, and submit in every thing to his guidance and disposal; and then all our affairs, even those that seem most intricate and perplexed, shall be made to issue well, and to our satisfaction, v. 5, 6.

(1.) The duty is very easy; and if we do it aright, it will make us easy; *Commit thy way unto the Lord; roll thy way upon the Lord*, so the margin reads it, Prov. 16. 3. Ps. 55. 22. *Cast thy burthen upon the Lord*, the burthen of thy care, 1 Pet. 5. 7. We must roll it off ourselves, so as not to afflict and perplex ourselves with thoughts about future events, (Matth. 6. 25.) not to cumber and trouble ourselves either with the contrivance of the means, or with expectation of the end, but refer it to God, leave it to him, by his wise and good providence to order and dispose of all our concerns, as he pleases; *Reveal thy way unto the Lord*; (so the LXX) that is, "By prayer spread thy case, and all thy cares about it, before the Lord," (as Jephthah uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh, Judg. 11. 11.) "and then trust in him to bring it to a good issue, with a full satisfaction that all is well that God does." We must do our duty, (that must be our care,) and then leave the event with God; *Sit still, and see how the matter will fall*, Ruth. 3. 18. We must follow Providence, and not force it; subscribe to Infinite Wisdom, and not prescribe.

(2.) The promise is very sweet; [1.] In general, "He shall bring that to pass, whatever it is, which thou hast committed to him, if not to thy contrivance, yet to thy content. He will find means to extricate thee out of thy straits, to prevent thy fears, and bring about thy purposes, to thy satisfaction." [2.] In particular, "He will take care of thy reputation, and bring thee out of thy difficulties, not only with comfort, but with credit and honour. *He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day*;" (v. 6.) that is, "He shall make it to appear, that thou art an honest man, and that is honour enough." *First*, It is implied that the righteousness and judgment of good people may, for a time, be clouded and eclipsed, either by remarkable rebukes of Providence, (Job's great afflictions darkened his righteousness,) or by the malicious censures and reproaches of men, who give them bad names, which they no way deserve, and lay to their charge things which they know not. *Secondly*, It is promised that God will, in due time, roll away the reproach they are under, clear up their innocency, and bring forth their righteousness, to their honour; perhaps in this world, at furthest, in the great day, Matth. 13. 43. Note, If we take care to keep a good conscience, we may leave it to God to take care of our good name.

7. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. 8. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. 9. For evil-doers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. 10. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. 11. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. 12. The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. 13. The LORD shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. 14. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast

down the poor and needy, *and* to slay such as be of upright conversation. 15. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. 16. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. 17. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous. 18. The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. 19. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. 20. But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD *shall be* as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.

In these verses, we have,

I. The foregoing precepts inculcated; for we are so apt to disquiet ourselves with needless, fruitless, discontents and distrusts, that it is necessary there should be precept upon precept, and line upon line, to suppress them, and arm us against them.

1. Let us compose ourselves by believing in God; "*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him*;" (v. 7.) be well reconciled to all he does, and acquiesce in it, for that is best that is, because it is what God has appointed; and be well satisfied that he will still make all to work for good to us, though we know not how or which way. Be silent to the Lord," so the word is; not with a sullen, but a submissive, silence. A patient bearing of what is laid upon us, and a patient expectation of what is further appointed for us, are as much our interest as they are our duty; for it will make us always easy, and there is a great deal of reason for it, for it is making a virtue of necessity.

2. Let us not discompose ourselves at what we see in this world; "*Fret not thyself because of him who prospers in his wicked way*;" who, though he is a bad man, yet thrives and grows rich and great in the world; no nor because of him who does mischief with his power and wealth, and brings wicked devices to pass against those that are virtuous and good, who seems to have gained his point, and to have run them down; if thy heart begins to rise at it, stroke down thy folly, and *cease from anger*, (v. 8.) check the first stirrings of discontent and envy, and do not harbour any hard thoughts of God and his providence upon this account; be not angry at any thing that God does, but forsake that wrath; it is the worst kind of wrath that can be. *Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil*, do not envy them their prosperity, lest thou be tempted to fall in with them, and to take the same evil course that they take to enrich and advance themselves, or some desperate course to avoid them and their power." Note, A fretful, discontented, spirit lies open to many temptations; and those that indulge it are in danger of doing evil.

II. The foregoing reasons, taken from the approaching ruin of the wicked, notwithstanding their prosperity, and the real happiness of the righteous, notwithstanding their troubles, are here much enlarged upon, and the same things repeated in a pleasing variety of expression.

We were cautioned (v. 7.) not to envy the wicked, either worldly prosperity, or the success of their plots against the righteous. The reasons here given respect these two temptations severally.

1. Good people have no reason to envy the worldly prosperity of wicked people, nor to grieve or be uneasy at it.

(1.) Because the prosperity of the wicked will soon be at an end; (v. 9.) *Evil doers shall be cut off* by some sudden stroke of divine justice, in the midst of their prosperity; what they have got by sin, will not only flow away from them, (Job, 20. 28.) but they shall be carried away with it. See the end of these men, (73. 17.) how dear their ill-got gain will cost them, and you will be far from envying them, or from being willing to espouse their lot, for better, for worse. Their ruin is sure, and it is very near; (v. 10.) *Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be what they now are*; they

are brought into desolation in a moment, 73. 19. Have a little patience, for the Judge stands before the door, Jam. 5. 8, 9. Moderate your passion, for the Lord is at hand; (Phil. 4. 5.) and when it comes, it will be an utter ruin, he and his shall be extirpated, the day that comes shall leave him neither root nor branch; (Mal. 4. 1.) *thou shalt diligently consider his place*, where but the other day he made a mighty figure, but it shall not be, you will not find it; he shall leave nothing valuable, nothing honourable, behind him. To the same purport, (v. 20.) *The wicked shall perish*; their death is their perdition, because it is the period of all their joy, and a passage to endless misery; *Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord*, but undone, for ever undone, are the dead that die in their sins. The wicked are the enemies of the Lord; such they make themselves, who will not have him to reign over them, and as such he will reckon with them; *They shall consume as the fat of lambs, they shall consume into smoke*. Their prosperity, which gratifies their sensuality, is like the fat of lambs, not solid or substantial, but loose and washy; and when their ruin comes, they shall fall as sacrifices to the justice of God, and be consumed as the fat of the sacrifices was upon the altar, whence it ascended in smoke. The day of God's vengeance on the wicked, is represented as a sacrifice of the fat of the kidneys of rams; (Isa. 34. 6.) for he will be honoured by the ruin of his enemies, as he was by the sacrifices; damned sinners are sacrifices, Mark, 9. 49. This is a good reason why we should not envy them their prosperity; while they are fed to the full, they are but in the fattening for the day of sacrifice, *like a lamb in a large place*; (Hos. 4. 16.) and the more they prosper, the more will God be glorified in their ruin.

(2.) Because the condition of the righteous, even in this life, is every way better, and more desirable, than that of the wicked, v. 16. In general, *a little that a righteous man has* of the honour, wealth, and pleasure of this world, *is better than the riches of many wicked*. Observe, [1.] The wealth of the world is so dispensed by the Divine Providence, that it is often the lot of good people to have but a little of it, and of wicked people to have abundance of it; for thus God would shew us that the things of this world are not the best things, for if they were, those would have most, that are best and dearest to God. [2.] That a godly man's little is really better than a wicked man's much; see Prov. 15. 16, 17.—16. 8.—28. 6. A godly man's estate, though ever so little, is better than a wicked man's estate, though ever so much, for it comes from a better hand, from a hand of special love, and not merely from a hand of common providence; it is enjoyed by a better title, God gives it to them by promise, (Gal. 3. 18.) it is their's by virtue of their relation to Christ, who is the Heir of all things; and it is put to a better use, it is sanctified to them by the blessing of God; *unto the pure all things are pure*, Tit. 1. 15. A little wherewith God is served and honoured, is better than a great deal prepared for Baal, or for a base lust.

The promises here made to the righteous, secure them such a happiness that they need not envy the prosperity of evil-doers. Let them know to their comfort,

First, That they shall inherit the earth, as much of it as Infinite Wisdom sees good for them; they have the promises of the *life that now is*, 1 Tim. 4. 8. If all the earth were necessary to make them happy, they should have it. All is their's, even the world, and things present, as well as *things to come*, 1 Cor. 3. 21, 22. They have it by inheritance, a safe and honourable title, not by permission only and connivance. When evil-doers are cut off, the righteous sometimes inherit what they gathered; *the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just*, Job, 27. 17. Prov. 13. 22. This promise is here made, 1. To those that live a life of faith; (v. 9.) *those that wait upon the Lord*, as dependents on him, expectants from him, and supplicants to him, *shall inherit the earth*, as a token of his present favour to them, and an earnest of better things intended for them in the other world. God is a good Master that provides plentifully and well, not only for his working servants, but for his waiting servants. 2. To those that live a quiet and peaceable life; (v. 11.) *The meek shall inherit the earth*. They are in least danger of being injured and disturbed in the possession of what they have; and they have most satisfaction in themselves,

and consequently the sweetest relish of their creature-comforts. Our Saviour has made this a gospel promise, and a confirmation of the blessing he pronounced on the meek, Matth. 5. 5.

Secondly, That they shall *delight themselves in the abundance of peace*, v. 11. Perhaps they have not abundance of wealth to delight in, but they have that which is better, abundance of peace, inward peace and tranquillity of mind, peace with God, and then peace in God, that great peace which they have that love God's law, whom *nothing shall offend*; (119. 165.) that abundance of peace which is in the kingdom of Christ; (72. 7.) that peace which the world cannot give, (John, 14. 27.) and which the wicked cannot have, Isa. 57. 21. This they shall delight themselves in, and in it they shall have a continual feast; while they that have abundance of wealth do but cumber and perplex themselves with it, and have little delight in it.

Thirdly, That God knows their days, v. 18. He takes particular notice of them, of all they do, and of all that happens to them. He keeps account of the days of their service, and not one day's work shall go unrewarded; and of the days of their suffering, that for those also they may receive a recompense. He knows their fair days, and has pleasure in their prosperity; he knows their cloudy and dark days, the days of their affliction, and, as the day is, so shall the strength be.

Fourthly, That *their inheritance shall be for ever*. Their time on earth is reckoned by days, which will soon be numbered, God takes cognizance of them, and gives them the blessings of every day in its day; but it was never intended that their inheritance should be confined within the limits of those days; no, that must be the portion of an immortal soul, and therefore must last as long as that lasts, and will run parallel with the longest line of eternity itself; *Their inheritance shall be for ever*; not their inheritance in the earth, but that incorruptible, indefeasible, one, which is laid up for them in heaven. They that are sure of an everlasting inheritance in the other world have no reason to envy the wicked their transitory possessions and pleasures in this world.

Fifthly, That, in the worst of times, it shall go well with them; (v. 19.) *They shall not be ashamed* of their hope and confidence in God, nor of the profession they have made of religion; for the comfort of that will stand them in stead, and be a real support to them, in evil times. When others droop, they shall lift up their heads with joy and confidence; even in the days of famine, when others are dying for hunger round about them, they shall be satisfied, as Elijah was; some way or other God will provide food convenient for them, or give them hearts to be satisfied and content without it; so that, if they should be hardly bestead and hungry, they shall not (as the wicked do) *fret themselves, and curse their king and their God*, (Isa. 8. 21.) but rejoice in God as the God of their salvation, even when *the fig-tree does not blossom*, Hab. 3. 17, 18.

2. Good people have no reason to fret at the occasional success of the designs of the wicked against the just; though they do bring some of their wicked devices to pass, which makes us fear they will gain their point, and bring them all to pass, yet let us cease from anger, and not fret ourselves so as to think of giving up the cause. For,

(1.) Their plots will be their shame, v. 12, 13. It is true, *the wicked plotteth against the just*, there is a rooted enmity in the seed of the wicked one against the righteous seed; their aim is, if they can, to destroy their righteousness; if that fail, then to destroy them. With this end in view, they have acted with a great deal both of cursed policy and contrivance, (they plot, they practise against the just,) and of cursed zeal and fury, *they gnash upon them with their teeth*; so desirous are they, if they could get it into their power, to eat them up, and so full of rage and indignation are they, because it is not in their power; but by all this they do but make themselves ridiculous; *the Lord shall laugh at them*, 2. 4, 5. They are proud and insolent, but God shall pour contempt upon them; he is not only displeased with them, but he despises them and all their attempts as vain and ineffectual, and their malice as impotent and in a chain; for *he sees that his day is coming*, that is, [1.] The day of God's reckoning,

the day of the revelation of his righteousness, which now seems clouded and eclipsed. Men have their day now; *this is your hour*, Luke, 22. 53. But God will have his day shortly, a day of recompenses, a day which will set all to rights, and render that ridiculous which now passes for glorious. *It is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment*; (1 Cor. 4. 3.) God's day will give a decisive judgment. [2.] The day of their ruin, the wicked man's day, the day set for his fall, that day is coming; which denotes delay, it is not yet come, but certainly it will come. The believing prospect of that day will enable the virgin, the daughter of Zion, to despise the rage of her enemies, and *laugh them to scorn*, Isa. 37. 22.

(2.) Their attempts will be their destruction, v. 14, 15. See here, [1.] How barbarous they are in their designs against good people. They prepare instruments of death, the sword and the bow, no less will serve; they hunt for the precious life; that which they design, is, to cast down and slay; it is the blood of the saints they thirst after. They carry on the design very far, and it is near to be put in execution; they have drawn the sword, and bent the bow; and all these military preparations are made against the helpless, the poor, and needy; this shews them to be very cowardly; and against the guiltless, *such as be of upright conversation*, that never gave them any provocation, nor offered injury to them, or any other person; this shews them to be very wicked. Uprightness itself will be no fence against their malice. But, [2.] How justly their malice recoils upon themselves; *their sword shall turn into their own heart*; which implies the preservation of the righteous from their malice, and the filling up of the measure of their own iniquity by it. Sometimes that very thing proves to be their own destruction, which they projected against their harmless neighbours; however, God's sword, which their provocations have drawn against themselves, will give them their death's wound.

(3.) Those that are not suddenly cut off, shall yet be so disabled to do any further mischief, that the interests of the church shall be effectually secured; *Their bows shall be broken*; (v. 15.) the instruments of their cruelty shall fail them, and they shall lose those whom they had made tools of, to serve their bloody purposes with; nay, their arms shall be broken, so that they shall not be able to go on with their enterprises. *But the Lord upholds the righteous*, so that they neither sink under the weight of their afflictions, nor are crushed by the violence of their enemies. He upholds them both in their integrity, and in their prosperity; and they that are so upheld by the Rock of ages, have no reason to envy the wicked the support of their broken reeds.

21. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. 22. For *such as be* blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and *they that be* cursed of him shall be cut off. 23. The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. 24. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth *him with* his hand. 25. I have been young, and *now* am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. 26. *He is* ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed *is* blessed. 27. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. 28. For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. 29. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. 30. The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. 31. The law of his God *is* in his heart; none of his

steps shall slide. 32. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. 33. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.

These verses are much to the same purport with the foregoing verses of this psalm, for it is a subject worthy to be dwelt upon. Observe here,

I. What is required of us, as the way to our happiness; which we may learn both from the characters here laid down, and from the directions here given. If we would be blessed of God,

1. We must make conscience of giving every body their own; *for the wicked borrows, and pays not again, v. 21.* It is the first thing which the Lord our God requires of us, that we do justly, and render to all their due. It is not only a shameful paltry thing, but a sinful wicked thing, not to repay what we have borrowed. Some make this an instance, not so much of the wickedness of the wicked, as of the misery and poverty to which they are reduced by the just judgment of God, that they shall be necessitated to borrow for their supply, and then be in no capacity to repay again, and so lie at the mercy of their creditors. Whatever some men seem to think of it, as it is a great sin for those that are able to deny the payment of their just debts, so it is a great misery not to be able to pay them.

2. We must be ready to all acts of charity and beneficence; for as it is an instance of God's goodness to the righteous, that he puts it into the power of his hand to be kind, and to do good, (and so some understand it, God's blessing increases his little, to that degree, that he has abundance to spare for the relief of others,) so it is an instance of the goodness of the righteous man, that he has a heart proportionable to his estate; *he shews mercy, and gives, v. 21. He is ever merciful, or every day, or all the day, merciful, and lends, and sometimes there is as true charity in lending as in giving; giving and lending are then acceptable to God, when they come from a merciful disposition in the heart, which, if it be sincere, will be constant, and will keep us from being weary of well-doing. He that is truly merciful will be ever merciful.*

3. We must leave our sins, and engage in the practice of serious godliness; (*v. 27.*) *Depart from evil, and do good; cease to do evil, and abhor it; learn to do well, and cleave to it.* This is true religion.

4. We must abound in good discourse, and with our tongues must glorify God, and edify others. It is part of the character of a righteous man, (*v. 30.*) *That his mouth speaketh wisdom; not only he speaks wisely, but he speaks wisdom, like Solomon himself, for the instruction of those about him; his tongue talks not of things idle and impertinent, but of judgment, that is, of the word and providence of God, and the rules of wisdom for the right ordering of the conversation. Out of the abundance of a good heart will the mouth speak that which is good, and to the use of edifying.*

5. We must have our wills brought into an entire subjection to the will and word of God; (*v. 31.*) *The law of God, of his God, is in his heart; and in vain do we pretend that God is our God, if we do not receive his law into our hearts, and resign ourselves to the government of it. It is but a jest and a mockery to speak wisdom, and to talk of judgment, (v. 30.) unless we have the law in our hearts, and we think as we speak. The law of God must be a commanding, ruling, principle in the heart; it must be a light there, a spring there, and then the conversation will be regular and uniform, none of his steps will slide; it will effectually prevent backsliding into sin, and the uneasiness that follows from it.*

II. What is assured to us, as instances of our happiness and comfort, upon these conditions.

1. That we should have the blessing of God, and that blessing shall be the spring, and sweetness, and security, of all our temporal comforts and enjoyments; (*v. 22.*) *Such as be blessed of*

God, as all the righteous are, with a Father's blessing, by virtue of that shall inherit the earth, or the land, for so the same word is translated, v. 29. the land of Canaan, that glory of all lands. Our creature-comforts are then comforts indeed to us, when we see them flowing from the blessing of God, from his favour, his promise, and his covenant with us; and if we are sure of the blessing of God, we are sure not to want any thing that is good for us in this world. The earth shall yield us her increase, if God, as our own God, gives us his blessing, 67. 6. And as those whom God blesses are thus blessed indeed, for they shall inherit the land; so those whom he curses are cursed indeed, and they shall be cut off, and rooted out; and their extirpation by the divine curse will set off the establishment of the righteous, by the divine blessing, and be a foil to it.

2. That God will direct and dispose of our actions and affairs, so as may be most for his glory; (*v. 23.*) *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; by his grace and holy Spirit he directs the thoughts, affections, and designs, of good men; he has all hearts in his hand, but their's by their own consent; by his providence he over-rules the events that concern them, so as to make their way plain before them, both what they should do, and what they may expect. Observe, God orders the steps of a good man; not only his way in general, by his written word, but his particular steps, by the whispers of conscience, saying, This is the way, walk in it. He does not always shew him his way at a distance, but leads him step by step, as children are led, and so keeps him in a continual dependence upon his guidance; and this, (1.) Because he delights in his way, and is well-pleased with the paths of righteousness wherein he walks. The Lord knows the way of the righteous, (1. 6.) knows it with favour, and therefore directs it. (2.) That he may delight in his way. Because God orders his way according to his own will, therefore he delights in it: for as he loves his own image upon us, so he is well-pleased with what we do under his guidance.*

3. That God will keep us from being ruined by our falls either into sin or into trouble; (*v. 24.*) *Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down.* (1.) A good man may be overtaken in a fault, but the grace of God shall recover him to repentance, so that he shall not be utterly cast down. Though he may, for a time, lose the joys of God's salvation, yet they shall be restored to him; for God shall uphold him with his hand, uphold him with his free spirit. The root shall be kept alive, though the leaf wither; and there will come a spring after the winter. (2.) A good man may be in distress, his affairs embarrassed, his spirits sunk, but he shall not be utterly cast down; God will be the Strength of his heart, when his flesh and heart fail, and will uphold him with his comforts, so that the spirit he has made shall not fail before him.

4. That he shall not want the necessary supports of this life, (*v. 25.*) *"I have been young, and now am old; and, among all the changes I have seen in men's outward condition, and the observations I have made upon them, I never saw the righteous forsaken of God and man, as I have sometimes seen wicked people abandoned both by heaven and earth; nor do I ever remember to have seen the seed of the righteous reduced to that extremity as to beg their bread." David had himself begged his bread of Ahimelech the priest, but it was when Saul hunted him; and our Saviour has taught us to except the case of persecution for righteousness-sake out of all the temporal promises, (Mark, 10. 30.) because that has such peculiar honours and comforts attending it, as make it rather a gift (as the apostle reckons it, Phil. 1. 29.) than a loss or grievance. But there are very few instances of good men, or their families, that are reduced to such extreme poverty as many wicked people bring themselves to by their wickedness. He had not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread; forsaken, so some expound it. If they do want, God will raise them up friends to supply them, without a scandalous exposing of themselves to the reproach of common beggars; or if they go from door to door for meat, it shall not be with despair, as the wicked man that wanders abroad for bread, saying, Where is it? Job, 15. 23. Nor shall he be denied, as the*

prodigal, that would fain have filled his belly, but no man gave unto him, Luke, 15. 16. Nor shall he grudge, if he be not satisfied, as David's enemies, when they *reandered up and down for meat*, 59. 15. Some make this promise relate especially to those that are charitable and liberal to the poor, and to intimate that David never observed any that brought themselves to poverty by their charity; it is *withholding more than is meet that tends to poverty*, Prov. 11. 24.

5. That God will not desert us, but graciously protect us in our difficulties and straits; (v. 28.) *The Lord loves judgment*; he delights in doing justice himself, and he delights in those that do justice; and therefore he forsakes not his saints in affliction, when others make themselves strange to them, and become shy of them; but he takes care that they be preserved for ever, that the saints in every age be taken under his protection, that the succession be preserved to the end of time, and that particular saints be preserved from all the temptations, and through all the trials, of this present time, to that happiness which shall be for ever. He will *preserve them to his heavenly kingdom*, that is, a preservation for ever, 2 Tim. 4. 18. Ps. 12. 7.

6. That we shall have a comfortable settlement in this world, and in a better when we leave this. That we shall dwell for evermore, (v. 27.) and not be cut off, as the *seed of the wicked*, v. 28. That we shall inherit the land which the Lord our God gives us, and *dwell therein for ever*, v. 29. They shall not be tossed that make God their Rest, and are at home in him. But on this earth there is no dwelling for ever, no continuing city; it is in heaven only, that city which has foundations, that the righteous shall dwell for ever; that will be their everlasting habitation.

7. That we shall not become a prey to our adversaries, that seek our ruin, v. 32, 33. There is an adversary that takes all opportunities to do us a mischief, a wicked one that watches the righteous, (as a roaring lion watches his prey,) and seeks to slay him; there are wicked men that do so, that are very subtle; they watch the righteous, that they may have an opportunity to do them a mischief effectually, and may have a pretence wherewith to justify themselves in the doing of it; and they are very spiteful, for they seek to slay him; but it may very well be applied to the wicked one, the Devil, that old serpent, who has his wiles to entrap the righteous, his devices which we should not be ignorant of; that great red dragon, who seeks to slay them; that roaring lion, who goes about continually, restless and raging, and seeking whom he may devour. But it is here promised that he shall not prevail, neither Satan nor his instruments. (1.) He shall not prevail as a field-adversary; *The Lord will not leave him in his hand*; he will not permit Satan to do what he would, nor will he withdraw his strength and grace from his people, but will enable them to resist and overcome him, and *their faith shall not fail*, Luke, 22. 31, 32. A good man may fall into the hands of a messenger of Satan, and be sorely buffeted, but God will not leave him in his hands, 1 Cor. 10. 13. (2.) He shall not prevail as a law-adversary; *God will not condemn him when he is judged*, though urged to do it by the accuser of the brethren, that *accuses them before our God day and night*. His false accusations will be thrown out, as those exhibited against Joshua, (Zech. 3. 1, 2.) *The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. It is God that justifies*, and then *who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?*

34. Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. 35. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. 36. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. 37. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. 38. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall

be cut off. 39. But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. 40. And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.

The psalmist's conclusion of this sermon, (for that is the nature of this poem,) is of the same purport with the whole, and inculcates the same things.

I. The duty here pressed upon us is still the same, (v. 34.) *Wait on the Lord, and keep his way*; duty is ours, and we must mind it, and make conscience of it, keep God's way, and never turn out of it, nor loiter in it, keep close, keep going; but events are God's, and we must refer ourselves to him for the disposal of them; we must wait on the Lord, attend the motions of his providence, carefully observe them, and conscientiously accommodate ourselves to them. If we make conscience of *keeping God's way*, we may with cheerfulness wait on him, and commit to him our way; and we shall find him a good Master both to his working servants and to his waiting servants.

II. The reasons to enforce this duty are much the same too, taken from the certain destruction of the wicked, and the certain salvation of the righteous. This good man, being tempted to envy the prosperity of the wicked, that he might fortify himself against the temptation, *goes into the sanctuary of God*, and leads us thither; (73. 17.) there he understands their end, and thence gives us to understand it, and, by comparing that with the end of the righteous, baffles the temptation, and puts it to silence. Observe,

1. The misery of the wicked, at last, however they may prosper a while: *The end of the wicked shall be cut off*; (v. 38.) and that cannot be well, that will undoubtedly end so ill. The wicked, in their end, will be cut off from all good, and all hopes of it; a final period will be put to all their joys, and they will be for ever separated from the fountain of life to all evil. (1.) Some instances of the remarkable ruin of wicked people David had himself observed in this world; that the pomp and prosperity of sinners would not secure them from the judgments of God, when their day was come to fall; (v. 35, 36.) *I have seen a wicked man*, (the word is singular,) suppose Saul, or Abithophel, (for David was an old man when he penned this psalm,) *in great power, formidable*, (so some render it,) *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, carrying all before him with a high hand, and seeming to be firmly fixed, and finely flourishing, spreading himself like a green bay-tree, which produces all leaves and no fruit; like a native home-born Israelite, (so Dr. Hammond,) likely to take root. But what became of him? Eliphaz, long before, had learned, when he saw the foolish taking root, to curse his habitation, Job, 5. 3. And David saw cause for it; for this bay-tree is withered away as soon as the fig-tree Christ cursed; *he passed away as a dream*, as a shadow, such was he, and all the pomp and power he was so proud of; he was gone in an instant, *he was not, I sought him with wonder, but he could not be found*. He had acted his part, and then quitted the stage, and there was no miss of him. (2.) The total and final ruin of sinners, of all sinners, will shortly be made as much a spectacle to the saints, as they are now sometimes made a spectacle to the world; (v. 34.) *When the wicked are cut off*, (and cut off they certainly will be,) *thou shalt see it*, with awful adorations of the divine justice. *The transgressors shall be destroyed together*, v. 38. In this world, God singles out here one sinner, and there another, out of many, to be made an example *in terrorem*—as a warning; but in the day of judgment there will be a general destruction of all the transgressors, and not one shall escape. They that have sinned together shall be damned together; *Bind them in bundles, to burn them*.

2. The blessedness of the righteous, at last. Let us see what will be the end of God's poor despised people.

(1.) Preferment. There have been times, the iniquity of which has been such, that men's piety has hindered their preferment in

this world, and put them quite out of the way of raising estates; but those that keep God's way may be assured that, in due time, he will *exalt them to inherit the land*, (v. 34.) he will advance them to a place in the heavenly mansions, to dignity and honour, and true wealth, in the New Jerusalem; to inherit that good land, that land of promise, of which Canaan was a type; he will exalt them above all contempt and danger.

(2.) Peace, v. 37. Let all people *mark the perfect man, and behold the upright*, take notice of him to admire him and imitate him, keep your eye upon him to observe what comes of him, and you will find that *the end of that man is peace*. Sometimes the latter end of his days proves more comfortable to him than the beginning was; the storms blow over, and he is comforted again, after the time that he was afflicted; however, if all his days continue dark and cloudy, perhaps his dying day may prove comfortable to him, and his sun may set bright; or, if it should set under a cloud, yet his future state will be peace, everlasting peace. They that walk in their uprightness, while they live, shall enter into peace when they die, Isa. 57. 2. A peaceful death has concluded the troublesome life of many a good man; and all is well that thus ends everlastingly well. Balaam himself wished that his death and his last end might be like that of the righteous, Numb. 23. 10.

(3.) Salvation, v. 39, 40. *The salvation of the righteous*, (which may be applied to the great salvation of which *the prophets inquired and searched diligently*, (1 Pet. 1. 10.) that is, of the Lord; it will be the Lord's doing; the eternal salvation, that salvation of God, which those shall see that *order their conversation aright*, (50. 23.) that is, of the Lord too. And he that intends Christ and heaven for them, will be a God all-sufficient to them. *He is their Strength in time of trouble*, to support them under it, and carry them through it; *He shall help them and deliver them*, help them to do their duties, to bear their burthens, and to maintain their spiritual conflicts; help them to bear their troubles well, and get good by them, and, in due time, shall deliver them out of their troubles. He shall deliver them from the wicked that would overwhelm them and swallow them up; shall secure them there, where the wicked cease from troubling. He shall save them; not only keep them safe, but make them happy, because they trust in him; not because they have merited it from him, but because they have committed themselves to him, and reposed a confidence in him, and have thereby honoured him.

PSALM XXXVIII.

This is one of the penitential psalms; it is full of grief and complaint, from the beginning to the end. David's sins and his afflictions are the cause of his grief and the matter of his complaints. It should seem, he was now sick and in pain, which reminded him of his sins, and helped to humble him for them; he was, at the same time, deserted by his friends, and persecuted by his enemies, so that the psalm is calculated for the depth of distress and a complication of calamities. He complains, I. Of God's displeasure, and of his own sin, which provoked God against him, v. 1. 5. II. Of his bodily sickness, v. 6. 10. III. Of the unkindness of his friends, v. 11. IV. Of injuries which his enemies did him, pleading his good conduct toward them, yet confessing his sins against God, v. 12. 20. Lastly, He concludes the psalm with earnest prayers to God, for his gracious presence and help, v. 21, 22. In singing this psalm, we ought to be much affected with the malignity of sin; and if we have not such troubles as are here described, we know not how soon we may have, and therefore must sing of them by way of preparation, and we know that others have them, and therefore we must sing of them by way of sympathy.

A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance.

1. **O** LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. 2. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. 3. *There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin.* 4. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burthen they are too heavy for me. 5. My

wounds stink *and* are corrupt, because of my foolishness. 6. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. 7. For my loins are filled with a loathsome *disease*: and *there is no soundness in my flesh.* 8. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. 9. LORD, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. 10. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. 11. My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off.

The title of this psalm is very observable; it is a psalm *to bring to remembrance*; the 70th psalm, which was likewise penned in a day of affliction, is so entitled. It is designed, 1. To bring to his own remembrance; we will suppose it penned when he was sick and in pain, and then it teaches us that times of sickness are times to bring to remembrance; to bring the sin to remembrance, for which God contended with us; to awaken our consciences to deal faithfully and plainly with us, and set our sins in order before us, for our humiliation. *In a day of adversity, consider.* Or we may suppose it penned after his recovery, but designed as a record of the convictions he was under, and the workings of his heart when he was in affliction, that, upon every review of this psalm, he might call to mind the good impressions then made upon him, and make a fresh improvement of them. To the same purport was the writing of Hezekiah, when he had been sick. 2. To put others in mind of the same things which he was himself mindful of, and to teach them what to think, and what to say, when they are sick and in affliction; let them think as he did, and speak as he did.

I. He deprecates the wrath of God and his displeasure in his affliction; (v. 1.) *O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath.* With this same petition he began another prayer, *for the visitation of the sick*, 6. 1. This was most upon his heart, and should be most upon ours, when we are in affliction, that, however God rebukes and chastens us, it may not be in wrath and displeasure, for that will be wormwood and gall in the affliction and misery. Those that would escape the wrath of God, must pray against that, more than any outward affliction, and be content to bear any outward affliction, while it comes from, and consists with, the love of God.

II. He bitterly laments the impressions of God's displeasure upon his soul; (v. 2.) *Thine arrows stick fast in me.* Let Job's complaint (ch. 6. 4.) expound David's here; by the arrows of the Almighty, he means the terrors of God, which did set themselves in array against him. He was under a very melancholy, frightful, apprehension of the wrath of God against him for his sins, and thought he could look for nothing but judgment and fiery indignation to devour him. God's arrows, as they are sure to hit the mark, so they are sure to stick where they hit, to stick fast, till he is pleased to draw them out, and to bind up with his comforts the wound he has made with his terrors. This will be the everlasting misery of the damned—the arrows of God's wrath will stick fast in them, and the wound will be incurable. "Thy hand, thy heavy hand, presses me sore, and I am ready to sink under it; it not only lies hard upon me, but it lies long; and who knows the power of God's anger, the weight of his hand!" Sometimes God shot his arrows, and stretched forth his hand, *for David*, (18. 14.) but now *against him*; so uncertain is the continuance of divine comforts where yet the continuance of divine grace is assured. He complains of God's wrath, as that which inflicted the bodily distemper he was under; (v. 3.) *There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger.* The bitterness of it, infused in his mind, affected his body; but that was not the worst, it caused the disquietude of his heart, by reason of which he forgot the courage of a soldier, the dignity of a prince, and all the cheerfulness of the sweet psalmist

of Israel, and roared terribly, v. 8. Nothing will disquiet the heart of a good man so much as the sense of God's anger; which shews what a fearful thing it is to fall into his hands. The way to keep the heart quiet, is, to keep ourselves in the love of God, and to do nothing to offend him.

III. He acknowledges his sin to be the procuring, provoking, cause of all his troubles, and groans more under the load of guilt than any other load, v. 3. He complains that his flesh had no soundness, his bones had no rest, so great an agitation he was in. "It is because of thine anger; that kindles the fire which burns so fiercely;" but, in the next words, he justifies God herein, and takes all the blame upon himself. "It is because of my sin. I have deserved it, and so have brought it upon myself; my own iniquities do correct me." If our trouble be the fruit of God's anger, we may thank ourselves, it is our sin that is the cause of it. Are we restless? it is sin that makes us so. If there were not sin in our souls, there would be no pain in our bones, no illness in our bodies.

It is sin, therefore, that this good man complains most of, 1. As a burthen, a heavy burthen; (v. 4.) "*Mine iniquities are gone over my head*, as proud waters over a man that is sinking and drowning, or as a heavy burthen upon my head, pressing me down, more than I am able to bear, or to bear up under." Note, Sin is a burthen. The power of sin dwelling in us is a weight; (Heb. 12. 1.) all are clogged with it, it keeps men from soaring upward and pressing forward; all the saints are complaining of it as a body of death they are loaded with, Rom. 7. 24. The guilt of sin committed by us is a burthen, a heavy burthen; it is a burthen to God, he is pressed under it, (Amos, 2. 13.) a burthen to the whole creation, which groans under it, Rom. 8. 21, 22. It will, first or last, be a burthen to the sinner himself, either a burthen of repentance, when he is pricked to the heart for it, labours, and is heavy laden, under it; or a burthen of ruin, when it sinks him to the lowest hell, and will for ever detain him there; it will be a talent of lead upon him, Zech. 5. 8. Sinners are said to bear their iniquity. Threatenings are burthens. 2. As wounds, dangerous wounds; (v. 5.) "*My wounds stink and are corrupt*; (as wounds in the body rankle and fester, and grow foul, for want of being dressed and looked after;) and it is through my own foolishness." Sins are wounds, (Gen. 4. 23.) painful, mortal, wounds. Our wounds by sin are often in a bad condition, no care taken of them, no application made to them, and it is owing to the sinner's foolishness, in not confessing sin, 32. 3, 4. A slight sore neglected may prove of fatal consequence, and so may a slight sin, slighted and left unrepented of.

IV. He bemoans himself because of his afflictions, and gives ease to his grief, by giving vent to it, and pouring out his complaint before the Lord.

1. He was troubled in mind, his conscience was pained, and he had no rest in his own spirit; and a wounded spirit who can bear? He was troubled, or distorted, bowed down greatly, and *went mourning all the day long*, v. 6. He was always pensive and melancholy, which made him a burthen and terror to himself. His spirit was feeble and sore-broken, and his heart disquieted, v. 8. Herein David, in his sufferings, was a type of Christ, who, being in his agony, cried out, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful*. This is a sorer affliction than any other in this world; whatever God is pleased to lay upon us, we have no reason to complain, as long as he preserves to us the use of our reason and the peace of our consciences.

2. He was sick and weak in body; his loins filled with a loathsome disease, some swelling, or ulcer, or inflammation; some think a plague-sore, such as Hezekiah's boil; and there was no soundness in his flesh, but, like Job, he was all over distempered. Sec, (1.) What vile bodies those are which we carry about with us; what grievous diseases they are liable to; and what an offence and grievance they may soon be made by some diseases to the souls that animate them, as they always are a cloud and clog. (2.) That the bodies both of the greatest and of the best of men have in them the same seeds of diseases that the bodies of others have, and are liable to the same disasters. David himself, though so

great a prince, and so great a saint, was not exempt from the most grievous diseases; there was no soundness even in his flesh; probably this was after his sin in the matter of Uriah, and thus did he smart in his flesh for his fleshly lusts. When, at any time, we are distempered in our bodies, we ought to remember how God has been dishonoured in and by our bodies. He was *feeble and sore-broken*, v. 8. His heart panted, and was in a continual palpitation, v. 10. His strength and limbs failed him; as for the light of his eyes, that was gone from him, either with much weeping, or by a defluxion of rheum upon them, or through the lowness of his spirits, and the frequent returns of fainting.

Note, Sickness will tame the strongest body, and the stoutest spirit. David was famed for his courage and great exploits; and yet, when God contended with him by bodily sickness, and the impressions of his wrath upon his mind, his hair is cut, his heart fails him, and he is become weak as water. Therefore let not the strong man glory in his strength, nor any man set grief at defiance, however it may be thought at a distance.

3. His friends were unkind to him; (v. 11.) *My lovers* (such as had been merry with him in the day of his mirth) now *stand aloof from my sore*: they would not sympathize with him in his griefs, nor so much as come within hearing of his complaints, but, like the priest and Levite, (Luke, 10. 31.) *passed by on the other side*. Even his kinsmen, that were bound to him by blood and alliance, stood afar off. See what little reason we have to trust in man, or to wonder if we be disappointed in our expectations of kindness from men. Adversity tries friendship, and separates between the precious and the vile. It is our wisdom to make sure a Friend in heaven, who will not stand aloof from our sore, and from whose love no tribulation or distress shall be able to separate us. David, in his troubles, was a type of Christ in his agony, Christ on his cross, feeble and sore-broken, and then deserted by his friends and kinsmen, who beheld afar off.

Lastly, In the midst of his complaints he comforts himself with the cognizance God graciously took both of his griefs and of his prayers; (v. 9.) "*Lord, all my desire is before thee*; thou knowest what I want, and what I would have, *my groaning is not hid from thee*. Thou knowest the burthens I groan under, and the blessings I groan after." The *groanings which cannot be uttered* are not hid from him that *searches the heart*, and *knows what is the mind of the Spirit*, Rom. 8. 26, 27. In singing this, and praying it over, whatever burthen lies upon our spirits, we should by faith cast it upon God, and all our care concerning it, and then be easy.

12. They also that seek after my life lay snares *for me*; and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long. 13. But I, as a deaf *man*, heard not; and *I was* as a dumb man *that* openeth not his mouth. 14. Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth *are* no reproofs. 15. For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O LORD my God. 16. For I said, *Hear me*, lest *otherwise* they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify *themselves* against me. 17. For I *am* ready to halt, and my sorrow *is* continually before me. 18. For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. 19. But mine enemies *are* lively, *and* they are strong: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. 20. They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow *the thing that good is*. 21. For-sake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me. 22. Make haste to help me, O LORD my salvation.

In these verses,

I. David complains of the power and malice of his enemies, who, it should seem, not only took occasion, from the weakness of his body, and the trouble of his mind, to insult over him, but took advantage thence to do him a mischief. He has a great deal to say against them, which he humbly offers as a reason why God should appear for him, as (25. 19.) *Consider mine enemies.*

1. "They are very spiteful and cruel; they seek my hurt; nay, they seek after my life," v. 12. That life which was so precious in the sight of the Lord, and all good men, was aimed at, as if it had been forfeited, or a public nuisance; such is the enmity of the serpent's seed against the seed of the woman; it would wound the head, though it can but reach the heel. It is the blood of the saints that is thirsted after.

2. "They are very subtle and politic; they lay snares, they imagine deceits, and herein they are restless and unwearied, they do it all the day long; they speak mischievous things one to another; every one has something or other to propose, that may be a mischief to me." Mischief, covered and carried on by deceit, may well be called a snare.

3. "They are very insolent and abusive; when my foot slips, when I fall into any trouble, or when I make any mistake, misplace a word, or take a false step, they magnify themselves against me; they are pleased with it, and promise themselves that it will ruin my interest, and that, if I slip, I shall certainly fall and be undone."

4. "They are not only unjust, but very ungrateful; they hate me wrongfully; (v. 19.) I never did them any ill turn, nor so much as bore them any ill-will, nor ever gave them any provocation; nay, they render evil for good, v. 20. Many a kindness I have done them; for which I might have expected a return of kindness; but for my love they are my adversaries," 109. 4. Such a rooted enmity there is in the hearts of wicked men to goodness for its own sake, that they hate it, even then when they themselves have the benefit of it; they hate prayer, even in those that pray for them; and hate peace, even in those that would be at peace with them; but very ill-natured those are whom no courtesy will oblige, who are rather exasperated by it.

5. "They are very impious and devilish; they are my adversaries merely because I follow the thing that good is;" they hated him, not only for his kindness to them, but for his devotion and obedience to God; they hated him because they hated God, and all that bear his image. If we suffer ill for doing well, we must not think it strange; from the beginning it was so; Cain slew Abel, because his works were righteous; nor must we think it hard, because it will not always be so; for so much the greater will our reward be.

6. They are many and mighty; they are lively, they are strong, they are multiplied: (v. 19.) *Lord, how are they increased that trouble me?* 3. 1. Holy David was weak and faint, his heart panted, and his strength failed, he was melancholy and of a sorrowful spirit, and persecuted by his friends; but, at the same time, his wicked enemies were strong and lively, and their number increased; let us not therefore pretend to judge of men's characters by their outward condition; none knows love or hatred by all that is before them. It should seem that David, in this, as in other complaints he makes of his enemies, has an eye to Christ, whose persecutors were such as are here described, perfectly lost to all honour and virtue. None hate Christianity, but such as have first divested themselves of the first principles of humanity, and broken through its most sacred bonds.

II. He reflects, with comfort, upon his own peaceable and pious behaviour, under all the injuries and indignities that were done him. It is then only that our enemies do us a real mischief, when they provoke us to sin; (Neh. 6. 13.) when they prevail to put us out of the possession of our own souls, and drive us from God and our duty; if by divine grace we are enabled to prevent this mischief, we quench their fiery darts, and are saved from harm; if still we hold fast our integrity and our peace, who can hurt us? This David did here.

1. He kept his temper, and was not ruffled or discomposed by any of the slights that were put upon him, or the mischievous things that were said or done against him; (v. 13, 14.) "I, as a deaf man, heard not; I took no notice of the affronts put upon me,

did not resent them, nor was put into disorder by them, much less did I meditate revenge, or study to return the injury." Note, The less notice we take of the unkindness and injuries that are done us, the more we consult the quiet of our own minds. Being deaf, he was dumb, as a man in whose mouth there are no reproofs; he was as silent as if he had nothing to say for himself, for fear of putting himself into a heat, and incensing his enemies yet more against him; he would not only not recriminate upon them, but not so much as vindicate himself, lest his necessary defence should be construed his offence. Though they sought after his life, and his silence might be taken for a confession of his guilt, yet he was as a dumb man that opens not his mouth. Note, When our enemies are most clamorous, it is, generally, our prudence to be silent, or to say little, lest we make bad worse. David could not hope by his mildness to win upon his enemies, or by his soft answers to turn away their wrath, for they were men of such base spirits, that they rendered him evil for good; and yet he carried it thus meekly toward them, that he might prevent his own sin, and might have the comfort of it in the reflection. Herein David was a type of Christ, who was as a sheep dumb before the shearers, and, when he was reviled, reviled not again; and both are examples to us, not to render railing for railing.

2. He kept close to his God by faith and prayer, and so both supported himself under these injuries, and silenced his own resentments of them. (1.) He trusted in God; (v. 15.) "I was as a man that opens not his mouth, for in thee, O Lord, do I hope. I depend upon thee to plead my cause, and clear my innocency, and, some way or other, to put them to silence and shame." His lovers and friends, that should have owned him and stood by him, and appeared as witnesses for him, withdrew from him, v. 10. But God is a Friend that will never fail us, if we hope in him. *I was as a man that heareth not, for thou wilt hear.* Why need I hear, and God hear too? *He careth for you;* (1 Pet. 5. 7.) and why need you care, and God care too? "Thou wilt answer," (so some,) "and therefore I will say nothing." Note, It is a good reason why we should bear reproach and calumny with silence and patience, because God is a Witness to all the wrong that is done us, and, in due time, will be a Witness for us, and against those that do us wrong; therefore let us be silent, because if we be, then we may expect that God will appear for us, for this is an evidence that we trust in him; but if we undertake to manage for ourselves, we take God's work out of his hands, and forfeit the benefit of his appearing for us. Our Lord Jesus, when he suffered, therefore threatened not, because he committed himself to him that judges righteously; (1 Pet. 2. 23.) and we shall lose nothing, at last, by doing so; *Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me.* (2.) He called upon God; (v. 16.) *For I said, Hear me, that is supplied; "I said so,"* (as v. 15.) "in thee do I hope, for thou wilt hear, lest they should rejoice over me. I comforted myself with that, when I was apprehensive that they would overwhelm me." It is a great support to us, when men are false and unkind, that we have a God to go to, whom we may be free with, and who will be faithful to us.

III. He here bewails his own follies and infirmities. 1. He was very sensible of the present workings of corruption in him, and that he was now ready to repine at the providence of God, and to be put into a passion by the injuries men did him; *I am ready to halt,* v. 17. This will best be explained by a reflection like this which the psalmist made upon himself in a like case, (73. 2.) *My feet were almost gone, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked;* so here, *I was ready to halt,* ready to say, *I have cleansed my hands in vain.* His sorrow was continual; *All the day long have I been plagued;* (73. 13, 14.) and it was continually before him, he could not forbear poring upon it, and that made him almost ready to halt between religion and irreligion. The fear of this drove him to his God; "In thee do I hope, not only that thou wilt plead my cause, but that thou wilt prevent my falling into sin." Good men, by setting their sorrow continually before them, have been ready to halt, who, by setting God always before them, have kept their standing. 2. He remembered against himself his former transgressions, acknowledging that by them he had brought these troubles upon himself, and forfeited the divine protection, though

he could justify himself, before God he will judge and condemn himself; (v. 18.) "*I will declare mine iniquity, and not cover it, I will be sorry for my sin,* and not make a light matter of it;" and this helped to make him silent under the rebukes of Providence, and the reproaches of men. Note, If we be truly penitent for sin, that will make us patient under affliction, and particularly under unjust censures. Two things are required in repentance, (1.) Confession of sin; "*I will declare mine iniquity; I will not only in general own myself a sinner, but I will make a particular acknowledgment of what I have done amiss.*" We must declare our sins before God freely and fully, and with their aggravating circumstances, that we may give glory to God, and take shame to ourselves. (2.) Contrition for sin; "*I will be sorry for it;* sin will have sorrow; every true penitent grieves for the dishonour he has done to God, and the wrong he has done to himself; "*I will be in care or fear about my sin,*" (so some,) "*in fear lest it ruin me, and in care to get pardoned.*"

IV. He concludes with very earnest prayers to God for his gracious presence with him, and seasonable powerful succour in his distress; (v. 21, 22.) "*Forsake me not, O Lord, though my friends forsake me, and though I deserve to be forsaken by thee. Be not far from me, as my unbelieving heart is ready to fear thou art.*" Nothing goes nearer to the heart of a good man in affliction, than to be under the apprehension of God's deserting him in wrath; nor does any thing therefore come more feelingly from his heart than this prayer, "*Lord, be not thou far from me; make haste for my help;* for I am ready to perish, and in danger of being lost, if relief do not come quickly." God gives us leave, not only to call upon him when we are in trouble, but to hasten him. He pleads, "*Thou art my God, whom I serve, and on whom I depend to bear me out; and my Salvation, who alone art able to save me, who hast engaged thyself by promise to save me, and from whom alone I expect salvation.*" Is any afflicted, let him thus pray, let him thus plead, let him thus hope, in singing this psalm.

PSALM XXXIX.

David seems to have been in a great strait, when he penned this psalm, and, upon some account or other, very uneasy; for it is with some difficulty that he conquers his passion, and composes his spirit, himself to take that good counsel which he had given to others, (37.) to rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, without fretting; for it is easier to give the good advice, than to give the good example, of quietness under affliction. What was the particular trouble which gave occasion for the conflict David was now in, does not appear. Perhaps it was the death of some dear friend or relation that was the trial of his patience, and that suggested to him these meditations of mortality; and, at the same time, it should seem too, himself was weak and ill, and under some prevailing distemper. His enemies likewise were seeking advantages against him, and watched for his halting, that they might have something to reproach him for. Thus aggrieved, I. He relates the struggle that was in his breast, between grace and corruption, between passion and patience, v. 1. . 3. II. He meditates upon the doctrine of man's frailty and mortality, and prays to God to instruct him in it, c. 4. . 6. III. He applies himself to God for the pardon of his sins, the removal of his afflictions, and the lengthening out of his life till he was ready for death, v. 7. . 13. This is a funeral psalm, and very proper for the occasion; in singing it, we should get our hearts duly affected with the brevity, uncertainty, and calamitous state, of human life; and those on whose comforts God has, by death, made breaches, will find this psalm of great use to them, in order to their obtaining of what we ought much to aim at under such an affliction, which is, to get it sanctified to us for our spiritual benefit, and to get our hearts reconciled to the holy will of God in it.

To the chief musician, even to Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

1. **I SAID,** I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. 2. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. 3. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, 4. **LORD,** make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. 5. Behold, thou hast made my

days as an hand-breadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. 6. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.

David here recollects, and leaves upon record, the workings of his heart under his afflictions; and it is good for us to do so, that what was thought amiss, may be amended, and what was well thought of, may be improved the next time.

1. He remembered the covenants he had made with God, to walk circumspectly, and to be very cautious both of what he did, and what he said. When, at any time, we are tempted to sin, and are in danger of falling into it, we must call to mind the solemn vows we have made against sin, against the particular sin we are upon the brink of. God can, and will, remind us of them; (Jer. 2. 20.) *Thou saidst, I will not transgress;* and therefore we ought to remind ourselves of them. So David did here.

1. He remembers that he had resolved, in general, to be very cautious and circumspect in his walking; (v. 1.) *I said, I will take heed to my ways;* and it was well said, and what he would never unsay, and therefore most never gainsay. Note, (1.) It is the great concern of every one of us, to take heed to our ways, that is, to walk circumspectly, while others walk at all adventures. (2.) We ought steadfastly to resolve that we will take heed to our ways, and frequently to renew that resolution; fast bind, fast find. (3.) Having resolved to take heed to our ways, we must, upon all occasions, remind ourselves of that resolution, for it is a covenant never to be forgotten, but which we must be always mindful of.

2. He remembers that he had in particular covenanted against tongue sins—That he would not sin with his tongue, That he would not speak amiss, either to offend God, or offend the generation of the righteous, 73. 15. It is not so easy as we could wish, not to sin in thought; but if an evil thought should arise in his mind, he would lay his hand upon his mouth, and suppress it, that it should go no further: and this is so great an attainment, that if any offend not in word, the same is a perfect man; and so needful a one, that he who seems to be religious, but bridleth not his tongue, his religion is vain. David had resolved, (1.) That he would, at all times, watch against tongue sins. "*I will keep a bridle, or muzzle, upon my mouth;*" a bridle upon it, as upon an unruly horse, to guide and direct it, to check and curb it, to keep it in the right way, and on a good pace; see Jam. 3. 3. Watchfulness in the habit, is the bridle upon the head; watchfulness in the act and exercise, is the hand upon the bridle, a muzzle upon it, as upon an unruly dog that is fierce, and does mischief; by particular steadfast resolution, corruption is restrained from breaking out at the lips, and so is muzzled. (2.) That he would double his guard against them, when there was most danger of scandal; *when the wicked is before me.* When he was in company with the wicked, he would take heed of saying any thing that might harden them, or give occasion to them to blaspheme. If good men fall into bad company, they must take heed what they say. Or, *when the wicked is before me,* in my thoughts. When he was contemplating the pride and power, the prosperity and flourishing estate, of evil doers, he was tempted to speak amiss; and therefore then he would take special care what he said. Note, the stronger the temptation to a sin is, the stronger the resolution must be against it.

II. Pursuant to these covenants, he made a shift, with much ado, to bridle his tongue; (v. 2.) *I was dumb with silence, I held my peace even from good.* His silence was commendable; and the greater the provocation was, the more praise-worthy was his silence. Watchfulness and resolution, in the strength of God's grace, will do more toward the bridling of the tongue than we can imagine, though it be an unruly evil. But what shall we say of his keeping silence even from good? Was it his wisdom, that he refrained good discourse when the wicked were before him, because he would not cast pearls before swine? I rather think it was his weakness; be-

cause he might not say any thing, he would say nothing, but ran into an extreme, which was a reproach to the law, for that prescribes a mean between extremes. The same law which forbids all corrupt communication, requires that which is good, and to the use of edifying, Eph. 4. 29.

III. The less he spake, the more he thought, and the more warmly. Binding the distempered part, did but draw the humour to it; *My sorrow was stirred, my heart was hot within me, v. 3.* He could bridle his tongue, but he could not keep his passion under; though he suppressed the smoke, that was as a fire in his bones, and while he was musing upon his afflictions, and upon the prosperity of the wicked, the fire burned. Note, Those that are of a fretful discontented spirit, ought not to pore much, for, while they suffer their thoughts to dwell upon the causes of the calamity, the fire of their discontent is fed with fuel, and burns the more furiously. Impatience is a sin that has its ill cause within ourselves, and that is musing, and its ill effects upon ourselves, and that is no less than burning. If therefore we would prevent the mischief of ungoverned passions, we must redress the grievance of ungoverned thoughts.

IV. When he did speak, at last, it was to the purpose; *At the last, I spake with my tongue;* some make what he said, to be the breach of his good purpose, and that, in what he said, he sinned with his tongue; and so they make what follows, to be a passionate wish, *that he might die like Elijah,* (1 Kings, 19. 4.) and Job, ch. 6. 8, 9. But I rather take it to be, not the breach of his good purpose, but the reformation of his mistake in carrying it too far; he had kept silence from good, but now he would so keep silence no longer. He had nothing to say to the wicked that were before him, for to them he knew not how to place his words, but, after long musing, the first word he said, was, a prayer, and a devout meditation upon a subject, which it will be good for us all to think much of.

1. He prays to God to make him sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the near approach of death; (v. 4.) *Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days.* He does not mean, "Lord, let me know how long I shall live, and when I shall die;" we could not, in faith, pray such a prayer, for God has no where promised to let us know, but has, in wisdom, locked up that knowledge among the secret things which belong not to us, nor would it be good for us to know it; but, *Lord, make me to know my end,* means, "Lord, give me wisdom and grace to consider it, (Deut. 32. 29) and to improve what I know concerning it." *The living know that they shall die,* (Eccl. 9. 5.) but few care for thinking of it; we have therefore need to pray, that God by his grace would conquer that aversion which is in our corrupt hearts, to the thoughts of death. "Lord, make me to consider," (1.) "What death is; it is my end, the end of my life, and all the employments and enjoyments of life; it is the end of all men," Eccl. 7. 2. It is a final period to our state of probation and preparation, and an awful entrance upon a state of recompense and retribution. To the wicked man, it is the end of all his joys; to a godly man, it is the end of all his griefs. "Lord, give me to know my end, to be better acquainted with death, to make it more familiar to me, (Job, 17. 14.) and to be more affected with the greatness of the change. Lord, give me to consider what a serious thing it is to die." (2.) "How near it is; Lord, give me to consider the measure of my days, that they are measured in the counsel of God; the end is a fixed end, so the word signifies, *My days are determined;* (Job, 14. 5.) and that the measure is but short; "My days will soon be numbered and finished." When we look upon death as a thing at a distance, we are tempted to adjourn the necessary preparations for it; but when we consider how short life is, we shall see ourselves concerned to do what our hand finds to do, not only with all our might, but with all possible expedition. (3.) That it is continually working in us; "Lord, give me to consider how frail I am, how scanty the stock of life is, and how faint the spirits, which are as the oil, to keep that lamp burning." We find, by daily experience, that the earthly house of this tabernacle is mouldering and going to decay; "Lord, make us to consider this, that we may secure mansions in the house not made with hands."

2. He meditates upon the brevity and vanity of life, pleading it with God for relief under the burthens of life, as Job often, and pleading it with himself, for his quickening to the business of life.

(1.) Man's life on earth is short, and of no continuance, and that is a reason why we should sit loose to it, and prepare for the end of it; (v. 5.) *Behold, thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth;* the breadth of four fingers, a certain dimension, a small one, and the measure whereof we have always about us, always before our eyes; we need no rod, no pole, no measuring line, wherewith to take the dimension of our days, nor any skill in arithmetic wherewith to compute the number of them; no, we have the standard of them at our fingers' end, and there is no multiplication of it, it is but one hand-breadth in all. Our time is short, and God has made it so; for the number of our months is with him; it is short, and he knows it to be so; "It is as nothing before thee." He remembers *how short our time is,* 89. 47. "It is nothing in comparison with thee;" so some. All time is nothing to God's eternity, much less our share of time.

(2.) Man's life on earth is vain, and of no value, and therefore it is folly to be fond of it, and wisdom to make sure of a better life. Adam is Abel, *man is vanity,* in his present state; he is not what he seems to be, has not what he promised himself; he and all his comforts lie at a continual uncertainty, and if there were not another life after this, all things considered, he were made in vain. He is vanity; he is mortal, he is mutable. Observe how emphatically this truth is expressed here. [1.] *Every man is vanity,* without exception; high and low, rich and poor, all meet in this. [2.] He is so *at his best estate,* when he is young, and strong, and healthful, in wealth and honour, and the height of prosperity; when he is most easy, and merry, and secure, and thinks his mountain stands strong. [3.] He is *altogether vanity,* as vain as you can imagine. *All man is all vanity,* so it may be read; every thing about him is uncertain, nothing is substantial and durable but what relates to the new man. [4.] *Verily* he is so. This is a truth of undoubted certainty, but which we are very unwilling to believe, and need to have solemnly attested to us, as indeed it is by frequent instances. [5.] *Selah* is annexed, as a note commanding observation. "Stop here, and pause a while, that you may take time to consider and apply this truth, that every man is vanity." We ourselves are so.

Now, for the proof of the vanity of man, as mortal, he here mentions three things, and shews the vanity of each of them, v. 6. *First,* The vanity of our joys and honours: *Surely every man walks* (even when he walks in state, when he walks in pleasure,) *in a shadow, in an image, in a vain shew.* When he makes a figure, his fashion passes away, and his great pomp is but great fancy, Acts, 25. 23. It is but a shew, and therefore a vain shew, like the rainbow, the gaudy colours of which must needs vanish and disappear quickly, when the substratum is but a cloud, a vapour; such is life, (Jam. 4. 14.) and therefore such are all the gaieties of it. *Secondly,* The vanity of our griefs and fears; *Surely they are disquieted in vain.* Our disquietudes are often groundless; we vex ourselves without any just cause, and the occasions of our trouble are often the creatures of our own fancy and imagination: and they are always fruitless; we disquiet ourselves in vain, for we cannot, with all our disquietment, alter the nature of things, nor the counsel of God; things will be as they are, when we have disquieted ourselves ever so much about them. *Thirdly,* The vanity of our cares and toils. He takes a great deal of pains to *heap up riches,* and they are but like heaps of manure in the furrows of the field, good for nothing, unless they be spread. But when he has filled his treasures with his trash, he *knows not who shall gather them,* nor to whom they shall descend when he is gone; for he shall not take them away with him. He asks not, *For whom do I labour?* and that is his folly, Eccl. 4. 8. But if he did ask, he could not tell whether he should be a wise man or a fool, a friend or a foe; (Eccl. 2. 19.) *This is vanity.*

7. And now, LORD, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. 8. Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish.

9. I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it. 10. Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. 11. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. Selah. 12. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. 13. O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.

The psalmist, having meditated on the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the vanity and vexation of spirit that attend all the comforts of life, here, in these verses, turns his eyes and heart heaven-ward. When there is no solid satisfaction to be had in the creature, it is to be found in God, and in communion with him; and to him we should be driven by our disappointments in the world. David here expresses,

I. His dependence on God, v. 7. Seeing all is vanity, and man himself is so, 1. He despairs of a happiness in the things of the world, and disclaims all expectation from it; "*Now, Lord, what wait I for?*" Even nothing from the things of sense and time; I have nothing to wish for, nothing to hope for, from this earth." Note, The consideration of the vanity and frailty of human life, should deaden our desires to the things of this world, and lower our expectations from it. "If the world be such a thing as this, God deliver me from having or seeking my portion in it." We cannot count upon constant health and prosperity, nor upon comfort in any relation, for it is all as uncertain as our continuance here. "Now, though I have sometimes foolishly promised myself this and the other, from the world, now I am of another mind." 2. He takes hold of happiness and satisfaction in God; *My hope is in thee.* Note, When creature-confidences fail, it is our comfort that we have a God to go to, a God to trust to, and we should thereby be quickened to take so much the faster hold of him by faith.

II. His submission to God, and his cheerful acquiescence in his holy will, v. 9. If our hope be in God for a happiness in the other world, we may well afford to reconcile ourselves to all the dispensations of his providence concerning us in this world; "*I was dumb, I opened not my mouth,*" in a way of complaint and murmuring." He now again recovered that serenity and sedateness of mind which were disturbed, v. 2. Whatever comforts he is deprived of, whatever crosses he is burdened with, he will be easy; "*because thou didst it;*" it did not come to pass by chance, but according to thine appointment." We may here see, 1. A good God doing all, and ordering all events concerning us. Of every event we may say, "This is the finger of God, it is the Lord's doing;" whoever were the instruments. 2. A good man, for that reason, saying nothing against it. He is dumb, he has nothing to object, no question to ask, no dispute to raise upon it. All that God does is well done.

III. His desire toward God, and the prayers he puts up to him; *Is any afflicted? Let him pray,* as David here,

1. For the pardoning of his sin, and the preventing of his shame, v. 8. Before he prays, (v. 10.) *Remove thy stroke from me,* he prays, (v. 8.) "*Deliver me from all mine offences,*" from the guilt I have contracted, the punishment I have deserved, and the power of corruption I have been captivated by." When God forgives our sins, he delivers us from them, he delivers us from them all. He pleads, *Make me not a reproach to the foolish.* Wicked people are foolish people; and then they shew their folly most, when they think to shew their wit, by scoffing at God's people. When David prays that God would pardon his sins, and not make him a reproach, it is to be taken as a prayer for peace of conscience; ("Lord, leave me not to the power of melancholy, which the foolish will laugh at me for;") and as a

prayer for grace, that God would never leave him to himself, so far as to do any thing that might make him a reproach to bad men. Note, This is a good reason why we should both watch and pray against sin, because the credit of our profession is nearly concerned in the preservation of our integrity.

2. For the removal of his affliction, that he might speedily be eased of his present burthens; (v. 10.) *Remove thy stroke away from me.* Note, When we are under the correcting hand of God, our eye must be to God himself, and not to any other, for relief. He only, that inflicts the stroke, can remove it; and we may then, in faith, and with satisfaction, pray that our afflictions may be removed, when our sins are pardoned, (Isa. 38. 17.) and when, as here, the affliction is sanctified, and has done its work, and we are humbled under the hand of God.

(1.) He pleads the great extremity he was reduced to by his affliction, which made him the proper object of God's compassion; *I am consumed by the blow of thy hand.* His sickness prevailed to that degree, that his spirits failed, his strength was wasted, and his body emaciated. "The blow, or conflict, of thine hand has brought me even to the gates of death." Note, The strongest, and boldest, and best, of men cannot bear up under, much less make head against, the power of God's wrath. It was not his case only, but any man will find himself an unequal match for the Almighty, v. 11. When God, at any time, contends with us, when with rebukes he corrects us, [1.] We cannot impeach the equity of his controversy, but must acknowledge that he is righteous in it; for, whenever he corrects man, it is for iniquity. Our ways and our doings procure the trouble to ourselves, and we are beaten with a rod of our own making. It is the yoke of our transgressions, though it be *bound with his hand*, Lam. 1. 14. [2.] We cannot oppose the effects of his controversy, but he will be too hard for us. As we have nothing to move in arrest of his judgment, so we have no way of escaping the execution. God's rebukes make man's beauty to consume away like a moth; we often see, we sometimes feel, how much the body is weakened and decayed by sickness, in a little time; the countenance is changed; where are the ruddy cheek and lip, the sprightly eye, the lively look, the smiling face? It is the reverse of all this that presents itself to view. What a poor thing is beauty; and what fools are they that are proud of it, or in love with it, when it will certainly, and may quickly, be consumed thus! Some make the moth to represent man, who is as easily crushed as a moth with the touch of a finger, Job. 4. 19. Others make it to represent the divine rebukes, which silently and insensibly waste and consume us, as the moth does the garment. All which abundantly proves what he had said before, that surely every man is vanity, weak and helpless; so he will be found when God comes to contend with him.

(2.) He pleads the good impressions made upon him by his affliction. He hoped that the end was accomplished for which it was sent, and that therefore it would be removed in mercy; and unless an affliction has done its work, though it may be removed, it is not removed in mercy. [1.] It had set him a weeping, and he hoped God would take notice of that; when the Lord God called to mourning, he answered the call, and accommodated himself to the dispensation, and therefore could, in faith, pray, *Lord, hold not thy peace at my tears*, v. 12. He that does not willingly afflict and grieve the children of men, much less his own children, will not hold his peace at their tears, but will either speak deliverance for them, (and if he speak, it is done,) or, in the mean time, speak comfort to them, and make them to hear joy and gladness. [2.] It had set him a praying; and afflictions are sent to stir up prayer. If they have that effect, and, when we are afflicted, we pray more, and pray better, than before, we may hope that God will hear our prayer, and give ear to our cry; for the prayer which, by his providence, he gives occasion for, and which, by his Spirit of grace, he indites, shall not return void. [3.] It had helped to wean him from the world, and to take his affections off from it; now he began, more than ever, to look upon himself as a stranger and sojourner here, like all his fathers, not at home in this world, but travelling through

it to another, to a better, and would never reckon himself at home till he came to heaven. He pleads it with God; "Lord, take cognizance of me, and of my wants and burthens, for I am a stranger here, and therefore meet with strange usage; I am slighted and oppressed as a stranger; and whence should I expect relief but from thee, from that other country to which I belong?"

Lastly, He prays for a reprieve yet a little longer; (v. 13.) "*O spare me, ease me, raise me up from this illness, that I may recover strength both in body and mind, that I may get into a more calm and composed frame of spirit, and may be better prepared for another world, before I go hence by death, and shall be no more in this world.*" Some make this to be a passionate wish, that God would send him help quickly, or it would be too late, like that, Job, 10. 20, 21. But I rather take it as a pious prayer, that God would continue him here, till by his grace he had made him fit to go hence, and that he might finish the work of life, before his life was finished; *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee.*

PSALM XL.

It should seem, David penned this psalm, upon occasion of his deliverance, by the power and goodness of God, from some great and pressing trouble, by which he was in danger of being overwhelmed; probably, it was some trouble of mind, arising from a sense of sin, and of God's displeasure against him for it; whatever it was, the same Spirit that indited his praises for that deliverance, was in him, at the same time, a Spirit of prophecy, testifying of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow; or, ere he was aware, he was led to speak of Christ's undertaking, and the discharge of his undertaking, in words that must be applied to Christ only; and therefore how far the praises that here go before that illustrious prophecy, and the prayers that follow, may safely and profitably be applied to him, it will be worth while to consider. In this psalm, I. David records God's favour to him, in delivering him out of his deep distress, with thankfulness to his praise, v. 1. .5. II. Thence he takes occasion to speak of the work of our redemption by Christ, v. 6. .10. III. That gives him encouragement to pray to God for mercy and grace, both for himself and for his friends, v. 11. .17. If, in singing this psalm, we mix faith with the prophecy of Christ, and join in sincerity with the praises and prayers here offered up, we make melody with our hearts to the Lord.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

I WAITED patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. 2. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. 3. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, *even* praise unto our God: many shall see *it*, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. 4. Blessed *is* that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5. Many, O LORD my God, *are* thy wonderful works *which* thou hast done, and thy thoughts *which* *are* to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: *if* I would declare and speak *of them*, they are more than can be numbered.

In these verses, we have,

I. The great distress and trouble that the psalmist had been in. He had been plunged into a horrible pit, and into miry clay, (v. 2.) out of which he could not work himself, and in which he found himself sinking yet further. He says nothing, here, either of the sickness of his body, or the insults of his enemies, and therefore we have reason to think it was some inward disquiet, and perplexity of spirit, that was now his greatest grievance. Despondency of spirit, under the sense of God's withdrawals, and prevailing doubts and fears about the eternal state, are indeed a horrible pit and miry clay, and have been so to many a dear child of God.

II. His humble attendance upon God, and his believing expectations from him in those depths; *I waited patiently for the*

Lord, v. 1. Waiting, I waited. He expected relief from no other than from God; the same hand that tears, must heal, that smites, must bind up, (Hos. 6. 1.) or it will never be done. From God he expected relief, and he was big with expectation, not doubting but it would come in due time. There is power enough in God to help the weakest, and grace enough in God to help the unworthiest, of all his people that trust in him. But he waited patiently; which intimates that the relief did not come quickly; yet he doubted not but it would come, and resolved to continue believing, and hoping, and praying, till it did come. Those whose expectation is from God may wait with assurance, but must wait with patience. Now this is very applicable to Christ. His agony, both in the garden, and on the cross, was the same continued, and it was a horrible pit and miry clay. Then was his soul troubled and exceeding sorrowful; but then he prayed, *Father, glorify thy name; Father, save me*; then he kept hold of his relation to his Father, "My God, my God," and thus waited patiently for him.

III. His comfortable experience of God's goodness to him in his distress, which he records for the honour of God, and his own and others' encouragement.

1. God answered his prayers; *He inclined unto me, and heard my cry.* Those that wait patiently for God, though they may wait long, do not wait in vain. Our Lord Jesus was *heard, in that he feared*, Heb. 5. 7. Nay, he was sure that the Father heard him always.

2. He silenced his fears, and stilled the tumult of his spirits, and gave him a settled peace of conscience; (v. 2.) "*He brought me out of that horrible pit of despondency and despair, scattered the clouds, and shone bright upon my soul, with the assurances of his favour; and not only so, but set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.*" Those that have been under the prevalency of a religious melancholy, and by the grace of God have been relieved, may apply this very feelingly to themselves; they are brought up out of a horrible pit. (1.) The mercy is completed by the setting of their feet upon a rock, where they find firm footing, are as much elevated with the hopes of heaven, as they were, before, cast down with the fears of hell. Christ is the Rock on which a poor soul may stand fast, and on whose mediation alone between us and God we can build any solid hopes or satisfaction. (2.) It is continued in the establishment of their goings. Where God has given a steadfast hope, he expects there should be a steady, regular, conversation; and if that be the blessed fruit of it, we have reason to acknowledge, with abundance of thankfulness, the riches and power of his grace.

3. He filled him with joy, as well as peace, in believing; "*He has put a new song in my mouth*; he was given me cause to rejoice, and a heart to rejoice." He was brought, as it were, into a new world, and that filled his mouth with a new song, even praise to our God; for to his praise and glory must all our songs be sung. Fresh mercies, especially such as we never before received, call for new songs. This is applicable to our Lord Jesus, in his reception to paradise, his resurrection from the grave, and his exaltation to the joy and glory set before him; he was brought out of the horrible pit, set upon a rock, and had a new song put in his mouth.

IV. The good improvement that should be made of this instance of God's goodness to David.

1. David's experience would be an encouragement to many to hope in God, and, for that end, he leaves it here upon record; *Many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord.* They shall fear the Lord and his justice, which brought David, and the Son of David, into that horrible pit; and shall say, *If this be done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?* They shall fear the Lord and his goodness, in filling the mouth of David, and the Son of David, with new songs of joy and praise. There is a holy, reverent, fear of God, which is not only consistent with, but the foundation of, our hope in him. They shall not fear him, and shun him, but fear him and trust in him, in their greatest straits, not doubting but to find him as able and ready to help them as David did, in his distress. God's dealings with our

Lord Jesus, are our great encouragement to trust in God; when it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief for our sins, he demanded our debt from him; and when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, he made it to appear that he had accepted the payment he made, and was satisfied with it; and what greater encouragement can we have to fear and worship God, and to *trust in him*? See Rom. 4. 25.—5. 1, 2.

The psalmist invites others to make God their Hope, as he did, by pronouncing those happy that do so; (v. 4.) "*Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his Trust*, and him only; that has great and good thoughts of him, and is entirely devoted to him, and respects not the proud; does not do as they do that trust in themselves, nor depends upon those who proudly encourage others to trust in them, for both the one and the other turn aside to lies, as indeed all those do that turn aside from God." This is applicable, particularly, to our faith in Christ. Blessed are they that trust in him, and in his righteousness alone, and respect not the proud Pharisees, that set up their own righteousness in competition with that, that will not be governed by their dictates, nor turn aside to lies, with the unbelieving Jews, who *submit not to the righteousness of God*, Rom. 10. 3. Blessed are they that escape this temptation.

2. The joyful sense he had of this mercy, led him to observe, with thankfulness, the many other favours he had received from God, v. 5. When God puts new songs into our mouth, we must not forget our former songs, but repeat them; "*Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done*, both for me and others; this is but one of many." Many are the benefits with which we are daily loaded, both by the providence, and by the grace, of God. (1.) They are his works; not only the gifts of his bounty, but the operations of his power; he works for us, he works in us, and thus he favours us with matter, not only for thanks, but for praise. (2.) They are his wonderful works; the contrivance of them admirable; his condescension to us, in bestowing them upon us, admirable; eternity itself will be short enough to be spent in the admiration of them. (3.) All his wonderful works are the product of his thoughts to us-ward. He does all, according to the counsel of his own will, (Eph. 1. 11.) the purposes of his grace which he purposed in himself, Eph. 3. 11. They are the projects of infinite wisdom, the designs of everlasting love; (1 Cor. 2. 7. Jer. 31. 3.) *thoughts of good, and not of evil*, Jer. 29. 11. His gifts and callings will therefore be without repentance, because they are not sudden resolves, but the result of his thoughts, his many thoughts, to us-ward. (4.) They are innumerable; they cannot be methodised, or reckoned up in order; there is an order in all God's works, but they are so many that present themselves to our view at once, that we know not where to begin, nor which to name next; the order of them, and their natural references and dependencies, and how the links of the golden chain are joined, are a mystery to us, and what we shall not be able to account for, till the veil be rent, and the mystery of God finished. Nor can they be counted, not the very heads of them; when we have said the most we can, of the wonders of divine love to us, we must conclude with an *Et cetera*, and adore the depth, despairing to find the bottom.

6. Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. 7. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, 8. I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. 9. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. 10. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.

The psalmist, being struck with amazement at the wonderful works that God had done for his people, is strangely carried out here to foretell that work of wonder which excels all the rest, and is the foundation and fountain of all, that of our redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ. God's thoughts, which were to us-ward concerning that work, were the most curious, the most copious, the most gracious, and therefore to be most admired. This paragraph is quoted by the apostle, (Heb. 10. 5, &c.) and applied to Christ, and his undertaking for us. As in the institutions, so in the devotions, of the Old Testament, there is more of Christ than perhaps the Old-Testament saints were aware of; and when the apostle would shew us the Redeemer's voluntary undertaking of his work, he does not fetch his account out of the book of God's secret counsels, which belong not to us, but from the things revealed. Observe,

I. The utter insufficiency of the legal sacrifices to atone for sin, in order to our peace with God and our happiness in him; *Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire*; thou wouldest not have the Redeemer to offer them; something he must have to offer, but not these; (Heb. 8. 3.) therefore he must not be of the house of Aaron, Heb. 7. 14. Or, In the days of the Messiah, burnt-offering and sin-offering will be no longer required, but all those ceremonial institutions will be abolished. But that is not all; even while the law concerning them was in full force, it might be said, God did not desire them, nor accept them, for their own sake; they could not take away the guilt of sin by satisfying God's justice; the life of a sheep, which is so much inferior in value to that of a man, (Matth. 12. 12.) could not pretend to be an equivalent, much less an expedient, to preserve the honour of God's government and laws, and repair the injury done to that honour by the sin of man. They could not take away the terror of sin, by pacifying the conscience, nor the power of sin, by sanctifying the nature; it was impossible, Heb. 9. 9.—10. 1.. 4. What there was in them that was valuable, resulted from their reference to Jesus Christ, of whom they were types; shadows indeed, but shadows of good things to come, and trials of the faith and obedience of God's people, of their obedience to the law, and their faith in the gospel. But the Substance must come, which is Christ, who must bring that glory to God, and that grace to man, which it was impossible those sacrifices should ever do.

II. The designation of our Lord Jesus to the work and office of Mediator; *Mine ears hast thou opened*; God the Father disposed him to the undertaking, (Isa. 50. 5, 6.) and then obliged him to go through with it. *Mine ear hast thou digged*. It is supposed to allude to the law and custom of binding servants to serve for ever, by boring their ear to the door-post; see Exod. 21. 6. Our Lord Jesus was so in love with his undertaking, that he would not go out free from it, and therefore engaged them to persevere for ever in it; and, *for this reason*, he is able to save us to the uttermost, because he has engaged to serve his Father to the uttermost, who upholds him in it, Isa. 42. 1.

III. His own voluntary consent to this undertaking; "*Then said I, Lo, I come*"; then, when sacrifice and offering would not do, rather than the work should be undone, I said, Lo, I come, to enter the lists with the powers of darkness, and to advance the interests of God's glory and kingdom." This bespeaks three things; 1. That he freely offered himself to this service, which he was under no engagement at all to, prior to his own voluntary susception. It was no sooner proposed to him, than, with the greatest cheerfulness, he consented to it, and was wonderfully well pleased with the undertaking; had he not been perfectly voluntary in it, he could not have been a Surety, he could not have been a Sacrifice, for it is by this will, (this *animus offerentis*—mind of the offerer,) that we are sanctified, Heb. 10. 10. 2. That he firmly obliged himself to it; "*I come*"; I promise to come in the fulness of time." And therefore the apostle says, "It was when he came into the world that he had an actual regard to this promise, by which he had engaged his heart to approach unto God." He thus entered into bonds, not only to shew the greatness of his love, but because he was to have the honour of his undertaking before he had fully performed it. Though the price was not paid, it was secured to him.

paid, so that he was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. 3. That he frankly owned himself engaged; He said *Lo, I come*, said it all along to the Old Testament saints, who therefore knew him by the title of *ὁ ἐρχόμενος*—*He that should come*. This word was the foundation on which they built their faith and hope, and which they looked and longed for the accomplishment of.

IV. The reason why he came, in pursuance of his undertaking; because, *in the volume of the book it was written of him*, 1. In the close rolls of the divine decree and counsel; there it was written, that his ear was opened, and he said, *Lo, I come*; there the covenant of redemption was recorded, the counsel of peace between the Father and the Son; and to that he had an eye in all he did, the commandment he received of his Father. 2. In the letters patent of the Old Testament, Moses and all the prophets testified of him; in all the volumes of that book something or other was written of him, which he had an eye to, that all might be accomplished, John, 19. 28.

V. The pleasure he took in his undertaking; having freely offered himself to it, he did not fail, nor was discouraged, but proceeded with all possible satisfaction to himself; (v. 8, 9.) *I delight to do thy will, O my God*; it was, to Christ, his meat and drink to go on with this work appointed to him; (John, 4. 34.) and the reason here given, is, *Thy law is within my heart*; it is written there, it rules there, it is an active commanding principle there. It is meant of the law, concerning the work and office of the Mediator, what he was to do and suffer; this law was dear to him, and had an influence upon him in his whole undertaking. Note, When the law of God is written in our hearts, our duty will be our delight.

VI. The publication of the gospel to the children of men, even in the great congregation, v. 9, 10. The same that, as a Priest, wrought out redemption for us, as a Prophet, by his own preaching first, then by his apostles, and still by his word and Spirit, makes it known to us. *The great salvation began to be spoken by the Lord*, Heb. 2. 3. It is the gospel of Christ, that is preached to all nations. Observe, 1. What it is that is preached; it is righteousness, (v. 9.) God's righteousness, (v. 10.) the everlasting righteousness which Christ has brought in; (Dan. 9. 24.) compare Rom. 1. 16, 17. It is God's faithfulness to his promise, and the salvation which had long been looked for. It is God's loving-kindness and his truth, his mercy according to his word. Note, In the work of our redemption, we ought to take notice how bright all the divine attributes shine, and give to God the praise of each of them. 2. To whom it is preached; to the great congregation, (v. 9.) and again, v. 10. When Christ was here on earth, he preached to multitudes, thousands at a time. The gospel was preached both to Jews and Gentiles, to great congregations of both. Solemn religious assemblies are a divine institution, and in them the glory of God, in the face of Christ, ought to be both praised, to the glory of God, and preached for the edification of men. 3. How it is preached; freely and openly; *I have not refrained my lips, I have not hid it, I have not concealed it*. This intimates, that whoever undertook to preach the gospel of Christ, would be in great temptation to hide it and conceal it, because it must be preached with great contention, and in the face of great opposition; but Christ himself, and those whom he calls to that work, set their faces as a flint, (Isa. 50. 7.) and were wonderfully carried on in it. It is well for us, that they were so, for by this means our eyes come to see this joyful light, and our ears to hear this joyful sound; which otherwise we might for ever have perished in ignorance of.

11. Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy loving-kindness and thy truth continually preserve me. 12. For innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me. 13. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make

haste to help me. 14. Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil. 15. Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha. 16. Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified. 17. But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.

The psalmist, having meditated upon the work of redemption, and spoken of it in the person of the Messiah, now comes to make improvement of the doctrine of his mediation between us and God, and therefore speaks in his own person. Christ having done his Father's will, and finished his work, and given orders for the preaching of the gospel to every creature, we are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace, for mercy and grace.

I. This may encourage us to pray for the mercy of God, and to put ourselves under the protection of that mercy; (v. 11.) "Lord, thou has not spured thy Son, nor withheld him; *withhold not thou thy tender mercies* then, which thou hast laid up for us in him; for wilt thou not *with him also freely give us all things?* (Rom. 8. 32.) *Let thy loving-kindness and thy truth continually preserve me.*" The best saints are in continual danger, and see themselves undone, if they be not continually preserved by the grace of God; and the everlasting loving-kindness and truth of God are that which we have to depend upon for our preservation to the heavenly kingdom, 61. 7.

II. This may encourage us, in reference to the guilt of sin, that Jesus Christ has done that towards our discharge from it which sacrifice and offering could not do. See here, 1. The frightful sight he had of sin, v. 12. This was it that made the discovery he was now favoured with, of a Redeemer, very welcome to him. He saw his iniquities to be evils, the worst of evils; he saw that they compassed him about; in all the reviews of his life, and his reflections upon each step of it, still he discovered something amiss. The threatening consequences of his sin surrounded him; look which way he would, he saw some mischief or other waiting for him, which he was conscious to himself his sins had deserved. He saw them taking hold of him, arresting him, as the bailiff does the poor debtor; he saw them to be innumerable, and *more than the hairs of his head*. Convinced, awakened, consciences are apprehensive of danger from the numberless number of the sins of infirmity, which seem small as hairs, but, being numerous, are very dangerous; *Who can understand his errors?* God numbers our hairs, (Matth. 10. 30.) which yet we cannot number; so he keeps an account of our sins, which we keep no account of. The sight of sin so oppressed him, that he could not hold up his head; *I am not able to look up*, much less could he keep up his heart; *therefore my heart faileth me*. Note, The sight of our sins in their own colours would drive us to distraction, if we had not at the same time some sight of a Saviour. 2. The careful recourse he had to God, under the sense of sin; (v. 10.) seeing himself brought by his sins to the very brink of ruin, eternal ruin, with what a holy passion does he cry out, "*Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me*; (v. 13.) O save me from the wrath to come, and the present terrors I am in, through the apprehensions of that wrath; I am undone, I die, I perish, without speedy relief. In a case of this nature, where the bliss of an immortal soul is concerned, delays are dangerous; therefore, *O Lord, make haste to help me.*"

III. This may encourage us to hope for victory over our spiritual enemies, that seek after our souls to destroy them, (v. 14.) the roaring lion that goes about continually seeking to devour. If Christ has triumphed over them, we, through him, shall be more than conquerors. In the belief of this, we may pray, with humble boldness, *let them be ashamed and confounded together, and*

driven backward, v. 14. Let them be desolate, v. 15. Both the conversion of a sinner, and the glorification of a saint, are great disappointments to Satan, who does his utmost, with all his power and subtlety, to hinder both; now, our Lord Jesus having undertaken to bring about the salvation of all his chosen, we may in faith pray, that, both these ways, that great adversary may be confounded. When a child of God is brought into that horrible pit, and the miry clay, Satan cries, *Aha, aha*, thinking he has gained his point; but he shall rage when he sees the brand plucked out of the fire, and shall be *desolate, for a reward of his shame. The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. The accuser of the brethren is cast out.*

IV. This may encourage all that seek God, and love his salvation, to rejoice in him, and to praise him, *v. 16.* See here, 1. The character of good people; conformably to the laws of natural religion, they seek God, desire his favour, and in all their exigencies apply themselves to him, as a people should seek unto their God; conformably to the laws of revealed religion, they love his salvation, that great salvation of which the prophets inquired and searched diligently, which the Redeemer undertook to work out when he said, *Lo, I come.* All that shall be saved love the salvation, not only as a salvation from hell, but a salvation from sin. 2. The happiness secured to good people by this prophetic prayer: They that seek God shall rejoice and be glad in him, and with good reason, for he will not only be found of them, but will be their bountiful Rewarder. They that love his salvation shall be filled with the joy of his salvation, and shall say continually, *The Lord be magnified*; and thus they shall have a heaven upon earth; blessed are they that are thus still praising God.

Lastly, This may encourage the saints, in distress and affliction, to trust in God, and comfort themselves in him, *v. 17.* David himself was one of these, *I am poor and needy*; a king, perhaps, now on the throne, and yet, being troubled in spirit, he calls himself *poor and needy*, lost and undone, without a Saviour; in want and distress, *yet the Lord thinketh upon me*, in and through the Mediator, by whom we are made accepted. Men forget the poor and needy, and seldom think of them; but God's thoughts toward them, which he had spoken of, (*v. 5.*) are their support and comfort. They may assure themselves that God is their Help under their troubles, and will be, in due time, their Deliverer out of their troubles, and will make no long tarrying; for the vision is for an appointed time, and therefore, though it tarry, we may wait for it, for it shall come; it will come, it will not tarry.

PSALM XLI.

God's kindness and truth have often been the support and comfort of the saints, when they have had most experience of men's unkindness and treachery. David here found them so upon a sick bed; he found his enemies very barbarous, but his God very gracious. I. He here comforts himself in his communion with God under his sickness, by faith receiving and laying hold of God's promises to him, (v. 1. 3.) and lifting up his heart in prayer to God, v. 4. II. He here represents the malice of his enemies against him, their malicious censures of him, their spiteful reflections upon him, and their insolent conduct toward him, v. 5. 9. III. He leaves his case with God, not doubting but that he would own and favour him; (v. 10, 11.) and so the psalm concludes with a doxology, v. 13. Is any afflicted with sickness? let him sing the beginning of this psalm. Is any persecuted by enemies? let him sing the latter end of it; and we may any of us, in singing it, meditate upon both the calamities and comforts of good people in this world.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **BLESSED** is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.
2. The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him into the will of his enemies.
3. The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.
4. I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.

In these verses we have,

I. God's promises of succour and comfort to those that consider the poor; and we may suppose that David makes mention of these, with application, either, 1. To his friends, who were kind to him, and very considerate of his case, now that he was in affliction; *Blessed is he that considers poor David.* Here and there he met with one that sympathized with him, and was concerned for him, and kept up their good opinion of him and respect for him, notwithstanding his afflictions, while his enemies were so insolent and abusive to him; on these he pronounced this blessing, not doubting but that God would recompense to them all the kindness they had done him, particularly when they also came to be in affliction. The provocations which his enemies gave him did but endear his friends so much the more to him: or, 2. To himself; he had the testimony of his conscience for him, that he had considered the poor; that, when he was in honour and power at court, he had taken cognizance of the wants and miseries of the poor, and had provided for their relief, and therefore was sure God would, according to his promise, strengthen and comfort him in his sickness. Here is a comment upon that promise; *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* Observe,

(1.) What the mercy is which is required of us; it is to consider the poor or afflicted, whether in mind, body, or estate: these we are to consider with prudence and tenderness; we must take notice of their affliction, and inquire into their state; must sympathize with them, and judge charitably concerning them; we must wisely consider the poor; we must ourselves be instructed by the poverty and affliction of others; it must be *Maschil* to us, that is the word here used.

(2.) What the mercy is that is promised to us, if we thus shew mercy; He that considers the poor, (if he cannot relieve them, yet he considers them, and has a compassionate concern for them, and, in relieving them, does it considerably and with discretion,) shall be considered by his God: he shall not only be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, but he *shall be blessed upon the earth*; this branch of godliness, as much as any other, has the promise of the life that now is, and is usually recompensed with temporal blessings. Liberality to the poor is the surest and safest way of thriving; such as practise it may be sure of seasonable and effectual relief from God.

[1.] In all troubles; *He will deliver them in the day of evil*, so that, when the times are at the worst, it shall go well with them, and they shall not fall into the calamities in which others are involved; if any be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, *they shall.* Those who thus distinguish themselves from those that have hard hearts, God will distinguish from those that have hard usage. Are they in danger? He will preserve and keep them alive; and those who have a thousand times forfeited their lives, as the best have, must acknowledge it as a great favour if they have their *lives given them for a prey.* He does not say, "*They shall be preferred,*" but, "*They shall be preserved and kept alive,*" when the arrows of death fly thick round about them." Do their enemies threaten them? God will not deliver them *into the will of their enemies*; and the most potent enemy we have can have no power against us, but what is given him from above. The good-will of a God that loves us, is sufficient to secure us from the ill-will of all that hate us, men or devils! and that good-will we may promise ourselves an interest in, if we have considered the poor, and helped to relieve and rescue them.

[2.] Particularly in sickness; (*v. 3.*) *The Lord will strengthen him, both in body and mind, upon the bed of languishing*, on which he had long lain sick, and *he will make all his bed*; a very condescending expression, alluding to the care of those that nurse and tend sick people, especially of mothers for their children when they are sick, which is to make their beds easy for them; and that bed must needs be well-made which God himself has the making of. He will make all his bed from head to foot, so that no part shall be uneasy; he will turn his bed, (so the word is,) to shake it up, and make it very easy; or, he will turn it into a bed of health. Note, God has promised his people that he will strengthen them, and make them easy, under their bodily pains and sicknesses. He has not promised that they shall never be sick, nor that they shall

not lie long languishing, nor that their sickness shall not be unto death; but he has promised to enable them to bear their affliction with patience, and cheerfully to wait the issue; the soul shall by his grace be made to dwell at ease, when the body lies in pain.

II. David's prayer, directed and encouraged by these promises; (v. 4.) *I said, Heal my soul.* It is good for us to keep some account of our prayers, that we may not unsay, in our practices, any thing that we said in our prayers. Here is, 1. His humble petition; *Lord, be merciful to me.* He appeals to mercy, as one that knew he could not stand the test of strict justice. The best saints, even those that have been merciful to the poor, have not made God their Debtor, but must throw themselves on his mercy. When we are under the rod, we must thus recommend ourselves to the tender mercy of our God; *Lord, heal my soul.* Sin is the sickness of the soul, pardoning mercy heals it, renewing grace heals it; and this spiritual healing we should be more earnest for, than for bodily health. 2. His penitent confession; *"I have sinned against thee, and therefore my soul needs healing; I am a sinner, a miserable sinner, therefore, God, be merciful to me,"* Luke, 18. 13. It does not appear that this has reference to any particular gross act of sin, but, in general, to his many sins of infirmity, which his sickness set in order before him, and the dread of the consequences of which made him pray, *Heal my soul.*

5. Mine enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish? 6. And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; when he goeth abroad, he telleth it. 7. All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt. 8. An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more. 9. Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me. 10. But thou, O LORD, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them. 11. By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. 12. And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever. 13. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.

David often complains of the insolent conduct of his enemies toward him, when he was sick, which, as it was very barbarous in them, so it could not but be very grievous to him. They were not, indeed, arrived at that modern pitch of wickedness, of poisoning his meat and drink, or giving him something to make him sick; but, when he was sick, they insulted over him; (v. 5.) *Mine enemies speak evil of me;* designing thereby to grieve his spirit, to ruin his reputation, and so to sink his interest.

I. They longed for his death; *When shall he die, and his name perish* with him? He had but an uncomfortable life, and yet they grudged him that; but it was a useful life, he was, upon all accounts, the greatest ornament and blessing of his country; and yet, it seems, there were some who were sick of him, as the Jews were of Paul, crying out, *Away with such a fellow from the earth.* We ought not to desire the death of any; but to desire the death of useful men, for their usefulness, has much in it of the venom of the old serpent. They envied him his name, and the honour he had won, and doubted not but, if he were dead, that would be laid in the dust with him; yet, see how they were mistaken; when he had served his generation, he did die; (Acts, 13. 36.) but did his name perish? No, it lives and flourishes, to this day, in the sacred writings, and will, to the end of time; for the memory of the just is, and shall be, blessed.

II. They picked up every thing they could, to reproach him

with; (v. 6.) *"If he come to see me,"* (as it has always been reckoned a piece of neighbourly kindness to visit the sick,) *"he speaks vanity;* he pretends friendship, and that his errand is to mourn with me, and to comfort me; he tells me he is very sorry to see me so much indisposed, and wishes me my health; but it is all flattery and falsehood." We complain, and justly, of the want of sincerity in our days, and that there is scarcely any true friendship to be found among men; but it seems, by this, that the former days were no better than these; David's friends were all compliment, and had nothing of that affection for him in their hearts which they made profession of; nor was that the worst of it; it was upon a mischievous design that they came to see him, that they might make invidious remarks upon every thing he said or did, and might represent it as they pleased to others, with their own comments upon it, so as to render him odious or ridiculous; *His heart gathereth iniquity to itself,* puts ill constructions upon every thing; and then, when he goes among his companions, he tells it them, that they may tell it others; *Report, say they, and we will report it,* Jer. 20. 13. If he complained much of his illness, they would reproach him for his pusillanimity; if he scarcely complained at all, they would reproach him for his stupidity. If he prayed, or gave them good counsel, they would banter it, and call it *canting*; if he kept silence from good, when the wicked were before him, they would say that he had forgotten his religion, now that he was sick. There is no fence against those whose malice thus gathers iniquity.

III. They promised themselves that he would never recover from this sickness, nor ever wipe off the odium with which they had loaded him; *they whispered together against him,* (v. 7.) speaking that secretly, in one another's ears, which they could not for shame speak out, and which, if they did, they knew would be confuted; whisperers and backbiters are put together among the worst of sinners, Rom. 1. 29, 30. They whispered, that their plot against him might not be discovered, and so defeated; there is seldom whispering, (we say,) but there is lying, or some mischief on foot. Those whisperers devised evil to David; concluding he would die quickly, they contrived how to break all the measures he had concerted for the public good, to prevent the prosecution of them, and to undo all that he had hitherto been doing: this he calls *devising hurt against him*; and they doubted not but to gain their point; *An evil disease, a thing of Belial,* say they, *cleaves fast unto him*; the reproach with which they had loaded his name, they hoped, would cleave so fast to it, that it would perish with him, and then they should gain their point; they went by a modern maxim, *Fortiter calumniari, aliquid adhærebit—Fling an abundance of calumny, and part will be sure to stick.* The disease he is now under will certainly make an end of him; for it is the punishment of some great enormous crime, which he will not be brought to repent of, and proves him, however he has appeared, a son of Belial; or, it is inflicted by Satan, who is called *Belial, the wicked one,* 2 Cor. 6. 15. "It is" (according to a loose way of speaking some have) "a devilish disease, and therefore it will cleave fast to him, and now that he lieth, now that his distemper prevails so far as to oblige him to keep his bed, he shall rise up no more, we shall be rid of him, and divide the spoil of his preferments." We are not to think it strange, if, when good men are sick, there be those that hope for their death, as well as those that fear it, which makes the world not worthy of them, Rev. 11. 10.

IV. There was one particularly, in whom he had reposed a great deal of confidence, that took part with his enemies, and was as abusive to him as any of them; (v. 9.) *My own familiar friend*; probably, he means Ahithophel, who had been his bosom friend, and prime minister of state, in whom he trusted as one inviolably firm to him, and whose advice he relied much upon, in dealing with his enemies, who *did eat of his bread*, with whom he had been very intimate, and whom he had taken to sit at the table with him; nay, whom he had maintained and given a livelihood to, and so obliged, both in gratitude and interest, to adhere to him. They that had their *maintenance from the king's palace*, did not think it *meet for them to see the king's dishonour*, (Ezra, 4. 14.) much less to do him dishonour; yet this base and treacherous confidant of

David's, forgot all the eaten bread, and lifted up his heel against him that had lifted up his head; not only deserted him, but insulted him, kicked at him, endeavoured to supplant him. Those are wicked indeed, whom no courtesy done them, nor confidence reposed in them, will oblige; and let us not think it strange, if we receive abuses from such: David did, and the Son of David; for of Judas the traitor David here, in the Spirit, spake; our Saviour himself so expounds this, and *therefore* gave Judas the sop, that the scripture might be fulfilled; *He that eats bread with me, has lifted up his heel against me*, John 13. 18, 26. Nay, have not we ourselves carried it thus perfidiously and disingenuously toward God? *We eat of his bread daily, and yet lift up the heel against him*, as Jeshurun, that *waxed fat and kicked*, Deut. 32. 15.

Now, how did David bear this insolent ill-natured carriage of his enemies toward him?

1. He prayed to God that they might be disappointed. He said nothing to them, but turned himself to God; *O Lord, be thou merciful to me*, for they are unmerciful, v. 10. He had prayed in reference to the guilt of his sins, (v. 4.) *Lord, be merciful to me*; and now again, in reference to the insults of his enemies, *Lord, be merciful to me*, for that prayer will suit every case. God's mercy has in it a redress for every grievance; "They endeavour to run me down, but, Lord, do thou raise me up from this bed of languishing, from which they think I shall never rise. Raise me up, that I may requite them, that I may render them good for evil;" so some; for that was David's practice, 7. 4.—35. 13. A good man will even wish for an opportunity of making it to appear that he bears no malice to those that have been injurious to him, but, on the contrary, that he is ready to do them any good office. Or, "That, as a king, I may put them under the marks of my just displeasure, banish them the court, and forbid them my table for the future;" which would be a necessary piece of justice, for warning to others. Perhaps in this prayer is couched a prophecy of the exaltation of Christ, whom God raised up, that he might be a just Avenger of all the wrongs done to him and to his people, particularly by the Jews, whose utter destruction followed, not long after.

2. He assured himself that they would be disappointed; (v. 11.) "By this I know that thou favour'st me and my interest, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me." They hoped for his death, but he found himself, through mercy, recovering, and this would add to the comfort of his recovery; (1.) That it would be a disappointment to his adversaries; they would be crest-fallen and wretchedly ashamed, and there would be no occasion to upbraid them with their disappointment, they would fret at it themselves. Note, Though we may not take a pleasure in the fall of our enemies, we may take a pleasure in the frustrating of their designs against us. (2.) That that would be a token of God's favour to him, and a certain evidence that he did favour him, and would continue to do so. Note, When we can discern the favour of God to us, in any mercy personal or public, that doubles it, and sweetens it.

3. He depends upon God, who had thus delivered him from many an evil work, to preserve him to his heavenly kingdom, as blessed Paul, 2 Tim. 4. 18. "As for me, forasmuch as thou favour'st me, as a fruit of that favour, and to qualify me for the continuance of it, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and, in order to that, settest me before thy face, hast thine eye always upon me for good;" or, "Because thou dost, by thy grace, uphold me in my integrity, I know that thou wilt, in thy glory, set me for ever before thy face." Note, (1.) When at any time we suffer in our reputation, our chief concern should be about our integrity, and then we may cheerfully leave it to God to secure our reputation. David knows, that if he can but persevere in his integrity, he needs not fear his enemies' triumphs over him. (2.) The best man in the world holds his integrity no longer than God upholds him in it; for by his grace we are what we are; if we be left to ourselves, we shall not only fall, but fall away. (3.) It is a great comfort to us, that, however weak we are, God is able to uphold us in our integrity, and will do it, if we commit the keeping of it to him. (4.) If the grace of God did not take a constant care of us, we should not be upheld in our integrity; his eye is always upon us,

else we should soon start aside from him. (5.) Those whom God now upholds in their integrity, he will set before his face for ever, and make happy in the vision and fruition of himself; *He that endures to the end, shall be saved*.

4. The psalm concludes with a solemn doxology, or adoration of God as *the Lord God of Israel*, v. 13. It is not certain whether this verse pertains to this particular psalm; if so, it teaches us this, That a believing hope of our preservation through grace to glory, is enough to fill our hearts with joy, and our mouths with everlasting praise, even in our greatest straits; or, this verse may have been added as the conclusion of the first book of *Psalms*, which is reckoned to end here; the like being subjoined to 72. 89. 106. and then it teaches us to make God the Omega, who is the Alpha, to make him the End, who is the Beginning, of every good work. We are taught, (1.) To give glory to God as *the Lord God of Israel*, a God in covenant with his people; who has done great and kind things for them, and has more and better in reserve. (2.) To give him glory as an eternal God, that has both his being and his blessedness *from everlasting and to everlasting*. (3.) To do this with great affection and fervour of spirit; intimated in the double seal set to it; *Amen and Amen*; Be it so now, be it so to all eternity. We say, *Amen* to it, and let all others say, *Amen*, too.

PSALM XLII.

If the book of *Psalms* be, as some have styled it, a mirror, or looking-glass, of pious and devout affections, this psalm, in particular, deserves, as much as any one psalm, to be so entitled, and is as proper as any other to kindle and excite such in us; gracious desires are here strong and fervent; gracious hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, are here struggling, but the pleasing passion comes off a conqueror. Or we may take it for a conflict between sense and faith: sense objecting, and faith answering. I. Faith begins with holy desires toward God, and communion with him, v. 1. 2. II. Sense complains of the darkness and cloudiness of the present condition, aggravated by the remembrance of the former enjoyments, v. 3, 4. III. Faith silences the complaint with the assurance of a good issue at last, v. 5. IV. Sense renews its complaints of the present dark and melancholy state, v. 6, 7. V. Faith holds up the heart, notwithstanding, with hope that the day will dawn, v. 8. VI. Sense repeats its lamentations, (v. 9, 10.) and sighs out the same remonstrance it had before made of its grievances. VII. Faith gets the last word, (v. 11.) for the silencing of the complaints of sense, and though it be almost the same with that, (v. 5.) yet now it prevails and carries the day. The title does not tell us who was the penman of this psalm, but, most probably, it was David; and we may conjecture it was penned by him at a time when, either by Saul's persecution, or Absalom's rebellion, he was driven from the sanctuary, and cut off from the privilege of waiting upon God in public ordinances. The strain of it is much the same with 63, and therefore we may presume it was penned by the same hand, and upon the same or a like occasion. In singing it, if we be either in outward affliction, or in inward distress, we may accommodate to ourselves the melancholy expressions we find here; if not, we must, in singing them, sympathize with those whose case they speak too plainly, and thank God it is not our own case; but those passages in it, which express and excite holy desires toward God, and dependence on him, we must earnestly endeavour to bring our minds up to.

To the chief musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah.

1. **A**S the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. 2. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? 3. My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? 4. When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude that kept holy-day. 5. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

Holy love to God, as the Chief Good, and our Felicity, is the power of godliness, the very life and soul of religion, without which, all external professions and performances are but a shell

and carcase: now here we have some of the expressions of that love. Here is,

I. Holy love, *thirsting*; love upon the wing, *soaring upward* in holy desires toward the Lord, and toward the remembrance of his name; (v. 1, 2.) "*My soul panteth, thirsteth, for God, for nothing more than God, but still for more and more of him.*" Now, observe,

1. When it was that David thus expressed his vehement desire toward God. It was, (1.) When he was thus debarred from his outward opportunities of waiting on God; when he was banished to the land of Jordan, a great way off from the courts of God's house. Note, Sometimes God teaches us effectually to know the worth of mercies by the want of them, and whets our appetite for the means of grace, by cutting us short in those means. We are apt to loathe that manna, when we have plenty of it, which will be very precious to us, if ever we come to know the scarcity of it. (2.) When he was deprived, in a great measure, of the inward comfort he used to have in God; he now went mourning, but he went on panting. Note, If God, by his grace, has wrought in us sincere and earnest desires toward him, we may take comfort from these, when we want those ravishing delights we have sometimes had in God, because lamenting after God is as sure an evidence that we love him, as rejoicing in God. Before the psalmist records his doubts, and fears, and griefs, which had sorely shaken him, he premises this, That he looked upon the living God as his Chief Good, and had set his heart upon him accordingly, and was resolved to live and die by him; and, casting anchor thus at first, he rides out the storm.

2. What is the Object of his desire, and what it is he thus thirsts after. (1.) He pants after God, he thirsts for God; not the ordinances themselves, but the God of the ordinances. A gracious soul can take little satisfaction in God's courts, if it do not meet with God himself there; "*Oh that I knew where I might find him!*" That I might have more of the tokens of his favour, the graces and comforts of his Spirit, and the earnestness of his glory." (2.) He has, herein, an eye to God, as the living God, that has life in himself, and is the Fountain of life and all happiness to those that are his: the living God, not only in opposition to dead idols, the works of men's hands, but to all the dying comforts of this world, which perish in the using. Living souls can never take up their rest any where short of a living God. (3.) He longs to come and appear before God; to make himself known to him, as being conscious to himself of his own sincerity; to attend on him as a servant appears before his master, to pay his respects to him, and receive his commands; to give an account to him, as one from whom our judgment proceeds. To appear before God is as much the desire of the upright, as it is the dread of the hypocrite. The psalmist knew he could not come into God's courts, but he must incur expence, for so was the law, that *none should appear before God empty*; yet he longs to come, and will not grudge the charges.

3. What is the degree of this desire. It is very importunate, it is his soul that pants, his soul that thirsts, which bespeaks not only the sincerity, but the strength, of his desire; his longing for the water of the well of Bethlehem was nothing to this. He compares it to the panting of a liart, or deer, which is naturally hot and dry, especially of a hunted buck, after the water-brooks. Thus earnestly does a gracious soul desire communion with God; thus impatient is it in the want of that communion; so impossible does it find it to take up in any thing short of that communion; and so insatiable is it in taking the pleasures of that communion, when the opportunity of it returns, still thirsting after the full enjoyment of him in the heavenly kingdom.

II. Holy love, *mourning* for God's present withdrawals, and the want of the benefit of solemn ordinances; (v. 3.) "*My tears have been my meat day and night, during this forced absence from God's house.*" His circumstances were sorrowful, and he accommodated himself to them, received the impressions, and returned the signs, of sorrow; even the royal prophet was a weeping prophet, when he wanted the comforts of God's house. His tears were mingled with his meat; nay, they were *his meat, day and night*; he fed, he feasted, upon his own tears, when there was

such just cause for them; and it was a satisfaction to him, that he found his heart so much affected with a grievance of this nature. Observe, He did not think it enough to shed a tear or two, at parting from the sanctuary, to weep a farewell-prayer, when he took his leave, but, as long as he continued under a forced absence from that place of his delight, he never looked up, but wept, day and night. Note, Those that are deprived of the benefit of public ordinances, constantly miss them, and therefore should constantly mourn for the want of them, till they are restored to them again.

Two things aggravated his grief:

1. The reproaches with which his enemies teased him; *They continually say unto me, Where is thy God?* (1.) Because he was absent from the ark, the token of God's presence; judging of the God of Israel by the gods of the heathen, they concluded he had lost his God. Note, Those are mistaken, who think that, when they have robbed us of our Bibles, and our ministers, and our solemn assemblies, they have robbed us of our God; for though God has tied us to them, when they are to be had, he has not tied himself to them. We know where our God is, and where to find him, when we know not where his ark is, nor where to find that. Wherever we are, there is a way open heaven-ward. (2.) Because God did not immediately appear for his deliverance, they concluded that he had abandoned him; but herein also they were deceived: it does not follow that the saints have lost their God, because they have lost all their other friends. However, by this base reflection on God and his people, they added affliction to the afflicted, and that was what they aimed at. Nothing is more grievous to a gracious soul, than that which is intended to shake its hope and confidence in God.

2. The remembrance of his former liberties and enjoyments, v. 4. *San, remember thy good things*, is a great aggravation of evil things; so much do our powers of reflection and anticipation add to the grievance of this present time. David remembered the *days of old*, and then *his soul was poured out in him*; he melted away, and the thought almost broke his heart. He poured out his soul within him in sorrow, and then poured out his soul before God in prayer. But what was it that occasioned this painful melting of spirit? It was not the remembrance of the pleasures at court, or the entertainments of his own house, from which he was now banished, that afflicted him; but the remembrance of the free access he had formerly to God's house, and the pleasure he had in attending the sacred solemnities there. (1.) He went to *the house of God*, though in his time it was but a tent; nay, if this psalm was penned, as many think it was, at the time of his being persecuted by Saul, the ark was then in a private house, 2Sam. 6. 3. But the meanness, obscurity, and inconvenience, of the place, did not lessen his esteem of that sacred symbol of the divine presence. David was a courtier, a prince, a man of honour, a man of business, and yet very diligent in attending God's house, and joining in public ordinances; even in the days of Saul, when he and his great men *inquired not at it*, 1Chron. 13. 3. Whatever others did, David and his house would serve the Lord. (2.) He went with the multitude, and thought it no disparagement to his dignity, to be at the head of a crowd in attending upon God. Nay, this added to the pleasure of it, that he was accompanied with a multitude, and therefore it is twice mentioned, as that which he greatly lamented the want of now. The more the better, in the service of God; it is the more like to heaven, and a sensible help to our comfort in the communion of saints. (3.) He went with *the voice of joy and praise*; not only with joy and praise in his heart, but with the outward expressions of it, proclaiming his joy, and speaking forth the high praises of his God. Note, When we wait upon God in public ordinances, we have reason to do it both with cheerfulness and thankfulness, to take to ourselves the comfort, and give to God the glory, of our liberty of access to him. (4.) He went to keep holy-days, not to keep them in vain mirth and recreation, but in religious exercises. Solemn days are spent most comfortably in solemn assemblies.

III. Holy love, *hoping*; (v. 5.) *Why art thou cast down, O my soul?* His sorrow was upon a very good account, and yet it must not exceed its due limits, nor prevail to depress his spirits; he

therefore communes with his own heart, for his relief: "Come, my soul, I have something to say to thee in thy heaviness." Let us consider, 1. The cause of it. "Thou art cast down, as one stooping and sinking under a burthen, Prov. 12. 25. Thou art disquieted, in confusion and disorder; now, why art thou so?" This may be taken as an inquiring question; "Let the cause of this uneasiness be duly weighed; is it a just cause?" Our disquietudes would often vanish before a strict scrutiny into the grounds and reasons of them. "*Why am I cast down?* Is there a cause, a real cause? Have not others more cause, that do not make so much ado? Have not we, at the same time, cause to be encouraged?" Or it may be taken as an expostulating question; those that commune much with their own hearts, will often have occasion to chide them, as David did here. Why do I thus dishonour God by my melancholy dejections? Why do I discourage others, and do so much injury to myself? Can I give a good account of this tumult?" 2. The cure of it; *Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him.* A believing confidence in God is a sovereign antidote against prevailing despondency, and disquiet of spirit. And therefore, when we elide ourselves for our dejections, we must charge ourselves to hope in God; when the soul embraces itself, it sinks; if it catch hold on the power and promise of God, it keeps the head above water. *Hope in God,* (1.) That he shall have glory from us; "*I shall yet praise him*; I shall experience such a change in my estate, that I shall not want matter for praise; and such a change in my spirit, that I shall not want a heart for praise." It is the greatest honour and happiness of a man, and the greatest desire and hope of every good man, to be unto God for a name and a praise. What is the crown of heaven's bliss but this, that there we shall be for ever praising God? And what is our support under our present woes but this, that we shall yet praise God, that they shall not prevent, or abate, our endless hallelujahs? (2.) That we shall have comfort in him. We shall praise him for the help of his countenance; for his favour, and the support we have by it, and the satisfaction we have in it. Those that know how to value and improve the light of God's countenance, will find in that a suitable, seasonable, and sufficient, help, in the worst of times, and that which will furnish them with constant matter for praise. David's believing expectation of this kept him from sinking, nay, it kept him from drooping; his harp was a palliative cure of Saul's melancholy, but his hope was an effectual cure of his own.

6. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. 7. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. 8. Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. 9. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? 10. As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? 11. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

Complaints and comforts here, as before, take their turn, like day and night, in the course of nature.

I. He complains of the dejections of his spirit, but comforts himself with the thoughts of God, v. 6. 1. In his troubles; his soul was dejected, and he goes to God, and tells him so, *O my God, my soul is cast down within me.* It is a great support to us, when upon any account we are distressed, that we have liberty of access to

God, and liberty of speech before him, and may open to him the causes of our dejection. David had communed with his own heart about his own bitterness, and had not as yet found relief; and therefore he turns to God, and opens before him the trouble. Note, When we cannot get relief for our burthened spirits, by pleading with ourselves, we should try what we can do, by praying to God, and leaving our case with him. We cannot still these winds and waves; but we know who can. 2. In his devotion; his soul was elevated, and, finding the disease very painful, he had recourse to that as a sovereign remedy. "My soul is plunged; therefore, to prevent its sinking, I will remember thee, meditate upon thee, and call upon thee, and try what that will do to keep up my spirit." Note, The way to forget the sense of our miseries, is, to remember the God of our mercies. It was an uncommon case, when the psalmist remembered God, and was troubled, 77. 3. He had often remembered God, and was comforted, and therefore had recourse to that expedient now. He was now driven to the utmost borders of the land of Canaan, to shelter himself there from the rage of his persecutors; sometimes to the country about Jordan, when discovered there, to the land of the Hermonites, or to a hill called Mizar, or the little hill; but, (1.) Wherever he went, he took his religion along with him; in all these places, he remembered God, and lifted up his heart to him, and kept his secret communion with him. This is the comfort of the banished, the wanderers, the travellers, of those that are strangers in a strange land, that *Undique ad celos tantundem est via—Wherever they are there is a way open heaven-ward.* (2.) Wherever he was, he retained his affection for the courts of God's house; from the land of Jordan, or from the top of the hills, he used to look a long look, a longing look, toward the place of the sanctuary, and wish himself there. Distance and time could not make him forget that which his heart was so much upon, and which lay so near it.

II. He complains of the tokens of God's displeasure against him, but comforts himself with the hopes of the return of his favour in due time.

1. He saw his troubles coming from God's wrath, and that discouraged him; (v. 7.) "*Deep calls unto deep*, one affliction comes upon the neck of another, as if it were called to hasten after it; and thy water spouts give the signal, and sound the alarm, of war." It may be meant of the terrors and tosses of his mind, under the apprehensions of God's anger. One frightful thought summoned another, and made way for it, as is usual in melancholy people; he was overpowered and overwhelmed with a deluge of grief, like that of the old world, when the windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep were broken up. Or, it is an allusion to a ship at sea, in a great storm, tossed by the roaring waves, which go over it, 107. 25. Whatever waves and billows of affliction go over us at any time, we must call them *God's waves and his billows*, that we may humble ourselves under his mighty hand, and may encourage ourselves to hope, that, though we be threatened, we shall not be ruined; for the waves and billows are under a divine check, *The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of these many waters.* Let not good men think it strange, if they be exercised with many and various trials, and if they come thick upon them; God knows what he does, and so shall they shortly. Jonah, in the whale's belly, made use of these words of David, Jon. 2. 3. (they are exactly the same in the original,) and of him they were literally true, *All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me*; for the book of psalms is contrived so as to reach every one's case.

2. He expected his deliverance to come from God's favour; (v. 8.) *Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness.* Things are bad, but they shall not always be so; *Non si male nunc et olim sic erit—Though affairs are now in an evil plight, they may not always be so.* After the storm, there will come a calm, and the prospect of this supported him, when deep called unto deep. Observe, (1.) What he promised himself from God; *The Lord will command his loving-kindness.* He eyes the favour of God, as the fountain of all the good he looked for, that is life, that is better than life; and with that, God will gather those from whom he has, in a little wrath, hid his face, Isa. 54. 7, 8. God's conferring of his favour, is called his commanding it; this intimates the freeness of it,

we cannot pretend to merit it, but it is bestowed in a way of sovereignty, he gives like a king; it intimates also the efficacy of it; he speaks his loving-kindness, and makes us to hear it; speaks, and it is done. He *commands deliverance*, (44. 4.) *commands the blessing*, (133. 3.) as one having authority. By commanding his loving-kindness, he commands down the waves and the billows, and they shall obey him. This he will do in the day-time, for God's loving-kindness will make day in the soul, at any time. Though weeping has endured for a night, a long night, yet joy will come in the morning. (2.) What he promised for himself to God. If God command his loving-kindness for him, he will meet it, and bid it welcome with his best affections and devotions. [1.] He will rejoice in God; *In the night, his song shall be with me*. The mercies we receive in the day, we ought to return thanks for at night; when others are sleeping, we should be praising God. See 119. 62. *At midnight, will I rise to give thanks*. In silence and solitude, when we are retired from the hurries of the world, we must be pleasing ourselves with the thoughts of God's goodness. Or in the night of affliction; "Before the day dawns, in which God commands his loving-kindness, I will sing songs of praise in the prospect of it." Even in tribulation, the saints can rejoice in hope of the glory of God; sing in hope, and praise in hope, Rom. 5. 2, 3. It is God's prerogative to *give songs in the night*, Job, 35. 10. [2.] He will seek to God in a constant dependence upon him; *My prayer shall be to the God of my life*. Our believing expectation of mercy must not supersede, but quicken, our prayers for it. God is the God of our life, in whom we live and move, the Author and Giver of all our comforts; and therefore to whom should we apply ourselves by prayer, but to him? And from him what good may not we expect? It would put life into our prayers, in them to eye God as the God of our life; for then it is for our lives, and the lives of our souls, that we stand up to make request.

III. He complains of the insolence of his enemies, and yet comforts himself in God as his Friend, v. 9. . 11.

1. His complaint is, that his enemies oppressed and reproached him, and this made a great impression upon him. (1.) They oppressed him to that degree, that he went mourning, from day to day, from place to place, v. 9. He did not break out into indecent passions, though abused as never man was, but he silently wept out his grief, and went mourning; and for this we cannot blame him, it must needs grieve a man that truly loves his country, and seeks the good of it, to see himself persecuted and hardly used, as if he were an enemy to it. Yet David ought not hence to have concluded that God had forgotten him, and cast him off, nor thus to have expostulated with him, as if he did him as much wrong in suffering him to be trampled upon, as they did that trampled upon him; *Why go I mourning?* And *why hast thou forgotten me?* We may complain to God, but we are not allowed thus to complain of him. (2.) They reproached him so cuttingly, that it was a *sword in his bones*, v. 10. He had mentioned before what the reproach was that touched him thus to the quick, and here he repeats it, *They say daily unto me, Where is thy God?* A reproach which was therefore very grievous to him, both because it reflected dishonour upon God, and was intended to discourage his hope in God, which he had enough to do to keep up in any measure, and which was but too apt to fail of itself.

2. His comfort is, that God is his Rock, v. 9. A Rock to build upon, a Rock to take shelter in; the Rock of ages, in whom is everlasting strength, would be his Rock, his Strength in the inner man, both for doing and suffering. To him he had access with confidence, to God his Rock he might say what he had to say, and be sure of a gracious audience. He therefore repeats what he had said, (v. 5.) and concludes with it, (v. 11.) *Why art thou cast down, O my soul?* His griefs and fears were clamorous and troublesome, they were not silenced, though they were again and again answered; but here, at length, his faith came off a conqueror, and forced the enemies to quit the field. And he gains this victory, (1.) By repeating what he had before said; chiding himself, as before, for his dejections and disquietudes, and encouraging himself to trust in the name of the Lord, and to stay

himself upon his God. Note, It may be of great use to us, to think our good thoughts over again, and if we do not gain our point with them at first, perhaps we may the second time; however, where the heart goes along with the words, it is no vain repetition. We have need to press the same thing over and over again upon our hearts, and all little enough. (2.) By adding one word to it; *there*, he hoped to praise God for the salvation that was in his countenance; *here*, "I will praise him," says he, "as the Salvation of my countenance, from the present cloud that is upon it; if God smile upon me, that will make me look pleasant, look up, look forward, look round, with pleasure." He adds, *and my God*, "related to me, in covenant with me; all that he is, all that he has, is mine, according to the true intent and meaning of the promise;" this thought enabled him to triumph over all his griefs and fears; God's being with the saints in heaven, and being their God, is that which will *wipe away all tears from their eyes*, Rev. 21. 3, 4.

PSALM XLIII.

This psalm, it is likely, was penned upon the same occasion with the former, and, having no title, may be looked upon as an appendix to it; the malady presently returning, he had immediate recourse to the same remedy, because he had entered it in his book, with a probatum est upon it. The 2d verse of this psalm is almost the very same with the 9th verse of the foregoing psalm, as the 5th of this is exactly the same with the 11th of that. Christ himself, who had the Spirit without measure, when there was occasion, prayed a second and third time, saying the same words, Matth. 26. 44. In this psalm, I. He appeals to God concerning the injuries that were done him by his enemies, v. 1, 2. II. He prays to God to restore to him the free enjoyment of public ordinances again, and promises to make a good improvement of them, v. 3, 4. III. He endeavours to still the tumult of his own spirit, with a lively hope and confidence in God; (v. 5.) If, in singing this psalm, we labour after these, we sing with grace in our hearts.

1. **J**UDGE me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. 2. For thou art the God of my strength; why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? 3. O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. 4. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God. 5. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, *who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

David here makes his application to God by faith and prayer, as his Judge, his Strength, his Guide, his Joy, his Hope, with suitable affections and expressions.

I. As his Judge, his righteous Judge, who, he knew, would judge him, and who, (being conscious of his own integrity,) he knew, would judge for him; (v. 1.) *Judge me, O God, and plead my cause*. There were those that impeached him, against them he is defendant, and from their courts, where he stood unjustly convicted and condemned, he appeals to the court of heaven, the supreme judicature; praying to have their judgment given against him, reversed, and his innocency cleared. There were those that had injured him, against them he is plaintiff, and exhibits his complaint to him who is the Avenger of wrong, praying for justice for himself, and upon them. Observe, 1. Who his enemies were, with whom he had this struggle. Here was a sinful body of men, whom he calls an *ungodly or unmerciful nation*; those that are unmerciful make it appear that they are ungodly, for those that have any fear or love of their master will have compassion on their fellow-servants. And here

was one bad man the head of them, a deceitful and unjust man; most probably, Saul, who not only shewed no kindness to David, but dealt most perfidiously and dishonestly with him. If Absalom was the man he meant, his character was no better. As long as there are such bad men out of hell, and nations of them, it is not strange that good men, who are yet out of heaven, meet with hard and base treatment. Some think that David, by the spirit of prophecy, calculated this psalm for the use of the Jews in their captivity in Babylon, and that the Chaldeans are the ungodly nation here meant; to them it was very applicable, but only as other like scriptures, none of which are of private interpretation. God might design it for their use, whether David did or no. 2. What is his prayer with reference to them; *Judge me*. As to the quarrel God had with him for sin, he prays, "*Enter not into judgment with me, for then I shall be condemned;*" but as to the quarrel his enemies had with him, he prays, "*Lord, judge me, for I know that I shall be justified, plead my cause against them, take my part, and in thy providence appear on my behalf.*" He that has an honest cause may expect that God will plead it. "*Plead my cause so as to deliver me from them, that they may not have their will against me.*" We must reckon our cause sufficiently pleaded, if we be delivered, though our enemies be not destroyed.

II. As his Strength, his all-sufficient Strength; so he eyes God, (v. 2.) "*Thou art the God of my strength, my God, my Strength, from whom all my strength is derived, in whom I strengthen myself, who hast often strengthened me, and without whom I am weak as water, and utterly unable either to do or suffer any thing for thee.*" David now went mourning, destitute of spiritual joys, yet he found God to be the God of his strength. If we cannot comfort ourselves in God, we may stay ourselves upon him, and may have spiritual supports when we want spiritual delights. David here pleads this with God; "*Thou art the God on whom I depend as my Strength; why then dost thou cast me off?*" This was a mistake; for God never cast off any that trusted in him, whatever melancholy apprehensions they may have had of their own state. "*Thou art the God of my strength; why then is mine enemy too strong for me, and why go I mourning because of his oppressive power?*" It is hard to reconcile the mighty force of the church's enemies with the almighty power of the church's God; but the day will reconcile them, when all his enemies shall become his footstool.

III. As his Guide, his faithful Guide; (v. 3.) *Lead me, bring me to thy holy hill*. He prays, 1. That God by his providence would bring him back from his banishment, and open a way for him again to the free enjoyment of the privileges of God's sanctuary. His heart is upon *the holy hills and the tabernacles*, not upon his family-comforts, his court-preferments, or his diversions; he could bear the want of these, but he is impatient to see God's tabernacles again; nothing so amiable in his eyes as those; thither he would be brought back. In order to this, he prays, "*Send out thy light and thy truth; let me have this as a fruit of thy favour, which is light, and the performance of thy promise, which is truth.*" We need desire no more to make us happy, than the good that flows from God's favour, and is included in his promise. That mercy, that truth, is enough, is all; and when we see these in God's providences, we see ourselves under a very safe conduct. Note, Those whom God leads, he leads to his holy hill, and to his tabernacles; those therefore who pretend to be led by the Spirit, and yet turn their backs upon instituted ordinances, certainly deceive themselves. 2. That God by his grace would bring him into communion with himself, and prepare him for the vision and fruition of himself in the other world. Some of the Jewish writers by the *light and truth* here understand Messiah the Prince, and Elias his forerunner; these are come in answer to the prayers of the Old Testament; but we are still to pray for God's light and truth, the Spirit of light and truth, who supplies the want of Christ's bodily presence, to lead us into the mystery of godliness, and to guide us in the way to heaven. When God sends his light and truth into our hearts, those will guide us to the upper world in all our devotions, as well as in all

our aims and expectations; and if we conscientiously follow that light and that truth, they will certainly bring us to the holy hill above.

IV. As his Joy, his exceeding Joy. If God guide him to his tabernacles, if he restore him to his former liberties, he knows very well what he has to do; *Then will I go unto the altar of God, v. 4*. He will get as near as he can unto God, his exceeding Joy. Note, 1. Those that come to the tabernacles, should come to the altar; those that come to ordinances, should qualify themselves to come, and then come to special ordinances, to those that are most affecting and most binding. The nearer we come, the closer we cleave, to God, the better. 2. Those that come to the altar of God, must see to it that therein they come unto God, and draw near to him with the heart, with a true heart: we come in vain to holy ordinances, if we do not in them come to the holy God. 3. Those that come unto God, must come to him as their exceeding Joy, not only as their future Bliss, but as their present Joy; and that not a common, but an exceeding joy, far exceeding all the joys of sense and time. The phrase, in the original, is very emphatical—*unto God the Gladness of my joy*, or of my triumph. Whatever we rejoice or triumph in, God must be the Joy of it; all our joy in it must terminate in him, and must pass through the gift to the Giver. 4. When we come to God as our exceeding Joy, our comforts in him must be the matter of our praises to him as God, and our God. *Upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God*. David excelled at the harp; (1 Sam. 16. 16, 18.) and with that in which he excelled he would praise God; for God is to be praised with the best we have; it is fit he should, who is the best.

V. As his Hope, his never-failing Hope, v. 5. Here, as before, David quarrels with himself for his dejections and despondencies, and owns he did ill to yield to them, and that he had no reason to do so; *Why art thou cast down, O my soul?* He then quiets himself in the believing expectation he had of giving glory to God; *Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him*; and of enjoying glory with God, *He is the Health of my countenance, and my God*. This is what we cannot too much insist upon, for it is what we must live and die by.

PSALM XLIV.

We are not told either who was the penman of this psalm, or when, and upon what occasion, it was penned; upon a melancholy occasion, we are sure, not so much to the penman himself, (then we could have found occasions enough for it in the history of David and his afflictions,) but to the church of God in general; and therefore, if we suppose it penned by David, yet we must attribute it purely to the spirit of prophecy, and must conclude that that spirit (whatever he himself had) had in view the captivity of Babylon, or the sufferings of the Jewish church under Antiochus, or rather, the afflicted state of the Christian church in its early days, (to which v. 22. is applied by the apostle, Rom. 8. 36.) and indeed in all its days on earth, for it is its determined lot, that it must enter into the kingdom of heaven through many tribulations. And if we have any gospel-psalms pointing at the privileges and comforts of Christians, why should we not have one pointing at their trials and exercises? It is a psalm calculated for a day of fasting and humiliation, upon occasion of some public calamity, either pressing or threatening. In it the church is taught, I. To own with thankfulness, to the glory of God, the great things God had done for their fathers, v. 1. . 8. II. To exhibit a memorial of their present calamitous estate, v. 9. . 16. III. To file a protestation of their integrity and adherence to God, notwithstanding, v. 17. . 22. IV. To lodge a petition at the throne of grace for succour and relief, v. 22. . 26. In singing this psalm, we ought to give God the praise of what he has formerly done for his people, to represent our own grievances, or sympathize with those parts of the church that are in distress, to engage ourselves, whatever happens, to cleave to God and duty, and then cheerfully to wait the event.

To the chief musician for the sons of Korah, Maschil.

1. **W**E have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, *what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old*. 2. *How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out*. 3. For they got not

the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. 4. Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob. 5. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. 6. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. 7. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. 8. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah.

Some observe, that most of the psalms that are entitled *Maschil*, psalms of instruction, are sorrowful psalms; for afflictions give instructions, and sorrow of spirit opens the ear to them; *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest and teachest.*

In these verses, the church, though now trampled upon, calls to remembrance the days of her triumph, of her triumph in God, and over her enemies. This is very largely mentioned here, 1. As an aggravation of the present distress. The yoke of servitude cannot but lie very heavy on the necks of those that used to wear the crown of victory; and the tokens of God's displeasure must needs be most grievous to those that have been long accustomed to the tokens of his favour. 2. As an encouragement to hope that God would yet turn again their captivity, and return in mercy to them; accordingly he mixes prayers and comfortable expectations with his record of former mercies. Observe,

I. Their commemoration of the great things God had formerly done for them. In general; (v. 1.) *Our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days.* Observe, 1. The many operations of providence are here spoken of as one work; "They have told us the work which thou didst;" for there is a wonderful harmony and uniformity in all that God does, and the many wheels make but one wheel; (Ezek. 10. 13.) many works make but one work. 2. It is a debt which every age owes to posterity, to keep an account of God's works of wonder, and to transmit the knowledge of them to the next generation. Those that went before us told us what God did in their days, we are bound to tell those that come after us what he has done in our days, and let them do the like justice to those that shall succeed them; thus shall *one generation praise his works to another*; (145. 4.) *the fathers to the children shall make known his truth*, Isa. 38. 19. 3. We must not only make mention of the work God has done in our own days, but must also acquaint ourselves and our children with what he did in the times of old, long before our own days; and of this we have in the scripture a sure word of history, as sure as the word of prophecy. 4. Children must diligently attend to what their parents tell them of the wonderful works of God, and keep it in remembrance, as that which will be of great use to them. 5. Former experiences of God's power and goodness are strong supports to faith, and powerful pleas in prayer under present calamities. See how Gideon insists upon it, Judg. 6. 13. *Where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of?* In particular, their fathers had told them,

(1.) How wonderfully God planted Israel in Canaan at first, v. 2, 3. He drove out the natives, to make room for Israel, afflicted them, and cast them out, gave them as dust to Israel's sword, and as driven stubble to their bow. The many complete victories which Israel obtained over the Canaanites, under the command of Joshua, were not to be attributed to themselves, nor could they challenge the glory of them; [1.] They were not owing to their own merit, but to God's favour and free grace; *It was through the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour to them. Not for thy righteousness, or the uprightness of thy heart, doth God drive them out from before thee*, (Deut. 9. 5, 6.) but because God would perform the oath which he swore unto

their fathers, Deut. 7. 8. The less praise this allows us, the more comfort it administers to us, that we may see all our successes and enlargements coming to us from the favour of God and the light of his countenance. [2.] They were not owing to their own might, but to God's power engaged for them, without which all their own efforts and endeavours had been fruitless. It was not by their own sword that they got the land in possession, though they had great numbers of mighty men; nor did their own arm save them from being driven back by the Canaanites, and put to shame; but it was God's right hand and his arm. He fought for Israel, else they had fought in vain; it was through him that they did valiantly and victoriously. It was God that planted Israel in that good land, as the careful husbandman plants a tree, from which he promises himself fruit. See 80. 8. This is applicable to the planting of the Christian church in the world, by the preaching of the gospel. Paganism was wonderfully driven out, as the Canaanites, not all at once, but by little and little, not by any human policy or power, (for God chose to do it by the weak and foolish things of the world,) but by the wisdom and power of God; Christ by his Spirit went forth conquering and to conquer; and the remembrance of that is a great support and comfort to those that groan under the yoke of antichristian tyranny; for to the state of the church under the power of the New Testament Babylon, some think, (and particularly the learned Amyraldus,) the complaints in the latter part of this psalm may very fitly be accommodated. He that by his power and goodness planted a church for himself in the world, will certainly support it by the same power and goodness; and the *gates of hell shall not prevail against it*.

(2.) How frequently he had given them success against their enemies that attempted to disturb them in the possession of that good land; (v. 7.) *Thou hast, many a time, saved us from our enemies*, and hast put to flight, and so put to shame, *them that hated us*; witness the successes of the Judges against the nations that oppressed Israel. Many a time have the persecutors of the Christian church, and those that hate it, been put to shame by the power of truth, Acts, 6. 10.

II. The good use they make of this record, and had formerly made of it, in consideration of the great things God had done for their fathers of old.

1. They had taken God for their sovereign Lord, had sworn allegiance to him, and put themselves under his protection; (v. 4.) *Thou art my King, O God.* He speaks in the name of the church, as (74. 12.) *Thou art my King of old*; God, as a king, has made laws for his church, provided for the peace and good order of it, judged for it; pleaded its cause, fought its battles, and protected it; it is his kingdom in the world, and ought to be subject to him, and to pay him tribute; or, the psalmist speaks for himself here; "Lord, *Thou art my King*, Whither shall I go with my petitions, but to thee? The favour I ask is not for myself, but for thy church." Note, It is every one's duty to improve their personal interest at the throne of grace, for the public welfare and prosperity of the people of God; as Moses, "If I have found *race in thy sight*, guide thy people," Exod. 33. 13.

2. They had always applied themselves to him by prayer for deliverance, when at any time they were in distress; *Command deliverances for Jacob.* Observe, (1.) The enlargedness of their desire; they pray for deliverances, not one, but many, as many as they had need of, how many soever they were, a series of deliverances, a deliverance from every danger. 2. The strength of their faith in the power of God; they do not say, *Work deliverances*, but, *Command them*, which denotes his doing it easily and instantly; *Speak, and it is done*; such was the faith of the centurion, (Matth. 8. 8.) *Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed*: it denotes also his doing it effectually; "Command it, as one having authority, whose command will be obeyed;" *Where the word of a king is*, there is power, much more the word of the King of kings.

3. They had trusted and triumphed in him. As they owned it was not their own sword and bow that had saved them, (v. 3.) so neither did they trust to their own sword or bow to save them for the future; (v. 6.) "I will not trust in my bow, nor in any of my

military preparations, as if those would stand me in stead without God; no, *through thee will we push down our enemies*; (v. 5.) we will attempt it in thy strength, relying only upon that, and not upon the number or valour of our forces; and, having thee on our side, we will not doubt of success in the attempt. *Through thy name*, by virtue of thy wisdom directing us, thy power strengthening us, and working for us, and thy promise securing success to us, we shall, *we will, tread them under that rise up against us*."

4. They had made him their Joy and Praise; (v. 8.) "*In God we have boasted*, in him we do, and will boast, every day, and all the day long." When their enemies boasted of their strength and success, as Sennacherib and Rabshakeh hectoring Hezekiah, they owned they had nothing to boast of, in answer thereunto, but their relation to God, and their interest in him; and if he were for them, they could set all the world at defiance. *Let him that glories, glory in the Lord*, and let that for ever exclude all other boasting. Let those that trust in God, make their boast in him, for they know whom they have trusted; let them *boast in him all the day long*, for it is a subject that can never be exhausted. But let them withal praise his name for ever; if they have the comfort of his name, let them give unto him the glory due to it.

9. But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies. 10. Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy; and they which hate us spoil for themselves. 11. Thou hast given us like sheep *appointed* for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen. 12. Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase *thy wealth* by their price. 13. Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. 14. Thou makest us a by-word among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people. 15. My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me, 16. For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth; by reason of the enemy and avenger.

The people of God here complain to him of the low and afflicted condition that they were now in, under the prevailing power of their enemies and oppressors, which was the more grievous to them because *they* were now trampled upon, who had always been used, in their struggles with their neighbours, to win the day and get the upper hand, and because those were now their oppressors, whom they had many a time triumphed over and made tributaries; and especially because they had boasted in their God, with great assurance that he would still protect and prosper them, which made the distress they were in, and the disgrace they were under, the more shameful. Let us see what the complaint is.

1. That they wanted the usual tokens of God's favour to them, and presence with them; (v. 9.) "*Thou hast cast off*; thou seemest to have cast us off, and our cause, and to have cast off thy wonted care of us, and concern for us, and so hast put us to shame, for we boasted of the constancy and perpetuity of thy avour. Our armies go forth as usual, but they are put to flight, we gain no ground, but lose what we have gained, for thou goest not forth with them, for, if thou didst, which way soever they turned, they would prosper; but it is quite contrary." Note, God's people, when they are cast down, are tempted to think themselves cast off, and forsaken of God; but it is a mistake. *Hath God cast away his people? God forbid*, Rom. 11. 1.

II. That they were put to the worst before their enemies in the field of battle; (v. 10.) *Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy*, as Joshua complained when they met with a repulse at Ai; (Josh. 7. 8.) "We are dispirited, and have lost the ancient valour of Israelites; we flee, we fall, before those that used to flee and

fall before us; and then they that hate us have the plunder of our camp, and of our country; they spoil for themselves, and reckon all their own that they can lay their hands on. Attempts to shake off the Babylonish yoke have been ineffectual, and we have rather lost ground by them."

III. That they were doomed to the sword and to captivity; (v. 11.) "*Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat*. They make no more scruple of killing an Israelite than of killing a sheep; nay, like the butcher, they make a trade of it, they take a pleasure in it, as a hungry man in his meat; and we are led with as much ease, and as little resistance, as a lamb to the slaughter; many are slain, and the rest scattered among the heathen, continually insulted by their malice, or in danger of being infected by their iniquities." They looked upon themselves as bought and sold, and charged it upon God, *Thou sellest thy people*, when they should have charged it upon their own sin; *For your iniquities have you sold yourselves*, Isa. 50. 1. However, thus far was right, that they looked above the instruments of their trouble, and kept their eye upon God, as well knowing that their worst enemies had no power against them, *but what was given them from above*; they own it was God that *delivered them into the hands of the ungodly*, as that which is sold is delivered to the buyer. *Thou sellest them for nought, and dost not increase in their price*; so it may be read; "Thou dost not sell them by auction, to those that will bid most for them, but in haste, to those that will bid first for them; any one shall have them that will." Or, as we read it, *Thou dost not increase thy wealth by their price*; intimating, that they could have suffered this contentedly, if they had been sure that it would have redounded to the glory of God, and that his interest might have been some way served by their sufferings; but it was quite contrary, Israel's disgrace turned to God's dishonour; so that he was so far from being a Gainer in his glory by the sale of them, that it should seem he was greatly a Loser by it; see Isa. 52. 5. Ezek. 36. 20.

IV. That they were loaded with contempt, and all possible ignominy was put upon them. In this also they acknowledge God, "*Thou makest us a reproach*; thou bringest those calamities upon us which occasion the reproach, and thou permittest their virulent tongues to smite us." They complain, 1. That they were ridiculed and bantered, and were looked upon as the most contemptible people under the sun; their troubles were turned to their reproach, and upon the account of them they were derided. 2. That their neighbours, those about them, from whom they could not withdraw, were most abusive to them, v. 13. 3. That the heathen, the people that were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and aliens to the covenants of promise, made them a by-word, and shook the head at them, as triumphing in their fall, v. 14. 4. That the reproach was constant and incessant; (v. 15.) *My confusion is continually before me*. The church in general, the psalmist in particular, were continually teased and vexed with the insults of the enemy. To those that are going down, every one cries, "Down with them." 5. That it was very grievous, and in a manner overwhelmed him; *The shame of my face has covered me*. He blushed for sin, or rather for the dishonour done to God, and then it was a holy blushing. 6. That it reflected upon God himself; the reproach which the enemy and the avenger cast upon them, was downright blasphemy against God, v. 16. and 2 Kings, 19. 3. There was therefore strong reason to believe that God would appear for them. As there is no trouble more grievous to a generous and ingenuous mind than reproach and calumny, so there is none more grievous to a holy gracious soul than blasphemy and dishonour done to God.

17. All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. 18. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; 19. Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death. 20. If we have forgotten the name of our God, or

stretched out our hands to a strange god; 21. Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart. 22. Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. 23. Awake, why sleepest thou, O LORD? Arise, cast us not off for ever. 24. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression? 25. For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth. 26. Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake.

The people of God, being greatly afflicted and oppressed, here apply themselves to him; whither else should they go?

I. By way of appeal, concerning their integrity, which he only is an infallible Judge of, and which he will certainly be the Reward of.

Two things they call God to witness to.

1. That though they suffered these hard things, yet they kept close to God, and to their duty; (v. 17.) "*All this is come upon us, and it is as bad perhaps as bad can be, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither cast off the thoughts of thee, nor deserted the worship of thee; for though we cannot deny but that we have dealt foolishly, yet we have not dealt foolishly in thy covenant, so as to cast thee off, and take to other gods. Though idolaters were our conquerors, we did not therefore entertain any more favourable thoughts of their idols and idolatries; though thou hast seemed to forsake us, and withdraw from us, yet we have not therefore forsaken thee.*" The trouble they had been long in was very great; "*We have been sore-broken in the place of dragons, among men as fierce, and furious, and cruel, as dragons; we have been covered with the shadow of death, we have been under deep melancholy, and apprehensive of nothing short of death; we have been wrapped up in obscurity, and buried alive; and thou hast thus broken us, thou hast thus covered us; (v. 19.) yet we have not harboured any hard thoughts of thee, nor meditated a retreat from thy service; though thou hast slain us, we have continued to trust in thee; our heart is not turned back, we have not secretly withdrawn our affections from thee, neither have our steps, either in our religious worship, or in our conversation, declined from thy way, (v. 18.) the way which thou hast appointed us to walk in.*" When the heart turns back, the steps will soon decline; for it is the evil heart of unbelief that inclines us to depart from God. Note, We may the better bear our troubles, how pressing soever, if in them we still hold fast our integrity. While our troubles do not drive us from our duty to God, we should not suffer them to drive us from our comfort in God; for he will not leave us, if we do not leave him.

For the proof of their integrity, they take God's omniscience to witness, which is as much the comfort of the upright in heart, as it is the terror of hypocrites; (v. 20, 21.) "*If we have forgotten the name of our God, under pretence that he had forgotten us; or, in our distress, have stretched out our hands to a strange god, as more likely to help us, shall not God search this out? Shall he not know it more fully and distinctly, than we know that which we have with the greatest care and diligence searched out? Shall he not judge it, and call us to an account for it?*" Forgetting God was a heart sin, and stretching out the hand to a strange god was often a secret sin, Ezek. 8. 12. But heart sins and secret sins are known to God, and must be reckoned for; for *he knows the secrets of the heart*, and therefore is an infallible Judge of the words and actions.

2. That therefore they suffered these hard things, because they kept close to God and to their duty; (v. 22.) "*It is for thy sake that we are killed all the day long, because we stand related to thee, are called by thy name, call upon thy name, and will not worship other gods.*" In this, the Spirit of prophecy had reference to those who suffered, even unto death, for the testimony of Christ, to whom it is applied, Rom. 8. 36. So many were killed, and put

to such lingering deaths, that they were in the killing all the day long; so universally was this practised, that, when a man became a Christian, he reckoned himself as a *sheep appointed for the slaughter*.

II. By way of petition, with reference to their present distress, that God would, in his own due time, work deliverance for them. Their request is very importunate, *Awake, arise, v. 23. Arise for our help, redeem us; (v. 26.)* come speedily and powerfully to our relief, 80, 2. *Stir up thy strength, and come and save us.* They complained, (v. 12.) that God had sold them; here they pray, (v. 26.) that God would redeem them, for there is no appealing from God, but by appealing to him; if he sell us, it is not any one else that can redeem us; the same hand that tears, must heal, that smites, must bind up, Hos. 6. 1. They complained, (v. 9.) *Thou hast cast us off; but here they pray, (v. 23.) "Cast us not off for ever; let us not be finally forsaken of God."* The expostulations are very moving; *Why sleepest thou? v. 23.* He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps; but, when he does not immediately appear for the deliverance of his people, they are tempted to think he sleeps. The expression is figurative, as (78. 65.) *Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep;* but it was applicable to Christ in the letter; (Matth. 8. 24.) he was asleep when his disciples were in a storm, and they awoke him, saying, *Lord, save us, we perish.* "*Wherefore hidest thou thy face, that we may not see thee and the light of thy countenance?*" Or, "*that thou mayest not see us and our distresses? Thou forgettest our affliction and our oppression, for it still continues, and we see no way open for our deliverance.*"

And lastly, The pleas are very proper; not their own merit and righteousness, though they had the testimony of their consciences concerning their integrity, but they plead the poor sinner's pleas. 1. Their own misery, which made them the proper objects of the divine compassion; (v. 25.) "*Our soul is bowed down to the dust, under prevailing grief and fear; we are become as creeping things, the most despicable animals, our belly cleaves unto the earth, we cannot lift up ourselves, neither revive our own drooping spirits, nor recover ourselves out of our low and sad condition, and we lie exposed to be trodden on by every insulting foe.*" 2. God's mercy; "*O redeem us for thy mercy-sake; we depend upon the goodness of thy nature, which is the glory of thy name, (Exod. 34. 6.) and upon those sure mercies of David, which are conveyed by the covenant to all his spiritual seed.*"

PSALM XLV.

This psalm is an illustrious prophecy of Messiah the Prince: it is all over gospel, and points at him only, as a Bridegroom espousing the church to himself, and as a king ruling in it, and ruling for it. It is probable that our Saviour has reference to this psalm when he compares the kingdom of heaven, more than once, to a nuptial solemnity, the solemnity of a royal nuptial, Matth. 22. 2.—25. 1. *We have no reason to think it has any reference to Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter; if I thought it had reference to any other than the mystical marriage between Christ and his church, I would rather apply it to some of David's marriages, because he was a man of war, such a one as the bridegroom here is described to be, which Solomon was not. But I take it to be purely and only meant of Jesus Christ; of him speaks the prophet this, of him and of no other man; and to him (v. 6, 7.) it is applied in the New Testament, (Heb. 1. 8.) nor can it be understood of any other. The preface speaks the excellency of the song, v. 1. The psalm speaks, 1. Of the royal Bridegroom, who is Christ. 1. The transcendent excellency of his person, v. 2. 2. The glory of his victories, v. 3. 5. 3. The righteousness of his government, v. 6, 7. 4. The splendour of his court, v. 8, 9. II. Of the royal bride, which is the church. 1. Her consent gained, v. 10, 11. 2. The nuptials solemnized, v. 12. 15. 3. The issue of this marriage, v. 16, 17. In singing this psalm, our hearts must be filled with high thoughts of Christ, with an entire submission to, and satisfaction in, his government, and with an earnest desire of the enlarging and perpetuating of his church in the world.*

To the chief musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil. A song of loves.

1. **M**Y heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made our Saviour touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. 2. Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace

is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. 3. Gird thy sword upon *thy* thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. 4. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness *and* righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. 5. Thine arrows *are* sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; *whereby* the people fall under thee.

Some make *Shoshannim*, in the title, to signify an instrument of six strings; others take it in its primitive signification for lilies or roses, which, probably, were strewed, with other flowers, at nuptial solemnities; and then it is easily applicable to Christ, who calls himself the *Rose of Sharon*, and the *Lily of the vallies*, Cant. 2. 1. It is a song of loves, concerning the holy love that is between Christ and his church. It is a *song of the well-beloved*, the virgins, the companions of the bride, (v. 14.) prepared to be sung by them; the virgin company, that attend the Lamb on mount Zion, are said to *sing a new song*, Rev. 14. 3, 4.

The preface (v. 1.) speaks, 1. The dignity of the subject. It is a good matter, and it is pity that such a moving art as poetry should ever be employed about a bad matter. It is *touching the King*, King Jesus, and his kingdom and government. Note, Those that speak of Christ, speak of a good matter, no subject so noble, so copious, so fruitful, so profitable, and so well-becoming us; it is a shame that this good matter is not more the matter of our discourse. 2. The excellency of the management; this song was a confession with the mouth, of faith in the heart, concerning Christ and his church. (1.) The matter was well digested, as it well deserved; *My heart is inditing it*; which, perhaps, is meant of that Spirit of prophecy that dictated the psalm to David; that Spirit of Christ which was in the prophets, 1 Pet. 1. 11. But it is applicable to his devout meditations and affections in his heart, out of the abundance of which his mouth spake. Things concerning Christ ought to be thought of by us with all possible seriousness, with fixedness of thought, and a fire of holy love; especially when we are to speak of those things. We then speak best of Christ and divine things, when we speak, from the heart, that which has warmed and affected us; and we should never be rash in speaking of the things of Christ, but weigh well beforehand what we have to say, lest we speak amiss. See Eccl. 5. 2. (2.) It was well expressed; *I will speak of the things which I have made*. He would express himself, [1.] With all possible clearness, as one that did himself understand, and was affected with, the things he spake of. Not, "I will speak the things I have heard from others," that is speaking by rote; but, "the things which I have myself studied." Note, What God has wrought in our souls, as well as what he has wrought for them, we must declare to others, 66. 16. [2.] With all possible cheerfulness, freedom, and fluency; "*My tongue is as the pen of a ready writer*, guided by my heart in every word, as the pen is by the hand." We call the prophets the *penmen* of scripture, whereas really they were but the *pen*. The tongue of the most subtle disputant, and the most eloquent orator, is but the pen with which God writes what he pleases. Why should we quarrel with the pen, if bitter things be written against us; or idolize the pen, if it write in our favour? David not only spake what he thought of Christ, but wrote it, that it might spread the further, and last the longer. His tongue was as the pen of a ready writer, that lets nothing slip. When the heart is inditing a good matter, it is pity but the tongue should be as *the pen of a ready writer*, to leave it upon record.

In these verses, the Lord Jesus is represented,

I. As most beautiful and amiable in himself. It is a marriage song; and therefore the transcendent excellencies of Christ are represented by the beauty of the royal Bridegroom; (v. 2.) *Thou art fairer than the children of men*, than any of them. He proposed (v. 1.) to speak of the King, but immediately directs his speech to him. They that have an admiration and affection for Christ, love to go to him and tell him so. Thus we must profess our faith,

that we see his beauty, and our love, that we are pleased with it; *Thou art fair*, thou art *fairer than the children of men*. Note, Jesus Christ is in himself, and in the eyes of all believers, more amiable and lovely than the children of men. The beauties of the Lord Jesus, as God, as Mediator, far surpass those of human nature in general, and those which the most amiable and excellent of the children of men are endowed with; there is more in Christ to engage our love, than there is or can be in any creature. Our Beloved is more than another beloved. The beauties of this lower world, and its charms, are in danger of drawing away our hearts from Christ, and therefore we are concerned to understand how much he excels them all, and how much more worthy he is of our love.

II. As the great Favourite of heaven. He is fairer than the children of men, for God has done more for him than for any of the children of men, and all his kindness to the children of men is for his sake, and passes through his hands, through his mouth. 1. He has grace, and he has it for us; *grace is poured into thy lips*. By his word, his promise, his gospel, the *good will of God* is made known to us, and the *good work of God* is begun and carried on in us. He received all grace from God, all the endowments that were requisite to qualify him for his work and office as Mediator, that from his fulness we might receive, John, 1. 16. It was not only poured into his heart, for his own strength and encouragement, but poured into his lips, that by the words of his mouth in general, and the kisses of his mouth to particular believers, he might communicate both holiness and comfort. From this grace, poured into his lips, proceeded those gracious words which all admired, Luke, 4. 22. The gospel of grace is poured into his lips, for it *began to be spoken by the Lord*, and from him we receive it, he has the words of eternal life. *The spirit of prophecy is put into thy lips*; so the Chaldee. 2. He has the blessing, and he has it for us. "Therefore, because thou art the great Trustee of divine grace, for the use and benefit of the children of men, *therefore God has blessed thee for ever*, has made thee an everlasting Blessing, so as that in thee all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." Where God gives his grace, he will give his blessing; we are blessed with spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, Eph. 1. 3.

III. As victorious over all his enemies. The royal Bridegroom is a man of war, and his nuptials do not excuse him from the field of battle, (as was allowed by the law, Deut. 24. 5.) nay, they bring him to the field of battle, for he is to rescue his spouse by dint of sword out of her captivity; to conquer her, and to conquer for her, and then to marry her. Now we have here,

1. His preparations for war; (v. 3.) *Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty*. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit; by the promises of that word, and the grace contained in those promises, souls are made willing to submit to Jesus Christ, and become his loyal subjects; by the threatenings of that word, and the judgments executed according to them, those that stand it out against Christ, will, in due time, be brought down and ruined. By the gospel of Christ many Jews and Gentiles were converted, and, at length, the Jewish nation was destroyed, according to the predictions of it, for their implacable enmity to it; and paganism was quite abolished. The sword here girt on Christ's thigh, is the same which is said to *proceed out of his mouth*, Rev. 19. 15. When the gospel was sent forth to be preached to all nations, then our Redeemer *girded his sword upon his thigh*.

2. His expedition to this holy war; *He goes forth with his glory and his majesty*, as a great king takes the field with abundance of pomp and magnificence; his sword, his glory, and majesty. In his gospel he appears transcendently great and excellent, bright and blessed, in the honour and majesty which the Father has laid upon him. Christ, both in his person and in his gospel, had nothing of external glory or majesty, nothing to charm men, for he had no form nor comeliness, nothing to awe men, for he *took upon him the form of a servant*; it was all spiritual glory, spiritual majesty. There is so much grace, and therefore glory, in that word, *He that believes shall be saved*; so much terror, and therefore majesty, in that word, *He that believes not, shall be damned*; that we may well say, in the chariot of that gospel, which these words are the sum of, the Redeemer rides forth in glory and majesty. *In thy*

majesty ride prosperously, v. 4. Prosper thou; ride thou; this speaks the promise of his Father, that he should prosper according to the good pleasure of the Lord; that he should divide the spoil with the strong, in recompence of his sufferings. Those cannot but prosper to whom God says, *Prosper*, Isa. 52. 10. . 12. And it denotes the good wishes of his friends, praying that he may prosper in the conversion of souls to him, and the destruction of all the powers of darkness that rebel against him: *Thy kingdom come; Go on and prosper.*

3. The glorious cause in which he is engaged; *because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness*, which were, in a manner, sunk and lost among men, and which Christ came to retrieve and rescue. (1.) The gospel itself is *truth, meekness, and righteousness*, it commands by the power of truth and righteousness; for Christianity has these, incontestably, on its side, and yet it is to be promoted by meekness and gentleness, 1 Cor. 4. 12, 13. 2 Tim. 2. 25. (2.) Christ appears in it, in his *truth, meekness, and righteousness*, and these are his glory and majesty, and because of these he shall prosper. Men are brought to believe on him because he is true, to learn of him because he is meek; (Matth. 11. 29.) the gentleness of Christ is of mighty force, 2 Cor. 10. 1. Men are brought to submit to him because he is righteous, and rules with equity. (3.) The gospel, as far as it prevails with men, sets up in their hearts *truth, meekness, and righteousness*, rectifies their mistakes by the light of truth, controuls their passions by the power of meekness, and governs their hearts and lives by the laws of righteousness. Christ came, by setting up his kingdom among men, to restore those glories to a degenerate world, and to maintain the cause of those just and rightful rulers under him, that by error, malice, and iniquity, had been deposed.

4. The success of his expedition; *"Thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things; thou shalt experience a wonderful divine power going along with thy gospel, to make it victorious; and the effects of it will be terrible things."* (1.) In order to the conversion and reduction of sons to him, there are terrible things to be done; the heart must be pricked, conscience must be startled, and the terrors of the Lord must make way for his consolations; this is done by the right hand of Christ. The Comforter shall continue, John, 16. 8. (2.) In the conquest of the gates of hell, and its supporters, in the destruction of Judaism and Paganism, terrible things will be done, which will make *men's hearts fail them for fear*, (Luke, 21. 26.) and great men and chief captains call to the *rocks and mountains to fall on them*, Rev. 6. 15. The next verse describes these terrible things; (v. 5.) *Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies*. [1.] Those that were by nature enemies are thus wounded, in order to their being reduced and reconciled. Convictions are like the arrows of the bow, which are sharp in the heart on which they fasten, and bring people to fall under Christ, in subjection to his laws and government. They that thus fall on this stone shall be broken, Matth. 21. 44. [2.] Those that persist in their enmity are thus wounded, in order to their being ruined. The arrows of God's terrors are sharp in their hearts, whereby they shall fall under him, so as to be made his footstool, 110. 1. Those that would not have him to reign over them shall be brought forth and slain before him; (Luke, 19. 27.) those that would not submit to his golden sceptre shall be broken to pieces by his iron rod.

6. Thy throne, O God, *is for ever and ever*: the sceptre of thy kingdom *is a right sceptre*. 7. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. 8. All thy garments *smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia*, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. 9. Kings' daughters *were among thy honourable women*: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.

We have here the royal Bridegroom filling his throne with judgment, and keeping his court with splendour.

I. He here fills his throne with judgment. It is God the Father that says to the Son here, *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever*; as appears Heb. 1. 8, 9. where this is quoted to prove that he is God, and has a *more excellent name than the angels*. The Mediator is God, else he had neither been able to do the Mediator's work, nor fit to wear the Mediator's crown. Concerning his government, observe,

1. The eternity of it; it is *for ever and ever*. It shall continue on earth throughout all the ages of time, in despite of all the opposition of the gates of hell; and, in the blessed fruits and consequences of it, it shall last as long as the days of heaven, and run parallel with the line of eternity itself. Perhaps, even then the glory of the Redeemer, and the blessedness of the redeemed, shall be in a continual infinite progression; for it is promised, that not only of his government, but of *the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end*; (Isa. 9. 7.) even then when the kingdom shall be *delivered up to God, even the Father*, (1 Cor. 15. 24.) the throne of the Redeemer will continue.

2. The equity of it; *The sceptre of thy kingdom*, the administration of thy government is right, exactly according to the eternal counsel and will of God, which is the eternal rule and reason of good and evil. Whatever Christ does, he does none of his subjects any wrong, but rights those that do suffer wrong; *He loves righteousness and hates wickedness, v. 7.* He himself loves to do righteousness, and hates to do wickedness: and he loves those that do righteousness, and hates those that do wickedness: by the holiness of his life, the merit of his death, and the great design of his gospel, he has made it to appear that he loves righteousness, (for, by his example, his satisfaction, and his precepts, he has brought in an everlasting righteousness,) and that he hates wickedness, for never did God's hatred of sin appear so as it did in the sufferings of Christ.

3. The establishment and elevation of it; *Therefore God, even thy God*, (Christ, as Mediator, called God his God, (John, 20. 17.) as commissioned by him, and the Head of those that are taken into covenant with him,) he has *anointed thee with the oil of gladness; therefore*, that is, (1.) "In order to this righteous government of thine, God has given thee his Spirit, that divine unction, to qualify thee for thine undertaking," Isa. 61. 1. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me*. What God called him to, he fitted him for, Isa. 11. 2. The Spirit is called *the oil of gladness*, because of the delight wherewith Christ was filled, in carrying on his undertaking. He was anointed with the Spirit *above all his fellows*, above all those that were anointed, whether priests or kings. (2.) "In recompense of what thou hast done and suffered for the advancement of righteousness, and the destruction of sin, God has anointed thee with the oil of gladness, has brought thee to all the honours and all the joys of thine exalted state;" *because he humbled himself, God has highly exalted him*, Phil. 2. 8, 9. His anointing him, denotes the power and glory to which he is exalted; he is invested in all the dignities and authorities of the Messiah; and his anointing him with the oil of gladness, denotes the joy that was set before him, (so his exaltation is expressed, Heb. 12. 2.) both in the light of his *Father's countenance*, (Acts, 2. 28.) and in the success of his undertaking, which he shall see, and be satisfied, Isa. 53. 11. This he is anointed with *above all his fellows*, above all believers, who are his brethren, and who partake of the anointing; they by measure, he without measure. But the apostle brings it, to prove his pre-eminence above the angels, Heb. 1. 4, 9. The salvation of sinners is the joy of angels, (Luke, 15. 10.) but much more of the Son.

II. He keeps his court with splendour and magnificence.

1. His robes of state, wherein he appears, are taken notice of, not for their pomp, which might strike an awe upon the spectator, but their pleasantness, and the gratefulness of the odours with which they were perfumed; (v. 8.) *They smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia*; of these was compounded the *oil of gladness*, with which he and his garments were anointed: these were some of the ingredients of the holy anointing oil which God appointed, the like to which was not to be made up for any common use, (Exod. 30. 23, 24.) which was typical of the unction of the Spirit,

which Christ, the great High-Priest of our profession, received, and to which therefore there seems here to be a reference. It is the savour of these good ointments, his graces and comforts, that draw souls to him, (Cant. 1. 3, 4.) and makes him *precious to believers*, 1 Pet. 2. 7.

2. His royal palaces are said to be *ivory ones*, such as were then reckoned most magnificent. We read of an ivory house that Ahab made, 1 Kings, 22. 39. The mansions of light above are the ivory palaces, whence all the joys both of Christ and believers come, and where they will be for ever in perfection; for by them he is made glad, and all that are his with him; for they shall enter into the joy of their Lord.

3. The beauties of his court shine very bright. In public appearances at court, when the pomp of it is shewed, nothing is supposed to contribute so much to it as the splendour of the ladies, which is alluded to here, v. 9.

(1.) Particular believers are here compared to the ladies at court, richly dressed in honour of the sovereign; *Kings' daughters are among thy honourable women*, whose looks and mien, and ornaments, we may suppose, by the height of their extraction, to excel all others. All true believers are born from above; they are the children of the King of kings, these attend the throne of the Lord Jesus daily with their prayers and praises, which is really their honour, and he is pleased to reckon it his. The numbering of kings' daughters among his honourable women, or maids of honour, intimates that the kings, whose daughters they were, should be tributaries to him, and dependents on him, and would therefore think it a preferment to their daughters to attend him.

(2.) The church in general, constituted of these particular believers, is here compared to the queen herself; the queen-consort, whom, by an everlasting covenant, he hath betrothed to himself; she stands *at his right hand*, near to him, and receiving honour from him, in the richest array, *in gold of Ophir*, in robes woven with gold thread, or with a gold chain, and other ornaments of gold. This is *the bride, the Lamb's wife*, whose graces, which are her ornaments, are compared to *fine linen, clean and white*, (Rev. 19. 8.) for their purity; here to *gold of Ophir*, for their costliness; for as we owe our redemption, so we owe our adorning, not to corruptible things, but to the *precious blood of the Son of God*.

10. Harken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; 11. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he *is* thy Lord: and worship thou him. 12. And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; *even* the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour. 13. The king's daughter *is* all glorious within: her clothing *is* of wrought gold. 14. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needle-work: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. 15. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace. 16. Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth. 17. I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.

This latter part of the psalm is addressed to the royal bride, standing on the right hand of the royal Bridegroom. God, who said to the Son, *Thy throne is for ever and ever*, says this to the church, whom, upon the account of her espousals to the Son, he here calls his *daughter*.

I. He tells her of the duties expected from her, which ought to be considered by all those that come into relation to the Lord Jesus; "Harken therefore, and consider this, and *incline thine ear*;

submit to those conditions of thine espousals, and bring thy will to comply with them." This is the method of profiting by the word of God; *He that has ears, let him hear*, let him hearken diligently; he that hearkens, let him consider and weigh it duly; he that considers, let him incline and yield to the force of what is laid before him. And what is it that is here required?

1. She must renounce all others; "*Forget thine own people and thy father's house*, according to the law of marriage. Retain not the affection thou hast had for them, nor covet to return to them again; banish all such remembrance, not only of thy people that were dear to thee, but of thy father's house that were dearer, as may incline thee to look back, as Lot's wife to Sodom." When Abraham, in obedience to God's call, had quitted his native soil, he was not so much as *mindful of the country whence he came out*. This shews, (1.) How necessary it was for those who were converted from Judaism or Paganism to the faith of Christ, wholly to cast out the old leaven, and not to bring into their Christian profession, either the Jewish ceremonies, or the heathen idolatries, for these would make such a mongrel religion in Christianity as the Samaritans had. (2.) How necessary it is for us all, when we give up our names to Jesus Christ, to hate father and mother, and all that is dear to us in this world, in comparison, to love them less than Christ and his honour, and our interest in him, Luke, 14. 26.

Here is good encouragement given to the royal bride, *thou* entirely to break off from her former alliances; *So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty*; which intimates that the mixing of her old rites and customs, whether Jewish or Gentile, with her religion, would blemish her beauty, and would hazard her interest in the affections of the royal Bridegroom; but that if she entirely conform to his will, he would delight in her; the beauty of holiness, both on the church, and on particular believers, is, in the sight of Christ, of great price and very amiable. Where that is, he says, *This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it*. Among the golden candlesticks he walks with pleasure, Rev. 2. 1.

2. She must reverence him, must love, honour, and obey him: *He is thy Lord, and worship thou him*. The church is to be subject to Christ, as the wife to the husband, (Eph. 5. 24.) to call him *Lord*, as Sarah called Abraham, and to obey him, (1 Pet. 3. 6.) and so not only to submit to his government, but to give him divine honours; we must worship him as God, and our Lord; for this is the will of God, that *all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father*; nay, in so doing, it is reckoned that they honour the Father; if we confess that Christ is Lord, and pay our homage to him accordingly, it is *to the glory of God the Father*, Phil. 2. 11.

II. He tells her of the honours designed for her.

1. Great court should be made to her, and rich presents brought her; (v. 12.) "*The daughter of Tyre*," a rich and splendid city, "*the daughter of the King of Tyre shall be there with a gift*"; every royal family round about shall send a branch as a representative of the whole, to seek thy favour, and to make an interest in thee; *even the rich among the people*, whose wealth might be thought to discharge them from dependence at court, even they shall entreat thy favour, for his sake, to whom thou art espoused, that by thee they may make him their Friend;" the Jews, the pretending Jews, who are rich to a proverb, (as rich as a Jew,) shall come and worship before the church's feet in the Philadelphia period, and shall *know that Christ has loved her*, Rev. 3. 9. When the Gentiles, being converted to the faith of Christ, join themselves to the church, they then *come with a gift*, 2 Cor. 8. 5. Rom. 15. 16. When with themselves they devote all they have to the honour of Christ, and the service of his kingdom, they then *come with a gift*.

2. She shall be very splendid, and highly esteemed in the eyes of all, (1.) For her personal qualifications, the endowments of her mind, which every one shall admire; (v. 13.) *The king's daughter is all glorious within*. Note, The glory of the church is spiritual glory, and that is indeed all glory; it is the glory of the soul, and that is the man; it is glory in God's sight, and it is an earnest of eternal glory. The glory of the saints falls not within

the view of a carnal eye; as their life, so their glory, is hid with Christ in God, neither can the natural man know it, for it is spiritually discerned; but those who do so discern it, highly value it. Let us see here what is that true glory which we should be ambitious of, not that which *makes a fair shew in the flesh*, but which is in *the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible*, (1 Pet. 3. 4.) *whose praise is not of men, but of God*, Rom. 2. 29. (2.) For her rich apparel; though all her glory is within, that for which she is truly valuable, yet *her clothing* also is of wrought gold; the conversation of Christians, in which they appear in the world, must be enriched with good works, not gay and gaudy ones, like paint and flourish, but substantially good, like gold; and it must be accurate and exact, like wrought gold, which is worked with a great deal of care and caution.

3. Her nuptials shall be celebrated with a great deal of honour and joy; (v. 14, 15.) *She shall be brought to the king*, as the Lord God brought the woman to the man, (Gen. 2. 22.) which was a type of this mystical marriage between Christ and his church. None are brought to Christ, but whom the Father brings, and he has undertaken to do it; none besides are so brought *to the king*, (v. 14.) as to *enter into the king's palace*, v. 15. This intimates a two-fold bringing of the spouse to Christ. (1.) In the conversion of souls to Christ; then they are espoused to him, privately contracted, as chaste virgins, 2 Cor. 11. 2. Rom. 7. 4. (2.) In the completing of the mystical body, and the glorification of all the saints, at the end of time; then the *bride, the Lamb's wife*, shall be made completely ready, when all that belong to the election of grace shall be called in, and called home, and all gathered together to Christ, 2 Thess. 2. 1. Then is the marriage of the Lamb come, (Rev. 19. 7.—21. 2.) and the virgins *go forth to meet the bridegroom*, Matth. 25. 1. Then they shall *enter into the king's palaces*, into the heavenly mansions, to be ever with the Lord. In both these espousals, observe, to the honour of the royal bride, [1.] Her wedding-clothes; *raiment of needle-work*, the righteousness of Christ, the graces of the Spirit; both curiously wrought by divine wisdom. [2.] Her bride-maids; *the virgins her companions*, the wise virgins who have oil in their vessels as well as in their lamps, those who, being joined to the church, cleave to it and follow it, these shall go in to the marriage. [3.] The mirth with which the nuptials will be celebrated; *With gladness and rejoicings shall she be brought*; when the prodigal is brought home to his father, *it is meet that we should make merry and be glad*; (Luke, 15. 32.) and when the marriage of the Lamb is come, *let us be glad and rejoice*; (Rev. 19. 7.) *for the day of his espousals is the day of the gladness of his heart*, Cant. 3. 11.

4. The progeny of this marriage shall be illustrious; (v. 16.) *Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children*. Instead of the Old Testament church, the economy of which was waxen old, and ready to *vanish away*, (Heb. 8. 13.) as the fathers that are going off, there shall be a New Testament church, a Gentile church, that shall be grafted into the same olive, and partake of its root and fatness; (Rom. 11. 17.) more and more eminent shall be the *children of the desolate*, than the *children of the married wife*, Isa. 54. 1. This promise to Christ is of the same import with that, (Isa. 53. 10.) *He shall see his seed*; and these shall be made *princes in all the earth*, there shall be some of all nations brought into subjection to Christ, and so made princes, *made to our God kings and priests*, Rev. 1. 6. Or it may intimate that there should be a much greater number of Christian kings than ever there was of Jewish kings; those in Canaan only, these in all the earth; nursing fathers and nursing mothers to the church, which shall *suck the breast of kings*. They are princes of Christ's making; *for by him kings reign, and princes decree justice*.

5. The praise of this marriage shall be perpetual, in the praises of the royal Bridegroom; (v. 18.) *I will make thy name to be remembered*. His Father has given him a name above every name, and here promises to make it perpetual, by keeping up a succession of ministers and Christians in every age, that shall bear up his name; which shall thus *endure for ever*, (72. 17.) by being remembered

all the generations of time; for the entail of

Christianity shall not be cut off. "Therefore, because they shall remember thee in all generations, they shall praise thee for ever and ever." They that help to support the honour of Christ on earth, shall in heaven see his glory, and share in it, and be for ever praising him. In the believing hope of our everlasting happiness in the other world, let us always keep up the remembrance of Christ, as our only Way thither, in our generation; and, in assurance of the perpetuating of the kingdom of the Redeemer in the world, let us transmit the remembrance of him to succeeding generations, that his name *may endure for ever, and be as the days of heaven*.

PSALM XLVI.

This psalm encourages us to hope and trust in God, and his power, and providence, and gracious presence, with his church, in the worst of times, and directs us to give him the glory of what he has done for us, and what he will do: probably, it was penned upon occasion of David's victories over the neighbouring nations, (2 Sam. 8.) and the rest which God gave him from all his enemies round about. We are here taught, I. To take comfort in God, when things look very black and threatening, v. 1. 5. II. To mention, to his praise, the great things he has wrought for his church against its enemies, v. 6. 9. III. To assure ourselves that God, who has glorified his own name, will glorify it yet again, and to comfort ourselves with that, v. 10, 11. We may, in singing it, apply it, either to our spiritual enemies, and the encouragement we have to hope, that, through Christ, we shall be more than conquerors over them, or to the public enemies of Christ's kingdom in the world, and their threatening insults, endeavouring to preserve a holy security and serenity of mind, when they seem most formidable. It is said of Luther, that, when he heard any discouraging news, he would say, Come, let us sing the 46th psalm.

To the chief musician for the sons of Korah. A song upon Alamoth.

1. **G**OD is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3. *Though* the waters thereof roar and be troubled, *though* the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. 4. *There is* a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. 5. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.

The psalmist here teaches us, by his own example,

I. To triumph in God, and his relation to us, and presence with us, especially when we have had some fresh experiences of his appearing in our behalf; (v. 1.) *God is our Refuge and Strength*; we have found him so, he has engaged to be so, and he ever will be so. Are we pursued? God is our Refuge to whom we may flee, and in whom we may be safe, and think ourselves so; secure upon good ground, Prov. 18. 10. Are we oppressed by troubles? have we work to do, and enemies to grapple with? God is our Strength, to bear us up under our burthens, to fit us for all our services and sufferings; who will by his grace put strength into us, and on whom we may stay ourselves. Are we in distress? He is a Help, to do all that for us which we need, a present Help, a Help found, so the word is, one whom we have found to be so, a Help on which we may write *Probatum est*, as Christ is called a *tried stone*, Isa. 28. 16. Or, a *Help at hand*, one that we shall never have to seek for, but that is always near. Or, a *Help sufficient*, a Help accommodated to every case and exigence; whatever it is, he is a very present Help; we cannot desire a better Help, nor shall ever find the like in any creature.

II. To triumph over the greatest dangers; *God is our Strength and our Help*, a God all-sufficient to us; *therefore will not we fear*. Those that with a holy reverence fear God, need not with any amazement be afraid of the power of hell or earth. *God be for us, who can be against us*, to do us any harm? *It is*

our duty, it is our privilege, to be thus fearless; it is an evidence of a clear conscience, of an honest heart, and of a lively faith in God, and his providence and promise; "*We will not fear, though the earth be removed*, though all our creature-confidences fail us, and sink us; nay, though that which should support us threaten to swallow us up, as the earth did Korah," for whose sons this psalm was penned, and, some think, by them, yet, while we keep close to God, and have him for us, we will not fear, for we have no cause to fear;

—Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinae.—Hon.

—Let Jove's dread arm with thunder rend the spheres,
Beneath the crush of worlds undaunted he appears.

Observe here,

1. How threatening the danger is. We will suppose the earth to be removed, and thrown into the sea, even the mountains, the strongest and firmest parts of the earth, to lie buried in the unfathomed ocean; we will suppose the sea to roar and rage, and make a dreadful noise, and its foaming billows to insult the shore with so much violence as even to *shake the mountains*, v. 3. Though kingdoms and states be in confusion, embroiled in wars, tossed with tumults, and their governments in continual revolution; though their powers combine against the church and people of God, aim at no less than their ruin, and go very near to gain their point; yet will not we fear, knowing that all these troubles will end well for the church. See §3. 4. If the earth be removed, those have reason to fear who have laid up their treasures on earth, and set their hearts upon it; but not those who have laid up for themselves treasures in heaven, and who can expect to be then most happy, when *the earth, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up*. Let those be troubled at the troubling of the waters, who build their confidence on such a floating foundation, but not those who are led to *the Rock that is higher than they*, and find firm footing upon that Rock.

2. How well-grounded the defence of this danger is, considering how well-guarded the church is, and that interest which we are concerned for. It is not any private particular concern of our own that we are in pain about; no, it is the city of God, *the holy place of the tabernacle of the most High*; it is the ark of God, for which our hearts tremble. But when we consider what God has provided for the comfort and safety of his church, we shall see reason to have our hearts fixed, and set above the fear of evil tidings. Here is,

(1.) Joy to the church, even in the most melancholy and sorrowful times; (v. 4.) *There is a river*, the streams whereof shall make it glad, even then when the waters of the sea roar, and threaten it. It alludes to the waters of Siloam, which *went softly by Jerusalem*; (Isa. 8. 6, 7.) though of no great depth or breadth, yet the waters of it were made serviceable to the defence of Jerusalem, in Hezekiah's time, Isa. 22. 10, 11. But this must be understood spiritually; the covenant of grace is the river, the promises of which are the streams, or, the Spirit of grace is the river, (John, 7. 38, 39.) the comforts of which are *the streams, that make glad the city of our God*. God's word and ordinances are rivers and streams with which God makes his saints glad in cloudy and dark days. God himself is to his church a Place of *broad rivers and streams*, Isa. 33. 21. The streams that make glad the city of God are not rapid, but gentle, like those of Siloam. Note, The spiritual comforts, which are conveyed to the saints by soft and silent whispers, and which come not with observation, are sufficient to balance the most loud and noisy threatenings of an angry and malicious world.

(2.) Establishment to the church; though heaven and earth are shaken, yet *God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved*, v. 5. God has assured his church of his special presence with her, and concern for her; his honour is embarked in her, he has set up his tabernacle in her, and has undertaken the protection of it, and therefore she shall not be moved, that is, [1.] Not destroyed, nor removed, as the earth may be, v. 2. The church shall survive the world, and be in bliss when it is in ruins. It is *built upon a rock*, and the *gates of hell shall not prevail against it*.

[2.] Not disturbed, not much moved, with fears of the issue. If God be for us, if God be with us, we need not be moved at the most violent attempts made against us.

(3.) Deliverance to the church, though her dangers be very great; *God shall help her*; and who then can hurt her? He shall help her under her troubles, that she shall not sink; nay, that the more she is afflicted, the more she shall multiply. God shall help her out of her troubles, and that right early; *when the morning appears*, very speedily, for he is *a present Help*, (v. 1.) and very seasonably, then when things are brought to the last extremity, and when the relief will be most welcome. This may be applied by particular believers to themselves; if God be in our hearts, in the midst of us, by his word dwelling richly in us, we shall be established, we shall be helped; let us therefore trust and not be afraid; all is well, and will end well.

6. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. 7. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. 8. Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. 9. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. 10. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. 11. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

These verses give glory to God, both as King of nations, and as King of saints.

1. As King of nations, ruling the world by his power and providence, and over-ruling all the affairs of the children of men to his own glory; he does according to his will among the inhabitants of the earth, and none may say, *What doest thou?*

1. He checks the rage, and breaks the power, of the nations that oppose him and his interests in the world; (v. 6.) *The heathen raged* at David's coming to the throne, and at the setting up of the kingdom of the Son of David; compare 2. 1, 2. *The kingdoms were moved* with indignation, and rose in a tumultuous, furious manner, to oppose it; but *God uttered his voice, spake to them in his wrath*, and they were moved in another sense, they were struck into confusion and consternation, put into disorder, and all their measures broken; the earth itself melted under them, so that they found no firm footing, their earthly hearts failed them for fear, and dissolved like snow before the sun. Such a melting of the spirits of the enemies, is described, Judg. 5. 4, 5. and see Luke, 21. 25, 26.

2. When he pleases to draw his sword, and give it commission, he can make great havock among the nations, and lay all waste; (v. 8.) *Come, behold the works of the Lord*, they are to be observed, (66. 5.) and to be sought out, 111. 2. All the operations of Providence must be considered as the works of the Lord, and his attributes and purposes must be taken notice of in them. Particularly, take notice of the *desolations he has made in the earth*, among the enemies of his church, who thought to have laid the land of Israel desolate. The destruction they designed to bring upon the church has been turned upon themselves. War is a tragedy which commonly destroys the stage it is acted on; David carried the war into the enemies' country; and Oh what desolations did it make there! Cities were burnt, countries laid waste, armies of men cut off and laid in heaps upon heaps. Come and see the effects of desolating judgments, and stand in awe of God; say, *How terrible art thou in thy works?* 66. 3. Let all that oppose him, see this with terror, and expect the same cup of trembling to be put into their hands; let all that fear him, and trust in him, see it with pleasure, and not be afraid of the most formidable powers armed against the church. Let them gird themselves, but *they shall be broken to pieces*.

3. When he pleases to sheathe his sword, he puts an end to the wars of the nations, and crowns them with peace, v.9. War and peace depend on his word and will, as much as storms and calms at sea do, 107.25, 29. *He makes wars to cease unto the end of the earth*; sometimes in pity to the nations, that they may have a breathing time, when, by long wars with each other, they have run themselves out of breath. Both sides perhaps are weary of the war, and willing to let it fall; expedients are found out for accommodation; martial princes are removed, and peace-makers set in their room; and then the bow is broken by consent, the spear cut asunder, and turned into a pruning-hook, the sword beaten into a plough-share, and the chariots of war burned, there being no more occasion for them; or rather it may be meant of what he does, at other times, in favour of his own people. He makes those wars to cease, that were waged against them, and designed for their ruin. He breaks the enemies' bow that was drawn against them; *No weapon formed against Zion shall prosper*, Isa. 54.17. The total destruction of Gog and Magog is prophetically described by the burning of their weapons of war; (Ezek. 39.9, 10.) which intimates likewise the church's perfect security and assurance of lasting peace, which made it needless to lay up those weapons of war for their own service. The bringing of a long war to a good issue, is a work of the Lord, which we ought to behold with wonder and thankfulness.

II. As King of saints, and as such we must own that *great and marvellous are his works*, Rev. 15.3.

He does, and will do, great things,

1. For his own glory; (v.10.) *Be still, and know that I am God*. (1.) Let his enemies be still, and threaten no more, but know it, to their terror, that he is God, one infinitely above them, and that will certainly be too hard for them; let them rage no more, for it is all in vain, *he that sits in heaven laughs at them*; and, in spite of all their impotent malice against his name and honour, he will be exalted among the heathen, and not only among his own people, he will be exalted in the earth, and not only in the church. Men will set up themselves, will have their own way, and do their own will; but let them know that God will be exalted, he will have his way, will do his own will, will glorify his own name, and *wherein they deal proudly, he will be above them*, and make them know that he is so. (2.) Let his own people be still; let them be calm and sedate, and tremble no more, but know, to their comfort, that the Lord is God, he is God alone, and will be exalted above the heathen; let him alone to maintain his honour, to fulfil his own counsels, and to support his own interest in the world. Though we be depressed, yet let us not be dejected, for we are sure that God will be exalted, and that may satisfy us; he will work for his great name, and then no matter what becomes of our little names. When we pray, *Father, glorify thy name*, we ought to act faith upon the answer given to that prayer, when Christ himself prayed it; *I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it yet again*. Amen, Lord, so be it.

2. For his people's safety and protection. He triumphs in the former, *I will be exalted*; they triumph in this, (v.7.) and again v.11. It is the burthen of the song, "*The Lord of hosts is with us*"; he is on our side, he takes our part, is present with us and President over us; *The God of Jacob is a Refuge*, to whom we may flee, and in whom we may confide, and be sure of safety." Let all believers triumph in this. (1.) They have the presence of a God of power, of all power; *The Lord of hosts is with us*. God is the Lord of hosts, for he has all the creatures, which are called *the hosts of heaven and earth*, at his beck and command, and he makes what use he pleases of them, as the instruments either of his justice or of his mercy. This sovereign Lord is with us, sides with us, acts with us, and has promised he will never leave us. Hosts may be against us, but we need not fear them, if the Lord of hosts be with us. (2.) They are under the protection of a God in covenant, who not only is able to help them, but is engaged in honour and faithfulness to help them. He is the God of Jacob, not only Jacob the person, but Jacob the people; nay, and of all praying people, the spiritual seed of wrestling Jacob; and he is our Refuge, by whom we are sheltered, and in whom we are

satisfied, who by his providence secures our welfare, when without are fightings, and who by his grace quiets our minds, and establishes them, when within are fears. The Lord of hosts, the God of Jacob, has been, is, and will be, with us; has been, is, and will be, our Refuge: the original includes all; and well may *Selah* be added to it; Mark this, and take the comfort of it, and say, *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

PSALM XLVII.

The scope of this psalm is to stir us up to praise God, to stir up all people to do it, and, I. We are directed in what manner to do it, publicly, cheerfully, and intelligently, v.1, 6, 7. II. We are furnished with matter for praise, 1. God's majesty, v.2. 2. His sovereign and universal dominion, v.2, 7, 9. 3. The great things he had done, and will do, for his people, v.3, 5. Many suppose that this psalm was penned upon occasion of the bringing up of the ark to mount Zion, which v.5. seems to refer to; God is gone up with a shout; but it looks further, to the ascension of Christ into the heavenly Zion, after he had finished his undertaking on earth, and to the setting up of his kingdom in the world, to which the heathen should become willing subjects. In singing this psalm, we are to give honour to the exalted Redeemer, to rejoice in his exaltation, and to celebrate his praises, confessing that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

To the chief musician. A psalm for the sons of Korah.

1. **O** CLAP your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. 2. For the LORD most High is terrible; *he is a great King over all the earth*. 3. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet. 4. He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. *Selah*.

The psalmist, having his own heart filled with great and good thoughts of God, endeavours to engage all about him in the blessed work of praise; as one convinced that God is worthy of all blessing and praise, and as one grieved at his own and others' backwardness to, and barrenness in, this work. Observe, in these verses,

I. Who are called upon to praise God; "*all ye people*, all ye people of Israel;" those were his own subjects, and under his charge, and therefore he will engage them to praise God, for on them he has an influence. Whatever others do, he and his house, he and his people, shall praise the Lord. Or, "*all ye people and nations of the earth*;" and so it may be taken as a prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles, and the bringing of them into the church; see Rom. 15.11.

II. What they are called upon to do; "*O clap your hands*, in token of your own joy and satisfaction in what God has done for you; of your approbation, nay your admiration, of what God has done in general; and of your indignation against all the enemies of God's glory, Job, 27.23. *Clap your hands*, as men transported with pleasure, that cannot contain themselves; shout unto God, not to make him hear, (his ear is not heavy,) but to make all about you hear, and take notice how much you are affected and filled with the works of God. Shout with the voice of triumph in him, and in his power and goodness, that others may join with you in the triumph." Note, Such expressions of pious and devout affections as to some may seem indecent and imprudent, ought not to be hastily censured and condemned, much less ridiculed, because, if they come from an upright heart, God will accept the strength of the affection, and excuse the weakness of the expressions of it.

III. What is suggested to us as matter for our praise.

1. That the God with whom we have to do, is a God of awful majesty; (v.2.) *The Lord most High is terrible*. He is infinitely above the noblest creatures, higher than the highest; there are those perfections in him that are to be revered by all, and particularly that power, holiness, and justice, that are to be dreaded by all those that contend with him.

2. That he is a God of sovereign and universal dominion: he is a King that reigns alone, and with an absolute power; a King over all the earth; all the creatures, being made by him, are subject to him, and therefore he is a great King; the King of kings.

3. That he takes a particular care of his people, and their concerns, has done so, and ever will,

(1.) In giving them victory and success, (v.3.) subduing the people and nations under them, both those that stood in their way, (44. 2.) and those that made attempts upon them. This, God had done for them, witness the planting of them in Canaan, and their continuance there unto this day. This they doubted not but he would still do for them by his servant David, who prospered, which way soever he turned his victorious arms; but this looks forward to the kingdom of the Messiah, which was to be set over all the earth, and not confined to the Jewish nation. Jesus Christ shall subdue the Gentiles; he shall bring them in as sheep into the fold, so the word signifies, not for slaughter, but for preservation. He shall subdue their affections, and make them a *willing people in the day of his power*; shall bring their thoughts into obedience to him, and reduce them, which had gone astray, under the guidance of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, 1 Pet. 2. 25.

(2.) In giving them rest and settlement; (v.4.) *He shall choose our inheritance for us.* He had chosen the land of Canaan to be an inheritance for Israel, it was the land which the Lord their God spied out for them; see Deut. 32. 8. This justified their possession of that land, and gave them a good title; and this sweetened their enjoyment of it, and made it comfortable; they had reason to think it a happy lot, and to be satisfied in it, when it was that which Infinite Wisdom chose for them. And the setting up of God's sanctuary in it, made it *the excellency, the honour of Jacob*; (Amos, 6. 8.) and he chose so good an inheritance for Jacob, because he loved him, Deut. 7. 8. Apply this spiritually, and it bespeaks, [1.] The happiness of the saints, that God himself has chosen their inheritance for them, and it is a goodly heritage: *he* has chosen it, who knows the soul, and what will serve to make it happy; and he has chosen so well, that he himself has undertaken to be the *Inheritance of his people*, (16. 5.) and he has laid up for them in the other world an inheritance incorruptible, 1 Pet. 1. 4. This will be indeed the excellency of Jacob, for whom, because he loved them, he prepared such a happiness as eye has not seen. [2.] The faith and submission of the saints to God. This is the language of every gracious soul, "God shall choose my inheritance for me; let him appoint me my lot, and I will acquiesce in the appointment. He knows what is good for me better than I do myself, and therefore I will have no will of my own but what is resolved into his."

5. God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. 6. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. 7. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. 8. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. 9. The princes of the people are gathered together, *even* the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth *belong* unto God: he is greatly exalted.

We are here most earnestly pressed to praise God, and to sing his praises; so backward are we to this duty, that we have need to be urged to it by precept upon precept, and line upon line; so we are here, (v.6.) *Sing praises to God*, and again, *Sing praises, Sing praises to our King*, and again, *Sing praises*. This intimates that it is a very necessary and excellent duty, that it is a duty we ought to be frequent and abundant in; we may sing praises again and again in the same words, and it is no vain repetition, if it be done with new affections. Should not a people praise their God? (Dan. 5. 4.) Should not subjects praise their king? God is our God, our King, and therefore we must praise him; we must sing his praises, as those that are pleased with them, and that are not ashamed of them. But here is a needful rule subjoined; (v.7.) *Sing ye praises with understanding, with Maschil.* 1. "Intelligently; as those that do yourselves understand why and for what

reasons you praise God, and what is the meaning of the service." This is the gospel rule, (1 Cor. 14. 15.) *To sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also*; it is only with the heart that we make melody to the Lord, Eph. 5. 19. It is not an acceptable service, if it be not a reasonable service. (2.) "Instructively; as those that desire to make others understand God's glorious perfections, and to teach them to praise him."

Three things are mentioned in these verses as just matter for our praises, and each of them will admit of a double sense;

I. We must praise God going up; (v.5.) *God is gone up with a shout*; which may refer, 1. To the carrying up of the ark to the hill of Zion, which was done with great solemnity, David himself dancing before it; the priests, it is likely, blowing the trumpets, and the people following with their loud huzzas. The ark being the instituted token of God's special presence with them, when that was brought up by warrant from him, he might be said to *go up*. The emerging of God's ordinances out of obscurity, in order to the more public and solemn administration of them, is a great favour to any people, which they have reason to rejoice in, and give thanks for. 2. To the ascension of our Lord Jesus into heaven, when he had finished his work on earth, Acts, 1. 9. Then *God went up with a shout*, the shout of a King, of a Conqueror, as one who, having *spoiled principalities and powers*, then *led captivity captive*, 68. 18. He went up as Mediator, typified by the ark, and the mercy-seat over it, and was brought as the ark was into the most holy place, *into heaven itself*; see Heb. 9. 24. We read not of a shout, or the sound of a trumpet, at the ascension of Christ, but they were the inhabitants of the upper world, those sons of God, that then shouted for joy, Job, 38. 7. He shall come again in the same manner as he went; (Acts, 1. 11.) and we are sure that he shall come again with a shout and the sound of a trumpet.

II. We must praise God reigning, v.7, 8. God is not only *our* King, and therefore we owe our homage to him, but he is *King of all the earth*, (v.7.) over all the kings of the earth, and therefore, in every place, the incense of praise is to be offered up to him. Now this may be understood, 1. Of the kingdom of providence. God, as Creator, and the God of nature, *reigns over the heathens*, disposes of them, and all their affairs, as he pleases, though they know him not, nor have any regard to him. *He sits upon the throne of his holiness*, which he has prepared in the heavens, and there he rules over all, even over the heathen, serving his own purposes by them and upon them. See here the extent of God's government; all are born within his allegiance; even the heathen, that serve other gods, are ruled by the true God, our God, whether they will or no. See the equity of his government; it is a throne of holiness, on which he sits, whence he gives warrants, orders, and judgment, in which we are sure there is no iniquity. 2. Of the kingdom of the Messiah. Jesus Christ, who is God, and whose *throne is for ever and ever, reigns over the heathen*; not only he is intrusted with the administration of the providential kingdom, but he shall set up the kingdom of his grace in the Gentile world, and rule in the hearts of multitudes that were bred up in heathenism, Eph. 2. 12, 13. This the apostle speaks of as a great mystery, that the *Gentiles should be fellow-heirs*, Eph. 3. 6. Christ *sits upon the throne of his holiness*, his throne in the heavens, where all the administrations of his government are intended to shew forth God's holiness, and to advance holiness among the children of men.

III. We must praise God as *attended and honoured by the princes of the people*, v.9. This may be understood, 1. Of the congress or convention of the states of Israel, the heads and rulers of the several tribes, at the solemn feasts, or to dispatch the public business of the nation. It was the honour of Israel, that they were the *people of the God of Abraham*, as they were Abraham's seed, and taken into his covenant; and, thanks be to God, this blessing of Abraham is come upon the isles of the Gentiles, Gal. 3. 14. It was their happiness, that they had a settled government, *princes of their people*, who were the *shields of their land*; magistracy is the shield of a nation, and it is a great mercy to any people to have this shield; especially when their princes, *their shields, belong unto the Lord*, are devoted to his honour, and their power is employed in his ser-

vice, for then he is greatly exalted. It is likewise the honour of God, that, in another sense, the *shields of the earth do belong to him*; magistracy is his institution, and he serves his own purposes by it in the government of the world, turning the hearts of kings, as the rivers of water, which way soever he pleases. It was well with Israel when the princes of their people were gathered together to consult for the public welfare. The unanimous agreement of the great ones of a nation in the things that belong to its peace, is a very happy omen, which promises abundance of blessings. 2. It may be applied to the calling of the Gentiles into the church of Christ, and taken as a prophecy, that, in the days of the Messiah, the kings of the earth and their people should join themselves to the church, and bring their glory and power into the New Jerusalem; that they should all become *the people of the God of Abraham*, to whom it was promised that he should be *the father of many nations*. The *volunteers* of the people, so it may be read; it is the same word that is used, (110.3.) *Thy people shall be willing*; for those that are gathered to Christ are not forced, but made freely willing, to be his. When the *shields of the earth*, the ensigns of royal dignity, (1 Kings, 14. 27, 28.) are surrendered to the Lord Jesus, as the keys of a city are presented to the conqueror or sovereign, when princes use their power for the advancement of the interests of religion, then Christ is greatly exalted.

PSALM XLVIII.

This psalm, as the two former, is a triumphant song; some think it was penned on occasion of Jehoshaphat's victory, 2 Chron. 20. Others, of Sennacherib's defeat, when his army laid siege to Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time; but, for aught I know, it might be penned by David, upon occasion of some eminent victory obtained in his time; yet not so calculated for that, but that it might serve any other the like occasion in aftertimes, and be applicable also to the glories of the gospel-church, of which Jerusalem was a type, especially when it shall come to be a church triumphant, the heavenly Jerusalem, (Heb. 12. 22.) the Jerusalem which is above, Gal. 4. 26. Jerusalem is here praised, I. For its relation to God, v. 1, 2. II. For God's care of it, v. 3. III. For the terror it strikes upon its enemies, v. 4. IV. For the pleasure it gives to its friends, who delight to think, 1. Of what God has done, does, and will do, for it, v. 8. 2. Of the gracious discoveries he makes of himself, in and for that holy city, v. 9, 10. 3. Of the effectual provision which is made for its safety, v. 11. 13. 4. Of the assurance we have of the perpetuity of God's covenant with the children of Zion, v. 14. In singing this psalm, we must be affected with the privilege we have as members of the gospel-church, and must express and excite our sincere good-will to all its interests.

A song and psalm for the sons of Korah.

1. **G**REAT is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. 2. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. 3. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. 4. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. 5. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. 6. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. 7. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east-wind.

The psalmist is designing to praise Jerusalem, and to set forth the grandeur of that city; but he begins with the praises of God, and his greatness, (v. 1.) and ends with the praises of God, and his goodness, v. 14. For, whatever is the subject of our praises, God must be both the Alpha and Omega of them. And, particularly, whatever is said to the honour of the church, must redound to the honour of the church's God.

What is here said to the honour of Jerusalem, is,

I. That the King of heaven owns it; it is *the city of our God*, (v. 1.) which he chose out of all the cities of Israel to put his name there; of Zion he said kinder things than ever he said of any place upon earth, *This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have*

desired it, 132. 13, 14. It is *the city of the great King*, (v. 2.) the King of all the earth, who is pleased to declare himself in a special manner present there. This our Saviour quotes, to prove, that to swear by Jerusalem, is profanely to swear by God himself, (Matth. 5. 35.) for it is the city of the great King, who has chosen it for the special residence of his grace, as heaven is of his glory.

1. It is enlightened with the knowledge of God. In Judah God is known, and his name is great, but especially in Jerusalem, the head-quarters of the priests, whose lips were to keep this knowledge. In Jerusalem *God is great*, (v. 1.) who in other places was made little of, was made nothing of. Happy the kingdom, the city, the family, the heart, in which God is great, in which he is uppermost, in which he is all. There *God is known*; (v. 3.) and where he is known, he will be great; none condemn God but those that are ignorant of him.

2. It is devoted to the honour of God. It is therefore called *the mountain of his holiness*, for *holiness to the Lord* is written upon it, and all the furniture of it, Zech. 14. 20, 21. This is the privilege of the church of Christ, that it is a holy nation, a peculiar people; Jerusalem, the type of it, is called *the holy city*, bad as it was, (Matth. 27. 53.) till that was set up, but never after.

3. It is the place appointed for the solemn service and worship of God; there he is greatly praised, and *greatly to be praised*, v. 1. Note, The clearer discoveries are made to us of God and his greatness, the more it is expected that we should abound in his praises. They that from all parts of the country brought their offerings to Jerusalem, had reason to be thankful that God would not only permit them thus to attend him, but promise to accept them, and meet them with a blessing, and reckon himself praised and honoured by their services. Herein Jerusalem typified the gospel-church; for what little tribute of praise God has from this earth, arises from that church upon earth, which is therefore his tabernacle among men.

4. It is taken under his special protection; (v. 3.) He is *known for a Refuge*; he has approved himself such a one, and as such a one he is there applied to by his worshippers. They that know him, will *trust in him, and seek to him*, 9. 10. God was known, not only in the streets, but even in the palaces, of Jerusalem, for a Refuge; the great men had recourse to God, and acquaintance with him. And then religion was likely to flourish in the city, when it reigned in the palaces.

5. Upon all these accounts, Jerusalem, and especially mount Zion, on which the temple was built, were universally beloved and admired; *Beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth*, v. 2. The situation must needs be every way agreeable, when Infinite Wisdom chose it for the place of the sanctuary; and that which made it beautiful, was, that it was the mountain of holiness, for there is a beauty in holiness. This earth is, by sin, covered with deformity, and therefore justly might that spot of ground, which was thus beautified with holiness, be called *the joy of the whole earth*, that is, what the whole earth had reason to rejoice in, that God would thus in very deed dwell with man upon the earth. Mount Zion was on the north side of Jerusalem, and so was a shelter to the city from the cold and bleak winds that blew from that quarter; or, if fair weather was expected out of the north, they were thus directed to look Zion-ward for it.

II. That the kings of the earth were afraid of it. That God was known in their palaces for a Refuge, they had had a late instance, and a very remarkable one. Whatever it was,

1. They had had but too much occasion to fear their enemies; For *the kings were assembled*, v. 4. The neighbouring princes were confederate against Jerusalem, their heads and horns, their policies and powers, were combined for its ruin; they were assembled with all their forces, they passed, advanced, and marched on, together, not doubting but they should soon make themselves masters of that city which should have been the joy, but was the envy, of the whole earth.

2. God made their enemies to fear them. The very sight of Jerusalem struck them into a consternation, and gave check to their fury; as the sight of the tents of Jacob frightened Balaam from his purpose to curse Israel, Numb. 24. 2. *They saw it and marvelled,*

and hasted away, v. 5. Not *Veni, vidi, vici—I came, I saw, I conquered*; but, on the contrary, *Veni, vidi, victus sum—I came, I saw, I was defeated*. Not that there was any thing to be seen in Jerusalem that was so very formidable; but the sight of it brought to mind what they had heard concerning the special presence of God in that city, and the divine protection it was under, and God impressed such terrors on their minds thereby, as made them retire with precipitation. Though they were kings, though they were many in confederacy, yet they knew themselves an unequal match for Omnipotence, and therefore *fear came upon them, and pain*, v. 6. Note, God can dispirit the stoutest of his church's enemies, and soon put them in pain that live at ease. The fright they were in upon the sight of Jerusalem is here compared to the throes of a woman in travail, which are sharp and grievous, which sometimes come suddenly, (1 Thess. 5. 3.) which cannot be avoided, and which are effects of sin and the curse. The defeat hereby given to their designs upon Jerusalem is compared to the dreadful work made with a fleet of ships by a violent storm, when some are split, others shattered, all dispersed; (v. 7.) *Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east-wind*; effects at sea lie thus exposed. The terrors of God are compared to an east-wind; (Job, 27. 20, 21.) these shall put them into confusion, and break all their measures. *Who knows the power of God's anger?*

8. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah. 9. We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple. 10. According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness. 11. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments. 12. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. 13. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. 14. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide *even* unto death.

We have here the good use and improvement which the people of God are taught to make of his late glorious and gracious appearances for them against their enemies, that they might work for their good.

I. Let our faith in the word of God be hereby confirmed. If we compare what God has done with what he has spoken, we shall find, that as *we have heard*, so *have we seen*, (v. 8.) and what we have seen, obliges us to believe what we have heard. 1. "As we have heard done in former providences, in the days of old, so have we seen done in our own days." Note, God's latter appearances for his people, against his and their enemies, are consonant to his former appearances, and should put us in mind of them. 2. "As we have heard in the promise and prediction, so have we seen in the performance and accomplishment. We have heard that God is the Lord of hosts, and that Jerusalem is the city of our God, is dear to him, is his particular care; and now we have seen it, we have seen the power of our God, we have seen his goodness, we have seen his care and concern for us; that he is a *Wall of fire round about Jerusalem, and the Glory in the midst of her*." Note, In the great things that God has done, and is doing, for his church, it is good to take notice of the fulfilling of the scriptures; and this would help us the better to understand both the providence itself, and the scripture that is fulfilled in it.

II. Let our hope of the stability and perpetuity of the church be hereby encouraged. "From what we have seen, compared with what we have heard, in the city of our God, we may conclude, that God will establish it for ever." This was not fulfilled in Jerusalem, (that city was long since destroyed, and all its glory laid in the dust,) but has its accomplishment in the gospel-church; we are sure that that shall be established for ever, it is built upon

a rock, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, Matth. 16. 18. God himself has undertaken the establishment of it; it is the Lord that has founded Zion, Isa. 14. 32. And what we have seen, compared with what we have heard, may encourage us to hope in that promise of God, upon which the church is built.

III. Let our minds be hereby filled with good thoughts of God. "From what we have heard, and seen, and hope for, we may take occasion to think much of God's loving-kindness, whenever we meet in the midst of his temple," v. 9. All the streams of mercy that flow down to us, must be run up to the fountain of God's loving-kindness. It is not owing to any merit of our's, but purely to his mercy, and the peculiar favour he bears to his people. This, therefore, we must think of with delight, think of frequently, and fixedly. What subject can we dwell upon more noble, more pleasant, more profitable! We must have God's loving-kindness always before our eyes, (26. 3.) especially when we attend upon him in his temple. When we enjoy the benefit of public ordinances undisturbed, we meet in his temple, and there is none to make us afraid, we should take occasion thence to think of his loving-kindness.

IV. Let us give to God the glory of the great things which he has done for us, and mention them to his honour; (v. 10.) "According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise, not only in Jerusalem, but to the ends of the earth." By the late signal deliverance of Jerusalem, God had made himself a name; he had gloriously discovered his wisdom, power, and goodness, and made all the nations about sensible of it; and so was his praise; that is, some, in all parts, would be found giving glory to him accordingly. As far as his name goes, his praise will go, at least, it should go, and, at length, it shall go, when all the ends of the world shall praise him, 22. 27. Rev. 11. 15. Some, by his name, understand especially that glorious name of his, the *Lord of hosts*; according to that name, so is his praise; for all the creatures, even to the ends of the earth, are under his command. But his people must, in a special manner, acknowledge his justice in all he does for them; "Righteousness fills thy right hand; all the operations of thy power are consonant to the eternal rules of equity."

V. Let all the members of the church in particular, take to themselves the comfort of what God does for his church in general; (v. 11.) "Let mount Zion rejoice, the priests and Levites that attend the sanctuary, and then let all the daughters of Judah, the country-towns, and the inhabitants of them, be glad; let the women, in their songs and dances, as usual on occasion of public joys, celebrate with thankfulness this great salvation which God has wrought for us." Note, When we have given God the praise, we may then take the pleasure, of the extraordinary deliverances of the church, and be glad because of God's judgments, the operations of his providence, all which we may see wrought in wisdom, (therefore called *judgments*;) and working for the good of his church.

VI. Let us diligently observe the instances and evidences of the church's beauty, strength, and safety, and faithfully transmit our observations to those that shall come after us; (v. 12, 13.) *Walk about Zion*. Some think this refers to the ceremony of the triumph; let those who are employed in that solemnity, walk round the walls, as they did, (Neh. 12. 31.) singing, and praising God. In doing this, let them tell the towers, and mark well the bulwarks, 1. That they might magnify the late wonderful deliverance God had wrought for them. Let them observe, with wonder, that the towers and bulwarks are all in their full strength, and none of them damaged; the palaces in their beauty, and none of them blemished; there is not the least damage done to the city by the kings that were assembled against it; (v. 4.) *Tell this to the generation following*, as a wonderful instance of God's care of his holy city, that the enemies should not only ruin or destroy it, but not so much as hurt or deface it. 2. That they might fortify themselves against the fear of the like threatening danger, another time. And so, (1.) We may understand it literally of Jerusalem, and the strong-hold of Zion. Let the daughters of Judah see the towers and bulwarks of Zion, with pleasure, equal to the terror with which the kings, their enemies, saw them, v. 5. Jerusalem was generally looked upon as an impregnable place, as appears,

Lam. 4. 12. *All the inhabitants of the world would not have believed that an enemy should have entered the gates of Jerusalem: nor could they have entered, if the inhabitants had not sinned away their defence. Set your heart to her bulwarks.* This intimates that the principal bulwarks of Zion were, not the objects of sense, which they might set their eye upon, but the objects of faith, which they must set their hearts upon; it was well enough fortified, indeed, both by nature and art; but its bulwarks, that were mostly to be relied upon, were the special presence of God in it, the beauty of holiness he had put upon it, and the promises he had made concerning it. "Consider Jerusalem's strength, and tell it to the generations to come, that they may do nothing to weaken it, and that, if at any time it be in distress, they may not basely surrender it to the enemy as not tenable." Calvin observes here, that when they are directed to transmit to posterity a particular account of the towers, and bulwarks, and palaces of Jerusalem, it is intimated, that, in process of time, they would all be destroyed, and remain no longer to be seen; for, otherwise, what need was there to preserve the description and history of them? When the disciples were admiring the buildings of the temple, their Master told them, that in a little time one stone of it should not be left upon another, Matth. 24. 1, 2. Therefore, (2.) This must certainly be applied to the gospel-church, that mount Zion, Heb. 12. 22. "Consider the towers, and bulwarks, and palaces, of that, that you may be invited and encouraged to join yourselves to it, and embark in it. See it founded on Christ, the Rock fortified by the divine power, guarded by him that neither slumbers nor sleeps. See what precious ordinances are its palaces, what precious promises are its bulwarks; tell this to the generation following, that they may with purpose of heart espouse its interests, and cleave to it."

VII. Let us triumph in God, and in the assurances we have of his everlasting loving-kindness, v. 14. Tell this to the generation following, transmit this truth as a sacred deposit to your posterity, That this God, who has now done such great things for us, is our God for ever and ever; he is constant and unchangeable in his love to us and care for us. 1. If God be our God, he is our's for ever, not only through all the ages of time, but to eternity; for it is the everlasting blessedness of glorified saints, that *God himself will be with them, and will be their God*, Rev. 21. 3. 2. If he be our God, he will be our Guide, our faithful constant Guide, to shew us our way, and to lead us in it; he will be so, even unto death, which will be the period of our way, and will bring us to our rest. He will lead and keep us, even to the last. He will be our Guide above death; so some. He will so guide us, as to set us above the reach of death, so that it shall not be able to do us any real hurt. He will be our Guide beyond death; so others. He will conduct us safe to a happiness on the other side death, to a life in which there shall be no more death. If we take the Lord for our God, he will conduct and convey us safe to death, through death, and beyond death; down to death, and up again to glory.

PSALM XLIX.

This psalm is a sermon, and so is the next. In most of the psalms, we have the penman praying or praising; in these, we have him preaching; and it is our duty, in singing psalms, to teach and admonish ourselves and one another. The scope and design of this discourse is, to convince the men of this world of their sin and folly in setting their hearts upon the things of this world, and so to persuade them to seek the things of a better world; as also to comfort the people of God, in reference to their own troubles, and the grief that arises from the prosperity of the wicked. I. In the preface, he proposes to awaken worldly people out of their security, (v. 1. 3.) and to comfort himself and other godly people in a day of distress, v. 4, 5. II. In the rest of the psalm, 1. He endeavours to convince sinners of their folly in dotting upon the wealth of this world, by shewing them, (1.) That they cannot, with all their wealth, save their friends from death, v. 6. 9. (2.) They cannot save themselves from death, v. 10. (3.) They cannot secure themselves a happiness in this world, v. 11, 12. Much less, (4.) Can they secure to themselves a happiness in the other world, v. 14. 2. He endeavours to comfort himself and other good people, (1.) Against the fear of death, v. 15. (2.) Against the fear of the prospering power of wicked people, v. 16. 20. In singing this psalm, let us receive these instructions, and be wise.

To the chief musician. A psalm for the sons of Korah.

1. **H**EAR this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world: 2. Both low and

high, rich and poor, together. 3. My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. 4. I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp. 5. Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?

This is the psalmist's preface to his discourse concerning the vanity of the world, and its insufficiency to make us happy; and we seldom meet with an introduction more solemn than this is; for there is no truth of more undoubted certainty, nor of greater weight and importance, and the consideration of which will be of more advantage to us.

I. He demands the attention of others to that which he was about to say; (v. 1, 2.) *Hear this, all ye people*; hear it and heed it, hear it and consider it; what is spoken once, hear twice; *Hear and give ear*, 62. 9, 11. Not only, "Hear, all ye Israelites, and give ear all the inhabitants of Canaan," but, *Hear, all ye people, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world*; for this doctrine is not peculiar to those that are blessed with divine revelation, but even the light of nature witnesses to it. All men may know, and therefore let all men consider, that their riches will not profit them in the day of death. Both low and high, both rich and poor, must come together, to hear the word of God; let both, therefore, hear this with application. Let those that are high and rich in the world, hear of the vanity of their worldly possessions, and not be proud of them, nor secure in the enjoyment of them, but lay them out in doing good, that with them they may make to themselves friends; let those that are poor and low, hear this, and be content with their little, and not envy those that have abundance. Poor people are as much in danger from an inordinate desire toward the wealth of the world, as rich people from an inordinate delight in it.

He gives a good reason why his discourse should be regarded; (v. 3.) *My mouth shall speak of wisdom*; what he had to say, 1. Was true and good. It is wisdom and understanding, it will make those wise and intelligent that receive it, and submit to it. It is not doubtful but certain, not trivial but weighty, not a matter of nice speculation, but of admirable use to guide us in the right way to our great end. 2. It was what he had himself well-digested. What his mouth spake was the *meditation of his heart*; (as 19. 14. —45. 1.) it was what God put into his mind, what he had himself seriously considered, and was fully apprized of the meaning of, and convinced of the truth of. That which ministers speak from their own hearts is most likely to reach the hearts of their hearers.

II. He engages his own attention; (v. 4.) *I will incline mine ear to a parable*. It is called a *parable*, not because it is figurative and obscure, but because it is a wise discourse, and very instructive. It is the same word that is used concerning Solomon's proverbs. The psalmist will himself incline his ear to it. This intimates, 1. That he was taught it by the Spirit of God, and did not speak of himself. Those that undertake to teach others, must first learn themselves. 2. That he thought himself nearly concerned in it, and was resolved not to venture his own soul upon that bottom which he dissuaded others from venturing their's upon. 3. That he would not expect others should attend to that which he himself did not attend to as a matter of the greatest importance. Where God gives the tongue of the learned, he first wakens the ear to hear as the learned, Isa. 50. 4.

III. He promises to make the matter as plain, and as affecting, as he could; *I will open my dark saying upon the harp*. What he learned for himself, he would not conceal or confine to himself, but would communicate, for the benefit of others. 1. Some understood it not, it was a riddle to them; tell them of the vanity of the things that are seen, and of the reality and weight of invisible things, and they say, *Ah, Lord God, doth he not speak parables?* For the sake of such, he would open this dark saying, and make it so plain, that he that runs might read it. 2. Others understood it well enough, but they were not removed by it, it never affected them, and, for their sake, he would open it upon the harp, and try

that expedient to work upon them, to win upon them. *A verse may find him who a sermon flies.* Herbert.

IV. He begins with the application of it to himself, and that is the right method in which to treat of divine things; we must first preach to ourselves, before we undertake to admonish or instruct others. Before he comes to set down the folly of carnal security, (v. 6.) he here lays down, from his own experience, the benefit and comfort of a holy gracious security, which they enjoy who trust in God, and not in their worldly wealth; *Wherefore should I fear?* he means, *Wherefore should I fear their fear*, (Isa. 8. 12.) the fears of worldly people? 1. "Wherefore should I be afraid of them? Wherefore should I fear in the days of trouble and persecution, *when the iniquity of my heels*, or of my supplanters that endeavour to trip up my heels, *shall compass me about*, and they shall surround me with their mischievous attempts? Why should I be afraid of those, all whose power lies in their wealth, which will not enable them to redeem their friends? I will not fear their power, for it cannot enable them to ruin me." The great men of the world will not appear at all formidable, when we consider what little stead their wealth will stand them in. We need not fear their casting us down from our excellency, who cannot support themselves in their own excellency. 2. "Wherefore should I be afraid *like them*?" The days of old age and death are the *days of evil*, Eccl. 12. 1. In the day of judgment, *the iniquity of our heels*, or of our steps, our past sins, will compass us about, will be set in order before us. *Every work will be brought into judgment, with every secret thing; and every one of us must give account of himself.* In these days, worldly wicked people will be afraid; nothing more dreadful to them, than have set their hearts upon the world, than to think of leaving it; death to them is the king of terrors, because, after death, comes the judgment, when their sins will surround them as so many furies; but wherefore should a good man fear death, who has God with him? 23. 4. When his iniquities compass him about, he sees them all pardoned, his conscience is purified and pacified; and then, even in the judgment-day, when the hearts of others fail them for fear, they can lift up their heads with joy, Luke, 21. 26, 28. Note, The children of God, though ever so poor, are in this truly happy, above the most prosperous of the children of this world, that they are well-guarded against the terrors of death, and the judgment to come.

6. They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; 7. None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: 8. (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever;) 9. That he should still live for ever, *and* not see corruption. 10. For he seeth *that* wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. 11. Their inward thought is, *that* their houses shall continue for ever, *and* their dwelling-places to all generations; they call *their* lands after their own names. 12. Nevertheless, man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts *that* perish. 13. This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah. 14. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling.

In these verses, we have,

I. A description of the spirit and way of worldly people, whose

portion is in this life, 17. 14.—49. 6, 11. It is taken for granted that they have wealth, and a multitude of riches, (v. 6.) houses and lands of inheritance, which they call their own, v. 11. God often gives abundance of the good things of this world to bad men, who live in contempt of him, and rebellion against him—by which it appears, that they are not the best things in themselves, for then God would give most of them to his best friends; and that they are not the best things for us, for then *they* would not have so much of them, who, being marked for ruin, are to be ripened for it by their prosperity, Prov. 1. 32. A man may have abundance of the wealth of this world, and be made better by it, may thereby have his heart enlarged in love, and thankfulness, and obedience, and may do that good with it which will be fruit abounding to his account; and therefore it is not men's having riches that denominates them worldly, but their setting their hearts upon them as the best things; and so these worldly people are here described;

1. They repose a confidence in their riches; *They trust in their wealth*, (v. 6.) they depend upon it as their portion and happiness, and expect that it will secure them from all evil, and supply them with all good, and that they need nothing else, no, not God himself. Their gold is their hope, (Job, 31. 24.) and so it becomes their god. Thus our Saviour explains the difficulty of the salvation of rich people; (Mark, 10. 24.) *How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!* See 1 Tim. 6. 17.

2. They take a pride in their riches; *They boast themselves in the multitude of them*, as if they were sure tokens of God's favour, and certain proofs of their own ingenuity and industry. *My might, and the power of my hand, have gotten me this wealth*; as if they made them truly great and happy, and more really excellent, than their neighbours. They boast that they have all they would have, (10. 3.) and can set all the world at defiance; *I sit as a queen, and shall be a lady for ever*; therefore they call their lands after their own names, hoping thereby to perpetuate their memory; and, if their lands do retain the names by which they called them, it is but a poor honour; but they often change their names when they change their owners.

3. They flatter themselves with an expectation of the perpetuity of their worldly possessions; (v. 11.) *Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever*, and with this thought they please themselves. Are not all thoughts inward? Yes: but it intimates, (1.) That this thought is deeply rooted in their minds, is rolled and revolved there, and carefully lodged in the innermost recesses of their hearts. A godly man has thoughts of the world, but they are his outward thoughts; his inward thought is reserved for God and heavenly things; but a worldly man has only some floating foreign thoughts of the things of God, while his fixed thought, his inward thought, is about the world; that lies nearest his heart, and is upon the throne there. (2.) There it is industriously concealed; they cannot, for shame, say that they expect their houses to continue for ever, but, inwardly, they think so. If they cannot persuade themselves that *they* shall continue for ever, yet they are so foolish as to think *their houses* shall, and their dwelling-places—suppose they should, what good will that do them, when they shall be no longer their's? But they will not; for the world passes away, and the fashion of it: all things are devoured by the teeth of time.

II. A demonstration of their folly herein. In general, (v. 13.) *This their way is their folly.* Note, The way of worldliness is a very foolish way: they that lay up their treasure on earth, and set their affections on things below, act contrary both to right reason and to their true interest. God himself pronounced him a *fool* who thought his goods were laid up for many years, and that they would be a portion for his soul, Luke, 12. 19, 20. And yet their posterity approve their sayings, agree with them in the same sentiments, say as they say, and do as they do, and tread in the steps of their worldliness. Note, The love of the world is a disease that runs in the blood; men have it by kind, till the grace of God cures it.

To prove the folly of carnal worldlings, he shews,

1. That, with all their wealth, they cannot save the life of the dearest friend they have in the world, nor purchase a reprieve for

him when he is under the arrest of death; (v. 7. 9.) *None of them can by any means redeem his brother*; his brother-worldling, who would give him counter-security out of his own estate, if he would but be bail for him: and gladly he would, in hopes that he might do the same kindness for him another time. But their words will not be taken one for another, nor will one man's estate be the ransom of another man's life. God does not value it, it is of no account with him; and the true value of things is as they stand in his books. His justice will not accept it by way of commutation or equivalent. The Lord of our brother's life is the Lord of our estate, and may take both, if he pleases, without either difficulty to himself or wrong to us; and therefore one cannot be ransom for another. We cannot bribe death, that our brother should still live, much less that he should live for ever, in this world, nor bribe the grave, that he should not see corruption; for we must needs die, and return to the dust, and there is no discharge from that war. What folly is it to trust to that, and boast of that, which will not enable us so much as for one hour to respite the execution of the sentence of death upon a parent, a child, or a friend that is to us as our own soul! It is certainly true, that *the redemption of the soul is precious, and ceaseth for ever*; life, when it is going, cannot be arrested, and when it is gone, it cannot be recalled, by any human art, or worldly price. But this looks further, to the eternal redemption which was to be wrought out by the Messiah, whom the Old Testament saints had an eye to as the Redeemer. Immortality is a jewel of too great a value to be purchased by the wealth of this world. We are *not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold*, 1 Pet. 1. 18, 19. The learned Dr. Hammond applies the 8th and 9th verses expressly to Christ; "*The redemption of the soul shall be precious, shall be high-prized, it shall cost very dear; but, being once wrought, it shall cease for ever, it shall never need to be repeated*, Heb. 9. 25, 26.—10. 12. And he, the Redeemer, *shall yet live for ever, and shall not see corruption*; he shall rise again before he sees corruption, and then shall live for evermore," Rev. 1. 18. Christ did that for us, which all the riches of the world could not do; well therefore may he be dearer to us than any worldly things. Christ did that for us which a brother, a friend, could not do for us, no not one of the best estate or interest; and therefore those that *love father or brother more than him, are not worthy of him*. This likewise shews the folly of worldly people, who sell their souls for that which would never buy them.

2. That, with all their wealth, they cannot secure themselves from the stroke of death. The worldling sees, and it vexes him to see it, that *wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish*, v. 10. Therefore he cannot but expect that it will, at length, come to his own turn; he cannot find any encouragement to hope that he himself shall continue for ever, and therefore foolishly comforts himself with this, that, though he shall not, his house shall. Some rich people are wise, they are politicians, but they cannot out-wit death, nor evade his stroke, with all their art and management; others are fools and brutish, (*Fortuna favet fatuis—Fools are fortune's favourites*,) these, though they do no good, yet perhaps do no great hurt, in the world: but that shall not excuse them, they shall perish, and be taken away by death, as well as the wise that did mischief with their craft. Or by the wise and the foolish we may understand the godly and the wicked; the godly die, and their death is their deliverance; the wicked perish, their death is their destruction; but, however, they leave their wealth to others. (1.) They cannot continue with it, nor will it serve to procure them a reprieve. That is a frivolous plea, though once it served a turn; (Jer. 41. 8.) *Slay us not, for we have treasures in the field*. (2.) They cannot carry it away with them, but must leave it behind them. (3.) They cannot foresee who will enjoy it when they have left it; they must leave it to others, but to whom they know not, perhaps to a fool, (Eccl. 2. 19.) perhaps to an enemy.

And as men's wealth will stand them in no stead in a dying hour, so neither will their honour; (v. 12.) *Man, being in honour, abides not*. We will suppose a man advanced to the highest pinnacle of preferment, as great and happy as the world can make

him; man in splendour, man at his best estate, surrounded and supported with all the advantages he can desire: yet then he abides not, his honour does not continue, that is a fleeting shadow, he himself does not. He tarries not all night; this world is an inn, in which his stay is so short, that he can scarcely be said to get a night's lodging in it; so little rest is there in these things; he has but a bailing-time: *He is like the beasts that perish*; he must as certainly die as the beasts, and his death will be as final a period to his state in this world as their's is; his dead body likewise will putrify as their's do; and (as Dr. Hammond observes) frequently the greatest honours and wealth, unjustly gotten by the parent, descend not to any one of his posterity, (as the beasts, when they die, leave nothing behind them to their young ones, but the wide world to feed in,) but fall into other hands immediately, for which he never designed to gather them.

3. That their condition on the other side death will be very miserable. The world they dote upon, will not only not save them from death, but will sink them so much the lower into hell; (v. 14.) *Like sheep they are laid in the grave*. Their prosperity did but feed them like sheep for the slaughter, (Hos. 4. 16.) and then death comes and shuts them up in the grave, like fat sheep in a fold, *to be brought forth to the day of wrath*, Job, 21. 30. Multitudes of them, like flocks of sheep dead of some disease, are thrown into the grave, and there death shall feed on them, the second death, *the worm that dies not*, Job, 24. 40. Their own guilty consciences, like so many vultures, shall be continually preying upon them, with, *Son, remember*, Luke, 16. 25. Death insults and triumphs over them, as it is represented in the fall of the king of Babylon, at which *hell from beneath is moved*, Isa. 14. 9. &c. While a saint can ask proud Death, *Where is thy sting?* Death will ask the proud sinner, *Where is thy wealth, thy pomp?* and the more he was fattened with prosperity, the more sweetly will death feed on him. And in the morning of the resurrection, when all that sleep in the dust shall awake, (Dan. 12. 2.) *the upright shall have dominion over them*; shall not only be advanced to the highest dignity and honour, when they are filled with everlasting shame and contempt, elevated to the highest heavens, when they are sunk to the lowest hell; but they shall be assessors with Christ in passing judgment upon them, and shall applaud the justice of God in their ruin. When the rich man in hell begged that Lazarus might bring him a drop of water to cool his tongue, he owned that that upright man had dominion over him, as the foolish virgins also owned the dominion of the wise, and that they lay much at their mercy, when they begged, *Give us of your oil*. Let this comfort us, in reference to the oppressions which the upright are now often groaning under, and the dominion which the wicked have over them. The day is coming, when the tables will be turned, (Esther, 9. 1.) and the upright will have the dominion. Let us now judge of things, as they will appear at that day. But what will become of all the beauty of the wicked? Alas! that shall all be consumed in the grave from their dwelling; all that upon which they valued themselves, and for which others caressed and admired them, was all adventitious and borrowed, it was paint and varnish, and they will rise in their own native deformity. The beauty of holiness is that which the grave, that consumes all other beauty, cannot touch, or do any damage to. Their beauty shall consume, the grave, or hell, being a habitation to every one of them; and what beauty can be there where there is nothing but the blackness of darkness for ever?

15. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for he shall receive me. Selah. 16. Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; 17. For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. 18. Though while he lived he blessed his soul:

and *men* will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. 19. He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. 20. Man *that* is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts *that* perish.

Good reason is here given to good people,

I. Why they should not be afraid of death. There is no cause for that fear, if they have such a comfortable prospect as David here has of a happy state on the other side death, v. 15. He had shewed (v. 14.) how miserable the dead are that die in their sins; here he shews how blessed the dead are that die in the Lord. The distinction of men's outward condition, how great a difference soever it makes in life, makes none at death; rich and poor meet in the grave: but the distinction of men's spiritual state, though, in this life, it makes a small difference, where all things come alike to all, yet, at and after death, it makes a very great one; *Now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* The righteous has hope in his death, so has David here hope in God concerning his soul. Note, The believing hopes of the soul's redemption from the grave, and reception to glory, are the great support and joy of the children of God in a dying hour. They hope,

1. That God will redeem their souls from the power of the grave; which includes, (1.) The preserving of the soul from going to the grave with the body. The grave has a power over the body, by virtue of the sentence, (Gen. 3. 19.) and it is cruel enough in executing that power, (Cant. 8. 6.) but it has no such power over the soul: it has power to silence, and imprison, and consume, the body; but the soul then moves, and acts, and converses, more freely than ever; (Rev. 6. 9, 10.) it is immaterial and immortal. When death breaks the dark-lanthorn, yet it does not extinguish the candle that was pent up in it. (2.) The re-uniting of the soul and body at the resurrection. The soul is often put for the life; that indeed falls under the power of the grave for a time, but it shall, at length, be redeemed from it, when mortality shall be swallowed up of life. The God of life, that was its Creator at first, can and will be its Redeemer at last. (3.) The salvation of the soul from eternal ruin; "God shall redeem my soul from the *sheol* of hell, the wrath to come, that pit of destruction into which the wicked shall be cast," v. 14. It is a great comfort to dying saints, that they shall not be hurt of the second death, (Rev. 2. 11.) and therefore the first death has no sting, and the grave no victory.

2. That he will receive them to himself. He redeems their souls, that he may receive them, (31. 5.) *Into thy hands I commit my spirit, for thou hast redeemed it.* He will receive them into his favour, will admit them into his kingdom, into the mansions that are prepared for them, (John, 14. 2, 3.) those everlasting habitations, Luke, 16. 9.

II. Why they should not be afraid of the prosperity and power of wicked people in this world, which, as it is their pride and joy, has often been the envy, and grief, and terror, of the righteous; which yet, all things considered, there is no reason for.

1. He supposes they will be under a strong temptation to envy the prosperity of sinners, and to be afraid that they will carry all before them with a high hand, that with their wealth and interest they will run down religion and religious people, and that they will be found the truly happy people; for he supposes, (1.) That they are made rich, and so are enabled to give law to all about them, and have every thing at command: *Pecunie obediunt omnes et omnia—Every person and every thing obey the commanding influence of money.* (2.) That the glory of their house, from very small beginnings, is increased greatly, which naturally makes men haughty, insolent, and imperious, v. 16. Thus they seem to be the favourites of Heaven, and therefore formidable. (3.) That they are very easy and secure in themselves and in their own minds; (v. 18.) *In his life-time, he blessed his soul;* he thought himself a very happy man, such an one as he would be, and a very good man, such an one as he should be, because he prospered in the world. He blessed his soul, as that rich fool

who said to his soul, "*Soul, take thine ease, and be not disturbed either with cares and fears about the world, or with the rebukes and admonitions of conscience. All is well, and will be well for ever.*" Note, [1.] It is of great consequence to consider what that is in which we bless our souls, upon the score of which we think well of ourselves. Believers *bless themselves in the God of truth*, (Isa. 65. 16.) and think themselves happy if he be their's; carnal people bless themselves in the wealth of the world, and think themselves happy if they have abundance of that. [2.] There are many whose precious souls lie under God's curse, and yet they do themselves bless them; they applaud that in themselves which God condemns, and speak peace to themselves, when God denounces war against them. Yet this is not all. (4.) They are in good reputation among their neighbours; "*Men will praise thee, and cry thee up, as having done well for thyself in raising such an estate and family.*" This is the sentiment of all the children of this world, that those do best for themselves that do most for their bodies, by heaping up riches, though, at the same time, nothing is done for the soul, nothing for eternity; and accordingly they *bless the covetous, whom the Lord abhors*, 10. 3. If men were to be our judges, it were our wisdom thus to recommend ourselves to their good opinion: but what will it avail us to be approved of men, if God condemn us? Dr. Hammond understands this of the good man here spoken to, for it is the second person, not of the wicked man spoken of; "*He, in his life-time, blessed his soul, but thou shalt be praised for doing well unto thyself.*" The worldling magnified himself; but thou that dost not, like him, speak well of thyself, but dost well for thyself, in securing thy eternal welfare, thou shalt be praised, if not of men, yet of God, which will be thine everlasting honour.

2. He suggests that which is sufficient to take off the strength of the temptation, by directing us to look forward to the end of prosperous sinners; (73. 17.) "Think what they will be, in the other world, and you will see no cause to envy them what they are, and have, in this world."

(1.) In the other world, they will be never the better for all the wealth and prosperity they are now so fond of; it is a miserable portion, which will not last so long as they must; (v. 17.) *When he dies*, it is taken for granted that he goes into another world himself, but *he shall carry nothing away with him* of all that which he has been so long heaping up. The greatest and wealthiest cannot therefore be the happiest, because they are never the better for their living in this world; as they came naked into it, they shall go naked out of it. But those have something to shew in the other world, for their living in this world, who can say, through grace, that though they came corrupt, and sinful, and spiritually naked, into it, they go renewed, and sanctified, and well-clothed with the righteousness of Christ, out of it. They that are rich in the graces and comforts of the Spirit, have something which, when they die, they shall carry away with them, something which death cannot strip them of, nay, which death will be the improvement of; but as for worldly possessions, as we *brought nothing into the world*, (what we have we had from others,) so it is certain that we shall carry nothing out, but leave it to others, 1 Tim. 6. 7. They shall descend, but their glory, that which they called and counted their glory, and gloried in, shall not descend after them, to lessen the disgrace of death and the grave, to bring them off in the judgment, or abate the torments of hell; grace is glory that will ascend with us, but no earthly glory will descend after us.

(2.) In the other world, they will be infinitely the worse for all their abuses of the wealth and prosperity they enjoyed in this world, (v. 19.) *The soul shall go to the generation of his fathers*, his worldly-wicked fathers, whose sayings he approved, and whose steps he trod in, his fathers who would not hearken to the word of God, Zech. 1. 4. He shall go to be there where they are that shall never see light, shall never have the least glimpse of comfort and joy, being condemned to utter darkness. Be not afraid then of the pomp and power of wicked people; for the end of the man that is in honour, if he be not wise and good, will be miserable; if he

understand not, he is to be pitied rather than envied. A fool, a wicked man, in honour, is really as despicable an animal as any under the sun; he is *like the beasts that perish*; (v. 20.) nay, it is better to be a beast, than to be a man that makes himself like a beast. Men in honour, that understand, that know and do their duty, and make conscience of it, are as gods, and children of the Most High. But men in honour, that understand not, that are proud, and sensual, and oppressive, are as beasts, and they shall perish, like the beasts, ingloriously as to this world, though not, like the beasts, indemnified as to another world. Let prosperous sinners therefore be afraid for themselves, but let not even suffering saints be afraid of them.

PSALM L.

This psalm, as the former, is a psalm of instruction, not of prayer or praise; it is a psalm of reproof and admonition, in singing which, we are to teach and admonish one another. In the foregoing psalm, after a general demand of attention, God by his prophet deals (v. 3.) with the children of this world, to convince them of their sin and folly in setting their hearts upon the wealth of this world; in this psalm, after a like preface, he deals with those that were, in profession, the church's children, to convince them of their sin and folly in placing their religion in ritual services, while they neglected practical godliness; and this is as sure a way to ruin as the other. This psalm is intended, 1. As a reproof to the carnal Jews, both those that rested in the external performances of their religion, and were remiss in the more excellent duties of prayer and praise; and those that expounded the law to others, but lived wicked lives themselves. 2. As a prediction of the abolishing of the ceremonial law, and of the introducing of a spiritual way of worship, in and by the kingdom of the Messiah, John 4. 23, 24. 3. As a representation of the day of judgment, in which God will call men to an account concerning their observance of those things which they have thus been taught; men shall be judged according to what is written in the books; and therefore Christ is fitly represented speaking as a Judge, then when he speaks as a Lawgiver. Here is, I. The glorious appearance of the Prince that gives law and judgment, v. 1. 6. II. Instruction given to his worshippers, to turn their sacrifices into prayers, v. 7. 15. III. A rebuke to those that pretend to worship God, but live in disobedience to his commands; (v. 16. 20.) their doom read; (v. 21, 22.) and warning given to all to look to their conversation as well as to their devotions, v. 23. These instructions and admonitions we must take to ourselves and give to one another, in singing this psalm.

A psalm of Asaph.

1. **T**HE mighty God, *even the LORD*, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. 2. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. 3. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. 4. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. 5. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. 6. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.

It is probable that Asaph was not only the chief musician, who was to put a tune to this psalm, but that he was himself the penman of it; for we read that in Hezekiah's time they praised God in the words of David, and of Asaph the seer, 2 Chron. 29. 30.

Here is,

I. The court called, in the name of the King of kings; (v. 1.) *The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken*; El, Elohim, Jehovah, the God of infinite power, justice, and mercy, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. God is the Judge, the Son of God came for judgment into the world, and the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of judgment. All the earth is called to attend, not only because the controversy God had with his people Israel, for their hypocrisy and ingratitude, might safely be referred to any man of reason; nay, let the house of Israel itself judge between God and his vineyard; (Isa. 5. 3.) but because all the children of men are concerned to know the right way of worshipping God, in spirit and in truth; because, when the kingdom of the Messiah should be set up, all should be in-

structed in the evangelical worship, and invited to join in it, (see Mal. 1. 11. Acts. 10. 34.) and because, in the day of final judgment, all nations shall be gathered together, to receive their doom, and every man shall give an account of himself unto God.

II. The judgment set, and the Judge taking his seat. As, when God gave the law to Israel in the wilderness, it is said, *He came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir, and shined forth from mount Paran, and came with ten thousands of his saints, and then from his right hand went a fiery law*; (Deut. 33. 2.) so, with allusion to that, when God comes to reprove them for their hypocrisy, and to send forth his gospel to supersede the legal institutions, it is said here, 1. That *he shall shine out of Zion*, as then from the top of Sinai, v. 2. Because in Zion his oracle was now fixed, thence his judgments upon that provoking people were denounced, and thence the orders issued for the execution of them; (Joel, 2. 1.) *Blow ye the trumpet in Zion*. Sometimes there are more than ordinary appearances of God's presence and power working with and by his word and ordinances, for the convincing of men's consciences, and the reforming and refining of his church; and then God, who always dwells in Zion, may be said to *shine out of Zion*. Moreover, he may be said to *shine out of Zion*, because the gospel, which set up spiritual worship, was to *go forth from mount Zion*, (Isa. 2. 3. Mic. 4. 2.) and the preachers of it were to *begin at Jerusalem*, (Luke, 24. 47.) and Christians are said to come unto mount Zion, to receive their instructions, Heb. 12. 22, 23. Zion is here called *the perfection of beauty*, because it was the holy hill; and holiness is indeed the perfection of beauty. 2. That *he shall come, and not keep silence*, shall no longer seem to wink at the sins of men, as he had done, (v. 21.) but shall shew his displeasure at them, and shall also cause that mystery to be published to the world by his holy apostles, which had long lain hid, *that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs*, (Eph. 3. 5, 6.) and that the partition-wall of the ceremonial law should be taken down; this shall now no longer be concealed. In the great day, *our God shall come, and shall not keep silence*, but shall make those to hear his judgment that would not hearken to his law. 3. That his appearance should be very majestic and terrible; *a fire shall devour before him*. The fire of his judgments shall make way for the rebukes of his word, in order to the awakening of the hypocritical nation of the Jews, that the sinners in Zion, being afraid of that devouring fire, (Isa. 33. 14.) might be startled out of their sins. When his gospel-kingdom was to be set up, Christ came to send fire on the earth, Luke, 12. 49. The Spirit was given in cloven tongues as of fire, introduced by a rushing mighty wind, which was very tempestuous, Acts, 2. 2, 3. And, in the last judgment, Christ shall come in flaming fire, 2 Thess. 1. 8. See Dan. 7. 9. Heb. 10. 27. 4. That as on mount Sinai he came with *ten thousands of his saints*, so he shall now call to the heavens from above, to take notice of this solemn process, (v. 4.) as Moses often called heaven and earth to witness against Israel, (Deut. 4. 26.—31. 28.—32. 1.) and God by his prophets, Isa. 1. 2. Mic. 6. 2. The equity of the judgment of the great day will be attested and applauded by heaven and earth, by saints and angels, even all the holy myriads.

III. The parties summoned; (v. 5.) *Gather my saints unto me*. This may be understood, either, 1. Of saints indeed; "Let them be gathered to God through Christ: let the few pious Israelites be set by themselves;" for to them the following denunciations of wrath do not belong; rebukes to hypocrites ought not to be terrors to the upright. When God will reject the services of those that only offered sacrifice, resting in the outside of the performance, he will graciously accept those who, in sacrificing, make a covenant with him, and so attend to, and answer, the end of the institution of sacrifices. The design of the preaching of the gospel, and the setting up of Christ's kingdom, was, to gather together in one the children of God, John, 11. 52. And, at the second coming of Jesus Christ, all his saints shall be gathered together unto him, (2 Thess. 2. 1.) to be assessors with him in the judgment, for the saints shall judge the world, 1 Cor. 6. 2. Now it is here given as a character of the saints, that they have made a covenant with God by sacrifice. Note, (1.) Those only shall be gathered to God as his saints, who have, in sincerity, covenanted with him, who have taken

him to be their God, and given up themselves to him to be his people, and thus have joined themselves unto the Lord. (2.) It is only by sacrifice, by Christ the great Sacrifice, (from whom all the legal sacrifices derived what value they had,) that we poor sinners can covenant with God, so as to be accepted of him. There must be an atonement made for the breach of the first covenant, before we can be admitted again into covenant. Or, 2. It may be understood of saints in profession, such as the people of Israel were, who are called a *kingdom of priests*, and a *holynation*, Exod. 19. 6. They were, as a body politic, taken into covenant with God, the covenant of peculiarity, and it was done with great solemnity by sacrifice, Exod. 24. 8. "Let them come and hear what God has to say to them; let them receive the reproofs God sends them now by his prophets, and the gospel he will, in due time, send them by his Son; which shall supersede the ceremonial law. If these be slighted, let them expect to hear from God another way, and to be judged by that word which they will not be ruled by."

IV. The issue of this solemn trial foretold; (v. 6.) *The heavens shall declare his righteousness*; those heavens that were called to be witnesses to the trial; (v. 4.) *the people in heaven shall say, Hallelujah. True and righteous are his judgments*, Rev. 19. 1, 2. The righteousness of God, in all the rebukes of his word and providence, in the establishment of his gospel, (which brings in an everlasting righteousness, and in which the righteousness of God is revealed,) and especially in the judgment of the great day, is what the heavens will declare, 1. It will be universally known, and proclaimed to all the world. *As the heavens declare the glory*, the wisdom, and power, of God the Creator, (19. 1.) so they shall no less openly declare the glory, the justice, and righteousness, of God the Judge; and so loud do they proclaim both, that *there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard*, as it follows there, v. 3. 2. It will be incontestably owned and proved; who can deny what the heavens declare? Even sinners' own consciences will subscribe to it, and hell as well as heaven will be forced to acknowledge the righteousness of God. The reason given, is, *for God is Judge himself*, and therefore, (1.) He will be just; for it is impossible he should do any wrong to any of his creatures, he never did, nor ever will. When men are employed to judge for him, they may do unjustly; but when he is Judge himself, there can be no injustice done. *Is God unrighteous, who takes vengeance?* The apostle, for this reason, startles at the thought of it; *God forbid! for then how shall God judge the world?* Rom. 3. 5, 6. These decisions will be perfectly just, for against them there will lie no exception, and from them there will lie no appeal. (2.) He will be justified; *God is Judge*, and therefore he will not only execute justice, but he will oblige all to own it; for he *will be clear when he judges*, 51. 4.

7. Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: *I am God, even thy God*. 8. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt-offerings, *to have been continually before me*. 9. I will take no bullock out of thy house, *nor* he-goats out of thy folds. 10. For every beast of the forest is mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills. 11. I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field *are* mine. 12. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. 13. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? 14. Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: 15. And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

God is here dealing with those that placed all their religion in the observances of the ceremonial law, and thought those sufficient.

I. He lays down the original contract between him and Israel,

in which they had avouched him to be their God, and he them to be his people, and so both parties were agreed; (v. 7.) *Hear, O my people, and I will speak*. Note, It is justly expected, that, whatever others do, when he speaks, his people should give ear; who will, if they do not? And then we may comfortably expect that God will speak to us, when we are ready to hear what he says; even when he testifies against us in the rebukes and threatenings of his word and providences, we must be forward to hear what he says, to hear even the *rod*, and him that has appointed it.

II. He puts a slight upon the legal sacrifices, v. 8, &c. Now,

1. This may be considered as looking back to the use of these under the law. God had a controversy with the Jews; but what was the ground of the controversy? Not their neglect of the ceremonial institutions; no, they had not been wanting in the observance of them, their burnt-offerings had been continually before God, they took a pride in them, and hoped by their offerings to procure a dispensation for their lusts, as the adulterous woman, Prov. 7. 14. Their constant sacrifices, they thought, would both expiate and excuse their neglect of the weightier matters of the law. Nay, if they had, in some degree, neglected these institutions, yet that should not have been the cause of God's quarrel with them, for it was but a small offence, in comparison with the immoralities of their conversation. They thought God was mightily beholden to them for the many sacrifices they had brought to his altar, and that they had made him very much their Debtor by them, as if he could not have maintained his numerous family of priests without their contributions; but God here shews them the contrary, (1.) That he did not need their sacrifices; what occasion had He for their bullocks and goats, who has the command of all *the beasts of the forest*, and the *cattle upon a thousand hills*, (v. 9, 10.) has an incontestable propriety in them, and dominion over them, has them all always under his eye, and within his reach, and can make what use he pleases of them? they all wait on him, and are all at his disposal; 104. 27. 29. Can we add any thing to his store, whose all the wild fowl and wild beasts are, the world itself and the fulness thereof? v. 11, 12. God's infinite self-sufficiency proves our utter insufficiency to add any thing to him. (2.) That he could not be benefited by their sacrifices. Their goodness, of this kind, could not possibly extend unto him, nor, if they were in this matter righteous, was he the better; (v. 13.) *Will I eat the flesh of bulls?* It is as absurd to think that their sacrifices could, of themselves, and by virtue of any innate excellency in them, add any pleasure or praise to God, as it would be to imagine that an infinite Spirit could be supported by meat and drink, as our bodies are. It is said indeed of the demons whom the Gentiles worshipped, that they did *eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drink the wine of their drink-offerings*, (Deut. 32. 38.) they regaled themselves in the homage they robbed the true God of; but will the great Jehovah be thus entertained? No, *to obey is better than sacrifice*, and to love God and our neighbour, *better than all burnt-offerings*, so much better, that God, by his prophets, often told them that their sacrifices were not only not acceptable, but abominable, to him, while they lived in sin; instead of pleasing him, he looked upon them as a mockery, and therefore an affront and provocation to him; see Prov. 15. 8. Isa. 1. 11, &c.—66. 3. Jer. 6. 20. Amos, 5. 21. They are therefore here warned not to rest in these performances; but to conduct themselves, in all other instances, toward God as their God.

2. This may be considered as looking forward to the abolishing of these by the gospel of Christ. Thus Dr. Hammond understands it. When God shall set up the kingdom of the Messiah, he shall abolish the old way of worship by sacrifice and offerings; he will no more have those to be *continually before him*; (v. 8.) he will no more require of his worshippers to bring him their bullocks and their goats, to be burnt upon his altar, v. 9. For indeed he never appointed this, as that which he had any need of, or took any pleasure in, for, besides that all we have is his already, he has far more beasts in the forest, and upon the mountains, which we know nothing of, nor have any property in, than we have in our folds; but he instituted it, to prefigure the great sacrifice which his own Son should, in the fulness of time, offer upon the cross, to make atone-

ment for sin, and all the other spiritual sacrifices of acknowledgment, with which God, through Christ, will be well pleased.

III. He directs to the best sacrifices of prayer and praise, as those which, under the law, were preferred before all burnt-offerings and sacrifices, and on which then the greatest stress was laid, and which now, under the gospel, come in the room of those carnal ordinances which were imposed until the times of reformation. He shews us here, (v. 14, 15.) what is good, and what the Lord our God requires of us, and will accept, when sacrifices are slighted and superseded. 1. We must make a penitent acknowledgment of our sins: offer to God *confession*; so some read it, and understand it of the confession of sin, in order to our giving glory to God, and taking shame to ourselves, that we may never return to it; *A broken and contrite heart is the sacrifice which God will not despise*, 51. 17. If the sin was not abandoned, the sin-offering was not accepted. 2. We must give God thanks for his mercies to us; *Offer to God thanksgiving*, every day, often every day, (*Seven times a day will I praise thee*), and upon special occasions; and *this shall please the Lord*, if it come from an humble thankful heart, full of love to him, and joy in him, *better than an ox or bullock, that has horns and hoofs*, 69. 30, 31. 3. We must make conscience of performing our covenants with him; *Pay thy vows to the Most High*, forsake thy sins, and do thy duty better, pursuant to the solemn promises thou hast made him to that purport. When we give God thanks for any mercy we have received, we must be sure to pay the vows we made to him when we were in the pursuit of the mercy, else our thanksgivings will not be accepted. Dr. Hammond applies this to the great gospel-ordinance of the eucharist, in which we are to give thanks to God for his great love in sending his Son to save us, and to pay our vows of love and duty to him, and to give alms. Instead of all the Old-Testament types of a Christ to come, we have that blessed memorial of a Christ already come. 4. In the day of distress, we must apply ourselves to God by faithful and fervent prayer; (v. 15.) *Call upon me in the day of trouble*, and not upon any other god. Our troubles, though we see them coming from God's hand, must drive us to him, and not drive us from him. We must thus acknowledge him in all our ways, depend upon his wisdom, power, and goodness, and refer ourselves entirely to him, and so give him glory. This is a cheaper, easier, readier, way of seeking his favour, than by a peace-offering, and yet more acceptable. 5. When he, in answer to our prayers, delivers us, as he has promised to do in such way and time as he shall think fit, we must glorify him, not only by a grateful mention of his favour, but by living to his praise. Thus must we keep up our communion with God; meeting him with our prayers when he afflicts us, and with our praises when he delivers us.

16. But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or *that* thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? 17. Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. 18. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. 19. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. 20. Thou sittest *and* speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. 21. These *things* hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether *such an one* as thyself: *but* I will reprove thee, and set *them* in order before thine eyes. 22. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear *you* in pieces, and *there* be none to deliver. 23. Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth *his* conversation *aright* will I shew the salvation of God.

God, by the psalmist, having instructed his people in the *right* way of worshipping him, and keeping up their communion with him, here directs his speech to the wicked, to hypocrites, whether they were such as professed the Jewish or the Christian religion. Hypocrisy is wickedness, for which God will judge. Observe here,

1. The charge drawn up against them.

1. They are charged with invading and usurping the honours and privileges of religion; (v. 16.) *What hast thou to do, O wicked man, to declare my statutes?* This is a challenge to those that are really profane, but seemingly godly, to shew what title they have to the cloak of religion, and by what authority they wear it, when they use it only to cover and conceal the abominable impieties of their hearts and lives. Let them make out their claim to it if they can. Some think it points prophetically at the Scribes and Pharisees, that were the teachers and leaders of the Jewish church, at the time when the kingdom of the Messiah, and that evangelical way of worship spoken of in the foregoing verses, were to be set up. They violently opposed that great revolution, and used all the power and interest which they had by sitting in Moses's seat to hinder it; but the account which our blessed Saviour gives of them, (Matth. 23.) and St. Paul, (Rom. 2. 21, 22.) makes this expostulation here agree very well to them. They took on them to declare God's statutes, but they hated Christ's instruction; and therefore what had they to do, to expound the law, who rejected the gospel? But it is applicable to all those that are practisers of iniquity, and yet professors of piety, especially if withal they be preachers of it. Note, It is very absurd in itself, and a great affront to the God of heaven, for those that are wicked and ungodly, to declare his statutes, and to take his covenant in their mouths. It is very possible, and too common, for those that declare God's statutes to others, to live in disobedience to them themselves; and for those that take God's covenant in their mouths, in their hearts to continue their covenant with sin and death; but they are guilty of an usurpation, they take to themselves an honour which they have no title to, and there is a day coming, when they will be thrust out as intruders, *Friend, how camest thou in hither?*

2. They are charged with transgressing and violating the laws and precepts of religion.

(1.) They are charged with a daring contempt of the word of God; (v. 17.) *Thou hatest instruction*. They loved to give instruction, and to tell others what they should do, for this fed their pride, and made them look great, and by this craft they got their living; but they hated to receive instruction from God himself, for that would be a check upon them, and a mortification to them; "Thou hatest discipline, the reproofs of the word, and the rebukes of Providence." No wonder that those who hate to be reformed hate the means of reformation; *Thou castest my words behind thee*. They seemed to set God's words before them, when they sat in Moses's seat, and undertook to teach others out of the law; (Rom. 2. 19.) but in their conversations they cast God's Word behind them, and did not care for seeing that rule which they were resolved not to be ruled by. This is despising the commandment of the Lord. (2.) A close confederacy with the worst of sinners; (v. 18.) "*When thou sawest a thief*, instead of reproofing him and witnessing against him, as those should do that declare God's statutes, thou consentedst with him, didst approve of his practices, and desire to be a partner with him, and to share in the profits of his cursed trade; and *thou hast been partaker with adulterers*, hast done as they did, and encouraged them to go on in their wicked courses; hast done these things, and hast *had pleasure in them that do them*," Rom. 1. 32. (3.) A constant persisting in the worst of tongue-sins; (v. 19.) "*Thou givest thy mouth to evil*; not only allowest thyself in, but additest thyself wholly to, all manner of evil speaking." [1.] *Lying*; *Thy tongue frames deceit*, which denotes contrivance and deliberation in lying. It knits or links deceit; so some. One lie begets another, and one fraud requires another to cover it. [2.] *Slandering*; (v. 20.) "*Thou sittest, and speakest against thy brother*, dost basely abuse and misrepresent him, magisterially judge and censure him, and pass sentence upon him, as if thou wert his master, to whom he must stand or fall, whereas he is thy brother, as good as thou

art, and upon the level with thee, for he is *thine own mother's son*. He is thy near relation, whom thou oughtest to love, to vindicate, and stand up for, if others abused him; yet thou dost thyself abuse him, whose faults thou oughtest to cover and make the best of; if really he had done amiss, yet thou dost most falsely and unjustly charge him with that which he is innocent of; *thou sittest*, and doest this, as a judge upon the bench, with authority; thou sittest in the seat of the scornful, to deride and backbite those whom thou oughtest to respect and be kind to." Those that do ill themselves, commonly delight in speaking ill of others.

II. The proof of this charge; (v. 21.) "*These things thou hast done*; the fact is too plain to be denied, the fault too bad to be excused; these things, God knows, and thine own heart knows, thou hast done." The sins of sinners will be proved upon them, beyond contradiction, in the judgment of the great day; "*I will reprove thee*, or convince thee, so that thou shalt have not one word to say for thyself." The day is coming when impenitent sinners will have their mouths for ever stopped, and be struck speechless. What confusion will they be filled with, when God shall set their sins in order before their eyes! They would not see their sins to their humiliation, but cast them behind their backs, covered them, and endeavoured to forget them, nor would they suffer their own consciences to put them in mind of them; but the day is coming when God will make them see their sins to their everlasting shame and terror; he will set them in order, original sin, actual sins, sins against the law, sins against the gospel, against the first table, against the second table, sins of childhood and youth, of riper age, and old age. He will set them in order, as the witnesses are set in order, and called in order, against the criminal, and asked what they have to say against him.

III. The Judge's patience, and the sinner's abuse of that patience; "I kept silence, did not give thee any disturbance in thy sinful way, but let thee alone to take thy course; sentence against thine evil works was respited, and not executed speedily." Note, The patience of God is very great toward provoking sinners. He sees their sins, and hates them; it would be neither difficulty nor damage to him, to punish them, and yet he waits to be gracious, and gives them space to repent, that he may render them inexcusable if they repent not. His patience is the more wonderful, because the sinner makes such an ill use of it; "*Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself*, as weak and forgetful as thyself, as false to my word as thyself, nay, as much a friend to sin as thyself." Sinners take God's silence for consent, and his patience for connivance; and therefore the longer they are reprieved, the more are their hearts hardened; but, if they turn not, they shall be made to see their error when it is too late, and that the God they provoke is just, and holy, and terrible, and not such a one as themselves.

IV. The fair warning given of the dreadful doom of hypocrites; (v. 22.) "*Now consider this, ye that forget God*; consider that God knows, and keeps accounts of, all your sins; that he will call you to an account for them; that patience, abused, will turn into the greater wrath; that though you forget God, and your duty to him, he will not forget you, and your rebellions against him: consider this in time, before it be too late; for if these things be not considered, and the consideration of them improved, he will *tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver*." It is the doom of hypocrites to be *cut in sunder*, Matth. 24. 51. Note, 1. Forgetfulness of God is at the bottom of all the wickedness of the wicked. They that know God, and yet do not obey him, do certainly forget him. 2. Those that forget God forget themselves; and it will never be right with them, till they consider, and so recover themselves. Consideration is the first step toward conversion. 3. Those that will not consider the warnings of God's word will certainly be torn in pieces by the executions of his wrath. 4. When God comes to tear sinners in pieces, there is no delivering them out of his hand. They cannot deliver themselves, nor can any friend they have in the world deliver them.

V. Full instructions given to us all, how to prevent this fearful doom. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; we have

it, v. 23. which directs us what to do, that we may attain our chief end.

1. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and we are here told, that who offers praise glorifies him; whether he be Jew or Gentile, those spiritual sacrifices shall be accepted from him. We must praise God, and we must sacrifice praise, direct it to God, as every sacrifice was directed; put it into the hands of the Priest, our Lord Jesus, who is also the Altar; see that it be made by fire, sacred fire, that it be kindled with the flame of holy and devout affection; we must be fervent in spirit, praising the Lord. This he is pleased, in infinite condescension, to interpret as glorifying him. Hereby we give him the glory due to his name, and do what we can to advance the interests of his kingdom among men.

2. Man's chief end, in conjunction with this, is, to enjoy God; and we are here told that those who order their conversation aright shall see his salvation. (1.) It is not enough for us to offer praise, but we must withal order our conversation aright. Thanksgiving is good, but thanks-living is better. (2.) Those that would have their conversation right must take care and pains to order it; to dispose it according to rule; to understand their way, and to direct it. (3.) Those that take care of their conversation make sure their salvation; them God will make to see his salvation; for it is a salvation ready to be revealed; he will make them to see it and enjoy it, to see it, and to see themselves happy for ever in it. Note, The right ordering of the conversation is the only way, and it is a sure way, to obtain the great salvation.

PSALM LI.

Though David penned this psalm upon a very particular occasion, yet it is of as general use as any of David's psalms; it is the most eminent of the penitential psalms, and most expressive of the cares and desires of a repenting sinner. It is pity indeed, that, in our devout addresses to God, we should have any thing else to do than to praise God, for that is the work of heaven; but we make other work for ourselves, by our own sins and follies: we must come to the throne of grace in the posture of penitents, to confess our sins, and sue for the grace of God; and if therein we would take with us words, we can no where find any more apposite than in this psalm, which is the record of David's repentance for his sin in the matter of Uriah, which was the greatest blemish upon his character: all the rest of his faults were nothing to this; it is said of him, (1 Kings, 15. 5.) That he turned not aside from the commandment of the Lord all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. In this psalm, I. He confesses his sin, v. 3..6. II. He prays earnestly for the pardon of his sin, v. 1, 2, 7, 9. III. For peace of conscience, v. 8, 12. IV. For grace to go and sin no more, v. 10, 11, 14. V. For liberty of access to God, v. 15. VI. He promises to do what he could for the good of the souls of others, (v. 13.) and for the glory of God, v. 16, 17, 12. And lastly, concludes with a prayer for Zion and Jerusalem, v. 18. Those whose consciences charge them with any gross sin should, with a believing regard to Jesus Christ, the Mediator, again and again pray over this psalm; nay, though we have not been guilty of adultery and murder, or any the like enormous crime, yet, in singing it, and prying over it, we may very sensibly apply it to all ourselves, which if we do with suitable affections, we shall, through Christ, find mercy's pardon, and grace for seasonable help.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

1. **H**AVE mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. 2. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. 3. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. 4. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. 5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me. 6. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

The title has reference to a very sad story, that of David's fall. But, though he fell, he was not utterly cast down, for God graciously upheld him, and raised him up. 1. The sin which, in this psalm, he laments, was, the folly and wickedness he committed with his neighbour's wife; a sin not to be spoken of, or thought of, without detestation. His debauching of Bathsheba was the inlet to all the other sins that followed; it was as the letting forth of water. This sin of David's is recorded for warning to all, that he who thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall. 2. The repentance which, in this psalm, he expresses, he was brought to by the ministry of Nathan, who was sent of God to convince him of his sin, after he had continued above nine months (for aught that appears) without any particular expressions of remorse and sorrow for it. But though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, and to lie a great while in it, yet he will, by some means or other, recover them to repentance, bring them to himself, and to their right mind, again. Herein, generally, he uses the ministry of the word, which yet he is not tied to. But those that have been overtaken in any fault, ought to reckon a faithful reproof the greatest kindness that can be done them, and a wise reprover their best friend. *Let the righteous smite me, and it shall be excellent oil.* 3. David, being convinced of his sin, poured out his soul to God in prayer for mercy and grace. Whither should backsliding children return, but to the Lord their God, from whom they have backslidden, and who alone can heal their backslidings? 4. He drew up, by divine inspiration, the workings of his heart toward God, upon this occasion, into a psalm, that it might be often repeated, and long after reviewed; and this he committed to the chief musician, to be sung in the public service of the church. (1.) As a profession of his own repentance, which he would have to be generally taken notice of; his sin having been notorious, that the plaster might be as wide as the wound. Those that truly repent of their sins will not be ashamed to own their repentance; but, having lost the honour of innocents, will rather covet the honour of penitents. (2.) As a pattern to others, both to bring them to repentance by his example, and to instruct them, in their repentance, what to do, and what to say. Being converted himself, he thus *strengthens his brethren*; (Luke, 22. 32.) and, *for this cause he obtained mercy*, 1 Tim. 1. 10.

In these words, we have,

I. David's humble petition, v. 1, 2. His prayer is much the same with that which our Saviour puts into the mouth of his penitent publican in the parable; *God be merciful to me a sinner!* Luke, 18. 13. David was, upon many accounts, a man of great merit; he had not only done much, but suffered much, in the cause of God; and yet, when he is convinced of sin, he does not offer to balance his evil deeds with his good deeds, nor can he think that his services will atone for his offences; but he flies to God's infinite mercy, and depends upon that only for pardon and peace; *Have mercy upon me, O God.* He owns himself obnoxious to God's justice, and therefore casts himself upon his mercy; and it is certain that the best man in the world is undone, if God be not merciful to him. Observe,

1. What his plea is for this mercy; *"Have mercy upon me, O God, not according to the dignity of my birth, as descended from the prince of the tribe of Judah, not according to my public services as Israel's champion, or my public honours as Israel's king;"* his plea is not, *Lord, remember David and all his afflictions, how he vowed to build a place for the ark*; (132. 1, 2.) a true penitent will make no mention of any such thing; but, *"Have mercy upon me for thy mercy's sake. I have nothing to plead with thee, but,"* (1.) *"The freeness of thy mercy, according to thy loving-kindness, thy clemency, the goodness of thy nature, which inclines thee to pity the miserable."* (2.) *"The fulness of thy mercy. There is in thee not only loving-kindness and tender mercies, but abundance of it, a multitude of tender mercies for the forgiveness of many sinners, of many sins, to multiply pardons as we multiply transgressions."*

2. What is the particular mercy that he begs; the pardon of sin; *Blot out my transgressions*, as a debt is blotted or crossed out of the book, when either the debtor has paid it, or the creditor

has remitted it; *"Wipe out my transgressions, that they may not appear to demand judgment against me, nor stare me in the face, to my confusion and terror."* The blood of Christ, sprinkled upon the conscience, to purify and pacify that, blots out the transgression, and, having reconciled us to God, reconciles us to ourselves, v. 2. *"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity; wash my soul from the guilt and stain of my sin by thy mercy and grace; for it is only from a ceremonial pollution that the water of separation will avail to cleanse me. Multiply to wash me; the stain is deep, for I have lain long soaking in the guilt, so that it will not easily be got out. Oh wash me much, wash me thoroughly; cleanse me from my sin."* Sin defiles us, renders us odious in the sight of the holy God, and uneasy to ourselves; it unfits us for communion with God, in grace or glory. When God pardons sin, he cleanses us from it, so that we become acceptable to him, easy to ourselves, and have liberty of access to him. Nathan had assured David, upon his first profession of repentance, that his sin was pardoned; *The Lord has taken away thy sin, thou shalt not die*; (2 Sam. 12. 13.) yet he prays, *Wash me, cleanse me; blot out my transgressions*; for God will be sought unto, even for that which he has promised; and those whose sins are pardoned must pray that the pardon may be more and more cleared up to them. God had forgiven him, but he could not forgive himself; and therefore he is thus importunate for pardon, as one that thought himself unworthy of it, and knew how to value it.

II. David's penitential confessions, v. 3. 5. 1. He was very free to own his guilt before God; *I acknowledge my transgressions*; this he had formerly found the only way of easing his conscience, 32. 4, 5. Nathan said, *Thou art the man; I am*, says David; *I have sinned.* 2. He had such a deep sense of it, that he was continually thinking of it, with sorrow and shame. His contrition for his sin was not a slight sudden passion, but an abiding grief; *"My sin is ever before me, to humble me and mortify me, and make me continually blush and tremble. It is ever against me;"* (so some); *"I see it before me as an enemy, accusing and threatening me."* David was, upon all occasions, put in mind of his sin, and was willing to be so, for his further abasement. He never walked on the roof of his house without a penitent reflection on his unhappy walk there, when from thence he saw Bathsheba; never lay down to sleep, without a sorrowful thought of the bed of his uncleanness; never sat down to meat, never sent his servant on an errand, or took his pen in hand, but it put him in mind of his making Uriah drunk, the treacherous message he sent by him, and the fatal warrant he wrote, and signed, for his execution. Note, The acts of repentance, even for the same sin, must be often repeated. It will be of good use for us to have our sins ever before us, that by the remembrance of our past sins we may be kept humble, may be armed against temptation, quickened to duty, and made patient under the cross.

(1.) He confesses his actual transgressions; (v. 4.) *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.* David was a very great man, and yet, having done amiss, submits to the discipline of a penitent, and thinks not his royal dignity will excuse him from it. Rich and poor must here meet together; there is one law of repentance for both; the greatest must be judged shortly, and therefore must judge themselves now. David was a very good man, and yet, having sinned, he willingly accommodates himself to the place and posture of a penitent. The best men, if they sin, should give the best example of repentance.

[1.] His confession is particular; *"I have done this evil, this that I am now reproved for, this that my own conscience now upbraids me with."* Note, It is good to be particular in the confession of sin, that we may be the more express in praying for pardon, and so may have the more comfort in it. We ought to reflect upon the particular heads of our sins of infirmity, and the particular circumstances of our gross sins.

[2.] He aggravates the sin which he confesses, and lays a load upon himself for it; *Against thee, and in thy sight.* Hence our Saviour seems to borrow the confession which he puts into the mouth of the returning prodigal; *I have sinned against Heaven and before thee*, Luke, 15. 18. Two things David laments in his

sin. *First*, That it was committed against God. To him the affront is given, and he is the Party wronged. It is his truth that by wilful sin we deny; his conduct that we despise; his command that we disobey; his promise that we distrust; his name that we dishonour; and it is with him that we deal deceitfully and disingenuously. From this topic Joseph fetched the great argument against sin, (Gen. 39. 9.) and David here the great aggravation of it; *Against thee only*. Some make this to bespeak the prerogative of his crown, that, as a king, he was not accountable to any but God; but it is more agreeable to his present temper, to suppose that it bespeaks the deep contrition of his soul for his sin, and that it was upon right grounds. He here sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah; against his own soul and body, and family; against his kingdom, and against the church of God; and all this helped to humble him; but none of these were sinned against so as God was; and therefore this he lays the most sorrowful accent upon; *Against thee only have I sinned*. *Secondly*, That it was committed in God's sight; "This not only proves it upon me, but renders it exceeding sinful." This should greatly humble us for all our sins, that they have been committed under the eye of God, which argues either a disbelief of his omniscience, or a contempt of his justice.

[3.] He justifies God in the sentence passed upon him; for that *the sword shall never depart from his house*, 2 Sam. 12. 10, 11. He is very forward to own his sin, and aggravate it, not only that he might obtain the pardon of it himself, but that by his confession he might give honour to God; *First*, That God might be justified in the threatenings he had spoken by Nathan; "Lord, I have nothing to say against the justice of them; I deserve what is threatened, and a thousand times worse." Thus Eli acquiesced in the like threatenings, (1 Sam. 3. 13.) *It is the Lord*. And Hezekiah, (2 Kings, 20. 19.) *Good is the word of the Lord, which thou hast spoken*. *Secondly*, That God might be clear when he judged, when he executed those threatenings. David published his confession of sin, that, when hereafter he should come into trouble, none might say, God had done him any wrong; for he owns the Lord is righteous: thus will all true penitents justify God by condemning themselves; *Thou art just in all that is brought upon us*.

(2.) He confesses his original corruption; (v. 5.) *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity*. He does not call upon God to behold it, but unto himself. "Come, my soul, look unto the rock out of which I was hewn, and thou wilt find I was shapen in iniquity. Had I duly considered this before, I find I should not have made so bold with the temptation, nor have ventured among the sparks with such tinder in my heart; and so the sin might have been prevented: let me consider it now, not to excuse or extenuate the sin; *Lord, I did so; but indeed I could not help it, my inclination led me to it*;" (for as that plea is false, with due care and watchfulness, and improvement of the grace of God, he might have helped it; so it is what a true penitent never offers to put in;) "but let me consider it rather as an aggravation of the sin; Lord, I have not only been guilty of adultery and murder, but I have an adulterous murderous nature; therefore I abhor myself." David elsewhere speaks of the admirable structure of his body, (139. 14, 15.) it was *curiously wrought*; and yet here he says it was shapen in iniquity, sin was twisted in with it; not as it came out of God's hands, but as it comes through our parents' loins. He elsewhere speaks of the piety of his mother, that she was God's handmaid, and he pleads his relation to her; (116. 16.—86. 16.) and yet he here says *she conceived him in sin*; for though she was, by grace, a child of God, she was, by nature, a daughter of Eve, and not excepted from the common character. Note, It is to be sadly lamented by every one of us, that we brought into the world with us a corrupt nature, wretchedly degenerated from its primitive purity and rectitude; we have, from our birth, the snares of sin in our bodies, the seeds of sin in our souls, and a stain of sin upon both. This is what we call *original sin*, because it is as ancient as our original, and because it is the original of all our actual transgressions. This is that foolishness which is bound in the heart of a child, the proneness to evil, and backward-

ness to good, which is the burthen of the regenerate, and the ruin of the unregenerate; it is a bent to backslide from God.

III. David's acknowledgment of the grace of God; (v. 6.) both his good-will toward us, (*Thou desirest truth in the inward parts*;) "Thou wouldest have us all honest and sincere, and true to our profession;" and his good work in us, "In the hidden part thou hast made," or shalt make, "me to know wisdom." Note, 1. Truth and wisdom will go very far toward making a man a good man. A clear head and a sound heart (prudence and sincerity) bespeak the man of God perfect. 2. What God requires of us, he himself works in us, and he works it in the regular way, enlightening the mind, and so gaining the will. But how does this come in here? (1.) God is hereby justified and cleared; "Lord, thou wast not the Author of my sin; there is no blame to be laid upon thee; but I alone must bear it; for thou hast many a time admonished me to be sincere, and hast made me to know that which, if I had duly considered it, would have prevented my falling into this sin; had I improved the grace thou hast given me, I had kept mine integrity." (2.) The sin is hereby aggravated; "Lord, thou desirest truth; but where was it when I dissembled with Uriah? *Thou hast made me to know wisdom*; but I have not lived up to what I have known." (3.) He is hereby encouraged, in his repentance, to hope that God would graciously accept of him; for, [1.] God had made him sincere in his resolutions never to return to folly again; *Thou desirest truth in the inward part*; this is that which God has an eye to, in a returning sinner, that *in his spirit there be no guile*, 32. 2. David was conscious to himself of the uprightness of his heart toward God, in his repentance, and therefore doubted not but God would accept him. [2.] He hoped that God would enable him to make good his resolutions, that, in the hidden part, in the new man, which is called the *hidden man of the heart*, (1 Pet. 3. 4.) he would make him to know wisdom, so as to discern and avoid the designs of the tempter, another time. Some read it as a prayer; "Lord, in this instance, I have done foolishly; for the future, make me to know wisdom." Where there is truth, God will give wisdom; those that sincerely endeavour to do their duty, shall be taught their duty.

7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8. Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice. 9. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. 10. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. 11. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me. 12. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free Spirit. 13. *Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

See here,

I. What David prays for; many excellent petitions he here puts up; to which, if we do but add, for Christ's sake, they are as evangelical as any other.

1. He prays that God would cleanse him from his sins, and the defilement he had contracted by them; (v. 7.) "*Purge me with hyssop*; pardon my sins, and let me know that they are pardoned, that I may be restored to those privileges which by sin I have forfeited and lost." The expression here alludes to a ceremonial distinction, that of cleansing the leper, or those that were unclean by the touch of a body, by sprinkling water, or blood, or both, upon them, with a bunch of hyssop, by which they were, at length, discharged from the restraints they were laid under by their pollution. "Lord, let me be as well assured of my restoration to thy favour, and to the privilege of communion with-

thee, as they were thereby assured of their re-admission to their former privileges." But it is founded upon gospel-grace; *Purge me with hyssop*, with the blood of Christ applied to my soul by a lively faith, as water of purification was sprinkled with a bunch of hyssop. It is the blood of Christ, which is therefore called *the blood of sprinkling*, (Heb. 12. 24.) that purges the conscience from dead works, from that guilt of sin, and dread of God, which shut us out of communion with him, as the touch of a dead body, under the law, shut a man out from the courts of God's house. If this blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin, cleanse us from our sin, then we shall be clean indeed, Heb. 10. 2. If we be washed in this fountain opened, we shall be whiter than snow; not only acquitted, but accepted; so those are, that are justified; (Isa. 1. 18.) *Though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.*

2. He prays that, his sins being pardoned, he might have the comfort of that pardon. He asks not to be comforted, till first he is cleansed; but if sin, the bitter root of sorrow, be taken away, he can pray in faith, *"Make me to hear joy and gladness;"* (v. 8.) let me have a well-grounded peace, of thy creating, thy speaking, so that the bones which thou hast broken by convictions and threatenings, may rejoice, may not only be set again, and eased from the pain, but may be sensibly comforted, and, as the prophet speaks, may flourish as an herb." Note, (1.) The pain of an heart truly broken for sin, may well be compared to that of a broken bone; and it is the same Spirit who, as a Spirit of bondage, smites and wounds, and, as a Spirit of adoption, heals and binds up. (2.) The comfort and joy that arise from a sealed pardon to a penitent sinner, are as refreshing as perfect ease from the most exquisite pain. (3.) It is God's work, not only to speak this joy and gladness, but to make us hear it, and take the comfort of it. He earnestly desires that God would lift up the light of his countenance upon him, and so put gladness into his heart; that he would not only be reconciled to him, but, which is a further act of grace, let him know that he was so.

3. He prays for a complete and effectual pardon. This is that which he is most earnest for, as the foundation of his comfort; (v. 9.) *"Hide thy face from my sins;"* be not provoked by them to deal with me as I deserve; they are ever before me, let them be cast behind thy back; blot out all mine iniquities out of the book of thine account; blot them out, as a cloud is blotted out and dispelled by the beams of the sun," Isa. 44. 22.

4. He prays for sanctifying grace; and this every true penitent is as earnest for, as for pardon and peace, v. 10. He does not pray, "Lord, preserve me my reputation," as Saul, *I have sinned, yet honour me before this people.* No, his great concern is, to get his corrupt nature changed: the sin he had been guilty of, was, (1.) An evidence of its impurity, and therefore he prays, *Create in me a clean heart, O God.* He now saw, more than ever, what an unclean heart he had, and sadly laments it, but sees it is not in his own power to amend it, and therefore begs of God, (whose prerogative it is to create,) that he would create in him a clean heart. He only that made the heart, can new make it; and to his power nothing is impossible. He created the world by the word of his power, as the God of nature, and it is by the word of his power as the God of grace that *we are clean*, (John, 15. 3.) that *we are sanctified*, John, 17. 17. (2.) It was the cause of its disorder, and undid much of the good work that had been wrought in him; and therefore he prays, *"Lord, renew a right spirit within me;"* repair the decays of spiritual strength, which this sin has been the cause of, and set me to rights again." Renew a constant spirit within me; so some. He had, in this matter, discovered much inconstancy and inconsistency with himself, and therefore prays, "Lord, fix me for the time to come, that I may never in like manner depart from thee."

5. He prays for the continuance of God's good-will toward him, and the progress of his good work in him, v. 11. (1.) That he might never be shut out from God's favour; *"Cast me not away from thy presence,"* as one whom thou abhorrest, and canst not endure to look upon." He prays, that he might not be thrown out of God's protection, but that, wherever he went, he might have

the divine presence with him, might be under the guidance of his wisdom, and in the custody of his power, and that he might not be forbidden communion with God; "Let me not be banished thy courts, but always have liberty of access to thee by prayer." He does not deprecate the temporal judgments which God by Nathan had threatened to bring upon him; "God's will be done;" but, "Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath. If the sword come into my house never to depart from it, yet let me have a God to go to in my distresses, and all shall be well." (2.) That he might never be deprived of God's grace; *Take not thy holy Spirit from me.* He knew he had by his sin grieved the Spirit, and provoked him to withdraw; and that, because he also was flesh, God might justly have said that his Spirit should no more strive with him, or work upon him, Gen. 6. 3. This he dreads, more than any thing; we are undone, if God take his holy Spirit from us. Saul was a sad instance of this. How exceeding sinful, how exceeding miserable, was he, when the Spirit of the Lord was departed from him! David knew it, and therefore begs thus earnestly; "Lord, whatever thou take from me, my children, my crown, my life, yet *take not thy holy Spirit from me,*" (see 2 Sam. 7. 15.) "but continue thy holy Spirit with me, to perfect the work of my repentance, to prevent my relapse into sin, and to enable me to discharge my duty both as a prince and as a psalmist."

6. He prays for the restoration of divine comforts, and the perpetual communications of divine grace, v. 12. David finds two ill effects of his sin; (1.) It had made him sad, and therefore he prays, *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.* A child of God knows no true nor solid joy, but the joy of God's salvation, joy in God his Saviour, and in the hope of eternal life. By wilful sin we forfeit this joy, and deprive ourselves of it; our evidences cannot but be clouded, and our hopes shaken; when we give ourselves so much cause to doubt of our interest in the salvation, how can we expect the joy of it? But when we truly repent, we may pray and hope that God will restore to us those joys. They that sow in penitential tears, shall reap in the joys of God's salvation, when the times of refreshing shall come. (2.) It had made him weak, and therefore he prays, *"Uphold me with thy free Spirit;"* I am ready to fall, either into sin or into despair; Lord, sustain me; my own spirit" (though the spirit of a man will go far toward the sustaining his infirmity) "is not sufficient, if I be left to myself, I shall certainly sink; therefore uphold me with thy Spirit, let him counter-work the evil spirit that would cast me down from mine excellency. Thy Spirit is a free spirit, a free agent himself, working freely," (and that makes those free, whom he works upon, for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;) "thy ingenuous princely Spirit." He was conscious to himself of having acted, in the matter of Uriah, very disingenuously, and unlike a prince; his behaviour was base and paltry: "Lord," says he, "let thy Spirit inspire my soul with noble and generous principles, that I may always act as becomes me." A free spirit will be a firm and fixed spirit, and will uphold us. The more cheerful we are in our duty, the more constant we shall be to it.

II. See what David here promises, v. 13. Observe, 1. What good work he promises God; *I will teach transgressors thy ways.* David had been himself a transgressor, and therefore could speak experimentally to transgressors, and resolves, having himself found mercy with God in the way of repentance, to teach others God's ways; (1.) Our way to God by repentance; he would teach others that had sinned, to take the same course that he had taken, to humble themselves, to confess their sins, and seek God's face; and, (2.) God's way towards us in pardoning mercy; how ready he is to receive those that return to him. He taught the former by his own example, for the direction of sinners in repenting: he taught the latter by his own experience, for their encouragement. By this psalm he is, and will be to the world's end, teaching transgressors, telling them what God had done for his soul. Note, Penitents should be preachers; Solomon was so, and blessed Paul. 2. What good effect he promises himself from his doing this; *"Sinners shall be converted unto thee, and shall*

neither persist in their wanderings from thee, nor despair of finding mercy in their returns to thee." The great thing to be aimed at in teaching transgressors, is, their conversion to God; that is a happy point gained, and happy they that are instrumental to contribute towards it, Jam. 5. 20.

14. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. 15. O LORD, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. 16. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering. 17. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. 18. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. 19. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

2. David prays against the guilt of sin, and prays for the grace of God, enforcing both petitions from a plea taken from the glory of God, which he promises with thankfulness to shew forth.

1. He prays against the guilt of sin, that he might be delivered from that, and promises that then he would praise God, v. 14. The particular sin he prays against, is, blood-guiltiness, the sin he had now been guilty of, having slain Uriah with the sword of the children of Ammon. Hitherto, perhaps, he had stopped the mouth of conscience with that frivolous excuse, that he did not kill him himself; but now he was convinced that he was the murderer, and, hearing the blood cry to God for vengeance, he cries to God for mercy, "*Deliver me from blood-guiltiness*; let me not lie under the guilt of the kind I have contracted, but let it be pardoned to me, and let me never be left to myself to contract the like guilt again." Note, It concerns us all to pray earnestly against the guilt of blood. In this prayer, he eyes God as the God of salvation. Note, Those to whom God is the God of salvation, he will deliver from guilt; for the salvation he is the God of, is, salvation from sin. We may therefore plead this with him, "Lord, thou art the God of my salvation, therefore deliver me from the dominion of sin." He promises, that, if God would deliver him, *his tongue should sing aloud of his righteousness*; God should have the glory both of pardoning mercy, and of preventing grace. God's righteousness is often put for his grace, especially in the great business of justification and sanctification. This he would comfort himself in, and therefore sing of; and this he would endeavour both to acquaint and to affect others with; he would sing aloud of it. This all those should do that have had the benefit of it, and owe their all to it.

2. He prays for the grace of God, and promises to improve that grace to his glory; (v. 15.) "*O Lord, open thou my lips*, not only that I may teach and instruct sinners," (which the best preacher cannot do to any purpose, unless God give him the opening of the mouth, and the tongue of the learned,) "*but that my mouth may shew forth thy praise*; not only that I may have abundant matter for praise, but a heart enlarged in praise." Guilt had closed his lips, had gone near to stop the mouth of prayer; he could not for shame, he could not for fear, come into the presence of that God whom he knew he had offended, much less speak to him; his heart condemned him, and therefore he had little confidence toward God: it cast a damp particularly upon his praises; when he had lost the joys of his salvation, his harp was hung upon the willow-trees; therefore he prays, "*Lord, open my lips*, put my heart in tune for praise again." To them that are tongue-tied by reason of guilt, the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins says effectually, *Ephphatha—Be opened*; and when the

lips are opened, what should they speak but the praises of God, as Zacharias did? Luke, 1. 64.

II. David offers the sacrifice of a penitent, contrite, heart, as that which he knew God would be pleased with.

1. He knew well that the sacrificing of beasts was, in itself, of no account with God; (v. 16.) *Thou desirest not sacrifice, (else would I give it with all my heart to obtain pardon and peace,) thou delightest not in burnt-offering.* Here see how glad David would have been to give thousands of rams, to make atonement for sin. Those that are thoroughly convinced of their misery and danger, by reason of sin, would spare no cost to obtain the remission of it, Mic. 6. 6, 7. But see how little God valued this! As trials of obedience, and types of Christ, he did indeed require sacrifices to be offered; but he had no delight in them for any intrinsic worth or value they had; *Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not.* As they cannot make satisfaction for sin, so God cannot take any satisfaction in them, any otherwise than as the offering of them is expressive of love and duty to him.

2. He knew also how acceptable true repentance is to God; (v. 17.) *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.* See here, (1.) What the good work is, that is wrought in every true penitent; a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. It is a work wrought upon the heart; that is it that God looks at, and requires, in all religious exercises, particularly in the exercises of repentance. It is a sharp work wrought there, no less than the breaking of the heart; not in despair, (as we say, when a man is undone, His heart is broken,) but in necessary humiliation, and sorrow, for sin. It is a heart breaking with itself, and breaking from its sin; it is a heart pliable to the word of God, and patient under the rod of God; a heart subdued and brought into obedience; it is a heart that is tender, like Josiah's, and trembles at God's word. Oh that there were such a heart in us! (2.) How graciously God is pleased to accept of this; it is *the sacrifices of God*; not one, but many, it is instead of all burnt-offering and sacrifice. The breaking of Christ's body for sin, is the only sacrifice of atonement, for no sacrifice but that could take away sin; but the breaking of our hearts for sin, is a sacrifice of acknowledgment, a sacrifice of God, for to him it is offered up; he requires it, he prepares it, (he provides this lamb for a burnt-offering,) and he will accept of it. That which pleased God, was, not the feeding of a beast, and making much of it, but killing it; so it is not the pampering of our flesh, but the mortifying of it, that God will accept. The sacrifice was bound, was bled, was burnt; so the penitent heart is bound by convictions, bleeds in contrition, and then burns in holy zeal against sin, and for God. The sacrifice was offered upon the altar that sanctified the gift; so the broken heart is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ; there is no true repentance without faith in him; and this is the sacrifice which he will not despise. Men despise that which is broken, but God will not. He despised the sacrifice of torn and broken beasts, but he will not despise that of a torn and broken heart. He will not overlook it, he will not refuse or reject it; though it make God no satisfaction for the wrong done him by sin, yet he does not despise it. The proud Pharisee despised the broken-hearted publican; and he thought very meanly of himself, but God did not despise him. More is implied than is expressed; the great God overlooks heaven and earth, to look with favour upon a *broken and contrite heart*, Isa. 66, 1, 2.—57. 15.

III. David intercedes for Zion and Jerusalem, with an eye to the honour of God. See what concern he had,

1. For the good of the church of God; (v. 18.) *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion*, that is, (1.) "To all the particular worshippers in Zion, to all that love and fear thy name; keep them from falling into such wounding, wasting, sins as these of mine; defend and succour all that fear thy name." Those that have been in spiritual troubles themselves, know how to pity and pray for those that are in like manner afflicted. Or, (2.) To the public interests of Israel. David was sensible of the wrong he had done to Judah and Jerusalem by his sin; how it had weakened the hands, and saddened the hearts, of good people, and opened the mouths of their adversaries: he was likewise afraid lest, he being

a public person, his sin should bring judgments upon the city and kingdom, and therefore he prays to God to secure and advance those public interests which he had damaged and endangered. He prays, that God would prevent those national judgments which his sin had deserved, that he would continue those blessings, and carry on that good work, which it had threatened to retard and put a stop to. He prays, not only that God would do good to Zion, as he did to other places, by his providence, but that he would do it in his good pleasure, with the peculiar favour he bore to that place which he had chosen to put his name there; that the walls of Jerusalem, which perhaps were now in the building, might be built up, and that good work finished. Note, [1.] When we have most business of our own, and of greatest importance at the throne of grace, yet then we must not forget to pray for the church of God; nay, our Master has taught us in our daily prayers to begin with that, *Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come*. [2.] The consideration of the prejudice we have done to the public interests by our sins, should engage us to do them all the service we can, particularly by our prayers.

2. For the honour of the churches of God, v. 19. If God would shew himself reconciled to him and his people, as he had prayed, then they should go on with the public services of his house; (1.) Cheerfully to themselves. The sense of God's goodness to them would enlarge their hearts in all the instances and expressions of thankfulness and obedience. They will then come to his tabernacle with burnt-offerings, with whole burnt-offerings, which were intended purely for the glory of God, and they shall offer, not lambs and rams only, but bullocks, the costliest sacrifices, upon his altar. (2.) Acceptably to God; "*Thou shalt be pleased with them*"; we shall have reason to hope so, when we perceive the sin taken away, which threatened to hinder thine acceptance." Note, It is a great comfort to a good man, to think of the communion that is between God and his people in their public assemblies; how he is honoured by their humble attendance on him, and they are happy in his gracious acceptance of them.

PSALM LII

David, no doubt, was in very great grief, when he said to Abiathar, (1 Sam. 22. 22.) I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house, which were put to death upon Doeg's malicious information; to give some vent to that grief, and to gain some relief to his mind under it, he penned this psalm, wherein, as a prophet, and therefore with as good an authority as if he had been now a prince upon the throne, I. He arraigns Doeg for what he had done, v. 1. II. He accuses him, convicts him, and aggravates his crimes, v. 2. 4. III. He passes sentence upon him, v. 5. IV. He foretells the triumphs of the righteous in the execution of the sentence, v. 6, 7. V. He comforts himself in the mercy of God, and the assurance he had that he should yet praise him, v. 8, 9. In singing this psalm, we should conceive a detestation of the sin of lying, foresee the ruin of those that persist in it, and please ourselves with the assurance of the preservation of God's church and people, in spite of all the malicious designs of the children of Satan, that father of lies.

To the chief musician, Maschil. A psalm of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, David is come to the house of Ahimelech.

1. **W**HY boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually. 2. Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. 3. Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah. 4. Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue. 5. God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling-place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.

The title is a brief account of the story which the psalm refers to. David now, at length, saw it necessary to quit the court, and shift for his own safety, for fear of Saul, who had once and

again attempted to murder him. Being unprovided with arms and victuals, he, by a wife, got Ahimelech the priest to furnish him with both; Doeg an Edomite happened to be there, and he went and informed Saul against Ahimelech, representing him as confederate with a traitor; upon which accusation, Saul grounded a very bloody warrant, to kill all the priests; and Doeg, the prosecutor, was the executioner, 1 Sam. 22. 9, &c.

In these verses,

I. David argues the case fairly with this proud and mighty man, v. 1. Doeg, it is probable, was mighty in respect of bodily strength; but, if he was, he gained no reputation to it by his easy victory over the unarmed priests of the Lord; it is no honour for those that wear a sword, to hector those that wear an ephod. However, he was, by his office, a *mighty man*, for he was set over the servants of Saul, chamberlain of the household. This was he that boasted himself, not only in the power he had to do mischief, but in the mischief he did. Note, It is bad to do ill, but it is worse to boast of it, and glory in it, when we have done; not only not to be ashamed of a wicked action, but to justify it; not only to justify it, but to magnify it, and value ourselves upon it. They that glory in their sin, glory in their shame; and then it becomes yet more shameful; mighty men are often mischievous men, and *boast of their heart's desire*, 10. 3. It is uncertain how the following words come in; *The goodness of God endures continually*. Some make it the wicked man's answer to this question. The patience and forbearance of God (the great proofs of his goodness) are abused by sinners to the hardening of their hearts in their wicked ways; because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily, nay, because God is continually doing them good, therefore they boast in mischief; as if their prosperity in their wickedness were an evidence that there is no harm in it. But it is rather to be taken as an argument against him, to shew, 1. The sinfulness of his sin; "God is continually doing good, and those that therein are like him, have reason to glory in their being so: but thou art continually doing mischief, and therein art utterly unlike him, and contrary to him, and yet gloriest in being so." 2. The folly of it; "Thou thinkest, with the mischief which thou boastest of, (so artfully contrived, and so successfully carried on,) to run down and ruin the people of God; but thou wilt find thyself mistaken, the goodness of God endures continually for their preservation, and then they need not fear what man can do unto them." The enemies in vain boast in their mischief, while we have God's mercy to boast in.

II. He draws up a high charge against him in the court of heaven, as he had drawn up a high charge against Ahimelech in Saul's court, v. 2. 4. He accuses him of the wickedness of his tongue, (that unruly evil full of deadly poison,) and the wickedness of his heart, which that was an evidence of. Four things he charges him with. 1. Malice; his tongue does mischief, not only pricking like a needle, but cutting like a sharp razor. Scornful bantering words would not content him: he loved devouring words, words that would ruin the priests of the Lord whom he hated. 2. Falsehood; it was a deceitful tongue that he did this mischief with; (v. 4.) he loved lying, (v. 3.) and this sharp razor did work deceitfully, (v. 2.) that is, before he had this occasion given him to discover his malice against the priests, he had acted very plausibly toward them; though he was an Edomite, he attended the altars, and brought his offerings; and paid his respects to the priests, as decently as any Israelite; therein he put a force upon himself, (for he was *detained before the Lord*,) but thus he gained an opportunity of doing them so much the greater mischief. Or, it may refer to the information itself, which he gave in against Ahimelech; for the matter of fact was, in substance, true, yet it was misrepresented, and false colours put upon it; and therefore he might well be said to love lying, and to have a deceitful tongue. He told the truth, but not all the truth, as a witness ought to do; had he told that David made Ahimelech believe he was then going upon Saul's errand, the kindness he shewed him would have appeared to be not only not traitorous against Saul, but respectful to him. It will not save us from the guilt of lying, to be able to say, "There was some truth in what we said," if we pervert it, and make

it to appear otherwise than it was. 3. Subtlety in sin; "*Thy tongue devises mischiefs*; it speaks the mischief which thy heart devises." The more there is of craft and contrivance in any wickedness, the more there is of the Devil in it. 4. Affection to sin; "*Thou lovest evil more than good*; that is, thou lovest evil, and hast no love at all to that which is good; thou takest delight in lying, and makest no conscience of doing right. Thou wouldst rather please Saul, by telling a lie, than please God, by speaking truth." Those are of Doeg's spirit, who, instead of being pleased (as we ought all to be) with an opportunity of doing a man a kindness in his body, estate, or good name, are glad when they have a fair occasion to do a man a mischief, and readily close with an opportunity of that kind; that is loving evil more than good. It is bad to speak devouring words, but it is worse to love them, either in others or in ourselves.

III. He reads his doom, and denounces the judgments of God against him for his wickedness; (v. 5.) "*Thou hast destroyed the priests of the Lord, and cut them off, and therefore God shall likewise destroy thee for ever*." Sons of perdition actively, shall be sons of perdition passively, as Judas and the man of sin. Destroyers shall be destroyed; those especially that hate, and persecute, and destroy, the priests of the Lord, his ministers, and people, who are made to our God priests, a royal priesthood, shall be taken away with a swift and everlasting destruction. Doeg is here condemned; 1. To be driven out of the church; *He shall pluck thee out of the tabernacle*, not thy dwelling-place, but God's; so it is most probably understood. "Thou shalt be cut off from the favour of God, and his presence, and all communion with him, and shalt have no benefit either by oracle or offering." Justly was he deprived of all the privileges of God's house, who had been so mischievous to his servants; he had come sometimes to God's tabernacle, and attended in his courts, but he was *detained* there, he was weary of his service, and sought an opportunity to defame his family; it was very fit, therefore, that he should be taken away, and plucked out thence; we should forbid one of our house, that should serve us so. Note, We forfeit the benefit of ordinances, if we make an ill use of them. 2. To be driven out of the world; "*He shall root thee out of the land of the living*, in which thou thoughtest thyself so deeply rooted." When good men die, they are transplanted from the land of the living on earth, the nursery of the plants of righteousness, to that in heaven, the garden of the Lord, where they shall take root for ever; but when wicked men die, they are rooted out of the land of the living, to perish for ever; as fuel to the fire of divine wrath. This will be the portion of those that contend with God.

6. The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him: 7. *Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness*. 8. But *I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever*. 9. *I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints*.

David was at this time in great distress, the mischief Doeg had done him was but the beginning of his sorrows; and yet here we have him triumphing, and that is more than rejoicing, in tribulation. Blessed Paul, in the midst of his troubles, is in the midst of his triumphs, 2 Cor. 2. 14. David here triumphs.

I. In the fall of Doeg. Yet, lest this should look like personal revenge, he does not speak of it as his own act, but the language of other righteous persons. They shall observe God's judgments on Doeg, and speak of them; 1. To the glory of God; *They shall see and fear*; (v. 6.) they shall reverence the justice of God, and stand in awe of him, as a God of almighty power, before whom the proudest sinner cannot stand, and before whom, therefore, we ought every one of us to humble ourselves. Note, God's judgments on the wicked should strike an awe upon the righteous,

and make them afraid of offending God, and incurring his displeasure, 119. 120. Rev. 15. 3, 4. 2. To the shame of Doeg. They shall laugh at him, not with a ludicrous, but a rational, serious, laughter, as *he that sits in heaven shall laugh at him*, 2. 4. He shall appear ridiculous, and worthy to be laughed at. We are told how they shall triumph in God's just judgments on him; (v. 7.) *Lo, this is the man that made not God his Strength*. The fall and ruin of a wealthy mighty man, cannot but be generally taken notice of, and every one is apt to make his remarks upon it; now this is the remark which the righteous should make upon Doeg's fall, that no better could come of it, since he took the wrong method of establishing himself in his wealth and power. If a newly-erected fabric tumbles down, every one immediately inquires, where was the fault in the building of it? Now, that which ruined Doeg's prosperity, was, (1.) That he did not build it upon a rock; *He made not God his Strength*, he did not think that the continuance of his prosperity depended upon the favour of God, and therefore took no care to make sure that favour, nor to keep himself in God's love, made no conscience of his duty to him, nor sought him in the least. Those wretchedly deceive themselves, that think to support themselves in their power and wealth without God and religion. (2.) That he did build it upon the sand. He thought his wealth would support itself; *He trusted in the abundance of his riches*, which, he imagined, were *laid up for many years*; nay, he thought his wickedness would help to support it; he was resolved to stick at nothing, for the securing and advancing of his honour and power; right or wrong, he would get what he could, and keep what he had, and be the ruin of any one that stood in his way; and this, he thought, would strengthen him; they may have any thing that will make conscience of nothing. But now see what it comes to; see what untempered mortar he built his house with, now that it is fallen, and himself buried in the ruins of it.

II. In his own stability; (v. 8, 9.) "*This mighty man is plucked up by the roots; but I am like a green olive-tree*, planted and rooted, fixed and flourishing; he is turned out of God's dwelling-place, but I am established in it, not detained, as Doeg, by any thing but the abundant satisfaction I meet with there." Note, Those that by faith and love dwell in the house of God, shall be like green olive-trees there; the wicked are said to flourish like a green bay-tree, (37. 35.) which bears no useful fruit, though it have abundance of large leaves; but the righteous flourish like a green olive-tree, which is fat as well as flourishing, (92. 14.) and with *its fatness honours God and man*, (Judg. 9. 9.) deriving its root and fatness from the good Olive, Rom. 11. 17.

Now, what must we do, that we may be as green olive-trees?

1. We must live a life of faith and holy confidence in God and his grace; "*I see what comes of men's trusting in the abundance of their riches, and therefore I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever*; not in the world, but in God, not in my own merit, but in God's mercy, which dispenses its gifts freely, even to the unworthy, and has in it an all-sufficiency to be our portion and happiness." This mercy is for ever, it is constant and unchangeable, and its gifts will continue to all eternity; we must, therefore, for ever trust in it, and never come off from that foundation.

2. We must live a life of thankfulness and holy joy in God; (v. 9.) "*I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it*, hast avenged the blood of thy priests upon their bloody enemy, and given him blood to drink; and hast performed thy promise to me;" which he was as sure would be done in due time, as if it were done already. It contributes very much to the beauty of our profession, and to our fruitfulness in every grace, to be much in praising God; and it is certain that we never want matter for praise.

3. We must live a life of expectation, and humble dependence upon God; *I will wait on thy name*; I will attend upon thee in all those ways wherein thou hast made thyself known, hoping for the discoveries of thy favour to me, and willing to tarry till the time appointed for them; *for it is good before thy saints*; or, *in the opinion and judgment of thy saints*, with whom David heartily concurs. *Communis sensus fidelium*—All the saints are of this mind. (1.) That God's name is good in itself; that God's mani-

festations of himself to his people are gracious and very kind; there is no other name given than this, that would be our refuge and strong tower. (2.) That it is very good for us to wait on that name; that there is nothing better to calm and quiet our spirits, when they are ruffled and disturbed, and to keep us in the way of duty, when we are tempted to use any indirect courses for our own relief, than to hope, and quietly wait for, the salvation of the Lord, Lam. 3. 26. All the saints have experienced the benefit of it, who never attended him in vain, never followed his guidance, but it ended well, nor were ever made ashamed of their believing expectations from him. What is good before all the saints, let us therefore abide and abound in, and in this particularly; *Turn thou to thy God, keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually*, Hos. 12. 6.

PSALM LIII.

God speaks once, yea twice, and it were well if man would even then perceive it; God, in this psalm, speaks twice, for this is the same almost verbatim with the 14th psalm. The scope of it is to convince us of our sins, to set us a blushing, and trembling, because of them; and this is what we are with so much difficulty brought to, that there is need of line upon line to this purport. The word, as a convincing word, is compared to a hammer, the strokes whereof must be frequently repeated. God, by the psalmist, here, I. Shews us how bad we are, v. 1. II. Proves it upon us by his own certain knowledge, v. 2, 3. III. He speaks terror to persecutors, the worst of sinners, v. 4, 5. IV. He speaks encouragement to God's persecuted people, v. 6. Some little variation there is between Ps. 14. and this, but none considerable; between v. 5, 6. there, and v. 5. here; some expressions there used, are here left out, concerning the shame which the wicked put upon God's people, and, instead of that, is here foretold the shame which God would put upon the wicked; which alteration, with some others, he made by divine direction, when he delivered it the second time to the chief musician. In singing it, we ought to lament the corruption of the human nature, and the wretched degeneracy of the world we live in, yet rejoicing, in hope of the great salvation.

To the chief musician upon Mahalath, Maschil. A psalm of David.

1. **T**HE fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.* Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: *there is none that doeth good.* 2. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were *any* that did understand, that did seek God. 3. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; *there is none that doeth good, no, not one.* 4. Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people *as they eat bread*: they have not called upon God. 5. There were they in great fear, *where* no fear was: for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth *against* thee: thou hast put *them* to shame, because God hath despised them. 6. Oh that the salvation of Israel *were come* out Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

This psalm was opened before, and therefore we shall here only observe, in short, some things concerning sin, in order to the increasing of our sorrow for it and hatred of it.

1. The fact of sin; is that proved? Can the charge be made out? Yes, God is a Witness to it, an unexceptionable witness: from the place of his holiness he looks on the children of men, and sees how little good there is among them, v. 2. All the sinfulness of their hearts and lives is naked and open before him.

2. The fault of sin; is there any harm in it? Yes, it is iniquity, (v. 1, 4.) it is an unrighteous thing; it is that which there is no good in, (v. 1, 3.) it is an evil thing, it is the worst of evils, it is that which makes this world such an evil world as it is; it is going back from God, v. 3.

3. The fountain of sin; how comes it that men are so bad? Surely, it is because there is no fear of God before their eyes: they say in their hearts, "*There is no God at all to call us to an account, none that we need to stand in awe of.*" Men's bad

practices flow from their bad principles; if they profess to know God, yet in works, because in thoughts, they deny him.

4. The folly of sin; he is a fool, (in the account of God, whose judgment we are sure is right,) that harbours such corrupt thoughts; atheists, whether in opinion or practice, are the greatest fools in the world. They that do not seek God, do not understand, they are like brute-beasts that have no understanding; for man is distinguished from the brutes, not so much by the powers of reason, as by a capacity for religion. The workers of iniquity, whatever they pretend to, have no knowledge; those may truly be said to know nothing, that do not know God, v. 4.

5. The filthiness of sin; sinners are corrupt, (v. 1.) their nature is vitiated and spoiled, and the more noble the nature is, the more vile it is when it is depraved; as that of the angels, *Corruptio optimi est pessima—Nothing, when corrupted, is so bad as the best.* Their iniquity is abominable, it is odious to the holy God, and it renders them so; whereas otherwise he *hates nothing that he has made.* It makes men filthy, altogether filthy; wilful sinners are offensive in the nostrils of the God of heaven and of the holy angels. What decency soever proud sinners pretend to, it is certain that wickedness is the greatest defilement in the world.

6. The fruit of sin; see to what a degree of barbarity it brings men at last; when men's hearts are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, see their cruelty to their brethren, that are bone of their bone—because they will not *run with them to the same excess of riot, they eat them up, as they eat bread*; as if they were not only become beasts, but beasts of prey. And see their contempt of God at the same time; they have not called upon him, but scorn to be beholden to him.

7. The fear and shame that attend sin; (v. 5.) *There were they in great fear*, who had made God their Enemy; their own guilty consciences frightened them, and filled them with horror, though otherwise there was no apparent cause of fear; *the wicked flees when none pursues.* See the ground of this fear; it is because God has formerly scattered the bones of those that encamped against his people; not only broken their power, and dispersed their forces, but slain them, and reduced their bodies to dry bones, like those scattered at the grave's mouth, 141. 7. Such will be the fate of those that lay siege to the camp of the saints, and the beloved city, Rev. 20. 9. The apprehensions of this cannot but put those into frights that eat up God's people. This enables the virgin, the daughter of Zion, to put *them* to shame, and expose them, because God has despised them; to laugh at them, because he that sits in heaven laughs at them. We need not look upon those enemies with fear, whom God looks upon with contempt. If he despises them, we may.

Lastly, The faith of the saints, and their hope and power touching the cure of this great evil; (v. 6.) There will come a Saviour, a great salvation, a salvation from sin. Oh that it might be hastened! for it will bring in glorious and joyful times. There were those in the Old-Testament times, that looked and hoped, that prayed and waited, for this redemption. (1.) God will, in due time, save his church from the sinful malice of its enemies, which would bring joy to Jacob and Israel, that had long been in a mournful melancholy state. Such salvations were often wrought, and all typical of the everlasting triumphs of the glorious church. (2.) He will save all believers from their own iniquities, that they may not be led captive by them, which will be everlasting matter of joy to them. From this work the Redeemer had his name *Jesus*, for he shall save his people from their sins, Matth. 1. 21.

PSALM LIV.

The key of this psalm hangs at the door, for the title tells us upon what occasion it was penned—when the inhabitants of Ziph, men of Judah, (types of Judas the traitor,) betrayed David to Saul, by informing him where he was, and putting him in a way how to seize him. This they did twice; (1 Sam. 23. 19. —26. 1.) and it is upon record, to their everlasting infamy. The psalm is sweet; the former part of it, perhaps, was meditated when he was in his distress, and put into writing when the danger was over, with the addition of the two last verses, which speak his thankfulness for the deliverance, which yet might be written in faith, even then when he was in the midst of his fright. Here, I. He complains to God of the malice of his enemies, and prays for help against them, v. 1. 3. II. He comforts himself with an assurance of the divine favour

and protection, and that, in due time, his enemies should be confounded, and he delivered, v. 4. 7. What time we are in distress, we may comfortably sing this psalm.

To the chief musician on Neginoth, Maschil. A psalm of David, when the Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?

1. **SAVE** me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. 2. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. 3. For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them. Selah.

We may observe here,

1. The great distress that David was now in, which the title gives an account of. The Ziphims came of their own accord, and informed Saul where David was, with a promise to deliver him into his hand. One would have thought, when David was retired into the country, he should not have been pursued; into a desert country, he should not have been discovered; and into his own country, he should not have been betrayed; and yet it seems he was. Never let a good man expect to be safe and easy, till he comes to heaven. How treacherous, how officious, were these Ziphims! It is well that God is faithful, for men are not to be trusted, Mic. 7. 5.

2. His prayer to God for succour and deliverance, v. 1, 2. He appeals to God's strength, by which he was able to help him, and to his name, by which he was engaged to help him; and begs he would save him from his enemies, and judge him, plead his cause, and judge for him. David has no other plea to depend upon than God's name, no other power to depend upon than God's strength, and those he makes his refuge and confidence. This would be the effectual answer of his prayers, (v. 2.) which even in his flight, when he had not opportunity for solemn address to God, he was ever and anon lifting up to heaven; *Hear my prayer, which comes from my heart, and give ear to the words of my mouth.*

3. His plea, which is taken from the character of his enemies, v. 3. (1.) They are *strangers*; such were the Ziphites, unworthy the name of Israelites; "They have used me more basely and barbarously than the Philistines themselves would have done." The worst treatment may be expected from those who, having broken through the bonds of relation and alliance, make themselves strangers. (2.) They are *oppressors*; such was Saul, who, as a king, should have used his power for the protection of all his good subjects, but abused it for their destruction. Nothing is so grievous as oppression in the seat of judgment, Eccl. 3. 16. Paul's greatest perils were by his own countrymen, and by false brethren; (2 Cor. 11. 26.) and so were David's. (3.) They were very formidable and threatening; they not only hated him and wished him ill, but they rose up against him in a body, joining their power to do him a mischief. (4.) They were very spiteful and malicious; *They seek after my soul*; they hunt for the precious life, no less will satisfy them. We may, in faith, pray that God would not by his providence give success, lest it should look like giving countenance, to such cruel bloody men. (5.) They were very profane and atheistical, and, for this reason, he thought God was concerned in honour to appear against them; *They have not set God before them*; they have quite cast off the thoughts of God, they do not consider that his eye is upon them, that, in fighting against his people, they fight against him, nor have they any dread of the certain fatal consequences of such an unequal engagement. Note, From those who do not set God before them no good is to be expected; nay, what wickedness will not such men be guilty of? What bonds of nature, or friendship, or gratitude, or covenant, will hold those that have broken through the fear of God? *Selah; Mark this.* Let us all be sure to set God before us at all times; for if we do not, we are in danger of becoming desperate.

4. Behold, God is mine helper: the LORD is with them that uphold my soul. 5. He shall

reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth. 6. I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O LORD; for it is good. 7. For he hath delivered me out of all trouble: and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies.

We have here the lively actings of David's faith in his prayer, by which he was assured the issue would be comfortable, though the attempt upon him was formidable.

1. He was sure that he had God on his side; that God took his part; (v. 4.) he speaks it with an air of triumph and exultation, *Behold, God is mine Helper.* If he be for him, he is for us; and if he be for us, we shall have such help in him, that we need not fear any power engaged against us. Though men and devils aim to be our destroyers, they shall not prevail while God is our Helper; *The Lord is with them that uphold my soul.* Cor. 11. 7. "The Lord taketh my part with them that help me. There are some that uphold me, and God is one of them; he is the principal one; none of them could help me, if he did not help them." Every creature is that to us (and no more) that God makes it to be. He means, "The Lord is he that upholds my soul, and keeps me from tiring in my work, and sinking under my brethren." He that by his providence upholds all things, by his grace upholds the souls of his people. God, who will, in due time, save his people, does, in the mean time, sustain them, and bear them up, so that the spirit he has made shall not fail before him.

2. God taking part with him, he doubted not but his enemies should both flee and fall before him; (v. 5.) "*He shall reward evil unto mine enemies that observe me, seeking an opportunity to do me a mischief. The evil they designed against me, the righteous God will return upon their own heads.*" David would not render evil to them, but he knew God would; *I as a deaf man heard not, for thou wilt hear.* The enemies we forgive, if they repent not, God will judge: and, for this reason, we must not avenge ourselves, because God has said, *Vengeance is mine.* But he prays, *Cut them off in thy truth.* This is not a prayer of malice, but a prayer of faith, for it is an eye to the word of God, and only desires the performance of that. There is truth in God's threatenings, as well as in his promises, and sinners that repent not will find it so to their cost.

3. He promises to give thanks to God for all the experience he had had of his goodness to him; (v. 6.) *I will sacrifice unto thee.* Though sacrifices were expensive, yet, when God required that his worshippers should in that way praise him, David would not only offer them, but offer them freely, and without grudging. All our spiritual sacrifices must, in this sense, be free-will offerings, for God loves a cheerful giver. Yet he will not only bring his sacrifice, which was but the shadow, the ceremony; he will mind the substance, *I will praise thy name.* A thankful heart, and the calves of our lips giving thanks to his name, are the sacrifices God will accept; *I will praise thy name, for it is good.* Thy name is not only great but good, and therefore to be praised; to praise thy name is not only what we are bound to, but it is good, it is pleasant, it is profitable; it is good for us, (Ps. 1.) therefore *I will praise thy name.*

4. He speaks of his deliverance as a thing done; (v. 7.) *I will praise thy name, and say, "He has delivered me; this shall be my song then."* That which he rejoices in, is, a complete deliverance; *He has delivered me from all trouble*; and a deliverance to his heart's content; *Mine eye has seen its desire upon mine enemies*; not seen them cut off and ruined, but forced to retreat; tidings being brought to Saul that the Philistines were upon him, 1 Sam. 23. 27, 28. All David desired, was, to be himself safe; when he saw Saul draw off his forces, he saw his desire; *He has delivered me from all trouble.* Either, (1.) With this thought David comforted himself when he was in distress, "*He has delivered me from all trouble* hitherto, and many a time I have gained my point, and seen my desire on mine enemies; therefore he will deliver me out of this trouble." We should thus, in our greatest straits, encourage ourselves with our past experiences. Or, (2.) With this thought he

magnified his present deliverance, when the fright is over, that it was an earnest of further deliverance. He speaks of the completing of his deliverance as a thing done, though he had as yet many troubles before him; because, having God's promise for it, he was as sure of it as if it was done already. "He that has begun to deliver me from this trouble, shall deliver me from all troubles, and shall, at length, give me to see my desire upon mine enemies." This may, perhaps, point at Christ, of whom David was a type; God would deliver him out of all the troubles of his state of humiliation, and he was perfectly sure of it; and all things are said to be put under his feet; for though we see not yet all things put under him, yet we are sure he shall reign till all his enemies be made his footstool, and he shall see his desire upon them. However, it is an encouragement to all believers to make that use of their particular deliverances which St. Paul does, (like David here) 2 Tim. 4. 17, 18. *He that delivered me from the mouth of the lion shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.*

PSALM LV.

It is the conjecture of many expositors, that David penned this psalm upon occasion of Absalom's rebellion, and that the particular enemy he here speaks of, that dealt treacherously with him, was Ahithophel; and some will therefore make David's troubles here typical of Christ's suffering, and Ahithophel's treachery a figure of Judah's, because they both hanged themselves. But there is nothing in it that is particularly applied to Christ in the New Testament. David was in great distress when he penned this psalm. I. He prays that God would manifest his favor to him, and pleads his own sorrow and fear, v. 1..8. II. He prays that God would manifest his displeasure against his enemies, and pleads their great wickedness and treachery, (v. 9..15.) and again, v. 20. 21. III. He assures himself that God would, in due time, appear for him against his enemies, comforts himself with the hopes of it, and encourages others to trust in God, (v. 16..19.) and again, v. 22, 23. In singing this psalm, we may, if there be occasion, apply it to our own troubles; if not, we may sympathize with those to whose case it comes nearer, foreseeing that there will be, at last, indignation and wrath to the persecutors, a salvation and joy to the persecuted.

To the chief musician on Neginoth, Maschil. A psalm of David.

1. **G**IVE ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. 2. Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise; 3. Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me. 4. My heart is sore-pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. 5. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. 6. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. 7. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah. 8. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.

In these verses, we have,

I. David praying. Prayer is a salve for every sore, and a relief to the spirit under every burthen; *Give ear to my prayer, O God, v. 1. 2.* He does not set down the petitions he offered up to God in his distress, but begs that God would hear the prayers which, at every period, his heart lifted up to God, and grant an answer of peace to them; *Attend to me, hear me.* Saul would not hear his petitions, his other enemies regarded not his pleas, but, "Lord, be thou pleased to hearken to me. *Hide not thyself from my supplication*; either as one unconcerned, and not regarding it, nor seeming to take any notice of it, or as one displeased, angry at me, and therefore at my prayer." If we, in our prayers, sincerely lay open ourselves, our case, our hearts, to God, we have reason to hope that he will not hide himself, his favours, his comforts, from us.

II. David weeping; for in this he was a type of Christ, that he was a man of sorrows, and often in tears; (v. 2.) "*I mourn in*

my complaint," (or, in my meditation, my melancholy musings; "and I make a noise; I cannot forbear such sighs and groans, and other expressions of grief, as discover it to those about me." Great griefs are sometimes noisy and clamorous, and thus are, in some measure, lessened, while those increase that are stifled, and have no vent given them. But what was the matter? v. 3. It is *because of the voice of the enemy*; the menaces and insults of Absalom's party, that swelled, and hectoring, and stirred up the people to cry out against David, and shout him out of his palace and capital city, as afterward the chief priests stirred up the mob to cry out against the Son of David, *Away with him, crucify him.* Yet it was not the voice of the enemy only that fetched tears from David's eyes, but their oppression, and the hardship he was thereby reduced to; *They cast iniquity upon me.* They could not justly charge David with any mal-administration in his government, could not prove any act of oppression or injustice upon him, but they loaded him with calumnies. Though they found no iniquity in him, relating to his trust as a king, yet they cast all manner of iniquity upon him, and represented him to the people as a tyrant fit to be expelled. Innocency itself is no security against violent and lying tongues. They hated him themselves, nay, in wrath they hated him; there was in their enmity both the heat and violence of anger, or sudden passion, and the implacableness of hatred and rooted malice; and therefore they studied to make him odious, that others also might hate him. This made him mourn, and the more, because he could remember the time when he was the darling of the people, and answered to his name, *David, a beloved one.*

III. David trembling, and in great consternation. We may well suppose him to be so, upon the breaking out of Absalom's conspiracy, and the general defection of the people, even those that he had little reason to suspect.

1. See what fear seized him. David was a man of great boldness, and in some very eminent instances had signalized his courage, and yet, when the danger was surprising and imminent, his heart failed him; let not the stout man therefore glory in his courage, any more than the strong man in strength. Now that *David's heart is sore-pained within him, the terrors of death are fallen upon him, v. 4.* Fearfulness of mind and trembling of body came upon him, and horror covered and overwhelmed him; (v. 5.) when without are fightings, no marvel that within are fears; and, if it was upon the occasion of Absalom's rebellion, we may suppose that the remembrance of his sin in the matter of Uriah, which God was now reckoning with him for, added as much more to the fright. Sometimes David's faith made him, in a manner, fearless, and he could boldly say, when surrounded with enemies, *I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.* But at other times his fears prevail and tyrannise; for the best men are not always alike strong in faith.

2. See how desirous he was, in this fright, to retire into a desert, any whither to be far enough from hearing the voice the enemy, and seeing their oppressions. He said, (v. 6.) said it to God in prayer, said it to himself in meditation, said it to his friends in complaint, *Oh that I had wings like a dove!* Much as he had been sometimes in love with Jerusalem, now that it was become a rebellious city, he longed to get clear of it, and, like the prophet, wishes he had in the wilderness a lodging place of way-faring men, that he might leave his people, and go from them, for they were an assembly of treacherous men, Jer. 9. 2. This agrees very well with David's resolution upon the breaking out of that plot, *Arise, let us flee, and make speed to depart,* 2 Sam. 15. 14. Observe,

(1.) How he would make his escape; he was so surrounded with enemies, that he saw not how he could escape but upon the wing, and therefore he wishes, *Oh that I had wings*, not like a hawk that flies strongly, but like a dove that flies swiftly; he wishes for wings, not to fly upon the prey, but to fly from the birds of prey, for such his enemies were. The wings of a dove were most agreeable to him who was of a dove-like spirit, and therefore the wings of an eagle would not become him. The dove flies low, and takes shelter as soon as she can, and thus would David fly.

(2.) What he would make his escape from; from the wind, storm, and tempest, the tumult and ferment that the city was now

in, and the danger to which he was exposed. Herein he was like a dove that cannot endure noise.

(3.) What he aimed at, in making this escape; not victory, but rest; "I would fly away, and be at rest, v. 6. I would fly any whither, if it were to a barren frightful wilderness, ever so far off, so I might be quiet," v. 7. Note, Peace and quietness, in silence and solitude, are what the wisest and best of men have most earnestly coveted, and the more when they have been vexed and wearied with the noise and clamour of those about them. Gracious souls wish to retire from the hurry and bustle of this world, that they may sweetly enjoy God and themselves; and, if there be any true peace on this side heaven, it is they that enjoy it in those retirements. This makes death desirable to a child of God, that it is a final escape from all the storms and tempests of this world, to perfect and everlasting rest.

9. Destroy, O LORD, and divide their tongues: for I have seen violence and strife in the city. 10. Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof; mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. 11. Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets. 12. For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: 13. But it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. 14. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company. 15. Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.

David here complains of his enemies, whose wicked plots had brought him, though not to his faith's end, yet to his wit's end, and prays against them by the spirit of prophecy. Observe here,

I. The character he gives of the enemies he feared. They were of the worst sort of men, and his description of them agrees very well with Absalom and his accomplices.

1. He complains of the city Jerusalem, which strangely fell in with Absalom and fell off from David, so that he had none there, but his own guards and servants, that he could repose any confidence in; *How is that faithful city become a harlot!* David did not take the representation of it from others; but with his own eyes, and with a sad heart, did himself see nothing but violence and strife in the city; (v. 9.) for, when they grew disaffected and disloyal to David, they grew mischievous one to another. If he walked the rounds upon the walls of the city, he saw that violence and strife went about it day and night, and mounted its guards, v. 10. All the arts and methods which the rebels used for the fortifying of the city, were made up of violence and strife, and there were no remains of honesty or love among them. If he looked into the heart of the city, mischief and injury, mutual wrong and vexation, were in the midst of it; wickedness, all manner of wickedness, is in the midst thereof; *Jusque datum secleri—Wickedness was legalized.* Deceit and guile, and all manner of treacherous dealing, departed not from her streets, v. 11. It may be meant of their base and barbarous usage of David's friends, and such as they knew were firm and faithful to him; they did them all the mischief they could, by fraud or force. Is this the character of Jerusalem, the royal city, and, which is more, the holy city; and in David's time too, so soon after the thrones of judgment and the testimony of Israel were both placed there? Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty? Lam. 2. 15. Is Jerusalem, the head quarters of God's priests, so ill taught? Can Jerusalem be ungrateful to David himself, its own illustrious founder, so that he cannot reside in it? Let us not be surprised

at the corruptions and disorders of this church on earth, but long to see the New Jerusalem, where there is no violence or strife, no mischief or guile, and into which no unclean thing shall enter, nor any thing that disquiets.

2. He complains of one of the ring-leaders of the conspiracy, that had been very industrious to foment jealousies, to misrepresent him and his government, and to incense the city against him; it was one that reproached him, as if he either abused his power, or neglected the use of it, for that was Absalom's malicious suggestion; *There is no man deputed of the king to hear thee;* 2 Sam. 15. 3. That and similar accusations were industriously spread among the people; and who was most active in it? "Not a sworn enemy, not Shimei, or any of the nonjurors; then I could have borne it, for I should not have expected better from them;" (and we find how patiently he did bear Shimei's curses;) "not one that professed to hate me, then I would have stood upon my guard against him, would have hid myself and my counsels from him, so that it would not have been in his power to betray me; but it was thou, a man, mine equal," v. 13. The Chaldee-paraphrase names Ahithophel as the person here meant, and nothing in that plot seems to have discouraged David so much as to hear that Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom, (2 Sam. 15. 31.) for he was the king's counsellor, 1 Chron. 27. 33. "It was thou, a man, mine equal, one whom I esteemed as myself, a friend as mine own soul, to whom I had communicated all my secrets, and who knew my mind as well as I myself did; my guide, with whom I advised, and by whom I was directed in all my affairs, whom I made president of the council, and prime-minister of state; my intimate acquaintance and familiar friend; this is the man that now abuses me. I have been kind to him, but I find him thus basely ungrateful; I have put a trust in him, but I find him thus basely treacherous; nay, and he could not have done me the one half of the mischief he does, if I had not shewed him so much respect." All this must needs be very grievous to an ingenuous mind, and yet this was not all; this traitor had seemed a saint, else he had never been David's bosom friend; (v. 14.) "We took counsel together, spent many an hour together, with a great deal of pleasure in religious discourse;" or, as Dr. Hammond reads it, "We joined ourselves together to the assembly; I gave him the right-hand of fellowship in holy ordinances, and then we walked to the house of God in company, to attend the public service." Note, (1.) There always has been, and always will be, a mixture of good and bad, sound and unsound, in the visible church, between whom, perhaps, for a long time, we can discern no difference; but the Searcher of hearts does. David, who went to the house of God in his sincerity, had Ahithophel in company with him, who went in his hypocrisy. The Pharisee and the Publican went together to the temple, to pray; but, sooner or later, they that are perfect, and they that are not, will be made manifest. (2.) Carnal policy may carry men on very far, and very long, in a profession of religion, while it is in fashion, and will serve a turn. In the court of pious David, none was more devout than Ahithophel, and yet his heart was not right in the sight of God. (3.) We must not wonder, if we be sadly deceived in some that have made great pretensions to those two sacred things, religion and friendship; David himself, though a very wise man, was thus imposed upon, which may make similar disappointments the more tolerable to us.

II. His prayers against them, which we are both to stand in awe of, and to comfort ourselves in, as prophecies, but not to copy into our prayers against any particular enemies of our own. He prays,

1. That God would disperse them, as he did the Babel-builders; (v. 9.) "Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues; blast their counsels, by making them to disagree among themselves, and clash with one another. Send an evil spirit among them, that they may not understand one another, but be envious and jealous one of another." This prayer was answered in the turning of Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness, by setting up the counsel of Hushai against it. God often destroys the church's enemies by dividing them; nor is there a surer way to the destruction of any people than their division. A kingdom, an interest, divided against itself, cannot long stand.

2. That God would destroy them, as he did Dathan and Abiram, and their associates, who were confederate against Moses, whose throat being an open sepulchre, the earth therefore opened, and swallowed them up. This was then a new thing which God executed, Numb. 16. 30. But David prays that it might now be repeated, or something equivalent; (v. 15.) "*Let death seize upon them by divine warrant, and let them go down quick into hell; let them be dead, and buried, and so, utterly destroyed, in a moment; for wickedness is wherever they are, it is in the midst of them.*" The souls of impenitent sinners go down quick, or alive, into hell, for they have a perfect sense of their miseries, and shall *therefore* live still, that they may be still miserable. This prayer is a prophecy of the utter, the final, the everlasting, ruin of all those who, whether secretly or openly, oppose and rebel against the Lord's Messiah.

16. As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. 17. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice. 18. He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle *that was* against me: for there were many with me. 19. God shall hear and afflict them, even he that abideth of old. Selah. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God. 20. He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him: he hath broken his covenant. 21. *The words* of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war *was* in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet *were* they drawn swords. 22. Cast thy burthen upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. 23. But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

In these verses,

I. David perseveres in his resolution to call upon God, being well assured that he should not seek him in vain; (v. 16.) "As for me, let them take what course they please to secure themselves, let violence and strife be their guards, prayer shall be mine: this I have found comfort in, and therefore this will I abide by; *I will call upon God*, and commit myself to him, and *the Lord shall save me.*" Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, in a right manner, shall be saved, Rom. 10. 13. He resolves to be both fervent, and frequent, in this duty. 1. He will pray fervently; *I will pray and cry aloud. "I will meditate,"* (so the former word signifies,) "I will speak with my own heart, and the prayer shall come thence." Then we pray aright, when we pray with all that is within us; think first, and then pray over our thoughts; for the true nature of prayer is, lifting up the heart to God. Having meditated, he will cry, he will cry aloud: the fervour of his spirit in prayer shall be expressed, and yet more excited, by the intenseness and earnestness of his voice. 2. He will pray frequently, every day, and three times a day, evening, and morning, and at noon. It is probable that this had been his constant practice, and he resolves to continue it, now that he is in his distress. Then we may come the more boldly to the throne of grace in trouble, when we do not then first begin to seek acquaintance with God, but it is what we have constantly practised, and the trouble finds the wheels of prayer going. They that think three meals a day little enough for the body, ought much more to think three solemn prayers a day little enough for the soul, and to count it a pleasure, not a task. As it is fit that in the morning we should begin the day with God, and in the evening close it with him, so it is fit that in the midst of the

day we should retire a while to converse with him. It was Daniel's practice to pray three times a day; (Dan. 6. 10.) and noon was one of Peter's hours of prayer, Acts, 10. 9. Let not us be weary of praying often, for God is not weary of hearing; "He shall hear my voice, and not blame me for coming too often, but the oftener the better, the more welcome."

II. He assures himself that God would, in due time, give an answer of peace to his prayers.

1. That he himself should be delivered, and his fears prevented; those fears with which he was much disordered, (v. 4. 5.) by the exercise of faith were now silenced, and he begins to rejoice in hope; (v. 18.) *God has delivered my soul in peace*, that is, he will deliver it; David is as sure of the deliverance as if it were already wrought. His enemies were at war with him, and the battle was against him, but God delivered him in peace, brought him off with as much comfort as if he had never been in danger. If he did not deliver him in victory, yet he delivered him in peace, inward peace, he delivered his soul in peace; by patience and holy joy in God he kept possession of that; those are safe and easy whose hearts and minds are kept by that peace of God which *passes all understanding*, Phil. 4. 7. David, in his fright thought all were against him; but now he sees there were many with him, more than he imagined, his interest proved better than he expected, and this he gives to God the glory of; for it is he that raises us up friends when we need them, and makes them faithful to us. There were many with him, for though his subjects deserted him, and went over to Absalom, yet God was with him, and the good angels. With an eye of faith he now sees himself surrounded, as Elisha was, with chariots of fire, and horses of fire, and therefore triumphs thus, *There are many with me, more with me than against me*, 2 Kings, 6. 16, 17.

2. That his enemies should be reckoned with, and brought down. They had frightened him with their menaces, (v. 3.) but here he says enough to frighten them, and make them tremble with more reason, and no remedy, for they could not ease themselves of their fears, as David could, by faith in God.

(1.) David here gives their character, as the reason why he expected God would bring them down.

[1.] They are impious and profane, and stand in no awe of God, of his authority or wrath; (v. 19.) "*Because they have no changes, no afflictions, no interruption to the constant course of their prosperity, no crosses to empty them from vessel to vessel, therefore they fear not God*, they live in a constant neglect and contempt of God and religion, which is the cause of all their other wickedness, and by which they are certainly marked for destruction.

[2.] They are treacherous and false, and will not be held by the most sacred and solemn engagements; (v. 20.) "*He has put forth his hand against such as be at peace with him*, that never provoked him, nor gave him any cause to quarrel with them; nay to whom he had given all possible encouragement to expect kindness from him. He has put forth his hand against those whom he had given his hand to, and has broken his covenant, both with God and man, has perfidiously violated his engagement to both;" than which nothing makes men riper for ruin.

[3.] They are base and hypocritical, pretending friendship while they design mischief; (v. 21.) "*The words of his mouth*" (probably he means Ahithophel particularly) "*were smoother than butter, and softer than oil*, so courteous was he and obliging, so free in his professions of respect and kindness, and the proffers of his service; yet, at the same time, *war was in his heart*, and all this courtesy was but a stratagem of war, and those very words had such a mischievous design in them, that they were as drawn swords designed to stab." They smile in a man's face, and cut his throat at the same time, as Joab, that kissed and killed. Satan is such an enemy; he flatters men into their ruin; *when he speaks fair, believe him not.*

(2.) David here foretells their ruin.

[1.] God shall afflict them, and bring them into straits and frights, and recompense tribulation to them that have troubled his people, and this, in answer to the prayers of his people; *God*

shall hear and afflict them, hear the cries of the oppressed, and speak terror to their oppressors, even he that abides of old, who is God from everlasting, and world without end, and who sits Judge from the beginning of time, and has always presided in the affairs of the children of men. Mortal men, though ever so high and strong, will easily be crushed by an eternal God, and are a very unequal match for him. This the saints have comforted themselves with, in reference to the threatening power of the church's enemies; (Hab. 1. 12.) *Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord?*

[2.] God shall bring them down, not only to the dust, but to the pit of destruction; (v. 23.) to the bottomless pit, which is called *destruction*, Job, 26. 6. He afflicted them, (v. 19.) to see if that would humble and reform them; but they not being wrought upon by that, he shall, at last, bring them to ruin. Those that are not reclaimed by the rod of affliction, will certainly be brought down into the pit of destruction. They are bloody and deceitful men, the worst of men, and therefore shall not live out half their days, not half so long as men ordinarily live, and as they might have lived in a course of nature, and as they themselves expected to live. They shall live as long as the Lord of life, the righteous Judge, has appointed, with whom the number of our months is; but he has determined to cut them off, by an untimely death, in the midst of their days. They were bloody men, and cut others off, and therefore God will justly cut them off: they were deceitful men, and defrauded others of the one half perhaps of what was their due; and now God will cut them short, though not of that which was their due, yet of that which they counted upon.

III. He encourages himself, and all good people, to commit themselves to God with confidence in him. He himself resolves to do so; (v. 23.) *"I will trust in thee, in thy providence, and power, and mercy, and not in my own prudence, strength, or merit; when bloody and deceitful men are cut off in the midst of their days, I shall still live by faith in thee."* And this he will have others to do; (v. 22.) *"Cast thy burthen upon the Lord, whoever thou art, that art burthened, and whatever the burthen is. Cast thy gift upon the Lord,"* so some read it; *"Whatever blessings God has bestowed upon thee to enjoy, commit them all to his custody, and particularly commit the keeping of thy soul to him."* Or, *"Whatever it is that thou desirest God should give thee, leave it to him to give it thee in his own way and time."* *Cast thy care upon the Lord*, so the LXX, to which the apostle refers, 1 Pet. 5. 7. Care is a burthen, it makes the heart stoop; (Prov. 12. 25.) we must cast it upon God by faith and prayer, commit our way and works to him; let him do as seemeth him good, and we will be satisfied. To cast our burthen upon God, is, to stay ourselves on his providence and promise, and to be very easy in the assurance that all shall work for good. If we do so, it is promised, 1. That he will sustain us, both support and supply us; will himself carry us in the arms of his power, as the nurse carries the sucking-child, will strengthen our spirits so by his Spirit, as that they shall sustain the infirmity. He has not promised to free us immediately from that trouble which gives rise to our cares and fears; but he will provide that we be not tempted above what we are able, and that we shall be able according as we are tempted. 2. That he will never suffer the righteous to be moved, to be so shaken by any troubles, as to quit either their duty to God, or their comfort in him. However, he will not suffer them to be moved for ever; (as some read it;) though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down.

PSALM LVI.

It seems by this, and many other psalms, that, even in times of the greatest trouble and distress, David never hung his harp upon the willow-trees, never unstrung it, or laid it by; but that, when his dangers and fears were greatest, he was still in tune for singing God's praises. He was in imminent peril when he penned this psalm, at least, when he meditated it; yet even then his meditation of God was sweet. I. He complains of the malice of his enemies, and begs mercy for himself, and justice against them, v. 1, 2, 5, 7. II. He confides in God, being assured that he took his part, comforting himself with this, that

therefore he was safe, and should be victorious, and that, while he lived, he should praise God, v. 3, 4, 8, 13. How pleasantly may a good Christian, in singing this psalm, rejoice in God, and praise him for what he will do, as well as for what he has done.

To the chief musician upon Jonath-clem-rechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath.

1. **B**E merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me. 2. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for *they be* many that fight against me, O thou most High. 3. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. 4. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. 5. Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts *are* against me for evil. 6. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. 7. Shall they escape by iniquity? in *thine* anger cast down the people, O God

David, in this psalm, by his faith throws himself into the hands of God, then when he had by his fear and folly thrown himself into the hands of the Philistines; it was when they took him in Gath, whither he fled for fear of Saul, forgetting the quarrel they had with him for killing Goliath; but they soon put him in mind of it, 1 Sam. 21. 10, 11. Upon that occasion he changed his behaviour, but with so little ruffle to his temper, that then he penned both this psalm and the 34th. This is called *Michtam*—*A golden psalm*. So some other psalms are entitled, but this has something peculiar in the title; it is upon *Jonath-clem-rechokim*, which signifies, *The silent dove afar off*. Some apply that to David himself, who wished for the wings of a dove on which to fly away. He was innocent and inoffensive, mild and patient, as a dove, was at this time driven from his nest, from the sanctuary, (84. 3.) was forced to wander afar off, to seek for shelter in distant countries, there he was like the doves of the valleys, mourning and melancholy; but silent, neither murmuring against God, nor railing at the instruments of his trouble; herein a type of Christ, who was as a sheep, dumb before the shearers, and a pattern to Christians, who, wherever they are, and whatever injuries are done them, ought to be as silent doves.

In this former part of the psalm,

I. He complains to God of the malice and wickedness of his enemies, to shew what reason he had to fear them, and what cause, what need, there was, that God should appear against them; (v. 1.) *Be merciful unto me, O God*. That petition includes all the good we come to the throne of grace for; if we obtain mercy there, we obtain all we can desire; and need no more to make us happy. It implies likewise our best plea, not our merit, but God's mercy, his free rich mercy. He prays he might find mercy with God, for with men he could find no mercy. When he fled from the cruel hands of Saul, he fell into the cruel hands of the Philistines; "Lord," (says he,) "be thou merciful to me now, or I am undone." The mercy of God is what we may flee to, and trust to, and in faith pray for, when we are surrounded on all sides with difficulties and dangers. He complains,

1. That his enemies were very numerous; (v. 2.) *"They be many that fight against me, and think to overpower me with numbers; take notice of this, O thou most High, and make it to appear that, wherein they deal proudly, thou art above them."* It is a point of honour to come into the help of one against many. And if God be on our side, how many soever they are that fight against us, we may, upon good grounds, boast, that there are more with us; for (as that great general said) "How many do we reckon him for?"

2. That they were very barbarous; they would swallow him up, (v. 1.) and again, v. 2. They sought to devour him; no less would serve, they came upon him with the utmost fury, like beasts of prey, to eat up his flesh, 27. 2. *Man* would swallow him up, those of his own kind, from whom he might have expected humanity. The ravenous beasts prey not upon those of their own species; yet a bad man would devour a good man, if he could. "They are men, weak and frail; make them to know that they are so," 9. 20.

3. That they were very unanimous; (v. 6.) *They gather themselves together*; though they were many, and of different interests among themselves, yet they united and combined against David, as Herod and Pilate against the Son of David.

4. That they were very powerful; quite too hard for him, if God did not help him; "*They fight against me*; (v. 2.) *They oppress me*; (v. 1.) I am almost overcome and borne down by them, and reduced to the last extremity."

5. That they were very subtle and crafty; (v. 6.) "They hide themselves; they industriously cover their designs, that they may the more effectually prosecute and pursue them. They hide themselves as a lion in his den, that they may mark my steps; they observe every thing I say and do, with a critical eye, that they may have something to accuse me of." Thus Christ's enemies watched him, Luke, 20. 20. Or, "They have an eye upon all my motions, that they may gain an opportunity to do me a mischief, and may lay their snares for me."

6. That they were very spiteful and malicious; they put invidious constructions upon every thing he said, though ever so honestly meant, and prudently expressed; (v. 5.) "They wrest my words, put them upon the rack, to extort that out of them which was never in them;" and so they made him an offender for a word, (Isa. 29. 21.) misrepresenting it to Saul, and aggravating it, to incense him yet more against him. They made it their whole business to ruin David, all their thoughts were against him for evil, which put evil interpretations upon all his words.

7. That they were very restless and unwearied; they continually waited for his soul, it was the life, the precious life, they hunted for; it was his death they longed for, v. 6. They fought daily against him, (v. 1.) and would daily swallow him up, (v. 2.) and every day they wrested his words, v. 5. Their malice would not admit the least cessation of arms, or the acts of hostility, but they were continually pushing at him. Such as this, is the enmity of Satan and his agents against the kingdom of Christ and the interests of his holy religion, which if we cordially espouse, we must not think it strange to meet with such treatment as this, as though some strange thing happened to us. Our betters have been thus used; so persecuted they the prophets.

II. He encourages himself in God, and in his promises, power, and providence, v. 3, 4. In the midst of his complaints, and before he has said what he has to say of his enemies, he triumphs in the divine protection. 1. He resolves to make God his Confidence, then when dangers were most threatening, and all other confidences failed; "*What time I am afraid*, in the day of my fear, when I am most terrified from without, and most timorous within, then *I will trust in thee*, and thereby my fears shall be silenced. Note, There are some times which are, in a special manner, times of fear with God's people; in these times, it is their duty and interest to trust in God as their God, and to know whom they have trusted. This will fix the heart, and keep it in peace. 2. He resolves to make God's promises the matter of his praises, and so we have reason to make them; (v. 4.) "*In God I will praise*, not only his work which he has done, but his word which he has spoken; I will give him thanks for a promise, though not yet performed; *in God*, in his strength, and by his assistance, I will both glory in his word, and give him the glory of it." Some understand, by *his word*, his providences, every event that he orders and appoints; "When I speak well of God, with him I will speak well of every thing that he does." 3. Thus supported, he will bid defiance to all adverse powers; "*When in God I have put my trust*, I am safe, I am easy,

and *I will not fear what flesh can do unto me*; it is but flesh, and cannot do much; nay, it can do nothing but by divine permission." As we must not trust to an arm of flesh, when it is engaged for us, so we must not be afraid of an arm of flesh when it is stretched out against us.

III. He foresees, and foretells, the fall of those that fought against him, and of all others that think to establish themselves in and by any wicked practices; (v. 7.) *Shall they escape by iniquity?* They hope to escape God's judgments, as they escape men's, by violence and fraud, and the arts of injustice and treachery; but shall they escape? No, they certainly shall not; the sin of sinners will never be their security, nor will either their impudence or their hypocrisy bring them off at God's bar; God will, in his anger, cast down, and cast out, such people, Rom. 2, 3. None are raised so high, or settled so firmly, but that the justice of God can bring them down, both from their dignities, and from their confidences; *Who knows the power of God's anger*; how high it can reach, and how forcibly it can strike?

8. Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: *are they not in thy book?* 9. When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. 10. In God will I praise his word: in the Lord will I praise his word. 11. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. 12. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. 13. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: *wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling*, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

Several things David here comforts himself with, in the day of his distress and fear.

I. That God took particular notice of all his grievances and all his griefs, v. 8. 1. Of all the inconveniencies of his state; *Thou tellest my wanderings, my flittings*, so the old translation. David was now but a young man, (under thirty,) and yet he had had many removes, from his father's house to the court, thence to the camp, and now driven out to sojourn where he could find a place, but not allowed to rest any where; hunted like a partridge upon the mountains; continual terrors and toils attended him; but this comforted him, that God kept a particular account of all his motions, and numbered all the weary steps he took, by night or by day. Note, God takes cognizance of all the afflictions of his people; and he does not cast out from his care and love those whom men have cast out from their acquaintance and converse. 2. Of all the impressions thus made upon his spirit. When he was wandering, he was often weeping; and therefore prays, "*Put thou my tears into thy bottle*, to be preserved and looked upon; nay, I know they are in thy book, the book of thy remembrance." God has a bottle and a book for his people's tears, both those for their sins, and those for their afflictions. This intimates, (1.) That he observes them with compassion and tender concern; he is afflicted in their afflictions, and knows their souls in adversity. As the blood of his saints, and their deaths, are precious in the sight of the Lord, so are their tears, not one of them shall fall to the ground. *I have seen thy tears*, 2 Kings, 20. 5. *I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself*, Jer. 31. 18. (2.) That he will remember them, and review them, as we do the accounts we have booked. Paul was mindful of Timothy's tears, (2 Tim. 1. 4.) and God will not forget the sorrows of his people. The tears of God's persecuted people are bottled up, and sealed among God's treasures; and when these books come to be opened, they will be found vials of wrath which will be poured out upon their persecutors, whom God will surely reckon with for all the tears they have forced from his people's eyes; and they will be breasts of consolation to God's mourners, whose sackcloth will be turned

into garments of praise; God will comfort his people according to the time wherein he has afflicted them, and give to them to reap in joy, who sowed in tears. What was sown a tear, will come up a pearl.

II. That his prayers would be powerful for the defeat and discomfiture of his enemies, as well as for his own support and encouragement; (v. 9.) "*When I cry unto thee, then shall my enemies turn back; I need no other weapons than prayers and tears; this I know, for God is for me*, to plead my cause, to protect and deliver me; and if God be for me, who can be against me so as to prevail?" The saints have God for them; they may know it; and to him they must cry when they are surrounded with enemies; which, if they do in faith, they shall find a divine power exerted and engaged for them; their enemies shall be made to turn back; their spiritual enemies, against whom we fight best upon our knees, Eph. 6. 18.

III. That his faith in God would set him above the fear of man, v. 10, 11. Here he repeats, with a strong pathos, what he had said; (v. 4.) "*In God will I praise his word; I will firmly depend upon the promise, for the sake of him that made it, who is true and faithful, and has wisdom, power, and goodness, enough to make it good.*" When we give credit to a man's bill, we honour him that drew it; so when we do, and suffer, for God, in a dependence upon his promise, not staggering at it, we give glory to God, we praise his word, and so give praise to him. Having thus put his trust in God, he looks with a holy contempt upon the threatening power of man; "*In God have I put my trust, and in him only, and therefore I will not be afraid what man can do unto me*, though I know very well what he would do if he could," v. 11. This triumphant word, so expressive of a holy magnanimity, the apostle puts into the mouth of every true believer, whom he makes a Christian hero, Heb. 13. 6. We may each of us boldly say, *The Lord is my Helper*, and then *I will not fear what man shall do unto me*; for he has no power but what he has given him from above.

IV. That he was in bonds to God; (v. 12.) "*Thy vows are upon me, O God; not upon me as a burthen which I am loaded with, but as a badge which I glory in, as that by which I am known to be thy menial servant; not upon me as fetters that hamper me, (such are superstitious vows,) but upon me as a bridle that restrains me from what would be hurtful to me, and directs me in the way of my duty. Thy vows are upon me, the vows I have made to thee, to which thou art not only a Witness, but a Party, and which thou hast commanded and encouraged me to make.*" It is probable that he means especially those vows which he had made to God in the day of his trouble and distress, which he would retain the remembrance of, and acknowledge the obligations of, when his fright was over. Note, It ought to be the matter of our consideration and joy, that *the vows of God are upon us*; our baptismal vows, renewed at the Lord's table, our occasional vows under convictions, under corrections, by these we are bound to live to God.

V. That he should still have more and more occasion to praise him; *I will render praises unto thee*. This is part of the performance of his vows; for vows of thankfulness properly accompany prayers for mercy, and, when the mercy is received, must be made good. When we study what we shall render, this is the least we can resolve upon, to render praises to God. Poor returns for rich receivings! Two things he will praise God for.

1. For what he had done for him; (v. 13.) "*Thou hast delivered my soul, my life, from death, which was just ready to seize me.*" If God have delivered us from sin, either from the commission of it by preventing grace, or from the punishment of it by pardoning mercy, we have reason to own that he has thereby delivered our souls from death, which is the wages of sin. If we, who were by nature dead in sin, are quickened together with Christ, and are made spiritually alive, we have reason to own that God has delivered our souls from death.

2. For what he would do for him; "*Thou hast delivered my soul from death, and so hast given me a new life, and thereby hast given me an earnest of further mercy, that thou wilt deliver*

my feet from falling: thou hast done the greater, and therefore thou wilt do the lesser; thou hast begun a good work, and therefore thou wilt carry it on, and perfect it." This may be taken either as the matter of his prayer, pleading his experience, or as the matter of his praise, raising his expectations; and those that know how to praise in faith, will give God thanks for mercies in promise and prospect, as well as in possession. See here, (1.) What David hopes for, that God would deliver his feet from falling either into sin, which would wound his conscience, or into the appearance of sin, from which his enemies would take occasion to wound his good name. Those that think they stand must take heed lest they fall, because the best stand no longer than God is pleased to uphold them. We are weak, our way is slippery, many stumbling-blocks are in it, our spiritual enemies are industrious to thrust us down, and therefore we are concerned by faith and prayer to commit ourselves to his care, who *keeps the feet of his saints*. (2.) What he builds this hope upon; "*Thou hast delivered my soul from death, and therein hast magnified thy power and goodness, and put me into a capacity of receiving further mercy from thee; and now wilt thou not secure and crown thy own work?*" God never brought his people out of Egypt, to slay them in the wilderness. He that in conversion delivers the soul from so great a death as sin is, will not fail to preserve it to his heavenly kingdom. (3.) What he designs in these hopes; *that I may walk before God, in the light of the living*, that is, [1.] "That I may get to heaven, the only land of light and life; for in this world darkness and death reign." [2.] "That I may do my duty, while this life lasts." Note, This we should aim at in all our desires and expectations of deliverance both from sin and trouble, that we may do God so much the better service; *that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we may serve him without fear*.

PSALM LVII.

This psalm is very like that which goes next before it; it was penned upon a like occasion, when David was both in danger of trouble, and in temptation to sin; it begins as that did, Be merciful to me; the method also is the same; I. He begins with prayer and complaint, yet not without some assurance of speeding in his request, v. 1..6. II. He concludes with joy and praise, v. 7..11. So that hence we may take direction and encouragement, both in our supplications, and in our thanksgivings, and may offer both to God in singing this psalm.

To the chief musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.

1. **B**E merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me; for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast. 2. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me. 3. He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. 4. My soul is among lions; and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. 5. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth. 6. They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah.

The title of this psalm has one word new in it, *Al-taschith—Destroy not*. Some make it to be only some known tune to which this psalm was set, others apply it to the occasion and matter of the psalm; *Destroy not*; that is, David would not let Saul be destroyed, when now in the cave there was a fair opportunity of

doing it, and his servants would fain have done it; No, says David, *destroy him not*, 1 Sam. 24. 4, 6. Or rather, God would not let David be destroyed by Saul; he suffered him to persecute David, but still under this limitation, *Destroy him not*; as he permitted Satan to afflict Job, *Only save his life*. David must not be destroyed, for *a blessing is in him*, (Isa. 65. 8.) even Christ, the Best of blessings. When David was in the cave, in imminent peril, he here tells us what were the workings of his heart toward God; and happy they that have such good thoughts as these in their minds, when they are in danger!

I. He supports himself with faith and hope in God, and prayer to him, v. 1, 2. Seeing himself surrounded with enemies, he looks up to God with that suitable prayer, *Be merciful to me, O Lord*; which he again repeats, and it is no vain repetition; *Be merciful unto me*. It was the publican's prayer, Luke, 18. 13. It is pity that any should use it slightly and profanely, should cry, *God be merciful to us*, or, *Lord, have mercy upon us*, when they mean only to express their wonder, or surprise, or vexation, but God and his mercy are not in all their thoughts. It is with much devout affection that David here prays, "*Be merciful unto me, O Lord*; look with compassion upon me, and in thy love and pity redeem me." To recommend himself to God's mercy, he here professes,

1. That all his dependence is upon God; *My soul trusteth in thee*, v. 1. He did not only profess to trust in God, but his soul did indeed rely on God only, with a sincere devotion and self-dedication, and an entire complacency and satisfaction. He goes to God, and, at the footstool of the throne of his grace, humbly professes his confidence in him; *In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge*, as the chickens take shelter under the wings of the hen, when the birds of prey are ready to strike at them, *until these calamities be over-past*. (1.) He was confident his troubles would end well, in due time; *these calamities will be over-past*; the storm will blow over, *Non si male nunc et olim sic erit—Though now distressed, I shall not always be*. Our Lord Jesus comforted himself with this, in his sufferings, (Luke, 22. 37.) *The things concerning me have an end*. (2.) He was very easy under the divine protection, in the mean time. [1.] He comforted himself in the goodness of God's nature, by which he is inclined to succour and protect his people, as the hen is by instinct to shelter her young ones. God comes upon the wing to the help of his people, which denotes a speedy deliverance; (18. 10.) and he takes them under his wing, which denotes warmth and refreshment, even when the calamities are upon them; see Matth. 23. 37. [2.] In the promise of his word, and the covenant of his grace; for it may refer to the out-stretched *wings of the cherubims*, between which God is said to dwell, (80. 1.) and whence he gave his oracles. "To God, as the God of grace, will I fly, and his promise shall be my refuge, and a sure passport it will be through all these dangers." God, by his promise, offers himself to us, to be trusted; we by our faith must accept of him, and put our trust in him.

2. That all his desire is toward God; (v. 2.) "*I will cry unto God most high*, for succour and relief; to him that is most high will I lift up my soul, and pray earnestly, even *unto God that performs all things for me*." Note, (1.) In every thing that befalls us, we ought to see, and own, the hand of God; whatever is done, is of his performing, in it his counsel is accomplished, and the scripture is fulfilled. (2.) Whatever God performs concerning his people, it will appear, in the issue, to have been performed for them, and for their benefit. Though God be high, *most high*, yet he condescends so low, as to take care that all things he made to work for good to them. (3.) This is a good reason why we should, in all our straits and difficulties, cry unto him; not only pray, but pray earnestly.

3. That all his expectation is from God; (v. 3.) *He shall send from heaven, and save me*. They that make God their only Refuge, and fly to him by faith and prayer, may be sure of salvation, in his way and time. Observe here, (1.) Whence he expects the salvation; from heaven. Look which way he will, on this earth, refuge fails, no help appears: but he looks for it from

heaven; they that lift up their hearts to things above, may from thence expect all good. (2.) What the salvation is that he expects; he trusts that God will save him *from the reproach of those that would swallow him up*, that aimed to ruin him, and, in the mean time, did all they could to vex him. Some read it, *He shall send from heaven, and save me, for he has put to shame him that would swallow me up*; he has disappointed their designs against me hitherto, and therefore he will perfect my deliverance. (3.) What he will ascribe his salvation to; *God shall send forth his mercy and truth*. God is good in himself, and faithful to every word that he has spoken, and so he makes it appear when he works deliverance for his people. We need no more to make us happy, than to have the benefit of the mercy and truth of God, 25. 10.

II. He represents the power and malice of his enemies; (v. 4.) *My soul is among lions*; so fierce and furious was Saul, and those about him, against David, that he might have been as safe in a den of lions, as among such men, who were continually roaring against him, and ready to make a prey of him. They are set on fire, and breathe nothing but flame; they set on fire the course of nature, inflaming one another against David, and *they were themselves set on fire of hell*, Jam. 3. 6. They were sons of men, from whom one might have expected something of the reason and compassion of a man; but they were beasts of prey in the shape of men; their *teeth*, which they gnashed upon him, and with which they hoped to tear him to pieces, and to eat him up, *were spears and arrows* fitted for mischiefs and murders; and their *tongue*, with which they cursed him, and wounded his reputation, was as a *sharp sword* to cut and kill; see 42. 10. A spiteful tongue is a dangerous weapon, wherewith Satan's instruments fight against God's people. He describes their malicious projects against him, (v. 6.) and shews the issue of them; "*They have prepared a net for my steps*, in which to take me, that I might not again escape out of their hands; *they have digged a pit before me*, that I might, ere I was aware, run headlong into it." See the policies of the church's enemies; see the pains they take to do mischief. But let us see what comes of it. 1. It is indeed some disturbance to David; *My soul is bowed down*. It made him droop, and hang the head, to think that there should be those that bore him so much ill-will. But, 2. It was destruction to themselves; they digged a pit for David, *into the midst whereof they are fallen*. The mischief they designed against David, returned upon themselves, and they were embarrassed in their counsels; then when Saul was pursuing David, the Philistines were invading him; nay, in the cave, when Saul thought David should fall into his hands, he fell into the hands of David, and lay at his mercy.

III. He prays to God to glorify himself and his own great name; (v. 5.) "Whatever comes of me and my interest, *be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens*, be thou praised by the holy angels, those glorious inhabitants of the upper world; and *let thy glory be above*, or over all the earth, let all the inhabitants of this earth be brought to know and praise thee." Thus God's glory should lie nearer our hearts, and we should be more concerned for it, than for any particular interests of our own. When David was in the greatest distress and disgrace, he did not pray, *Lord, exalt me*, but, *Lord, exalt thine own name*. Thus the Son of David, when his soul was troubled, and he prayed, *Father, save me from this hour*, immediately withdrew that petition, and presented this in the room of it, *For this cause came I to this hour; Father, glorify thy name*, John, 12. 27, 28. Or it may be taken as a plea to enforce his petition for deliverance; "*Lord, send from heaven to save me*, and thereby thou wilt glorify thyself as the God both of heaven and earth." Our best encouragement in prayer, is taken from the glory of God, and to that therefore, more than our own comfort, we should have an eye in all our petitions for particular mercies; for this is made the first petition in the Lord's prayer, as that which regulates and directs all the rest, *Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name*.

7. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed!

I will sing and give praise. 8. Awake up, my glory: awake, psaltery and harp: I *myself* will awake early. 9. I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations. 10. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. 11. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: *let thy glory be above all the earth.*

How strangely is the tune altered here! David's prayers and complaints, by the lively actings of faith, are here, all of a sudden, turned into praises and thanksgivings; his sackcloth is loosed, he is girded with gladness, and his hallelujahs are as fervent as his hosannas. This should make us in love with prayer, that, sooner or later, it will be swallowed up in praise. Observe,

1. How he prepares himself for the duty of praise; (v.7.) *My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed.* My heart is erect, or lifted up, (so some,) which was bowed down, v.6. *My heart is fixed,* (1.) With reference to God's providences; it is prepared for every event, being *stayed upon God*, 112.7. Isa. 26.3. *My heart is fixed,* and then *none of these things move me*, Acts, 20.24. If by the grace of God we be brought into this even composed frame of spirit, we have great reason to be thankful. (2.) With reference to the worship of God; *My heart is fixed to sing and give praise.* It is implied, that the heart is the main thing required in all acts of devotion; nothing is done to purpose in religion, further than it is done with the heart. The heart must be fixed; fixed for the duty, fitted and put in frame for it; fixed in the duty by a close application; *attending on the Lord without distraction.*

2. How he excites himself to the duty of praise; (v.8.) *Awake up, my glory—my tongue;* our tongue is our glory, and never more so than when it is employed in praising God; or, *my soul,* that must be first awakened; dull and sleepy devotions will never be acceptable to God; we must stir up ourselves, and all that is within us, to praise God; with a holy fire must that sacrifice be kindled, and ascend in a holy flame. David's tongue will lead, and his psaltery and harp will follow, in these hymns of praise. *I myself will awake,* not only, "I will not be dead, and drowsy, and careless, in this work," but, "I will be in the most lively frame, as one newly awakened out of a refreshing sleep." He will awake *early* to this work, early in the morning, to begin the day with God; early in the beginnings of a mercy; when God is coming towards us with his favours, we must go forth to meet him with our praises.

3. How he pleases himself, and (as I may say) even prides himself, in the work of praise; so far is he from being ashamed to own his obligations to God, and dependence upon him, that he resolves to *praise him among the people*, and to *sing unto him among the nations*, v.9. This intimates, (1.) That his own heart was much affected and enlarged in praising God; he would even make the earth ring with his sacred songs, that all might take notice how much he thought himself indebted to the goodness of God. (2.) That he desired to bring others in to join with him in praising God; he will publish God's praises among the people, that the knowledge and fear and love of God might be propagated, and the ends of the earth might see his salvation. When David was driven out into heathen lands, he would not only not worship their gods, but he would openly avow his veneration for the God of Israel, would take his religion along with him wherever he went, would endeavour to bring others in love with it, and leave the sweet savour of it behind him. David, in his psalms, which fill the universal church, and will to the end of time, may be said to be still *praising God among the people*, and *singing to him among the nations*; for all good people make use of his words in praising God. Thus St. John, in his writings, is said to *prophecy again before many peoples and nations*, Rev. 10.11.

4. How he furnishes himself with matter for praise, v.10. That which was the matter of his hope and comfort, (*God shall*

send forth his mercy and his truth, v.3.) is here the matter of his thanksgiving, *Thy mercy is great unto the heavens*, great beyond conception and expression; and *thy truth unto the clouds*, great beyond discovery, for what eye can reach that which is wrapped up in the clouds? God's mercy and truth reach to the heavens, for they will bring all such to heaven as lay up their treasure in them, and build their hopes upon them. God's mercy and truth are praised even to the heavens, that is, by all the bright and blessed inhabitants of the upper world, who are continually exalting God's praises to the highest, while David on earth is endeavouring to spread his praises to the furthest, v.9.

5. How he leaves it at last to God to glorify his own name; (v.11.) *Be thou exalted, O God.* The same words which he had used, (v.5.) to sum up his prayers in, he here uses again, (and no vain repetition,) to sum up his praises in; "Lord, I desire to exalt thy name, and that all the creatures may exalt it; but what can the best of us do towards it? Lord, take the work into thine own hands; do it thyself, *be thou exalted, O God.* In the praises of the church triumphant, thou art exalted to the heavens, and in the praises of the church militant, thy glory is throughout all the earth; but thou art above all the blessing and praise of both, (Neb. 9.5.) and therefore, Lord, exalt thyself *above the heavens*, and *above all the earth*: *Father, glorify thine own name: Thou hast glorified it, glorify it yet again."*

PSALM LVIII.

It is the probable conjecture of some, (Amyraldus particularly,) that before Saul began to persecute David by force of arms, and raised the militia to seize him, he formed a process against him by course of law, upon which he was condemned, unheard, and attainted as a traitor by the great council, or supreme court of judicature, and then proclaimed qui caput gerit lupinum—an outlawed wolf, whom any man might kill, and no man might protect. The elders, in order to curry favour with Saul, having passed this bill of attainder, it is supposed that David penned this psalm on the occasion: 1. He describes their sin, and aggravates that, v.1.5. 11. He imprecates and foretells their ruin, and the judgments which the righteous God would bring upon them for their injustice, v.6.9. Which would redound, 1. To the comfort of the saints, v.10. 2. To the glory of God, v.11. Sin appears here both exceeding sinful and exceeding dangerous, and God a just Avenger of wrong, with which we should be affected in singing this psalm.

To the chief musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David.

1. **D**O ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men? 2. Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth. 3. The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. 4. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: *they are* like the deaf adder *that stoppeth* her ear; 5. Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.

We have reason to think that this psalm refers to the malice of Saul and his janizaries against David, because it bears the same inscription (*Al-taschith*, and *Michtam of David*) with that which goes before and that which follows, both which appear, by the title, to have been penned with reference to that persecution through which God preserved him, (*Al-taschith—Destroy not,*) and therefore the psalms he then penned were precious to him, *Michtams, David's jewels*, as Dr. Hammond translates it.

In these verses, David, not as a king, for he was not yet come to the throne, but as a prophet, in God's name arraigns and convicts his judges, with more authority and justice than they shewed in prosecuting him. Two things he charges them with;

I. The corruption of their government. They were a congregation, a bench of justices, nay, perhaps, a congress or convention of the states, from whom one might have expected fair dealing, for they were men learned in the laws, had been brought up in the study of these statutes and judgments, which were so right-

teous, that those of other nations were not to be compared with them. One would not have thought a congregation of such could be bribed and biassed with pensions, and yet, it seems, they were, because the son of Kish could do that for them, which the son of Jesse could not, 1 Sam. 22. 7. He had vineyards, and fields, and preferments, to give them, and therefore, to please him, they would do any thing, right or wrong. Of all the melancholy views which Solomon took of this earth and its grievances, nothing vexed him so much as to see, that, in the *place of judgment*, *wickedness was there*, Eccl. 3. 16. So it was in Saul's time.

1. The judges would not do right, would not protect or vindicate oppressed innocency; (v. 1.) "*Do ye indeed speak righteousness, or judge uprightly?*" No, you are far from it, your own consciences cannot but tell you that you do not discharge the trust reposed in you as magistrates, by which you are obliged to be a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well. Is this the justice you pretend to administer? Is this the patronage, this the countenance, which an honest man, and an honest cause, may expect from you? Remember you are sons of men, mortal and dying, and that you stand upon the same level, before God, with the meanest of those you trample upon, and must yourselves be called to an account and judged. You are *sons of men*, and therefore we may appeal to yourselves, and to that law of nature which is written in every man's heart, *Do ye indeed speak righteousness?* And will not your second thoughts correct what you have done?" Note, It is good for us often to reflect upon what we say, with this serious question, *Do we indeed speak righteousness?* that we may unsay what we have spoken amiss, and may proceed no further in it.

2. They did a great deal of wrong; they used their power for the support of injury and oppression; (v. 5.) *In heart you work wickedness*. It intimates that they wrought with a great deal of plot and management, not by surprise, but with premeditation and design, and with a strong inclination to it, and resolution in it. The more there is of the heart, in any act of wickedness, the worse it is, Eccl. 8. 11. And what was their wickedness? It follows, "*You weigh the violence of your hands in the earth,*" (or *in the land*;) "the peace of which you are appointed to be the conservators of." They did all the violence and injury they could, either to enrich, or avenge, themselves, and they weighed it, that is, (1.) They did it with a great deal of craft and caution; "*You frame it by rule and lines,*" (so the word signifies,) "that it may effectually answer your mischievous intentions; such masters are you of the art of oppression." (2.) They did it under colour of justice. They held the balances (the emblem of justice) in their hands, as if they designed to do right, and right is expected from them, but the result is violence and oppression, which are practised more effectually from being practised under the pretext of law and right.

II. The corruption of their nature. This was the root of bitterness from which that gall and wormwood sprang; (v. 3.) *The wicked, who, in heart, work wickedness, are estranged from the womb*, estranged from God and all good, *alienated from the divine life*, and its principles, powers, and pleasures, Eph. 4. 18. A sinful state is a state of estrangement from that acquaintance with God, and service of him, which we were made for. Let none wonder that these wicked men dare do such things, for wickedness is bred in the bone with them, they brought it into the world with them, they have in their natures a strong inclination to it, they learned it from their wicked parents, and have been trained up in it by a bad education; they are called, and not miscalled, *transgressors from the womb*, one can therefore expect no other than that they will *deal very treacherously*; see Isa. 48. 8. They go astray from God and their duty as soon as they be born, as soon as possibly they can; the foolishness that is bound up in their hearts, appears with the first operations of reason; as the wheat springs up, the tares spring up with it. Three instances are here given of the corruption of nature.

1. Falsehood. They soon learn to speak lies, and *bend their tongues, like their bows*, for that purpose, Jer. 9. 3. How soon will little children tell a lie, to excuse a fault, or in their own

commendation! No sooner can they speak than they speak to God's dishonour; tongue-sins are some of the first of our actual transgressions.

2. Malice. Their poison (their ill-will, and the spite they bore to goodness and all good men, particularly to David) was *like the poison of a serpent*, innate, venomous, and very mischievous, and that which they can never be cured of. We pity a dog that is poisoned by accident, but hate a serpent that is poisonous by nature. Such was the cursed enmity in the serpent's brood, against the Lord and his anointed.

3. Untractableness. They are malicious, and nothing will work upon them, no reason, no kindness, to mollify them, and bring them to a better temper. *They are like the deaf adder that stops her ear*, v. 4, 5. The psalmist, having compared these wicked men, whom he here complains of, to serpents, for their poisonous malice, takes occasion thence, upon another account, to compare them to the deaf adder or viper, concerning which there was then this vulgar tradition, that, whereas by music, or some other art, they had a way of charming serpents, so as either to destroy them, or, at least, disable them to do mischief, this deaf adder would lay one ear to the ground, and stop the other with her tail, so that she could not hear the voice of the enchantment, and so defeated the intention of it, and secured herself. The using of this comparison neither verifies the story, nor, if it were true, justifies the use of this enchantment; for it is only an allusion to the report of such a thing, to illustrate the obstinacy of sinners in a sinful way. God's design, in his word and providence, is, to cure serpents of their malignity; to this end, how wise, how powerful, how well-chosen, are the charms! How forcible the right words! But all in vain, with most men; and what is the reason? It is, because they will not hearken. None so deaf as those that will not hear; *we have piped unto men, and they have not danced*; how should they, when they have stopped their ears?

6. Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD. 7. Let them melt away as waters *which run continually: when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows*, let them be as cut in pieces. 8. As a snail *which melteth*, let *every one of them* pass away: *like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun*. 9. Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in *his wrath*. 10. The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. 11. So that a man shall say, Verily *there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth*.

In these verses, we have,

I. David's prayers against his enemies, and all such enemies of God's church and people; for it is as enemies of the latter that he looks upon them, so that he was actuated by a public spirit, in praying against them, and not by any private revenge.

1. He prays that they might be disabled to do any further mischief; (v. 6.) *Break their teeth, O God*. Not so much that they might not feed themselves, as that they might not be able to make prey of others, 3. 7. He does not say, "*Break their necks,*" (no, let them live to repent, *slay them not, lest my people forget,*) but, "*Break their teeth, for they are lions, they are young lions, that live by rapine.*"

2. That they might be disappointed in the plots they had already laid, and might not gain their point; "*When he bends his bow, and takes aim to shoot his arrows at the upright in heart, let them be as cut in pieces*, v. 7. Let them fall at his feet, and *never come near the mark.*"

3. That they and their interest might waste and come to nothing; that they might *melt away as waters that ran continually*, as the waters of a land-flood, which, though they seem formidable for a while, soon soak into the ground, or return to their channels; or, in general, as *water is spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again*, but gradually dries away, and disappears. Such shall the *floods of ungodly men* be, which sometimes *make us afraid*; (13. 4.) so shall the proud waters be reduced, which threaten to *go over our soul*, 124. 4, 5. Let us by faith then see what they *shall be*, and then we shall not fear what they *are*. He prays, (v. 8.) that they might melt as a snail, which wastes by its own motion, in every stretch it makes leaving some of its moisture behind, which, by degrees, must needs consume it, though it make a path to shine after it. He that, like a snail in her house, is *plenus sui—full of himself*, that pleases himself, and trusts to himself, does but consume himself, and will quickly bring himself to nothing. And he prays, that they might be *like the untimely birth of a woman*, which dies as soon as it begins to live, and never sees the sun. Job, in his passion, wished himself had been such a one, (Job, 3. 16.) but he knew not what he said. We may, in faith, pray against the designs of the church's enemies, as the prophet does; (Hos. 9. 14.) *Give them, O Lord, what wilt thou give them? Give them a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts.* Which explains this here.

II. His prediction of their ruin; (v. 9.) "*Before your pots can feel the heat of a fire of thorns made under them, which they will presently do, for it is a quick fire, and violent while it lasts, so speedily, with such a hasty and violent flame, God shall hurry them away, as terribly and as irresistibly as with a whirlwind, as it were alive, as it were in fury.*" The proverbial expressions are somewhat difficult, but the sense is plain; 1. That the judgments of God often surprise wicked people in the midst of their jollity, and hurry them away of a sudden. When they are beginning to walk in the light of their own fire, and the sparks of their own kindling, they are made to *lie down in sorrow*; (Isa. 50. 11.) and their laughter proves like the crackling of thorns under a pot, the comfort of which is soon gone, here they can say, *Alas, I am warm*, Eccl. 7. 6. 2. That there is no standing before the destruction that comes from the Almighty; for *who knows the power of God's anger?* When God will take sinners away dead or alive, they cannot contest with him; *The wicked are driven away in their wickedness.*

Now there are two things which the psalmist promises himself as the good effects of sinners' destruction.

(1.) That saints would be encouraged and comforted by it; (v. 10.) *The righteous shall rejoice, when he sees the vengeance*; the pomp and power, the prosperity and success, of the wicked, are a discouragement to the righteous; they sadden their hearts, and weaken their hands, and are sometimes a strong temptation to them to question their foundations, 73. 2, 13. But, when they see the judgments of God hurrying them away, and just vengeance taken on them for all the mischief they have done to the people of God, they rejoice in the satisfaction thereby given to their doubts, and the confirmation thereby given to their faith in the providence of God, and his justice and righteousness in governing of the world; they shall rejoice in the victory thus gained over that temptation, by *seeing their end*, 73. 17. *He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked*; there shall be abundance of blood shed; (68. 23.) and it shall be as great a refreshment to the saints, to see God glorified in the ruin of sinners, as it is to a weary traveller to have his feet washed. It shall likewise contribute to their satisfaction; the sight of the vengeance shall make them tremble before God, (119. 120.) and shall convince them of the evil of sin, and the obligations they lie under to that God who pleads their cause, and will suffer no man to do them wrong, and go unpunished for it. The joy of the saints, in the destruction of the wicked, is then a holy joy, and justifiable, when it helps to make them holy, and to purify them from sin.

(2.) That sinners would be convinced and converted by it, v. 11. The vengeance God sometimes takes on the wicked in this world, will bring men to say, *Verily, there is a reward for*

the righteous. Any man may draw this inference from such providences, and many a man shall, who, before, denied even these plain truths, or doubted of them. Some shall have this confession extorted from them, others shall have their minds so changed, that they shall willingly own it, and thank God, who has given them to see it, and see it with satisfaction, That God is, and, That he is (1.) The bountiful Rewarder of his saints and servants; *Verily, (however it be, so it may be read,) there is a fruit to the righteous*; whatever damage a man may sustain, whatever hazard he may run, and whatever hardship he may undergo for his religion, he shall not only be no loser by it, but an unspeakable gainer, in the issue. Even in this world there is a reward for the righteous, they shall be recompensed in the earth. They shall be taken notice of, honoured, and protected, that seemed slighted, despised, and abandoned. (2.) That he is the righteous Governor of the world, and will surely reckon with the enemies of his kingdom; verily, however it be, though wicked people prosper and bid defiance to Divine Justice, yet it shall be made to appear, to their confusion, that the world is not governed by chance, but by a Being of infinite wisdom and justice; there is a God that judges in the earth, though he has prepared his throne in the heavens. He presides in all the affairs of the children of men, and directs and disposes them according to the counsel of his will, to his own glory; and he will punish the wicked, not only in the world to come, but *in the earth*, where they have laid up their treasure, and promised themselves a happiness; *in the earth*, that the Lord may be known by the judgments which he executes, and they may be taken as earnest of a judgment to come. *He is a God*, (so we read it,) not a weak man, not an angel, not a mere name, not (as the atheists suggest) a creature of men's fear and fancy, not a deified hero, not the sun and moon, as idolaters imagined; but a God, a self-existent, perfect, Being; he it is that judges the earth; his favour therefore let us seek, from whom every man's judgment proceeds, and to him let all judgment be referred.

PSALM LIX.

This psalm is of the same nature and scope with six or seven foregoing psalms; they are all filled with David's complaints of the malice of his enemies, and of their cursed and cruel designs against him; his prayers and prophecies against them; and his comfort and confidence in God as his God. The first is the language of nature, and may be allowed; the second of a prophetic spirit, looking forward to Christ and the enemies of his kingdom, and therefore not to be drawn into a precedent; the third of grace and a most holy faith, which ought to be imitated by every one of us. In this psalm, I. He prays to God to defend and deliver him from his enemies, representing them as very bad men, barbarous, malicious, and atheistical, v. 1. 7. II. He foresees and foretells the destruction of his enemies, which he would give to God the glory of, v. 8. 17. As far as it appears that any of the particular enemies of God's people fall under these characters, we may, in singing this psalm, read their doom, and foresee their ruin.

To the chief musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David; when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.

1. **D**ELIVER me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me. 2. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. 3. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me; not *for* my transgression, nor *for* my sin, O LORD. 4. They run and prepare themselves without *my* fault: awake to help me, and behold. 5. Thou therefore, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen: be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. Selah. 6. They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. 7. Behold, they belch out with their

mouth: swords are in their lips; for who, say they, doth hear?

The title of this psalm acquaints us particularly with the occasion on which it was penned; it was when Saul sent a party of his guards to beset David's house in the night, that they might seize him and kill him; we have the story, 1 Sam. 19. 11. It was when his hostilities against David were newly begun, and he had but just before narrowly escaped Saul's javelin. These first eruptions of Saul's malice could not but put David into disorder, and be both grievous and terrifying, and yet he kept up his communion with God, and such a composure of mind, so that he was never out of frame for prayer and praises; happy they whose intercourse with heaven is not intercepted or broken in upon by their cares, or griefs, or fears, or any of the hurries (whether outward or inward) of an afflicted state.

In these verses,

I. David prays to be delivered out of the hands of his enemies, and that their cruel designs against him might be defeated; (v. 1, 2.) "*Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God; thou art God, and canst deliver me; my God, under whose protection I have put myself, and thou hast promised me to be a God all-sufficient, and therefore, in honour and faithfulness, thou wilt deliver me. Set me on high out of the reach of the power and malice of them that rise up against me, and above the fear of it. Let me be safe, and see myself so, safe and easy, safe and satisfied. Oh deliver me, and save me!*" He cries out as one ready to perish, and that had his eye to God only for salvation and deliverance. He prays, (v. 4.) "*Awake to help me, take cognizance of my case, behold that with an eye of pity, and exert thy power for my relief.*" Thus the disciples, in the storm, awoke Christ, saying, *Master, save us, we perish.* And thus earnestly should we pray daily, to be defended and delivered from our spiritual enemies, the temptations of Satan, and the corruptions of our own hearts, which war against our spiritual life.

II. He pleads for deliverance. Our God gives us leave, not only to pray, but to plead with him, to order our cause before him, and to fill our mouth with arguments; not to move him, but to move ourselves; David does so here.

1. He pleads the bad character to his enemies; they are *workers of iniquity*, and therefore not only his enemies, but God's enemies; they are *bloody men*, and therefore not only his enemies, but enemies to all mankind; "Lord, let not the workers of iniquity prevail against one that is a worker of righteousness; nor bloody men against a merciful man."

2. He pleads their malice against him, and the imminent danger he was in from them; (v. 3.) "Their spite is great, they aim at my soul, my life, my better part; they are subtle and very politic, they lie in wait, taking an opportunity to do me a mischief; they are all mighty, men of honour, and estates, and interest in court and country; they are in a confederacy, they are united by league, and actually gathered together against me; combined both in consultation and action. They are very ingenious in their contrivances, and very industrious in the prosecution of them; (v. 4.) *They run and prepare themselves, with the utmost speed and fury, to do me a mischief.*" He takes particular notice of the brutish carriage of the messengers that Saul sent to take him; (v. 6.) "*They return at evening from the posts assigned them in the day, to apply themselves to their works of darkness, (their night-work, which may well be their day-shame,) and then they make a noise like a hound in pursuit of the hare.*" Thus did David's enemies, when they came to take him, raise an out-cry against him as a rebel, a traitor, a man not fit to live; with this clamour they went round about the city, to bring a bad reputation upon David, if possible, to set the mob against him, at least, to prevent their being incensed against them, which otherwise they had reason to fear they would be, so much was David their darling. Thus the persecutors of our Lord Jesus, who are compared to dogs, (22. 16.) ran him down with noise, for else they could not have taken him, at least, *not on the feast-day, for*

there would have been an uproar among the people. They belch out with their mouth the malice that boils in their hearts, v. 7. *Swords are in their lips*; reproaches that wound my heart with grief, (42. 10.) and slanders that stab my reputation. They were continually suggesting that which drew, and whet, Saul's sword against him, and the fault is laid upon the false accusers. The sword, perhaps, had not been in Saul's hand, if it had not been first in their lips.

3. He pleads his own innocence, not as to God, he was never backward to own himself guilty before him, but as to his persecutors; what they charged him with was utterly false, nor had he ever said or done any thing to deserve such treatment from them; (v. 3.) "*Not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Lord, thou knowest, who knowest all things.*" And again, (v. 4.) *without my fault.* Note, (1.) The innocence of the godly will not secure them from the malignity of the wicked. Those that are harmless, like doves, yet, for Christ's sake, are hated of all men, as if they were noxious like serpents, and *obnoxious* accordingly. (2.) Though our innocence will not secure us from troubles, yet it will greatly support and comfort us under our troubles. The testimony of our conscience for us, that we have behaved ourselves well toward those that behave themselves ill toward us, will be very much our rejoicing in the day of evil. (3.) If we are conscious to ourselves of our innocence, we may with humble confidence appeal to God, and beg of him to plead our injured cause, which he will do in due time.

4. He pleads that his enemies were profane and atheistical, and bolstered themselves up in their enmity to David, with the contempt of God; *For who (say they) doth hear?* v. 7. Not God himself, 10. 11.—94. 7. Note, It is strange, if those regard not what they say, who have made themselves believe that God regards not what they say.

III. He refers himself and his cause to the just judgment of God, v. 5. "The Lord, the Judge, be Judge between me and my persecutors!" In this appeal to God, he has an eye to him as *the Lord of hosts*, that has power to execute judgment, having all creatures, even hosts of angels, at his command; he views him also as *the God of Israel*, to whom he was, in a peculiar manner, King and Judge, not doubting that he would appear on the behalf of those that were upright, that were Israelites indeed. When Saul's hosts persecuted him, he had recourse to God as *the Lord of all hosts*; when those maligned him, whose spirit were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, he had recourse to God as *the God of Israel*. He desires, that is, he is very sure, that God will awake to visit all the nations, will make an early and exact inquiry into the controversies and quarrels that are among the children of men; there will be a day of visitation, (Isa. 10. 3.) and to that day David refers himself, with this solemn appeal, *Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors; Selah*; Mark that. 1. If David had been conscious to himself that he was a wicked transgressor, he would not have expected to find mercy; but as to his enemies, he could say he was no transgressor at all; (v. 3, 4.) "*Not for my transgression, and therefore thou wilt appear for me.*" As to God, he could say he was no *wicked* transgressor; for, though he had transgressed, he was a penitent transgressor, and did not obstinately persist in what he had done amiss. 2. He knew his enemies were wicked transgressors, wilful, malicious, and hardened, in their transgressions, both against God and man, and therefore he sues for justice against them; judgment without mercy. Let not those expect to find mercy, who never shewed mercy, for such are wicked transgressors.

8. But thou, O LORD, shalt laugh at them; thou shalt have all the heathen in derision. 9. *Because of his strength will I wait upon thee: for God is my defence.* 10. The God of my mercy shall prevent me: God shall let me see *my desire* upon mine enemies. 11. Slay them not, lest my people forget: scatter them by thy power; and bring

them down, O Lord our shield. 12. For the sin of their mouth *and* the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying *which* they speak. 13. Consume *them* in wrath, consume *them*, that they *may* not be: and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah. 14. And at evening let them return; *and* let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. 15. Let them wander up and down for meat, and grudge if they be not satisfied. 16. But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. 17. Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence, *and* the God of my mercy.

David here encourages himself, in reference to the threatening power of his enemies, with a pious resolution to wait upon God, and a believing expectation that he should yet praise him.

1. He resolves to wait upon God; (v.9.) "*Because of his strength,*" (either the strength of his enemies, the fear of which drove him to God, or because of God's strength, the hope of which drew him to God,) "*will I wait upon thee,* with a believing dependence upon thee, and confidence in thee." It is our wisdom and duty, in times of danger and difficulty, to wait upon God; for he is our Defence, our High-Place, in whom we shall be safe. He hopes,

1. That God will be to him a *God of mercy*; (v.10.) "*The God of my mercy shall prevent me* with the blessings of his goodness, and the gifts of his mercy; prevent my fears, prevent my prayers, and be better to me than my own expectations." It is very comfortable to us, in prayer, to eye God, not only as the God of mercy, but as the God of our mercy, the Author of all good in us, and the Giver of all good to us. Whatever mercy there is in God, it is laid up for us, and is ready to be laid out upon us. Justly does the psalmist call God's mercy *his mercy*, for all the blessings of the new covenant are called *the sure mercies of David*; (Isa. 55. 3.) and they are *sure to all the seed*.

2. That he will be to his persecutors a *God of vengeance*. His expectation of this he expresses partly by way of prediction, and partly by way of petition, which come all to one; for his prayer that it might be so, amounts to a prophecy that it shall be so. Here are several things which he foretells concerning his enemies, or observers, that sought occasions against him, and opportunity to do him a mischief; in all which he should see his desire, not a passionate or revengeful desire, but a believing desire, upon them, v.10.

(1.) He foresees that God would expose them to scorn, as they had indeed made themselves ridiculous; (v.8.) "*They think God does not hear them,* does not heed them; *but thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them* for their folly, to think that he who planted the ear, shall not hear, and thou shalt have not them only, but all other such heathenish people that live without God in the world, *in derision*." Note, Atheists and persecutors are worthy to be laughed at, and had in derision. See Ps. 2. Prov. 1. 26. Isa. 37. 22.

(2.) That God would make them standing monuments of his justice; (v.11.) "*Slay them not;* let them not be killed outright, *lest my people forget*. If the execution be soon done, the impressions of it will not be deep, and therefore will not be durable, but will quickly wear off; swift destructions startle men for the present, but they are soon forgotten; for which reason he prays that this might be gradual, "*Scatter them by thy power,* and let them carry about with them, in their wanderings, such tokens of God's displeasure as may spread the notice of their punishment to all parts of the country." Thus Cain himself, though a mur-

derer, was not slain, lest the vengeance should be forgotten, but was sentenced to be a *fugitive and a vagabond*. Note, When we think God's judgments come slowly upon sinners, we must conclude that God has wise and holy ends in the gradual proceedings of his wrath. "So scatter them, as that they may never again unite to do mischief, *bring them down, O Lord, our Shield*." If God has undertaken the protection of his people as their Shield, he will, doubtless, humble and abase all those that fight against them.

(3.) That they might be dealt with according to their deserts; (v.12.) "*For the sin of their mouth, even for the words of their lips;* (for every word they speak has sin in it,) *let them for this be taken in their pride,* even for their cursing others, and themselves, (a sin Saul was subject to, 1 Sam. 14. 28, 44.) and lying. Note, [1.] There is a great deal of malignity in tongue-sins, more than is commonly thought of. [2.] Cursing, and lying, and speaking proudly, are some of the worst of the sins of the tongue; and that man is truly miserable whom God deals with according to the deserts of these, *making his own tongue to fall on him*.

(4.) That God would glorify himself, as Israel's God and King, in their destruction; (v.13.) "*Consume them in wrath, consume them;* follow them with one judgment after another, till they be utterly ruined, let them be sensibly, but gradually, wasted, that they themselves, while they are in the consuming, may know, and that the standers-by may likewise draw this inference from it, *That God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth*." Saul and his party think to rule and carry all before them, but they shall be made to know that there is a Higher than they, that there is one who does and will over-rule them. The design of God's judgments is to convince men that the Lord reigns, that he fulfils his own counsels, gives law to all the creatures, and disposes all things to his own glory, so that the greatest of men are under his check, and he makes what use he pleases of them. He *rules in Jacob*, for there he keeps his court, there he is known, and his name is great; but he *rules to the end of the earth*, for all nations are within the territories of his kingdom. He *rules to the ends of the earth*, even over those that know him not, but he *rules for Jacob*; so it may be read; he has an eye to the good of his church in the government of the world; the administrations of that government, even to the ends of the earth, are *for Jacob his servant's sake, and for Israel's his elect*, Isa. 45. 4.

(5.) That he would make their sin their punishment; (v.14.) compare v.6. Their sin was, hunting for David, to make a prey of him; their punishment should be, that they should be reduced to such extreme poverty, that they should hunt about for meat to satisfy their hunger, and should miss of it, as they missed of David. Thus they should be, not cut off at once, but scattered, (v.11.) and gradually consumed; (v.15.) they that die by famine die by inches, and feel themselves die, Lam. 4. 9. He foretells, that they should be forced to beg their bread from door to door. [1.] That they should do it with the greatest regret and reluctancy imaginable; *to beg they are ashamed*, (which makes it the greater punishment to them,) and therefore they do it at evening, when it begins to be dark, that they may not be seen; at the time when other beasts of prey creep forth, 104. 20. [2.] That yet they should be very clamorous and loud in their complaints, which would proceed from a great indignation at their condition, which they cannot in the least degree reconcile themselves to; *They shall make a noise like a dog*. When they were in quest of David, they made a noise like an angry dog snarling and barking; now, when they are in quest of meat, they shall make a noise like an hungry dog howling and wailing. Those that repent of their sins, *mourn*, when in trouble, *like doves*; those whose hearts are hardened, make a noise, when in trouble, like dogs, *like a wild bull in a net, full of the fury of the Lord*. See Hos. 7. 14: *They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled on their beds for corn and wine*. [3.] That they should meet with little relief, but the hearts of people should be very much hardened toward

them: so that they should go round about the city, and wander up and down for meat, (v. 15.) and should get nothing but by dint of importunity, according to our marginal reading, *If they be not satisfied, they will tarry all night*; so that what people do give them, is not with good-will, but only to be rid of them, lest by their continual coming they weary them. [4.] That they should be insatiable, which is the greatest misery of all in a poor condition; *They are greedy dogs which can never have enough*, (Isa. 56. 11.) and *they grudge if they be not satisfied*. A contented man, if he has not what he would have, yet does not grudge, does not quarrel with Providence, nor fret within himself; but those whose God is their belly, if that be not filled, and its appetites gratified, fall out both with God and themselves. It is not poverty, but discontent, that makes a man unhappy.

II. He expects to praise God; that God's providence would find him matter for praise, and that God's grace would work in him a heart for praise, v. 16, 17. Observe,

1. What he would praise God for. (1.) He would praise his power and his mercy, both should be the subject matter of his song. Power, without mercy, is to be dreaded; mercy, without power, is not what a man can expect much benefit from; but God's power, by which he is able to help us, and his mercy, by which he is inclined to help us, will justly be the everlasting praise of all the saints. (2.) He would praise him, because he had, many a time, and all along, found him his Defence, and his Refuge, in the day of trouble. God brings his people into trouble, that they may experience his power and mercy in protecting and sheltering them, and may have occasion to praise him. (3.) He would praise him, because he had still a dependence upon him, and a confidence in him, as his Strength to support him and carry him on in his duty, his Defence to keep him safe from evil, and the God of his mercy to make him happy and easy. He that is all this to us, is certainly worthy of our best affections, praises, and services.

2. How he would praise God. (1.) He would sing. As that is a natural expression of joy, so it is an instituted ordinance for the exerting and exciting of holy joy and thankfulness. (2.) He would sing aloud, as one much affected with the glory of God, that was not ashamed to own it, and that desired to affect others with it. He will sing of God's power, but he will sing aloud of his mercy; the consideration of that raises his affections more than any thing else. (3.) He would sing aloud in the morning, when his spirits were most fresh and lively: God's compassions are new every morning, and therefore it is fit to begin the day with his praises. (4.) He would sing unto God, (v. 17.) to his honour and glory, and with him in his eye. As we must direct our prayers to God, so to him we must direct our praises, and must look up, making melody to the Lord.

PSALM LX.

After many psalms which David penned in a day of distress, this comes, which was calculated for a day of triumph; it was penned after he was settled in the throne, upon occasion of an illustrious victory which God blessed his forces with over the Syrians and Edomites: it was when David was in the zenith of his prosperity, and the affairs of his kingdom seem to have been in a better posture than ever they were either before or after. See 2 Sam. 8. 3, 13. 1 Chron. 18. 3, 12. David, in prosperity, was as devout as David in adversity. In this psalm, I. He reflects upon the bad state of the public interests, for many years, in which God had been contending with them, v. 1. 3. II. He takes notice of the happy turn lately given to their affairs, v. 4. III. He prays for the deliverance of God's Israel from their enemies, v. 5. IV. He triumphs in hope of their victories over their enemies, and begs of God to carry them on and complete them, v. 6. 12. In singing this psalm, we may have an eye both to the acts of the church, and to the state of our own souls, both which have their struggles.

To the chief musician upon Shushan-eduth, Michtam of David, to teach; when he strove with Aram-naharaim, and with Aram-zobah, when Joab returned, and smote of Edom in the valley of salt twelve thousand.

1. **O** GOD, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again. 2. Thou hast made

the earth to tremble; thou hast broken it: heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh. 3. Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment. 4. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah. 5. That thy beloved may be delivered; save with thy right hand, and hear me.

The title gives us an account, 1. Of the general design of the psalm; it is *Michtam—David's jewel*, and it is *to teach*. The Levites must teach it the people, and by it teach them both to trust in God, and to triumph in him; we must in it teach ourselves and one another. In a day of public rejoicing, we have need to be taught to direct our joy to God, and to terminate it in him, to give none of that praise to the instruments of our deliverance which is due to him only, and to encourage our hopes with our joys. 2. Of the particular occasion of it: It was at a time, (1.) When he was at war with the Syrians, and still had a conflict with them, both those of Mesopotamia, and those of Zobah. (2.) When he had gained a great victory over the Edomites, by his forces under the command of Joab, who had left 12,000 of the enemy dead upon the spot. David has an eye to both these concerns, in this psalm: he is in care about his strife with the Assyrians, and, in reference to that, he prays; he is rejoicing in his success against the Edomites, and, in reference to that, he triumphs with a holy confidence in God, that he would complete the victory. We have our cares, at the same time that we have our joys, and they may serve for a balance to each other, that neither may exceed. They may likewise furnish us with matter both for prayer and praise, for both must be laid before God with suitable affections and devotions. If one point be gained, yet in another we are still striving: the Edomites are vanquished, but the Syrians are not; therefore *let not him that girds on the harness, boast as if he had put it off*.

In these verses, which begin the psalm, we have,

I. A melancholy memorial of the many disgraces and disappointments which God had, for some years past, put the people under. During the reign of Saul, especially in the latter end of it, and during David's struggle with the house of Saul, while he reigned over Judah only, the affairs of the kingdom were much perplexed, and the neighbouring nations were vexatious to them. 1. He complains of hard things which they had seen, which they had suffered, (v. 3.) while the Philistines and other ill-disposed neighbours took all advantages against them. God sometimes shews even his own people hard things in this world, that they may not take up their rest in it, but may dwell at ease in him only. He owns God's displeasure to be the cause of all the hardships they had undergone; *"Thou hast been displeased by us, displeased against us, (v. 1.) and in thy displeasure hast cast us off, and scattered us, hast put us out of thy protection; else our enemies could not have prevailed thus against us. They had never made a prey of us, if thou hadst not broken the staff of bands, (Zech. 11. 14.) by which we were united, and so scattered us."* Whatever our trouble is, and whoever are the instruments of it, we must own the hand of God, his righteous hand, in it. 3. He laments the ill effects and consequences of the miscarriages of the late years. The whole nation was in a convulsion; *Thou hast made the earth to tremble, or the land*. The generality of the people had dreadful apprehension of the issue of these things; the good people themselves were in a consternation; *"Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment; we were like men intoxicated, and at our wit's end, not knowing how to reconcile these dispensations with God's promises and his relation to his people; we are amazed, can do nothing, nor know we what to do."*

Now this is mentioned here, *to teach*, that is, for the instruction of the people. When God is turning his hand in our favours, it is good to remember our former calamities. (1.) That we may retain the good impressions they made upon us, and may have them

revived! Our souls must still have the affliction and the misery in remembrance, that they may be *humbled within us*, Lam. 3. 19, 20. (2.) That God's goodness to us, in relieving and raising us up, may be more magnified; for it is as life from the dead, so strange, so refreshing. Our calamities serve as foils to our joys. (3.) That we may not be secure, but may always rejoice with trembling, as those that know not how soon we may be returned into the furnace again, which we were lately taken out of, as the silver is when it is not thoroughly refined.

II. A thankful notice of the encouragement God had given them to hope, that, though things had been long bad, they would now begin to mend; (v. 4.) "*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee*, (for, as bad as the times are, there is a remnant among us that desire to fear thy name, for whom thou hast a tender concern,) *that it may be displayed by thee, because of the truth of thy promise which thou wilt perform, and to be displayed by them, in defence of truth and equity*," 45. 4. This banner was David's government, the establishment and enlargement of it over all Israel; the pious Israelites, who feared God, and had a regard to the divine designation of David to the throne, took his elevation as a token for good, and like the lifting up of a banner to them. 1. It united them, as soldiers are gathered together to their colours; they that were scattered, (v. 1.) divided among themselves, and so, weakened and exposed, coalesced in him, when he was fixed upon the throne. 2. It animated them, and put life and courage into them, as the soldiers are heartened by the sight of their banner. 3. It struck a terror upon their enemies; to whom they could now hang out a flag of defiance. Christ, the Son of David, is given *for an Ensign of the people*, (Isa. 11. 10.) for a Banner to those that fear God; in him, as the Centre of their unity, they are gathered together in one; to him they seek, in him they glory and take courage; his love is the banner over them, in his name and strength they wage war with the powers of darkness, and under him the church becomes terrible as an army with banners.

III. An humble petition for seasonable mercy.

1. That God would be reconciled to them, though he had been displeased with them. In his displeasure their calamities began, and therefore in his favour their prosperity must begin; *O turn thyself to us again*; (v. 1.) smile upon us, and take part with us; be at peace with us, and in that peace we shall have peace. *Tranquillus Deus, tranquillat omnia—A God at peace with us, spreads peace over all the scene*.

2. That they might be reconciled to one another, though they had been broken and wretchedly divided among themselves; "*Heal the breaches of our land*, (v. 2.) not only the breaches made upon us by our enemies, but the breaches made among ourselves by our unhappy divisions." Those are breaches which the folly and corruption of man makes, and which nothing but the wisdom and grace of God can make up and repair, by pouring out a spirit of love and peace, by which only a shaken shattered kingdom is set to rights, and saved from ruin.

3. That thus they might be preserved out of the hands of their enemies; (v. 5.) "*That thy beloved may be delivered*, and not made a prey of, *save with thy right hand*, with thine own power, and by such instruments as thou art pleased to make the men of thy right hand, and *hear me*." They that fear God are his beloved; they are dear to him as the apple of his eye; they are often in distress, but they shall be delivered; God's own right hand shall save them, for they that have his heart have his hand; *Save them, and hear me*. Note, God's praying people may take the general deliverances of the church, as answers to their prayers in particular. If we improve what interest we have at the throne of grace for blessings for the public, and those blessings be bestowed, beside the share we have with others in the benefit of them, we may each of us say, with peculiar satisfaction, "God has therein heard me, and answered me."

6 God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. 7. Gilead is mine, and

Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver; 8. Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe: Philistia, triumph thou because of me. 9. Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom? 10. *Wilt not thou, O God, which hadst cast us off? And thou, O God, which didst not go out with our armies? 11. Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. 12. Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.*

David is here rejoicing in hope, and praying in hope; such are the triumphs of the saints, not so much upon the account of what they have in possession, as of what they have in prospect; (v. 6.) "*God has spoken in his holiness*; he has given me his word of promise, has *sworn by his holiness, and he will not lie unto David*; (89. 35.) therefore *I will rejoice*, and please myself with the hopes of the performance of the promise, which was intended for more than a pleasing promise." Note, God's word of promise, being a firm foundation of hope, is a full fountain of joy to all believers.

I. David here rejoices; and it is in prospect of two things;

1. The perfecting of this revolution in his own kingdom. God having *spoken in his holiness* that David shall be king, he doubts not but the kingdom is all his own, as sure as if it were already in his hand; *I will divide Shechem*, a pleasant city in mount Ephraim, and *mete out the valley of Succoth*, as my own; (v. 7.) *Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine*, and both entirely reduced. Ephraim would furnish him with soldiers for his life-guards and his standing forces, Judah would furnish him with able judges for his courts of justice; and thus Ephraim would be *the strength of his head*, and Judah *his lawgiver*. Thus may an active believer triumph in the promises, and take the comfort of all the good contained in them; for they are all yea and amen in Christ; "*God has spoken in his holiness, and then pardon is mine, peace mine, grace mine, Christ mine, heaven mine, God himself mine*;" *All is your's, for you are Christ's*, 1 Cor. 3. 22, 23.

2. The conquering of the neighbouring nations, which had been vexatious to Israel, were still dangerous, and opposed the throne of David, v. 8. Moab shall be enslaved, and put to the meanest drudgery; *The Moabites became David's servants*, 2 Sam. 8. 2. Edom shall be taken possession of, as David's own, which was signified by *drawing off his shoe* over it, Ruth, 4. 7. As for the Philistines, let them, if they dare, triumph over him as they had done; he will soon force them to change their note: rather let those that know their own interest, triumph because of him; for it would be the greatest kindness imaginable to them, to be brought into subjection to David, and communion with Israel.

But the war is not yet brought to an end; there is a strong city, Rabbah (perhaps) of the children of Ammon, which yet holds out; Edom is not yet subdued. Now, (1.) David is here inquiring for help to carry on the war; "*Who will bring me into the strong city? What allies, auxiliaries, can I depend upon, to make me master of the enemies' country, and their strong holds?*" They that have begun a good work, cannot but desire to make a thorough work of it, and to bring it to perfection. (2.) He is expecting it from God only; "*Wilt not thou, O God? For thou hast spoken in thine holiness; and wilt not thou be as good as thy word?*" He takes notice of the frowns of Providence they had been under, *Thou hadst, in appearance, cast us off, thou didst not go forth with our armies*; when they were defeated and met with disappointments, they owned it was because they wanted, that is, because they had forfeited, the gracious presence of God with them; yet they do not therefore fly from him, but rather take so much the faster hold of him; and the less he has done for them of late, the more they hoped he would do. At the same time that they own God's justice in what was past, they hoped in his mercy for what was to come; "*Though thou hadst cast us off, yet thou wilt not contend for*

ever, thou wilt not always chide; though thou hadst cast us off, yet thou hast begun to shew mercy; and wilt thou not perfect what thou hast begun?" The Son of David, in his sufferings, seemed to be cast off by his Father, when he cried out, *Why hast thou forsaken me?* And yet, even then, he obtained a glorious victory over the powers of darkness and their strong city, a victory which will undoubtedly be completed at last; for he is gone forth conquering and to conquer. The Israel of God, his spiritual Israel, are likewise through him, more than conquerors. Though sometimes they may be tempted to think that God has cast them off, and may be foiled in particular conflicts, yet God will bring them into the strong city at last; *Vincimur in praelio, sed non in bello*—*We are foiled in a battle, but not in the whole war.* A lively faith in the promise will assure us, not only that *the God of peace shall tread Satan under our feet shortly*, but that *it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom.*

II. He prays in hope. His prayer is, *Give us help from trouble*, v. 11. Even in the day of their triumph, they see themselves in trouble, because still in war, which is troublesome even to the prevailing side. None, therefore, can delight in war, but those that love to fish in troubled waters. The *help from trouble* they pray for, is, preservation from those they were at war with. Though now they were conquerors, yet, (so uncertain are the issues of war,) unless God gave them help in the next engagement, they might be defeated; therefore, *Lord, send us help from the sanctuary.* *Help from trouble* is rest from war, which they prayed for, as those that contended for equity, not for victory, *Sic querimus pacem—Thus we seek for peace.*

The hope with which they support themselves in this prayer, has two things in it. 1. A diffidence of themselves, and all their creature-confidences; *Vain is the help of man.* Then only we are qualified to receive help from God, when we are brought to own the insufficiency of all creatures to do that for us which we expect him to do. 2. A confidence in God, and in his power and promise; (v. 12.) "*Through God we shall do valiantly*, and so we shall do victoriously; for he it is, and he only, that shall tread down our enemies, and shall have the praise of it." Note, (1.) Our confidence in God must be so far from superseding, that it must encourage and quicken, our endeavours in the way of our duty. Though it is God that performs all things for us, yet there is something to be done by us. (2.) Hope in God is the best principle of true courage. Those that do their duty under his conduct, may afford to do it valiantly; for what need they fear who have God on their side? (3.) It is only through God, and by the influence of his grace, that we do valiantly; it is he that puts strength into us, and inspires us, who of ourselves are weak and timorous, with courage and resolution. (4.) Though we do ever so valiantly, the success must be attributed entirely to him; for *he it is that shall tread down our enemies*, and not we ourselves. All our victories, as well as our valour, are from him, and therefore at his feet all our crowns must be cast.

PSALM LXI.

David, in this psalm, as in many others, begins with a sad heart, but concludes with an air of pleasantness; begins with prayers and tears, but ends with songs of praise. Thus the soul, by being lifted up to God, returns to the enjoyment of itself. It should seem, David was driven out and banished when he penned this psalm, whether by Saul or Absalom is uncertain: some think by Absalom, because he calls himself the king; (v. 6.) but that refers to the King Messiah. David, in this psalm, resolves to persevere in his duty, encouraged thereto both by his experience, and by his expectations. I. He will call upon God, because God had protected him, v. 1. 3. II. He will call upon God, because God had provided well for him, v. 4, 5. III. He will praise God, because he had an assurance of the continuance of God's favour to him, v. 6. 8. So that, in singing this psalm, we may find that which is very expressive both of our faith and of our hope, of our prayers and of our praises; and some passages in this psalm are very peculiar.

To the chief musician upon Neginah. A psalm of David.

1. **H**EAR my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. 2. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is over-

whelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. 3. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. 4. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah.

In these verses, we may observe,

1. David's close adherence and application to God by prayer in the day of his distress and trouble; "Whatever comes, *I will cry unto thee*; (v. 2.) not cry to other gods, but to thee only; not fall out with thee because thou afflictest me, but still look unto thee, and wait upon thee; not speak to thee in a cold and careless manner, but cry to thee with the greatest importunity and fervency of spirit, as one that will not let thee go, except thou bless me." This he will do, (1.) Notwithstanding his distance from the sanctuary, the house of prayer, where he used to attend as in the court of requests; "*From the end of the earth, or of the land, from the most remote and obscure corner of the country, will I cry unto thee.*" Note, Wherever we are, we may have liberty of access to God, and may find a way open to the throne of grace, *Undique ad cœlos tantundem est via—Heaven is equally accessible from all places.* "Nay, because I am here in the end of the earth, in sorrow and solitude, therefore *I will cry unto thee.*" Note, That which separates us from our other comforts, should drive us so much the nearer to God, the Fountain of all comfort. (2.) Notwithstanding the dejection and despondency of his spirit; "Though *my heart is overwhelmed*, it is not so sunk, so burthened, but that it may be lifted up to God in prayer; if it is not capable of being thus raised, it is certainly too much cast down. Nay, because my heart is ready to be overwhelmed, therefore *I will cry unto thee*, for by that means it will be supported and relieved." Note, Weeping must quicken praying, and not deaden it. *Is any afflicted? let him pray.* Jam. 5. 13. Ps. 102. title.

2. The particular petition he put up to God, when his heart was overwhelmed, and he was ready to sink; *Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I*; that is, (1.) "To the Rock which is too high for me to get up to, unless thou help me to it. Lord, give me such an assurance and satisfaction of my own safety as I can never attain to but by thy special grace working such a faith in me." (2.) "To the Rock on the top of which I shall be set further out of the reach of my troubles, and nearer the serene and quiet region, than I can be by any power or wisdom of my own." God's power and promise are a rock that is higher than we. This Rock is Christ; they are safe that are in him. We cannot get upon this rock, unless God by his power lead us; *I will put thee in the left of the rock*, Exod. 33. 22. We should, therefore, by faith and prayer, put ourselves under the divine conduct, that we may be taken under the divine direction.

3. His desire and expectation of an answer of peace. He begs in faith; (v. 1.) "*Hear my cry, O God, attend unto my prayer*; let me have the present comfort of knowing that I am heard, (20. 6.) and in due time let me have that which I pray for."

4. The ground of this expectation, and the plea he uses to enforce his petition; (v. 3.) "*Thou hast been a Shelter for me*, I have found in thee a Rock higher than I; therefore I trust thou wilt still lead me to that Rock." Note, Past experiences of the benefit of trusting in God, as they should engage us still to keep close to him, so they should encourage us to hope that it will not be in vain. "*Thou hast been my strong Tower from the enemy*, and thou art as strong as ever, and thy name as much a refuge to the righteous as ever it was," Prov. 18. 10.

5. His resolution to continue in the way of duty to God, and dependence on him, v. 4. (1.) The service of God shall be his constant work and business: all those must make it so who expect to find God their Shelter and strong Tower: none but his menial servants have the benefit of his protection; *I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever.* David was now banished from the tabernacle, which was his greatest grievance; but he is assured that God, by his providence, would bring him back to his tabernacle, because he had, by his grace, wrought in him such a kindness for his

tabernacle, as that he was resolved to make it his perpetual residence, 27.4. He speaks of abiding in it *for ever*, because that tabernacle was a type and figure of heaven, Heb.9.8,9,24. Those that dwell in God's tabernacle, as it is a house of duty, during their short *ever* on earth, shall dwell in that tabernacle which is the house of glory, during an endless *ever*. (2.) The grace of God and the covenant of grace shall be his constant comfort; *I will make my refuge in the covert of his wings*, as the chickens seek both warmth and safety under the wings of the hen. Those that have found God a Shelter to them, ought still to have recourse to him in all their straits. This advantage they have that abide in God's tabernacle, that in the time of trouble he shall there hide them.

5. For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given *me* the heritage of those that fear thy name. 6. Thou wilt prolong the king's life: *and* his years as many generations. 7. He shall abide before God for ever: O prepare mercy and truth, *which* may preserve him. 8. So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.

In these verses, we may observe,

1. With what pleasure David looks back upon what God had done for him formerly; (v.5.) *Thou, O God, hast heard my vows*, that is, (1.) "The vows themselves which I made, and with which I bound my soul; thou hast taken notice of them; thou hast accepted them, because made in sincerity, and been well pleased with them; thou hast been mindful of them, and put me in mind of them;" God put Jacob in mind of his vows, Gen.31.13.—35.1. Note, God is a Witness to all our vows, all our good purposes, and all our solemn promises of new obedience. He keeps an account of them, which should be a good reason with us, as it was with David here, why we should perform our vows, v.8. For he that hears the vows we made, will make us hear respecting them, if they be not made good. (2.) "The prayers that went along with those vows; those thou hast graciously heard, and answered;" which encouraged him now to pray, *O God, hear my cry*. He that never did say to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain, will not now begin to say so. "Thou hast heard my vows, and given a real answer to them; for *thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name*." Note, [1.] There is a peculiar people in the world, that fear God's name, that with a holy awe and reverence accept of, and accommodate themselves to, all the discoveries he is pleased to make of himself to the children of men. [2.] There is a heritage peculiar to that peculiar people, present comforts, earnestness of their future bliss. God himself is their Inheritance, their Portion for ever. The Levites, that had God for their inheritance, must take up with him, and not expect a lot like their brethren; so those that fear God have enough in him, and therefore must not complain if they have but little of the world. [3.] We need desire no better heritage than that of those who fear God. If God deal with us as he uses to deal with those that love his name, we need not desire to be any better dealt with.

2. With what assurance he looks forward to the continuance of his life; (v.6.) *Thou shalt prolong the king's life*. This may be understood, either, (1.) Of himself; if it was penned before he came to the crown, yet, being anointed by Samuel, and knowing what God had spoken in his holiness, he could, in faith, call himself *the king*, though now persecuted as an outlaw; or, perhaps, it was penned when Absalom sought to dethrone him, and forced him into exile. There were those that aimed to shorten his life, but he trusted to God to prolong his life, which he did to the age of man set by Moses, that is, 70 years; which, being spent in serving his generation according to the will of God, (Acts, 13.36.) might be reckoned as many generations, because many generations would be the better for him. His resolution was, to abide in God's tabernacle for ever, (v.4.) in a way of duty; and now his

hope is, that he shall abide before God for ever, in a way of comfort. Those abide to good purpose in this world that abide before God; that serve him, and walk in his fear; and they that do so shall abide before him for ever. He speaks of himself in the third person, because the psalm was delivered to the chief musician for the use of the church, and he would have the people, in singing it, to be encouraged with an assurance, that, notwithstanding the malice of his enemies, their king, as they wished, should live for ever. Or, (2.) Of the Messiah, the King of whom he was a type; it was a comfort to David to think, whatever became of him, that the years of the Lord's Anointed should be as many generations, and that of the increase of his government and peace there should be no end. The Mediator shall abide before God for ever, for he always appears in the presence of God for us, and ever lives, making intercession; and because he lives, we shall live also.

3. With what importunity he begs of God to take him and keep him always under his protection; *O prepare mercy and truth which may preserve him*. God's promises, and our faith in them, are not to supersede, but to quicken and encourage, prayer. David is sure that God will prolong his life, and therefore prays that he would preserve it. Not that he would prepare him a strong life-guard, or a well-fortified castle; but that he would prepare mercy and truth for his preservation; that God's goodness would provide for his safety, according to the promise. We need not desire to be better secured than under the protection of God's mercy and truth. This may be applied to the Messiah; Let him be sent in the fulness of time, in *performance of the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham*, Micah, 7.20. Luke, 1.72, 73.

4. With what cheerfulness he vows the grateful returns of duty to God; (v.8.) *So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever*. Note, God's preservation of us calls upon us to praise him; and *therefore* we should desire to live, that we may praise him; *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee*. We must make praising God the work of our time, even to the last, as long as our lives are prolonged, we must continue praising God; and then it shall be made the work of our eternity, and we shall be praising him for ever; *that I may daily perform my vows*. His praising God was itself the performance of his vows, and it disposed his heart to the performance of his vows in other instances. Note, (1.) The vows we have made we must conscientiously perform. (2.) Praising God, and paying our vows to him, must be our constant daily work; every day we must be doing something towards it, because it is all but little in comparison with what is due, because we daily receive fresh mercies, and because, if we think much to do it daily, we cannot expect to be doing it eternally.

PSALM LXII.

This psalm has nothing in it directly either of prayer or praise, nor does it appear upon what occasion it was penned, nor whether upon any particular occasion, whether mournful or joyful. But in it, I. David, with a great deal of pleasure, professes his own confidence in God, and dependence upon him, and encourages himself to continue waiting on him, v.1..7. II. With a great deal of earnestness, he excites and encourages others to trust in God likewise, and not in any creature, v.8..12. In singing it, we should stir up ourselves to wait on God.

To the chief musician, to Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

1. **T**RULY my soul waiteth upon God: from him *cometh* my salvation. 2. He only is my rock and my salvation; *he is* my defence; I shall not be greatly moved. 3. How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall *shall ye be, and as a tottering fence*. 4. They only consult to cast *him* down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah. 5. My soul, wait thou only upon

God; for my expectation is from him. 6. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be moved. 7. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God.

In these verses, we have,

I. David's profession of dependence upon God, and upon him only, for all good; (v. 1.) *Truly my soul waiteth upon God. Nevertheless, (so some,) or, "However it be, whatever difficulties or dangers I may meet with, though God frown upon me, and I meet with discouragements in my attendance on him, yet still my soul waits upon God;" (or is silent to God, as the word is;) "says nothing against what he does, but quietly expects what he will do."* We are in the way both of duty and comfort when our souls wait upon God; when we cheerfully refer ourselves, and the disposal of all our affairs, to his will and wisdom, when we acquiesce in, and accommodate ourselves to, all the dispensations of his providence, and patiently expect a doubtful event, with an entire satisfaction in his righteousness and goodness, *however it be. Is not my soul subject to God?* So the LXX. So it is, certainly so it ought to be; our wills must be melted into his will. "My soul has respect to God, for from him cometh my salvation." He doubts not but his salvation will come, though now he was threatened and in danger; and he expects it to come from God, and from him only; for *in vain is it hoped for from hills and mountains*, Jer. 3. 23. Ps. 121. 1, 2. "From him I know it will come, and therefore on him will I patiently wait till it does come, for his time is the best time." We may apply it to our eternal salvation, which is called *the salvation of God*, (50. 23.) from him that comes; he prepared it for us, he prepares us for it, and preserves us to it, and therefore let our souls wait on him, to be conducted through this world to that eternal salvation, in such way as he thinks fit.

II. The ground and reason of this dependence; (v. 2.) *He only is my Rock and my Salvation, he is my Defence.* 1. "He has been so many a time; in him I have found shelter, and strength, and succour; he has, by his grace, supported me, and borne me up, under my troubles, and, by his providence, defended me from the insults of my enemies, and delivered me out of the troubles into which I was plunged; and therefore *I trust he will deliver me*," 2 Cor. 1. 10. 2. "He only can be my Rock and my Salvation; creatures are insufficient, they are nothing without him, and therefore I will look above them to him." 3. "He has by covenant undertaken to be so. Even he that is the Rock of ages, is my Rock; he that is the God of salvation, is my Salvation; he that is the Most High, is my High Place; and therefore I have all the reason in the world to confide in him."

III. The improvement he makes of his confidence in God.

1. Trusting in God, his heart is fixed. "If God is my Strength and mighty Deliverer, *I shall not be greatly moved*, I shall not be undone and ruined; I may be shocked, but I shall not be sunk." Or, "I shall not be much disturbed and disquieted in my own breast. I may be put into some fright, but I shall not be afraid with any amazement, nor so as to be put out of the possession of my own soul. I may be perplexed, but not in despair," 2 Cor. 4. 8. This hope in God will be an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.

2. His enemies are slighted, and all their attempts against him looked upon by him with contempt, v. 3, 4. If God be for us, we need not fear what man can do against us, though ever so mighty and malicious. He here, (1.) Gives a character of his enemies. *They imagine mischief*, design it with a great deal of the serpent's venom, and contrive it with a great deal of the serpent's subtlety, and this against a man, one of their own kind, against one single man, that is not an equal match for them, for they are many; they continued their malicious prosecution, though Providence had often defeated their mischievous designs. How long will ye do it? will ye never be convinced of your error? will your malice never have spent itself? They are unanimous in their consulta-

tions, to cast an excellent man down from his excellency, to draw an honest man from his integrity, to entangle him in sin, which is the only thing that can effectually cast us down from our excellency; to thrust a man, whom God has exalted, down from his dignity, and so to fight against God. Envy was at the bottom of their malice; they were grieved at David's advancement, and therefore plotted, by diminishing his character, and blackening that, (which was casting him down from his excellency,) to hinder his preferment. In order to this, they calumniate him, and love to hear such bad characters given of him, and such bad reports raised and spread concerning him, as they themselves know to be false; they delight in lies. And as they make no conscience of lying concerning him, to do him a mischief, so they make no conscience of lying to him, to conceal the mischief they design, and accomplish it the more effectually; *they bless with their mouth*, they compliment David to his face, but they curse inwardly; in their hearts they wish him all mischief, and privately they are plotting against him, and in their cabals carrying on some evil design or other, by which they hope to ruin him; it is dangerous putting our trust in men who are thus false; but God is faithful. (2.) He reads their doom, pronounces a sentence of death upon them, not as a king, but as a prophet; *Ye shall be slain, all of you*, by the righteous judgments of God. Saul and his servants were slain by the Philistines on mount Gilboa, according to this prediction; those who seek the ruin of God's chosen, are but preparing ruin for themselves. God's church is built upon a rock which will stand; but they that fight against it, and its patrons and protectors, shall be as a bowing wall and a tottering fence, which, having a rotten foundation, sinks with its own weight, falls of a sudden, and buries those in the ruins of it that put themselves under the shadow and shelter of it. David, having put his confidence in God, thus foresees the overthrow of his enemies, and, in effect, sets them at defiance, and bids them do their worst.

3. He is himself encouraged to continue waiting upon God; (v. 5. . 7.) *My soul, wait thou only upon God.* Note, The good we do, we should stir up ourselves to continue doing, and to do yet more and more, as those that have, through grace, experienced the comfort and benefit of it. We have found it good to wait upon God, and therefore should charge our souls, and even charm them, into such a constant dependence upon him, as may make us always easy. He had said, (v. 1.) *From him cometh my salvation*; he says, (v. 5.) *My expectation is from him*. His salvation was the principal matter of his expectation; let him have that from God, and he expects no more. His salvation being from God, all his other expectations are from him; "If God will save my soul, as to every thing else let him do what he pleases with me, and I will acquiesce in his disposals, knowing they shall *all turn to my salvation*," Phil. 1. 19. He repeats (v. 6.) what he had said concerning God, (v. 2.) as one that was not only assured of it, but greatly pleased with it, and that dwelt much upon it, in his thoughts: *He only is my Rock and my Salvation, he is my Defence*, I know he is: but there he adds, *I shall not be greatly moved*, here, *I shall not be moved at all*. Note, The more faith is acted, the more active it is; *Crescit cundo—It grows by being exercised*. The more we meditate upon God's attributes and promises, and our own experience, the more ground we get of our fears, which, like Haman, when they begin to fall, shall fall before us, and we shall be *kept in perfect peace*, Isa. 26. 3. And as David's faith in God advances to an unshaken staydness, so his joy in God improves itself into a holy triumph; (v. 7.) *In God is my salvation and my glory*. Where our salvation is, there our glory is; for what is our salvation, but the glory to be revealed; the eternal weight of glory: And there our glorying must be. In God let us boast all the day long. "The rock of my strength, my strong rock, on which I build my hopes, and stay myself, and my refuge, to which I flee for shelter when I am pursued, is in God, and in him only. I have no other to flee to, no other to trust to; the more I think of it, the better satisfied I am in the choice I have made." Thus does he *delight himself in the Lord, and then ride upon the high places of the earth*, Isa. 58. 14.

8. Trust in him at all times: ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah. 9. Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity. 10. Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them. 11. God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. 12. Also unto thee, O LORD, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

Here we have David's exhortation to others to trust in God, and wait upon him, as he had done. Those that have found the comfort of the ways of God themselves, will invite others into those ways; there is enough in God for all the saints to draw from, and we shall have never the less for others sharing with us.

I. He counsels all to wait upon God, as he did, v. 8. Observe, 1. To whom he gives this good counsel, *Ye people*, that is, All people; all shall be welcome to trust in God, for he is the *Confidence of all the ends of the earth*, 65. 5. *Ye people of the house of Israel*; (so the Chaldee;) they are especially engaged and invited to trust in God, for he is the God of Israel; and should not a people seek unto their God? 2. What the good counsel is which he gives. (1.) To confide in God; "Trust in him; deal with him, and be willing to deal upon trust; depend upon him to perform all things for you, upon his wisdom and goodness, his power and promise, his providence and grace. Do this at all times. We must have an habitual confidence in God always, must live a life of dependence upon him; must so trust in him at all times, as not at any time to put that confidence in ourselves, or in any creature, which is to be put in him only: and we must have an actual confidence in God upon all occasions; trust in him upon every emergency, to guide us when we are in doubt, to protect us when we are in danger, to supply us when we are in want, to strengthen us for every good word and work. (2.) To converse with God; *Pour out your heart before him*; the expression seems to allude to the pouring-out of the drink-offerings before the Lord. When we make a penitent confession of sin, our hearts are therein *poured out before God*, 1 Sam. 7. 6. But here it is meant of prayer, which, if it be as it should be, is, the pouring out of the heart before God. We must lay our grievances before him, offer up our desires to him with all humble freedom, and then entirely refer ourselves to his disposal, patiently submitting our wills to his: this is pouring out our hearts. 3. What encouragement he gives us to take this good counsel; *God is a Refuge for us*; not only my Refuge, (v. 7.) but a Refuge for us all, even as many as will flee to him, and take shelter in him.

II. He cautions us to take heed of misplacing our confidence, in which, as much as in any thing, *the heart is deceitful*, Jer. 17. 5. .9. They that trust in God truly, (v. 1.) will trust in him only, v. 5.

1. Let us not trust in the men of this world, for they are broken reeds; (v. 9.) *Surely men of low degree are vanity*, utterly unable to help us, and *men of high degree are a lie*, that will deceive us, if we trust to them. Men of low degree, one would think, might be relied on for their multitude and number, their bodily strength and service; and men of high degree, for their wisdom, power, and influence: but men of neither degree are to be depended on; nay, of the two, men of high degree are mentioned in terms more disparaging; for they are a lie, which denotes not only vanity, but iniquity. We are not so apt to depend upon men of low degree, as upon the king and the captain of the host, who, by the figure they make, tempt us to trust in them, and so, when they fail us, prove a lie. But, lay them in the balance, the balance of the scripture, or, rather, make trial of them, see how they will prove, whether they will answer your expectations from them or no, and

you will write *Tekel* upon them, they are alike lighter than vanity; there is no depending upon their wisdom to advise us, or their power to act for us, upon their good will to us, no, nor upon their promises, in comparison with God, or otherwise than in subordination to him.

2. Let us not trust in the wealth of this world, let not that be made our strong city; (v. 10.) *Trust not in oppression*, in riches got by fraud and violence; because, where there is a great deal, it is commonly got by indirect scraping or saving; our Saviour calls it the *mammon of unrighteousness*, Luke, 16. 9. "Trust not in the arts of getting riches. Think not, either because you have got abundance, or are in the way of getting, that therefore you are safe enough; for this is becoming vain in robbery, cheating yourselves while you think to cheat others." He that *trusted in the abundance of his riches, strengthened himself in his wickedness*; (52. 7.) but, at his end, he will be a fool, Jer. 17. 11. Let none be so stupid as to think of supporting themselves in their sin, much less of supporting themselves in this sin. Nay, because it is hard to have riches, and not to trust in them, if they increase, though by lawful and honest means, we must take heed lest we let out our affections inordinately toward them; "*Set not your heart upon them*; be not eager for them, do not take a complacency in them as the rest of your souls, nor put a confidence in them as your portion; be not over-solicitous about them, do not value yourselves and others by them; make not the wealth of the world your chief good and highest end; in short, do not make an idol of it." This we are most in danger of doing when they increase; when the grounds of the rich man brought forth plentifully, then he said to his soul, *Take thine ease* in these things, Luke, 12. 19. It is a smiling world that is most likely to draw the heart away from God, on whom only it should be set.

III. He gives a very good reason why we should make God our Confidence, because he is a God of infinite power, mercy, and righteousness, v. 11, 12. This he himself was well assured of, and would have us be assured of it. *God has spoken once, twice have I heard this*, that is, 1. "God has spoken it, and I have heard it, once, yea twice. He has spoken it, and I have heard it by the light of reason, which easily infers it from the nature of the infinitely perfect Being, and from his works both of creation and providence. He has spoken it, and I have heard once, yea twice, that is, many a time, by the events that have concerned me in particular. I have heard it, too, by the light of revelation, by dreams and visions, (Job, 4. 15.) by the glorious manifestation of himself upon mount Sinai," (to which, some think, it does especially refer,) "and by the written word." God has often told us what a great and good God he is, and we ought as often to take notice of what he has told us. Or, 2. "Though God spake it but once, I heard it twice; heard it diligently, not only with my outward ears, but with my soul and mind." To some God speaks twice, and they will not hear once; but to others he speaks but once, and they hear twice. Compare Job, 33. 14.

Now, what is it which is thus spoken and thus heard?

(1.) That the God with whom we have to do is infinite in power. Power belongs to God; he is almighty, and can do every thing; with him nothing is impossible. All the powers of all the creatures are derived from him, depend upon him, and are used by him as he pleases. His is the power, and to him we must ascribe it. This is a good reason why we should trust in him at all times, and live in a constant dependence upon him; for he is able to do all that for us which we trust in him for.

(2.) That he is a God of infinite goodness; here he turns his speech to God himself, as being desirous to give him the glory of his goodness, which is his glory; *Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy*. God is not only the greatest, but the best, of beings. Mercy is with him, 130. 4, 7. He is merciful, in a way peculiar to himself; he is the *Father of mercies*, 2 Cor. 1. 3. This is a further reason why we should trust in him, and answers the objections of our sinfulness and unworthiness; though we deserve nothing but his wrath, yet we may hope for all good from his mercy, which is over all his works.

(3.) That he never did, nor never will do, any wrong to any

of his creatures; *For thou renderest to every man according to his work.* Though he does not always do this, visibly, in this world, yet he will do it in the day of recompence. No service done him shall go unrewarded, nor any affront given him, unpunished, unless it be repented of. By this it appears that power and mercy belong to him. If he were not a God of power, there are sinners that would be too powerful to be punished; and if he were not a God of mercy, there are services that would be too worthless to be rewarded. This seems especially to bespeak the justice of God in judging upon appeals made to him by wronged innocency; he will be sure to judge according to truth, in righting the injured, and avenging them on those that have been injurious to them, 1 Kings, 8. 32. Let those, therefore, that are wronged, commit their cause to him, and trust to him to plead it.

PSALM LXIII.

This psalm has in it as much of warmth and lively devotion, as any of David's psalms in so little a compass. As the sweetest of Paul's epistles were those that bore date out of a prison, so some of the sweetest of David's psalms were those that were penned, as this was, in a wilderness. That which grieved him most in his banishment, was, the want of public ordinances; these he here longs to be restored to the enjoyment of; and the present want did but whet his appetite. Yet it is not the ordinances, but the God of the ordinances, that his heart is upon. And here we have, I. His desire toward God, v. 1, 2. II. His esteem of God, v. 3, 4. III. His satisfaction in God, v. 5. IV. His secret communion with God, v. 6. V. His joyful dependence upon God, v. 7, 8. VI. His holy triumph in God over his enemies, and in the assurance of his own safety, v. 9, 11. A devout and pious soul has little need of direction how to sing this psalm, so naturally does it speak its own genuine language; and an unsanctified soul, that is unacquainted and unaffected with divine things, is scarcely capable of singing it with understanding.

A psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

1. **O** GOD, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; 2. To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.

The title tells us when the psalm was penned, when David was in the wilderness of Judah; that is, in the forest of Hareth, 1 Sam. 22. 5. Or, in the wilderness of Ziph, 1 Sam. 23. 15. 1. Even in Canaan, though a fruitful land, and the people numerous, yet there were wildernesses, places less fruitful, and less inhabited, than other places. It will be so in the world, in the church, but not in heaven; there it is all city, all paradise, and no desert ground; the wilderness there shall blossom as the rose. 2. The best and dearest of God's saints and servants may sometimes have their lot cast in a wilderness, which speaks them lonely and solitary, desolate and afflicted, wanting, wandering, and unsettled, and quite at a loss what to do with themselves. 3. None of the straits and difficulties of a wilderness must put us out of tune for sacred songs; but even then it is our duty and interest to keep up a cheerful communion with God. There are psalms proper for a wilderness, and we have reason to thank God that it is the wilderness of Judah we are in, not the wilderness of Sin.

David, in these verses, *stirs up himself to take hold on God,*

I. By a lively active faith; *O God, thou art my God.* Note, In all our addresses to God, we must eye him as God, and our God, and this will be our comfort in a wilderness-state. We must acknowledge that God is, that we speak to one that really exists, and is present with us, when we say, *O God*, which is a serious word; pity it should ever be used as a by-word. And we must own his authority over us, and propriety in us, and our relation to him; *Thou art my God*, mine by creation, and therefore my rightful Owner and Ruler, mine by covenant, and my own consent." We must speak it with the greatest pleasure to ourselves, and thankfulness to God, as those that are resolved to abide by it; *O God, thou art my God.*

II. By pious and devout affections, pursuant to the choice he had made of God, and the covenant he had made with him.

1. He resolves to seek God, and his favour and grace. Thou art my God, and therefore I will seek thee; for, *should not a people seek unto their God?* Isa. 8. 19. We must seek him; we must covet his favour as our chief good, and consult his glory as our highest end; we must seek acquaintance with him by his word, and seek mercy from him by prayer. We must seek him, (1.) *Early*, with the utmost care, as those that are afraid of missing him; we must begin our days with him, begin every day with him; *Early will I seek thee.* (2.) *Earnestly*; "My soul thirsteth for thee, and my flesh longeth for thee; my whole man is affected with this pursuit, here in a dry and thirsty land." Observe, [1.] His complaint in the want of God's favourable presence. He was in a dry and thirsty land; so he reckoned it, not so much because it was a wilderness, as because it was at a distance from the ark, from the word and sacraments. This world is a *weary land*, so the word is; it is so to the worldly that have their portion in it, it will yield them no true satisfaction; it is so to the godly that have their passage through it, it is a valley of Baca, they can promise themselves little from it. [2.] His importunity for that presence of God; *My soul thirsteth, longeth, for thee.* His want quickened his desires, which were very intense; he thirsted as the hunted hart for the water-brooks; he would take up with nothing short of it. His desires were almost impatient; he longed, he languished, till he should be restored to the liberty of God's ordinances. Note, Gracious souls look down upon the world with a holy disdain, and look up to God with a holy desire.

2. He longs to enjoy God. What is it that he does so passionately wish for? What is his petition, and what is his request? It is this, (v. 2.) *To see thy power, and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.* That is, (1.) "To see it here in this wilderness, as I have seen it in the tabernacle; to see it in secret, as I have seen it in the solemn assembly." Note, when we want the benefit of public ordinances, we should desire and endeavour to keep up the same communion with God in our retirements, that we have had in the great congregation. A closet may be turned into a little sanctuary. Ezekiel had the visions of the Almighty in Babylon, and John, in the isle of Patmos. When we are alone, we may have the Father with us, and that is enough. (2.) "To see it again in the sanctuary, as I have formerly seen it there." He longs to be brought out of the wilderness, not that he might see his friends again, and be restored to the pleasures and gaieties of the court, but that he might have access to the sanctuary; not to see the priests there, and the ceremony of the worship, but *to see thy power and glory*, thy glorious power, or thy powerful glory, which is put for all God's attributes and perfections; "that I may increase in my acquaintance with them, and have the agreeable impressions of them made upon my heart." So *to behold the glory of the Lord*, as *to be changed into the same image*, 2 Cor. 3. 18. That I may see thy power and glory; he does not say, as I have seen *them*, but as I have seen *thee*. We cannot see the essence of God, but we see him, in seeing by faith his attributes and perfections. These sights David here pleases himself with the remembrance of; those were precious minutes which he spent in communion with God, he loved to think them over again; these he lamented the loss of, and longed to be restored to. Note, That which has been the delight, and is the desire, of gracious souls, in their attendance on solemn ordinances, is, to see God, and his power and glory in them.

3. Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. 4. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. 5. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: 6. When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches.

How soon are David's complaints and prayers turned into praises and thanksgivings! After two verses that speak his desire in seeking God, here are some that speak his joy and satisfaction in having found him. Faithful prayers may quickly be turned

into joyful praises, if it be not our own fault. *Let the hearts of those rejoice that seek the Lord*, (105. 3.) and let them praise him for working those desires in them, and giving them assurance that he will satisfy them. David was now in a wilderness, and yet had his heart much enlarged in blessing God. Even in affliction, we need not want matter for praise, if we have but a heart to it. Observe,

I. What David will praise God for; (v. 3.) *Because thy loving-kindness is better than life*, than lives; life, and all the comforts of life; life in its best estate; long life and prosperity. God's loving-kindness is, in itself, and in the account of all the saints, better than life. It is our spiritual life, and that is better than temporal life, 30. 5. It is better, a thousand times, to die in God's 'avour, than to live under his wrath. David, in the wilderness, finds, by comfortable experience, that God's loving-kindness is better than life; and *Therefore* (says he) *my lips shall praise thee*. Note, Those that have their hearts refreshed with the tokens of God's favour, ought to have them enlarged in his praises. A great deal of reason we have to bless God that we have better provisions, and better possessions, than the wealth of this world can afford us; and that, in the service of God, and in communion with him, we have better employments, and better enjoyments, than we can have in the business and converse of this world.

II. How he will praise God, and how long, v. 4. He resolves to live a life of thankfulness to God, and dependence on him. Observe, 1. His manner of blessing God; *"Thus will I bless thee"*; thus, as I have now begun; the present devout affections shall not pass away, like the morning cloud, but shine more and more, like the morning sun." Or, "I will bless thee with the same earnestness and fervency with which I have prayed to thee." 2. His continuance and perseverance therein; *I will bless thee while I live*. Note, Praising God must be the work of our whole lives; we must always retain a grateful sense of his former favours, and repeat our thanksgivings for them; we must every day give thanks to him for the benefits with which we are daily loaded. We must in every thing give thanks; and not be put out of frame for this duty by any of the afflictions of this present time. Whatever days we live to see, how dark and cloudy soever, though the days come, of which we say, *We have no pleasure in them*, yet still every day must be a thanksgiving-day, even to our dying-day. In this work we must spend our time, because in this work we hope to spend a blessed eternity. 3. His constant regard to God upon all occasions, which should accompany his praises of him; *I will lift up my hands in thy name*. We must have an eye to God's name, to all that by which he has made himself known, in all our prayers and praises, which we are taught to begin with, *Hallowed be thy name*, and to conclude with, *Thine is the glory*. This we must have an eye to in our work and warfare; we must lift up our hands to our duty, and against our spiritual enemies, in God's name, in the strength of his Spirit and grace, 71. 16. Zech. 10. 12. We must make all our vows in God's name; to him we must engage ourselves, and in a dependence upon his grace. And when we lift up the hands that hang down, in comfort and joy, it must be in God's name; from him our comforts must be fetched, and to him they must be devoted; *In thee do we boast all the day long*.

III. With what pleasure and delight he would praise God, v. 5. 1. With inward complacency; *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness*; not only as with bread, which is nourishing, but as with marrow, which is pleasant and delicious, Isa. 25. 6. David hopes he shall return again to the enjoyment of God's ordinances, and then he shall thus be satisfied, and the more for his having been for a time under restraint. Or, if not, yet in God's loving-kindness, and in conversing with him in solitude, he shall be thus satisfied. Note, There is that in a gracious God, and in communion with him, which gives abundant satisfaction to a soul, 36. 8.—65. 4. And there is that in a gracious soul, which takes abundant satisfaction in God, and communion with him. The saints have a contentment with God, they desire no more than his favour to make them happy; and they have a transcendent complacency in God, in comparison with which all the delights of

sense are sapless and without relish; as puddle-water in comparison with the wine of this consolation. 2. With outward expressions of this satisfaction; he will praise God *with joyful lips*. He will praise him, (1.) Openly; his mouth and lips shall praise God. When with the heart man believes, and is thankful, with the mouth confession must be made of both, to the glory of God; not that the performances of the mouth are accepted without the heart, (Matth. 15. 8.) but out of the abundance of the heart the mouth must speak, (45. 1.) both for the exciting of our own devout affections, and for the edification of others. (2.) Cheerfully; we must praise God with joyful lips; we must address ourselves to that and other duties of religion with great cheerfulness, and speak forth the praises of God from a principle of holy joy. Praising lips must be joyful lips.

IV. How he would entertain himself with thoughts of God when he was most retired; (v. 6.) *I will praise thee, when I remember thee upon my bed*. We must praise God, upon every remembrance of him. Now that David was shut out from public ordinances, he abounded the more in secret communion with God, and so did something toward making up his loss. Observe here,

1. How David employed himself in thinking of God. God was in all his thoughts, which is the reverse of the wicked man's character, 10. 4. The thoughts of God were ready to him; *"I remember thee"*; when I go to think, I find thee at my right hand, present to my mind." This subject should first offer itself, as that which we cannot forget or overlook. And they were fixed in him; *I meditate on thee*. Thoughts of God must not be transient thoughts, passing through the mind, but abiding thoughts, dwelling in the mind.

2. When David employed himself thus; *Upon his bed*, and in the night-watches. David was now wandering and unsettled, but, wherever he came, he brought his religion along with him. Upon my beds, so some: being hunted by Saul, he seldom lay, two nights together, in the same bed; but, wherever he lay, if, as Jacob, upon the cold ground, and with a stone for his pillow, good thoughts of God lay down with him. David was so full of business, all day, shifting for his own safety, that he had scarcely leisure to apply himself solemnly to religious exercises, and therefore, rather than want time for them, he denied himself his necessary sleep. He was now in continual peril of his life, so that we may suppose care and fear many a time held his eyes waking, and gave him wearisome nights; but then he entertained and comforted himself with thoughts of God. Sometimes we find David in tears upon his bed, (6. 6.) but thus he wiped away his tears. When sleep departs from our eyes, through pain or sickness of body, or any disturbance in the mind, our souls, by remembering God, may be at ease, and repose themselves. Perhaps an hour's pious meditation will do us more good than an hour's sleep would have done; see 16. 7.—17. 3.—4. 4.—119. 62. There were night-watches kept in the tabernacle for praising God, (134. 1.) in which, probably, David, when he had liberty, joined with the Levites; now that he could not keep place with them, he kept time with them, and wished himself among them.

7. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. 8. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. 9. But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. 10. They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes. 11. But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

David, having expressed his desires toward God, and his praises of him, here speaks his confidence in him, and his joyful expectations from him; (v. 7.) *In the shadow of thy wings I will rejoice*; alluding either to the wings of the cherubims, stretched

out over the ark of the covenant, between which God is said to dwell; ("I will rejoice in thine oracles, and in covenant and communion with thee;") or to the wings of a fowl, under which the helpless young ones have shelter, as the eagle's young ones, (Exod. 19. 4. Deut. 32. 11.) which speaks the divine power; and the young ones of the common hen, (Matth. 23. 37.) which speaks more of divine tenderness. It is a phrase often used in the psalms, (17. 8.—36. 7.—57. 1.—61. 4.—91. 4.) and no where else in this sense, except Ruth, 2. 12. where Ruth, when she became a proselyte, is said to *trust under the wings of the God of Israel*. It is our duty to *rejoice in the shadow of God's wings*, which denotes our recourse to him by faith and prayer, as naturally as the chickens, when they are cold or frightened, run by instinct under the wings of the hen. It intimates also our reliance upon him as able and ready to help us, and our refreshment and satisfaction in his care and protection. Having committed ourselves to God, we must be easy and pleased, and quiet from the fear of evil.

Now let us see further,

I. What were the supports and encouragements of David's confidence in God. Two things were as props to that hope, which the word of God was the only foundation of.

1. His former experiences of God's power in relieving him; "*Because thou hast been my Help*, when other helps and helpers failed me, therefore I will still rejoice in thy salvation, will trust in thee for the future, and will do it with delight and holy joy. Thou hast been not only my Helper, but my Help;" for we could never have helped ourselves, nor could any creature have been helpful to us, but by him. Here we may set up our Ebenezer, saying, *Hitherto the Lord has helped us*, and must therefore resolve that we will never desert him, never distrust him, nor ever droop in our walking with him.

2. The present sense he had of God's grace carrying him on in these pursuits; (v. 8.) *My soul follows hard after thee*, which speaks a very earnest desire, and a serious, vigorous, endeavour to keep up communion with God; if we cannot always have God in our embraces, yet we must always have him in our eye, reaching forth toward him as our Prize, Phil. 3. 14. To press hard after God, is to follow him close, as those that are afraid of losing the sight of him, and to follow him fast, as those that long to be with him. This David did, and he owns, to the glory of God, *Thy right hand upholds me*. God upholds him, (1.) Under his afflictions, that he might not sink under them; *Underneath are the everlasting arms*. (2.) In his devotions; God upheld him in his holy desires and pursuits, that he might not grow weary in well-doing. Those that follow hard after God, would soon fail and give off, if God's right hand did not uphold them. It is he that strengthens us in the pursuit of him, quickens our good affections, and comforts us while we have not yet attained what we are in the pursuit of. It is by the power of God, that is, his right hand, that we are kept from falling. Now this was a great encouragement to the psalmist to hope that he would, in due time, give him that which he so earnestly desired, because he had by his grace wrought in him those desires, and kept them up.

II. What it was that David triumphed in the hopes of.

1. That his enemies should be ruined, v. 9, 10. There were those that *sought his soul to destroy it*; not only his life, (which they struck at, both to prevent his coming to the crown, and because they envied and hated him for his wisdom, piety, and usefulness,) but his soul, which they sought to destroy by banishing him from God's ordinances, which are the nourishment and support of the soul, so, doing what they could to starve it; and, by sending him to serve other gods, so, doing what they could to poison it, 1 Sam. 26. 19. But he foresees, and foretells, (1.) That they shall *go into the lower parts of the earth*; to the grave, to hell; their enmity to David would be their death and their damnation; their ruin, their eternal ruin. (2.) That they shall fall by the sword; by the sword of God's wrath and his justice; by the sword of man, Job, 19. 28, 29. They shall die a violent death, Rev. 13. 10. This was fulfilled in Saul, he fell by the sword, his own sword; David foretold th yet he would not execute it

when it was in the power of his hand, once and again; for precepts, not prophecies, are our rule. (3.) That *they shall be a portion for foxes*; either their dead bodies shall be a prey to ravenous beasts, (Saul lay a good while unburied,) or their houses and estates shall be a habitation for wild beasts, Isa. 34. 14. Such as this will be the doom of Christ's enemies, that oppose his kingdom and interest in the world; *Bring them forth, and slay them before me*, Luke, 19. 27.

2. That he himself should gain his point at last, (v. 11.) that he should be advanced to the throne to which he had been anointed; *The king shall rejoice in God*. (1.) He calls himself *the king*, because he knew himself to be so in the divine purpose and designation; thus Paul, while yet in the conflict, writes himself *more than a conqueror*, Rom. 8. 37. Believers are made kings, though they are not to have the dominion till the morning of the resurrection. (2.) He doubts not but that though he was now sowing in tears, he should reap in joy; *The king shall rejoice*. (3.) He resolves to make God the Alpha and Omega of all his joys; he shall rejoice in God. Now this is applicable to the glories and joys of the exalted Redeemer. Messiah the Prince shall rejoice in God; he is already entered into the joy set before him, and his glory will be completed at his second coming.

Two things would be the good effect of his advancement;

[1.] It would be the consolation of his friends. Every one that swears to him, that is, to David, that comes into his interest, and takes an oath of allegiance to him, shall glory in his success; or that swears by him, that is, by the blessed name of God, and not by any idol; (Deut. 6. 13.) and then it means all good people, that make a sincere and open profession of God's name; they shall glory in God; they shall glory in David's advancement; *They that fear thee, will be glad when they see me*. They that heartily espouse the cause of Christ, shall glory in its victory at last. *If we suffer with him, we shall reign with him*.

[2.] It would be the confutation of his enemies; *The mouth of them that speak lies*, of Saul, and Doeg, and others that misrepresented David, and insulted over him, as if his cause was desperate, shall be quite stopped; they shall not have one word more to say against him, but will be for ever silenced and shamed. Apply this to Christ's enemies, to those that speak lies to him, as all hypocrites do, that tell him they love him, while their hearts are not with him; their mouth shall be stopped with that word, *I know you not whence you are*; they shall be for ever speechless, Matth. 22. 12. The mouths of those also that speak lies against him, that *pervert the right ways of the Lord*, and speak ill of his holy religion, will be stopped, in that day when the Lord shall come to reckon for all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. Christ's second coming will be the everlasting triumph of all his faithful friends and followers, who may therefore now triumph in the believing hopes of it.

PSALM LXIV.

This whole psalm has reference to David's enemies, persecutors, and slanderers; many such there were, and a great deal of trouble they gave him, almost all his days, so that we need not guess at any particular occasion of penning this psalm. I. He prays to God to preserve him from their malicious designs against him, v. 1, 2. II. He gives a very bad character of them, as men marked for ruin by their own wickedness, v. 3, 6. III. By the spirit of prophecy, he foretells their destruction, which would redound to the glory of God, and the encouragement of his people, v. 7, 10. In singing this psalm, we must observe the effect of the old enmity that is in the seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent; and assure ourselves that the serpent's head will be broken, at last, to the honour and joy of the holy seed.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **H**EAR my voice, O God, in my prayer:
2. preserve my life from fear of the enemy.
3. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked;
4. from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity:
5. Who wet their tongue like a sword, and bend
6. their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words:

4. That they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not. 5. They encourage themselves in an evil matter; they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them? 6. They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward *thought* of every one of them, and the heart, is deep.

David, in these verses, puts in before God a representation of his own danger, and of his enemies' character, to enforce his petition that God would protect him, and punish them.

I. He earnestly begs of God to preserve him; (v. 1, 2.) *Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer; grant me the thing I pray for: and this is it, Lord, preserve my life from fear of the enemy, from the enemy that I am in fear of.* He makes request for his life, which is, in a particular manner, dear to him, because he knows it is designed to be very serviceable to God and his generation. When his life is struck at, it cannot be thought he should altogether hold his peace; Esth. 7. 2, 4. And if he plead his fear of the enemy, it is no disparagement to his courage; his father Jacob, that prince with God, did so before him, (Gen. 32. 11.) *Deliver me from the hand of Esau, for I fear him. Preserve my life from fear,* not only from the thing itself which I fear, but from the disquieting fear of it; this is, in effect, the preservation of the life, for fear has torment; particularly the fear of death, by reason of which some are, all their life-time, subject to bondage. He prays, "*Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked, from the mischief which they secretly consult among themselves to do against me, and from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity, who join forces, as they join counsels, to do me a mischief.*" Observe, The secret counsel ends in an insurrection; treasonable practices begin in treasonable confederacies and conspiracies. "*Hide me from them, that they may not find me, that they may not reach me. Let me be safe under thy protection.*"

II. He complains of the great malice and wickedness of his enemies; "Lord, hide me from them, for they are the worst of men, not fit to be connived at; they are dangerous men, that will stick at nothing; so that I am undone, if thou do not take my part."

1. They are very spiteful in their calumnies and reproaches; v. 3, 4. They are described as military men, with their sword and bow, archers that take aim exactly, secretly and suddenly shoot at the harmless bird that apprehends not herself in any danger. But, (1.) Their tongues are their swords, flaming swords, two-edged swords, drawn swords, drawn in anger, with which they cut, and wound, and kill, the good name of their neighbour. The tongue is a little member, but, like the sword, it *boasts great things*, Jam. 3. 5. It is a dangerous weapon. (2.) Bitter words are their arrows. Scurrilous reflections, opprobrious nicknames, false representations, slanders and calumnies, the fiery darts of the wicked one, set on fire of hell. For these their malice bends their bows, to send out these arrows with so much the more force. (3.) The upright man is their mark, against him their spleen is, and they cannot speak peaceably either of him or to him. The better any man is, the more he is envied by those that are themselves bad, and the more ill is said of him. (4.) They manage it with a great deal of art and subtlety; they shoot in *secret*, that those they shoot at may not discover them, and avoid the danger, for *in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird.* And suddenly do they shoot, without giving a man lawful warning, or any opportunity to defend himself. *Cursed be he that thus smites his neighbour secretly*, in his reputation, Deut. 27. 24. There is no guard against a pass made by a false tongue. (5.) Herein they fear not; they are confident of their success, and doubt not but by these methods they shall gain the point which their malice aims at. Or, rather they fear not the wrath of God, which will be the portion of a false tongue. They are impudent and daring in the mischief they do to good people, as if they must never be called to an account for it.

2. They are very close, and very resolute, in their malicious projects, v. 5. (1.) They strengthen and corroborate themselves and one another in this evil matter, and, by joining together in it, they make one another the more bitter and the more bold; *Fortiter calumniari, aliquid adhaerebit—Lay on an abundance of reproach; part will be sure to stick.* It is bad to do a wrong thing, but worse to encourage ourselves and one another in it, that is doing the Devil's work for him. It is a sign that the heart is hardened to the highest degree, when it is thus fully set to do evil, and fears no colours. It is the office of conscience to discourage men in an evil matter, but, when that is baffled, the case is desperate. (2.) They consult with themselves and one another how to do the most mischief, and most effectually; *They commune of laying snares privily.* All their communion is in sin, and all their communication is how to sin securely. They hold councils of war for finding out the most effectual expedients to do mischief, every snare they lay was talked of before, and was laid with all the contrivance of their wicked wits combined. (3.) They please themselves with an atheistical conceit that God himself takes no notice of their wicked practices; *they say, Who shall see them?* A practical disbelief of God's omniscience is at the bottom of all the wickedness of the wicked.

3. They are very industrious in putting their projects in execution; (v. 6.) *They search out iniquity*, they take a great deal of pains to find out some iniquity or other to lay to my charge, they dig deep, and look far back, and put things to the utmost stretch, that they may have something to accuse me of; or, "They are industrious to find out new arts of doing mischief to me; in this they accomplish a diligent search; they go through with it, and spare neither cost nor labour; *evil men dig up mischief.* Half the pains that many take to damn their souls, would serve to save them. They are masters of all the arts of mischief and destruction, for *the inward thought of every one of them*, and the heart, are deep; deep as hell, desperately wicked, who can know it? By the unaccountable wickedness of their wit, and of their will, they shew themselves to be, both in subtlety and malignity, the genuine offspring of the old serpent.

7. But God shall shoot at them *with an arrow*; suddenly shall they be wounded. 8. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them shall flee away. 9. And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing. 10. The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and shall trust in him; and all the upright in heart shall glory.

We may observe here,

I. The judgments of God which should certainly come upon these malicious persecutors of David. Though they encouraged themselves in their wickedness, here is that which, if they would believe and consider it, was enough to discourage them. And it is observable how the punishment answers the sin. 1. They shot at David secretly and suddenly, to wound him; but God shall shoot at them, for he *ordains his arrows against the persecutors*; (7. 13.) *against the face of them*, 21. 12. And God's arrows will hit surer, and fly swifter, and pierce deeper, than theirs' do, or can. They have many arrows, but they are only bitter words, and words are but wind; the curse causeless shall not come; but God has one arrow that will be their death, his curse, which is never causeless, and therefore shall come; with it they shall be suddenly wounded, their wound by it will be a surprise upon them, because they were secure, and not apprehensive of any danger. 2. Their tongues fell upon him, but God shall *make their own tongues to fall upon themselves.* They do it by the desert of their sin, God does it by the justice of his wrath, r. 8. When God deals with men according to the desert of their tongue-sins,

and brings those mischiefs upon them, which they have passionately and maliciously imprecated upon others, then he makes their own tongues to fall upon them; and it is weight enough to sink a man to the lowest hell, like a talent of lead. Many have cut their own throats, and many more have damned their own souls, with their tongues, and it will be an aggravation of their condemnation; *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; art snared in the words of thy mouth. If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.* They that love cursing, it shall come unto them. Sometimes men's secret wickedness is brought to light by their own confession, and then their own tongue falls upon themselves.

II. The influence which these judgments should have upon others; for it is done *in the open sight of all*, Job, 34. 26.

1. Their neighbours shall shun them, and shift for their own safety; they shall flee away, for fear of partaking in their plagues, and being involved in their ruin, so dreadful will it be, and such a noise will it make in the country; they shall flee away, as the men of Israel did from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Numb. 16. 27. Some think this was fulfilled in the death of Saul, when not only his army was dispersed, but the inhabitants of the neighbouring country were so terrified with the fall, not only of their king but of his three sons, that they quitted their cities and fled, 1 Sam. 31. 7.

2. Spectators shall reverence the providence of God therein, v. 9. (1.) They shall understand and observe God's hand in all; and unless we do so, we are not likely to profit by the dispensations of Providence; (Hos. 14. 9.) *They shall wisely consider his doing.* There is need of consideration and serious thought rightly to take the matter of fact, and need of wisdom to put a true interpretation upon it. God's doing is well worth our considering, (Eccl. 7. 13.) but it must be considered wisely, that we put not a corrupt gloss upon a pure text. (2.) They shall be affected with a holy awe of God, upon the consideration of it. All men (all that have any thing of the reason of a man in them) shall fear and tremble because of God's judgments, 110. 120. They shall fear to do the like, fear being found persecutors of God's people; *Smite the scorner, and the simple shall beware.* (3.) They shall declare the work of God; they shall speak to one another, and to all about them, of the justice of God in punishing persecutors; what we wisely consider ourselves, we should wisely declare to others, for their edification and the glory of God; *This is the finger of God.*

3. Good people shall, in a special manner, take notice of it, and it shall affect them with a holy pleasure, v. 10. (3.) It shall increase their joy; *The righteous shall be glad in the Lord*, not glad of the misery and ruin of their fellow-creatures, but glad that God is glorified, and his word fulfilled, and the cause of injured innocence pleaded effectually. (2.) It shall encourage their faith; they shall commit themselves to him in the way of duty, and be willing to venture for him with an entire confidence in him. (3.) Their joy and faith shall both express themselves in a holy boasting; *All the upright in heart, that keep a good conscience and approve themselves to God, shall glory*, not in themselves, but in the favour of God, in his righteousness and goodness, their relation to him and interest in him; *Let him that glories, glory in the Lord.*

PSALM LXV.

In this psalm, we are directed to give to God the glory of his power and goodness, which appear, I. In the kingdom of grace, (v. 1.) *Hearing prayer*, (v. 2.) *Pardoning sin*, (v. 3.) *Satisfying the souls of the people*, (v. 4.) *Protecting and supporting them*, v. 5. II. In the kingdom of Providence, *Fixing the mountains*, (v. 6.) *Calming the sea*, (v. 7.) *Preserving the regular succession of day and night*, (v. 8.) *And making the earth fruitful*, v. 9. 13. These are blessings we are all indebted to God for, and therefore we may easily accommodate this psalm to ourselves in singing of it.

To the chief musician. A psalm and song of David.

1. **P**RAISE waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed.
2. O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all

flesh come. 3. Iniquities prevail against me: *as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.* 4. *Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.* 5. *By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea.*

The psalmist here has no particular concern of his own, at the throne of grace, but begins with an address to God, as the master of an assembly, and the mouth of a congregation; and observe,

I. How he gives glory to God, v. 1. 1. By humble thankfulness; *Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion*; waits in expectation of the mercy desired, waits till it arrives, that it may be received with thankfulness, at its first approach; when God is coming toward us with his favours, we must go forth to meet him with our praises, and wait till the day dawn. Praise waits, with an entire satisfaction in thy holy will, and dependence on thy mercy; when we stand ready in every thing to give thanks, then praise waits for God. Praise waits thine acceptance; the Levites by night stood in the house of the Lord, ready to sing their songs of praise at the hour appointed, (134. 1, 2.) and thus their praise waited for him: *Praise is silent unto thee*, (so the word is,) as wanting words to express the great goodness of God, and being struck with a silent admiration at it. As there are holy groanings which cannot be uttered, so there are holy adorations which cannot be uttered, and yet shall be accepted by him that searches the heart, and knows what is the mind of the spirit. Our praise is silent, that the praise of the blessed angels, who exceed in strength, may be heard. Let it not be told him that I speak, for if a man offer to speak forth all God's praise, surely he shall be swallowed up, Job, 37. 20. Before thee, praise is reputed as silence, so the Chaldee; so far exalted is God above all our blessing and praise. Praise is due to God from all the world, but it waits for him in Sion only, in his church, among his people; all his works praise him, they minister matter for praise, but his saints only bless him by actual adorations. The redeemed church sing their new song upon mount Sion, Rev. 14. 1, 3. In Sion was God's dwelling-place, 76. 2. Happy they who dwell with him there, for they will be still praising him. 2. By sincere faithfulness; *Unto thee shall the vow be performed*, the sacrifice shall be offered up, which was vowed. We shall not be accepted in our thanksgivings to God for the mercies we have received, unless we make conscience of paying the vows which we made when we were in pursuit of the mercy; for better it is not to vow, than to vow, and not to pay.

II. What he gives him glory for.

1. For hearing prayer; (v. 2.) *Praise waits for thee*; and why is it so ready? (1.) "Because thou art ready to grant our petitions. O thou that hearest prayer, thou canst answer every prayer, for thou art able to do for us more than we are able to ask or think, (Eph. 3. 20.) and thou wilt answer every prayer of faith, either in kind or kindness." It is much for the glory of God's goodness, and the encouragement of our's, that he is a God hearing prayer, and has taken it among the titles of his honour to be so; and we are much wanting to ourselves, if we do not take all occasions to give him his title. (2.) Because, for that reason, we are ready to run to him when we are in our straits; "Therefore, because thou art a God hearing prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come; justly does every man's praise wait for thee, because every man's prayer waits on thee, when he is in want or distress, whatever he does at other times. Now only the seed of Israel come to thee, and the proselytes to their religion; but when thy house shall be called a house of prayer to all people, then unto thee shall all flesh come, and be welcome," Rom. 10. 12, 13. To

him let us come, and come boldly, because he is a God that hears prayer.

2. For pardoning sin. In this, *who is a God like unto him?* Micah, 7. 13. By this he proclaims his name, (Exod. 34. 7.) and therefore, upon this account, praise waits for him, v. 3. "Our sins reach to the heavens, iniquities prevail against us, and appear so numerous, so heinous, that, when they are set in order before us, we are full of confusion, and ready to fall into despair. They prevail so against us, that we cannot pretend to balance them with any righteousness of our own; so that, when we appear before God, our own consciences accuse us, and we have no replication to make; and yet, as for our transgressions, thou shalt, of thine own free mercy, and for the sake of a righteousness of thine own providing, purge them away, so that we shall not come into condemnation for them." Note, The greater our danger is by reason of sin, the more cause we have to admire the power and riches of God's pardoning mercy, which can invalidate the threatening force of our manifold transgressions, and our mighty sins.

3. For the kind entertainments he gives to those that attend upon him, and the comfort they have in communion with him. Iniquity must first be purged away, (v. 3.) and then we are welcome to compass God's altars, v. 4. They that come into communion with God, shall certainly find true happiness and full satisfaction in that communion.

(1.) They are blessed; not only blessed is the nation, (33. 12.) but blessed is the man, the particular person, how mean soever, *whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts*; he is a happy man, for he has the surest token of the divine favour, and the surest pledge and earnest of everlasting bliss. Observe here, [1.] What it is to come into communion with God, in order to this blessedness. *First*, It is to approach to him by laying hold on his covenant, setting our best affections upon him, and letting out our desires toward him; it is to converse with him, as one we love and value. *Secondly*, It is to dwell in his courts, as the priests and Levites did, that were at home in God's house; it is to be constant in the exercises of religion, and apply ourselves closely to them, as we do to that which is the business of our dwelling-place. [2.] How we come into communion with God; not recommended by any merit of our own, or brought in by any management of our own, but by God's free choice; "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and so distinguishest from others who are left to themselves;" and it is by his effectual special grace, pursuant to that choice; whom he chooses he causes to approach; not only invites them, but inclines and enables them, to draw nigh to him. He draws them, John, 6. 44.

(2.) They shall be satisfied. Here the psalmist changes the person, not, *He* shall be satisfied, the man whom thou choosest, but, *We* shall; which teaches us to apply the promises to ourselves, and by an active faith to put our own names into them; *We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple*. Note, [1.] God's holy temple is his house; there he dwells, where his ordinances are administered. [2.] God keeps a good house; there is abundance of goodness in his house, righteousness, grace, and all the comforts of the everlasting covenant; there is enough for all, enough for each; it is ready, always ready; and all on free cost, without money and without price. [3.] In those things there is that which is satisfying to a soul, and with which all gracious souls will be satisfied; let them have the pleasure of communion with God, and that suffices them, they have enough, they desire no more.

4. For the glorious operations of his power on their behalf; (v. 5.) *By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation*. This may be understood of the rebukes which God in his providence sometimes gives to his own people; he often answers them by terrible things, for the awakening and quickening of them, but always in righteousness; he neither does them any wrong, nor means them any hurt, for even then he is the God of their salvation. See Isa. 45. 15. But it is rather to be understood of his judgments upon their enemies; God

answers his people's prayers by the destructions made, for their sakes, among the heathen, and the recompence he renders to their proud oppressors, as a righteous God, the God to whom vengeance belongs, and as the God that protects and saves his people. By *wonderful* things, (so some read it,) things which are very surprising, and which we looked not for, Isa. 64. 3. Or by things which strike an awe upon us, thou wilt answer us; the holy freedom that we are admitted to in God's courts, and the nearness of our approach to him, must not at all abate our reverence and godly fear of him; for he is terrible in his holy places.

5. For the care he takes of all his people, however distressed, and whithersoever dispersed; *he is the Confidence of all the ends of the earth*, of all the saints all the world over, and not their's only that were of the seed of Israel: for he is the God of the Gentiles, as well as of the Jews; the Confidence of them that are afar off from his holy temple, and its courts, that dwell in the island of the Gentiles; or that are in distress upon the sea. They trust in thee, and cry to thee, when they are at their wit's end, 107. 27, 28. By faith and prayer we may keep up our communion with God, and fetch in comfort from him, wherever we are, not only in the solemn assemblies of his people, but afar off upon the sea.

6. Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; *being girded with power*. 7. Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people. 8. They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens: thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice. 9. Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, *which* is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. 10. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. 11. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. 12. They drop *upon* the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. 13. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.

That we may be the more affected with the wonderful condescensions of the God of grace, it is of use to observe his power and sovereignty as the God of nature; the riches and bounty of his providential kingdom.

1. He establishes the earth, and it abides, 119. 90. (v. 6.) *By his own strength, he setteth fast the mountains*; did set them fast at first, and still keeps them firm, though they are sometimes shaken by earthquakes;

—Feriuntque summos
Fulmina montes.

The lightning blasts the loftiest hills.

Hence they are called *everlasting mountains*, Hab. 3. 6. Yet God's covenant with his people is said to stand more firm than they, Isa. 54. 10.

II. He stills the sea, and it is quiet, v. 7. The sea, in a storm, makes a great noise, which adds to its threatening terror; but, when God pleases, he commands silence among the waves and billows, and lays them to sleep, turns the storm into a calm quickly, 107. 29. And by this change in the sea, as well as by the former instance of the unchangeableness of the earth, it appears that he, whose the sea and the dry land are, is girded with power. And by this, our Lord Jesus gave a proof of his divine

power, that he *commanded the winds and waves, and they obeyed him*. To this instance of the quieting of the sea, he adds, as a thing much of the same nature, that he stills *the tumult of the people*, the common people. Nothing is more unruly and disagreeable than the insurrections of the mob, the insults of the rabble; yet even these God can pacify, in secret ways, which they themselves are not aware of. Or, it may be meant of the outrage of the people that were enemies to Israel, 2.1. God has many ways to still them, and will for ever silence their tumults.

III. He renews the morning and evening; and their revolution is constant, v.8. This regular succession of day and night may be considered, 1. As an instance of God's great power, and so it strikes an awe upon all. They that dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth are afraid at thy signs or tokens; they are by them convinced that there is a supreme Deity, a sovereign Monarch, before whom they ought to fear and tremble; for in these things the invisible things of God are clearly seen; and therefore they are said to be *set for signs*, Gen. 1. 14. Many of them, that dwell in the remote and dark corners of the earth, were so afraid at these tokens, that they were driven to worship them, (Deut. 4. 19.) not considering that they were God's tokens, undeniable proofs of his power and godhead, and therefore they should have been led by them to worship him. 2. As an instance of God's great goodness, and so it brings comfort to all; *Thou makest the outgoings of the morning*, before the sun rises, and of the evening, before the sun sets, *to rejoice*. As it is God that scatters the light of the morning, and draws the curtains of the evening, so he does both in favour to man, and makes both to rejoice, gives occasion to us to rejoice in both; so that, how contrary soever light and darkness are to each other, and how inviolable soever the partition between them, (Gen. 1. 4.) both are equally welcome to the world in their season: it is hard to say which is more welcome to us, the light of the morning, which befriends the business of the day, or the shadows of the evening, which befriend the repose of the night. Does the watchman wait for the morning? so does the hireling earnestly desire the shadow. Some understand it of the morning and evening sacrifice, which good people greatly rejoiced in, and in which God was constantly honoured. Thou makest them to *sing*, so the word is; for, every morning and every evening, songs of praise were sung by the Levites, it was that which the duty of every day required. We are to look upon our daily worship, alone, and with our families, to be both the most needful of our daily occupations, and the most delightful of our daily comforts; and if therein we keep up our communion with God, the outgoings both of the morning and of the evening are thereby made truly to rejoice.

IV. He waters the earth, and makes it fruitful; on this instance of God's power and goodness he enlarges very much. The psalm being, probably, penned upon occasion, either of a more than ordinary plentiful harvest, or of a seasonable rain after long drought. How much the fruitfulness of this lower part of the creation depends upon the influence of the upper, is easy to observe; if the heavens be as brass, the earth is as iron; which is a sensible intimation to a stupid world, that every good and perfect gift is from above, *omnia desuper—all from above*; we must lift up our eyes above the hills, lift them up to the heavens, where the original springs of all blessings are, out of sight, and thither must our praises return; as the first-fruits of the earth were, in the heave-offerings, lifted up towards heaven, by way of acknowledgment that thence they were derived. All God's blessings, even spiritual ones, are expressed by his raining righteousness upon us.

Now observe how the common blessing of rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, is here described.

1. How much there is in it of the power and goodness of God; which is here set forth by a great variety of lively expressions. (1.) God, that made the earth, hereby visits it, sends to it, gives proof of his care of it, v.9. It is a visit in mercy, which the inhabitants of the earth ought to return in praises. (2.) God, that made it dry land, hereby waters it, in order to its fruitfulness; though the productions of the earth flourished before God had

caused it to rain, yet even then there was a mist which answered the intention, and *watered the whole face of the ground*, Gen. 2. 5, 6. Our hearts are dry and barren, unless God himself be as the dew to us, and water us; and the plants of his own planting he will water, and make them to increase. (3.) Rain is the river of God, which is full of water; the clouds are the springs of this river, which do not flow at random, but in the channel which God cuts out for it. The showers of rain, as the rivers of water, he turns which way soever he pleases. (4.) This river of God enriches the earth, which without it would quickly be a poor thing. The riches of the earth, which are produced out of its surface, are abundantly more useful and serviceable to man than those which are hid in its bowels; we might live well enough without silver and gold, but not without corn and grass.

2. How much benefit is derived from it to the earth, and to man upon it.

(1.) To the earth itself; the rain in season gives it a new face; nothing is more reviving, more refreshing, than the *rain upon the new-mown grass*; (72. 6.) even the ridges of the earth, off which the rain seems to slide, are watered abundantly, for they drink in the rain which comes often upon them; the furrows of it, which are turned up by the plough, in order to the seedness, are settled by the rain, and made fit to receive the seed, (v. 10.) they are settled by being made soft. That which makes the soil of the heart tender, settles it; for the heart is established with that grace. Thus the springing of the year is blessed; and if the spring, that first quarter of the year, be blessed, that is an earnest of a blessing upon the whole year, which God is therefore said to *crown with his goodness*, (v. 11.) to compass it on every side as the head is compassed with a crown, and to complete the comforts of it, as the end of a thing is said to crown it. And his paths are said to *drop fatness*; for whatever fatness there is in the earth, which impregnates its productions, it comes from the outgoings of the divine goodness. Wherever God goes, he leaves the tokens of his mercy behind him, (Joel, 2. 13, 14.) and makes his path thus to shine after him. These communications of God's goodness to this lower world are very extensive and diffusive; (v. 12.) *They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness*, and not only upon the pastures of the inhabited land. The deserts, which man takes no care of, and receives no profit from, are under the care of the Divine Providence, and the profits of them redound to the glory of God, as the great Benefactor of the whole creation, though not immediately to the benefit of man; and we ought to be thankful not only for that which serves us, but for that which serves any part of the creation, because thereby it turns to the honour of the Creator. The wilderness, which makes not such returns as the cultivated grounds do, receives as much of the rain of heaven as the most fruitful soil; for God doeth good to the evil and unthankful. So extensive are the gifts of God's bounty, that in them the hills, the little hills, rejoice on every side, even the north-side, that lies most from the sun. Hills are not above the need of God's providence; little hills are not below the cognizance of it. But as, when he pleases, he can make them tremble, (114. 6.) so, when he pleases, he can make them rejoice.

(2.) To man upon the earth. God, by providing rain for the earth, prepares corn for man, v. 9. *As for the earth, out of it comes bread*, (Job, 28. 5.) for out of it comes corn; but every grain of corn that comes out of it, God himself prepared; and therefore he provides rain for the earth, that thereby he may prepare corn for man, under whose feet he has put the rest of the creatures, and for whose use he has fitted them. When we consider that the yearly produce of the corn is not only an operation of the same power that raises the dead, but an instance of that power not much unlike it, as appears by that of our Saviour, (John, 12. 24.) and that the constant benefit we have from it, is an instance of that goodness which endures for ever, we shall have reason to think that it is no less than a God that prepares corn for us.

Corn and cattle are the two staple commodities with which the husbandman, who deals immediately in the fruits of the earth, is enriched; and both are owing to the divine goodness in watering the earth, v. 13. To this it is owing that the pastures are clothed

with flocks, *v. 13*. So well stocked are the pastures, that they seem to be covered over with the cattle that are laid in them, and yet the pasture not overcharged; so well fed are the cattle, that they are the ornament and the glory of the pastures in which they are fed. The vallies are so fruitful, that they seem to be covered over with corn, in the time of harvest. The lowest parts of the earth are commonly the most fruitful, and one acre of the humble vallies is worth five of the lofty mountains. But both corn-ground and pasture-ground, answering the end of their creation, are said to *shout for joy, and sing*; because they are serviceable to the honour of God and the comfort of man, and because they furnish us with matter for joy and praise. As there is no earthly joy above the joy of harvest, so there were none of the feasts of the Lord, among the Jews, solemnized with greater expressions of thankfulness than the *feast of in-gathering at the end of the year*, *Exod. 23. 16*. Let all these common gifts of the divine bounty, which we yearly and daily partake of, increase our love to God, as the best of beings, and engage us to glorify him with our bodies, which he thus provides so well for.

PSALM LXVI.

This is a thanksgiving-psalm; and it is of such a general use and application, that we need not suppose it penned upon any particular occasion. All people are here called upon to praise God, I. For the general instances of his sovereign dominion and power in the whole creation, v. 1. .7. II. For the special tokens of his favour to the church, his peculiar people, v. 8. .12. And then, III. The psalmist praises God for his own experiences of his goodness to him in particular, especially in answering his prayers, v. 13. .20. If we have learned in every thing to give thanks for ancient and modern mercies, public and personal mercies, we shall know how to sing this psalm with grace and understanding.

To the chief musician. A song or psalm.

1. **M**AKE a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands; 2. Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious. 3. Say unto God, *How terrible art thou in thy works!* through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. 4. All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah. 5. Come and see the works of God: *he is terrible in his doing* toward the children of men. 6. He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him. 7. He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.

In these verses, the psalmist calls upon all people to praise God, *all lands, all the earth, v. 1*; all the inhabitants of the world that are capable of praising God. 1. This speaks the glory of God, that he is worthy to be praised by all, for he is good to all, and furnishes every nation with matter for praise. 2. The duty of man, that all are obliged to praise God; it is part of the law of creation, and therefore is required of every creature. 3. A prediction of the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ; the time should come when all lands should praise God, and this incense should in every place be offered to him. 4. A hearty good-will which the psalmist had to this good work of praising God; he will abound in it himself, and wishes that God might have his tribute paid him by all the nations of the earth, and not by the land of Israel only. He excites all lands, (1.) To make a joyful noise to God: holy joy is that devout affection which should animate all our praises; and though it is not making a noise in religion that God will accept of, (hypocrites are said to *cause their voice to be heard on high*, *Isa. 58. 4*.) yet, in praising God, [1.] We must be hearty and zealous, and must do, what we do, with all our might, with all that is within us; [2.] We must be open and public, as those that are not ashamed of our Master;

and both these are implied in making a noise, a joyful joy. (2.) To sing with pleasure, and to sing forth, for the edification of others, the honour of his name, of all that whereby he has made himself known, *v. 2*. That which is the honour of God's name, ought to be the matter of our praise. (3.) To make his praise glorious, as far as we can. In praising God, we must do it so as to glorify him, and that must be the scope and drift of all our praises. Reckon it your greatest glory to praise God; so some. It is the highest honour the creature is capable of, to be to the Creator for a name and a praise.

He had called upon all lands to praise God, *v. 1*; and, *v. 4*, he foretells that they shall do so: *All the earth shall worship thee*; some in all parts of the earth, even the remotest regions, for *the everlasting gospel shall be preached to every nation and kindred*; and this is the purport of it, *Worship him that made heaven and earth*, *Rev. 14. 6, 7*. Being thus sent forth, it shall not return void, but shall bring all the earth, more or less, to worship God, and sing unto him. In gospel-times God shall be worshipped by singing of psalms; they shall sing to God, that is, *sing to his name*, for it is only to his declarative glory, that by which he has made himself known, not to his essential glory, that we can contribute any thing by our praises.

That we may be furnished with matter for praise, we are here called upon to come and see the works of God; for his own works praise him, whether we do or no; and the reason why we do not praise him more and better, is, because we do not duly and attentively observe them. Let us therefore see God's works, and observe the instances of his wisdom, power, and faithfulness, in them, (*v. 5*.) and then speak of them, and speak of them to him, (*v. 3*.) say unto God, *How terrible art thou in thy works, terrible in thy doings!*

1. God's works are wonderful in themselves, and such as, when duly considered, may justly fill us with amazement. *God is terrible*, that is, admirable in his works, through the greatness of his power, which is such, and shines so bright, so strong, in all he does, that it may be truly said there are *not any works like unto his works*. Hence he is said to be *fearful in praises*, *Exod. 15. 11*. In all his doings toward the children of men, he is terrible, and to be eyed with an holy awe. Much of religion lies in a reverence for the Divine Providence.

2. They are formidable to his enemies, and have many a time forced and frightened them into a feigned submission; (*v. 3*.) *Through the greatness of thy power*, before which none can stand, *shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee*, they shall lie unto thee, (so the word is,) they shall be compelled, sore against their wills, to make their peace with thee upon any terms. Subjection extorted by fear is seldom sincere, and therefore force is no proper means of propagating religion; nor can there be much joy of such proselytes to the church as will in the end be found liars unto it, *Deut. 33. 29*.

3. They are comfortable and beneficial to his people, *v. 6*. When Israel came out of Egypt, *he turned the sea into dry land* before them, which encouraged them to follow God's guidance through the wilderness; and when they were to enter Canaan, for their encouragement in their wars, Jordan was divided before them, and they went through that flood on foot; and such foot, so signally owned by heaven, might well pass for cavalry, rather than infantry, in the wars of the Lord. There did the enemies tremble before them; (*Exod. 15. 14, 15*. *Josh. 5. 1*.) but *there did we rejoice in him*; both trust his power, (for relying on God is often expressed by rejoicing in him,) and sing his praise, *106. 12*. There did we rejoice; our ancestors did, and we in their loins. The joys of our fathers were our joys, and we ought to look upon ourselves as sharers in them.

4. They are commanding to all. God by his works keeps up his dominion in the world; (*v. 7*.) *He rules by his power for ever*; *his eyes behold the nations*. (1.) God has a commanding eye; from the height of heaven his eye commands all the inhabitants of the world, and he has a clear and full view of them all. *His eyes run to and fro through the earth*; the most remote and obscure nations are under his inspection. (2.) He has a commanding arm; his

power rules, rules for ever, and is never weakened, never obstructed; *strong is his hand, and high is his right hand.* Hence he infers, *Let not the rebellious exalt themselves*; let not those that have revolting and rebellious hearts dare to rise up in any overt acts of rebellion against God, as Adonijah exalted himself, saying, *I will be king*; let not those that are in rebellion against God exalt themselves, as if there were any probability that they should gain their point; no, let them be still, for God hath said, *I will be exalted*, and man cannot gainsay it.

8. O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard: 9. Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. 10. For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. 11. Thou broughtest us into the net: thou laidest affliction upon our loins. 12. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

In these verses, the psalmist calls upon God's people in a special manner to praise him. Let all lands do it, but Israel's land particularly. Bless our God; bless him as our's, a God in covenant with us, and that takes care of us as his own. Let them *make the voice of his praise to be heard*; (v.8.) for from whom should it be heard, but from those who are his peculiar favourites and select attendants?

Two things we have reason to bless God for.

I. Common protection; (v.9.) *He holdeth our soul in life*, that it may not drop away of itself; for, being continually in our hands, it is apt to slip through our fingers. We must own that it is the good providence of God that keeps life and soul together, and his visitation that preserves our spirit; *he puts our soul in life*; so the word is. He that gave us our being, by a constant renewed act upholds us in our being, and his providence is a continued creation. When we are ready to faint and perish, he restores our soul, and so puts it, as it were, into a new life, giving new comforts. *Non est vivere, sed valere vita—It is not existence, but happiness, that deserves the name of life.* But we are apt to stumble and fall, and are exposed to many destructive accidents, killing disasters as well as killing diseases, and therefore as to these also we are guarded by the divine power; *he suffers not our feet to be moved*, preventing many unforeseen evils, which we ourselves were not aware of our danger from. To him we owe it that we have not, long ere this, fallen into endless ruin. *He will keep the feet of his saints.*

II. Special deliverance from great distress. Observe,

1. How grievous the distress and danger were, v.11, 12. What particular trouble of the church this refers to, does not appear; it might be the trouble of some private persons or families only. But, whatever it was, they were surprised with it, as a bird with a snare, inclosed and entangled in it, as a fish in a net; they were pressed down with it, and kept under as with a load *upon their loins*, v.11. But they owned the hand of God in it; we are never in the net, but God brings us into it, never under affliction, but God lays it upon us. Is any thing more dangerous than fire and water? *We went through both*, afflictions of different kinds; the end of one trouble was the beginning of another; when we had got clear of one sort of dangers, we found ourselves involved in dangers of another sort. Such may be the troubles of the best of God's saints, but he has promised, *When thou passest through the waters, through the fire, I will be with thee*, Isa. 43. 2. Yet proud and cruel men may be as dangerous as fire and water, and more so; *Beware of men*, Matth. 10. 17. When men rose up against us, that was fire and water, and all that is threatening; (124. 2, 3, 4.) and that was the case here; *"Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads, to trample upon us and insult over us; to hector and abuse us, nay, and to make perfect slaves of us; they have said to our souls, Bow down, that we may go over,"* Isa. 51. 23.

While it is the pleasure of good princes to rule in the hearts of their subjects, it is the pride of tyrants to ride over their heads; yet the afflicted church in this also owns the hand of God, "Thou hast caused them thus to abuse us;" for the most furious oppressor has no power but what is given him from above.

2. How gracious God's design was, in bringing them into this distress and danger. See what the meaning of it is, (v.10.) *Thou, O God, hast proved us, and tried us.* Then we are likely to get good by our afflictions, when we look upon them under this notion, for then we may see God's grace and love at the bottom of them, and our own honour and benefit in the end of them. By afflictions we are proved as silver in the fire. (1.) That our graces, by being tried, may be made more evident, and so we may be approved, as silver, when it is touched and marked sterling, and this will be to *our praise at the appearing of Jesus Christ*, (1 Pet. 1. 7.) and perhaps in this world; Job's integrity and constancy were manifested by his afflictions. (2.) That our graces, by being exercised, may be made more strong and active, and so we may be improved, as silver, when it is refined by the fire, and made more clear from its dross; and this will be to our unspeakable advantage, for thus we are made partakers of God's holiness, Heb. 12. 10. Public troubles are for the purifying of the church, Dan. 11. 35. Rev. 2. 10. Deut. 8. 2.

3. How glorious the issue was at last. The troubles of the church will certainly end well; these do so. For (1.) The outlet of the trouble is happy. They are in fire and water, but they get through them; "We went through fire and water, and did not perish in the flames or floods." Whatever the troubles of the saints are, blessed be God, there is a way through them. (2.) The inlet to a better state is much more happy; *Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place*, into a well-watered place, for the word is, *like the gardens of the Lord*, and therefore fruitful. God brings his people into trouble, that their comforts afterward may be the sweeter, and that their affliction may thus yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness, which will make the poorest place in the world a wealthy place.

13. I will go into thy house with burnt-offerings: I will pay thee my vows, 14. Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. 15. I will offer unto thee burnt-sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks with goats. Selah. 16. Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. 17. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. 18. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me: 19. But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. 20. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.

The psalmist, having before stirred up all people, and all God's people in particular, to bless the Lord, here stirs up himself, and engages himself to do it.

I. In his devotions to his God, v.13..15. He had called upon others to sing God's praises, and to make a joyful noise with them; but, for himself, his resolutions go further, and he will praise God,

1. By costly sacrifices, which, under the law, were offered to the honour of God. All people had not wherewithal to offer these sacrifices, or wanted zeal to be at such an expense in praising God; but David, for his part, being able, is as willing, in this chargeable way to pay his homage to God; (v.13.) *I will go into thy house with burnt-offerings.* His sacrifices should be public, in the place which God had chosen; "I will go into thy house with them." Christ is our Temple, to whom we must bring our

spiritual gifts, and by whom they are sanctified. They should be the best of the kind; burnt-sacrifices, which were wholly consumed upon the altar, to the honour of God, and of which the offerer had no share; and burnt-sacrifices of fatlings, not the lame or the lean, but the best fed, and such as would be most acceptable at his own table. God, who is the best, must be served with the best we have. The feast God makes for us is a *feast of fat things, full of marrow*; (Isa. 25. 6.) and such sacrifices should we bring to him. He will offer bullocks with goats, so liberal would he be in his return of praise, and not strait-handed. He would not offer that which cost him nothing, but that which cost him a great deal; and this with the incense of rams, that is, with the fat of rams, which being burnt upon the altar, the smoke of it would ascend like the smoke of incense. Or, rams with incense. The incense typifies Christ's intercession, without which the fattest of our sacrifices will not be accepted.

2. By a conscientious performance of his vows. We do not acceptably praise God for our deliverance out of trouble, unless we make conscience of paying the vows we made when we were in trouble. This was the psalmist's resolution, (v. 13, 14.) *I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered when I was in trouble*. Note, (1.) It is very common, and very commendable, when we are under the pressure of any affliction, or in the pursuit of any mercy, to make vows, and solemnly to speak them before the Lord; to bind ourselves out from sin, and bind ourselves more closely to our duty; not as if this were an equivalent, or valuable consideration, for the favour of God, it is only a qualification for receiving the tokens of that favour. (2.) The vows which we made when we were in trouble, must not be forgotten when the trouble is over, but be carefully performed, for better it is not to vow, than to vow and not pay.

II. In his declarations to his friends, v. 16. He calls together a congregation of good people to hear his thankful narrative of God's favours to him; "*Come and hear, all ye that fear God*, for, 1. You will join with me in my praises, and help me in giving thanks." And we should be as desirous of the assistance of those that fear God, in returning thanks for the mercies we have received, as in praying for those we want. 2. "You will be edified and encouraged by that which I have to say; *The humble shall hear of it, and be glad*, (34. 2.) *They that fear thee will be glad when they see me*, (119. 74.) and therefore let me have their company, and I will declare to them, not to vain carnal people, that will banter it, and make a jest of it," (pearls are not to be cast before swine,) "but to them that fear God, and will make a good use of it, I will declare what God has done for my soul;" not in pride and vain-glory, that he might be thought more a favourite of heaven than other people, but for the honour of God, to which we owe this as a just debt, and for the edification of others. Note, God's people should communicate their experiences to each other; we should take all occasions to tell one another of the great and kind things which God has done for us, especially which he has done for our souls, the spiritual blessings with which he has blessed us in heavenly things; these we should be most affected with ourselves, and therefore with these we should be desirous to affect others.

Now what was it that God had done for his soul?

(1.) He had wrought in him a love to the duty of prayer, and had by his grace enlarged his heart in that duty, (v. 17.) *I cried unto him with my mouth*; but if God, among other things done for our souls, had not given us the spirit of adoption, teaching and enabling us to cry, *Abba Father*, we should never have done it. That God has given us leave to pray, a command to pray, encouragements to pray, and (to crown all) a heart to pray, is what we have reason to mention, with thankfulness, to his praise; and the more, if, when we cried to him with our mouth, he was extolled with our tongue, if we were enabled by faith and hope to give glory to him then, when we were seeking for mercy and grace from him, and to praise him for mercy in prospect, though it be not yet in possession. By crying to him we do indeed extol him. He is pleased to reckon himself honoured by the humble believing prayers of the upright, and this is a great thing which he has done for our souls, that he has been pleased so far to unite interests with

us, that, in seeking our *own* welfare, we seek his glory. *His exaltation was under my tongue*, so it may be read; I was considering in my mind how I might exalt and magnify his name: When prayers are in our mouths, praises must be in our hearts.

(2.) He had wrought in him a dread of sin as an enemy to prayer; (v. 18.) *If I regard iniquity in my heart*, I know very well *the Lord will not hear me*. The Jewish writers, some of them that have the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, put a very corrupt gloss upon these words; *If I regard iniquity in my heart*, that is, say they, If I allow myself only in heart-sins, and iniquity does not break out in my words and actions, *God will not hear me*, that is, he will not be offended with me, will take no notice of it, so as to lay it to my charge; as if heart-sins were no sins, in God's account; the falsehood of this our Saviour has shewn in his spiritual exposition of the law, Matth. 5. But the sense of this place is plain; *If I regard iniquity in my heart*, that is, "If I have favourable thoughts of it, if I love it, indulge it, and allow myself in it, if I treat it as a friend, and bid it welcome, make provision for it, and am loath to part with it, if I roll it under my tongue as a sweet morsel, though it be but a heart-sin that is thus countenanced and made much of, if I delight in it after the inward man, God will not hear my prayer, will not accept it, or be pleased with it, nor can I expect an answer of peace to it." Note, Iniquity, regarded in the heart, will certainly spoil the comfort and success of prayer; for *the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*. They that continue in love and league with sin, have no interest either in the promise or in the Mediator, and therefore cannot expect to speed in prayer.

(3.) He had graciously granted him an answer of peace to his prayers; (v. 19.) "*But verily God has heard me*; though, being conscious to myself of much amiss in me, I began to fear that my prayers would have been rejected, yet, to my comfort, I found that God was pleased to regard them." This God did for his soul; by answering his prayer, he gave him a token of his favour, and an evidence that he had wrought a good work in him. And therefore he concludes, (v. 20.) *Blessed be God*. The two foregoing verses are the major and minor propositions of a syllogism; *If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my prayers*, that is the proposition; *but verily God has heard me*, that is the assumption, from which he might have rationally inferred, "Therefore I do not regard iniquity in my heart;" but, instead of taking the comfort to himself, he gives the praise to God, *Blessed be God*. Whatever are the premises, God's glory must always be the conclusion; *God has heard me*, and therefore *blessed be God*. Note, What we win by prayer, we must wear with praise. Mercies, in answer to prayer, do, in a special manner, oblige us to be thankful. He has *not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy*; lest it should be thought that the deliverance was granted for the sake of some worthiness in his prayer, he ascribes it to God's mercy. This he adds by way of correction, "It was not my prayer that fetched the deliverance, but his mercy that sent it." Therefore God does not turn away our prayer, because he does not turn away his own mercy, for that is the foundation of our hopes, and the fountain of our comforts, and therefore ought to be the matter of our praises.

PSALM LXVII.

This psalm relates to the church, and is calculated for the public. Here is, I. A prayer for the prosperity of the church of Israel, v. 1. II. A prayer for the conversion of the Gentiles, and the bringing of them into the church, v. 2. 5. III. A prospect of happy and glorious times, when God shall do this, v. 6, 7. Thus was the psalmist carried out by the spirit of prophecy, to foretell the glorious estate of the Christian church, in which Jews and Gentiles should unite into one flock; the beginning of which blessed work ought to be the matter of our joy and praise, and the completing of it of our prayer and hope, in singing this psalm.

To the chief musician on Neginoth. A psalm or song.

1. **G**OD be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us. Selah.
2. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.
3. Let the people

praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. 4. O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah. 5. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. 6. *Then* shall the earth yield her increase; and God, *even our own God*, shall bless us. 7. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

The composition of this psalm is such as denotes the penman's affections to have been very warm and lively; by which spirit of devotion he was elevated to receive the spirit of prophecy concerning the enlargement of God's kingdom.

I. He begins with a prayer for the welfare and prosperity of the church then in being, in the happiness of which he should share, and think himself happy, v.1. Our Saviour, in teaching us to say, *Our Father*, has intimated that we ought to pray with and for others; so the psalmist here prays not, *God be merciful to me, and bless me*, but to us, and bless us; for we must make supplication for all saints, and be willing and glad to take our lot with them. We are here taught, 1. That all our happiness comes from God's mercy, and takes rise in that; and therefore the first thing prayed for, is, *God be merciful to us*, to us sinners, and pardon our sins, (Luke, 18.13.) to us miserable sinners, and help us out of our miseries. 2. That it is conveyed by God's blessing, and secured in that; *God bless us*, give us an interest in his promises, and confer upon us all the good contained in them. God's speaking well to us, amounts to his doing well for us. *God bless us*, is a comprehensive prayer; it is pity such excellent words should ever be used slightly and carelessly, and as a by-word. 3. That it is completed in the light of his countenance; *God cause his face to shine upon us*, God by his grace qualify us for his favour, and then give us the tokens of his favour. We need desire no more to make us happy, than to have God's face shine upon us, to have God love us, and let us know that he loves us; *To shine with us*; so the margin reads it; *with us* doing our endeavour, and let it crown that endeavour with success. If we by faith walk with God, we may hope that his face will shine with us.

II. He passes from this to a prayer for the conversion of the Gentiles; (v.2.) *That thy way may be known upon earth*. "Lord, I pray not only that thou wilt be merciful to us and bless us, but that thou wilt be merciful to all mankind, *that thy way may be known upon earth*." Thus public-spirited must we be in our prayers, *Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come*. We shall have never the less of God's mercy, and blessing, and favour, for others coming in to share with us. Or it may be taken thus, "*God be merciful to us Jews, and bless us*, that thereby thy way may be known upon earth; that, by the peculiar distinguishing tokens of thy favour to us, others may be allured to come and join themselves to us, saying, *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*," Zechar. 8.23. These verses, which point at the conversion of the Gentiles, may be taken, 1. As a prayer; and so it speaks the desire of the Old-Testament saints; so far were they from wishing to monopolize the privileges of the church, that they desired nothing more than the throwing down of the inclosure, and the laying open of the advantages. See then how the spirit of the Jews, in the days of Christ and his apostles, differed from the spirit of their fathers. The Israelites indeed, that were of old, desired that God's name might be known among the Gentiles, those counterfeit Jews were enraged at the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles; nothing in Christianity exasperated them so much as that did. 2. As a prophecy; that it shall be as he here prays. Many scripture-prophecies and promises are wrapt up in prayers, to intimate, that the answer of the church's prayer is as sure as the performance of God's promises.

Three things are here prayed for, with reference to the Gentiles.

(1.) That divine revelation might be sent among them, v.2. Two things he desires might be known upon earth, even among all nations, and not to the nation of the Jews only. [1.] God's way, the rule of duty; "*Let them all know, as well as we do, what is good, and what the Lord our God requires of them*"; let them be blessed and honoured with the same righteous statutes and judgments, which are so much the praise of our nation, and the envy of all its neighbours," Deut. 4.8. [2.] His saving health, or his salvation; the former is wrapt up in his law, this in his gospel. If God makes known his way to us, and we walk in it, he will shew us his saving health, 50.23. They that have themselves experimentally known the pleasantness of God's ways, and the comforts of his salvation, cannot but desire and pray that they may be known to others, even among all nations. All upon earth are bound to walk in God's way, all need his salvation, and there is in it enough for all; and therefore we should pray, that both the one and the other may be made known to all.

(2.) That divine worship may be set up among them, as it will be where divine revelation is received and embraced; (v.3.) "*Let the people praise thee, O God*, let them have matter for praise, let them have hearts for praise; yea, let not only some, but all the people, praise thee;" all nations in their national capacity, some of all nations. It is again repeated, (v.5.) as that which the psalmist's heart was very much upon. They that delight in praising God themselves, cannot but desire that others also may be brought to praise him; that he may have the honour of it, and they may have the benefit of it. It is a prayer, [1.] That the gospel might be preached to them, and then they would have cause enough to praise God, as for the day-spring after a long and dark night. *Ortus est sol—The sun is risen*. Acts, 8.8. [2.] That they might be converted and brought into the church, and then they would have a disposition to praise God, the living and true God, and not the dumb and dunghill deities they had worshipped, Dan. 5.4. Then their hard thoughts of God would be silenced, and they would see him, in the gospel-glass, to be love itself, and the proper object of praise. [3.] That they might be incorporated into solemn assemblies, and might praise God in a body, that they might all together praise him with one mind and one mouth. Thus a face of religion appears upon a land, when God is publicly owned, and the ordinances of religious worship are duly celebrated in religious assemblies.

(3.) That the divine government may be acknowledged and cheerfully submitted to; (v.4.) *O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy*. Holy joy, joy in God, and in his name, is the heart and soul of thankful praise. That *all the people may praise thee, let the nations be glad*. They that rejoice in the Lord always, will in every thing give thanks. The joy he wishes to the nations, is, holy joy; for it is joy in God's dominion, joy that *God has taken to himself his great power, and has reigned*, which the unconverted nations are angry at, Rev. 11.17, 18. Let them be glad, [1.] That *the kingdom is the Lord's*, 22.28. That he, as an absolute Sovereign, shall govern the nations upon earth. That by the kingdom of his providence he shall over-rule the affairs of kingdoms, according to the counsel of his will, though they neither know him nor own him; and that in due time he shall disciple all nations by the preaching of his gospel, (Matth. 28.19.) and set up the kingdom of his grace among them, upon the ruin of the Devil's kingdom. That he shall make them a willing people in the day of his power, and even *the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ*. [2.] That *every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord*; "Let them be glad that thou shalt judge the people righteously, that thou shalt give a law and gospel which shall be a righteous rule of judgment, and shalt pass an unerring sentence, according to that rule, upon all the children of men; against which there will lie no exception." Let us all be glad that we are not to be one another's judges, but that he that judges us is the Lord, whose judgment we are sure is according to truth.

III. He concludes with a joyful prospect of all good, when God shall do this, when the nations shall be converted, and brought to praise God.

1. The lower world shall smile upon them, and they shall have the fruits of that; (v. 6.) *Then shall the earth yield her increase.* Not but that God gave rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons to the nations, when they *sat in darkness*; (Acts, 14. 17.) But, when they were converted, the earth yielded its increase to God; the meat and the drink then became a *meat-offering and a drink-offering to the Lord our God*; (Joel, 2. 14.) and then it was fruitful to some good purpose. Then it yielded its increase more than before, to the comfort of men, who through Christ acquired a covenant-title to the fruits of it, and had a sanctified use of it. Note, The success of the gospel sometimes brings outward mercies along with it; righteousness exalts a nation. See Isa. 4. 2.—62. 9.

2. The upper world shall smile upon them, and they shall have the favours of that which is much better; *God, even our own God, shall bless us*, v. 6. And again, (v. 7.) *God shall bless us.* Note, (1.) There are a people in the world that can, upon good grounds, call God their God. (2.) Believers have reason to glory in their relation to God, and the interest they have in him. It is here spoken with an air of triumph; *God, even our own God.* (3.) Those who through grace call God their own, may with an humble confidence expect a blessing from him. If he be our God, he shall bless us with special blessings. (4.) The blessing of God is our's in covenant, is that which sweetens all our creature-comforts to us, and makes them comforts indeed; then we receive the increase of the earth as a mercy indeed, when with it God, even our own God, gives us his blessing.

3. All the world shall hereby be brought to do like them; *The ends of the earth shall fear him*, that is, worship him, which is to be done with a godly fear. The blessings God bestows upon us, call upon us not only to love him, but to fear him, to keep up high thoughts of him, and to be afraid of offending him. When the gospel begins to spread, it shall get ground more and more, till it reach to the ends of the earth. The heaven hid in the meal shall diffuse itself, till the whole be leavened. And the many blessings which they will own themselves to have received, that are brought into the church, invite others to join themselves to them. It is good to cast in our lot with those that are the blessed of the Lord.

PSALM LXVIII.

This is a most excellent psalm, but in many places the genuine sense is not easy to come at; for in this, as in some other scriptures, there are things dark and hard to be understood. It does not appear when, or upon what occasion, David penned this psalm; but, probably, it was when, God having given him rest from all his enemies round about, he brought the ark (which was both the token of God's presence and a type of Christ's mediation) from the house of Obed-edom to the tent he had pitched for it in Zion; for the first words are the prayer which Moses used at the removing of the ark, Numb. 10. 35. From this he is led, by the Spirit of prophecy, to speak glorious things concerning the Messiah, his ascension into heaven, and the setting up of his kingdom in the world. I. He begins with prayer, both against God's enemies, (v. 1, 2.) and for his people, v. 3. II. He proceeds to praise, which takes up the rest of the psalm, calling upon all to praise God, (v. 4, 26, 32.) and suggesting many things as matter for praise. 1. The greatness and goodness of God, v. 4. 6. 2. The wonderful works God had wrought for his people formerly, bringing them through the wilderness, (v. 7, 8.) settling them in Canaan, (v. 9, 10.) giving them victory over their enemies, (v. 11, 12.) and delivering them out of the hands of their oppressors, v. 13, 14. 3. The special presence of God in his church, (v. 15. 17.) 4. The ascension of Christ, (v. 18.) and the salvation of his people by him, v. 19, 20. 5. The victories which Christ would obtain over his enemies, and the favours he would bestow upon his church, v. 21. 28. 6. The enlargement of the church by the accession of the Gentiles to it, v. 29. 31. And so he concludes the psalm with an awful acknowledgment of the glory and grace of God, v. 32. 35. With all these great things we should endeavour to be duly affected in singing this psalm.

To the chief musician. A psalm or song of David.

1. **L**ET God arise, let his enemies be scattered; let them also that hate him flee before him. 2. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish in the presence of God. 3. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before

God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. 4. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. 5. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. 6. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

In these verses,

I. David prays that God would appear in his glory;

1. For the confusion of his enemies; (v. 1, 2.) "*Let God arise, as a Judge to pass sentence upon them, as a General to take the field and do execution upon them; and let them be scattered, and flee before him, as unable to keep their ground, much less to make head against him. Let God arise, as the sun when he goes forth in his strength; and the children of darkness shall be scattered, as the shadows of the evening flee before the rising sun. Let them be driven away as smoke by the wind, which ascends as if it would eclipse the sun, but is presently dispelled, and there appears no remainder of it; Let them melt as wax before the fire, which is quickly dissolved.*" Thus does David comment upon Moses's prayer, and not only repeat it, with application to himself and his own times, but enlarge upon it, to direct us how to make use of scripture-prayers. Nay, it looks further to the Redeemer's victory over the enemies of his kingdom, for he was the Angel of the covenant, that guided Israel through the wilderness. Note, (1.) There are, and have been, and ever will be, such as are enemies to God, and hate him; that join in with the old serpent against the kingdom of God among men, and against the seed of the woman. (2.) They are the wicked, and none but the wicked, that are enemies to God; the children of the wicked one. (3.) Though we are to pray for our enemies as such, yet we are to pray against God's enemies as such, against their enmity to him, and all their attempts upon his kingdom. (4.) If God but arise, all his impenitent implacable enemies, that will not repent to give him glory, will certainly and speedily be scattered, and driven away, and made to perish at his presence; for none ever hardened his heart against God, and prospered. The day of judgment will be the day of the complete and final *perdition of ungodly men*, (2 Pet. 3. 7.) who shall melt like wax before that flaming fire in which the Lord shall then appear, 2 Thess. 1. 8.

2. For the comfort and joy of his own people; (v. 3.) "*Let the righteous be glad, that are now in sorrow, let them rejoice before God, in his favourable presence. God is the Joy of his people, let them rejoice whenever they come before God, yea, let them exceedingly rejoice, let them rejoice with gladness.*" Note, Those who rejoice in God have reason to rejoice with exceeding joy; and this joy we ought to wish to all the saints, for it belongs to them, *Light is sown for the righteous.*

II. He praises God for his glorious appearances, and calls upon us to praise him, to sing to his name, and extol him,

1. As a great God, infinitely great; (v. 4.) *He rides upon the heavens, by his name JAH.* He is the Spring of all the motions of the heavenly bodies, directs and manages them, as he that rides in the chariot, sets it a-going; has a supreme command of the influences of heaven; he rides upon the heavens for the help of his people, (Deut. 33. 26.) so swiftly, so strongly, and so much above the reach of opposition. He rules these by his name *Jah*, or *Jehovah*, a self-existent, self-sufficient Being, the fountain of all beings, power, motion, and perfection; this is his name for ever. When we thus extol God, we must *rejoice before him*; holy joy in God will very well consist with that reverence and godly fear wherewith we ought to worship him.

2. As a gracious God, a God of mercy, and tender compassion. He is great, but he despises not any, no not the meanest; nay, being a God of great power, he uses his power for the relief of those that are distressed, v. 5, 6. The fatherless, the widows, the solitary, find him a God all-sufficient to them. Observe how much

God's goodness is his glory. He that *rides on the heavens, by his name Jah*, one would think, should immediately have been adored as King of kings and Lord of lords, and the sovereign Director of all the affairs of states and nations; he is so, but this he rather glories in, that he is a *Father to the fatherless*. *Though God be high, yet has he respect unto the lowly*. Happy they that have an interest in such a God as this. He that *rides upon the heavens* is a Father worth having; thrice happy is the people whose God is the Lord. (1.) When families are bereaved of their head, God takes care of them, and is himself their Head; and the widows and the fatherless children shall find that in him which they have lost in the relation that is removed, and infinitely more and better. He is a *Father of the fatherless*, to pity them, to bless them, to teach them, to provide for them, and to portion them. He will *preserve them alive*, (Jer. 49. 11.) and with him they shall *find mercy*, Hos. 14. 3. They have liberty to call him Father, and to plead their relation to him as their Guardian, 146. 9.—10. 14, 18. He is a Judge or Patron of the widows, to give them counsel, and to do them right; to own them, and plead their cause, Prov. 22. 23. He has an ear open to all their complaints, and a hand open to all their wants. He is so *in his holy habitation*; which may be understood either of the habitation of his glory in heaven, (there he has prepared his throne of judgment, which the fatherless and widow have free recourse to, and are taken under the protection of, 9. 4, 7.) or, of the habitation of his grace on earth; and so it is a direction to the widows and fatherless, how to apply themselves to God; let them go to his holy habitation, to his word and ordinances, there they may find him, and find comfort in him. (2.) When families are to be built up, he is the Founder of them; *God sets the solitary in families*, brings them into comfortable relations that were lonely, gives them a convenient settlement that were unsettled; (113. 9.) *he makes those dwell at home that were forced to seek for relief abroad*, (so Dr. Hammond,) putting them that were destitute into a way of getting their livelihood, which is a very good way for man's charity, as it is of God's bounty.

3. As a righteous God. (1.) In relieving the oppressed; *he brings out those that are bound with chains*, and sets them at liberty, who were unjustly imprisoned, and brought into servitude. No chains can detain those whom God will make free. (2.) In reckoning with the oppressors; *The rebellious dwell in a dry land*, and have no comfort in that which they have got by fraud and injury. The best land will be a dry land to those that by their rebellion have forfeited the blessing of God, which is the juice and fatness of all our enjoyments. Israel were brought out of Egypt into the wilderness, but were there better provided for than the Egyptians themselves, whose land, if Nilus failed them, as it sometimes did, was a dry land.

7. O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: 8. The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: *even Sinai itself was moved* at the presence of God, the God of Israel. 9. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary. 10. Thy congregation hath dwelt therein: thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor. 11. The Lord gave the word; great *was* the company of those that published it. 12. Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil. 13. Though ye have lien among the pots *yet shall ye be as* the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. 14. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was *white* as snow in Salmon.

The psalmist here, having occasion to give God thanks for the

great things he had done for him and his people of late, takes occasion thence to praise him for what he had done for their fathers in the days of old. Fresh mercies should put us in mind of former mercies, and revive our grateful sense of them. Let it never be forgotten,

I. That God himself was the Guide of Israel through the wilderness; when he had brought them out of their chains, he did not leave them in the dry land, but himself went before them, in a *march through the wilderness*, v. 7. It was not a journey but a march, for they went as soldiers, as an army with banners. The Egyptians promised themselves that the wilderness had shut them in, but they were deceived; God's Israel having him for their Leader, marched through the wilderness, and were not lost in it. Note, If God bring his people into a wilderness, he will be sure to go before them in it, and bring them out of it. Cant. 8. 5.

II. That he manifested his glorious presence with them at mount Sinai, v. 8. Never did any people see the glory of God, nor hear his voice, as Israel did, Deut. 4. 32, 33. Never had any people such an excellent law given them; so expounded, so enforced. Then the *earth shook*, and the neighbouring countries, it is likely, felt the shock; terrible thunders there were, accompanied, no doubt, with thunder-showers, in which the heav'ns seemed to drop; while the divine doctrine *dropt as the rain*, Deut. 32. 2. *Sinai itself*, that vast mountain, that long ridge of mountains, *was moved at the presence of God*; see Judg. 5. 4, 5. Deut. 33. 2. Hab. 3. 3. This terrible appearance of the Divine Majesty, as it would possess them with a fear and dread of him, so it would encourage their faith in him and dependence upon him. Whatever mountains of difficulty lay in the way of their happy settlement, he that could move Sinai itself, could remove them, could get over them.

III. That he provided very comfortably for them both in the wilderness and in Canaan; (v. 9, 10.) *Thou didst send a plentiful rain, and hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor*. This may refer, 1. To the victualling of their camp with manna in the wilderness, which was rained upon them, as were also the quails, (78. 24, 27.) and it might be fitly called a *rain* of liberality or munificence, for it was a memorable instance of the divine bounty. This confirmed the camp of Israel, (here called *God's inheritance*, because he had chosen them to be a peculiar treasure to himself,) *when it was weary*, and ready to perish; this confirmed their faith, and was a proof of God's power and goodness. Even in the wilderness God found a comfortable dwelling for Israel, which was his congregation. Or, 2. To the seasonable supplies granted them in Canaan, that land *flowing with milk and honey*, which is said to *drink water of the rain of heaven*, Deut. 11. 11. When sometimes that fruitful land was ready to be turned into barrenness for the iniquity of them that dwelt therein, God, in judgment, remembered mercy, and sent them a plentiful rain, which refreshed it again, so that the congregation of Israel dwelt therein, and there was provision enough, even to satisfy their poor with bread. This looks further to the spiritual provision made for God's Israel; the spirit of grace and the gospel of grace are the plentiful rain, with which God confirms his inheritance, and from which their fruit is found, Isa. 45. 8. Christ himself is the Rain; (72. 6.) *He shall come as showers that water the earth*.

IV. That he often gave them victory over their enemies; armies, and kings of armies, appeared against them, from their first coming into Canaan, and all along in the times of the judges, till David's days, but, first or last, they gained their point against them, v. 11, 12, 14. Observe here, 1. That God was their Commander in chief; *The Lord gave the word*, as General of their armies; he raised up judges for them, gave them their commissions and instructions, and assured them of success; *God spoke in his holiness*, and then *Gilead is mine*. 2. That they had prophets, as God's messengers, to make known his mind to them. God gave them his word, (*the word of the Lord came unto them*), and then *great was the company of the preachers*, prophets and prophetesses; for the word is feminine. When God has messages to send, he will not want messengers. Or perhaps it may allude to the women's joining in the triumph, when the victory was obtained, as was usual, (Exod. 15. 20. 1 Sam. 18. 7.) in which they took notice of

the word of God, triumphing in that as much as in his works.

3. That their enemies were defeated, and put to confusion; *Kings of armies did flee*, did flee with the greatest terror and precipitation imaginable, did not fight and flee, but flee and flee, retired without striking a stroke; they fled apace, fled and never rallied again. 4. That they were enriched with the plunder of the field; *She that tarried at home divided the spoil*. Not only the men, the soldiers that abode by the stuff, who were, by a statute of distributions, to share the prey, (1 Sam. 30. 24.) but even the women that tarried at home had a share; which intimates the abundance of spoil that should be taken. 5. That these great things which God did for them were sanctified to them, and contributed to their reformation; (v. 14.) *When the Almighty scattered kings for her*, for the church, *she was white as snow in Salmon*, purified and refined by the mercies of God; *when the host went forth against the enemy, they kept themselves from every wicked thing*, and so the host returned victorious, and Israel, by the victory, was confirmed in their purity and piety. This account of Israel's victories is applicable to the victories obtained by the exalted Redeemer, for those that are his, over death and hell. By the resurrection of Christ our spiritual enemies were made to flee, their power was broken, and they were for ever disabled to hurt any of God's people. This victory was first notified by the women (the she-publishers) to the disciples, (Matth. 28. 7.) and by them it was preached to all the world; while believers that tarry at home, that did not themselves contribute any thing towards it, enjoy the benefit of it, and divide the spoil.

V. That, from a low and despised condition, they had been advanced to splendour and prosperity. When they were bond-slaves in Egypt, and afterward, when they were oppressed sometimes by one potent neighbour, and sometimes by another, they did, as it were, *lie among the pots or rubbish*, as despised broken vessels, or as vessels in which there was no pleasure—they were black, and dirty, and discoloured. But God, at length, *delivered them from the pots*; (81. 6.) and in David's time they were in a fair way to be one of the most prosperous kingdoms in the world, amiable in the eyes of all about them, *like the wings of a dove covered with silver*, v. 13. "And so, says Dr. Hammond, under Christ's kingdom, the heathen idolaters, that were brought to the basest and "most despicable condition of any creatures, worshipping wood "and stone, and given up to the vilest lusts, should, from that "detestable condition, be advanced to the service of Christ, and "the practice of all Christian virtues, the greatest inward beauties "in the world." It may be applied also to the deliverance of the church out of a suffering state, and the comforts of particular believers after their despondencies.

15. The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. 16. Why leap ye, ye high hills? *this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in*; yea, the LORD will dwell in it for ever. 17. The chariots of God are twenty thousand, *even thousands of angels*: the LORD is among them, *as in Sinai*, in the holy place. 18. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, *for the rebellious also*, that the LORD God might dwell among them. 19. Blessed be the LORD, *who daily loadeth us with benefits*, even the God of our salvation. Selah. 20. *He that is our God is the God of salvation*; and unto God the LORD belong the issues from death. 21. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, *and the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses*.

David, having given God praise for what he had done for Israel in general, as the God of Israel, (v. 8.) here comes to give him

praise as Zion's God in a special manner; compare 9. 11. *Sing praises to the Lord which dwelleth in Zion*, for which reason Zion is called *the hill of God*.

I. He compares it with the hill of Bashan, and other high and fruitful hills, and prefers it before them, v. 15, 16. It is true, Zion was but little and low, in comparison with them, and was not covered over with flocks and herds as they were, yet, upon this account, it has the pre-eminence above them all, that it is *the hill of God*, the hill which he desires to dwell in, and where he chooses to manifest the tokens of his peculiar presence, 132. 13, 14. Note, It is much more honourable to be holy to God, than to be high and great in the world. "Why leap ye, ye high hills? Why do you insult over poor Zion, and boast of your own height? This is the hill which God has chosen, and therefore, though you exceed it in bulk, and be first-rates, yet, because on this the royal flag is hoisted, you must all strike sail to it." Zion was especially honourable, because it was a type of the gospel-church, which is therefore called mount Zion, (Heb. 12. 22.) and this is intimated here, when he said, *The Lord will dwell in it for ever*, which must have its accomplishment in the gospel Zion. There is no kingdom in the world comparable to the kingdom of the Redeemer, no city comparable to that which is incorporated by the gospel-charter, for there God dwells, and will dwell for ever.

II. He compares it with mount Sinai, of which he had spoken, (v. 8.) and shews that it has the Shechinah or divine presence in it, as really, though not as sensibly, as Sinai itself had, v. 17. Angels are *the chariots of God*, his chariots of war, which he makes use of against his enemies; his chariots of conveyance, which he sends for his friends, as he did for Elijah, and Lazarus is said to be carried by the angels; his chariots of state, in the midst of which he shews his glory and power. They are vastly numerous; *twenty thousands*, even thousands multiplied. There is an *innumerable company of angels* in the heavenly Jerusalem, Heb. 12. 22. The enemies David fought with had chariots; (2 Sam. 8. 4.) but what were they, for number or strength, to the chariots of God? While David had them on his side, he needed not to fear those that trusted in *chariots and horses*, 20. 7. God appeared on mount Sinai, attended with myriads of angels, by whose dispensation the law was given, Acts, 7. 53. *He comes with ten thousands of saints*, Deut. 33. 2. And still in Zion God manifests his glory, and is really present, with a numerous retinue of his heavenly hosts, signified by the cherubims, between which God is said to dwell. So that, as some read the last words of the verse, *Sinai is in the sanctuary*; the sanctuary was to Israel instead of mount Sinai, whence they received divine oracles. Our Lord Jesus has these chariots at command; when the First Begotten was brought into the world, it was with this charge, *Let all the angels of God worship him*; (Heb. 1. 6.) they attended him upon all occasions, and he is now among them, *angels, principalities, and powers, being made subject to him*, 1 Pet. 3. 22. And it is intimated in the New Testament, that the angels are present in the solemn religious assemblies of Christians, 1 Cor. 11. 10. Let the woman have a veil on her head, *because of the angels*; and see Eph. 3. 10.

III. The glory of mount Zion was, the King whom God set on that holy hill, (2. 6.) who came to the daughter of Zion, Matth. 21. 5. Of his ascension the psalmist here speaks, and to it it is expressly applied, (Eph. 4. 8.) *Thou hast ascended on high*; (v. 18.) compare 47, 5, 6. Christ's ascending on high is here spoken of as a thing past, so sure was it; and spoken of to his honour, so great was it. It may include his whole exalted state, but points especially at his ascension into heaven to the right hand of the Father, which was as much our advantage as his advancement. For, 1. He then triumphed over the gates of hell; he led *captivity captive*; he led his captives in triumph; as great conquerors used to do, *making a shew of them openly*, Col. 2. 15. He led those captive who had led us captives, and who, if he had not interposed, would have held us captive for ever. Nay, he led *captivity itself captive*, having quite broken the power of sin and Satan. As he was the Death of death so he was the Cap-

tivity of captivity, Hos. 13. 14. This speaks the complete victory which Jesus Christ obtained over our spiritual enemies; it was such, that through him *we also are more than conquerors*, that is, triumphers, Rom. 8. 37. 2. He then opened the gates of heaven to all believers; *Thou hast received gifts for men*; he gave gifts to men, so the apostle reads it, Eph. 4. 8. For he received that he might give; on his head the anointing of the Spirit was poured, that from him it might descend to the skirts of his garments. And he gave what he had received; having received power to give eternal life, he bestows it upon *as many as were given him*, John. 17. 2. *Thou hast received gifts for men*, not for angels; fallen angels were not to be made saints, nor standing angels made gospel-ministers, Heb. 2. 5. Not for Jews only, but for all men; whoever will may reap the benefit of these gifts. The apostle tells us what these gifts were, (Eph. 4. 11.) *prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers*, the institution of a gospel-ministry, and the qualification of men for it; both which are to be valued as the gifts of Heaven, and the fruits of Christ's ascension. *Thou hast received gifts in man*; so the margin; that is, in the human nature which Christ was pleased to clothe himself with, that he might be a *merciful and faithful High-Priest in things pertaining to God*. In him, as Mediator, *all fulness dwells*, that *from his fulness we might receive*. To magnify the kindness and love of Christ to us in receiving these gifts for us, the psalmist observes, (1.) The forfeiture we had made of them. He received them for the *rebellious also*, for those that had been rebellious; so all the children of men had been in their fallen state; perhaps it is especially meant of the Gentiles, that had been *enemies in their minds by wicked works*, Col. 1. 21. For them these gifts are received, to them they are given, that they might lay down their arms, that their enmity might be slain, and that they might return to their allegiance. This magnifies the grace of Christ exceedingly, that through him rebels are, upon their submission, not only pardoned, but preferred. They have commissions given them under Christ, which some say, in our law, amounts to the reversing of an attainder. Christ came to a rebellious world not to condemn it, but that through him it might be saved. (2.) The favour designed us in them; He received gifts for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them; that he might set up a church in a rebellious world, in which he would dwell by his word and ordinances, as of old in the sanctuary; that he might set up his throne, and Christ might dwell in the hearts of particular persons that had been rebellious. The gracious intention of Christ's undertaking was to rear up the *tabernacle of God among men*, that he might dwell with them, and they might themselves be living temples to his praise, Ezek. 37. 27.

IV. The glory of Zion's King, is, that he is a Saviour and Benefactor to all his willing people, and a consuming Fire to all those that persist in rebellion against him, v. 19. . 21. We have here good and evil, life and death, the blessing and the curse, set before us, like that, (Mark, 16. 16.) *He that believes shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned*.

1. They that take God for their God, and so give up themselves to him to be his people, shall be loaded with his benefits, and to them he will be a God of salvation. If in sincerity we avouch God to be our God, and seek to him as such, (1.) He will continually do us good, and furnish us with occasion for praise. Having mentioned the gifts Christ received for us, (v. 18.) fifty does he subjoin, in the next words, *Blessed be the Lord*, for it is owing to the mediation of Christ that we live, and live comfortably, and are daily loaded with benefits. So many, so weighty, are the gifts of God's bounty to us, that he may be truly said to load us with them; he *pours out blessings* till there be *no room to receive them*, Mal. 3. 10. So constant are they, and so unwearied is he in doing us good, that he *daily* loads us with them, according as the necessity of every day requires. (2.) He will, at length, be unto us the God of salvation, of everlasting salvation, the *salvation of God*, which he will shew to them that order their conversation aright, (50. 23.) the salvation of the soul. He that *daily leads us with benefits* will not put us off with present things for a portion, but will be the God of our salvation; and what he

gives us now, he gives as the God of salvation, pursuant to the great design of our salvation. *He is our God*, and therefore he will be the God of eternal salvation to us, for that only will answer the vast extent of his covenant-relation to us as our God. But has he power to complete this salvation? Yes, certainly, *for unto God the Lord belong the issues from death*. The keys of hell and death are put into the hand of the Lord Jesus, Rev. 1. 18. He, having made an escape from death himself in his resurrection, has both authority and power to rescue those that are his from the dominion of death, by altering the property of it to them when they die, and giving them a complete victory over it when they shall rise again; *for the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*. And to those that shall thus for ever escape death, and shall find such an outlet from it as not to be hurt of the second death, to them surely deliverances from temporal death are mercies indeed, and come from God as the God of their salvation. See 2 Cor. 1. 10.

2. They that persist in their enmity to him, will certainly be ruined, (v. 21.) *God shall wound the head of his enemies*, of Satan the old serpent, of whom it was by the first promise foretold, that the *Seed of the woman* should break his head, Gen. 3. 15. He shall destroy all the powers of the nations, whether Jews or Gentiles, that oppose him and his kingdom among men, 110. 6. *He shall wound the heads over many countries*; of all those, whoever they are, that will not have him to reign over them, for those he accounts his enemies, and they shall be brought forth and slain before him, Luke, 19. 27. *He will wound the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses*. Note, Those who go on still in their trespasses, and hate to be reformed, God looks upon as his enemies, and will treat them accordingly. In calling the head the *hairy scalp*, perhaps there is an allusion to Absalom, whose bushy hair was his halter. Or it denotes either the most fierce and barbarous of his enemies, who let their hair grow, to make themselves look the more frightful; or the most fine and delicate of his enemies, who are nice about their hair: neither the one nor the other can secure themselves from the fatal wounds which Divine Justice will give to the heads of those that go on in their sins.

22. The LORD said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring *my people* again from the depths of the sea: 23. That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of *thine* enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same. 24. They have seen thy goings, O God; *even* the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary. 25. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among *them were* the damsels playing with timbrels. 26. Bless ye God in the congregations, *even* the LORD, from the fountain of Israel. 27. There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah, and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali. 28. Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us. 29. Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee. 30. Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people, *till every one* submit himself with pieces of silver: scatter thou the people that delight in war. 31. Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.

In these verses, we have three things.

I. The gracious promise which God makes of the redemption

of his people, and their victory over his and their enemies; (v. 22, 23.) *The Lord said*, in his own gracious purpose and promise, "I will do great things for my people, as the God of their salvation," v. 20. God will not fail the expectations of those who by faith take him for their God. It is promised, 1. That he will set them in safety from their danger, as he had done formerly: *I will again bring them from the depths of the sea*, as he did Israel, when he brought them out of the slavery of Egypt into the ease and liberty of the wilderness; and *I will again bring them from Bashan*, as he did Israel, when he brought them from their wants and wanderings in the wilderness into the fullness and settlement of the land of Canaan; for the land of Bashan was on the other side Jordan, where they had wars with Sihon and Og, and whence their next remove was into Canaan. Note, The former appearances of God's power and goodness for his people should encourage their faith and hope in him for the future, that what he has done he will do again. He will set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people; (Isa. 11. 11.) and we may perhaps see repeated *all the wonders which our fathers told us of*. But this is not all; 2. That he will make them victorious over their enemies; (v. 23.) *That thy feet may be dipped*, as thou passest along, *in the blood of thine enemies*, shed like water in great abundance, and the tongue of thy dogs may lap in the same. Dogs licked the blood of Ahab; and, in the destruction of the antichristian generation, we read of blood up to the horses' bridles, Rev. 14. 20. The victories with which God blessed David's forces over the enemies of Israel are here prophesied of, but as types of Christ's victory over death and the grave, for himself and for all believers, in his resurrection (and their's by virtue of his) out of the earth; and of the destruction of the enemies of Christ and his church, who shall have blood given them to drink, for they are worthy.

II. The welcome entertainment which God's own people shall give to these glorious discoveries of his grace, both in his word and in his works. Has he spoken in his holiness? Has he said he will bring again from Bashan? What then is required of us in return to this?

1. That we observe his motions; (v. 24.) "*They have seen, thy people have seen, thy goings, O God*; while others regard not the work of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, they have seen the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary." See here, (1.) How an active faith appropriates God; he is God and King; but that is not all, he is *my* God and *my* King. Those who thus take him for their's, may see him, in all his outgoings, acting as their God, as their King, for their good, and in answer to their prayers. (2.) Where God's most remarkable outgoings are; even in the sanctuary, in and by his word and ordinances; and among his people, in the gospel-church especially, in and by which is made known the manifold wisdom of God. These outgoings of his in the sanctuary far outshine the outgoings of the morning and the evening, and more loudly proclaim his eternal power and godhead. (3.) What is our duty in reference to these outgoings, which is to observe them, *This is the finger of God; surely God is with us of a truth*.

2. That we give him glory in the most devout and solemn manner. When we see his goings in his sanctuary,

(1.) Let those that are immediately employed in the service of the temple praise him, v. 25. It was asserted that the Levites, some of whom were singers, and others players on instruments, who had the nearest views of his outgoings in his sanctuary, should lead in his praises. And, it being a day of extraordinary triumph, among them were damsels playing with timbrels, to complete the concert. "Thus, (says Dr. Hammond,) when Christ is gone up to heaven, the apostles shall celebrate and publish it to all the world, and even the women that were witnesses of it shall affectionately join with them in divulging it."

(2.) Let all the people of Israel, in their solemn religious assembly, give glory to God; *Bless ye God*, not only in temples, but in the synagogues, or schools of the prophets; or wherever there is a congregation of those that came forth from the fountain of Israel, that are of the seed of Jacob, let them concur in blessing God. Public mercies, which we jointly share in, call for public thanksgivings, which all should join in. "Thus (says

"Dr. Hammond) all Christians shall be obliged solemnly to magnify the name of the Messiah, and, to that end, frequently to assemble together in congregations." And,

(3.) Let those among them who, upon any account, are the most eminent, and make a figure, go before the rest in praising God, v. 27. There was little Benjamin, (that was the royal tribe in Saul's time,) with their rulers, the princes of Judah, (that was the royal tribe in David's time,) and their council, their captains or leaders. In the beginning of David's reign, there had been long war between Judah and Benjamin, but now they both join in praises for success against the common enemy. But why are the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali particularly mentioned? Perhaps, because those tribes, lying toward the north, lay most exposed to the incursions of the Syrians, and other neighbours that molested them, and therefore should be in a particular manner thankful for these victories over them. Dr. Hammond gives another reason, That these were the two learned tribes, *Naphtali giveth goodly words*, (Gen. 49. 21.) and Zebulun had those that handle the pen of the writer, Judg. 5. 14. These shall join in praising God, their princes especially. It is much for the honour of God, when those that are above others in dignity, power, and reputation, go before them in the worship of God, and are forward in using their influence and interest for the advancing of any service that is to be done to him. Dr. Hammond notes hence, that the kingdom of the Messiah should, at length, be submitted to by all the potentates and learned men in the world.

3. That we seek unto him, and depend upon him, for the perfecting of what he has begun, v. 28. In the former part of the verse, the psalmist speaks to Israel, "*Thy God has commanded thy strength*; whatever is done for thee, or whatever strength thou hast to help thyself, it comes from God, his power and grace, and the word which he has commanded. Thou hast no reason to fear, while thou hast strength of God's commanding; and no reason to boast, while thou hast no strength but what is of his commanding." In the latter part, he speaks to God, encouraged by his experiences; "*Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us*. Lord, confirm what thou hast commanded, perform what thou hast promised, and bring to an happy end that good work which thou hast so gloriously begun." What God has wrought he will strengthen; where he has given true grace, he will give more grace. Some make this whole verse to be a believer's address to the Messiah, whom David calls God, as he had done, 45. 6, 8. "*Thy God*" (God the Father) "*has commanded thy strength*, has made thee strong for himself, as the man of his right hand, (80. 17.) has treasured up strength in thee for us; therefore we pray, that thou, O God the Son, wilt strengthen what thou hast wrought for us, wilt accomplish thine undertaking for us, by finishing thy good work in us."

III. The powerful invitation and inducement which would hereby be given to those that are without, to come in and join themselves to the church, v. 29. . 31. This was in part fulfilled by the accession of many proselytes to the Jewish religion in the days of David and Solomon; but it was to have its full accomplishment in the conversion of the Gentile nations to the faith of Christ, and the making of them fellow-heirs, and of the same body, with the seed of Israel, Eph. 3. 6.

1. Some shall submit for fear; (v. 30.) "*The company of spearmen*, that stand it out against Christ and his gospel, that are not willing to be ruled by him, that persecute the preachers and professors of his name, that are furious and outrageous as a multitude of bulls, fat and wanton as the calves of the people," (which is a description of those Jews and Gentiles that opposed the gospel of Christ, and did what they could to prevent the setting up of his kingdom in the world,) "Lord, rebuke them, abate their pride, assuage their malice, and confound their devices, till, conquered by the convictions of their consciences, and the many checks of providence, they be every one of them brought, at length, to submit themselves with pieces of silver, as being glad to make their peace with the church upon any terms." Even Judas submitted himself with pieces of silver, when he returned them with this confession, *I have betrayed innocent blood*.

And see Rev. 3. 9. Many, by being rebuked, have been happily saved from being ruined. But as for those that will not submit, notwithstanding these rebukes, he prays for their dispersion, which amounts to a prophecy of it; *Scatter thou the people that delight in war*, who take such a pleasure in opposing Christ, that they will never be reconciled to him. This may refer to the unbelieving Jews, who delighted in making war upon the holy seed, and would not submit themselves, and were therefore scattered over the face of the earth. David had himself been a man of war, but could appeal to God, that he never delighted in war and bloodshed for its own sake; as for those that did, and therefore would not submit to the fairest terms of peace, he does not doubt but God would scatter them. Those are lost to all the sacred principles of humanity, as well as Christianity, that can delight in war, and take a pleasure in contention; let them expect that, sooner or later, they shall have enough of it, Isa. 33. 1. Rev. 13. 10.

2. Others shall submit willingly; (v. 29. 31.) *Because of thy temple at Jerusalem*, (this David speaks of in faith, for the temple of Jerusalem was not built in his time, only the materials and model were prepared,) *kings shall bring presents unto thee*, rich presents shall be brought, such as are fit for kings to bring. Even kings themselves, that stand much upon the punctilios of honour and prerogative, shall court the favour of Christ, at a great expense. There is that in God's temple, that beauty and benefit in the service of God, in communion with him, and in the gospel of Christ, which went forth from Jerusalem, that is enough to invite kings themselves to bring presents to God, to present themselves to him as living sacrifices, and with themselves the best performances. He mentions *Egypt* and *Ethiopia*, two countries out of which subjects and supplicants were least to be expected; (v. 31.) *Princes shall come out of Egypt*, as ambassadors to seek God's favour, and submit to him; and they shall be accepted, *for the Lord of Hosts shall thereupon bless them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people*, Isa. 19. 25. Even Ethiopia, that had stretched out her hands against God's Israel, (2 Chron. 14. 9.) should now *stretch out her hands unto God*, in prayer, in presents, and to take hold on him, and that soon; *Agree with thine adversary quickly*. Out of all nations some shall be gathered in to Christ, and be owned by him.

32. Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; Selah: 33. To him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old; lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice. 34. Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency is over Israel, and his strength is in the clouds. 35. O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God.

The psalmist, having prayed for, and prophesied of, the conversion of the Gentiles, here invites them to come in and join with the devout Israelites in praising God, intimating that their accession to the church would be the matter of their joy and praise; (v. 32.) Let the kingdoms of the earth sing praises to the Lord; they all ought to do it, and when they become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, they will do it. God is here proposed to them as the proper Object of praise, upon several accounts.

1. Because of his supreme and sovereign dominion; *He rides upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old*; (v. 33.) compare v. 4. He has, from the beginning, nay, from before all time, prepared his throne; he sits on the circuit of heaven; guides all the motions of the heavenly bodies; and, from the highest heavens, which are the residence of his glory, dispenses the influences of his power and goodness to this lower world.

2. Because of his awful and terrible majesty; *He sends out his voice, and that a mighty voice*; which may refer either generally

to the thunder, which is called *the voice of the Lord*, and is said to be *powerful and full of majesty*, (29. 3, 4.) or in particular to that thunder in which God spake to Israel at mount Sinai.

3. Because of his mighty power; *Ascribe ye strength unto God*, (v. 34.) acknowledge him to be a God of such irresistible power, that it is folly to contend with him, and wisdom to submit to him; acknowledge that he has power sufficient both to protect his faithful subjects, and to destroy his stubborn adversaries; and give him the glory of all the instances of his omnipotence. *Thine is the kingdom and power, and therefore, Thine is the glory*. We must acknowledge his power, (1.) In the kingdom of grace. *His excellency is over Israel*; he shews his sovereign care in protecting and governing his church; that is the excellency of his power, which is employed for the good of his people. (2.) In the kingdom of providence: *His strength is in the clouds*, whence comes the thunder of his power, the small rain, and the great rain of his strength. Though God has his strength in the clouds, yet he condescends to gather his Israel under the shadow of his wings, Dent. 33. 26.

4. Because of the glory of his sanctuary, and the wonders wrought there; (v. 35.) *O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places*. God is to be admired and adored with reverence and godly fear by all those that attend him in his holy places, that receive his oracles, that observe his operations according to them, and that pay their homage to him. He displays that out of his holy places, which speaks aloud that he will be sanctified in those that come nigh unto him. Out of heaven, his holy place above, he does, and will, shew himself a terrible God. Nor is any attribute of God more dreadful to sinners than his holiness.

5. Because of the grace bestowed upon his people; *The God of Israel is he that gives strength and power unto his people*, which the gods of the nations, that were vanity and a lie, could not give to their worshippers; how should they help them, when they could not help themselves? All Israel's strength against their enemies came from God; they owned they had *no might of their own*, 2 Chron. 20. 12. And all our sufficiency for our spiritual work and warfare is from the grace of God. It is through Christ strengthening us that we can do all things, and not otherwise; and therefore he must have the glory of all we do, (115. 1.) and our humble thanks for enabling us to do it, and accepting the work of his own hands in us. If it be the God of Israel that gives strength and power unto his people, they ought to say, *Blessed be God*. If all be from him, let all be to him.

PSALM LXIX.

David penned this psalm, when he was in affliction; and in it, I. He complains of the great distress and trouble he was in, and earnestly begs of God to relieve and succour him, v. 1. 21. II. He imprecates the judgments of God upon his persecutors, v. 22. 29. III. He concludes with the voice of joy and praise, in an assurance that God would help and succour him, and would do well for the church, v. 30. 36. Now, in this, David was a type of Christ, and divers passages in this psalm are applied to Christ in the New Testament, and are said to have their accomplishment in him, v. 4, 9, 21; and v. 22, refers to the enemies of Christ. So that (like the 22d psalm) it begins with the humiliation, and ends with the exaltation, of Christ, one branch of which was the destruction of the Jewish nation for persecuting him, which the imprecations here are predictions of. In singing this psalm, we must have an eye to the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that followed; not forgetting the sufferings of Christians too, and the glory that shall follow them; for it may lead us to think of the ruin reserved for the persecutors, and the rest reserved for the persecuted.

To the chief musician upon Shoshannim. A psalm of David.

1. **S**AVE me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. 2. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. 3. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. 4. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I

restored *that* which I took not away. 5. O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee. 6. Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. 7. Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. 8. I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children. 9. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. 10. When I wept, and *chastened* my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach. 11. I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb to them. 12. They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I *was* the song of the drunkards.

In these verses, David complains of his troubles, intermixing with those complaints some requests for relief.

1. His complaints are very sad, and he pours them out before the Lord, as one that hoped thus to ease himself of a burthen that lay very heavy upon him.

1. He complains of the deep impressions that his troubles made upon his spirit; (v. 1, 2.) "*The waters of affliction*, those bitter waters, *are come unto my soul*; not only threaten my life, but disquiet my mind; they fill my head with perplexing cares, and my heart with oppressive grief; so that I cannot enjoy God and myself as I used to do." We shall bear up under our troubles, if we can but keep them from our hearts; but when they put us out of the possession of our own souls, our case is bad. *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity*; but what shall we do when the spirit is wounded? That was David's case here. His thoughts sought for something to confide in, and with which to support his hope, but he found nothing; he sunk in deep mire, where there was no standing, no firm footing; the considerations that used to support and encourage him, now failed him, or were out of the way, and he was ready to give himself up for gone. He sought for something to comfort himself with, but found himself in deep waters that overflowed him, overwhelmed him. He was like a sinking drowning man, in such confusion and consternation. This points at Christ's sufferings in his soul, and the inward agony he was in, when he said, *Now is my soul troubled*; and *My soul is exceeding sorrowful*; for it was his soul that he made an offering for sin. And it instructs us, when we are in affliction, to commit the keeping of our souls to God, that we may be neither soured with discontent, nor sink into despair.

2. He complains of the long continuance of his troubles; (v. 3.) *I am weary of my crying*. Though he could not keep his head above water, yet he cried to his God, and the more death was in his view, the more life was in his prayers; yet he had not immediately an answer of peace given in, no, nor so much of that support and comfort in praying, which God's people used to have; so that he was almost weary of crying, grew hoarse, and his throat so dried, that he could cry no more. Nor had he his wonted satisfaction in believing, hoping, and expecting relief, *My eyes fail while I wait for my God*; he had almost looked his eyes out, in expectation of deliverance. Yet his pleading this with God, is an indication that he is resolved not to give up believing and praying. His throat is dried, but his heart is not; his eyes fail, but his faith does not. Thus our Lord Jesus, on the cross, cried out, *Why hast thou forsaken me?* Yet, at the same time, he kept hold of his relation to him, *My God, my God*.

3. He complains of the malice and multitude of his enemies, their injustice and cruelty, and the hardships they put upon him, v. 4. *They hated him, they would destroy him, for hatred aims at the destruction of the person hated*; but what was his iniquity,

what was his sin, what provocation had he given them, that they were so spiteful toward him? None at all; "*They hate me without cause*; I never did them the least injury, that they should bear me such ill-will." Our Saviour applies this to himself, (John, 15. 25.) *They hated me without a cause*. We are apt to use this, in justification of our passion against those that hate us, that we never gave them cause to hate us. But it is rather an argument why we should bear it patiently, because then we suffer as Christ did, and may then expect that God will right us; "*They are mine enemies wrongfully, for I have been no enemy to them*." In a world where unrighteousness reigns so much, we must not wonder if we meet with those that are our enemies wrongfully. Let us take care that we never do wrong, and then we may the better bear it, if we receive wrong. These enemies were not to be despised, but were very formidable, both for their number, *They are more than the hairs of mine head*, (Christ's enemies were numerous, they that came to seize him were a great multitude; how were they increased that troubled him!) and for their strength, *They are mighty*, in authority and power. We are weak, but our enemies are strong; for *we wrestle against principalities and powers*. *Then I restored that which I took not away*. Applying this to David, (1.) It was what his enemies compelled him to; they made him suffer for that offence which

had never been guilty of. (2.) It was what he consented to, that, if possible, he might pacify them, and make them to be at peace with him. He might have insisted upon the laws of justice and honour, the former not requiring, and the latter commonly thought to forbid, the restoring of that which we took not away, for that is to wrong ourselves both in our wealth and in our reputation. Yet the case may be such sometimes, that it may become our duty. Blessed Paul, though free from all men, yet, for the honour of Christ, and the edification of the church, made himself a servant to all. But, applying it to Christ, it is an observable description of the satisfaction which he made to God for our sin by his blood; *Then he restored that which he took not away*; he underwent the punishment that was due to us, paid our debt, suffered for our offence. God's glory, in some instances of it, was taken away by the sin of man; man's honour, and peace, and happiness, were taken away; it was not he that took them away, and yet by the merit of his death he restored them.

4. He complains of the unkindness of his friends and relations, and this is a grievance which with an ingenuous mind cuts as deep as any other; (v. 8.) "*I am become a stranger to my brethren*; they make themselves strange to me, and use me as a stranger, are shy of conversing with me, and ashamed to own me." This was fulfilled in Christ, whose *brethren did not believe on him*, (John, 7. 5.) who *came to his own, and his own received him not*, (John, 1. 11.) and who was forsaken by his disciples, whom he had been free with as his brethren.

5. He complains of the contempt that was put upon him, and the reproach with which he was continually loaded. And in this, especially, his complaint points at Christ, who for our sakes submitted to the greatest disgrace, and made himself of no reputation; we having by sin injured God in his honour, Christ made him satisfaction, not only by divesting himself of the honours due to an incarnate Deity, but by submitting to the greatest dishonours that could be done to any man. Two things David here takes notice of as aggravations of the indignities done him: (1.) The ground and matter of the reproach, v. 10, 11. They ridiculed him for that by which he both humbled himself and honoured God. When men lift up themselves in pride and vain glory, they are justly laughed at for it; but David chastened his soul, and clothed himself with sackcloth, and, from his abasing himself, they took occasion to trample upon him. When men dishonour God, it is just that it turn to their dishonour; but when David, purely in devotion to God, and to testify his respect to him, wept, and chastened his soul with fasting, and made sackcloth his garment, as humble penitents used to do; instead of commending his devotion, and recommending it as a great example of piety, they did all they could both to discourage him in it, and to prevent others from following his good example, for that was his re-

proach; they laughed at him, as a fool, for mortifying himself thus; and even for this he became a proverb to them; they made him the common subject of their banter. We must not think it strange if we be ill-spoken of for that which is well done, and in which we have reason to hope that we are accepted of God. Our Lord Jesus was stoned for his good works, (John, 10. 32.) and, when he cried, *Eli, Eli, My God, my God*, was bantered, as if he called for Elias. (2.) The persons that reproached him, v. 12. [1.] Even the gravest, and the most honourable, from whom better was expected; *They that sit in the gate speak against me*, and their reproaches pass for the dictates of senators, and the decrees of judges, and are credited accordingly. [2.] The meanest, and the most despicable, the abjects, (35. 15.) the scum of the country, the children of fools, yea, the children of base men; (Job, 30. 8.) and he was the song of the drunkards, they made themselves and their companions merry with him. See the bad consequences of the sin of drunkenness; it makes men despisers of those that are good, 2 Tim. 3. 3. When the king was made sick with bottles of wine, he stretched out his hand with scorn, Hos. 7. 5. The bench of the drunkards is the seat of the scornful. See what is commonly the lot of the best of men; they that are the praise of the wise, are the song of fools: but it is easy to those that rightly judge of things, to despise being thus despised.

II. His confessions of sin are very serious; (v. 5.) "*O God thou knowest my foolishness*, both what is, and what is not; my sins that I am guilty of are not hid from thee, and therefore thou knowest how innocent I am of those crimes which they charge upon me." Note, Even then when, as to men's unjust accusations, we plead *Not guilty*, yet, before God, we must acknowledge ourselves to have deserved all that is brought upon us, and much worse. This is the genuine confession of a penitent, who knows that he cannot prosper in covering his sin, and that therefore it is his wisdom to acknowledge it, because it is naked and open before God. 1. He knows the corruption of our nature; *Thou knowest the foolishness that is bound up in my heart*. All our sins take rise from our foolishness. 2. He knows the transgressions of our lives; they are not hid from him, no not our heart-sins, no not those that are committed most secretly. They are all done in his sight, and are never cast behind his back, till they are repented of and pardoned. This may be applied to Christ, for he knew no sin, yet he was made sin for us; and God knew it, nor was it hid from him, when it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief.

III. His supplications are very earnest. 1. For himself; (v. 1.) "*Save me, O God, save me from sinking, from despairing*." Thus Christ was heard in that he feared, for he was saved from letting fall his undertaking, Heb. 5. 7. 2. For his friends; (v. 6.) *Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, and that seek thee, O God of Israel*, (under these two characters we ought to seek God, and in seeking him to wait on him, as the *God of hosts*, who has all power to help, and as the *God of Israel* in covenant with his people, whom therefore he is engaged in honour and truth to help,) let not them be ashamed and confounded for my sake. This intimates his fear, that, if God did not appear for him, it would be a discouragement to all other good people, and would give their enemies occasion to triumph over them; it intimates too his earnest desire, that, whatever became of him, all that seek God, and wait upon him, might be kept in heart, and in countenance, and might neither be discouraged in themselves, nor exposed to contempt from others. If Jesus Christ had not been owned and accepted of his Father in his sufferings, all that seek God; and wait for him, had been ashamed and confounded; but they have confidence towards God, and in his name come boldly to the throne of grace.

IV. His plea is very powerful, v. 7, 9. Reproach was one of the greatest of his burthens; "Lord, roll away the reproach, and plead my cause, for, 1. It is for thee that I am reproached, for serving thee and trusting in thee; *For thy sake I have borne reproach*." Those that are evil spoken of for well-doing, may with an humble confidence leave it to God to bring forth their righteousness as the light. 2. "It is with thee that I am reproached;

The zeal of thine house has eaten me up, has made me forget myself, and do that which they wickedly turn to my reproach. They that hate thee and thy house, for that reason hate me, because they know how zealously affected I am to it. That is it that has made them ready to eat me up, and has eaten up all the love and respect I had among them." They that blasphemed God, and spoke ill of his word and ways, did therefore reproach David, for believing in his word, and walking in his ways. Or it may be considered as an instance of David's zeal for God's house, that he resented all the indignities done to God's name, as if they had been done to his own name. He laid to heart all the dishonour done to God, and the contempt cast upon religion; these he laid nearer to his heart than any outward troubles of his own. And therefore he had reason to hope God would interest himself in the reproaches cast upon him, because he had always interested himself in the reproaches cast upon God. Both the parts of this verse are applied to Christ; (1.) It was an instance of his love to his Father, that *the zeal of his house did even eat him up*, when he whipped the buyers and sellers out of the temple, which reminded his disciples of this text, John, 2. 17. (2.) It was an instance of his self-denial, and that he pleased not himself, that *the reproaches of them that reproached God fell upon him*, (Rom. 15. 3.) and therein he set us an example.

13. But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O LORD, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation. 14. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. 15. Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. 16. Hear me, O LORD; for thy loving-kindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. 17. And hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily. 18. Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies. 19. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee. 20. Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. 21. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

David had been speaking before of the spiteful reproaches which his enemies cast upon him; *But as for me, my prayer is unto thee*. They spoke ill of him for his fasting and praying, and for that he was made the song of the drunkards; but, notwithstanding that, he resolves to continue praying. Note, Though we may be jeered for well-doing, we must never be jeered out of it. Those can bear but little for God, and their confessing of his name before men, that cannot hear a scoff and a hard word, rather than quit their duty. David's enemies were very abusive to him, but this was his comfort, that he had a God to go to, with whom he would lodge his cause. "They think to carry their cause by insolence and calumny; but I use other methods, whatever they do, *As for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord*." And it was in an acceptable time; not the less acceptable for being a time of affliction. God will not drive us from him, though it is need that drives us to him; nay, it is the more acceptable, because the misery and distress of God's people make them so much the more the objects of his pity: it is seasonable for him to help them, when all other helps fail, and they are undone, and feel that they are, if he do not help

them. We find this expression used concerning Christ, (Isa. 49. 8.) *In an acceptable time have I heard thee.* Now observe,

I. What his requests are. 1. That he might have a gracious audience given to his complaints, the cry of his affliction, and the desire of his heart. *Hear me;* (v. 13.) and again, *Hear me, O Lord;* (v. 16.) *Hear me speedily;* (v. 17.) not only hear what I say, but grant what I ask. Christ knew that *the Father heard him always*, John, 11. 42. 2. That he might be rescued out of his troubles; might be saved from sinking under the load of grief; (*Deliver me out of the mire;* let me not stick in it, (so some,) but help me out, and *set my feet on a rock*, 40. 2.) might be saved from his enemies, that they might not swallow him up, nor have their will against him; *“Let me be delivered from them that hate me, as a lamb from the paw of the lion,* v. 14. Though I am come into deep waters. (v. 2.) where I am ready to conclude that the floods will overflow me, yet let my fears be prevented, and silenced; let not the water-flood, though it flow upon me, overflow me, v. 15. Let me not fall into the gulf of despair, let not that deep swallow me up, let not that pit shut her mouth upon me, for then I am undone.” He gave himself for lost, in the beginning of the psalm, yet now he has his head above water, and is not so weary of crying as he thought himself. 3. That God would turn to him, (v. 16.) that he would smile upon him, and not hide his face from him, v. 17. The tokens of God’s favour to us, and the light of his countenance shining upon us, are enough to keep our spirits from sinking in deepest mire of outward troubles, nor need we desire any more to make us safe and easy, v. 18. “Draw nigh to my soul, to manifest thyself to it, and that shall redeem it.”

II. What his pleas are, to enforce these petitions.

1. He pleads God’s mercy and truth; (v. 13.) *In the multitude of thy mercy hear me.* There is a mercy in God, a multitude of mercies, all kinds of mercy, inexhaustible mercy, mercy enough for all, enough for each; and hence we must take our encouragement in praying. The truth also of his salvation, the truth of all those promises of salvation which he has made to those that trust in him, is a further encouragement. He repeats his argument taken from the mercy of God; *“Hear me, for thy loving-kindness is good;* it is so in itself, it is rich, and plentiful, and abundant, it is so in the account of all the saints, it is very precious to them. it is their life, their joy, their all; Oh, let me have the benefit of it! Turn to me, *according to the multitude of thy tender mercies,”* v. 16. See how highly he speaks of the goodness of God; in him there are mercies, tender mercies, and a multitude of them. If we think well of God, and continue to do so, under the greatest hardships, we need not fear but God will do well for us; for *he takes pleasure in those that hope in his mercy*, 147. 11.

2. He pleads his own distress and affliction; *“Hide not thy face from me, for I am in trouble,* (v. 17.) and therefore need thy favour; therefore it will come seasonably; and therefore I shall know how to value it.” He pleads particularly the reproach he was under, and the indignities that were done him; (v. 19.) *Thou hast known my reproach, my shame, and my dishonour.* See what a stress is laid upon this: for, in the sufferings of Christ for us, perhaps nothing contributed more to the satisfaction he made for sin, which had been so injurious to God in his honour, than the reproach, and shame, and dishonour, he underwent; which God took notice of, and accepted, as more than an equivalent for the everlasting shame and contempt which our sins had deserved, who therefore must by repentance take shame to ourselves, and bear the reproach of our youth. And if at any time we be called out to suffer reproach, and shame, and dishonour, for his sake, this may be our comfort, that he knows it, and as he is beforehand with us, so he will not be behind-hand with us. The psalmist speaks the language of an ingenuous nature, when he says, (v. 20.) *Reproach has broken my heart, I am full of heaviness;* for it bears hard upon one that knows the worth of a good name, to be oppressed with a bad one; but, when we consider what an honour it is to be dishonoured for God, and what a favour to be counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, (as they deemed it, Acts, 5. 41.) we shall see there is no reason at all why it should sit so heavy, or be any heart-breaking to us.

3. He pleads the insolence and cruelty of his enemies; (v. 18.) *Deliver me because of mine enemies,* because they were such as he had before described them; (v. 4.) *“Mine adversaries are all before thee,* (v. 19.) thou knowest what sort of men they are, what danger I am in from them, what enemies they are to thee, and how much thou art reflected upon in what they do, and design against me.” One instance of their barbarity is given, (v. 21.) *They gave me gall for my meat,* (the word signifies a bitter herb, and is often joined with wormwood,) *and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* This was literally fulfilled in Christ, and did so directly point to him, that he would not say *It is finished,* till this was fulfilled; and, in order that his enemies might have occasion to fulfil it, he said, *I thirst*, John, 19. 28, 29. Some think that the hyssop which they put to his mouth, with vinegar, was the bitter herb which they gave him with the vinegar for his meat. See how particularly the sufferings of Christ were foretold, which proves the scripture to be the word of God; and how exactly the predictions were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, which proves him to be the true Messiah. This is he that should come, and we are to look for no other.

4. He pleads the unkindness of his friends, and his disappointment in them; (v. 20.) *I looked for some to take pity, but there was none;* they all failed him, like the brooks in summer. This was fulfilled in Christ, for in his sufferings all his disciples forsook him and fled. We cannot expect too little from men, miserable comforters are they all; nor can we expect too much from God, for he is the Father of mercy, and the God of all comfort and consolation.

22. Let their table become a snare before them: and *that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap.* 23. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. 24. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. 25. Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents. 26. For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. 27. Add iniquity to their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. 28. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous. 29. But *I am poor and sorrowful:* let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high.

These imprecations are not David’s prayers against his enemies, but prophecies of the destruction of Christ’s persecutors, especially the Jewish nation, which our Lord himself foretold with tears, and which was accomplished about forty years after the death of Christ. The two first verses of this paragraph are expressly applied to the judgments of God upon the unbelieving Jews by the apostle, (Rom. 11. 9, 10.) and therefore the whole must look that way. The rejection of the Jews for rejecting Christ, as it was a signal instance of God’s justice, and an earnest of the vengeance which God will at last take on all that are obstinate in their infidelity, so it was, and continues to be, a convincing proof of the truth of the Christian religion; one great objection against it, at first, was, that it set aside the ceremonial law; but its doing so was effectually justified, and that objection removed, when God so remarkably set it aside by the utter destruction of the temple, and the sinking of those, with the Mosaic economy, that obstinately adhered to it, in opposition to the gospel of Christ.

Let us observe here,

I. What the judgments are which should come upon the crucifiers of Christ; not upon all of them, for there were those who had a hand in his death, and yet repented, and found mercy, (Acts

2. 23.—3. 14, 15.) but upon those of them and their successors, who justified it by an obstinate infidelity, and rejection of his gospel, and by an inveterate enmity to his disciples and followers. See 1 Thess. 2. 15, 16. It is here foretold,

1. That their sacrifices and offerings should be mischief and prejudice to them; (v. 22.) *Let their table become a snare.* The altar of the Lord, which is called *his table and their's*, because, in feasting upon the sacrifices, they were partakers of the altar: this should have been for their welfare or peace, for they were peace-offerings, but it became a snare and a trap to them, for by their affection and adherence to the altar they were held fast in their infidelity, and hardened in their prejudices against Christ, that Altar which they had no right to eat off who continued to serve the tabernacle, Heb. 13. 10.

Or, it may be understood of their common creature-comforts, even their necessary food; they had given Christ gall and vinegar, and therefore justly shall their meat and drink be made gall and vinegar to them. When the supports of life and delights of sense, through the corruption of our nature, become an occasion of sin to us, and are made the food and fuel of our sensuality, then our table is a snare, which is a good reason why we should never feed ourselves without fear, Jude, 12.

2. That they should never have the comfort either of that knowledge, or of that peace, which believers are blessed with in the gospel of Christ, v. 23. That they should be given up, (1.) To a judicial blindness;—*Let their eyes be darkened*, that they see not the glory of God in the face of Christ. Their sin was, that they would not see, but shut their eyes against the light, loving darkness rather; their punishment was, that they should not see, but be given up to their own hearts' lusts, which were hardening, and the god of this world should be permitted to blind their minds, 2 Cor. 4. 4. This was foretold concerning them, (Isa. 6. 10.) and Christ ratified it, Matth. 13. 14, 15. John, 12. 40. (2.) To a judicial terror. There is a gracious terror, which opens the way to comfort, such as that of Paul, (Acts, 9. 6.) he trembled and was astonished; but this is a terror that shall never end in peace, but shall make their loins continually to shake, through horror of conscience, as Belshazzar, when the joints of his loins were loosed. Let them be driven to despair, and filled with constant confusion. This was fulfilled in the desperate counsels of the Jews, when the *Romans* came upon them.

3. That they should fall and lie under God's anger and fiery indignation; (v. 24.) *Pour out thine indignation upon them.* Note, Those who reject God's great salvation proffered to them, may justly fear that his indignation will be poured out upon them; for they that submit not to the Son of his love, will certainly be made the generation of his wrath. It is the doom passed on those who believe not in Christ, that the *wrath of God abideth on them*, (John, 3. 36.) it takes hold of them, and will never let them go. Salvation itself will not save those that are not willing to be ruled by it. Behold the goodness and severity of God!

4. That their place and nation should be utterly taken away, the very thing they were afraid of, and to prevent which, as they pretended, they persecuted Christ; John, 11. 48. (v. 25.) *Let their habitation be desolate*, which was fulfilled when their country was laid waste by the Romans, and *Zion, for their sakes, was ploughed as a field*, Mic. 3. 12. The temple was the house which they were in a particular manner proud of, but this was *left unto them desolate*, Matth. 23. 38. Yet that is not all, it ought to be some satisfaction to us, if we be cut off from the enjoyment of our possessions, that others will have the benefit of them when we are dislodged; but is here added, *Let none dwell in their tents*, which was remarkably fulfilled in Judah and Jerusalem, for, after the destruction of the Jews, it was long ere the country was inhabited to any purpose. But this is applied particularly to Judas, by St. Peter, Acts, 1. 20. For he being *felo de se*—a suicide, we may suppose his estate was confiscated, so that *his habitation was desolate, and no man of his own kindred dwelt therein*.

5. That their way to ruin should be down-hill, and nothing should stop them, nor interpose to prevent it; (v. 27.) "Lord, leave them to themselves, to add iniquity to iniquity." Those that

are bad, if they be given up to their own hearts' lusts, will certainly be worse; they will add sin to sin, nay, they will *add rebellion to their sin*, Job, 34. 37. It is said of the Jews, that they *filled up their sin always*, 1 Thess. 2. 16. *Add the punishment of iniquity to their iniquity*, so some read it, for the same word signifies both sin and punishment, so close is their connexion. If men will sin, God will reckon for it. But those that have multiplied to sin, may yet find mercy, for God multiplies to pardon, through the righteousness of the Mediator; and therefore, that they might be precluded from all hopes of mercy, he adds, *Let them not come into thy righteousness*, to receive the benefit of the righteousness of God, which is by faith in a Mediator, Phil. 3. 9. Not that God shuts out any from that righteousness, for the gospel excludes none that do not by their unbelief exclude themselves; but let them be left to take their own course, and they will never come into this government; for, being ignorant of the demands of God's righteousness, and going about to establish the merit of their own, they *have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*, Rom. 10. 3. And those that are so proud and self-willed, that they will not come into God's righteousness, shall have their doom accordingly; themselves have decided it, they *shall not come into his righteousness*. Let them not expect any benefit by it, that are not willing and glad to be beholden to it.

6. That they should be cut off from all hopes of happiness; (v. 28.) *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living*; let them not be suffered to live any longer, who, the longer they live, the more mischief they do. Multitudes of the unbelieving Jews fell by sword and famine, and none of those who had embraced the Christian faith perished among them; the nation, as a nation, was blotted out, and became not a people. Many understand it of their rejection from God's covenant, and all the privileges of it; that is *the book of the living*; "Let the commonwealth of Israel itself, Israel according to the flesh, now become alienated from that covenant of promise, which hitherto it has had the monopoly of. Let it appear that they were never written in the Lamb's book of life, but reprobate silver let men call them, because the Lord has rejected them. Let them not be written with the righteous; let them not have a place in the congregation of the saints, when they shall all be gathered in the general assembly of those whose names are written in heaven," 1. 5.

II. What the sin is, for which these dreadful judgments should be brought upon them; (v. 26.) *They persecute him whom thou hast smitten, and talk to the grief of thy wounded.* 1. Christ was he whom God had smitten, for it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and he was esteemed *stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted*, and therefore men *hid their faces from him*, Isa. 53. 3, 4, 10. They persecuted him with a rage reaching up to heaven, they cried, *Crucify him, crucify him*. Compare that of St. Peter with this, (Acts, 2. 23.) though he was *delivered by the counsel and foreknowledge of God*, it was *with wicked hands that they crucified and slew him*. They talked to the grief of the Lord Jesus when he was upon the cross, saying, *He trusted in God, let him deliver him*, than which nothing could be said more grieving. 2. The suffering saints were God's wounded, wounded in his cause, and for his sake, and them they persecuted, and *talked to their grief*. For these things *wrath came upon them to the uttermost*, 1 Thess. 2. 16. and see Matth. 23. 34, &c. This may be understood more generally, and it teaches us that nothing is more provoking to God than to insult over those whom he has smitten, and to add affliction to the afflicted, upon which it justly follows here, *Add iniquity to iniquity*; see Zech. 1. 15. Those that are of a wounded spirit, under trouble and fear about their spiritual state, ought to be very tenderly dealt with, and care must be taken not to *talk to their grief, and not to make the heart of the righteous sad*.

III. What the psalmist thinks of himself in the midst of all; (v. 29.) "But I am poor and sorrowful, that is the worst of my case, under outward afflictions, yet *written among the righteous*, and not under God's indignation as they are." It is better to be poor and sorrowful, with the blessing of God, than rich and jovial, and under his curse. For they who come into God's righteousness shall soon see an end of their poverty and sorrow, and his

salvation shall set them up on high, which is the thing that David here prays for; Isa. 61. 10. This may be applied to Christ. He was, in his humiliation, poor and sorrowful, a man of sorrows, and that had not where to lay his head; but God highly exalted him, the salvation wrought for him, the salvation wrought by him, *set him up on high, far above all principalities and powers.*

30. I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. 31. *This* also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs. 32. The humble shall see *this*, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God. 33. For the LORD heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners. 34. Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein. 35. For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah: that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. 36. The seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein.

The psalmist here, both as a type of Christ, and as an example to Christians, concludes a psalm with holy joy and praise, which he began with complaints and remonstrances of his griefs.

1. He resolves to praise God himself, not doubting but that therein he should be accepted of him; (v. 30, 31.) "*I will praise the name of God*, not only with my heart, but with my song, and *magnify him with thanksgiving*;" for he is pleased to reckon himself magnified by the thankful praises of his people. It is intimated that all Christians ought to glorify God with their praises, *in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs*. And *this shall please the Lord*, through Christ, the Mediator of our praises as well as of our prayers, better than the most valuable of the legal sacrifices, (v. 31.) *an ox or bullock*. This is a plain intimation, that, in the days of the Messiah, an end should be put, not only to the sacrifices of atonement, but to those of praise and acknowledgment, which were instituted by the ceremonial law; instead of them, spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving are accepted; the calves of our lips, not the calves of the stall, Heb. 13. 15. It is a great comfort to us, that humble and thankful praises are more pleasing to God than the most costly pompous sacrifices are, or ever were.

2. He encourages other good people to rejoice in God, and continue seeking him; (v. 32, 33.) *The humble shall see this, and be glad*. They shall observe, to their comfort, (1.) The experiences of the saints. They shall see how ready God is to hear the poor, when they cry to him, and to give them that which they call upon him for; how far he is from despising his prisoners, though men despise them; he favours them with his gracious visits, and will find a time to enlarge them. *The humble shall see this, and be glad*, not only because, when one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it, but because it is an encouragement to them, in their straits and difficulties, to trust in God. It shall revive the hearts of those who seek God, to see more seals and subscriptions to this truth, that Jacob's God never said to Jacob's seed, *Seek ye me, in vain*. (2.) The exaltation of the Saviour, for of him the psalmist had been speaking, and of himself as a type of him. When his sorrows are over, and he enters into the joy that was set before him, when he is heard, and discharged from his imprisonment in the grave, the humble shall look upon it and be glad, and they that seek God through Christ, shall live and be comforted; concluding, that, if they suffer with him, they shall also reign with him.

3. He calls upon all the creatures to praise God; the heaven, and earth, and sea, and the inhabitants of each, v. 34. Heaven and earth, and the hosts of both, were made by him, and therefore *let heaven and earth praise him*. Angels in heaven, and

saints on earth, may each of them, in their respective labitations furnish themselves with matter enough for constant praise. Let the fishes of the sea, though mute to a proverb, praise the Lord, for the sea is his, and he made it.

The praises of the world must be offered for God's favours to his church, v. 35, 36. For God will save Zion, the holy mountain, where his service was kept up. He will save all that are sanctified and set apart to him, all that employ themselves in his worship, and all those over whom Christ reigns; for he was King upon the holy hill of Zion. He has mercy in store for the cities of Judah, of which tribe Christ was. God will do great things for the gospel-church, in which let all that wish well to it, rejoice. For, (1.) It shall be peopled and inhabited. There shall be added to it such as shall be saved. The cities of Judah shall be built, particular churches shall be formed and incorporated according to the gospel-model, that there may be a remnant to dwell there, and to have it in possession, to enjoy the privileges conferred upon it, and to pay the tribute and services required from it. They that love his name, that have a kindness for religion in general, shall embrace the Christian religion, and take their place in the Christian church; they shall dwell therein, as citizens, and of the household of God. (2.) It shall be perpetuated and inherited. Christianity was not to be *res unius aetatis*—a transitory thing; no, *the seed of his servants shall inherit it*, God will secure and raise up for himself a seed to serve him, and they shall inherit the privileges of their fathers; for the promise is to you and your children, as it was of old, *I will be a God to thee, and thy seed after thee*. The land of promise shall never be lost for want of heirs, for God *can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham*, and will do it rather than the entail shall be cut off. David shall never want a man to stand before him. The Redeemer shall see his seed, and prolong his days in them, till the mystery of God shall be finished, and the mystical body completed. And since the holy seed is the substance of the world, and if that were all gathered in, the world would be at an end quickly, it is just that, for this assurance of the preservation of it, heaven and earth should praise him.

PSALM LXX.

This psalm is adapted to a state of affliction; it is copied almost word for word from the 40th, and, some think, for that reason, is entitled, a psalm to bring to remembrance; for it may be of use sometimes to pray over the prayers we have formerly made to God, upon like occasions, which may be done with new affections. David here prays that God would send, I. Help to himself, v. 1, 5. II. Shame to his enemies, v. 2, 3. III. Joy to his friends, v. 4. These five verses were the five last verses of Ps. 40. He seems to have intended this short prayer to be, both for himself and us, a salve for every sore, and therefore to be always in mind; in singing, we may apply it to our particular troubles, whatever they are.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David, to bring to remembrance.

1. **MAKE** haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O LORD. 2. Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul: let them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt. 3. Let them be turned back for a reward of their shame that say, Aha, alia. 4. Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: and let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified. 5. But I *am* poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: thou *art* my help and my deliverer; O LORD, make no tarrying.

The title tells us that this psalm was designed to bring to remembrance, to put God in remembrance of his mercy and promises; for so we are said to do, when we pray to him, and plead with him; (Isa. 43. 26.) *Put me in remembrance*. Not that the

Æternal Mind needs a remembrancer, but 'his honour he is pleased to put upon the prayer of faith. It was rather to put himself and others in remembrance of former afflictions, that we may never be secure, but always in expectation of troubles, and of former devotions, that, when the clouds return after the rain, we may have recourse to the same means which we have formerly found effectual for fetching in comfort and relief. We may in prayer use the words we have often used before; our Saviour in his agony prayed thrice, saying the same words; so David here uses the words he had used before, yet not without some alterations, to shew that he did not design to tie himself or others to them as a form. God looks at the heart, not at the words.

1. David here prays that God would make haste to relieve and succour him; (v. 1, 5.) *I am poor and needy, in want and distress, and much at a loss within myself. Poverty and necessity are very good pleas in prayer to a God of infinite mercy, who despises not the sighing of a contrite heart, and has pronounced a blessing upon the poor in spirit; who fills the hungry with good things. He prays, (1.) That God would appear for him to deliver him from his troubles in due time. (2.) That in the mean time he would come in to him, to help him under his troubles, that he might not sink and faint. (3.) That he would do this quickly; Make haste, (v. 1.) and again, (v. 5.) Make haste, make no tarrying. Sometimes God seems to delay helping his own people, that he may excite such earnest desires as these. He that believes does not make haste, so as to anticipate or out-run the divine counsels, so as to force a way of escape, or to take any unlawful methods of relief; but he may make haste by going forth to meet God in humble prayer, that he would hasten the desired succour. "Make haste unto me, for the longing desire of my soul is toward thee; I shall perish, if I be not speedily helped; I have no other to expect relief from; thou art my Help and my Deliverer. Thou hast engaged to be so to all that seek thee; I depend upon thee to be so to me; I have often found thee so; and thou art sufficient, all-sufficient, to be so; therefore make haste to me."*

2. He prays that God would fill the faces of his enemies with shame, v. 2, 3. Observe, (1.) How he describes them; they sought after his soul, his life, to destroy that; his mind, to disturb that; to draw him from God to sin, and to despair; they desired his hurt, his ruin; when any calamity befell him, or threatened him, they said, "*Aha, aha, so would we have it, we shall gain our point now, and see him ruined.*" Thus spiteful, thus insolent, were they. (2.) What his prayer is against them; "*Let them be ashamed; let them be brought to repentance, so filled with shame, as that they may seek thy name; (83. 16.) let them see their fault and folly, in fighting against those whom thou dost protect, and be ashamed of their envy, Isa. 26. 11. However, let their designs against me be frustrated, and their measures broken; let them be turned back from their malicious pursuits, and then they will be ashamed and confounded, and, like the enemies of the Jews, much cast down in their own eyes,*" Neh. 6. 16.

3. He prays that God would fill the hearts of his friends with joy; (v. 4.) that all those who seek God, and love his salvation, who desire it, delight in it, and depend upon it, may have continual matter for joy and praise, and hearts for both; and then he doubts not but he may put in for a share of the blessing he prays for; and so may we, if we answer the character. (1.) Let us make the service of God our great business, and the favour of God our great delight and pleasure, for that is seeking him, and loving his salvation. Let the pursuit of a happiness in God be our great care, and the enjoyment of it our great satisfaction. A heart to love the salvation of the Lord, and to prefer it before any secular advantages whatsoever, so as cheerfully to quit all, rather than hazard our salvation, is a good evidence of our interest in it, and title to it. (2.) Let us then be assured, that, if it be not our own fault, the joy of the Lord shall fill our minds, and the high praises of the Lord shall fill our mouths. Those that seek God, if they seek him early, and seek him diligently, shall rejoice and be glad in him, for their seeking him is as an evidence of his good will to them, and an earnest of their finding him, 105. 3. There is joy even in seeking God, for it is

one of the fundamental principles of religion, That God is the *Rewarder of all those that diligently seek him.* Those that love God's salvation shall say with pleasure, with constant pleasure, (for praising God, if we make it our continual work, will be our continual feast,) *Let God be magnified, as he will be, to eternity, in the salvation of his people.* All who wish well to the comfort of the saints, and to the glory of God, cannot but say a hearty *amen* to this prayer, that those who love God's salvation may say continually, *Let God be magnified.*

PSALM LXXI.

David penned this psalm in his old age, as appears by several passages in it; which makes many think that it was penned at the time of Absalom's rebellion; for that was the great trouble of his latter days. It might be occasioned by Sheba's insurrection, or some trouble that happened to him in that part of his life, of which it was foretold, that the sword should not depart from his house. But he is not over-particular in representing his case, because he intended it for the general use of God's people in their afflictions, especially those they meet with in their declining years; for this psalm, above any other, is fitted for the use of the old disciples of Jesus Christ. 1. He begins the psalm with believing prayers; with prayers that God would deliver and save him, (v. 2, 4.) and not cast him off, (v. 9.) or be far from him, (v. 12.) and that his enemies might be put to shame, v. 13. He pleads his confidence in God; (v. 1, 3, 5, 7.) the experience he had had of help from God; (v. 6.) and the malice of his enemies against him, v. 10, 11. 11. He concludes the psalm with believing praises, v. 14, &c. Never was his hope more established, v. 16, 18, 20, 21. Never were his joys and thanksgivings more enlarged, v. 15, 19, 22. 24. He is in an ecstasy of joyful praise; in the singing of it, we too should have our faith in God encouraged, and our hearts raised in blessing his holy name.

1. **I**N thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion. 2. Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me, and save me. 3. Be thou my strong habitation, wherunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress. 4. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. 5. For thou art my hope, O LORD God: thou art my trust from my youth. 6. By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee. 7. I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge. 8. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day. 9. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. 10. For mine enemies speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, 11. Saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him. 12. O God, be not far from me; O my God, make haste for my help. 13. Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt.

Two things, in general, David here prays for; That he might not be confounded, and, That his enemies and persecutors might be confounded.

1. He prays that he might never be made ashamed of his dependence upon God, nor disappointed in his believing expectations from him. With this petition every true believer may

come boldly to the throne of grace; for God will never dash the hope that is of his own raising. Now observe here,

1. How David professes his confidence in God, and with what pleasure and grateful variety of expression he repeats his profession of that confidence, still presenting the profession of it to God, and pleading it with him. We praise God, and so please him, by telling him, (if it be indeed true,) what an entire confidence we have in him; (v. 1.) "*In thee, O Lord, and in thee only, do I put my trust.*" Whatever others do, I choose the God of Jacob for my Help. They that are entirely satisfied with God's all-sufficiency, and the truth of his promise, and, in dependence upon that, as sufficient to make them amends, are freely willing to do and suffer, to lose and venture, for him, may truly say, *In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust.* Those that will deal with God, must deal upon trust; if we are shy of dealing with him, it is a sign we do not trust him. *Thou art my Rock and my Fortress,* (v. 3.) and again, "*Thou art my Refuge, my strong Refuge;* (v. 7.) I fly to thee, and am sure to be safe in thee, and under thy protection. If thou secure me, none can hurt me. *Thou art my Hope and my Trust;* (v. 5.) thou hast proposed thyself to me in thy word as the proper Object of my hope and trust; I have hoped in thee, and never found it vain to do so."

2. How his confidence in God is supported and encouraged by his experiences; (v. 5, 6.) "*Thou hast been my Trust from my youth;* ever since I was capable of discerning between my right hand and my left, I stayed myself upon thee, and saw a great deal of reason to do so; for *by thee have I been holden up from the womb.*" Ever since he had the use of his reason, he had been a dependent upon God's goodness, because ever since he had a being, he had been a monument of it. Note, The consideration of the gracious care which the Divine Providence took of us in our birth and infancy, should engage us to an early piety, and constant devotedness to his honour. He that was our Help from our birth, ought to be our Hope from our youth. If we received so much mercy from God before we were capable of doing him any service, we should lose no time when we are capable. This comes in here as a support to the psalmist in his present distress; not only that God had given him his life and being, bringing him out of his mother's bowels into the world, and providing that he should not die from the womb, nor give up the ghost when he came out of the belly; but that he had betimes made him one of his family; "*Thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels into the arms of thy grace, under the shadow of thy wings, into the bond of thy covenant; thou tookest me into thy church, as a son of thine handmaid, and born in thine house, 116. 16.*" And therefore," (1.) "I have reason to hope that thou wilt protect me; thou that hast held me up hitherto, wilt not let me fall now; thou that madest me, wilt not forsake the work of thine own hands; thou that helpedst me, when I could not help myself, wilt not abandon me now that I am as helpless as I was then." (2.) "Therefore I have reason to resolve that I will devote myself unto thee; *My praise shall therefore be continually of thee;* I will make it my business every day to praise thee, and will take all occasions to do it."

3. What his requests to God are, in this confidence.

(1.) That he might *never be put to confusion*, (v. 1.) that he might not be disappointed of the mercy he expected, and so made ashamed of his expectation. Thus we may all pray in faith, that our confidence in God may not be our confusion. Hope of the glory of God is hope that makes not ashamed.

(2.) That he might be delivered out of the hand of his enemies; (v. 2.) "*Deliver me in thy righteousness;* as thou art the righteous Judge of the world, pleading the cause of the injured, and punishing the injurious, cause me some way or other to escape." (God will, with the temptation, make a way to escape, 1 Cor. 10. 13.) "*Incline thine ear unto my prayers,* and, in answer to them, save me out of my troubles, r. 4. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hands of those that are ready to pull me in pieces." Three things he pleads for deliverance; [1.] The encouragement God had given him to expect it; *Thou hast given commandment to save me;* (v. 3.) thou hast promised to do it; and such efficacy is there in God's promises, that they are often spoken of as com-

mands; like that, *Let there be light, and there was light.* He speaks, and it is done. [2.] The character of his enemies; they are wicked, unrighteous, cruel, men, and it will be for the honour of God to appear against them, (v. 4.) for he is a holy, just, and good, God. [3.] The many eyes that were upon him; (v. 7.) "*I am as a wonder unto many;* every one waits to see what will be the issue of such extraordinary troubles as I am fallen into, and such extraordinary confidence as I profess to have in God." Or, "I am looked upon as a monster, am one whom every body shuns, and therefore am undone if the Lord be not my Refuge. Men abandon me, but God will not."

(3.) That he might always find rest and safety in God; (v. 3.) *Be thou my strong Habitation;* be thou to me a *Rock of repose, whereto I may continually resort.* They that are at home in God, that live a life of communion with him, and confidence in him, that continually resort unto him by faith and prayer, having their eyes ever toward him, may promise themselves a strong Habitation in him, such as never will fall of itself, nor can ever be broken through by any invading power; and they shall be welcome to resort to him continually upon all occasions, and not be upbraided as coming too often.

(4.) That he might have continual matter for thanksgiving to God, and might be continually employed in that pleasant work; (v. 8.) "*Let my mouth be filled with thy praise,* as now it is with my complaints, and then I shall not be ashamed of my hope, but my enemies will be ashamed of their insolence." They that love God, love to be praising him, and desire to be doing it all the day; not only in their morning and evening devotions, not only *seven times a day*, (119. 164.) but *all the day*, to intermix with all they say something or other that may redound to the honour and praise of God. They resolve to do it while they live, they hope to be doing it eternally in a better world.

(5.) That he might not be neglected now in his declining years; (v. 9.) *Cast me not off now in the time of my old age, forsake me not when my strength fails.* Observe here, [1.] The natural sense he had of the infirmities of age; *My strength fails;* where there was strength of body, and vigour of mind, strong sight, a strong voice, strong limbs, alas! in old age they fail; the life is continued, but the strength is gone, or that which is, is *labour and sorrow*, 90. 10. [2.] The gracious desire he had of the continuance of God's presence with him under these infirmities; *Lord, cast me not off, do not then forsake me.* This intimates that he should look upon himself as undone, if God should abandon him; to be cast off and forsaken of God is a thing to be dreaded at any time, especially in the time of old age, and when our strength fails us; for it is God that is the Strength of our heart. But it intimates that he had reason to hope God would not desert him; the faithful servants of God may be comfortably assured that he will not cast them off in old age, nor forsake them when their strength fails them. He is a Master that is not wont to cast off old servants. In this confidence, David here prays again, (v. 12.) "*O God, be not far from me,* let me not be under the apprehension of thy withdrawals, for then I am miserable; *O my God, a God in covenant with me, make haste for my help,* lest I perish before help come."

If he prays that his enemies might be made ashamed of their designs against him. Observe, 1. What it was which they unjustly said against him, v. 10, 11. Their plot was deep and desperate, it was against his life; *They lay wait for my soul,* (v. 10.) and are adversaries to that, v. 13. Their powers and policies were combined, they take counsel together, and very insolent they were in their conduct; they say, *God has forsaken him, persecute and take him.* Here their premises are utterly false, that because a good man was in great trouble, and had continued long in it, and was not so soon delivered as perhaps he expected, therefore God had forsaken him, and would have no more to do with him. All are not forsaken of God, who think so themselves, or whom others think to be so. And as their premises were false, so their inference was barbarous. If God has forsaken him, then persecute and take him, and doubt not but to make a prey of him. This is *talking to the grief of one whom God hath smitten*, 69. 26

But thus they endeavour to discourage David, as Sennacherib endeavoured to intimidate Hezekiah, by suggesting that God was his Enemy, and fought against him; *Am I now come up without the Lord against this city, to destroy it?* Isa. 36. 10. It is true, if God has forsaken a man, there is none to deliver him; but therefore to insult over him, ill becomes those who are conscious to themselves that they deserve to be for ever forsaken of God. But rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, though I fall, I shall rise. He that seems to forsake for a small moment, will gather with everlasting kindness. 2. What it was which he justly prayed for, from a spirit of prophecy, not a spirit of passion; (v. 13.) Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul. If they will not be confounded by repentance, and so saved, let them be confounded with everlasting dishonour, and so ruined. God will turn into shame the glory of those who turn into shame the glory of God and his people.

14. But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more. 15. My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof. 16. I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only. 17. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. 18. Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come. 19. Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee! 20. Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. 21. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. 22. I will also praise thee with the psallery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel. 23. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed. 24. My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long; for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.

David is here in a holy transport of joy and praise, arising from his faith and hope in God; we have both together, (v. 14.) where there is a sudden and remarkable change of his voice, his fears are all silenced, his hopes raised, and his prayers turned into thanksgivings, "Let mine enemies say what they will, to drive me to despair, *I will hope continually*, hope in all conditions, in the most cloudy and dark day; I will live upon hope, and will hope to the end." Since we hope in one that will never fail us, let not our hope in him fail us; and then we shall praise him yet more and more. "The more they reproach me, the more closely will I cleave to thee; I will praise thee more and better than ever I have done yet." The longer we live, the more expert we should grow in praising God, and the more we should abound in it. *I will add over and above all thy praise*, all the praise I have hitherto offered, for it is all too little. When we have said all we can, to the glory of God's grace, there is still more to be said; it is a subject that can never be exhausted, and therefore we should never grow weary of it. Now observe, in these verses,

I. How his heart is established in faith and hope; and it is a good thing that the heart be so established. Observe,

1. What he hopes in, v. 16. (1.) In the power of God: "*I will*

go in the strength of the Lord God, not sit down in despair, but stir up myself to, and exert myself in, my work and warfare; will go forth and go on, not in any strength of my own, but in God's strength; disclaiming my own sufficiency, and depending on him only as all-sufficient; in the strength of his providence, and in the strength of his grace." We must always go about God's work, in his strength, having our eyes up unto him to work in us both to will and to do. (2.) In the promise of God; "*I will make mention of thy righteousness*, thy faithfulness to every word which thou hast spoken, the equity of thy disposals, and thy kindness to thy people that trust in thee. This I will make mention of as my plea in prayer for thy mercy." We may very fitly apply it to the righteousness of Christ, which is called the *righteousness of God by faith*, and which is *witnessed by the law and the prophets*; we must depend upon God's strength for assistance, and upon Christ's righteousness for acceptance. *In the Lord have I righteousness and strength*, Isa. 45. 24.

2. What he hopes for.

(1.) He hopes that God will not leave him in his old age, but will be the same to him to the end, that he had been all along, v. 17, 18. Observe here, [1.] What God had done for him when he was young; *Thou hast taught me from my youth*. The good education and good instructions which his parents gave him when he was young, he owns himself obliged to give God thanks for as a great favour. It is a blessed thing to be taught of God from our youth, from our childhood to know the holy scriptures, and it is what we have reason to bless God for. [2.] What he had done for God when he was middle-aged; *He had declared all God's wondrous works*. Those that have got good when they are young, must be doing good when they are grown up, and must continue to communicate what they have received. We must own that all the works of God's goodness to us are wondrous works, admiring he should do so much for us who are so undeserving, and we must make it our business to declare them, to the glory of God, and the good of others. [3.] What he desired of God now that he was old; *Now that I am old and gray-headed, dying to this world, and hastening to another, O God, forsake me not*. This is what he earnestly desires and confidently hopes for. Those that have been taught of God from their youth, and have made it the business of their lives to honour him, may be sure that he will not leave them when they are old and gray-headed, will not leave them helpless and comfortless, but will make the evil days of old age their best days, and such as they shall have occasion to say they have pleasure in. [4.] What he designed to do for God in his old age; "*I will not only shew thy strength, by my own experience of it, to this generation, but I will leave my observations upon record for the benefit of posterity, and so shew it to every one that is to come.*" As long as we live, we should be endeavouring to glorify God and edify one another; and those that have had the largest and longest experience of the goodness of God to them, should improve their experiences for the good of their friends. It is a debt which the old disciples of Christ owe to the succeeding generations, to leave behind them a solemn testimony to the power, pleasure, and advantage, of religion, and the truth of God's promises.

(2.) He hopes that God would revive him, and raise him up out of his present low and disconsolate condition; (v. 20.) *Thou who hast made me to see and feel great and sore troubles*, above most men, *shalt quicken me again*. Note, [1.] The best of God's saints and servants are sometimes exercised with great and sore troubles in this world. [2.] God's hand is to be eyed in all the troubles of the saints, and that will help to extenuate them, and make them seem light. He does not say, "*Thou hast burthened me with those troubles,*" but "*shewed them me;*" as the tender father shews the child the rod to keep him in awe. [3.] Though God's people be brought ever so low, he can revive them, and raise them up. Are they dead? He can quicken them again. See 2 Cor. 1. 9. Are they buried, as dead men out of mind? He can bring them up again from the depths of the earth, can cheer the most drooping spirit, and raise the most sinking interest. [4.] If we have a due regard to the hand of God in our troubles, we may

promise ourselves, in due time, a deliverance out of them. Our present troubles, though great and sore, shall be no hinderance to our joyful resurrection from the depths of the earth; witness our great Master, to whom this may have some reference; his Father shewed him great and sore troubles, but quickened him and brought him up from the grave.

(3.) He hopes that God would not only deliver him out of his troubles, but would advance his honour and joy more than ever; (v. 21.) "Thou shalt not only restore me to my greatness again, but shalt increase it, and give me a better interest, after this shock, than before; thou shalt not only comfort me, but comfort me on every side, so that I shall see nothing black or threatening on any side." Note, Sometimes God makes his people's troubles contribute to the increase of their greatness, and their sun shines the brighter for having been under a cloud. If he makes them contribute to the increase of their goodness, that will prove in the end the increase of their greatness, their glory; and if he comfort them on every side, according to the time and degree wherein he has afflicted them on every side, they will have no reason to complain. When our Lord Jesus was quickened again, and brought back from the depths of the earth, his greatness was increased, and he entered on the joy set before him.

(4.) He hopes that all his enemies would be put to confusion, v. 24. He speaks of it with the greatest assurance as a thing done, and triumphs in it accordingly; *They are confounded, they are brought to shame, that seek my hurt.* His honour would be their disgrace, and his comfort their vexation.

II. Let us now see how his heart is enlarged in joy and praises; how he rejoices in hope, and sings in hope, for we are saved by hope.

1. He will speak of God's righteousness and his salvation, as great things, things which he was well acquainted with, and much affected with, which he desired God might have the glory of, and others might have the comfortable knowledge of; (v. 15.) *My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness, and thy salvation;* and again, (v. 24.) *My tongue shall talk of thy righteousness,* and this, *all the day.* God's righteousness, which David seems here to be in a particular manner affected with, includes a great deal: the rectitude of his nature; the equity of his providential disposals; the righteous laws he has given us to be ruled by; the righteous promises he has given us to depend upon; and the everlasting righteousness which his Son has brought in for our justification. God's righteousness and his salvation are here joined together; let no man think to put them asunder, nor expect salvation without righteousness, 50. 23. If these two are made the objects of our desire, let them be made the subjects of our discourse all the day, for they are subjects that can never be drawn dry.

2. He will speak of them with wonder and admiration; as one astonished at the dimensions of divine love and grace, the height and depth, the length and breadth, of it; *"I know not the numbers thereof;* (v. 15.) Though I cannot give a particular account of thy favours to me, they are so many, so great; (if *I would count them, they are more in number than the sand,* 40. 5.) yet, knowing them to be numberless, I will be still speaking of them, for in them I shall find new matter," v. 19. The righteousness that is in God is very high; that which is done by him for his people is very great: put both together, and we shall say, *O God, who is like unto thee?* This is praising God, acknowledging his perfections and performances to be, (1.) Above our conception; they are very high and great; so high, that we cannot apprehend them; so great that we cannot comprehend them. (2.) Without any parallel; no being like him, no works like his; *O God, who is like unto thee?* None in heaven, none on earth, no angel, no king. God is a non-such; we do not rightly praise him, if we do not own him to be so.

3. He will speak of them with all the expressions of joy and exultation, v. 22, 23. Observe, (1.) How he would eye God in praising him. [1.] As a faithful God; *I will praise thee, even thy truth.* God is made known by his word; if we praise that, and the truth of that, we praise him. By faith we set to our seal that God is true; and so we praise his truth. [2.] As a God in

covenant with him; "O my God, whom I have consented to, and avouched for mine." As in our prayers, so in our praises, we must look up to God as our God, and give him the glory of our interest in him and relation to him. [3.] As the Holy One of Israel; Israel's God in a peculiar manner, glorious in his holiness among that people, and faithful to his covenant with them. It is God's honour, that he is a Holy One; it is his people's honour, that he is the Holy One of Israel. (2.) Observe how he will express his joy and exultation; [1.] With his hand, in sacred music, with the psalter, with the harp; at these David excelled, and the best of his skill shall be employed in setting forth God's praises to such advantage as might affect others. [2.] With his lips, in sacred songs; *"Unto thee will I sing,* to thine honour, and with a desire to be accepted of thee. *My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee,* knowing they cannot be better employed." [3.] In both, with his heart; *"My soul shall rejoice, which thou hast redeemed."* Note, *First,* Holy joy is the very heart and life of thankful praise. *Secondly,* We do not make melody to the Lord, in singing his praises, if we not do it with our hearts. My lips shall rejoice, but that is nothing; lip-labour, though ever so well laboured, if that be all, is but lost labour in serving God; the soul must be at work, and with all that is within us we must bless his holy name, else all about us is worth little. *Thirdly,* Redeemed souls ought to be joyful, thankful souls. The work of redemption ought, above all God's works, to be celebrated by us in our praises. The Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us to God, must therefore be counted worthy of all blessing and praise.

PSALM LXXII.

The foregoing psalm was penned by David when he was old, and, it should seem, so was this too; for Solomon was now standing fair for the crown; that was his prayer for himself, this for his son and successor, and, with these two, the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended, as we find in the close of this psalm. If we have but God's presence with us while we live, and good hopes concerning those that shall come after us, that they shall be praising God on earth when we are praising him in heaven, it is enough. This is entitled a psalm for Solomon: it is probable that David dictated it, or, rather, that it was by the blessed Spirit dictated to him, when, a little before he died, by divine direction, he settled the succession, and gave orders to proclaim Solomon king, 1 Kings, 1. 30, &c. But, though Solomon's name is here made use of, Christ's kingdom is here prophesied of, under the type and figure of Solomon's. David knew what the divine oracle was, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne, Acts, 2. 30. To him he here bare witness, and with the prospect of the glories of his kingdom he comforted himself in his dying moments, when he foresaw that his house would not be so with God, not so great, not so good, as he wished. David, in spirit, I. Begins with a short prayer for his successor, v. 1. II. He passes immediately into a long prediction of the glories of his reign, v. 2. 17. And, III. He concludes with praise to the God of Israel, v. 18. 20. In singing this psalm, we must have an eye to Christ, praising him as a King, and pleasing ourselves with our happiness as his subjects.

A psalm for Solomon.

1. GIVE the King thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son.

This verse is a prayer for the king, even the king's son.

1. We may apply it to Solomon; *Give him thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness;* make him a man, a king; make him a good man, a good king. (1.) It is the prayer of a father for his child; a dying blessing, such as the patriarchs bequeathed to their children. The best thing we can ask of God for our children, is, that God will give them wisdom and grace to know and do their duty; that is better than gold. Solomon learned to pray for himself as his father had prayed for him, not that God would give him riches and honour, but a wise and understanding heart. It was a comfort to David, that his own son was to be his successor; but more so, that he was likely to be both judicious and righteous. David had given him a good education, (Prov. 4. 3.) had taught him *good judgment and righteousness*, yet that would not do unless God gave him his judgments. Parents cannot give grace to their children, but may, by prayer, bring them to the God of grace, and shall not seek him in vain, for their prayer shall either be answered, or it shall return with comfort into

their own bosom. (2.) It is the prayer of a king for his successor. David had executed judgment and justice during his reign, and now he prays that his son might do so too. Such a concern as this we should have for posterity—desiring and endeavouring that those who come after us may do God more and better service in their day than we have done in ours. Those have little love either to God or man, and are of a very narrow selfish spirit, who care not what becomes of the world and the church when they are gone. (3.) It is the prayer of subjects for their king. It should seem, David penned this psalm for the use of the people, that they, in singing, might pray for Solomon. Those who would live quiet and peaceable lives, must pray for kings and all in authority, that God would give them his judgments and righteousness.

2. We may apply it to Christ; not that he who intercedes for us needs us to intercede for him. But, (1.) It is a prayer of the Old-Testament church for sending the Messiah, as the church's King, King on the holy hill of Zion, of whom the King of kings had said, *Thou art my Son*, 2. 6, 7. "Hasten his coming, to whom all judgment is committed;" and we must thus hasten the second coming of Christ, when he shall *judge the world in righteousness*. (2.) It is an expression of the satisfaction which all true believers take in the authority which the Lord Jesus has received from the Father; "Let him have all power both in heaven and earth, and be the Lord our Righteousness; let him be the great Trustee of divine grace for all that are his; give it him, that he may give it us."

2. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. 3. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. 4. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. 5. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. 6. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. 7. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. 8. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. 9. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. 10. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. 11. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. 12. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. 13. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. 14. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight. 15. And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised. 16. There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. 17. His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men

shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.

This is a prophecy of the prosperity and perpetuity of the kingdom of Christ, under the shadow of the reign of Solomon. It comes in, 1. As a plea to enforce the prayer; "Lord, *give him thy judgments, and thy righteousness*, and then *he shall judge thy people with righteousness*, and so shall answer the end of his elevation, v. 2. Give him thy grace, and then thy people, committed to his charge, will have the benefit of it." *Because God loved Israel, he made him king over them to do judgment and justice*, 2 Chron. 9. 8. We may in faith wrestle with God for that grace which we have reason to think will be of common advantage to his church. 2. As an answer of peace to the prayer. As by the prayer of faith we return answers to God's promises of mercy, so by the promises of mercy God returns answers to our prayers of faith. That this prophecy must refer to the kingdom of the Messiah, is plain, because there are many passages in it which cannot be applied to the reign of Solomon. There was indeed a great deal of righteousness and peace, at first, in the administration of his government, but, before the end of his reign, there were both trouble and unrighteousness. The kingdom here spoken of is to last as long as the sun, but Solomon's was soon extinct. Therefore even the Jewish expositors understand it of the kingdom of the Messiah.

Let us observe the many great and precious promises here made, which were to have their full accomplishment only in the kingdom of Christ; and yet some of them were in part fulfilled in Solomon's reign.

I. That it should be a *righteous government*; (v. 2.) *He shall judge thy people with righteousness*. Compare Isa. 11. 4. All the laws of Christ's kingdom are consonant to the eternal rules of equity; the chancery it erects, to relieve against the rigours of the broken law, is indeed a court of equity; and against the sentence of his last judgment there will lie no exception. The peace of his kingdom shall be supported by righteousness; (v. 3.) for then only is the peace like a river, when the *righteousness is as the waves of the sea*. The world will be judged in righteousness, Acts, 17. 31.

II. That it should be a peaceable government; *The mountains shall bring peace, and the little hills*; (v. 3.) that is, (says Dr. Hammond,) both the superior and the inferior courts of judicature in Solomon's kingdom. There shall be *abundance of peace*, v. 7. Solomon's name signifies *peaceable*, and such was his reign; for in it Israel enjoyed the victories of the foregoing reign, and preserved the tranquillity and repose of that reign. But peace is, in a special manner, the glory of Christ's kingdom, for, as far as it prevails, it reconciles men to God, to themselves, and to one another, and slays all enmities; for he is our Peace.

III. That the poor and needy should be, in a particular manner, taken under the protection of this government; *He shall judge thy poor*, v. 2. Those are God's poor, that are impoverished by keeping a good conscience, and those shall be provided for with a distinguishing care, shall be judged for with judgment, with a particular cognizance taken of their case, and a particular vengeance taken for their wrongs. The poor of the people, and the children of the needy, he will be sure so to judge, as to save, v. 4. This is insisted upon again, (v. 12, 13.) intimating that Christ will be sure to carry his cause on behalf of his injured poor. He will deliver the needy that lie at the mercy of their oppressors, the poor also, both because they have no helper, and it is for his honour to help them; and because they cry unto him, and he has promised, in answer to their prayers, to help them; they by prayer *commit themselves unto him*, 10. 14. He will spare the needy that throw themselves on his mercy, and will not be rigorous and severe with them, he will save their souls, and that is all they desire; *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. Christ is the poor man's King.

IV. That proud oppressors shall be reckoned with; *He shall break them in pieces*; (v. 4.) shall take away their power to hurt, and punish them for all the mischief they have done. This is the

office of a good king, *Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos*—*To spare the vanquish'd, and debase the proud.* The Devil is the great oppressor, whom Christ will break in pieces, and of whose kingdom he will be the destruction; *with the breath of his mouth shall he slay that wicked one*, (Isa. 11. 4.) and shall deliver the souls of his people *from deceit and violence*, v. 14. He shall save from the power of Satan, both as an old serpent working by deceit to ensnare them, and as a roaring lion working by violence to terrify and devour them. So *precious shall their blood be unto him*, that not a drop of it shall be shed by the deceit or violence of Satan or his instruments, without being reckoned for. Christ is a King, who, though he calls his subjects sometimes to resist unto blood for him, yet is not prodigal of their blood, nor will ever have it parted with, but upon a valuable consideration to his glory and their's, and the filling up of the measure of their enemies' iniquity.

V. That religion shall flourish under Christ's government; (v. 5.) *They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure.* Solomon indeed built the temple, and the fear and worship of God was well kept up, for some time, under his government, but it did not last long; this, therefore, must point at Christ's kingdom, all the subjects of which are brought to, and kept in, the fear of God; for the Christian religion has a direct tendency to, and a powerful influence upon, the support and advancement of natural religion. Faith in Christ will set up, and keep up, the fear of God; and therefore this is the everlasting gospel that is preached, *Fear God, and give honour to him*, Rev. 14. 7. And as Christ's government promotes devotion toward God, so it promotes both justice and charity among men; (v. 7.) *In his days shall the righteous flourish*; righteousness shall be practised, and those that practise righteousness shall be preferred. Righteousness shall abound, and be in reputation, shall command, and be in power. The law of Christ, written in the heart, disposes men to be honest and just, and to render to all their due; it likewise disposes men to live in love; and so it produces abundance of peace, and beats swords into ploughshares. Both holiness and love shall be perpetual in Christ's kingdom, and shall never go to decay, for the subjects of it shall *fear God as long as the sun and moon endure*; Christianity, in the profession of it, having got footing in the world, shall keep its ground till the end of time, and having, in the power of it, got footing in the heart, it will continue there till, by death, the sun, and the moon, and the stars, that is, the bodily senses, are darkened. Through all the changes of the world, and all the changes of life, Christ's kingdom will support itself; and if the fear of God continues as long as the sun and moon, abundance of peace will. The peace of the church, the peace of the soul, shall run parallel with its purity and piety, and last as long as these last.

VI. That Christ's government shall be very comfortable to all his faithful loving subjects; (v. 6.) *He shall*, by the graces and comforts of his Spirit, *come down like rain upon the mown grass*; not on that which is cut down, but that which is left growing, that it may spring again, though it was beheaded. The gospel of Christ distils as the rain which softens the ground that was hard, moistens that which was dry, and so makes it green and fruitful, Isa. 55. 10. Let our hearts *drink in the rain*, Heb. 6. 7.

VII. That Christ's kingdom shall be extended very far, and greatly enlarged; considering, 1. The extent of his territories; (v. 8.) *He shall have dominion from sea to sea*, from the South sea to the North, or from the Red sea to the Mediterranean; and from the river Euphrates, or Nile, to the ends of the earth. Solomon's dominion was very large, (1 Kings, 4. 21.) according to the promise, Gen. 15. 18. But no sea, no river, is named, that it might, by these proverbial expressions, bespeak the universal monarchy of the Lord Jesus. His gospel has been, or shall be, preached to all nations, (Matth. 24. 14.) and the *kingdoms of the world shall become his kingdoms*, (Rev. 11. 15.) when the fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought in. His territories shall be extended to those countries, (1.) That were strangers to him; *They that dwell in the wilderness*, out of all high roads, that seldom hear news, shall hear the glad tidings of the Redeemer,

and redemption by him, *shall bow before him*, shall believe in him, accept of him, worship him, and take his yoke upon them. Before the Lord Jesus we must all either bow or break: if we break, we are ruined, if we bow, we are certainly made for ever. (2.) That were enemies to him, and had fought against him; *They shall lick the dust*, they shall be brought down, and laid in the dust, shall bite the ground for vexation, and be so hunger-bitten, that they shall be glad of dust, the serpent's meat, (Gen. 3. 15.) for of his seed they are; and over whom shall not he rule, when his enemies themselves are thus humbled and brought low? 2. The dignity of his tributaries; He shall not only reign over them that dwell in the wilderness, the peasants and cottagers, but over them that dwell in the palaces, (v. 10.) *The kings of Tarshish, and of the isles*, that lie most remote from Israel, and are *the isles of the Gentiles*, (Gen. 10. 5.) these shall bring presents to him as their Sovereign Lord, by and under whom they hold their crowns, and all their crown-lands. They shall court his favour, and make an interest in him, that they may hear his wisdom. This was literally fulfilled in Solomon; for *all the kings of the earth sought the wisdom of Solomon, and brought every man his present*; (2 Chron. 9. 23, 24.) and in Christ too, when the wise men of the East, who, probably, were men of the first rank in their own country, came to worship him, and *brought him presents*, Matth. 2. 11. They shall present themselves to him; that is the best present we can bring to Christ, and without that no other present is acceptable, Rom. 12. 1. *They shall offer gifts*, spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, offer them to Christ as their God, on Christ as their Altar, which sanctifies every gift. Their conversion to God is called the *offering up*, or *sacrificing of the Gentiles*, Rom. 15. 16. And so is their devotion to God, Heb. 13. 15, 16. Yea, all kings shall, sooner or later, *fall down before him*, either to do their duty to him, or to receive their doom from him, v. 11. They shall fall before him, either as his willing subjects, or as his conquered captives; as supplicants for his mercy, or expectants of his judgment. And when the kings submit, the people come in of course; *All nations shall serve him*, all shall be invited into his service; some of all nations shall come into it, and in every nation *incense shall be offered to him, and a pure offering*, Mal. 1. 11. Rev. 7. 9.

VIII. That he shall be honoured and beloved by all his subjects, (v. 15.) *He shall live*; his subjects shall desire his life, *O king, live for ever*, and with good reason; for he has said, *Because I live, you shall live also; and of him it is witnessed, that he liveth, ever liveth, making intercession*, Heb. 7. 8, 25. He shall live, and live prosperously; and, 1. Presents shall be made to him. Though he shall be able to live without them, for he needs neither the gifts, nor the services of any; yet to him *shall be given of the gold of Sheba*; gold, the best of metals, gold of Sheba, which, probably, was the finest gold; for he that is best must be served with the best. They that have abundance of the wealth of this world, that have gold at command, must give it to Christ, must serve him with it, do good with it; *Honour the Lord with thy substance*. 2. Prayers shall be made for him, and that continually. The people prayed for Solomon, and that helped to make him and his reign so great a blessing to them. It is the duty of subjects to make prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, for kings and all in authority; not in compliment to them, as it is too often done, but in concern for the public welfare. But how is this applied to Christ? He needs not our prayers, nor can have any benefit by them. But the Old-Testament saints prayed for his coming, prayed continually for it; for they called him *He that should come*. And, now that he is come, we must pray for the success of his gospel, and the advancement of his kingdom, which he calls praying for him; Hosanna to the Son of David, prosperity to his reign; and we pray for his second coming. It may be read, *Prayer shall be made through him*, &c. for his sake; whatsoever we ask of the Father shall be in his name, and in dependence upon his intercession. 3. Praises shall be made of him, and high encomiums given of his wisdom, justice, and goodness; *Daily shall he be praised*. By praying daily in his name, we give him honour. Subjects ought to speak well

of the government that is a blessing to them; and much more ought all Christians to praise Jesus Christ, daily to praise him; for they owe their all to him, and to him they lie under the highest obligations.

IX. That under his government there shall be a wonderful increase both of meat and mouths, both of the fruits of the earth in the country, and of the people inhabiting the cities, v. 16. 1. The country shall grow rich; sow but a *handful of corn on the top of the mountains*, whence one would expect but little, and yet *the fruit of it shall shake like Lebanon*, it shall come up like a wood, so thick, and tall, and strong, like the cedars of Lebanon. Even upon the tops of the mountains, the earth shall bring forth by handfuls; that is an expression of great plenty; (Gen. 41. 47.) as the grass upon the house-top is said to be that wherewith the mower fills not his hand. This is applicable to the wonderful productions of the seed of the gospel in the days of the Messiah. A handful of that seed, sown in the mountainous and barren soil of the Gentile world, produced a wonderful harvest gathered into Christ, fruit that shook like Lebanon. The fields were *white to the harvest*, John. 4. 35. Matth. 9. 37. The grain of mustard-seed grew up to a great tree. 2. The towns shall grow populous; *They of the city shall flourish like grass*, for number, for verdure. The gospel-church, the city of God among men, shall have all the marks of prosperity, many shall be added to it, and those that are, shall be happy in it.

X. That his government shall be perpetual, both to his honour, and to the happiness of his subjects. The Lord Jesus shall reign for ever, and of him only thus must be understood, and not at all of Solomon. It is Christ only that shall *be feared throughout all generations*, (v. 5.) and *as long as the sun and moon endure*, v. 7. 1. The honour of the prince is immortal, and shall never be sullied; (v. 17.) *His name shall endure for ever*, in despite of all the malicious attempts and endeavours of the powers of darkness to eclipse the lustre of it, and to cut off the line of it; it shall be preserved, it shall be perpetuated, it shall be propagated. As the names of earthly princes are continued in their posterity, so Christ is in himself; *Filiabitur nomen ejus—His name shall descend to posterity*; all nations, while the world stands, shall call him blessed; shall bless God for him, continually speak well of him, and think themselves happy in him. To the end of time, and to eternity, his name shall be celebrated, shall be made use of; every tongue shall confess it, and every knee shall bow before it. 2. The happiness of the people is universal too, it is complete, and everlasting; men shall be blessed, truly and for ever blessed, in him. This plainly refers to the promise made unto the fathers, that in the Messiah all the nations of the earth should be blessed, Gen. 12. 3.

18. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. 19. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen. 20. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

Such an illustrious prophecy as is in the foregoing verses of the Messiah and his kingdom, may fitly be concluded, as it is here, with hearty prayers and praises.

1. The psalmist is here enlarged in thanksgivings for the prophecy and promise, v. 18, 19. So sure is every word of God, and with so much satisfaction may we rely upon it, that we have reason enough to give thanks for what he has said, though it be not yet done. We must own, that, for all the great things he has done for the world, for the church, for the children of men, for his own children, in the kingdom of providence, in the kingdom of grace, for all the power and trust lodged in the hands of the Redeemer, God is worthy to be praised; we must stir up ourselves and all that is within us to praise him after the best manner, and desire that all others may do it. *Blessed be the Lord, that is, blessed be his glorious name*; for it is only in his name that we can contribute

any thing to his glory and blessedness, and yet that is *ascribed above all blessing and praise*. Let it be blessed for ever, it shall be blessed for ever, it deserves to be blessed for ever, and we hope to be for ever blessing it. We are here taught to bless the name of Christ, and to bless God in Christ, for all that which he has done for us by him. We must bless him, (1.) As the Lord God, as a self-existent, self-sufficient, Being, and our Sovereign Lord. (2.) As the God of Israel, in covenant with that people, and worshipped by them, and who does this in performance of the truth unto Jacob and the mercy to Abraham. (3.) As the God who only does wondrous things, in creation and providence, and especially this work of redemption, which excels them all. Men's works are little common trifling things, which, however, without him, they could not do. But God does all by his own power, and they are wondrous things which he does, and such as will be the eternal admiration of saints and angels.

2. He is earnest in prayer for the accomplishment of this prophecy and promise; *Let the whole earth be filled with his glory*; as it will be when the *kings of Tarshish, and the isles, shall bring presents to him*. It is sad to think how empty the earth is of the glory of God, how little service and honour he has from a world to which he is such a bountiful Benefactor. All those, therefore, that wish well to the honour of God, and the welfare of mankind, cannot but desire that the earth may be filled with the discoveries of his glory, suitably returned in thankful acknowledgments of his glory. Let every heart, and every mouth, and every assembly, be filled with the high praises of God. We shall see how earnest David is in this prayer, and how much his heart is in it, if we observe, (1.) How he shuts up the prayer with a double seal; "*Amen and Amen*, again and again I say, I say it, and let all others say the same, so be it; Amen to my prayer; Amen to the prayers of all the saints to this purport; *Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come*." (2.) How he even shuts up his life with this prayer, v. 20. This was the last psalm that ever he penned, though not placed last in this collection; he penned it when he lay on his death-bed, and with this he breathes his last; "Let God be glorified, let the kingdom of the Messiah be set up, and kept up in the world, and I have enough, I desire no more. With this let the prayers of David the son of Jesse be ended; even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

PSALM LXXIII.

This psalm, and the ten that next follow it, carry the name of Asaph in the titles of them. If he was the penman of them, (as many think,) we rightly call these psalms of Asaph. If he was only the chief musician, to whom they were delivered, our marginal reading is right, which calls them psalms for Asaph. It is probable that he penned them; for we read of the words of David, and of Asaph the seer, which were used in praising God, in Hezekiah's time, 2 Chron. 29, 30. Though the Spirit of prophecy, by sacred songs, descended chiefly on David, who is therefore styled the sweet psalmist of Israel, yet God put some of that Spirit upon those about him. This is a psalm of great use; it gives us an account of the conflict which the psalmist had with a strong temptation to envy the prosperity of wicked people. He begins his account with a sacred principle, which he held fast, and, by the help of which, he kept his ground, and carried his point, v. 1. He then tells us, I. How he got into the temptation, v. 2. 14. II. How he got out of the temptation, and gained a victory over it, v. 15. 26. III. How he got by the temptation, and was the better for it, v. 21. 28. If, in singing this psalm, we fortify ourselves against the like temptation, we do not use it in vain. The experiences of others should be our instructions.

A psalm of Asaph.

1. **T**RULY God is good to Israel, *even* to such as are of a clean heart. 2. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. 3. For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4. For *there are* no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. 5. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. 6. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence

covereth them *as* a garment. 7. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. 8. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly *concerning* oppression: they speak loftily. 9. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. 10. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full *cup* are wrung out to them. 11. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? 12. Behold, these *are* the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase *in* riches. 13. Verily I have cleansed my heart *in* vain, and washed my hands in innocency. 14. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

This psalm begins somewhat abruptly, *Yet God is good to Israel*, so the margin reads it: he had been thinking of the prosperity of the wicked; while he was thus musing, the fire burned, and, at last, he spake by way of check to himself for what he had been thinking of; "However it be, yet God is good." Though wicked people receive many of the gifts of his providential bounty, yet we must own that he is, in a peculiar manner, good to Israel; they have favours from him, which others have not.

The psalmist designs an account of a temptation he was strongly assaulted with—to envy the prosperity of the wicked; a common temptation, which has tried the graces of many of the saints. Now, in this account,

I. He lays down, in the first place, that great principle which he is resolved to abide by, and not to quit while he was parleying with this temptation, *v. 1.* Job, when he was entering into such a temptation, fixed for his principle, the omniscience of God; *Times are not hidden from the Almighty*, Job, 24. 1. Jeremiah's principle is, the justice of God; *Righteous art thou, O God, when I plead with thee*, Jer. 12. 1. Habakkuk's principle is, the holiness of God; *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, Hab. 1. 13. The psalmist's here, is, the goodness of God. These are truths which cannot be shaken, and which we must resolve to live and die by. Though we may not be able to reconcile all the disposals of Providence with them, we must believe they are reconcileable. Note, Good thoughts of God will fortify us against many of Satan's temptations. *Truly God is good*; he had had many thoughts in his mind concerning the providences of God, but this word, at last, settled him; For all this, God is good, *good to Israel, even to those that are of a clean heart.* Note, 1. Those are the Israel of God that are of a clean heart, purified by the blood of Christ, cleansed from the pollutions of sin, and entirely devoted to the glory of God. An upright heart is a clean heart; cleanness is truth in the inward part. 2. God, who is good to all, is, in a special manner, good to his church and people, as he was to Israel of old. God was good to Israel in redeeming them out of Egypt, taking them into covenant with himself, giving them his laws and ordinances, and, in the various providences that related to them; he is, in like manner, good to all them that are of a clean heart, and, whatever happens, we must not think otherwise.

II. He comes, now, to relate the shock that was given to his faith, in God's distinguishing goodness to Israel, by a strong temptation to envy the prosperity of the wicked, and therefore to think that the Israel of God are no happier than other people, and that God is no kinder to them than to others. He speaks of it as a very near escape, that he had not been quite foiled and overthrown by this temptation, *v. 2.* "But, as for me, though I was so well satisfied in the goodness of God to Israel, yet my feet were almost gone, the tempter had almost tripped up my heels, my steps had well nigh slipped, I had like to have quitted

my religion, and given up all my expectations of benefit by it, for I was envious at the foolish." Note, 1. The faith even of strong believers may sometimes be sorely shaken, and ready to fail them. There are storms that will try the firmest anchors. 2. Those that shall never be quite undone, are sometimes very near it, and, in their own apprehension, as good as gone. Many a precious soul, that shall live for ever, had once a very narrow turn of its life; almost and well nigh ruined, but a step between it and fatal apostacy, and yet snatched as a brand out of the burning, which will for ever magnify the riches of divine grace in the nations of them that are saved.

Now let us take notice of the process of the psalmist's temptation, what he was tempted with, and tempted to do.

(1.) He observed that foolish wicked people have sometimes a very great share of outward prosperity. He saw, with grief, *the prosperity of the wicked, v. 3.* Wicked people are really foolish people, and act against reason and their true interest, and yet every stander-by sees their prosperity.

[1.] They seem to have the least share of the troubles and calamities of this life; (*v. 5.*) *They are not in the troubles of other men*, even of wise and good men, *neither are they plagued like other men*, but seem as if, by some special privilege, they were exempted from the common lot of sorrows. If they meet with some little trouble, it is nothing to what others endure, that are less sinners, and yet greater sufferers.

[2.] They seem to have the greatest share of the comforts of this life. They live at ease, and bathe themselves in pleasures, so that *their eyes stand out with fatness, v. 7.* See what the excess of pleasure is; the moderate use of it enlightens the eyes, but they that indulge themselves inordinately in the delights of sense have their eyes ready to start out of their heads. Epicures are really their own tormentors, by putting a force upon nature, while they pretend to gratify it. And well may they feed themselves to the full, who have more than heart could wish, more than they themselves ever thought of, or expected to be masters of. They have, at least, more than an humble, quiet, contented, heart could wish, yet not so much as they themselves wish for. There are many who have a great deal of this life in their hands, but nothing of the other life in their hearts. They are ungodly, live without the fear and worship of God, and yet they prosper and come on in the world, and not only are rich, but increase in riches, *v. 12.* They are looked upon as thriving men; while others have much ado to keep what they have, they are still adding more, more honour, power, pleasure, by increasing in riches; *They are the prosperous of the age*, so some read it.

[3.] Their end seems to be peace; this is mentioned first, on account of its being so strange; for it was never thought to be the peculiar privilege of the godly; (*37. 37.*) yet, to outward appearance, it is often the lot of the ungodly; (*v. 4.*) *There are no bands in their death.* They are not taken off by a violent death; they are foolish, and yet die not as fools die; for *their hands are not bound, nor their feet put in fetters*, 2 Sam. 3. 33, 34. They are not taken off by an untimely death, like the fruit forced from the tree before it is ripe, but are left to hang on, till, through old age, they gently drop off themselves. They do not die of sore and painful diseases, there are no pangs, no agonies, in their death, but their strength is firm to the last, so that they scarcely feel themselves die. They are of those who *die in their full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet*; not of those that *die in the bitterness of their souls, and never eat with pleasure*, Job, 21. 23, 25. Nay, they are not bound by the terrors of conscience in their dying moments, they are not frightened either with remembrance of their sins, or the prospect of their misery; but die securely. We cannot judge of men's state on the other side death, either by the manner of their death, or the frame of their spirits in dying. Men may die like lambs, and yet have their place with the goats.

(2.) He observed that they made a very bad use of their outward prosperity, and were hardened by it in their wickedness, which very much strengthened the temptation he was in to fret at it. If it had done them any good, if it had made them less pro-

roking to God, or less oppressive to man, it would never have vexed him; but it had quite a contrary effect upon them.

[1.] It made them very proud and haughty, because they live at ease; *Pride compasses them as a chain*, v. 6. They shew themselves (to all that see them) to be puffed up with their prosperity, as men shew their ornaments; *The pride of Israel testifies to his face*, Hos. 5. 5. Isa. 3. 9. *Pride ties on their chain*, or necklace; so Dr. Hammond reads it. It is no harm to wear a chain or necklace; but when pride ties it on, when it is worn to gratify a vain mind, it ceases to be an ornament. It is not so much what the dress or apparel is, (though we have rules for that, 1 Tim. 2. 9.) as what principle ties it on, and with what spirit it is worn. And as the pride of sinners appears in their dress, so it does in their talk; *They speak loftily*; (v. 8.) they affect *great swelling words of vanity*, (2 Pet. 2. 18.) bragging of themselves, and disdaining all about them. Out of the abundance of the pride that is in their heart they speak big.

[2.] It made them oppressive to their poor neighbours; (v. 6.) *Violence covers them as a garment*. What they have got by fraud and oppression, they keep and increase by the same wicked methods, and care not what injury they do to others, nor what violence they use, so they may but enrich and aggrandize themselves. *They are corrupt*, like the giants, the sinners of the old world, when *the earth was filled with violence*, Gen. 6. 11, 13. They care not what mischief they do, either for mischief-sake, or for their own advantage-sake. *They speak wickedly concerning oppression*, they oppress and justify themselves in it; they that speak well of sin, speak wickedly of it. *They are corrupt*, that is, dissolved in pleasures, and every thing that is luxurious; (so some;) and then they deride and speak maliciously, they care not whom they wound with the poisoned darts of calumny, from on high they speak oppression.

[3.] It made them very insolent in their carriage, toward both God and man; (v. 9.) *They set their mouth against the heavens*; putting contempt upon God himself and his honour, bidding defiance to him, and his power and justice; they cannot reach the heavens with their hands, to shake God's throne, else they would; but they shew their ill-will by setting their mouth against the heavens. Their tongue also walks through the earth, and they take liberty to abuse all that come in their way. No man's greatness or goodness can secure him from the scourge of the virulent tongue; they take a pride and pleasure in bantering all mankind; they are pests of the country, for they neither fear God nor regard man.

[4.] In all this, they were very atheistical and profane. They could not have been thus wicked, if they had not learned to say, (v. 11.) *How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?* So far were they from desiring the knowledge of God, who gave them all the good things they had, and would have taught them to use them well, that they were not willing to believe God had any knowledge of them, that he took any notice of their wickedness, or would ever call them to an account. As if because he is *Most High*, he could not, or would not, see them, Job, 22. 12, 13. Whereas because he is *Most High*, therefore he can, and will, take cognizance of all the children of men, and of all they do, or say, or think. What an affront is it to the God of infinite knowledge, from whom all knowledge is, to ask, *Is there knowledge in him?* Well may he say, (v. 12.) *Behold, these are the ungodly*.

(3.) He observed, that, while wicked men thus prospered in their impiety, and were made more impious by their prosperity, good people were in great affliction, and he himself in particular, which very much strengthened the temptation he was in to quarrel with Providence.

[1.] He looked abroad, and saw many of God's people greatly at a loss; (v. 10.) "Because the wicked are so very daring, therefore his people return hither; they are at the same pause, the same plunge, that I am at; they know not what to say to it, any more than I do, and the rather, because waters of a full cup are wrung out to them; they are not only made to drink, and to drink deep, of the bitter cup of affliction, but to drink all; care is taken that

they lose not a drop of that unpleasant potion, the waters are wrung out unto them, that they may have the dregs of the cup. They pour out abundance of tears when they hear wicked people blaspheme God, and speak profanely," as David did, 119. 136. These are the waters wrung out to them.

[2.] He looked at home, and felt himself under the continual frowns of Providence, while the wicked were sunning themselves in its smiles; (v. 14.) "For my part," says he, "*All the day long have I been plagued with one affliction or another, and chastened every morning*, as duly as the morning comes." His afflictions were great, he was chastened and plagued; the returns of them were constant, *every morning* with the morning, and they continued, without intermission, *all the day long*. This he thought was very hard, that, when those who blasphemed God were in prosperity, he, that worshipped God, was under such great affliction. He spake feelingly when he spake of his own troubles; there is no disputing against sense, except by faith.

(4.) From all this arose a very strong temptation to cast off his religion. [1.] Some, that observed the prosperity of the wicked, especially comparing it with the afflictions of the righteous, were tempted to deny a Providence, and to think that God had forsaken the earth. In this sense some take v. 11. There are those, even among God's professing people, that say, "How does God know? Surely all things are left to blind fortune, and not disposed of by an all-seeing God." Some of the heathen, upon such a remark as this, have asked, *Quis putet esse Deos?—Who will believe that there are Gods?* [2.] Though the psalmist's feet were not so far gone as to question God's omniscience, yet he was tempted to question the benefit of religion, and to say, (v. 13.) *Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain*, and have, to no purpose, *washed my hands in innocency*. See here what it is to be religious; it is to cleanse our hearts, in the first place, by repentance and regeneration, and then to wash our hands in innocency, by an universal reformation of our lives. It is not in vain to do this; not in vain to serve God and keep his ordinances; but good men have been sometimes tempted to say, "It is in vain," and "Religion is a thing that there is nothing to be got by," because they see wicked people in prosperity. But however the thing may appear now, when the pure in heart, those blessed ones, shall see God, (Matth. 5. 8.) they will not say that they have cleansed their hearts in vain.

15. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend *against* the generation of thy children. 16. When I thought to know this, it *was* too painful for me; 17. Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *then* understood I their end. 18. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. 19. How are they *brought* into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. 20. As a dream when *one* awaketh; so, O LORD, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

We have seen what a strong temptation the psalmist was in to envy prospering profaneness; now here we are told how he kept his footing, and got the victory.

1. He kept up a respect for God's people, and with that he restrained himself from speaking what he had thought amiss, v. 15. He got the victory by degrees, and this was the first point he gained; he was ready to say, *Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain*, and thought he had reason to say it; but he kept his mouth with this consideration, "*If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should* myself revolt and apostatize from, and so give the greatest offence imaginable to, *the generation of thy children*." Observe here, 1. Though he thought amiss, he took care not to utter that evil thought which he had conceived. Note, It is bad to think ill, but it is worse to speak it, for that is giving the evil thought an *Imprimatur*—A public sanction; it is allowing it, giving consent to it, and publishing it for the infection of others. But it is a good

sign that we repent of the evil imagination of the heart, if we suppress it, and the error remains with ourselves. If, therefore, thou hast been so foolish as to think evil, be so wise as to *lay thy hand upon thy mouth*, and let it go no further, Prov. 30. 32. *If I say, I will speak thus.* Observe, Though his corrupt heart made this inference from the prosperity of the wicked, yet he did not mention it to those about him, till he had debated within himself, whether it were fit to be mentioned or no. Note, We must think twice before we speak once; both because some things may be thought, which yet may not be spoken, and because the second thoughts may correct the mistakes of the first. 2. The reason why he would not speak it, was, for fear of giving offence to those whom God owned for his children. Note, (1.) There are a people in the world, that are the generation of God's children, a set of men that hear and love God as their Father. (2.) We must be very careful not to say or do any thing which may justly offend *any of these little ones*, (Matth. 18. 6.) especially which may offend *the generation of them*, may sadden their hearts, or weaken their hands, or shake their interest. (3.) There is nothing that can give more general offence to the generation of God's children, than to say that *we have cleansed our heart in vain*, or that it is in vain to serve God; for there is nothing more contrary to their universal sentiment and experience, nor any thing that grieves them more, than to hear God thus reflected on. (4.) Those that wish themselves in the condition of the wicked, do, in effect, quit the tents of God's children.

II. He foresaw the ruin of wicked people; by this he baffled the temptation, as by the former he gave some check to it. Because he durst not speak what he had thought, for fear of giving offence, he began to consider whether he had any good reason for that thought; (v. 16.) "I endeavoured to understand the meaning of this unaccountable dispensation of Providence; but *it was too painful for me*, I could not conquer it by the strength of my own reasoning;" it is a problem, not to be solved by the mere light of nature, for, if there were not another life after this, we could not fully reconcile the prosperity of the wicked with the justice of God; but, (v. 17.) *he went into the sanctuary of God*; he applied himself to his devotions, meditated upon the attributes of God, and the *things revealed which belong to us and to our children*; he consulted the scriptures, and the lips of the priests who attended the sanctuary; he prayed to God to make this matter plain to him, and to help him over this difficulty; and, at length, he understood the wretched end of wicked people, which he plainly foresaw to be such, that, even in the height of their prosperity, they were rather to be pitied than envied, for they were but ripening for ruin. Note, 1. There are many great things, and things needful to be known, which will not be known otherwise than by going into the sanctuary of God, by the word and prayer. The sanctuary therefore must be the resort of a tempted soul. 2. We must judge of persons and things as they appear by the light of divine revelation, and then we shall judge righteous judgment; particularly we must judge by the end; all is well that ends well, everlastingly well; but nothing well that ends ill, everlastingly ill. The righteous man's afflictions end in peace, and therefore he is happy; the wicked man's enjoyments end in destruction, and therefore he is miserable.

(1.) The prosperity of the wicked is short and uncertain; the high places in which Providence sets them, are *slippery places*, (v. 18.) where they cannot long keep footing; but when they offer to climb higher, that very attempt will be the occasion of their sliding and falling. Their prosperity has no firm ground, it is not built upon God's favour or his promise; and they have not the satisfaction of feeling that it rests on firm ground.

(2.) Their destruction is sure, and sudden, and very great. This cannot be meant of any temporal destruction; for they were supposed to *spend all their days in wealth*, and their death itself had no bands in it; *In a moment they go down to the grave*, so that even that could scarcely be called *their destruction*; it must therefore be meant of eternal destruction on the other side death; hell and destruction. They flourish for a time, but are undone for ever. [1.] Their ruin is sure and inevitable; he speaks of it as a

thing done; *They are cast down*; for their destruction is as certain as if it were already accomplished. He speaks of it as God's doing, and therefore it cannot be resisted; *Thou castest them down*, It is *destruction from the Almighty*, (Joel, 1. 15.) from *the glory of his power*, 2 Thess. 1. 9. Who can support those whom God will cast down, on whom God will lay burthens? [2.] It is swift and sudden; Their damnation slumbers not; for *how are they brought into desolation as in a moment!* v. 19. It is easily effected, and will be a surprise to themselves and all about them. [3.] It is severe and very dreadful. It is a total, final, ruin; *They are utterly consumed with terrors*. It is the misery of the damned, that the terrors of the Almighty, whom they have made their Enemy, fasten upon their guilty consciences, which can neither shelter them from them, nor strengthen them under them; and therefore not their being, but their bliss, must needs be utterly consumed by them; not the least degree of comfort or hope remains to them; the higher they were lifted up in their prosperity, the sorer will their fall be when they are cast down into *destructions*, (for the word is plural,) and suddenly *brought into desolation*.

(3.) Their prosperity is therefore not to be envied at all, but despised rather; *quod erat demonstrandum—which was the point to be established*; v. 20. *As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest*, or when they awake, (as some read it,) *thou shalt despise their image*, their shadow, and *make it to vanish*. In the *day of the great judgment*, (so the Chaldee paraphrase reads it,) when they are awaked out of their graves, thou shalt, in wrath, despise their image; for *they shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt*.

See here, [1.] What their prosperity now is; it is but an image, a vain shew, a fashion of the world that passes away; it is not real, but imaginary, and it is only a corrupt imagination that makes it a happiness; it is not substance, but a mere shadow; it is not what it seems to be, nor will it prove what we promise ourselves from it; it is as a dream, which may please us a little, while we are asleep, yet, even then, it disturbs our repose; but, how pleasing soever it is, it is all but a cheat, all false; when we awake, we find it so. A hungry man *dreams that he eats, but he wakes, and his soul is empty*, Isa. 29. 8. A man is never the more rich or honourable for dreaming he is so. Who therefore will envy a man the pleasure of a dream? [2.] What will be the issue of it; God will awake to judgment, to plead his own and his people's injured cause; they shall be made to awake out of the sleep of their carnal security, and then God shall despise their image; he shall make it appear to all the world how despicable it is; so that the righteous shall laugh at them, 52. 6, 7. How did God despise that rich man's image, when he said, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!* Luke, 12. 19, 20. We ought to be of God's mind, for his judgment is according to truth, and not to admire and envy that which he despises, and will despise; for, sooner or later, he will bring all the world to be of one mind.

21. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. 22. So foolish *was I*, and ignorant: I was *as a beast* before thee. 23. Nevertheless I *am* continually with thee: thou hast holden *me* by my right hand. 24. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. 25. Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* and *there is none* upon earth that I desire beside thee. 26. My flesh and my heart faileth: *but God is the strength of my heart*, and my portion for ever. 27. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a-whoring from thee. 28. But *it is good for me to draw near to God*: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.

Behold Samson's riddle again unriddled, *Out of the eater came*

forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness; for we have here an account of the good improvement which the psalmist made of that sore temptation with which he had been assaulted, and by which he was almost overcome. He that stumbles and does not fall, by recovering himself takes so much the longer steps forward. It was so with the psalmist here; divers good lessons he learned from his temptation, his struggles with it, and his victories over it. Nor would God suffer his people to be tempted, if his grace were not sufficient for them, not only to save them from harm, but to make them gainers by it; even this shall work for good.

I. He learned to think very humbly of himself, and to abase and accuse himself before God; (v. 21, 22.) he reflects with shame upon the disorder and danger he was in, and the vexation he gave himself, by entertaining the temptation, and parleying with it; *My heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins*, as one afflicted with the acute pain of the stone in the region of the kidneys. If evil thoughts at any time enter into the mind of a good man, he does not roll them under his tongue as a sweet morsel, but they are grievous and painful to him; temptation was to Paul as a thorn in the flesh, 2 Cor. 12. 7. This particular temptation, the working of envy and discontent, is as painful as any other; where it constantly rests, it is the *rotteness of the bones*, (Prov. 14. 30.) where it does but occasionally come, it is the pricking of the reins. Fretfulness is a corruption that is its own correction.

Now, in the reflection upon it, 1. He owns it was his folly thus to vex himself; "So foolish was I to be my own tormentor." Let peevish people thus reproach themselves for, and shame themselves out of, their discontents; "What a fool am I thus to make myself uneasy without a cause!" 2. He owns it was his ignorance to vex himself at this; "So ignorant was I of that which I might have known, and which, if I had known it aright, would have been sufficient to have silenced my murmurs. *I was as a beast*, Behemoth, a great beast, *before thee*. Beasts mind present things only, and never look before at what is to come; and so did I. If I had not been a great fool, I should never have suffered such a senseless temptation to have prevailed over me so far. What! to envy wicked men upon account of their prosperity? To be ready to wish myself one of them, and to think of changing conditions with them? *So foolish was I*." Note, If good men do, at any time, through the surprise and strength of temptation, think, or speak, or act, amiss, when they see their error, they will reflect upon it with sorrow, and shame, and self-abhorrence; will call themselves *fools* for it; *Surely I am more brutish than any man*, Prov. 30. 2. Job, 42. 5, 6. Thus David, 2 Sam. 24. 10.

II. He took occasion hence to own his dependence on, and obligations to, the grace of God; (v. 23.) "Nevertheless, foolish as I am, *I am continually with thee*, and in thy favour, *thou hast holden me by my right hand*." This may refer, either, 1. To the care God had taken of him, and the kindness he had shewed him, all along from his beginning hitherto. He had said, in the hour of temptation, (v. 14.) *All the day long have I been plagued*; but here he corrects himself for that passionate complaint, "Though God has chastened me, he has not cast me off; notwithstanding all the crosses of my life, *I have been continually with thee*, I have had thy presence with me, and thou hast been nigh unto me in all that which I have called upon thee for; and therefore, though perplexed, yet not in despair. Though God has sometimes written bitter things against me, yet he has still *holden me by my right hand*, both to keep me, that I should not desert him, or fly off from him, and to prevent my sinking and fainting under my burthens, or losing my way in the wilderness through which I have walked." If we have been kept in the way with God, kept close to our duty, and upheld in our integrity, we must own ourselves indebted to the free grace of God for our preservation; *Having obtained help of God, I continue hitherto*. And if he has thus maintained the spiritual life, the earnest of eternal life, we ought not to complain, whatever calamities of this present time we have met with. Or, 2. To the late experience he had had of the power of divine grace in carrying him through this strong temptation, and bringing him off a conqueror; "I was foolish and ignorant, and yet thou hast had compassion on me, and taught me, (Job. 5. 2.) and kept me

under thy protection;" for the unworthiness of man is no bar to the free grace of God. We must ascribe our safety in temptation, and our victory over it, not to our own wisdom, for we are foolish and ignorant, but to the gracious presence of God with us, and the prevalence of Christ's intercession for us, that our faith may not fail; "*My feet were almost gone*, and they had quite gone past recovery, but that thou hast holden me by my right hand, and so kept me from falling."

III. He encouraged himself to hope that the same God who had delivered him from this evil work, would *preserve him to his heavenly kingdom*, as St. Paul does; (2 Tim. 4. 18.) "I am now upheld by thee, therefore *thou shalt guide me with thy counsel*; leading me, as thou hast done hitherto, many a difficult step; and, since I am now continually with thee, *thou shalt afterward receive me to glory*," v. 24. This completes the happiness of the saints, so that they have no reason to envy the worldly prosperity of sinners. Note, 1. All those who commit themselves to God, shall be guided with his counsel, with the counsel both of his Word and of his Spirit, the best Counsellors. The psalmist had like to have paid dear for following his own counsels in this temptation, and therefore resolves, for the future, to take God's advice, which shall never be wanting to those that duly seek it, with a resolution to follow it. 2. All those who are guided and led by the counsel of God in this world, shall be received to his glory in another world. If we make God's glory in us the end we aim at, he will make our glory with him the end we shall for ever be happy in. Upon this consideration, let us never envy sinners, but rather bless ourselves in our own blessedness. If God direct us in the way of our duty, and prevent our turning aside out of it, he will afterward, when our state of trial and preparation is over, receive us to his kingdom and glory; the believing hopes and prospects of which will reconcile us to all the dark providences that now puzzle and perplex us, and ease us of the pain we have been put into by some threatening temptations.

IV. He was hereby quickened to cleave the closer to God, and very much confirmed and comforted in the choice he had made of him; (v. 25, 26.) his thoughts here dwell with delight upon his own happiness in God, as much greater than the happiness of the ungodly that prospered in the world. He saw little reason to envy them what they had in the creature, when he found how much more and better, surer and sweeter, comforts he had in the Creator, and what cause he had to congratulate himself on this account. He had complained of his afflictions; (v. 14.) but this makes them very light and easy, *All is well, if God be mine*. We have here the breathings of a sanctified soul toward God, and its repose in him, as that to a godly man really, which the prosperity of a worldly man is to him in conceit and imagination; *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* There is scarcely a verse, in all the psalms, more expressive than this of the pious and devout affections of a soul to God; here it soars up toward him, follows hard after him, and yet, at the same time, has an entire satisfaction and complacency in him.

1. It is here supposed that God alone is the Felicity and Chief Good of man. He, and he only, that made the soul, can make it happy; there is none in heaven, none in earth, that can pretend to do it besides.

2. Here are expressed the workings and breathings of a soul toward God accordingly. If God be our Felicity,

(1.) Then we must have him; (*Whom have I but thee?*) we must choose him, and make sure to ourselves an interest in him. What will it avail us that he is the Felicity of souls, if he be not the Felicity of our souls, and if we do not by a lively faith make him our's, by joining ourselves to him in an everlasting covenant?

(2.) Then our desire must be toward him, and our delight in him; the word signifies both; we must delight in what we have of God, and desire what we yet further hope for. Our desires must not only be offered up to God, but they must all terminate in him; desiring nothing more than God, but still more and more of him; this includes all our prayers, *Lord, give us thyself*; as that includes all the promises, *I will be to them a God*. *The desire of our souls is to thy name*.

(3.) We must prefer him in our choice and desire before any

other. [1.] "*There is none in heaven but thee, none to seek to, or trust in, none to court or covet acquaintance with, but thee.*" God is in himself more glorious than any celestial being, (89. 6.) and must be, in our eyes, infinitely more desirable. Excellent beings there are in heaven, but God only can make us happy. His favour is infinitely more to us than the refreshment of the dews of heaven, or the benign influence of the stars of heaven; more than the friendship of the saints in heaven, or the good offices of the angels there. [2.] *I desire none on earth beside thee; not only none in heaven, a place at a distance, which we have but little acquaintance with, but none on earth neither, where we have many friends, and where much of our present interest and concern lie.* "Earth carries away the desires of most men, and yet I have none on earth, no persons, no things, no possessions, no delights, that I desire beside thee, or with thee, in comparison or competition with thee." We must desire nothing beside God, but what we desire for him; (*Nil præter te, nisi propter te—Nothing beside thee, except for thy sake;*) nothing but what we desire from him, and can be content without, so that it be made up in him. We must desire nothing beside God, as needful to be a partner with him in making us happy.

(4.) Then we must repose ourselves in God with an entire satisfaction, v. 26. Observe here, [1.] Great distress and trouble supposed; *My flesh and my heart fail.* Note, Others have experienced, and we must expect, the failing both of flesh and heart. The body will fail by sickness, age, and death; and that which touches the bone and the flesh, touches us in a tender part, that part of ourselves which we have been but too fond of; when the flesh fails, the heart is ready to fail too; the conduct, courage, and comfort fail. [2.] Sovereign relief provided in this distress; *But God is the Strength of my heart, and my Portion for ever.* Note, Gracious souls, in their greatest distresses, rest upon God as their spiritual Strength, and their eternal Portion. First, "*He is the Strength of my heart:* the Rock of my heart, a firm Foundation, which will bear my weight, and not sink under it. *God the Strength of my heart;* I have found him so, I do so still, and hope ever to find him so." In the distress supposed, he had put the case of a double failure, both *flesh and heart fail*; but in the relief, he fastens on a single support, he leaves out the flesh and the consideration of that, it is enough that God is the *Strength of his heart.* He speaks as one careless of the body, (Let that fail, there is no remedy,) but as one concerned about the soul, to be *strengthened in the inner man.* Secondly, "*He is my Portion for ever;* he will not only support me while I am here, but make me happy when I go hence." The saints choose God for their Portion, they have him for their Portion, and it is their happiness that he will be their Portion; a Portion that will last as long as the immortal soul lasts.

V. He was fully convinced of the miserable estate of all wicked people. This he learned in the sanctuary, upon this occasion, and he would never forget it; (v. 27.) "*Lo, they that are far from thee,* in a state of distance and estrangement, that desire the Almighty to depart from them, shall certainly perish; so shall their doom be; they choose to be far from God, and they shall be far from him for ever; thou shalt justly destroy all them that go a whoring from thee, all apostates, that in profession have been betrothed to God, but forsake him, their duty to him, and their communion with him, to embrace the bosom of a stranger." The doom is severe, no less than perishing, and being destroyed. It is universal; "They shall all be destroyed without exception." It is certain; "Thou hast destroyed:" it is as sure to be done as if done already; and the destruction of some ungodly men is an earnest of the perdition of all. God himself undertakes to do it, into whose hands it is a fearful thing to fall; "Thou, though infinite in goodness, wilt reckon for thine injured honour and abused patience, and wilt destroy them that go a whoring from thee."

VI. He was greatly encouraged to cleave to God, and to confide in him, v. 28. *If they that are far from God shall perish,* then, 1. Let this constrain us to live in communion with God; if it fare so ill with those that live at a distance from him, then it is good, very good, the chief good, that good for a man, in this life,

which he should most carefully pursue and secure. "It is best for me to draw near to God, and to have God draw near to me:" the original may take in both. *But for my part,* (so I would read it,) *the approach of God is good for me.* Our drawing near to God takes rise from his drawing near to us, and it is the happy meeting that makes the bliss. Here is a great truth laid down, That it is good to draw near to God; but the life of it lies in the application, "*It is good for me.*" Those are the wise, who know what is good for themselves; "*It is good,* says he, (and every good man agrees with him in it,) *it is good for me to draw near to God;* it is my duty, it is my interest." 2. Let us therefore live in a continual dependence upon him; "*I have put my trust in the Lord God,* and will never go a whoring from him after any creature-confidences." If wicked men, notwithstanding all their prosperity, shall perish and be destroyed, then let us trust in the Lord God, in him, not in them, (see 146. 3. .5.) in him, and not in our worldly prosperity; let us trust in God, and neither fret at them nor be afraid of them; let us trust in him for a better portion than their's is. 3. While we do so, let us not doubt but that we shall have occasion to praise his name. Let us trust in the Lord, that we may declare all his works. Note, Those that with an upright heart put their trust in God, shall never want matter for thanksgiving to him.

PSALM LXXIV.

This psalm does so particularly describe the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, by Nebuchadnezzar and the army of the Chaldeans, and can so ill be applied to any other event we meet with in the Jewish history, that interpreters incline to think, either, it was penned by David, or Asaph in David's time, with a prophetic reference to that sad event; which yet is not so probable; or, that it was penned by another Asaph, who lived at the time of the captivity, or by Jeremiah, (for it is of a piece with his Lamentations,) or some other prophet, and, after the return out of captivity, was delivered to the sons of Asaph, who were called by his name, for the public service of the church. That was the most eminent family of the singers in Ezra's time. See Ezra, 2. 41.—3. 10. Neh. 11. 17, 22.—12. 35, 46. The deplorable case of the people of God, at that time, is here spread before the Lord, and left with him. The prophet, in the name of the church, I. Puts in complaining pleas of the miseries they suffered, for the quickning of their desires in prayer, v. 1. .11. II. He puts in comfortable pleas for the encouraging of their faith in prayer, v. 12. .17. III. He concludes with divers petitions to God for deliverances, v. 18. .23. In singing it, we must be affected with the former desolations of the church, for we are members of the same body, and may apply it to any present distresses or desolations of any part of the Christian church.

Maschil of Asaph.

1. **O** GOD, why hast thou cast us off for ever? *Why* doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? 2. Remember thy congregation, *which* thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, *which* thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt. 3. Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; *even* all *that* the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. 4. Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs. 5. *A man* was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. 6. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. 7. They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled *by casting down* the dwelling-place of thy name to the ground. 8. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land. 9. We see not our signs: *there is* no more any prophet; *neither is there* among us any that knoweth how long. 10. O God, how long

shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? 11. Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom.

This psalm is entitled *Maschil*, a psalm to give instruction, for it was penned in a day of affliction, which is intended for instruction; and this instruction, in general, it gives us, That, when we are, upon any account, in distress, it is our wisdom and duty to apply ourselves to God by faithful and fervent prayer, and we shall not find it in vain to do so.

Three things they here complain of.

I. The displeasure of God against them, as that which was the cause and bitterness of all their calamities. They look above the instruments of their trouble, who, they knew, could have no power against them, unless it were given them from above, and keep their eye upon God, by whose determined counsel they were delivered up into the hands of wicked and unreasonable men. Observe the liberty they take to expostulate with God; (v.1.) we hope, not too great a liberty, for Christ himself, upon the cross, cried out, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* So the church here, *O God, why hast thou forsaken us for ever?* Here they speak according to their present dark and melancholy apprehensions; for otherwise, *Has God cast away his people? God forbid*, Rom. 11.1. The people of God must not think that because they are cast down, they are therefore cast off; that because men cast them off, therefore God does; and that because he seems to cast them off for a time, therefore they are really cast off for ever: yet this expostulation intimates, that they dreaded God's casting them off more than any thing, that they desired to be owned of him, whatever they suffered from men, and were desirous to know wherefore he thus contended with them; *Why doth thine anger smoke?* Why does it rise up to such a degree, that all about us take notice of it, and ask, *What means the heat of this great anger?* Dent. 29.24. Compare v.20. where the anger of the Lord and his jealousy are said to *smoke* against sinners.

Observe what they plead with God, now that they lay under the tokens and apprehensions of his wrath.

1. They plead their relation to him; "We are the sheep of thy pasture, the sheep wherewith thou hast been pleased to stock thy pasture, thy peculiar people, whom thou art pleased to set apart for thyself, and design for thine own glory. That the wolves worry the sheep is not strange; but was ever any shepherd thus displeased at his own sheep? Remember, we are thy congregation, (v.2.) incorporated by thee and for thee, and devoted to thy praise; we are the rod, or tribe, of thine inheritance, whom thou hast been pleased to claim a special property in, above other people, (Dent. 32.9.) and from whom thou hast received the rents and issues of praise and worship, more than from the neighbouring nations. Nay, a man's inheritance may lie at a great distance, but we are pleading for mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt, which has been the place of thy peculiar delight and residence, thy demesne and mansion."

2. They plead the great things God had done for them, and the vast expense he had been at upon them; "It is thy congregation, which thou hast not only made with a word's speaking, but purchased of old by many miracles of mercy, when they were first formed into a people; it is thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed when they were sold into servitude;" God gave Egypt to ruin for their ransom, gave men for them, and people for their life, Isa. 43.3, 4. "Now, Lord, wilt thou now abandon a people that cost thee so dear, and has been so dear to thee?" And if the redemption of Israel out of Egypt was an encouragement to hope that he would not cast them off, much more reason have we to hope that God will not cast off any whom Christ has redeemed with his own blood; but the people of his purchase shall be for ever the people of his praise.

3. They plead the calamitous state that they were in; (v.3.) "Lift up thy feet; come with speed to repair the desolations that are made in thy sanctuary, which otherwise will be perpetual and

irreparable." It has been sometimes said, that the divine vengeance strikes with iron hands, yet it comes with leaden feet; and then those who wait for the day of the Lord, cry, *Lord, lift up thy feet. Exalt thy steps*; magnify thyself in the outgoing of thy providence. When the desolations of the sanctuary have continued long, we are tempted to think they will be perpetual; but it is a temptation; for God will avenge his own elect, will avenge them speedily, though he bear long with their oppressors and persecutors.

II. They complain of the outrage and cruelty of their enemies; not so much, no not at all, of what they had done to the prejudice of their secular interests; here are no complaints of the burning of their cities and ravaging of their country, but only what they had done against the sanctuary and the synagogue. The concerns of religion should lie nearer our hearts, and affect us more, than any worldly concern whatsoever. The desolation of God's house should grieve us more than the desolation of our own houses; for the matter is not great what becomes of us and our families in this world, provided God's name may be sanctified, his kingdom may come, and his will be done.

1. He complains of the desolations of the *sanctuary*, as Daniel, ch.9.17. The temple at Jerusalem was the dwelling-place of God's name, and therefore the *sanctuary*, or *holy place*, v.7. In this, the enemies did wickedly, (v.3.) for they destroyed it in downright contempt of God and affront to him. (1.) They *roared in the midst of God's congregations*; there where God's faithful people attend on him with an humble, reverent, silence, or softly speaking, they roared in a riotous, revelling, manner, being elated with having made themselves masters of that sanctuary, of which they had sometimes heard formidable things. (2.) They *set up their ensigns for signs*; the banners of their army they set up in the temple, (Israel's strongest castle, as long as they kept close to God,) as trophies of their victory. There where the signs of God's presence used to be, now the enemy had set up their ensigns. This daring defiance of God and his power touched his people in a tender part. (3.) They took a pride in destroying the *carved work* of the temple. As much as, formerly, men thought it an honour to lend an hand to the building of the temple, and he was thought famous that helped to fell timber for that work, so much, now, they valued themselves upon their agency in destroying it, v.5,6. Thus, as formerly those were celebrated for wise men that did service to religion, so now they are cried up for wits that help to run it down. Some read it thus, *They shew themselves, as one that lifts up axes on high in a thicket of trees*, for so do they break down the carved work of the temple; they make no more scruple of breaking down the rich wainscot of the temple, than wood-cutters do of hewing trees in the forest; such indignation have they at the sanctuary, that the most curious carving that ever was seen is beaten down by the common soldiers, without any regard had to it, either as a dedicated thing, or as a piece of exquisite art. (4.) They set fire to it, and so violated or destroyed it to the ground, v.7. The Chaldeans burnt the house of God, that stately, costly, fabric, 2Chron.36.19. And the Romans left not there one stone upon another, (Matth. 24.2.) razing it, razing it even to the foundations, till Zion, the holy mountain, was, by Titus Vespasian, ploughed as a field.

2. He complains of the desolations of the *synagogues*, or schools of the prophets, which, before the captivity, were in use, though much more after. There God's word was read and expounded, and his name praised and called upon, without altars or sacrifices. These also they had a spite to; (v.8.) *Let us destroy them together*; not only the temple, but all the places of religious worship, and the worshippers with them; *let us destroy them together*, let them be consumed in the same flame. Pursuant to this impious resolve, they burnt up all the *synagogues of God in the land*, and laid them all waste. So great was their rage against religion, that the religious houses, because religious, were all levelled with the ground, that God's worshippers might not glorify God, and edify one another, by meeting in solemn assemblies.

III. The great aggravation of all these calamities, was, that they had no prospect at all of relief, nor could they foresee an end

of them; (v.9.) "We see our enemy's sign set up in the sanctuary, but we see not our signs, none of the tokens of God's presence, no hopeful indications of approaching deliverance; *there is no more any prophet* to tell us how long the trouble will last, and when things concerning us shall have an end; that the hope of an issue, at last, may support us under our troubles." In the captivity in Babylon, they had prophets, and had been told how long the captivity should continue, but the day was cloudy and dark, (Ezek. 34.12.) and they had not as yet the comfort of these gracious discoveries; God spake once, yea, twice, good words and comfortable words, but they perceived them not. Observe, They do not complain, "We see not our armies, there are no men of war to command our forces, nor any to go forth with our hosts;" but, "no prophets, none to tell us how long."

This puts them upon expostulating with God, as delaying, 1. To assert his honour, (v.10.) *How long shall the adversary reproach, and blaspheme thy name?* In the desolations of the sanctuary, our chief concern should be for the glory of God, that that may not be injured by the blasphemies of those who persecute his people for his sake, because they are his; and therefore our inquiry should be, not "How long shall we be troubled," but "How long shall God be blasphemed?" 2. To exert his power; (v.11.) *Why withdrawest thou thy hand, and dost not stretch it out, to deliver thy people, and destroy thine enemies? Pluck it out of thy bosom, and be not as a man astonished, as a man that cannot save, or will not,*" Jer.14.9. When the power of enemies is most threatening, it is comfortable to fly to the power of God.

12. For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. 13. Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. 14. Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness. 15. Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers. 16. The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. 17. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter.

The lamenting church fastens upon something here, which she calls to mind, and *therefore hath she hope*, (as Lam.3.21.) with which she encourages herself, and silences her own complaints.

Two things quiet the minds of those that are here sorrowing for the solemn assembly.

I. That God is the God of Israel, a God in covenant with his people; (v.12.) *God is my King of old.* This comes in both as a plea in prayer to God, (44.4. *Thou art my King, O God,*) and as a prop to their own faith and hope, to encourage themselves to expect deliverance, considering the *days of old*, 77.5. The church speaks as a complex body, the same in every age, and therefore calls God, "My King, my King of old," or, "from antiquity;" he of old put himself into that relation to them, and appeared and acted for them in that relation; as Israel's King, he wrought salvation in the midst of the nations of the earth; for what he did, in the government of the world, tended toward the salvation of his church.

Several things are here mentioned, which God had done for his people, as their King of old, which encouraged them to commit themselves to him, and depend upon him. 1. He had divided the sea before them, when they came out of Egypt, not by the strength of Moses or his rod, but by his own strength; and he that could do that could do any thing. 2. He had destroyed Pharaoh and the Egyptians; Pharaoh was the leviathan, the Egyptians were the dragons, fierce and cruel. Observe, (1.) The victory obtained over these enemies; God brake their

heads, baffled their politics; as when Israel, the more they were afflicted by them, multiplied the more; God crushed their powers, though complicated, ruined their country by ten plagues, and, at last, drowned them all in the Red sea; *This is Pharaoh and all his multitude*, Ezek. 31.18. It was the Lord's doing, none besides could do it, and he did it with a strong hand and outstretched arm. This was typical of Christ's victory over Satan and his kingdom, pursuant to the first promise, that the Seed of the woman should break the serpent's head. (2.) The improvement of this victory for the encouragement of the church; *Thou gavest him to be meat to the people of Israel, now going to inhabit the wilderness.* The spoil of the Egyptians enriched them; they stripped their slain, and so got the Egyptians' arms and weapons, as before they had got their jewels. Or rather, this providence was meat to their faith and hope, to support and encourage them in reference to the other difficulties they were likely to meet with in the wilderness. It was part of the spiritual meat which they were all made to eat of. Note, The breaking of the heads of the church's enemies, is the joy and strength of the hearts of the church's friends. Thus the companions make a banquet even of leviathan, Job, 41.6. (3.) God had both ways altered the course of nature, both in fetching streams out of the rock, and turning streams into rock, v.15. [1.] He had dissolved the rock into waters; *Thou didst bring out the fountain and the flood*; (so some read it;) and every one knows whence it was brought, out of the rock, out of the flinty rock. Let this never be forgotten, but let it especially be remembered, that the Rock was Christ, and the waters out of it spiritual drink. [2.] He had congealed the waters into rock; *Thou driedst up mighty, rapid, rivers*, Jordan particularly, at the time when it overflowed all its banks. He that did these things could now deliver his oppressed people, and break the yoke of the oppressors, as he had done formerly; nay, he would do it, for his justice and goodness, his wisdom and truth, are still the same, as well as his power.

II. That the God of Israel is the God of nature, v.16,17. It is he that orders the regular successions and revolutions, 1. Of day and night; he is the Lord of all time; the evening and the morning are of his ordaining; it is he that opens the eyelids of the morning light, and draws the curtains of the evening shadow. *He has prepared the moon and the sun*; (so some read it;) the two great lights, to rule by day and night alternately. The preparing of them denotes their constant readiness, and exact observance of their time, which they never miss a moment. 2. Of summer and winter; "Thou hast appointed all the bounds of the earth, and the different climates of its several regions, for thou hast made summer and winter, the frigid and the torrid zones; or rather, the constant revolutions of the year, and its several seasons." Herein we are to acknowledge God, from whom all the laws and powers of nature are derived; but how does this come in here? (1.) He that had power at first to settle, and still to preserve, this course of nature, by the diurnal and annual motions of the heavenly bodies, has certainly all power both to save and to destroy, and with him nothing is impossible, nor any difficulties or oppositions insuperable. (2.) He that is faithful to his covenant with the day and with the night, and preserves the ordinances of heaven inviolable, will certainly make good his promise to his people, and never cast off those whom he has chosen, Jer.31.35,36.—33.20,21. His covenant with Abraham and his seed is as firm as that with Noah and his sons, Gen.8.21. (3.) Day and night, summer and winter, being counterchanged in the course of nature, throughout all the borders of the earth, we can expect no other than that trouble and peace, prosperity and adversity, should be, in like manner, counterchanged in all the borders of the church. We have as much reason to expect affliction as to expect night and winter. But we have then no more reason to despair of the return of comfort, than we have to despair of day and summer.

18. Remember this, *that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name* 19. O deliver not the

soul of thy turtle-dove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever. 20. Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. 21. O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name. 22. Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. 23. Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.

The psalmist here, in the name of the church, most earnestly begs that God would appear for them against their enemies, and put an end to their present troubles; to encourage his own faith, he interests God in this matter; (v.22.) *Arise, O God, plead thine own cause.* This we may be sure he will do, for he is jealous for his own honour; whatever is his own cause, he will plead it with a strong hand, will appear against those that oppose it, and with and for those that cordially espouse it. He will arise and plead it, though for a time he seems to neglect it; he will stir up himself, will manifest himself, will do his own work in his own time. Note, The cause of religion is God's own cause, and he will certainly plead it.

Now, to make it out that the cause is God's, he pleads,

I. That the persecutors are God's sworn enemies; "Lord, they have not only abused us, but they have been, and are, abusive to thee; what is done against us, for thy sake, does, by consequence, reflect upon thee. But that is not all, they have directly and immediately reproached thee, and blasphemed thy name," v.18. This was that which they roared in the sanctuary; they triumphed as if they had now got the mastery of the God of Israel, of whom they had heard such great things. As nothing grieves the saints more, than to hear God's name blasphemed, so nothing encourages them more to hope that God will appear against their enemies, than when they are arrived at such a pitch of wickedness as to reproach God himself; this fills the measure of their sins apace, and hastens their ruin. The psalmist insists much upon this; "We dare not answer their reproaches, Lord, do thou answer them. Remember that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name, (v.18.) and that still the foolish man reproaches thee daily." Observe the character of those that reproach God; they are foolish. As atheism is folly, (14.1.) profaneness and blasphemy are no less so. Perhaps they are riled up for the wits of the age, that ridicule religion and sacred things; but really they are the greatest fools, and will shortly be made to appear so before all the world. And yet see their malice; They reproach God daily, as constantly as his faithful worshippers pray to him and praise him; see their impudence; They do not hide their blasphemous thoughts in their own bosoms, but proclaim them with a loud voice; (*Forget not the voice of thine enemies, v.23.*) and this, with a daring defiance of divine justice; They rise up against thee, and by their blasphemies even wage war with heaven, and take up arms against the Almighty. Their noise and tumult ascend continually, (so some,) as the cry of Sodom came up before God, calling for vengeance, Gen. 18.21. *It increases continually;* (so we read it;) they grow worse and worse, and are hardened in their impieties by their successes. Now, Lord, *remember this, do not forget it.* God needs not to be put in remembrance by us of what he has to do, but thus we must shew our concern for his honour, and believe that he will vindicate us.

II. That the persecuted are his covenant-people.

1. See what distress they are in; they are fallen into the hands of the multitude of the wicked, v.19. *How are they increased that trouble them!* There is no standing before an enraged multitude, especially like these, armed with power; and as they are numerous, so they are barbarous; *The dark places of the earth are full of*

the habitations of cruelty. The land of the Chaldeans, where there ~~was~~ none of the light of the knowledge of the true God, (though otherwise it was famed for learning and arts,) was indeed a dark place; the inhabitants of it were alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them, and therefore they were cruel; where there was no true divinity, there was scarcely to be found common humanity; they were especially cruel to the people of God; certainly they have no knowledge, who *eat them up*, 14.4. They are oppressed, (v.21.) because they are poor and unable to right themselves; they are oppressed, and so made poor.

2. See what reason they had to hope that God would appear for their relief, and not suffer them to be always thus trampled upon. Observe how the psalmist pleads with God for them; (1.) "It is *thy turtle-dove* that is ready to be swallowed up by the multitude of the wicked," v.19. The church is a dove, for harmlessness and mildness, innocency and inoffensiveness, purity and fruitfulness; a dove, for mournfulness in a day of distress; a turtle-dove for fidelity, and the constancy of love: turtle-doves and pigeons were the only fowls that were offered in sacrifice to God. "Shall thy turtle-dove, that is true to thee, and devoted to thine honour, be delivered, its life and soul and all, into the hand of the multitude of the wicked, to whom it will soon become an easy and acceptable prey? Lord, it will be thine honour to help the weak, especially to help thine own." (2.) "It is *the congregation of thy poor*, and they are not the less thine for their being poor; (for God has *chosen the poor of this world*, Jam. 2.5.) but they have the more reason to expect thou wilt appear for them, because they are *many*, it is *the congregation of thy poor*: let them not be abandoned and forgotten for ever." (3.) "They are in covenant with thee; and wilt thou not *have respect unto the covenant?* v.20. Wilt thou not perform the promises thou hast, in thy covenant, made to them? Wilt thou not own them whom thou hast brought into the bond of the covenant?" When God delivers his people, it is *in remembrance of his covenant*, Lev. 26.42. "Lord, though we are unworthy to be respected, yet have respect to the covenant." (4.) "They trust in thee, and boast of their relation to thee, and expectations from thee; Oh let not them return ashamed of their hope, (v.21.) as they will be, if they be disappointed." (5.) "If thou deliver them, they will praise thy name, and give thee the glory of their deliverance. Appear, Lord, for those that will praise thy name, against those that blaspheme it."

PSALM LXXV.

Though this psalm is attributed to Asaph, in the title, yet it does so exactly agree with David's circumstances, at his coming to the crown after the death of Saul, that most interpreters apply it to that juncture, and suppose that either Asaph penned it, in the person of David, as his poet-laureat; (probably, the substance of the psalm was some speech which David made to a convention of the states, at his accession to the government, and Asaph turned it into verse, and published it in a poem, for the better spreading of it among the people;) or that David penned it, and delivered it to Asaph as precursor of the temple. In this psalm, I. David returns God thanks for bringing him to the throne, v.1,9. II. He promises to lay out himself for the public good, in the use of the power God had given him, v.2,3,10. III. He checks the insolence of those that opposed his coming to the throne, v.4,5. IV. He fetches a reason for all this from God's sovereign dominion in the affairs of the children of men, v.6,8. In singing this psalm, we must give to God the glory of all the revolutions of states and kingdoms, believing that they are all according to his counsel, and that he will make them all to work for the good of his church.

To the chief musician, Al-taschith. A psalm or song of Asaph.

1. **U**NTO thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks: for *that* thy name is near thy wondrous works declare
2. When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly. 3. The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it. Selah. 4. I said unto the fools, Deal not

foolishly; and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn: 5. Lift not up your horn on high: speak *not with a stiff neck*.

In these verses,

I. The psalmist gives to God the praise of his advancement to honour and power, and the other great things he had done for him and for his people Israel; (v.1.) *Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks*, for all the favours thou hast bestowed upon us; and again, *unto thee do we give thanks*; for our thanksgivings must be often repeated. Did not we often pray for mercy, when we were in pursuit of it; and shall we think it will suffice once or twice to give thanks, when we have obtained it? Not only *I* do give thanks, but *we* do; *I* and all my friends. If we share with others in their mercies, we must join with them in their praises; "Unto thee, O God, the Author of our mercies; and we will not give that glory to the instruments which is due to thee only. For that thy name is near, that the complete accomplishment of thy promise made to David is not far off, thy wondrous works, which thou hast already done for him, declare." Note, 1. There are many works which God does for his people, that may truly be called *wondrous works*, out of the common course of providence, and quite beyond our expectation. 2. These wondrous works declare the nearness of his name; they shew that he himself is at hand, nigh to us in what we call upon him for, and that he is about to do some great things for his people, in pursuance of his purpose and promise. 3. When God's wondrous works declare the nearness of his name, it is our duty to give him thanks, again and again to give him thanks.

II. He lays himself under an obligation to use his power well, pursuant to the great trust reposed in him; (v.2.) *When I shall receive the congregation, I will judge uprightly*. Here he takes it for granted, that God would, in due time, perfect that which concerned him, that though the congregation was very slow in gathering to him, and great opposition was made to it, yet, at length, he should receive it; for what God has spoken in his holiness, he will perform by his wisdom and power. Being thus in expectation of the mercy, he promises to make conscience of his duty; "When I am a judge, I will judge, and judge uprightly; not as those that went before me, who either neglected judgment, or, which was worse, perverted it; either did no good with their power, or did hurt." Note, 1. Those that are advanced to posts of honour, must remember they are posts of service, and must set themselves with diligence and application of mind to do the work to which they are called. He does not say, "When I shall receive the congregation, I will take my ease, and take state upon me, and leave the public business to others;" but, "I will mind it myself." 2. Public trusts are to be managed with great integrity; they that judge, must judge uprightly, according to the rules of justice, without respect of persons.

III. He promises himself that his government would be a public blessing to Israel, v.3. The present state of the kingdom was very bad; *The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved*; and no marvel, when the former reign was so dissolute, that all went to wrack and ruin. There was a general corruption of manners, for want of putting the laws in execution against vice and profaneness. They were divided one from another, for want of centering, as they ought to do, in the government God had appointed. They were all to-pieces, two against three, and three against two, crumbled into factions and parties, which was likely to issue in their ruin; but *I bear up the pillars of it*. Even in Saul's time, David did what he could for the public welfare; but he hoped, that, when he had himself received the congregation, he should do much more, and should not only prevent the public ruin, but recover the public strength and beauty. Now, 1. See the mischief of parties; they melt and dissolve a land and the inhabitants of it. 2. See how much one head frequently holds up. The fabric had sunk, if David had not held up the pillars of it. This may well be applied to Christ and his government. The *world and all the inhabitants of it* were dissolved by sin, man's

apostasy threatening the destruction of the whole creation; but Christ bore up the pillars of it, he saved the whole world from utter ruin, by saving his people from their sins, and into his hand the administration of the kingdom of Providence is committed, for *he upholds all things by the word of his power*, Heb. 1. 3.

IV. He checks those that opposed his government, that were against his accession to it, and obstructed the administration of it, striving to keep up that vice and profaneness which he had made it his business to suppress; (v.4,5.) *I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly*. He had said so to them in Saul's time, when he had not power to restrain them, yet he had wisdom and grace to reprove them, and to give them good counsel; though they bore themselves high, upon the favour of that unhappy prince, he cautioned them not to be too presumptuous. Or rather, he does now say so to them. As soon as he came to the crown, he issued out a proclamation against vice and profaneness, and here we have the contents of it. 1. To the simple sneaking sinners, the fools in Israel, that corrupted themselves, to them he said, "*Deal not foolishly*"; do not act so directly contrary both to your reason and to your interest as you do, while you walk contrary to the laws God has given Israel, and the promises he has made to David." Christ, the Son of David, gives us this counsel, issues out this edict, *Deal not foolishly*. He who is made of God to us Wisdom, bids us be wise for ourselves, and not make fools of ourselves. 2. To the proud daring sinners, the wicked, that set God himself at defiance, he says, "*Lift not up the horn*"; boast not of your power and prerogatives, persist not in your contumacy and contempt of the government set over you; *lift not up your horn on high*, as though you could have what you will, and do what you will; *speak not with a stiff neck*, in which is an iron sinew, that will never bend to the will of God in the government; for they that will not bend, shall break; they whose necks are stiffened, are so to their own destruction." This is Christ's word of command in his gospel, that *every mountain will be brought low before him*, Isa. 40. 4. Let not the antichristian power, with its heads and horns, lift up itself against him, for it shall certainly be broken to pieces; what is said with a stiff neck, must be unsaid again with a broken heart, or we are undone. Pharaoh said with a stiff neck, *Who is the Lord?* But God made him know, to his cost.

6. For promotion *cometh* neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. 7. But God *is* the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another. 8. For in the hand of the LORD *there is* a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring *them out, and drink them*. 9. But I will declare for ever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. 10. All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off; *but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted*.

In these verses, we have two great doctrines laid down, and two good inferences drawn from them, for the confirmation of what he had before said.

I. Here are two great truths laid down concerning God's government of the world, which we ought to mix faith with, both pertinent to the occasion.

1. That from God alone kings receive their power, (v.6,7.) and therefore to God alone David would give the praise of his advancement; having his power from God, he would use it for him, and therefore they were fools that lifted up the horn against him. We see strange revolutions in states and kingdoms, and are surprised at the sudden disgrace of some, and elevation of others; we are all full of such changes, when they happen; but here we are directed to look at the Author of them, and are here taught where the original of power is, and whence promotion

comes. Whence comes preferment in kingdoms, to the sovereignty of them? And whence come preferments in kingdoms, to places of power and trust in them? The former depends not upon the will of the people, nor the latter on the will of the prince, but both on the will of God, who has all hearts in his hands; to him therefore those must look who are in pursuit of preferment, and then they begin right. We are here told, (1.) Negatively; which way we are not to look for the fountain of power; *Promotion comes neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the desert*, that is, neither from the desert on the north of Jerusalem, nor from that on the south; so that the fair gale of preferment is not to be expected to blow from any point of the compass, but only from above, directly thence. Men cannot gain promotion either by the wisdom or wealth of the children of the east, or by the numerous forces of the isles of the Gentiles, that lay westward, or those of Egypt or Arabia, that lay south; no concurring smiles of second causes will raise men to preferment without the First Cause. The learned Bishop Lloyd (*Serm. in loc.*) gives this gloss upon it; All men took the original of power to be from heaven, but from whom there, many knew not; the eastern nations, who were generally given to astrology, took it to come from their stars, especially the sun, their god; No, says David, it comes neither from the east, nor from the west, neither from the rising, nor from the setting, of such a planet, or such a constellation, nor from the south, nor from the exaltation of the sun, or any star in the mid-heaven. He mentions not the north, because none supposed it to come thence; or, because the same word that signifies the north, signifies the secret place; and from the secret of God's counsel it does come; or from the oracle in Zion, which lay on the north side of Jerusalem. Note, No wind is so good as to blow promotion, but as He directs, who has the winds in his fists. (2.) Positively; *God is the Judge*, the Governor or Umpire; when parties contend for the prize, he *puts down one, and sets up another*, as he sees fit, so as to serve his own purposes, and bring to pass his own counsels. Herein he acts by prerogative, and is not accountable to us for any of these matters; nor is it any damage, danger, or disgrace, that He, who is infinitely wise, holy, and good, has an arbitrary and despotic power to set up, and put down, whom, and when, and how, he pleases. This is a good reason why magistrates should rule for God, as those that must give account to him, because it is by him that kings reign.

2. That from God alone all must receive their doom; (v. 8.) *In the hand of the Lord there is a cup*, which he puts into the hands of the children of men, a cup of providence, mixed up (as he thinks fit) of many ingredients; a cup of affliction; the sufferings of Christ are called a cup, Matth. 20. 22. John, 18. 11. The judgments of God upon sinners are the cup of the Lord's right hand, Hab. 2. 16. *The wine is red*, denoting the wrath of God, which is infused into the judgments executed on sinners, and is the wormwood and the gall in the affliction and the misery. It is red as fire, red as blood, for it burns, it kills. It is full of mixture, prepared in wisdom, so as to answer the end: there are mixtures of mercy and grace in the cup of affliction, when it is put into the hands of God's own people; mixtures of the curse, when it is put into the hands of the wicked; it is wine mingled with gall. These vials, (1.) Are poured out upon all; see Rev. 15. 7.—16. 1. where we read of the angels pouring out the vials of God's wrath upon the earth. Some drops of this wrath may light on good people; when God's judgments are abroad, they have their share in common calamities; but, (2.) The dregs of the cup are reserved for the wicked. The calamity itself is but the vehicle into which the wrath and curse is infused, the top of which has little of the infusion; but the sediment is pure wrath, and that shall fall to the share of sinners; they have the dregs of the cup now, in the terrors of conscience, and hereafter, in the torments of hell. They shall wring them out, that not a drop of the wrath may be left behind, and they shall drink them, for the curse shall enter into their bowels like water, and like oil into their bones. The cup of the Lord's indignation will be to them a cup of trembling, everlasting trembling, Rev. 14. 10. The wicked man's cup, while he prospers in the world, is full of mixture, but

the worst is at the bottom. The wicked are reserved unto the day of judgment.

II. Here are two good practical inferences drawn from these great truths, and they are the same purposes of duty that he began the psalm with. This being so, 1. He will praise God, and give him glory, for the power to which he had advanced him; (v. 9.) *I will declare for ever that which thy wondrous works declare*, v. 1. He will praise God for his elevation, not only at first, while the mercy was fresh, but for ever, so long as he lives; the exaltation of the Son of David will be the subject of the saints' everlasting praises. He will give glory to God, not only as his God, but as the God of Jacob; knowing it was for Jacob his servant's sake, and because he loved his people Israel, that he made him king over them. 2. He will use the power with which he is intrusted, for the great ends for which it was put into his hands, (v. 10.) as before, v. 2, 4. According to the duty of the higher powers, (1.) He resolves to be a terror to evil-doers, to humble their pride, and break their power; "Though not all the heads, yet *all the horns of the wicked will I cut off*, with which they push their poor neighbours; I will disable them to do mischief." Thus God promises to raise up carpenters which should *fray the horns of the Gentiles that had scattered Judah and Israel*, Zech. 1. 18..21. (2.) He resolves to be a Protection and Praise to them that do well; *The horns of the righteous shall be exalted*; they shall be preferred and put into places of power; and they that are good, and have hearts to do good, shall not want ability and opportunity for it. This agrees with David's resolutions, 101. 3, &c. Herein David was a type of Christ, who with the breath of his mouth shall slay the wicked, but shall *exalt with honour the horn of the righteous*, 112. 9.

PSALM LXXVI.

This psalm seems to have been penned upon occasion of some great victory obtained by the church over some threatening enemy or other, and designed to grace the triumph. The LXX call it, A song upon the Assyrians; whence many good interpreters conjecture, that it was penned when Sennacherib's army, then besieging Jerusalem, was entirely cut off by a destroying angel in Hezekiah's time; and several passages in the psalm are very applicable to that work of wonder; but there was a religious triumph upon occasion of another victory, in Jehoshaphat's time, which might as well be the subject of this psalm; (2 Chron. 20. 28.) and it might be called a song of Asaph, because always sung by the sons of Asaph. Or it might be penned by Asaph, who lived in David's time, upon occasion of the many triumphs with which God delighted to honour that reign. Upon occasion of this glorious victory, whatever it was, I. The psalmist congratulates the happiness of the church, in having God so nigh, v. 1. 3. II. He celebrates the glory of God's power, which this was an illustrious instance of, v. 4. 6. III. He infers hence, what reason all have to fear before him, v. 7. 9. And, IV. What reason his people have to trust in him, and to pay their vows to him, v. 10. 12. It is a psalm proper for a thanksgiving-day, upon the account of public successes, and not improper at other times, because it is never out of season to glorify God for the great things he has done for his church formerly, especially for the victories of the Redeemer over the powers of darkness, which all those Old-Testament victories were types of, at least, those that are celebrated in the psalms.

To the chief musician on Neginoth. A psalm or song of Asaph.

1. **I**N Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. 2. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion. 3. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah. 4. Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. 5. The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands. 6. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep.

The church is here triumphant, even in the midst of its militant state. The psalmist, in the church's name, triumphs here in God, the Centre of all our triumphs.

I. In the revelation God had made of himself to them, v. 1. It is the honour and privilege of Judah and Israel, that among them God is known, and where he is known his name will be great. God is known as he is pleased to make himself known; and they are happy to whom he discovers himself. Happy people that have their land filled with the knowledge of God; happy persons that have their hearts filled with that knowledge! In Judah God was known, so as he was not known in other nations, which made the favour the greater, inasmuch as it was distinguishing, 147. 19, 20.

II. In the tokens of God's special presence with them in his ordinances, v. 2. In the whole land of Judah and Israel God was known, and his name was great; but in Salem, in Zion, were his tabernacle and his dwelling-place; there he kept court, there he received the homage of his people by their sacrifices, and entertained them by the feasts upon the sacrifices; thither they came, to address themselves to him, and thence by his oracles he issued out his orders; there he recorded his name; and of that place he said, *Here will I dwell, for I have desired it.* It is the glory and happiness of a people to have God among them by his ordinances; but his dwelling-place is a tabernacle, a moveable dwelling; yet a little while is that light with us.

III. In the victories they had obtained over their enemies; (v. 3.) *There brake he the arrows of the bow.* Observe how threatening the danger was; though Judah and Israel, Salem and Zion, were thus privileged, yet war is raised against them, and the weapons of war are furnished. Here are bow and arrows, shield and sword, and all for battle; but all are broken and rendered useless. And it was done there, 1. In Judah and Israel, in favour of that people near to God. While the weapons of war were used against other nations, they answered their end, but, when turned against that holy nation, they were immediately broken. The Chaldee paraphrases it thus, When the house of Israel did his will, he placed his majesty among them, and there he brake the arrows of the bow; while they kept close to his service, they were great and safe, and every thing went well with them. Or, 2. In the tabernacle and dwelling-place in Zion, there he brake the arrows of the bow; it was done in the field of battle, and yet it is said to be done in the sanctuary, because done in answer to the prayers which God's people there made to him, and in performance of the promises which he there made to them; of both which, see that instance, 2 Chron. 20. 5, 14. Public successes are owing as much to what is done in the church, as to what is done in the camp.

Now this victory redounded very much,

(1.) To the immortal honour of Israel's God; (v. 4.) *Thou art, and hast manifested thyself to be, more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.* [1.] "Than the great and mighty ones of the earth in general, who are high, and think themselves firmly fixed like mountains, but are really mountains of prey, oppressive to all about them. It is their glory to destroy; it is thine to deliver." [2.] "Than our invaders in particular: when they besieged the cities of Judah, they cast up mounts against them, and raised batteries; but thou art more able to protect us, than they are to annoy us." Wherein the enemies of the church deal proudly, it will appear that God is above them.

(2.) To the perpetual disgrace of the enemies of Israel, v. 5, 6. They were *stout-hearted*, men of great courage and resolution, flushed with their former victories, enraged against Israel, confident of success; they were *men of might*, robust, and fit for service; they had chariots and horses, which were then greatly valued and trusted to in war, 20. 7. But all this force was of no avail when it was levelled against Jerusalem. [1.] The stout-hearted have despoiled and disarmed themselves; (so some read it;) when God pleases, he can make his enemies to weaken and destroy themselves. They have slept, not the sleep of the righteous, who sleep in Jesus, but their sleep, the sleep of sinners, that shall wake to everlasting shame and contempt. [2.] The men of might can no more find their hands, than the stout-hearted can their spirit. As the bold men are cowed, so the strong men are lamed, and cannot so much as find their hands, to save their

own heads, much less to hurt their enemies. [3.] The chariots and horses may be truly said to be *cast into a dead sleep*, when their drivers and their riders were so. God did but speak the word, as the God of Jacob, that commands deliverances for Jacob, and, at his rebuke, the chariot and horse were both cast into a dead sleep; when the men were laid dead upon the spot by the destroying angel, the chariot and horse were not at all formidable. See the power and efficacy of God's rebukes. With what pleasure may we Christians apply all this to the advantages we enjoy by the Redeemer! It is through him that God is known; it is in him that God's name is great; to him it is owing that God has a tabernacle and a dwelling-place in his church. He it was that vanquished the strong man armed, spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly.

7. Thou, *even thou, art* to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry? 8. Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still, 9. When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth. Selah. 10. Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. 11. Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared. 12. He shall cut off the spirit of princes: *he is* terrible to the kings of the earth.

This glorious victory, with which God had graced and blessed his church, is here made to speak three things.

I. Terror to God's enemies; (v. 7..9.) "*Thou, even thou, art to be feared*; thy majesty is to be revered, thy sovereignty to be submitted to, and thy justice to be dreaded by those that have offended thee." Let all the world learn by this event to stand in awe of the great God. 1. Let all be afraid of his wrath against the daring impiety of sinners; *Who may stand in thy sight, from the minute that thou art angry?* If God be a consuming Fire, how can chaff and stubble stand before him, though his anger be kindled but a little, 2. 12. 2. Let all be afraid of his jealousy for oppressed innocency, and the injured cause of his own people; "*Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven, then when thou didst arise to save all the meek of the earth*"; (v. 8, 9.) and *then the earth feared, and was still*, waiting what would be the issue of those glorious appearances of thine." Note, (1.) God's people are the *meek of the earth*, (Zeph. 2. 3.) the *quiet in the land*, (35. 20.) that can bear any wrong, but do none. (2.) Though the meek of the earth are by their meekness exposed to injury, yet God will, sooner or later, appear for their salvation, and plead their cause. (3.) When God comes to save *all the meek of the earth*, he will *cause judgment to be heard from heaven*; he will make the world know that he is angry at the oppressors of his people, and takes what is done against them, as done against himself. The righteous God long seems to keep silence, yet, sooner or later, he will make judgment to be heard. (4.) When God is speaking judgment from heaven, it is time for the earth to compose itself into an awful and reverent silence; *The earth feared, and was still*, as silence is made by proclamation, when the court sits. *Be still, and know that I am God*, 46. 10. *Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord, for he is raised up to judgment*, Zech. 2. 13. Those that suppose this psalm to have been penned upon the occasion of the routing of Sennacherib's army, take it for granted that the descent of the destroying angel, who did the execution, was accompanied with thunder, by which *God caused judgment to be heard from heaven*, and that the earth feared, that is, there was an earthquake, but it was soon over. But this is altogether uncertain.

II. Comfort to God's people, v. 10. We live in a very angry provoking world, we often feel much, and are apt to fear more,

from the wrath of man, which seems boundless. But this is a great comfort to us, 1. That, as far as God permits the wrath of man to break forth at any time, he will make it turn to his praise, will bring honour to himself, and serve his own purposes by it; *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, not only by the checks given to it, when it shall be forced to confess its own impotency, but even by the liberty given to it for a time.* The hardships which God's people suffer by the wrath of their enemies are made to redound to the glory of God and his grace; and the more the heathen rage and plot against the Lord and his Anointed, the more will God be praised for setting his King upon his holy hill of Zion, in spite of them, 2.1.6. When the heavenly hosts make this the matter of their thanksgiving-songs, that God has taken to him his great power, and has reigned, though the nations were angry, (Rev. 11. 17, 18.) then the wrath of man adds lustre to the praises of God. 2. That what will not turn to his praise, shall not be suffered to break out; *The remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.* Men must never permit sin, because they cannot check it when they will; but God can. He can set bounds to the wrath of man, as he does to the raging sea; *Hitherto it shall come, and no further; here shall its proud waves be stayed.* God restrained the remainder of Sennacherib's rage, for he put a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his jaws; (Isa. 37. 29.) and, though he permitted him to talk big, he restrained him from doing what he designed.

III. Duty to all, v. 11, 12. Let all submit themselves to this great God, and become his loyal subjects.

Observe, 1. The duty required of us all, all that are about him, that have any dependence upon him, or any occasion to approach to him; and who is there that has not? We are, therefore, every one of us commanded to do our homage to the King of kings; *Vow and pay;* take an oath of allegiance to him, and make conscience of keeping it. Vow to be his, and pay what you vow. Bind your souls with a bond to him, (for that is the nature of a vow,) and then live up to the obligations you have laid upon yourselves; *for better it is not to vow, than to vow and not to pay.* And, having taken him for our King, let us bring presents to him, as subjects to their Sovereign, 1 Sam. 10. 27. *Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land,* Isa. 16. 1. Not that God needs any present we can bring, or can be benefited by it; but thus we must give him honour, and own that we have our all from him. Our prayers and praises, and especially our hearts, are the presents we should bring to the Lord our God. 2. The reasons to enforce this duty; *Render to all their due, fear to whom fear is due;* and is it not due to God? Yes; (1.) He ought to be feared; *He is the Fear,* so the word is; his name is glorious and fearful; and he is the proper Object of our fear; with him is terrible majesty. The God of Abraham is called *the Fear of Isaac;* (Gen. 31. 42.) and we are commanded to *make him our Fear,* Isa. 8. 13. When we bring presents to him, we must have an eye to him as greatly to be feared; for he is terrible in his holy places. (2.) He will be feared, even by those who think it their sole prerogative to be feared; (v. 12.) *He shall cut off the spirit of princes;* he shall slip it off as easily as we slip off a flower from the stalk, or a bunch of grapes from the vine; so the word signifies. He can dispirit those that are most daring, and make them heartless; for he is, or will be, *terrible to the kings of the earth;* and, sooner or later, if they be not so wise as to submit themselves to him, he will force them to call in vain to *rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from his wrath,* Rev. 6. 16. Since there is no contending with God, it is as much our wisdom as it is our duty to submit to him.

PSALM LXXVII.

This psalm, according to the method of many other psalms, begins with sorrowful complaints, but ends with comfortable encouragements. The complaints seem to be of personal grievances, but the encouragements relate to the public concerns of the church, so that it is not certain whether it was penned upon a personal or a public account. If they were private troubles that he was groaning under, it teaches us, that what God has wrought for his church in general, may be improved for the comfort of particular believers; if it was some public calamity that he is here lamenting, his speaking of it so feelingly, as if it had been some particular trouble of his own, shews how much we should lay to heart the

interests of the church of God, and make them our's. One of the rabbins says, This psalm is spoken in the dialect of the captives; and therefore some think it was penned in the captivity in Babylon. 1. The psalmist complains here of the deep impressions which his troubles made upon his spirits, and the temptation he was in to despair of relief, v. 1. 10. 11. He encourages himself to hope that it would be well at last, by the remembrance of God's former appearances for the help of his people, of which he gives several instances, v. 11. 20. In singing this psalm, we must take shame to ourselves for all our sinful distrusts of God, and of his providence and promise, and give to him the glory of his power and goodness, by a thankful commemoration of what he has done for us formerly, and a cheerful dependence on him for the future.

To the chief musician, to Jeduthun. A psalm of Asaph.

1. **I** CRIED unto God with my voice, *even unto* God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me. 2. In the day of my trouble I sought the LORD: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. 3. I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. 4. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled, that I cannot speak. 5. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. 6. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search. 7. Will the LORD cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? 8. Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? 9. Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. 10. And I said, This is my infirmity: *but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.*

We have here the lively portraiture of a good man, under prevailing melancholy, fallen into, and sinking in, that horrible pit and that miry clay, but struggling to get out. Drooping saints, that are of a sorrowful spirit, may here in this glass see their own faces. The conflict which the psalmist had with his griefs and fears seems to have been over when he penned this record of it; for he says, (v. 1.) *I cried unto God, and he gave ear unto me;* which, while the struggle lasted, he had not the comfortable sense of, as he had afterward; but he inserts it in the beginning of his narrative, as an intimation that his trouble did not end in despair; for God heard him, and, at length, he knew that he heard him. Observe,

1. His melancholy prayers. Being afflicted, he prayed, (Jam. 5. 13.) and, being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; (v. 1.) *My voice was unto God, and I cried even with my voice unto God.* He was full of complaints, but he directed them to God, and turned them all into prayers, vocal prayers, very earnest and importunate. Thus he gave vent to his grief, and gained some ease; and thus he took the right way in order to relief; (v. 2.) *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord.* Note, Days of trouble must be days of prayer, days of inward trouble especially, when God seems to have withdrawn from us; we must seek him, and seek till we find him. In the day of his trouble, he did not seek for the diversion of business or recreation, to shake off his trouble that way, but he sought God, and his favour and grace. Those that are under trouble of mind must not think to drink it away, or laugh it away, but must pray it away. *My hand was stretched out in the night, and ceased not;* so Dr. Hammond reads the following words, as speaking the incessant importunity of his prayers. Compare 143. 5, 6.

II. His melancholy grief. Grief may then be called melancholy indeed, 1. When it admits of no intermission; such was his; *My sore, or wound, ran in the night, and bled inwardly, and it ceased not, no, not in the time appointed for rest and sleep.* 2. When it admits of no consolation; and that also was his case. *My soul*

refused to be comforted; he had no mind to hearken to those that would be his comforters. *As vinegar upon nitre, so is he that sings songs to a heavy heart*, Prov. 25. 20. Nor had he any mind to think of those things that would be his comforts; he put them far from him, as one that indulged himself in sorrow. Those that are in sorrow, upon any account, do not only prejudice themselves, but affront God, if they refuse to be comforted.

III. His melancholy musings. He pored so much upon the trouble, whatever it was, personal or public, that, 1. The methods that should have relieved him did but increase his grief, v. 3. (1.) One would have thought that the remembrance of God should have comforted him, but it did not; *I remembered God, and was troubled*, as poor Job; (ch. 23. 15.) *I am troubled at his presence; when I consider, I am afraid of him*. When he remembered God, his thoughts fastened only upon his justice, and wrath, and dreadful majesty; and thus God himself became a Terror to him. (2.) One would have thought that pouring out his soul before God should have given him ease, but it did not; he complained, and yet his spirit was overwhelmed, and sank under the load. 2. The means of his present relief were denied him, v. 4. He could not enjoy sleep, which, if it be quiet and refreshing, is a parenthesis to our griefs and cares; *"Thou holdest mine eyes waking with thy terrors, which make me full of tossings to and fro until the dawning of the day."* He could not speak, by reason of the disorder of his thoughts, the tumult of his spirits, and the confusion his mind was in; *he kept silence even from good*, while his heart was hot within him; he was ready to burst like a new bottle, (Job, 32. 19.) and yet so troubled, that he could not speak and refresh himself. Grief never preys so much upon the spirits as when it is thus smothered and pent up.

IV. His melancholy reflections; (v. 5, 6.) *"I have considered the days of old*, and compared them with the present days; and our former prosperity does but aggravate our present calamities; for we see not the wonders that our fathers told us of." Melancholy people are apt to pore altogether upon the days of old, and the years of ancient times, and to magnify them, for the justifying of their own uneasiness and discontent at the present posture of affairs. But say not thou that the former days were better than these, because it is more than thou knowest whether they were or no, Eccl. 7. 10. Neither let the remembrance of the comforts we have lost make us unthankful for those that are left or impatient under our crosses.

Particularly, he called to remembrance his song in the night, the comforts with which he had supported himself in his former sorrows, and entertained himself in his former solitude; these songs he remembered, and tried if he could not sing them over again; but he was out of tune for them, and the remembrance of them did but pour out his soul in him, 43. 4. See Job, 35. 10.

V. His melancholy fears and apprehensions; *"I communed with mine own heart*, v. 6. Come, my soul, what will be the issue of these things? what can I think of them? and what can I expect they will come to at last? I made diligent search into the causes of my trouble, inquiring wherefore God contended with me, and what would be the consequences of it. And thus I began to reason, *Will the Lord cast off for ever*, as he does for the present? He is not now favourable; and will he be favourable no more? His mercy is now gone; and is it clean gone for ever? His promise now fails; and does it fail for evermore? God is not now gracious; but has he forgotten to be gracious? His tender mercies have been withheld, perhaps in wisdom; but are they shut up, shut up in anger?" v. 7. 9. This is the language of a disconsolate deserted soul, walking in darkness, and having no light; a case not uncommon even with those that fear the Lord, and obey the voice of his servant, Isa. 50. 10. He may here be looked upon, 1. As groaning under a sore trouble; God hid his face from him, and withdrew the usual tokens of his favour. Note, Spiritual trouble is, of all others, most grievous to a gracious soul; nothing wounds and pierces it like the apprehensions of God's being angry, the suspending of his favour, and the superseding of his promise; this wounds the spirit; and who can bear that? 2. As grappling with a strong temptation. Note, God's own people, in a cloudy

and dark day, may be tempted to make desperate conclusions about their own spiritual state, and the condition of God's church and kingdom in the world, and, as to both, to give up all for gone. We may be tempted to think that God has abandoned us, and cast us off, that the covenant of grace fails us, and that the tender mercy of our God shall be for ever withheld from us. But we must not give way to such suggestions as these. If fear and melancholy ask such peevish questions, let faith answer them from the scripture; *Will the Lord cast off for ever?* God forbid, Rom. 11. 1. No, *The Lord will not cast off his people*, 94. 14. *Will he be favourable no more?* Yes, he will; *for though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion*, Lam. 3. 32. *Is his mercy clean gone for ever?* No; his mercy endures for ever; as it is from everlasting, it is to everlasting, 103. 17. *Doth his promise fail for evermore?* No; it is impossible for God to lie, Heb. 6. 18. *Hath God forgotten to be gracious?* No; he cannot deny himself, and his own name, which he hath proclaimed *gracious and merciful*, Exod. 34. 6. *Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* No; they are new every morning; (Lam. 3. 23.) and therefore, *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* Hos. 11. 8, 9.

Thus was he going on with his dark and dismal apprehensions, when, on a sudden, he first checked himself with that word, *Selah*; "Stop there, go no further, let us hear no more of these unbelieving surmises;" and he then chid himself; (v. 10.) *I said, This is mine infirmity*. He is soon aware that it is not well said, and therefore, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul?* *I said, "This is mine affliction;"* (so some understand it,) "this is the calamity that falls to my lot, and I must make the best of it; every one has his affliction, his trouble in the flesh; and this is mine, the cross I must take up." Or rather, "This is my sin, it is mine iniquity; the plague of my own heart." These doubts and fears proceed from the want and weakness of faith, and the corruption of a distempered mind. Note, (1.) We all know that concerning ourselves of which we must say, *"This is our infirmity*, a sin that most easily besets us." (2.) Dependancy of spirit, and distrust of God, under affliction, are too often the infirmities of good people, and, as such, are to be reflected upon by us with sorrow and shame, as by the psalmist here; *This is my infirmity*. When, at any time, it is working in us, we must thus suppress the rising of it, and not suffer the evil spirit to speak. We must argue down the insurrections of unbelief, as the psalmist here; *But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High*. He had been considering the years of ancient times, (v. 5.) the blessings formerly enjoyed, the remembrance of which did only add to his grief; but now he considered them as the years of the right hand of the Most High; that those blessings of ancient times came from the Ancient of days, from the power and sovereign disposal of his right hand, who is over all, God blessed for ever; and this satisfied him; for may not the Most High with his right hand make what changes he pleases?

11. I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. 12. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. 13. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God? 14. Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. 15. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. 16. The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. 17. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. 18. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. 19. Thy way is in the sea, and thy

path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. 20. Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

The psalmist here recovers himself out of the great distress and plague he was in, and silences his own fears of God's casting off his people, by the remembrance of the great things he had done for them formerly, which, though he had in vain tried to quiet himself with, (v. 5, 6.) yet he tried again, and, upon this second trial, found it not in vain. It is good to persevere in the proper means for the strengthening of faith, though they do not prove effectual at first; "*I will remember, surely I will*, what God has done for his people of old, till I can thence infer a happy issue of the present dark dispensations," v. 11, 12. Note, 1. The works of the Lord, for his people, have been wondrous works. 2. They are recorded for us, that they may be remembered by us. 3. That we may have benefit by the remembrance of them, we must meditate upon them, and dwell upon them in our thoughts, and must talk of them, that we may inform ourselves, and others, further concerning them. 4. The due remembrance of the works of God will be a powerful antidote against distrust of his promise and goodness; for he is God, and changes not. If he begin, he will finish his work, and bring forth the top-stone.

Two things, in general, satisfied him very much.

I. That *God's way is in the sanctuary*, v. 13. It is in holiness, so some. When we cannot solve the particular difficulties that may arise in our constructions of the Divine Providence, this we are sure of, in general, That God is holy in all his works, that they are all worthy of himself, and consonant to the eternal purity and rectitude of his nature. He has holy ends in all he does, and will be sanctified in every dispensation of his providence. His way is according to his promise, which he has spoken in his holiness, and made known in the sanctuary; what he has done is according to what he has said, and may be interpreted by it; and, from what he has said, we may easily gather that he will not cast off his people for ever. God's way is for the sanctuary, and for the benefit of it. All he does is intended for the good of his church.

II. That *God's way is in the sea*; though God is holy, just, and good, in all he does, yet we cannot give an account of the reasons of his proceedings, nor make any certain judgment of his designs; *His path is in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known*, v. 19. God's ways are like the deep waters, which cannot be fathomed; (36. 6.) like the way of a ship in the sea, which cannot be tracked; Prov. 30. 18, 19. God's proceedings are always to be acquiesced in, but cannot always be accounted for.

He specifies some particulars, for which he goes as far back as the infancy of the Jewish church, and from which he gathers, 1. That there is no God to be compared with the God of Israel; (v. 13.) *Who is so great a God as our God?* Let us first give to God the glory of the great things he has done for his people, and acknowledge him therein great above all comparison; and then we may take to ourselves the comfort of what he has done, and encourage ourselves with it. 2. That he is a God of almighty power; (v. 14.) "*Thou art the God that alone doest wonders*, above the power of any creature; thou hast, visibly, and beyond any contradiction, declared thy strength among the people." What God has done for his church, has been a standing declaration of his almighty power, for therein he has made bare his everlasting arm.

(1.) God brought Israel out of Egypt, v. 15. This was the beginning of mercy to them, and was yearly to be commemorated among them in the passover; "*Thou hast with thine arm, stretched out in so many miracles, redeemed thy people* out of the hand of the Egyptians." Though they were delivered by power, yet they are said to be redeemed, as if it had been done by price, because it was typical of the great redemption which was to be wrought out, in the fulness of time, both by price and power. Those that were redeemed are here called, not only *the sons of Jacob*, to whom the promise was made, but of *Joseph* also, who had a most firm and lively belief of the performance of it; for, when he was dying,

he made mention of the departing of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and gave commandment concerning his bones.

(2.) He divided the Red sea before them; (v. 16.) *The waters gave way*, and a lane was made through that crowd instantly, as if they had seen God himself at the head of the armies of Israel, and had retired for fear of him. Not only the surface of the waters, but *the depths, were troubled*, and opened to the right and to the left, in obedience to his word of command.

(3.) He destroyed the Egyptians; (v. 17.) *The clouds poured out water* upon them, while the pillar of fire, like an umbrella over the camp of Israel, sheltered it from the shower, in which, as in the deluge, the waters that were above the firmament concurred with those that were beneath the firmament to destroy the rebels. Then *the skies sent out a sound, thine arrows also went abroad*; which is explained, (v. 18.) *The voice of thy thunder was heard in the heaven*, that is, the sound which the skies sent forth; *The lightnings lightened the world*; those are the arrows which went abroad, by which the host of the Egyptians was discomfited with so much terror, that *the earth of the adjacent coast trembled and shook*. Thus God's way was in the sea, for the destruction of his enemies, as well as for the salvation of his people; and yet, when the waters returned to their place, *his footsteps were not known*; (v. 19.) there was no mark set upon the place, as there was afterward in Jordan, Josh. 4. 9. We do not read, in the story of Israel's passing through the Red sea, that there were thunders and lightnings, and an earthquake: yet there might be, and Josephus says there were, such displays of the divine terror upon that occasion. But it may refer to the thunders, lightnings, and earthquakes, that were at mount Sinai when the law was given.

(4.) He took his people Israel under his own guidance and protection; (v. 20.) *Thou leddest thy people like a flock*. They being weak and helpless, and apt to wander like a flock of sheep, and lying exposed to the beasts of prey, God went before them with all the care and tenderness of a Shepherd, that they might not fail. The pillar of cloud and fire led them, yet that is not here taken notice of, but the agency of Moses and Aaron, by whose hand God led them: they could not do it without God, but God did it with and by them. Moses was their governor, Aaron their high-priest; they were guides, overseers, and rulers, to Israel, and by them God led them. The right and happy administration of the two great ordinances of magistracy and ministry, is, though not so great a miracle, yet as great a mercy, to any people, as the pillar of cloud and fire was to Israel in the wilderness.

The psalm concludes abruptly, and does not apply those ancient instances of God's power to the present distresses of the church, as one might have expected. But, as soon as the good man began to meditate on these things, he found he had gained his point; his very entrance upon this matter *gave him light and joy*; (119. 130.) his fears suddenly and strangely vanished, so that he needed to go no further; *he went his way, and did eat, and his countenance was no more sad*.

PSALM LXXVIII.

This psalm is historical; it is a narrative of the great mercies God had bestowed upon Israel, the great sins wherewith they had provoked him, and the many tokens of his displeasure they had been under for their sins. The psalmist began, in the foregoing psalm, to relate God's wonders of old, for his own encouragement in a difficult time; there he brake off abruptly, but here resumes the subject, for the edification of the church, and enlarges much upon it; shewing not only how good God had been to them, which was an earnest of further finishing mercy, but how basely they had conducted themselves toward God, which justified him in correcting them as he did at this time, and forbade all complaints. Here is, I. The preface to this church-history, commanding the attention of the present age to it, and recommending it to the study of the generations to come, v. 1. .8. II. The history itself from Moses to David; it is put into a psalm or song, that it might be the better remembered, and transmitted to posterity, and that the singing of it might affect them with the things here related, more than they would be with a bare narrative of them. The general scope of this psalm we have, v. 9. .11. where notice is taken of the present rebukes they were under, (v. 9.) the sin which brought them under those

rebukes, (v. 10.) and the mercies of God to them formerly, which aggravated that sin, v. 11. As to the particulars, we are here told, 1. What wonderful works God had wrought for them in bringing them out of Egypt, (v. 12..16.) providing for them in the wilderness, (v. 23..29.) plaguing and ruining their enemies, (v. 43..53.) and, at length, putting them in possession of the land of promise, v. 54,55. 2. How ungrateful they were to God for his favours to them, and how many and great provocations they were guilty of. How they murmured against God, and distrusted him, (v. 17..20.) and did but counterfeit repentance and submission when he punished them, (v. 34..37.) thus grieving and tempting him, v. 40..42. How they affronted God with their idolatries, after they came to Canaan, v. 56..58. 3. How God had justly punished them for their sins, (v. 21,22.) in the wilderness, making their sin their punishment, (v. 29..33.) and now, of late, when the ark was taken by the Philistines, v. 59..64. 4. How graciously God had spared them, and returned in mercy to them, notwithstanding their provocations. He had forgiven them formerly, (v. 38,39.) and now, of late, had removed the judgments they had brought upon themselves, and brought them under a happy establishment, both in church and state, v. 65..72. As the general scope of this psalm may be of use to us, in the singing of it, to put us upon recollecting what God has done for us, and for his church formerly, and what we have done against him, so the particulars also may be of use to us, for warning against those sins of unbelief and ingratitude which Israel of old was notoriously guilty of, and the record of which was preserved for our learning. These things happened unto them for ensamples, 1 Cor. 10. 11. Heb. 4. 11.

Maschil of Asaph.

1. **G**IVE ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: 3. Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. 4. We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. 5. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: 6. That the generation to come might know *them*, even the children *which* should be born; *whos* should arise and declare *them* to their children: 7. That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: 8. And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation *that* set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.

These verses, which contain the preface to this history, shew that the psalm answers the title; it is indeed *Maschil*, a psalm to give instruction; if we receive not the instruction it gives, it is our own fault. Here,

1. The psalmist demands attention to what he wrote; (v. 1.) *Give ear, O my people, to my law.* Some make these the psalmist's words; David, as a king, or Asaph, in his name, as his secretary of state, or scribe to the sweet-singer of Israel, here calls upon the people, as his people committed to his charge, to give ear to his law. He calls his instructions his *law* or *edict*, such was their commanding force in themselves; every good truth, received in the light and love of it, will have the power of the law upon the conscience; yet that was not all, David was a king, and he would interpose his royal power for the edification of his people. If God, by his grace, make great men good men, they will be capable of doing more good than others, because their word will be a law to all about them, who must therefore give ear, and hearken; for to what purpose is divine revelation brought to our ears, if we will not incline our ears to it, both humble ourselves, and engage ourselves to hear it, and heed it? Or, the psalmist, being a prophet, speaks as God's mouth, and so calls them *his people*, and demands

subjection to what was said as to a law. Let him that has an ear thus hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, Rev. 2. 7.

II. Several reasons are given why we should diligently attend to that which is here related.

1. The things here discoursed of are weighty, and deserve consideration, strange, and need it; (v. 2.) *I will open my mouth in a parable*, in that which is sublime and uncommon, but very excellent, and well worthy your attention; *I will utter dark sayings*, which challenge your most serious regards as much as the enigmas with which the eastern princes and learned men used to try one another. These are called *dark sayings*, not because they are hard to be understood, but because they are greatly to be admired, and carefully to be looked into. This is said to be fulfilled in the parables which our Saviour put forth, (Matth. 13. 35.) which were (as this) representations of the state of the kingdom of God among men.

2. They are the monuments of antiquity; *dark sayings of old, which our fathers have told us*, v. 3. They are things of undoubted certainty, we have heard them and known them, and there is no room left to question the truth of them. The gospel of Luke is called a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us; (Luke, 1. 1.) so were the things here related. The honour we owe to our parents and ancestors obliges us to attend to that which our fathers have told us, and, as far as it appears to be true and good, to receive it with so much the more reverence and regard.

3. They are to be transmitted to posterity, and it lies as a charge upon us carefully to hand them down; (v. 4.) because our fathers told them us, *we will not hide them from their children.* Our children are called *their's*, for they were in care for their seed's seed, and looked upon them as *their's*; and, in teaching our children the knowledge of God, we repay to our parents some of that debt we owe to them for teaching us. Nay, if we have no children of our own, we must declare the things of God to *their* children, the children of others. Our care must be for posterity in general, and not only for our own posterity; and for the generation to come hereafter, the children that shall be born, as well as for the generation that is next rising up, and the children that are born. That which we are to transmit to our children, is, not only the knowledge of languages, arts, and sciences, liberty and property, but especially the praises of the Lord, and his strength appearing in the wonderful works he has done. Our great care must be to lodge our religion, that great deposit, pure and entire in the hands of those that succeed us.

There are two things, the full and clear knowledge of which we must preserve the entail of to our heirs.

(1.) The law of God; for this was given with a particular charge to teach it diligently to their children; (v. 5.) *He established a testimony* or covenant, and enacted a law, in Jacob and Israel, gave them precepts and promises, which he commanded them to make known to their children, Deut. 6. 7, 20. The church of God, as the historian says of the Roman commonwealth, was not to be *res unius ætatis*—a business of one age, but was to be kept up from one generation to another; and therefore, as God provided for a succession of ministers in the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron, so he appointed that parents should train up their children in the knowledge of his law; and when they were grown up, they must arise, and declare them to their children, (v. 6.) that, as one generation of God's servants and worshippers passes away, another generation may come, and the church, as the earth, may abide for ever; and thus God's name among men may be as the days of heaven.

(2.) The providences of God concerning them, both in mercy and in judgment. The former seem to be mentioned for the sake of this; since God gave order that his laws should be made known to posterity, it is requisite that with them his works also should be made known, the fulfilling of the promises made to the obedient, and the threatenings denounced against the disobedient. Let these be told to our children and our children's children.

[1.] That they may take encouragement to conform themselves to the will of God, v. 7. That, not forgetting the works of God

wrought in former days, they might set their hope in God, and keep his commandments, might make his command their rule, and his covenant their stay; those only may with confidence hope for God's salvation, that make conscience of doing his commandments. The works of God, duly considered, will very much strengthen our resolution both to set our hope in him, and to keep his commandments, for he is able to hear us out in both.

[2.] That they may take warning not to conform themselves to the example of their fathers; (v. 8.) *That they might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation.* See here, *First*, What was the character of their fathers; though they were the seed of Abraham, taken into covenant with God, and, for aught we know, the only professing people he had then in the world, yet they were stubborn and rebellious, and walked contrary to God, in direct opposition to his will; they did indeed profess relation to him, but they did not set their hearts right, they were not cordial in their engagements to God, nor inward with him in their worship of him, and therefore their *spirit was not steadfast with him*, but upon every occasion they flew off from him. Note, Hypocrisy is the high road to apostacy; those that do not set their hearts right, will not be steadfast with God, but play fast and loose. *Secondly*, What was a charge to the children; *That they be not as their fathers.* Note, Those that are descended from wicked and ungodly ancestors, if they will but consider the word and works of God, will see reason enough not to tread in their steps. It will be no excuse for a vain conversation, that it was received by tradition from our fathers; (1 Pet. 1. 18.) for what we know of them, that was evil, must be an admonition to us, that we dread that which was so pernicious to them, as we would shun those courses which they took, that were ruinous to their health or estates.

9. The children of Ephraim, *being armed, and carrying bows*, turned back in the day of battle. 10. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; 11. And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them. 12. Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, *in the field of Zoan*. 13. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap. 14. In the day-time also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. 15. He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave *them* drink as out of the great depths. 16. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. 17. And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. 18. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. 19. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? 20. Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? 21. Therefore the LORD heard *this*, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; 22. Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation: 23. Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, 24. And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given *them* of the corn of heaven. 25. Man did eat

angels' food: he sent them meat to the full. 26. He caused an east-wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south-wind. 27. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: 28. And he let *it* fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. 29. So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire; 30. They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat *was* yet in their mouths, 31. The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen *men* of Israel. 32. For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works. 33. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. 34. When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. 35. And they remembered that God *was* their rock, and the high God their redeemer. 36. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. 37. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant. 38. But he, *being* full of compassion, forgave *their* iniquity, and destroyed *them* not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. 39. For he remembered that they *were* *but* flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.

In these verses,

1. The psalmist observes the late rebukes of Providence that the people of Israel had been under, which they had brought upon themselves by their dealing treacherously with God, v. 9..11. The children of Ephraim, in which tribe Shiloh was, though they *were* well armed, and shot with bows, yet *turned back in the day of battle*. This seems to refer to that shameful defeat which the Philistines gave them in Eli's time, when they took the ark prisoner, 1 Sam. 4. 10, 11. Of this the psalmist here begins to speak, and, after a long digression, returns to it again, v. 61. Well might that event be thus fresh in mind, in David's time, above forty years after, for the ark, which in that memorable battle was seized by the Philistines, though it was quickly brought out of captivity, was never brought out of obscurity, till David fetched it from Kirjath-jearim to his own city. Observe, 1. The shameful cowardice of the children of Ephraim, that warlike tribe, so famed for valiant men, Joshua's tribe; the children of that tribe, though as well armed as ever, turned back, when they came to face the enemy. Note, Weapons of war stand men in little stead without a martial spirit, and that is gone, if God be gone. Sin dispirits men, and takes away the heart. 2. The causes of their cowardice, which were no less shameful; and these were, (1.) A shameful violation of God's law, and their covenant with him; (v. 10.) they were basely treacherous and perfidious, for *they kept not the covenant of God*, and basely stubborn and rebellious, (as they were described, v. 8.) for they peremptorily refused to walk in his law, and, in effect, told him to his face they would not be ruled by him. (2.) A shameful ingratitude to God for the favours he had bestowed upon them; they *forgot his works and his wonders*, his works of wonder which they ought to have admired, v. 11. Note, Our forgetfulness of God's works is at the bottom of our disobedience to his laws.

II. He takes occasion hence to consult precedents, and to compare *this* with their fathers' case; who were in like manner

unmindful of God's mercies to them, and ungrateful to their Founder and great Benefactor, and were therefore often brought under his displeasure. The narrative in these verses is very remarkable, for it relates a kind of struggle between God's goodness and man's badness, and mercy, at length, rejoices against judgment.

1. God did great things for his people Israel, when he first incorporated them, and formed them into a people; *Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers*, and not only in their sight, but in their cause, and for their benefit; so strange, so kind, that one would think they should never be forgotten. What he did for them in the land of Egypt is barely mentioned here, (v. 12.) but afterward resumed, v. 43. He proceeds here to shew, (1.) How he made a lane for them through the Red sea, and caused them, gave them courage, to pass through, though the waters stood over their heads, as a heap, v. 13. See Isa. 63. 12, 13. where God is said to *lead them by the hand*, as it were, *through the deep*, that *they should not stumble*. (2.) How he provided a guide for them through the untrodden paths of the wilderness; (v. 14.) he led them step by step, in the day-time, by a cloud, which also sheltered them from the heat, and *all the night with a light of fire*, which perhaps warmed the air, at least, made the darkness of night less frightful, and perhaps kept off wild beasts, Zech. 2. 5. (3.) How he furnished their camp with fresh water, in a dry and thirsty land where no water was; not by opening the bottles of heaven, (that had been a common way,) but by broaching a rock; (v. 15, 16.) *He clave the rocks in the wilderness*, which yielded water, though they were not capable of receiving it either from the clouds above, or the springs beneath. Out of the dry and hard rock he gave them drink, not distilled as out of an alembic, drop by drop, but in streams *running down like rivers*, and as out of the great depths. God gives abundantly, and is rich in mercy; he gives seasonably, and sometimes makes us to feel the want of mercies, that we may the better know the worth of them. This water, which God gave Israel out of the rock, was the more valuable, because it was spiritual drink, and that Rock was Christ.

2. When God began thus to bless them, they began to affront him; (v. 17.) *They sinned yet more against him*, more than they had done in Egypt, though there they were bad enough, Ezek. 20. 8. They bore the miseries of their servitude better than the difficulties of their deliverance, and never murmured at their task-masters, so as they did at Moses and Aaron; as if they were *delivered to do all these abominations*, Jer. 7. 10. As sin sometimes takes occasion by the commandment, so at other times it takes occasion by the deliverance, to become more exceeding sinful; *They provoked the Most High*; though he is Most High, and they knew themselves an unequal match for him, yet they provoked him, and even bid defiance to his justice. And this in the wilderness, where he had them at his mercy, and therefore they were bound in interest to please him; and where he shewed them so much mercy, and therefore they were bound in gratitude to please him; yet there they said and did that which they knew would provoke him; *They tempted God in their heart*, v. 18. Their sin began in their heart, and thence it took its malignity; *They do always err in their heart*, Heb. 3. 10. Thus they tempted God, tried his patience to the utmost, whether he would bear with them or no; and, in effect, bid him do his worst. Two ways they provoked him;

(1.) By desiring, or rather demanding, that which he had not thought fit to give them; *They asked meat for their lust*. God had given them meat for their hunger, in the manna, wholesome pleasant food, and in abundance; he had given them meat for their faith, out of the heads of leviathan, which *he brake in pieces*, 74. 14. But all this would not serve; they must have meat for their lust, dainties and varieties to gratify a luxurious appetite. Nothing is more provoking to God than our quarrelling with our allotment, and indulging the desires of the flesh.

(2.) By distrusting his power to give them what they desired. This was tempting God indeed! They challenged him to give them flesh; and if he did not, they would say, it was because he could not, not because he did not see it fit for them; (v. 19.) *They spake against God*. They that set bounds to God's power, speak against

him. It was as injurious a reflection as could be cast upon God, to say, *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?* They had manna, but they did not think they had a table furnished, unless they had boiled and roast, a first, a second, and a third, course, as they had in Egypt, where they had both flesh and fish, and sauce too; (Exod. 16. 3. Numb. 11. 5.) dishes of meat, and salvers of fruit. What an unreasonable, insatiable, thing is luxury! Such a mighty thing did these epicures think a table well furnished to be, that they thought it was more than God himself could give them in that wilderness; whereas, the *beasts of the forest*, and all the *fowls of the mountains*, are his, 50. 10, 11. Their disbelief of God's power was so much the worse, in that they did at the same time own that he had done as much as that came to; (v. 20.) *Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out*, which they and their cattle drank of. And whether is it easier to furnish a table in the wilderness, which a rich man can do, or to fetch water out of a rock, which the greatest potentate on the earth cannot do? Never did unbelief, though always unreasonable, ask so absurd a question; "Can he that melted down a rock into streams of water, give bread also?" Or, can he, that has given bread, provide flesh also? Is any thing too hard for Omnipotence? When once the ordinary powers of nature are exceeded, God has made bare his arm, and we must conclude nothing is impossible with him. Be it ever so great a thing that we ask, it becomes us to own, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst*.

3. God justly resented the provocation, and was much displeased with them; (v. 21.) *The Lord heard this, and was wroth*. Note, God is a Witness to all our murmurings and distrusts; he hears them, and is much displeased with them. *A fire was kindled for this against Jacob, the fire of the Lord burnt among them*, Numb. 11. 1. Or, it may be understood of the fire of God's anger which came up against Israel. To unbelievers our God is himself a consuming Fire. Those that will not believe the power of God's mercy, shall feel the power of his indignation, and be made to confess, that *it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands*. Now here we are told,

(1.) Why God thus resented the provocation, v. 22. Because by this it appeared that they believed not in God, they did not give credit to the revelation he had made of himself to them, for they durst not commit themselves to him, nor venture themselves with him; *They trusted not in the salvation* he had begun to work for them; for then they would not thus have questioned its progress. Those cannot be said to trust in God's salvation as their felicity at last, who cannot find in their hearts to trust in his providence for food convenient in the way to it. That which aggravated their unbelief, was, the experience they had had of the power and goodness of God, v. 23. 25. He had given them undeniable proofs of his power, not only on earth beneath, but in heaven above; for *he commanded the clouds from above*, as one that had created them, and commanded them into being; he made what use he pleased of them. Usually, by their showers, they contribute to the earth's producing corn; but now, when God so commanded them, they showered down corn themselves, which is therefore called here *the corn of heaven*; for heaven can do the work without the earth, but not the earth without heaven. God, who has the key of the clouds, *opened the doors of heaven*, that is more than *opening the windows*, which yet is spoken of as a great blessing, Mal. 3. 10. To all that by faith and prayer, ask, seek, and knock, these doors shall at any time be opened, for the God of heaven is rich in mercy to all that call upon him; he not only keeps a good house, but keeps open house. Justly might God take it ill that they should distrust him, when he had been so very kind to them, that he *had rained down manna upon them to eat*, substantial food, daily, duly, enough for all, enough for each; *Man did eat angels' food*, such as angels, if they had occasion for food, would eat and be thankful; or rather such as was given by the ministry of angels, and (as the *Chaldee* reads it) such as descended from the dwelling of angels. Every one, even the least child in Israel, did eat the bread of the mighty; (so the margin reads it;) the weakest stomach could digest it, and yet it was so nourishing, that it was strong meat for strong men. And though the provision was so

good, yet they were not stinted, nor ever reduced to short allowance; for he sent them meat to the full; if they gathered little, it was their own fault; and yet even then they had no lack, Exod. 16. 18. The daily provision God makes for us, and has made ever since we came into the world, though it has not so much of miracle as this, has no less of mercy, and is therefore a great aggravation of our distrust of God.

(2.) How he expressed his resentment of the provocation; not in denying them what they so inordinately lusted after, but in granting it to them. [1.] Did they question his power? He soon gave them a sensible conviction that he could furnish a table in the wilderness. Though the winds seem to blow where they list, yet, when he pleased, he could make them his caterers to fetch in provisions, v. 26. *He caused an east-wind to blow, and a south-wind, either a south-east-wind, or an east-wind, first to bring in the quails from that quarter, and then a south-wind to bring in more from that quarter; so that he reigned flesh upon them, and that of the most delicate sort, not butchers' meat, but wild-fowl and abundance of it, as dust, as the sand of the sea, (n. 27.) so that the meanest Israelite might have sufficient; and it cost them nothing, no, not the pains of fetching it from the mountains, for He let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitation, v. 28.* We have the account, Numb. 11. 31, 32. See how good God is, even to the evil and unthankful, and wonder that his goodness does not overcome their badness. See what little reason we have to judge of God's love by such gifts of his bounty as these; dainty bits are no tokens of his peculiar favour; Christ gave dry bread to the disciples that he loved, but a sop dipped in the sauce to Judas that betrayed him. [2.] Did they defy his justice, and boast that they had gained their point? He made them pay dear for their quails, for, though he gave them their own desire, they were not estranged from their lust; (v. 29, 30.) their appetite was insatiable, they were well-filled, and yet they were not satisfied; for they knew not what they would have; such is the nature of lust, it is content with nothing, and the more it is humoured, the more humourous it grows. They that indulge their lust will never be estranged from it. Or it intimates that God's liberality did not make them ashamed of their ungrateful lustings, as it would have done, if they had had any sense of honour. But what came of it? While the meat was yet in their mouth, rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, (v. 31.) those that were most luxurious, and most daring. See Numb. 11. 33, 34. They were fed as sheep for the slaughter: the butcher takes the fattest first. We may suppose there were some pious and contented Israelites, that did eat moderately of the quails, and were never the worse; for it was not the meat that poisoned them, but their own lust. Let epicures and sensualists here read their doom; the end of those who make a god of their belly, is destruction, Phil. 3. 19. The prosperity of fools shall destroy them, and their ruin will be the greater.

4. The judgments of God upon them did not reform them, nor attain the end, any more than his mercies; (v. 32.) *For all this, they sinned still, they murmured and quarrelled with God and Moses as much as ever. Though God was wroth, and smote them, yet they went on frowardly in the way of their heart; (Isa. 57. 17.) they believed not for his wondrous works.* Though his works of justice were as wondrous, and as great proofs of his power as his works of mercy, yet they were not wrought upon by them to fear God, nor convinced how much it was their interest to make him their Friend. Those hearts are hard indeed, that will neither be melted by the mercies of God, nor broken by his judgments.

5. They persisting in their sins, God proceeded in his judgments, but they were judgments of another nature, which wrought not suddenly, but slowly. He punished them, not now with such acute diseases as that was which slew the fattest of them, but a lingering chronical distemper; (v. 33.) *Therefore their days did he consume in vanity in the wilderness, and their years in trouble.* By an irreversible doom they were condemned to wear out thirty-eight tedious years in the wilderness, which, indeed, were consumed in vanity; for in all those years there was not a step taken

nearer Canaan, but they were turned back again, and wandered to and fro as in a labyrinth, not one stroke struck toward the conquest of it: and not only in vanity, but in trouble, for their carcasses were condemned to fall in the wilderness, and there they all perished, but Caleb and Joshua. Note, Those that sin still, must expect to be in trouble still. And the reason why we spend our days in so much vanity and trouble, why we live with so little comfort, and to so little purpose, is, because we do not live by faith.

6. Under these rebukes, they professed repentance, but they were not cordial and sincere in it. (1.) Their profession was plausible enough; (v. 34, 35.) *When he slew them, or condemned them to be slain, then they sought him;* they confessed their fault, and begged his pardon. When some were slain, others in a fright cried to God for mercy, and promised they would reform, and be very good; then they returned to God, and inquired early after him. So one would take them to be such as desired to find him. And they pretend to do this, because, however they had forgotten it formerly, now they remembered that God was their Rock, and therefore, now that they needed him, they would fly to him, and take shelter in him; and now they remembered that the high God was their Redeemer, who brought them out of Egypt, and to whom, therefore, they might come with boldness. Afflictions are sent to put us in mind of God as our Rock and our Redeemer; for, in prosperity, we are apt to forget him. (2.) They were not sincere in this profession; (v. 36, 37.) *They did but flatter him with their mouth,* as if they thought by fair speeches to prevail with him to revoke the sentence and remove the judgment, with a secret intention to break their word when the danger was over; they did not return to God with their whole heart, but feignedly, Jer. 3. 10. All their professions, prayers, and promises, were extorted by the rack; it was plain that they did not mean as they said, for they did not adhere to it; they thawed in the sun, but froze in the shade; they did but lie to God with their tongues, for their heart was not with him, was not right with him, as appeared by the issue, for they were not steadfast in his covenant. They were not sincere in their reformation, for they were not constant; and, by thinking thus to impose upon a heart-searching God, they really put as great an affront upon him as by any of their reflections.

7. God, hereupon, in pity to them, put a stop to the judgments which were threatened, and in part executed; (v. 38, 39.) *But, he being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity.* One would think this counterfeit repentance should have filled up the measure of their iniquity. What could be more provoking than to lie thus to the holy God, than thus to keep back part of the price, the chief part? Acts. 5. 3. And yet he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity thus far, that he did not destroy them, and cut them off from being a people, as he justly might have done, but spared their lives till they had reared another generation which should enter into the promised land. *Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it, Isa. 65. 8. Many a time he turned his anger away;* for he is Lord of his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath, to deal with them as they deserved. And why did he not? Not because their ruin would have been any loss to him, but, (1.) Because he was full of compassion, and, when he was going to destroy them, his repentings were kindled together, and he said, *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?* Hos. 11. 8. (2.) Because, though they did not rightly remember that he was their Rock, he remembered that they were but flesh. He considered the corruption of their nature, which inclined them to evil, and was pleased to make that an excuse for his sparing them, though it was really no excuse for their sin. See Gen. 6. 3. He considered the weakness and frailty of their nature, and what an easy thing it would be to crush them; *They are as a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.* They may soon be taken off; but, when they are gone, they are gone irrecoverably, and then what will become of the covenant with Abraham? They are flesh, they are wind; whence it were easy to argue, they may justly, they may immediately, be cut off, and there would be no loss of them: but God argues on the contrary, therefore

he will not destroy them; for the true reason is, *He is full of compassion.*

40. How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, *and* grieve him in the desert! 41. Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. 42. They remembered not his hand, *nor* the day when he delivered them from the enemy. 43. How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan: 44. And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. 45. He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them. 46. He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust. 47. He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. 48. He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. 49. He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels *among them*. 50. He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; 51. And smote all the first-born in Egypt; the chief of *their* strength in the tabernacles of Ham: 52. But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. 53. And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. 54. And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, *even to this* mountain, *which* his right hand had purchased. 55. He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents. 56. Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies: 57. But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. 58. For they provoked him to anger with their high-places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. 59. When God heard *this*, he was wroth, and greatly adhorred Israel: 60. So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent *which* he placed among men; 61. And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand. 62. He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance. 63. The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage. 64. Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation. 65. Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, *and* like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. 66. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach. 67. Moreover, he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim:

68. But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved. 69. And he built his sanctuary like high *palaces*, like the earth which he hath established for ever. 70. He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: 71. From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. 72. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.

The matter and scope of this paragraph are the same with the former, shewing what great mercies God had bestowed upon Israel, how provoking they had been, what judgments he had brought upon them for their sins, and yet how, in judgment, he remembered mercy at last. Let not those that receive mercy from God be thereby imholdened to sin, for the mercies they receive will aggravate their sin, and hasten the punishment of it; yet let not those that are under divine rebukes for sin be discouraged from repentance, for their punishments are means of repentance, and shall not prevent the mercy God has yet in store for them. Observe,

I. The sins of Israel in the wilderness again reflected on, because written for our admonition; (v. 40, 41.) *How often did they provoke him in the wilderness!* Not once, or twice, but many a time; and the repetition of the provocation was a great aggravation of it, as well as the place, (v. 17.) God kept an account how often they provoked him, though they did not; (Numb. 14. 22.) *They have tempted me these ten times.* By provoking him they did not so much anger him as grieve him, for he looked upon them as his children, *Israel is my son, my first-born*, and the undutiful, disrespectful, behaviour of children does more grieve than anger the tender parents; they lay it to heart, and take it unkindly, Isa. 1. 2. They grieved him, because they put him under a necessity of afflicting them; which he did not willingly. After they had humbled themselves before him, they *turned back and tempted God*, as before, and *limited the Holy One of Israel*, prescribing to him what proofs he should give of his power and presence with them, and what methods he should take in leading them, and providing for them. They limited him to their way, and their time, as if he did not observe that they quarrelled with him. It is presumption for us to limit *the Holy One of Israel*; for, being *the Holy One*, he will do what is most for his own glory; and, being *the Holy One of Israel*, he will do what is most for their good; and we both impeach his wisdom, and betray our own pride and folly, if we go about to prescribe to him. That which occasioned their limiting God for the future, was, their forgetting of his former favours; (v. 42.) *They remembered not his hand*, how strong it is, and how it had been stretched out for them, nor *the day when he delivered them from the enemy*, Pharaoh, that great enemy who sought their ruin. There are some days made remarkable by signal deliverances, which ought never to be forgotten, for the remembrance of them would encourage us in our greatest straits.

II. The mercies of God to Israel, which they were unmindful of when they tempted God, and limited him; this catalogue of the works of wonder which God wrought for them, begins higher, and is carried down further, than that before, v. 12, &c.

1. This begins with their deliverance out of Egypt, and the plagues with which God compelled the Egyptians to let them go: these were the signs God wrought in Egypt, (v. 43.) the wonders he wrought in the field of Zoan, that is, in the country of Zoan, as we say, *in Agro N.* meaning in such a country.

Divers of the plagues of Egypt are here specified, which speak aloud the power of God, and his favour to Israel, as well as terror to his and their enemies. As, (1.) *The turning of the waters into blood*: they had made themselves drunk with the blood of God's people, even the infants, and now God gave them blood to drink, *for they were worthy*, v. 41. (2.) *The flies and frogs which infested them*, mixtures of insects in swarms, in shoals,

which devoured them, which destroyed them, v. 45. For God can make the weakest and most despicable animals instruments of his wrath, when he pleases; what they want in strength may be made up in number. (3.) The plague of locusts, which devoured their increase, and that which they had laboured for, v. 46. They are called *God's great army*, Joel 2. 25. (4.) The hail, which destroyed their trees, especially their vines, the weakest of trees, (v. 47.) and their cattle, especially their flocks of sheep, the weakest of their cattle, which were killed with hot thunderbolts; (v. 48.) and the frost, or congealed rain, (as the word signifies,) was so violent, that it destroyed even the sycamore trees. (5.) The death of the first-born was the last and sorest of the plagues of Egypt, and that which perfected the deliverance of Israel; it was first in intention, (Exod. 4. 23.) but last in execution; for, if gentler methods would have done the work, this had been prevented: but it is here largely described, v. 49. 51. [1.] The anger of God was the cause of it; wrath was now come upon the Egyptians to the uttermost; Pharaoh's heart having been often hardened after lesser judgments had softened it, God now stirred up all his wrath; for he cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, anger in the highest degree; wrath and indignation the cause, and trouble, tribulation, and anguish, (Rom. 2. 8, 9.) the effect. This from on high he cast upon them, and did not spare, and they could not flee out of his hands, Job 27. 22. He made a way, or, as the word is, He weighed a path, to his anger; he did not cast it upon them uncertainly, but by weight; his anger was weighed with the greatest exactness in the balances of justice; for, in his greatest displeasure, he never did, nor ever will do, any wrong to any of his creatures; the path of his anger is always weighed. [2.] The angels of God were the instruments employed in this execution; He sent evil angels among them; not evil in their own nature, but in respect to the errand upon which they were sent; they were destroying angels, or angels of punishment, which passed through all the land of Egypt, with orders, according to the weighed paths of God's anger, not to kill all, but the first-born only. Good angels become evil angels to sinners; they that make the holy God their Enemy, must never expect the holy angels to be their friends. [3.] The execution itself was very severe; He spared not their soul from death, but suffered death to ride in triumph among them, and gave their life over to the pestilence, which cut the thread of life off immediately; for he smote all the first-born in Egypt, (v. 51.) the chief of their strength, the hopes of their respective families; children are the parents' strength, and the first-born the chief of their strength. Thus, because Israel was precious in God's sight, he gave men for them, and people for their life, Isa. 43. 4.

By these plagues on the Egyptians, God made a way for his own people to go forth like sheep; distinguishing between them and the Egyptians, as the shepherd divides between the sheep and the goats, having set his own mark on these sheep, by the blood of the lamb sprinkled on their door-posts. He made them go forth like sheep, not knowing whither they went, and guided them in the wilderness, like as a shepherd guides his flock, with all possible care and tenderness, v. 52. He led them on safely, though in dangerous paths, so that they feared not, that is, they needed not to fear; they were indeed frightened at the Red sea, (Exod. 14. 10.) but that was said to them, and done for them, which effectually silenced their fears. But the sea overwhelmed their enemies, that ventured to pursue them into it, v. 53. It was a lane to them, but a grave to their persecutors.

2. It is carried down as far as their settlement in Canaan; (v. 54.) He brought them to the border of his sanctuary, to that land, in the midst of which he set up his sanctuary, which was, as it were, the centre and metropolis, the crown and glory, of it; that is a happy land which is the border of God's sanctuary; it was the happiness of that land, that there God was known, and there were his sanctuary and dwelling-place, 76. 1, 2. The whole land in general, and Zion in particular, was the mountain which his right hand had purchased, which by his own power he had set apart for himself. See 44. 3. He made them to ride on

the high places of the earth, Isa. 58. 14. Dent. 32. 13. They found the Canaanites in the full and quiet possession of that land, but God cast out the heathen before them, not only took away their title to it, as the Lord of the whole earth, but himself executed the judgment given against them, and, as Lord of hosts, turned them out of it, and made his people Israel tread upon their high places, dividing each tribe an inheritance by line, and making them to dwell in the houses of those whom they had destroyed. God could have turned the uninhabited, uncultivated, wilderness (which perhaps was nearly of the same extent as Canaan) into fruitful soil, and have planted them there; but the land he designed them was to be a type of heaven, and therefore must be the glory of all lands; it must likewise be fought for, for the kingdom of heaven suffers violence.

III. The sins of Israel after they were settled in Canaan; (v. 56. 58.) The children were like their fathers, and brought their old corruptions into their new habitations; though God had done so much for them, yet they tempted and provoked the most high God still. He gave them his testimonies, but they did not keep them; they began very promisingly, but they turned back, gave God good words, but dealt unfaithfully, and were like a deceitful bow, which seemed likely to send the arrow to the mark, but, when it is drawn, breaks, and drops the arrow at the archer's foot, or, perhaps, makes it recoil in his face. There was no hold of them, nor any confidence to be put in their promises or professions. They seemed sometimes devoted to God, but they presently turned aside, and provoked him to anger with their high places and their graven images. Idolatry was the sin that did most easily beset them, and which, though they often professed their repentance for, they as often relapsed into. It was spiritual adultery either to worship idols, or to worship God by images, as if he had been an idol, and therefore by it they are said to move him to jealousy, Deut. 32. 16, 21.

IV. The judgments God brought upon them for these sins. Their place in Canaan would no more secure them in a sinful way, than their descent from Israel; You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you, Amos 3. 2. Idolatry is winked at among the Gentiles, but not in Israel. 1. God was displeased with them; (v. 59.) When God heard this, when he heard the cry of their iniquity, which came up before him, he was wroth, he took it very heinously, as well he might, and he greatly abhorred Israel, whom he had greatly loved and delighted in. They that had been the people of his choice, became the generation of his wrath. Presumptuous sins, idolatries especially, render even Israelites odious to God's holiness, and obnoxious to his justice. 2. He deserted his tabernacle among them, and removed the defence which was upon that glory, v. 60. God never leaves us till we leave him, never withdraws till we have driven him from us. His name is Jealous, and he is a jealous God; and therefore no marvel if a people whom he had betrothed to himself he loathed and rejected, and he refuse to cohabit with them any longer, when they have embraced the bosom of a stranger. The tabernacle at Shiloh was the tent God had placed among men, in which God would in very deed dwell with men upon the earth; but when his people treacherously forsook it, he justly forsook it, and then all its glory departed. Israel has small joy of the tabernacle without the presence of God in it. 3. He gave up all into the hands of the enemy. Those whom God forsakes become an easy prey to the destroyer. The Philistines are sworn enemies to the Israel of God, and no less so to the God of Israel, and yet God will make use of them to be a scourge to his people. (1.) God permits them to take the ark prisoner, and carry it off as a trophy of their victory, to shew that he had not only forsaken the tabernacle, but even the ark itself, which shall now be no longer a token of his presence; (v. 61.) He delivered his strength into captivity, as if it had been weakened and overcome, and his glory fell under the disgrace of being abandoned into the enemy's hand. We have the story, 1 Sam. 4. 11. When the ark is become as a stranger among Israelites, no marvel if it soon be made a prisoner among Philistines. (2.) He suffers the armies of Israel to be routed by the

Philistines; (v. 62, 63.) *He gave his people over unto the sword, to the sword of his own justice, and of the enemy's rage, for he was wroth with his inheritance; and that wrath of his was the fire which consumed their young men in the prime of their time, by the sword or sickness, and made such a devastation of them, that their maidens were not praised, were not given in marriage, which is honourable in all; because there were no young men for them to be given to, and because the distresses and calamities of Israel were so many and great, that the joys of marriage-solemnities were judged unseasonable; and it was said, Blessed is the womb that beareth not.* General destructions produce a scarcity of men; (Isa. 13. 12.) *I will make a man more precious than fine gold, so that seven women shall take hold of one man,* Isa. 4. 1.—3. 25. Yet this was not the worst, (3.) Even their priests, who attended the ark, fell by the sword, Hophni and Phinehas; justly they fell, for they made themselves vile, and were sinners before the Lord exceedingly; and their priesthood was so far from being their protection, that it aggravated their sin, and hastened their fall; justly did they fall by the sword, because they exposed themselves in the field of battle, without call or warrant; we throw ourselves out of God's protection, when we go out of our place, and out of the way of our duty. When the priests fell, *their widows made no lamentation,* v. 64. All the ceremonies of mourning were lost and buried in substantial grief; the widow of Phinehas, instead of lamenting her husband's death, died herself, when she had called her son *Ichabod*, 1 Sam. 4. 19, &c.

V. God's return, in mercy, to them, and his gracious appearances for them after this. We read not of their repentance and return to God, but God was *grieved for the miseries of Israel*, (Judg. 10. 16.) and concerned for his own honour, *fearing the wrath of the enemy, lest they should behave themselves strangely*, Deut. 32. 27. And therefore *then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep*, (v. 65.) *and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine*; not only like one that is raised out of sleep, and recovers himself from the slumber which, by drinking, he was overcome with, who then regards that which before he seemed wholly to neglect, but like one that is refreshed with sleep, and whose heart is made glad by the sober and moderate use of wine, and is therefore the more lively and vigorous, and fit for business. When God had delivered the ark of his strength into captivity, as one jealous of his honour, he soon put forth the arm of his strength to rescue it; stirred up his strength to do great things for his people.

I. He plagued the Philistines who held the ark in captivity, v. 66. He smote them with emerods in the hinder parts, wounded them behind, as if they were fleeing from him, even then when they thought themselves more than conquerors. He put them to reproach, and they themselves helped to make it a perpetual reproach, by the golden images of their emerods, which they returned with the ark for a trespass-offering, (1 Sam. 6. 5.) to remain in *perpetuum rei memoriam*—as a perpetual memorial. Note, Sooner or later, God will glorify himself by putting disgrace upon his enemies, then when they are most elevated with their successes.

2. He provided a new settlement for his ark, after it had been some months in captivity, and some years in obscurity. He did indeed *refuse the tabernacle of Joseph*, he never sent it back to Shiloh, in the tribe of Ephraim, v. 67. The ruins of that place were standing monuments of divine justice. *Go, see what I did to Shiloh*, Jer. 7. 12. But he did not wholly take away the glory from Israel; the moving of the ark is not the removing of it; Shiloh has lost it, but Israel has not; God will have a church in the world, and a kingdom among men, though this or that place may have its candlestick removed; nay, the rejection of Shiloh is the election of Zion, as, long after, the fall of the Jews was the riches of the Gentiles, Rom. 11. 12. When God *chose not the tribe of Ephraim*, of which tribe Joshua was, he *chose the tribe of Judah*, (v. 68.) because of that tribe Jesus was to be, who is greater than Joshua. Kirjath-jearim, the place to which the ark was brought after its rescue out of the hands of the Philistines, was in the tribe of Judah; there it took possession of that tribe; but thence it was removed to Zion, *that mount Zion which he*

loved, (v. 68.) which was *beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth*; there it was, that he *built his sanctuary like high palaces, and like the earth*. David indeed erected only a tent for the ark, but a temple was then designed and prepared for, and finished by his son; and that was, (1.) A very stately place. It was built like the palaces of princes, and the great men of the earth, nay, it excelled them all in splendour and magnificence; Solomon built it, and yet here it is said, *God built it*, for his father had taught him, perhaps with reference to this undertaking, that *except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain* that build it, 127. 1. which is a psalm for Solomon. (2.) A very stable place, like the earth; though not to continue as long as the earth, yet, while it was to continue, it was as firm as the earth, which *God upholds by the word of his power*, and it was not finally destroyed till the gospel-temple was erected, which is to continue as long as the sun and moon endure, (89. 36, 37.) and against which the *gates of hell shall not prevail*.

3. He set a good government over them; a monarchy, and a monarch after his own heart. *He chose David his servant* out of all the thousands of Israel, and put the sceptre into his hand, out of whose loins Christ was to come, and who was to be a type of him, v. 70. Concerning David, observe here,

(1.) The meanness of his beginning. His extraction indeed was great, for he descended from the prince of the tribe of Judah, but his education was poor: he was bred, not a scholar, not a soldier, but a shepherd, he was *taken from the sheep-folds*, as Moses was, for God delights to put honour upon the humble and diligent, to raise the poor out of the dust, and to set them among princes; and sometimes finds those most fit for public action that have spent the beginning of their time in solitude and contemplation. The Son of David was upbraided with the obscurity of his original, *Is not this the carpenter?* David was taken, he does not say, *from leading the rams*, but *from following the ewes*, especially those great with young, which intimated, that, of all the good properties of a shepherd, he was most remarkable for his tenderness and compassion to those of his flock that most needed it; this temper of mind fitted him for government, and made him a type of Christ, who, when he feeds his flock like a shepherd, does with a particular care *gently lead those that are with young*, Isa. 40. 11.

(2.) The greatness of his advancement. God preferred him to *feed Jacob his people*, v. 71. It was a great honour that God put upon him, in advancing him to be a king, especially to be king over Jacob and Israel, God's peculiar people, near and dear to him; but withal it was a great trust reposed in him, when he was charged with the government of those that were God's own inheritance. God advanced him to the throne, that he might feed them, not that he might feed himself; that he might do good, not that he might make his family great. It is the charge given to all the under-shepherds, both magistrates and ministers, that they *feed the flock of God*.

(3.) The happiness of his management. David, having so great a trust put into his hands, obtained mercy of the Lord, to be found both skilful and faithful in the discharge of it; (v. 72.) *So he fed them*, he ruled them and taught them, guided and protected them, [1.] Very honestly; he did it *according to the integrity of his heart*, aiming at nothing but the glory of God, and the good of the people committed to his charge; the principles of his religion were the maxims of his government, which he administered, not with carnal policy, but with *godly sincerity, by the grace of God*. In every thing he did, he meant well, and had no by-end in view. [2.] Very discreetly; he did it *by the skilfulness of his hands*; he was not only very sincere in what he designed, but very prudent in what he did, and chose out the most proper means in pursuit of his end, for his God did instruct him to discretion. Happy the people that are under such a government! With good reason does the psalmist make this the finishing, crowning, instance of God's favour to Israel; for David was a type of Christ, the great and good Shepherd, who was humbled first, and then exalted, and of whom it was foretold, that he should be filled with the *spirit of wisdom and understanding*, and should *judge and reprove with equity*, Isa. 11.

3, 4. On the integrity of his heart and the skilfulness of his hands all his subjects may entirely rely, and of the increase of his government and people there shall be no end.

PSALM LXXIX.

This psalm, if penned with any particular event in view, is with most probability made to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the woeful harock made of the Jewish nation by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar. It is set to the same tune, as I may say, with the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and that weeping prophet borrows two verses out of it, (v. 6, 7.) and makes use of them in his prayer, Jer. 10. 25. Some think it was penned long before, by the spirit of prophecy, prepared for the use of the church in that cloudy and dark day. Others think that it was penned then by the spirit of prayer, either by a prophet named Asaph, or some other prophet, for the sons of Asaph. Whatever the particular occasion was, we have here, I. A representation of the very deplorable condition that the people of God were in at this time, v. 1..5. II. A petition to God for succour and relief; that their enemies might be reckoned with, (v. 6, 7, 10, 12.) that their sins might be pardoned, (v. 8, 9.) and that they might be delivered, v. 11. III. A plea taken from the readiness of his people to praise him, v. 13. In times of the church's peace and prosperity, this psalm may, in the singing of it, give us occasion to bless God that we are not thus trampled on and insulted. But it is especially seasonable in a day of treading down and perplexity, for the exciting of our desires toward God, and the encouragement of our faith in him, as the church's Patron.

A psalm of Asaph.

1. **O** GOD, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.
2. The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth.
3. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and *there was none to bury them.*
4. We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us.
5. How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire?

We have here a sad complaint exhibited in the court of heaven. The world is full of complaints, and so is the church too, for it suffers, not only *with* it, but *from* it, as a *hily among thorns*. God is complained to; whither should children go with their grievances, but to their father, to such a father as is able and willing to help? The heathen are complained of, who, being themselves aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, were sworn enemies to it. Though they knew not God, nor owned him, yet God having them in a chain, the church very fitly appeals to him against them, for he is King of nations, to over-rule them, to judge among the heathen, and the King of saints, to favour and protect them.

I. They complain here of the anger of their enemies, and the outrageous fury of the oppressor, exerted,

1. Against places, v. 1. They did all the mischief they could, (1.) To the holy land; they invaded that, and made inroads into it; "*The heathen are come into thine inheritance*, to plunder that, and lay it waste." Canaan was dearer to the pious Israelites, as it was God's inheritance, than as it was their own; as it was the land in which God was known, and his name was great, than as it was the land in which they were bred and born, and which they and their ancestors had been long in possession of. Note, injuries done to religion should grieve us more than even those done to common right, nay, to our own right. We should better bear to see our own inheritance wasted than God's inheritance. This psalmist had mentioned it in the foregoing psalm, as an instance of God's great favour to Israel, that he had *east out the heathen before them*, 78. 55. But see what a change sin made; now the heathen are suffered to pour in upon them. (2.) To the holy city; *They have laid Jerusalem on heaps, heaps of rubbish, such heaps*

as are raised over graves, so some. The inhabitants were buried in the ruins of their own houses, and their dwelling-places became their sepulchres, their long homes. (3.) To the holy house; that sanctuary which God had built like high palaces, and which was thought to be established as the earth, was now laid level with the ground; *Thy holy temple have they defiled*, by entering into it, and laying it waste. God's own people had defiled it by their sins, and therefore God suffered their enemies to defile it by their insolence.

2. Against persons, against the bodies of God's people; further their malice could not reach. (1.) They were prodigal of their blood, and killed them without mercy; their eye did not spare, nor did they give any quarter; (v. 3.) *Their blood have they shed like water*, wherever they met with them, *round about Jerusalem*, in all the avenues to the city; whoever *went out, or came in*, was *waited for of the sword*. Abundance of human blood was shed, so that the channels of water ran with blood. And they shed it with no more reluctance or regret than if they had spilt so much water, little thinking that every drop of it will be reckoned for in the day when *God shall make inquisition for blood*. (2.) They were abusive to their dead bodies; when they had killed them, they would let none bury them. Nay, those that were buried, even the *dead bodies of God's servants, the flesh of his saints*, whose names and memories they had a particular spite at, they digged up again, and *gave them to be meat to the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth*; or, at least, they left those so exposed, whom they slew, they hung them in chains, which was in a particular manner grievous to the Jews to see, because God had given them an express law against this, as a barbarous thing, Dent. 21. 23. This inhuman usage of Christ's witnesses is foretold; (Rev. 11. 9.) and thus even the dead bodies were witnesses against their persecutors. This is mentioned, (says Austin, *De Civitate Dei, lib. 1. cap. 12.*) not as an instance of the misery of the persecuted, (for the bodies of the saints shall rise in glory, however they became meat to the birds and the fowls,) but of the malice of the persecutors.

3. Against their names; (v. 4.) "*We that survive are become a reproach to our neighbours*, they all study to abuse us, and load us with contempt, and represent us as ridiculous, or odious, or both; upbraiding us with our sins and with our sufferings, or giving the lie to our relation to God, and expectations from him; so that we are become a *scorn and derision to them that are round about us.*" If God's professing people degenerate from what themselves and their fathers were, they must expect to be told of it; and it is well if a just reproach will help to bring us to a true repentance. But it has been the lot of the gospel-Israel to be made unjustly a reproach and derision; the apostles themselves were *counted as the offscouring of all things*.

II. They wonder more at God's anger, v. 5. This they discern in the anger of their neighbours, and this they complain most of; *How long, Lord, wilt thou be angry? Shall it be for ever?* This intimates, that they desired no more than that God would be reconciled to them, that his anger might be turned away, and then the remainder of men's wrath would be restrained. Note, Those who desire God's favour as better than life, cannot but dread and deprecate his wrath as worse than death.

6. Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. 7. For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling-place. 8. O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. 9. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name; and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake. 10. Wherefore should the heathen say, *Where is their God?* let him be known among the heathen

in our sight *by* the revenging of the blood of thy servants *which is* shed. 11. Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die; 12. And render unto our neighbours seven-fold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord. 13. So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations.

The petitions here put up to God, are very suitable to the present distresses of the church, and they have pleas to enforce them, interwoven with them, taken mostly from God's honour.

1. They pray that God would so turn away his anger from them, as to turn it upon those that persecuted and abused them; (v. 6.) "*Pour out thy wrath, the full vials of it, upon the heathen; let them wring out the dregs of it, and drink them.*" This prayer is, in effect, a prophecy, in which the *wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.* Observe here, (1.) The character of those he prays against; they are such as have not known God, nor called upon his name. The reason why men do not call upon God, is, because they do not know him, how able and willing he is to help them. They that persist in ignorance of God, and neglect of prayer, are the ungodly, who *live without God in the world.* There are kingdoms that know not God, and obey not the gospel, but neither their multitude, nor their force united, will secure them from his just judgments. (2.) Their crime; *they have devoured Jacob, v. 7.* That is crime enough, in the account of Him, who reckons that those who touch his people, *touch the apple of his eye.* They have not only disturbed, but devoured, Jacob; not only encroached upon his dwelling-place, the land of Canaan, but have laid it waste by plundering and depopulating it. (3.) Their condemnation. "*Pour out thy wrath upon them; do not only restrain them from doing further mischief, but reckon with them for the mischief they have done.*"

2. They pray for the pardon of sin, which they own to be the procuring cause of all their calamities. How unrighteous soever men were, God was righteous in permitting them to do what they did. They pray,

(1.) That God would not *remember against them their former iniquities*; (v. 8.) either their own former iniquities, that now, when they were old, they might not be made to possess the iniquities of their youth; or the former iniquities of their people, the sins of their ancestors. In the captivity of Babylon, former iniquities were brought to account; but God promises not again to do so; (Jer. 31. 29, 30.) and so they pray, "*Remember not against us our first sins;*" which some make to look as far back as the golden calf, because God said, *In the day when I visit, I will visit for this sin of their's upon them, Exod. 32. 34.* If the children by repentance and reformation cut off the entail of the parents' sin, they may in faith pray that God will not *remember them, against them.* When God pardons sin, he blots it out, and remembers it no more.

(2.) That he would purge away the sins they had been lately guilty of, by the guilt of which their minds and consciences had been defiled; *Deliver us, and purge away our sins, v. 9.* Then deliverances from trouble are granted in love, and are mercies indeed, when they are grounded upon the pardon of sin, and flow from that; we should therefore be more earnest with God in prayer for the removal of our sins, than for the removal of our afflictions, and the pardon of them is the foundation and sweetness of our deliverances.

3. They pray that God would work deliverance and salvation for them, and bring their troubles to a good end, and that speedily; *Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us, v. 8.* They had no hopes but from God's mercies, his tender mercies; their case was

so deplorable, that they looked upon themselves as the proper objects of divine compassion, and so near to desperate, that, unless divine mercy did speedily interpose to prevent their ruin, they were undone. This whets their importunity, "*Lord, help us; Lord, deliver us; help us under our troubles, that we bear them well; help us out of our troubles, that the spirit may not fail. Deliver us from sin, from sinking.*" Three things they plead, (1.) The great distress they were reduced to; "*We are brought very low, and, being low, shall be lost, if thou help us not.*" The lower we are brought, the more need we have of help from heaven, and the more will divine power be magnified in raising us up. (2.) Their dependence upon him; "*Thou art the God of our salvation, who alone canst help; salvation belongs to the Lord, from whom we expect help, for in the Lord alone is the salvation of his people.*" They who make God the God of their salvation, shall find him so. (3.) The interest of his own honour in their case; they plead no merit of their's, they pretend to none, but, "*Help us for the glory of thy name; pardon us for thy name's sake.*" The best encouragements in prayer are those that are taken from God only, and those things whereby he has made himself known. Two things are insinuated in this plea. [1.] That God's name and honour would be greatly injured, if he did not deliver them; for those that derided them, blasphemed God, as if he were weak and could not help them, or withdrawn and would not; therefore they plead; (v. 10.) "*Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? He has forsaken them, and forgotten them; and this they get by worshipping a God whom they cannot see.*" *Nil præter nubes, et cæli numen adorant. Juv.—They adore no other Divinity than the clouds and the sky.* That which was their praise, (That they served a God that is every where,) was now turned to their reproach and his too, as if they served a God that is no where. "*Lord,*" say they, "*make it to appear that thou art, by making it to appear that thou art with us and for us; that when we are asked, Where is your God? we may be able to say, He is nigh unto us in all that which we call upon him for; and you see he is so by what he doeth for us.*" [2.] That God's name and honour would be greatly advanced, if he did deliver them; his mercy would be glorified in delivering them that were so miserable and helpless. By making bare his everlasting arm on their behalf, he would make unto himself an everlasting name; and their deliverance would be a type and figure of the great salvation, which, in the fulness of time, Messiah the Prince would work out, to the glory of God's name.

4. They pray that God would avenge them on their adversaries, (1.) For their cruelty and barbarity; (v. 10.) "*Let the avenging of our blood*" (according to the ancient law, Gen. 9. 6.) "*be known among the heathen; let them be made sensible that what judgments are brought upon them are punishments of the wrong they have done to us; let this be in our sight, and by this means let God be known among the heathen, as the God to whom vengeance belongs, (94. 1.) and the God that espouses his people's cause.*" Those that have intoxicated themselves with the blood of the saints, shall have *blood given them to drink*, for they are worthy. (2.) For their insolence and scorn; (v. 12.) "*Render to them their reproach.*" The indignities which by word and deed they have done to the people of God, himself, and his name, let them be repaid to them with interest." The reproach wherewith men have reproached us only, we must leave it to God, whether he will render it to them or no, and must pray that he would forgive them; but the reproach wherewith they have blasphemed God himself, we may in faith pray that God would render it seven-fold into their bosoms, so as to strike at their hearts, to humble them, and bring them to repentance. This prayer is a prophecy of the same import with that of Enoch, That God will convince sinners of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him, (Jude 15.) and will return them into their own bosoms by everlasting terrors at the remembrance of them.

5. They pray that God would find out a way for the rescue of his poor prisoners, especially the condemned prisoners, v. 11. The case of their brethren, who were fallen into the hands of the enemy, was very sad; they were kept close prisoners, and because

they durst not be heard to bemoan themselves, they vented their griefs in deep and silent sighs. All their breathing was sighing, and so was their praying. They were appointed to die, as sheep for the slaughter, and had received the sentence of death within themselves. This deplorable case the psalmist recommends, (1.) To the divine pity; "*Let their sighs come up before thee*, and be thou pleased to take cognizance of their moans." (2.) To the divine power; "*According to the greatness of thy arm*, which no creature can contest with, *preserve thou those that are appointed to die*, from the death to which they are appointed." Man's extremity is God's opportunity to appear for his people. See 2 Cor. 1. 8.. 10.

Lastly, They promise the returns of praise for the answers of prayer; (v. 13.) *So we will give thee thanks for ever*. Observe, (1.) How they please themselves with their relation to God; "Though we are oppressed and brought low, yet we are the sheep of thy pasture, not disowned and cast off by thee for all this; *We are thine, save us*." (2.) How they promise themselves an opportunity of praising God for their deliverance, which they therefore desired, and would bid welcome, because it would furnish them with matter for thanksgiving, and put their hearts in tune for that excellent work, the work of heaven. (3.) How they oblige themselves not only to give God thanks at present, but to *shew forth his praise unto all generations*, that is, to do all they could, both to perpetuate the remembrance of God's favours to them, and to engage their posterity to keep up the work of praise. (4.) How they plead this with God; "Lord, appear for us, against our enemies; for, if they get the better, they will *blaspheme thee*"; (v. 12.) but if we overcome, we will praise thee. Lord, we are that people of thine, which thou hast *formed for thyself to shew forth thy praise*; if we be cut off, whence shall that rent, that tribute, be raised?" Note, Those lives that are entirely devoted to God's praise are assuredly taken under his protection.

PSALM LXXX.

This psalm is much to the same purport with the foregoing. Some think it was penned upon occasion of the desolation and captivity of the ten tribes, as the foregoing psalm of the two. But many were the distresses of the Israel of God, many perhaps which are not recorded in the sacred history, some whereof might give occasion for the drawing up this psalm, which is proper to be sung in the day of Jacob's trouble; and if, in singing it, we express a true love to the church, and a hearty concern for its interest, with a firm confidence in God's power to help it out of its greatest distresses, we make melody with our hearts to the Lord. The psalmist here, I. Begs for the tokens of God's presence with them, and favour to them, v. 1. 3. II. He complains of the present rebukes they were under, v. 4. 7. III. He illustrates the present desolations of the church, by the comparison of a vine and a vineyard, which had flourished, but was now destroyed, v. 8. 10. IV. He concludes with prayer to God for the preparing of mercy for them, and the preparing of them for mercy, v. 17. 19. This, as many psalms before and after, relates to the public interests of God's Israel, which ought to lie nearer to our hearts than any secular interest of our own.

To the chief musician upon Shoshannim, Eduth. A psalm of Asaph.

1. **G**IVE ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. 2. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. 3. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. 4. O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? 5. Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. 6. Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves. 7. Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

The psalmist here, in the name of the church, applies himself to God by prayer, with reference to the present afflicted state of Israel.

1. He entreats God's favour for them; (v. 1, 2.) that is all in all to the sanctuary when it is desolate, and is to be sought in the first place. Observe, (1.) How he eyes God in his address, as the Shepherd of Israel, whom he had called the *sheep of his pasture*, (79. 13.) under whose guidance and care Israel was, as the sheep under the care and conduct of the shepherd. Christ is the great and good Shepherd, to whom we may in faith commit the custody of his sheep that were given to him. He *leads Joseph like a flock*, to the best pastures, and out of the way of danger; if Joseph follow him not as obsequiously as the sheep do the shepherd, it is his own fault. He *dwells between the cherubims*, where he is ready to receive petitions, and to give directions; the mercy-seat was between the cherubims; and it is very comfortable, in prayer, to look up to God as sitting on a throne of grace, and that it is so to us, is owing to the great propitiation, for the mercy-seat was the propitiatory. (2.) What he expects and desires from God; that he would give ear to the cry of their miseries, and of their prayers; that he would shine forth both in his own glory, and in favour and kindness to his people; that he would shew himself, and smile on them; that he would stir up his strength, that he would excite it, and exert it: it had seemed to slumber; "Lord, awaken it:" his cause met with great opposition, and the enemies threatened to overpower it; "Lord, put forth thy strength so much the more, and come for salvation to us; be to thy people a powerful Help, and a present Help; Lord, do this before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh," that is, "in the sight of all the tribes of Israel, let them see it to their satisfaction." Perhaps these three tribes are named, because they were the tribes which formed that squadron of the camp of Israel that, in their march through the wilderness, followed next after the tabernacle; so that before them the ark of God's strength rose to scatter their enemies.

2. He complains of God's displeasure against them. God was angry, and he dreads that more than any thing, v. 4. (1.) It was great anger; he apprehended that God was angry against the prayer of his people; not only that he was angry notwithstanding their prayers, by which they hoped to turn away his wrath from them; but that he was angry with their prayers, though they were his own people that prayed. That God should be angry at the sins of his people, and at the prayers of his enemies, is not strange; but that he should be angry at the prayers of his people, is strange indeed. He not only delayed to answer them, (that he often does, in love,) but he was displeased at them. If he be really angry at the prayers of his people, we may be sure it is because they ask amiss, Jam. 4. 3. They pray, but they do not wrestle in prayer, their ends are not right, or there is some secret sin harboured and indulged in them; they do not lift up pure hands, but they lift up hands with wrath and doubting. But perhaps it is only in their own apprehension; he seems angry with their prayers, when really he is not; for thus he will try their patience and perseverance in prayer; as Christ tried the woman of Canaan when he said, *It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs*. (2.) It was anger that had continued a great while; "*How long wilt thou be angry?*" We have still continued praying, and yet are still under thy frowns."

Now the tokens of God's displeasure, which they had been long under, were both their sorrow and shame. [1.] Their sorrow; (v. 5.) *Thou feedest them with the bread of tears*, they eat their meat from day to day in tears, this is the vinegar in which they *dipped their morsel*, 42. 3. They had tears given them to drink, not now and then a taste of that bitter cup, but in great measure. Note, There are many that spend their time in sorrow, who yet shall spend their eternity in joy. [2.] It was their shame, v. 6. God, by frowning upon them, made them a strife unto their neighbours, each strove which should expose them most; and such a cheap and easy prey were they made to them, that all the strife was, who should have the stripping and plundering of them. Their enemies laughed among themselves to see the frights they were in, the straits they were reduced to, and the disappointments they met

with. When God is displeased with his people, we must expect to see them in tears, and their enemies in triumph.

3. He prays earnestly for converting grace, in order to their acceptance with God, and their salvation; *Turn us again, O God, v. 3. Turn us again, O God of hosts; (v. 7.)* and then *cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.* It is the burthen of the song, for we have it again, v. 19. They are conscious to themselves that they have gone astray from God and their duty, and have turned aside into sinful ways, and that this was it that provoked God to hide his face from them, and to give them up into the hand of their enemies; and therefore they desire to begin their work at the right end; "Lord, turn us to thee in a way of repentance and reformation, and then, no doubt, thou wilt return to us in a way of mercy and deliverance." Observe, (1.) No salvation but from God's favour; "*Cause thy face to shine*, let us have thy love and the light of thy countenance, and then we shall be saved." (2.) No obtaining favour with God unless we be converted to him. We must turn again to God from the world and the flesh, and then he will cause his face to shine upon us. (3.) No conversion to God but by his own grace: we must frame our doings to turn to him, (Hos. 5. 4.) and then pray earnestly for his grace, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned*, pleading that gracious promise, (Prov. 1. 23.) *Turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you.* The prayer here is for a national conversion; in this method we must pray for national mercies, that what is amiss may be amended, and then our grievances would be soon redressed. National holiness would secure national happiness.

8. Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. 9. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. 10. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. 11. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. 12. Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? 13. The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. 14. Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; 15. And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. 16. It is burnt with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. 17. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, and upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. 18. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. 19. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

The psalmist is here presenting his suit for the Israel of God, and pressing it home at the throne of grace, pleading with God for mercy and grace for them. The church is here represented as a vine, (c. 8, 14.) and a vineyard, v. 15. The Root of this vine is Christ, Rom. 11. 18. The branches are believers, John, 15. 5. The church is like a vine, weak, and needing support, unsightly, and having an unpromising outside, but spreading and fruitful, and its fruit most excellent; the church is a choice and noble vine; we have reason to acknowledge the goodness of God, that he has planted such a vine in the wilderness of this world, and preserved it to this day. Now observe here,

I. How the vine of the Old-Testament church was planted at

first. It was brought out of Egypt with a high hand, the heathen were cast out of Canaan to make room for it; seven nations to make room for that one. *Thou didst sweep before it*; so some read, (v. 9.) to make clear work; the nations were swept away as dirt with the besom of destruction. God, having made room for it, and planted it, caused it to take deep root by a happy establishment of their government both in church and state; which was so firm, that, though their neighbours about them often attempted it, they could not prevail to pluck it up.

II. How it spread and flourished. 1. The land of Canaan itself was fully peopled. At first, they were not so numerous as to replenish it, Exod. 23. 29. But in Solomon's time *Judah and Israel were many as the sand of the sea*; the land was filled with them, and yet such a fruitful land that it was not over-stocked, v. 10. The hills of Canaan were covered with their shadow, and the branches, though they extended themselves far, like those of the vine, yet were not weak like them, but as strong as those of the goodly cedars. Israel not only had abundance of men, but those mighty men of valour. 2. They extended their conquests and dominion to the neighbouring countries; (v. 11.) *She sent out her boughs to the sea*, the great sea westward, and *her branches to the river*, to the river of Egypt southward, the river of Damascus northward, or rather, the river Euphrates eastward, Gen. 15. 18. Nebuchadnezzar's greatness is represented by a flourishing tree, Dan. 4. 20, 21. But it is observable here concerning this vine, that it is praised for its shadow, its boughs, and its branches, but not a word of its fruit, for *Israel was an empty vine*, Hos. 10. 1. God came, looking for grapes, but behold, wild grapes, Isa. 5. 2. And if a vine do not bring forth fruit, no tree so useless, so worthless, Ezek. 15. 2, 6.

III. How it was wasted and ruined; "Lord, thou hast done great things for this vine, and why shall it be all undone again? If it were a plant not of God's planting, it were not strange to see it rooted up; but shall God desert and abandon that which he himself gave being to?" v. 12. *Why hast thou then broken down her hedges?* There was a good reason for this change in God's way toward them; this noble vine was become *the degenerate plant of a strange vine*, (Jer. 2. 21.) to the reproach of its great Owner, and then no marvel if he *took away its hedge*; (Isa. 5. 5.) yet God's former favours to this vine are urged as pleas in prayer to God, and improved as encouragements to faith, that for all this God would not wholly cast them off. Observe, 1. The malice and enmity of the Gentile nations against Israel; as soon as ever God *brake down their hedges* and left them exposed, troops of enemies presently brake in upon them, that waited for an opportunity to destroy them. They that passed by the way, plucked at them; *the boar out of the wood* and *the wild beast of the field* were ready to ravage it, v. 13. But, 2. See also the restraint which these cruel enemies were under, for, till God had *broken down their hedges*, they could not pluck a leaf of this vine. The Devil could not hurt Job, so long as God continued the *hedge round about him*, Job, 1. 10. See how much it is the interest of any people to keep themselves in the favour of God, and then they need not fear any wild beast of the field, Job, 5. 23. If we provoke God to withdraw, *our defence is parted from us*, and we are undone. The deplorable state of Israel is described; (v. 16.) *It is burnt with fire, it is cut down*; the people are treated like thorns and briers, that are nigh unto cursing, and whose end is to be burned, and no longer like vines that are protected and cherished; they perish not through the rage of the wild beast and the boar, but *at the rebuke of thy countenance*; that was it which they dreaded, and to which they attributed all their calamities. It is well or ill with us, according as we are under God's smiles or frowns.

IV. What their requests were to God hereupon.

1. That God would help the vine; (v. 14, 15.) that he would graciously take cognizance of its case, and to do for it as he thought fit; "*Return, we beseech thee, O Lord of hosts*, for thou hast seemed to go away from us. *Look down from heaven*, to which thou hast retired; from heaven, that place of prospect, whence thou seest all the wrongs that are done us; that place of power, whence thou canst send effectual relief; from heaven, where thou

hast prepared thy throne of judgment, to which we appeal, and where thou hast prepared a better country for those that are Israelites indeed; thence give a gracious look, thence make a gracious visit, to this vine. Take our woeful condition into thy compassionate consideration, and for the particular fruits of thy pity we refer ourselves to thee. Only behold the vineyard, or rather the root, which *thy right hand hath planted*, and which therefore we hope thy right hand will protect; that *branch which thou madest strong for thyself*, to shew forth thy praise, (Isa. 43. 21.) that with the fruit of it thou mightest be honoured. Lord, it is formed by thyself, and for thyself, and therefore it may with an humble confidence be committed to thyself, and to thine own care; *As for God, his work is perfect*. What we read the *Branch*, in the Hebrew is the *Son*, (*Ben*;) whom in thy counsel thou hast made strong for thyself. That branch was to come out of the stock of Israel; *My servant the Branch*, Zech. 3. 8. And therefore, till he was come, Israel in general, and the house of David in particular, must be preserved and upheld, and kept in being. *He is the true Vine*, John, 15. 1. Isa. 11. 1. *Destroy it not, for that a blessing is in it*, Isa. 65. 8.

2. That he would help the vine-dresser; (v. 17, 18.) *“Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand;”* that king (whoever it was) of the house of David, that was now to go in and out before them; *“let thy hand be upon him, not only to protect and cover him, but to own him, and strengthen him, and give him success.”* We have this phrase, Ezra, 7. 28. *And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me*. Their king is called the *man of God's right hand*, as he was the representative of their state, which was dear to God, as his Benjamin, the *son of his right hand*; as he was president in their affairs, and an instrument in God's right hand of much good to them, defending them from themselves and from their enemies, and directing them in the right way; and as he was under-shepherd under him who was the great Shepherd of Israel. Princes, who have power, must remember that they are *sons of men*, of *Adam*, so the word is; that, if they are strong, it is God that has made them strong, and he has made them so for himself, for they are his ministers to serve the interests of his kingdom among men; which if they do in sincerity, *his hand shall be upon them*; and we should pray in faith that it may be so, adding this promise, that, if God will adhere to our governors, we will adhere to him; *So will not we go back from thee*; we will never desert a cause which we see that God espouses, and is the Patron of. Let God be our Leader, and we will follow him. Adding also this prayer, *“Quicken us, put life into us, revive our dying interests, revive our drooping spirits, and then we will call upon thy name.* We will continue to do so upon all occasions, having found it not in vain to do so.” We cannot call upon God's name in a right manner, unless he quicken us; but it is he that puts life into our souls, that puts liveliness into our prayers.

But many interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, apply this to the Messiah, the Son of David, the Protector and Saviour of the church, and the Keeper of the vineyard. (1.) He is the Man of God's right hand, to whom he has *sworn by his right hand*, so the Chaldee; whom he has exalted to his right hand, and who is indeed his right hand, the Arm of the Lord, for all power is given to him. (2.) He is that Son of man whom he *made strong for himself*, for the glorifying of his name, and the advancing of the interests of his kingdom among men. (3.) God's hand is upon him throughout his whole undertaking, to bear him out and carry him on, to protect and animate him, that the *good pleasure of the Lord might prosper in his hand*. (4.) The stability and constancy of believers are entirely owing to the grace and strength which are laid up for us in Jesus Christ, 68. 28. In him is our strength found, by which we are enabled to persevere to the end. Let thy hand be upon him, on him let our help be laid, who is mighty, let him be made able to save to the uttermost, and that will be our security; *so will not we go back from thee*.

Lastly, The psalm concludes with the same petition that had been put up twice before, and yet it is no vain repetition; (v. 19.) *Turn us again*. The title given to God rises, (v. 3.) *O God,*

(v. 7.) *O God of hosts*, (v. 19.) *O Lord (Jehovah) God of hosts*. When we come to God for his grace, his good will towards us and his good work in us, we should pray earnestly, continue instant in prayer, and pray more earnestly.

PSALM LXXXI.

This psalm was penned, as is supposed, not upon occasion of any particular providence, but for the solemnity of a particular ordinance, either that of the new moon in general, or that of the feast of trumpets, on the new moon of the seventh month, Lev. 23. 24. Numb. 29. 1. When David, by the Spirit, introduced the singing of psalms into the temple-service, this psalm was intended for that day, to excite and assist the proper devotions of it. All the psalms are profitable; but if one psalm be more suitable than another to the day, and the observances of it, we should choose that. The two great intentions of our religious assemblies, and which we ought to have in our eye in our attendance on them, are answered in this psalm, which are, to give glory to God, and to receive instruction from God; to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple: accordingly, by this psalm we are assisted, on our solemn feast-days, I. In praising God for what he is to his people, (v. 1. 3.) and has done for them, v. 4. 7. II. In teaching and admonishing one another concerning the obligations we lie under to God, (v. 8. 10.) the danger of revolting from him, (v. 11, 12.) and the happiness we should have, if we would but keep close to him, v. 13. 16. This, though spoken primarily of Israel of old, is written for our learning, and is therefore to be sung with application.

To the chief musician upon Gittith. A psalm of Asaph.

1. **S**ING aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. 2. Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. 3. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast-day. 4. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob. 5. This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not. 6. I removed his shoulder from the burthen: his hands were delivered from the pots. 7. Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee: I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

When the people of God were gathered together in the solemn day, the day of the feast of the Lord, they must be told that they had business to do, for we do not go to church to sleep, or to be idle; no, there is that which the duty of every day requires: work of the day, which is to be done in its day. And here,

I. The worshippers of God are excited to their work; and are taught, by singing this psalm, to stir up both themselves and one another to it, v. 1. 3. Our errand is, to give unto God the glory due unto his name, and in all our religious assemblies we must mind this as our business. 1. In doing this, we must eye God as our Strength, and as the God of Jacob, v. 1. He is the Strength of Israel, as a people, for he is a God in covenant with them, who will powerfully protect, support, and deliver them, who fights their battles and makes them do valiantly and victoriously. He is the Strength of every Israelite; by his grace we are enabled to go through all our services, sufferings, and conflicts; to him, as our Strength, we must pray, and we must sing praise to him, as the God of all the wrestling seed of Jacob, with whom we have a spiritual communion. 2. We must do this by all the expressions of holy joy and triumph. It was then to be done by musical instruments, the timbrel, harp, and psaltery; and by blowing the trumpet, some think, in remembrance of the sound of the trumpet on mount Sinai, which waxed louder and louder; it was then, and is now, to be done, by singing psalms, singing aloud, and making a joyful noise. The pleasantness of the harp, and the awfulness of the trumpet, intimate to us that God is to be worshipped with cheerfulness and holy joy, with

reverence and godly fear. Singing aloud, and making a noise, intimate that we must be warm and affectionate in praising God; that we must with a hearty good-will shew forth his praise, as those that are not ashamed to own our dependence on him, and obligations to him; and that we should join many together in this work, the more the better, it is the more like heaven. 3. This must be done in the time appointed. No time is amiss for praising God; (*Seven times a day will I praise thee; nay, at midnight will I rise and give thanks unto thee;*) but some are times appointed, not for God to meet us, (he is always ready,) but for us to meet one another, that we may join together in praising God. The solemn feast-day must be a day of praise; when we are receiving the gifts of God's bounty, and rejoicing in them, then it is proper to sing here his praises.

H. They are here directed in their work.

1. They must look up to the divine institution, which it is the observation of; in all religious worship we must have an eye to the command; (*v. 4.*) *This was a statute for Israel*, for the keeping up of a face of religion among them; it was a law of the God of Jacob, which all the seed of Jacob are bound by, and must be subject to. Note, Praising God is not only a good thing, which we do well to do, but it is our indispensable duty, which we are obliged to do, it is at our peril if we neglect it; and in all religious exercises we must have an eye to the institution, as our warrant and rule; "*This I do, because God has commanded me; and therefore I hope he will accept me;*" then it is done in faith.

2. They must look back upon those operations of Divine Providence, which it is the memorial of. This solemn service was ordained for a testimony, (*v. 5.*) a standing traditional evidence, for the attesting of the matters of fact. It was a testimony to Israel, that they might know and remember what God had done for their fathers, and would be a testimony against them, if they should be ignorant of them, and forget them.

(1.) The psalmist, in the people's name, puts himself in mind of the general work of God on Israel's behalf, which was kept in remembrance by this and other solemnities, *v. 5.* When God went out against the land of Egypt, to lay it waste, that he might force Pharaoh to let Israel go, then he ordained solemn feast-days to be observed by a statute for ever in their generations, as a memorial of it, particularly the passover, which perhaps is meant by the *solemn feast-day*; (*v. 3.*) that was appointed just then when God went out through the land of Egypt, to destroy the first-born, and passed over the houses of the Israelites, *Exod. 12. 23, 24.* By it that work of wonder was to be kept in perpetual remembrance, that all ages might in it behold the goodness and severity of God. The psalmist, speaking for his people, takes notice of this aggravating circumstance of their slavery in Egypt, that there they heard a language that they understood not, there they were strangers in a strange land; the Egyptians and the Hebrews understood not one another's language, for Joseph spake to his brethren by an interpreter, (*Gen. 42. 23.*) and the Egyptians are said to be, to the house of Jacob, *a people of a strange language*, *114. 1.* To make a deliverance appear the more gracious, the more glorious, it is good to observe every thing that makes the trouble we are delivered from appear the more grievous.

(2.) The psalmist, in God's name, puts the people in mind of some of the particulars of their deliverance; here he changes the person, *v. 6.* God speaks by him, saying, *I removed his shoulder from the burthen.* Let him remember this on the feast-day, [1.] That God had brought them out of the house of bondage; had removed their shoulder from the burthen of oppression, under which they were ready to sink; had delivered their hands from the pots, or panniers, or baskets, in which they carried clay or bricks. Deliverance out of slavery is a very sensible mercy, and which ought to be had in everlasting remembrance. But this was not all. [2.] God had delivered them at the Red sea; then they called in trouble, and he rescued them, and disappointed the designs of their enemies against them, *Exod. 14. 10.* Then he answered them with a real answer, out of the secret place of thunder, that is, out of the pillar of fire, through which God looked upon the host of the Egyptians, and troubled it, *Exod. 14. 21, 25.*

Or, it may be meant of the giving of the law at mount Sinai; which was the secret place, for it was death to gaze, (*Exod. 19. 21.*) and it was in thunder that God then spake. Even the terrors of Sinai were favours to Israel, *Dent. 4. 33.* [3.] God had borne their manners in the wilderness; "*I proved thee at the waters of Meribah*; thou didst there shew thy temper, what an unbelieving murmuring people thou wast, and yet I continued my favour to thee," *Selah*; Mark that; compare God's goodness and man's badness, and they will serve as foils to each other. Now, if they, on their solemn feast-days, were thus to call to mind their redemption out of Egypt, much more ought we, on the Christian sabbath, to call to mind a more glorious redemption wrought out for us by Jesus Christ, from worse than Egyptian bondage, and the many gracious answers he has given to us, notwithstanding our manifold provocations.

8. Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; 9. There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god. 10. I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. 11. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. 12. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. 13. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! 14. I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. 15. The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. 16. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.

God, by the psalmist, here speaks to Israel, and, in them, to us, on whom the ends of the world are come.

I. He demands their diligent and serious attention to what he was about to say; (*v. 8.*) "*Hear O my people*; who should hear me, if my own people will not? I have heard and answered thee; now, wilt thou hear me? Hear what is said with the greatest solemnity, and the most unquestionable certainty, for it is what I will testify unto thee. Do not only give me the hearing, but hearken unto me, be advised by me, be ruled by me." Nothing could be more reasonably or more justly expected, and yet God puts an *if* upon it; "*If thou wilt hearken unto me.*" It is thine interest to do so, and yet it is questionable whether thou wilt or no, for thy neck is an iron sinew."

II. He puts them in mind of their obligation to him, as the Lord their God and Redeemer; (*v. 10.*) *I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt*; this is the preface to the ten commandments, and a powerful reason for the keeping of them, shewing that we are bound to it in duty, interest, and gratitude, all which bonds we break asunder, if we be disobedient.

III. He gives them an abstract both of the precepts and of the promises which he gave them as the Lord, and their God, upon their coming out of Egypt. 1. The great command was, That they should have no other gods before him; (*v. 9.*) *There shall no strange god be in thee*, none beside thine own God. Other gods might well be called *strange gods*, for it was very strange that ever any people, who had the true and living God for their God, should hanker after any other. God is jealous in this matter, for he will not suffer his glory to be given to another; and therefore in this matter they must be circumspect, *Exod. 23. 13.* 2. The great promise was, That God himself, as a God all-sufficient, would be nigh unto them in all that which they called

upon him for, Deut. 4. 7. That, if they would adhere to him as their powerful Protector and Ruler, they should always find him their bountiful Benefactor. Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it, as the young ravens that cry open their mouths wide, and the old ones fill them. See here, (1.) What is our duty; to raise our expectations from God, and enlarge our desires toward him. We cannot look for too little from the creature, nor too much from the Creator. We are not straitened in him; why therefore should we be straitened in our own bosoms? (2.) What is God's promise; I will fill thy mouth with good things, 103. 5. There is enough in God to fill our treasures, (Prov. 8. 21.) to replenish every hungry soul, (Jer. 31. 25.) to supply all our wants, to answer all our desires, and to make us completely happy. The pleasures of sense will surfeit, and never satisfy; (Isa. 55. 2.) divine pleasures will satisfy, and never surfeit. And we may have enough from God, if we pray for it in faith; *Ask, and it shall be given you; he gives liberally, and upbraids not.* God assured his people Israel, that it should be their own fault, if he did not do as great and kind things for them as he had done for their fathers. Nothing should have been thought too good, too much, to give them, if they would but have kept close to God. He would moreover have given them such and such things, 2 Sam. 12. 8.

IV. He charges them with a high contempt of his authority as their Lawgiver, and his grace and favour as their Benefactor, v. 11. He had done much for them, and designed to do more; but all in vain; *"My people would not hearken to my voice, but turned a deaf ear to all I said."* Two things he complains of; 1. Their disobedience to his commands; they did hear his voice, so as never any people did; but they would not hearken to it, they would not be ruled by it, neither by the law, nor by the reason of it. 2. Their dislike of his covenant-relation to them; *They would none of me.* "They acquiesced not in my word;" so the Chaldee. God was willing to be to them a God, but they were not willing to be to him a people; they did not like his terms. "I would have gathered them, but they would not." They had none of him; and why had they not? It was not because they might not, they were fairly invited into covenant with God; it was not because they could not, for the word was nigh them, even in their mouth and in their heart: but it was purely because they would not. God calls them his people, for they were bought by him, bound to him, his by a thousand ties, and yet even they have not hearkened, have not obeyed; Israel, the seed of Jacob my friend, set me at nought, and would have none of me. Note, All the wickedness of the wicked world is owing to the wilfulness of the wicked will. The reason why people are not religious, is, because they will not be so.

V. He justifies himself with this, in the spiritual judgments he had brought upon them; (v. 12.) *So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts*, which would be more dangerous enemies, and more mischievous oppressors, to them, than any of the neighbouring nations ever were. God withdrew his Spirit from them, took off the bridle of restraining grace, left them to themselves, and justly; they will do as they will, and therefore let them do as they will: *Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.* It is a righteous thing with God to give those up to their own hearts' lusts that indulge them, and give up themselves to be led by them; for why should his Spirit always strive? His grace is his own, and he is Debtor to no man, and yet, as he never gave his grace to any that could say they deserved it, so he never took it away from any, but such as had first forfeited it; *They would none of me, so I gave them up*, let them take their course; and see what follows; they walked in their own counsels, in the way of their heart, and in the sight of their eye, both in their worships, and in their conversations. I left them to do as they would, and then they did all that was ill; they walked in their own counsels, and not according to the counsels of God, and his advice. God therefore was not the Author of their sin, he left them to the lusts of their own hearts, and the counsels of their own heads; if they do not well, the blame must lie upon their own hearts, and the blood upon their own heads.

VI. He testifies his good will to them, in wishing they had done well for themselves. He saw how sad their case was, and how sure their ruin, when they were delivered up to their own lusts; that is worse than being given up to Satan, which may be in order to reformation, (1 Tim. 1. 20.) and to salvation, 1 Cor. 5. 5. But to be delivered up to our own hearts' lusts, is to be sealed under condemnation. He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; what fatal precipices will not these hurry a man to? Now, here God looks upon them with pity, and shews that it was with reluctance that he thus abandoned them to their folly and fate; *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* Hos. 11. 8, 9. So here, *Oh that my people had hearkened!* See Isa. 48. 18. Thus Christ lamented the obstinacy of Jerusalem; *If thou hadst known, Luke, 19. 42.* The expressions here are very affecting, (v. 13. 16.) designed to shew, 1. How unwilling God is that any should perish, and desirous that all should come to repentance. He delights not in the ruin of sinful persons or nations. 2. What enemies sinners are to themselves, and what an aggravation it will be of their misery, that they might have been happy upon such easy terms.

Observe here, (1.) The great mercy God had in store for his people, and which he would have wrought for them, if they had been obedient. [1.] He would have given them victory over their enemies, and would soon have completed the reduction of them. They should not only have kept their ground, but have gained their point, against the remaining Canaanites, and their encroaching vexatious neighbours; (v. 14.) *I should have subdued their enemies*; and it is God only that is to be depended on for the subduing our enemies. Nor would he have put them to the expense and fatigue of a tedious war, he would soon have done it; for he would have turned his hand against their adversaries, and then they had not been able to stand before them. It intimates how easily he would have done it, and without any difficulty; with the turn of a hand; nay, *with the breath of his mouth shall he slay the wicked*, Isa. 11. 4. If he but turn his hand, the haters of the Lord will submit themselves to him; (v. 15.) and though they are not brought to love him, yet they shall be made to fear him, and to confess that he is too hard for them, and that it is in vain to contend with him. God is honoured, and so is his Israel, by the submission of those that have been in rebellion against them, though it be but a forced and feigned submission. [2.] He would have confirmed and perpetuated their posterity, and established it upon sure and lasting foundations. In despite of all the attempts of their enemies against them, their time should have endured for ever, and they should never have been disturbed in the possession of the good land God had given them, much less evicted, and turned out of all possession. [3.] He would have given them great plenty of all good things; (v. 16.) *He should have fed them with the finest of the wheat*, with the best grain, and best of the kind. Wheat was the staple-commodity of Canaan, and they exported a deal of it, Ezek. 27. 17. He would not only have provided for them the best sort of bread, but with *honey out of the rock would he have satisfied them*. Beside the precious products of the fruitful soil, that there might not be a barren spot in all their land, even the clefts of the rock should serve for bee-hives, and in them they should find honey in abundance. See Deut. 32. 13, 14. In short, God designed to make them every way easy and happy.

(2.) The duty God required from them as the condition of all this mercy. He expected no more than that they should hearken to him, as a scholar to his teacher, to receive his instructions; as a servant to his master, to receive his commands; and that they should walk in his ways, those ways of the Lord which are right and pleasant, that they should observe the institutions of his ordinances, and attend the intimations of his providence; there was nothing unreasonable in this.

(3.) Observe how the reason of the withholding of the mercy is laid in their neglect of the duty; If they had hearkened to me, I would soon have subdued their enemies. Note, National sin and disobedience is the great and only thing that retards and obstructs national salvation and deliverance. *When I would have*

healed Israel, and set every thing to rights among them, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and so a stop was put to the cure, Hos. 7. 1. We are apt to say, "If such a method had been taken, such an instrument employed, we should soon have subdued our enemies;" but we mistake; if we had hearkened to God, and kept to our duty, the thing had been done, but it is sin that makes our troubles long, and salvation slow. And this is that which God himself complains of, and wishes it had been otherwise. Note, Therefore God would have us do our duty to him, that we may be qualified to receive favour from him. He therefore delights in our serving him, not because he is the better for it, but because we shall be.

PSALM LXXXII.

This psalm is calculated for the meridian of princes' courts, and courts of justice, not in Israel only, but in other nations; yet it was probably penned primarily for the use of the magistrates of Israel, the great Sanhedrim, and their other elders, who were in places of power, and perhaps by David's direction. This psalm is designed to make kings wise, and to instruct the judges of the earth, as 2. 10, to tell them their duty, as 2 Sam. 23. 3. and to tell them of their faults, as 58. 1. We have here, I. The dignity of magistracy, and its dependence upon God, v. 1. II. The duty of magistrates, v. 3, 4. III. The degeneracy of bad magistrates, and the mischief they do, v. 2, 5. IV. Their doom read, v. 6, 7. V. The desire and prayer of all good people, that the kingdom of God may be set up more and more, v. 8. Though magistrates may most closely apply this psalm to themselves, yet we may any of us sing it with understanding, when we give glory to God in singing it, as presiding in all public affairs, providing for the protection of injured innocency, and ready to punish the most powerful in justice, and when we comfort ourselves with the belief of his present government, and with the hopes of his future judgment.

A psalm of Asaph.

1. **G**OD standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods. 2. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. 3. Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. 4. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked. 5. They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course.

We have here,

I. God's supreme presidency and power in all councils and courts, asserted and laid down, as a great truth necessary to be believed both by princes and subjects; (v. 1.) *God stands, as chief Director, in the congregation of the mighty, the mighty One, in cætu fortis—in the councils of the prince, the supreme Magistrate, and he judges among the gods, the inferior magistrates; both the legislative and the executive power of princes is under his eye and his hand.* Observe here, 1. The power and honour of magistrates, they are the *mighty*; they are so in authority, for the public good; it is a great power that they are intrusted with, and they ought to be mighty in wisdom and courage. They are, in the Hebrew dialect, called *gods*; the same word is used for these subordinate governors, that is used for the sovereign Ruler of the world. They are *Elohim*; angels are so called, both because they are great in power and might, and because God is pleased to make use of their service in the government of this lower world; and magistrates, in an inferior capacity, are likewise the ministers of his providence in general, for the keeping up of order and peace in human societies, and particularly of his justice and goodness in punishing evil doers, and protecting them that do well. Good magistrates, who answer the ends of magistracy, are as God; some of his honour is put upon them, they are his vicegerents, and great blessings to any people. *A divine sentence is in the lips of the king, Prov. 16. 10.* But as *roaring lions, and ranging bears, so are wicked rulers over the poor people, Prov. 26. 15.* 2. A good form and constitution of government intimated, and

that is a mixed monarchy like our's; here is the mighty One, the Sovereign, and here is his congregation, his privy council, his parliament, his bench of judges, who are called the *gods*. 3. God's incontestable sovereignty maintained in and over all the congregations of the mighty. God stands, he judges among them; they have their power from him, and are accountable to him; *by him kings reign.* He is present at all their debates, and inspects all they say and do, and what is said and done amiss will be called over again, and they reckoned with for their mal-administrations. God has their hearts in his hands, and their tongues too, and he directs them *which way soever he will, Prov. 21. 1.* So that he has a negative voice in all their resolves, and his counsels shall stand, whatever devices are in men's hearts; he makes what use he pleases of them, and serves his own purposes and designs by them, though their hearts little think so, Isa. 10. 7. Let magistrates consider this, and be awed by it; God is with them in the judgment, 2 Chron. 19. 6. Deut. 1. 17. Let subjects consider this, and be comforted with it; for good princes and good judges, who mean well, are under a divine direction, and bad ones, who mean ever so ill, are under a divine restraint.

II. A charge given to all magistrates to do good with their power, as they will answer it to him by whom they are intrusted with it, v. 3, 4. 1. They are to be the protectors of those who lie exposed to injury, and the patrons of those who want advice and assistance. *Defend the poor, who have no money wherewith to make friends or fee counsel, and the fatherless, who, while they are young and unable to help themselves, have lost all those who would have been guides of their youth.* Magistrates, as they must be fathers to their country in general, so particularly to those in it who are fatherless; they are called the *gods*. Herein they must be followers of him, they must be *fathers of the fatherless.* Job was so, Job, 29. 12. 2. They are to administer justice impartially, and do *right to the afflicted and needy, who, being weak and helpless, have often wrongs done them: and will be in danger of losing all, if magistrates do not, ex officio—officially, interpose for their relief.* If a poor man has an honest cause, his poverty must be no prejudice to his cause, how great and powerful soever those are that contend with him. 3. They are to rescue those who are already fallen into the hands of oppressors, and deliver them; (v. 4.) *Rid them out of the hand of the wicked, avenge them of their adversary, Luke, 18. 3.* These are clients whom there is nothing to be got by, no pay for serving them, no interest by obliging them; yet these are they whom judges and magistrates must concern themselves for, whose comfort they must consult, and whose cause they must espouse.

III. A charge drawn up against bad magistrates, who neglect their duty, and abuse their power, forgetting that God standeth among them, v. 2, 5. Observe,

1. What the sin is they are here charged with; they judge unjustly, contrary to the rules of equity and the dictates of their consciences; giving judgment *against* those who have right on their side, out of malice and ill-will; or *for* those who have an unrighteous cause, out of favour and partial affection. To do unjustly is bad, but to judge unjustly is much worse, because it is doing wrong under colour of right; against such acts of injustice there is least fence for the injured, and by them encouragement is given to the injurious. It was as great an evil as any Solomon saw under the sun, when he observed *the place of judgment, that iniquity was there, Eccl. 3. 16. Isa. 5. 7.* They not only accepted the persons of the rich, because they were rich, though that is bad enough, but (which is much worse) they *accepted the persons of the wicked, because they were wicked; they not only countenanced them in their wickedness, but loved them the better for it, and fell in with their interests.* Woe unto thee, O land, when thy judges are such as these!

2. What was the cause of this sin. They were told plainly enough that it was their office and duty to protect and deliver the poor, it was many a time given them in charge, yet they judge unjustly, for *they know not, neither will they understand.* They do not care to hear their duty, they will not take pains to study it, they have no desire to take things right, but are governed by in-

terest, not by reason or justice; *a gift in secret blinds their eyes*. They know not, because they will not understand; none so blind as those that will not see. They have baffled their own consciences, and so they walk on in darkness, not knowing or caring what they do or whither they go. They that walk on in darkness are walking on to everlasting darkness.

3. What were the consequences of this sin; *All the foundations of the earth*, or of the land, are out of course; when justice is perverted, what good can be expected? *The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved*, as the psalmist speaks in a like case, 75. 3. The miscarriages of public persons are public mischiefs.

6. I have said, *Ye are gods*; and all of you are children of the most High. 7. But he shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. 8. Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

We have here,

1. Earthly gods abased and brought down, v. 6, 7. The dignity of their character is acknowledged; (v. 6.) *I have said, ye are gods*. They have been honoured with the name and title of gods; God himself called them so in the statute against treasonable words; (Exod. 22. 28.) *Thou shalt not revile the gods*. And if they have this style from the Fountain of honour, who can dispute it? But what is man, that he should be thus magnified? He called them *gods*, because *unto them the word of God came*, so our Saviour expounds it; (John, 10. 35.) they had a commission from God, and were delegated and appointed by him to be the shields of the earth, the conservators of the public peace, and revengers to execute wrath upon those that disturb it, Rom. 13. 4. All of them are in this sense *children of the most High*. God has put some of his honour upon them, and employs them in his providential government of the world, as David made his sons chief rulers. Or "Because *I said, Ye are gods*, ye have carried the honour further than was intended, and have imagined yourselves to be *the children of the most High*," as the king of Babylon, (Isa. 14. 14.) *I will be like the most High*, and the king of Tyre, (Ezek. 28. 2.) *Thou hast set thy heart as the heart of God*. It is a hard thing for men to have so much honour put upon them by the hand of God, and so much honour paid them, as ought to be by the children of men, and not to be proud of it and puffed up with it, and so to think of themselves above what is meet. But here follows a mortifying consideration; *Ye shall die like men*. This may be taken, either, (1.) As the punishment of bad magistrates, such as judged unjustly, and by their misrule put the *foundations of the earth out of course*; God will reckon with them, and will cut them off in the midst of their pomp and prosperity; they shall die like other wicked men, and fall like one of the heathen princes, and their being Israelites shall not secure them, any more than their being judges; or like one of the angels that sinned; or like one of the giants of the old world. Compare this with that which Elihu observed concerning the mighty oppressors in his time; (Job, 34. 26.) *He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others*. Let those that abuse their power, know that God will take both it and their lives from them; for wherein they deal proudly, he will *shew himself above them*. Or, (2.) As the period of the glory of all magistrates in this world; let them not be puffed up with their honour, or neglect their work, but let the consideration of their mortality, be both mortifying to their pride, and quickening to their duty. Ye are called gods, but ye have no patent for immortality, *ye shall die like men*, like common men, and, *like one of them, ye, O princes, shall fall*. Note, Kings and princes, all the judges of the earth, though they are gods to us, are men to God, and shall die like men, and all their honour shall be laid in the dust. *Mors sceptrā ligonibus aequat—Death mingles sceptres with spades*.

2. The God of heaven exalted and raised high, v. 8. The psalmist finds it to little purpose to reason with these proud oppressors, they turned a deaf ear to all he said, and walked on

in darkness; and therefore he looks up to God, appeals to him, and begs of him *to take unto himself his great power*; *Arise, O God, judge the earth*; and, when he prays that he would do it, he believes that he will do it; *Thou shalt inherit all nations*. This has respect, (1.) To the kingdom of providence; God governs the world, sets up and puts down whom he pleases, he inherits all nations, has an absolute dominion over them, to dispose of them as a man does of his inheritance; this we are to believe, and to comfort ourselves with, that the earth is not given so much *into the hands of the wicked*, the wicked rulers, as we are tempted to think it is, Job, 9. 24. But God has reserved the power to himself, and overrules them. In this faith we must pray, "*Arise, O God, judge the earth*, appear against those that judge unjustly, and set shepherds over thy people after thine own heart." There is a righteous God to whom we may have recourse, and on whom we may depend, for the effectual relief of all that find themselves aggrieved by unjust judges. (2.) It has respect to the kingdom of the Messiah. It is a prayer for the hastening of that, that Christ would come, who is to judge the earth; and that promise is pleaded, that God shall *give him the heathen for his inheritance*. Thou, O Christ, shalt *inherit all nations*, and be the Governor over them, 2. 8.—22. 28. Let the second coming of Christ set to-rights all these disorders. There are two words with which we may comfort ourselves and one another, in reference to the mismanagements of power among men; one is, (Rev. 19. 6.) *Hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth*; the other is, (Rev. 22. 20.) *Surely, I come quickly*.

PSALM LXXXIII.

This psalm is the last of those that go under the name of Asaph. It is penned, as most of those, upon a public account, with reference to the insults of the church's enemies, who sought its ruin. Some think it was penned upon occasion of the threatening descent which was made upon the land of Judah, in Jehoshaphat's time, by the Moabites and Ammonites, those children of Lot here spoken of, (v. 8.) who were at the head of the alliance, and to whom all the other states here mentioned were auxiliaries. We have the story, 2 Chron. 20. 1. where it is said, *The children of Moab and Ammon, and others besides them, invaded the land*. Others think it was penned with reference to all the confederacies of the neighbouring nations against Israel, from first to last. The psalmist here makes an appeal and application, 1. To God's knowledge, by a presentation of their designs and endeavours to destroy Israel, v. 1. .8. 2. To God's justice and jealousy, both for his church and for his own honour, by an earnest prayer for the defeat of their attempt, that the church might be preserved, the enemies humbled, and God glorified, v. 9. .18. This, in the singing of it, we may apply to the enemies of the gospel-church, all antichristian powers and factions, representing to God their confederacies against Christ and his kingdom, and rejoicing in the hope that all their projects will be baffled, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church.

A song or psalm of Asaph.

1. **K**EEP not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. 2. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. 3. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. 4. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from *being* a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. 5. For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee: 6. The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes; 7. Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre; 8. Assur also is joined with them; they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah.

The Israel of God were now in danger and fear, and great distress; and yet their prayer is called, *A song or psalm*, to

singing psalms is not unseasonable, no, not when the harps are hung upon the willow-trees.

I. The psalmist here begs of God to appear on the behalf of his injured threatened people; (v. 1.) "*Keep not thou silence, O God, but give judgment for us against those that do us an apparent wrong.*" Thus Jehoshaphat prayed upon occasion of that invasion; (2 Chron. 20. 11.) *Behold, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession.* Sometimes God seems to connive at the unjust treatment which is given to his people; he keeps silence, as one that either did not observe it, or did not concern himself in it; he holds his peace, as if he would observe an exact neutrality, and let them fight it out; he is still, and gives not the enemies of his people any disturbance or opposition, but seems to sit by as *a man astonished, or as a mighty man that cannot save.* Then he gives us leave to call upon him, as here, "*Keep not thou silence, O God.* Lord, speak to us by thy prophets, for our encouragement against our fears;" (as he did in reference to that invasion, 2 Chron. 20. 14, &c.) "Lord, speak for us by thy providence, and speak against our enemies; speak deliverance to us, and disappointment to them." God's speaking is his acting; for with him saying and doing are the same thing.

II. He here gives an account of the grand alliance of the neighbouring nations against Israel, which he begs of God to break, and blast the projects of.

Now observe here,

1. Against whom this confederacy is formed; it is against the Israel of God, and so, in effect, against the God of Israel. Thus the psalmist takes care to interest God in their cause, not doubting but that, if it appeared that they were for God, God would make it to appear that he was for them, and then they might set all their enemies at defiance; for who then could be against them? "Lord," says he, "they are thine enemies, and they hate thee." All wicked people are God's enemies, (the *carnal mind is enmity against God*;) but especially wicked persecutors; they hated the religious worshippers of God, because they hated God's holy religion, and the worship of him. This was that which made God's people so zealous against them—that they fought against God; *They are confederate against thee, v. 5.* Were our interest only concerned, we could the better bear it, but when God himself is struck at, it is time to cry, Help, Lord! *Keep not thou silence, O God.* He proves that they are confederate against God, for they are so against the people of God, who are near and dear to him, his son, his first-born, his portion, and the lot of his inheritance; he may truly be said to fight against me, that endeavours to destroy my children, to root out my family, and ruin my estate. "Lord," says the psalmist, "they are thy enemies, for they consult against thy hidden ones." Note, God's people are his hidden ones; hidden, (1.) In respect of secrecy; their life is *hid with Christ in God*; the world knows them not; if they knew them, they would not hate them as they do. (2.) In respect of safety; God takes them under his special protection, hides them in the hollow of his hand; and yet, in defiance of God and his power, and promise to secure his people, they will consult, and ruin them, and *cast them down from their excellency*, (62. 4.) and so make a prey of those whom the Lord has set apart for himself, 4. 3. They resolve to destroy those whom God resolves to preserve.

2. How this confederacy is managed; the Devil is at the bottom of it, and therefore it is carried on, (1.) With a great deal of heat and violence; *Thine enemies make a tumult, v. 2.* The heathen rage, 2. 1. *The nations are angry*, Rev. 11. 18. They are noisy in their clamours against the people, whom they hope to run down with their loud calumnies; this comes in as a reason why God should not keep silence: "The enemies talk big, and talk much; Lord, let them not talk all, but do thou speak to them in thy wrath," 2. 5. (2.) With a great deal of pride and insolence; They have lifted up the head; in confidence of their success, they are so elevated, as if they could overtop the Most High, and overpower the Almighty. (3.) With a great deal of art and policy; They have taken crafty counsel, v. 3. The subtlety of the old serpent appears in their management, and they contrive, by all possible means, though ever so base, ever so bad, to gain their

point. They are *profound to make slaughter*, (Hos. 5. 2.) as if they could outwit Infinite Wisdom. (4.) With a great deal of unanimity; whatever separate clashing interest they have among themselves, against the people of God they *consult with one consent*, (v. 5.) nor is *Satan's kingdom divided against itself*. To push on this unholy war, they lay their heads together, and their horns, and their hearts too. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri—Even an enemy may instruct.* Do the enemies of the church act with one consent to destroy it? Are the kings of the earth of one mind to give their power and honour to the beast? And shall not the church's friends be unanimous in serving her interests? If Herod and Pilate are made friends, that they may join in crucifying Christ, surely Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Peter, will soon be made friends, that they may join in preaching Christ.

3. What it is that is aimed at in this confederacy; they consult not like the Gibeonites to make a league with Israel, that they might strengthen themselves by such a desirable alliance, which had been their wisdom: they consult, not only to clip the wings of Israel, to recover their new conquests, and check the progress of their victorious arms; not only to keep the balance even between them and Israel, and to prevent their power from growing exorbitant; this will not serve; it is no less than the utter ruin and extirpation of Israel that they design; (v. 4.) "*Come, let us cut them off from being a nation*, as they cut off the seven nations of Ganaan; let us leave them neither root nor branch, but lay their country so perfectly waste, *that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance*, no not in history;" for with them they would destroy their Bibles, and burn all their records. Such is the enmity of the serpent's seed against the seed of the woman. It is the secret wish of wicked men, that the church of God might not have a being in the world, that there might be no such thing as religion among mankind; having banished the sense of it out of their own hearts, they would gladly see the whole earth as well rid of it; all its laws and ordinances abolished, all its restraints and obligations shaken off, and all that preach, profess, or practise it, cut off; this they would bring it to, if it were in their power; but *he that sits in heaven shall laugh at them*.

4. Who they are that are drawn into this confederacy; the nations that entered into this alliance are here mentioned, (v. 6..8.) the Edomites and Ishmaelites, both descendants from Abraham, lead the van, for the apostates from the church have been its most bitter and spiteful enemies, witness Julian. These were allied to Israel in blood, and yet in alliance against Israel. There are no bonds of nature so strong, but the spirit of persecution has broken through them; *The brother shall betray the brother to death*. Moab and Ammon were the children of righteous Lot; but as an incestuous, so a degenerate, race. The Philistines were long a thorn in Israel's side, and very vexations; how the inhabitants of Tyre, who, in David's time, were Israel's firm allies, come in among their enemies, I know not, but that Assur, that is, the Assyrian, also is joined with them, is not strange, or that (as the word is) they were an arm to the children of Lot. See how numerous the enemies of God's church have always been; *Lord, how are they increased that trouble it!* God's heritage was a speckled bird, all the birds round about were against her (Jer. 12. 9.) which highly magnifies the power of God in preserving to himself a church in the world, in despite of the combined force of earth and hell.

9. Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison

10. Which perished at En-dor: they became as dung for the earth. 11. Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna: 12. Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession. 13. O my God, make them like a wheel: as the stubble before the wind. 14. As the fire burneth the wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire;

15. So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm. 16. Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD. 17. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: 18. That *men* may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most High over all the earth.

The psalmist here, in the name of the church, prays for the destruction of those confederate forces, and, in God's name, foretells it; for, this prayer, that it might be so, amounts to a prophecy that it shall be so; and this prophecy reaches to all the enemies of the gospel-church; whoever they be that oppose the kingdom of Christ, here they may read their doom.

The prayer is, in short, that these enemies, who were confederate against Israel, might be defeated in all their attempts, and that they might prove their own ruin, and so God's Israel might be preserved and perpetuated. Now this is here illustrated,

I. By some precedents; let that be their punishment which has been the fate of others who have formerly set themselves against God's Israel. The defeat and discomfiture of former combinations may be pleaded in prayer to God, and improved for the encouragement of our own faith and hope; because God is the same still that ever he was, the same to his people, and the same against his and their enemies; with him is no variableness.

1. He prays that their armies might be destroyed as the armies of former enemies had been; (v. 9, 10.) *Do to them as to the Midianites*; let them be routed by their own fears; for so the Midianites were, more than by Gideon's 300 men. Do to them as to the army under the command of Sisera, who was general under Jabin king of Canaan, which God discomfited (Judg. 4. 15.) at the brook Kishon, near to which was Endor; they became as dung on the earth, their dead bodies were thrown like dung, laid in heaps, or spread, to fatten the ground; they were trodden to dirt by Barak's small, but victorious, army; and this was fitly made a precedent here, because Deborah made it so to after-times when it was fresh; (Judg. 5. 31.) *So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord*, that is, So they shall perish.

2. He prays that their leaders might be destroyed as they had been formerly; the common people would not have been so mischievous, if their princes had not set them on, and therefore they are particularly prayed against, v. 11, 12. Observe, (1.) What their malice was against the Israel of God; they said, *Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession*, (v. 12.) the pleasant places of God, so the word is, by which we may understand the land of Canaan, which was a pleasant land, and was Immanuel's land; or, the temple, which was indeed God's pleasant place; (Isa. 64. 11.) or, (as Dr. Hammond suggests,) the pleasant pastures, which these Arabians, who traded in cattle, did, in a particular manner, seek after. The princes and nobles aimed to enrich themselves by this war; and their armies must be made as dung for the earth, to serve their covetousness and their ambition. (2.) What their lot should be; they shall be made like Oreb and Zeeb, two princes of the Midianites, who, when their forces were routed, were taken in their flight by the Ephraimites, and slain; (Judg. 7. 25.) and, like Zeba and Zalmunna, whom Gideon himself slew, Judg. 8. 21. "Let these enemies of our's be made as easy a prey to us, as they were to the conquerors then." We may not prescribe to God, but we may pray to God that he will deal with the enemies of his church in our days, as he did with those in the days of our fathers.

II. He illustrates it by some similitudes, and prays,

1. That God would make them like a wheel, (v. 13.) that they might be in continual motion, unquiet, unsettled, and giddy, in all their counsels and resolves; that they might roll down easily and speedily to their own ruin. Or, as some think, that they might be broken by the judgments of God, as the corn is broken, or beaten out, by the wheel which was then used in threshing.

Thus, when a *wise king scattereth the wicked*, he is said to *bring the wheel over them*, Prov. 20. 26. They that trust in God have their hearts fixed; they that fight against him are unfixed, like a wheel.

2. That they might be chased as stubble, or chaff, before the fierce wind. The wheel, though it continually turn round, is fixed on its own axis; but let them have no more fixation than the light stubble has, which the wind hurries away, and nobody desires to save it, but is willing it should go, Ps. 1. 4. Thus shall the *wicked be driven away in his wickedness, and chased out of the world*.

3. That they might be consumed, as wood by the fire, or as briars and thorns, as fern or furze, upon the mountains, by the flames, v. 14. When the stubble is driven by the wind, it will rest, at last, under some hedge, in some ditch or other; but he prays that they might not only be driven away as stubble, but burnt as stubble. And this will be the end of wicked men, (Heb. 6. 8.) and particularly of all the enemies of God's church. The reddition of these comparisons we have; (v. 15.) *So persecute them with thy tempest*, persecute them to their utter ruin, and make them *afraid with thy storm*. See how sinners are made miserable; the storm of God's wrath raises terrors in their own hearts, and so they are made completely miserable. God can deal with the proudest and most daring sinner that has bid defiance to his justice, and can make him afraid as a grasshopper. It is the torment of devils, that they tremble.

III. He illustrates it by the good consequences of their confusion, v. 16. 18. He prays here that God, having filled their hearts with terror, would thereby fill their faces with shame, that they might be ashamed of their enmity to the people of God, (Isa. 26. 11.) ashamed of their folly in acting both against Omnipotence itself, and their own true interest. They did what they could to put God's people to shame, but the shame will, at length, return upon themselves.

Now, 1. The beginning of this shame might be a means of their conversion; "Let them be broken and baffled in their attempts, *that they may seek thy name, O Lord*. Let them be put to a stand, that they may have both leisure and reason to pause a little, and consider who it is that they are fighting against, and what an unequal match they are for him, and may, therefore, humble and submit themselves, and desire conditions of peace. Let them be made to *fear thy name*, and perhaps that will bring them to *seek thy name*." Note, That which we should earnestly desire and beg of God for our enemies and persecutors, is, that God would bring them to repentance, and we should desire their abasement in order to this; no other confusion to them, than what may be a step toward their conversion.

2. If it did not prove a means of their conversion, the perfecting of it would redound greatly to the honour of God; if they will not be ashamed and repent, let them be put to shame and perish; if they will not be troubled and turned, which would soon put an end to all their trouble, a happy end, *let them be troubled for ever*, and never have peace; this will be for God's glory; (v. 18.) that other men may know and own, if they themselves will not, *that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH*, (that incommunicable, though not ineffable, name,) *art the Most High over all the earth*. God's triumphs over his and his church's enemies, will be incontestable proofs, (1.) That he is, according to his name JEHOVAH, a self-existent, self-sufficient, Being, that has all power and perfection in himself. (2.) That he is the most high God, sovereign Lord of all, above all gods, above all kings, above all that exalt themselves, and pretend to be high. (3.) That he is so, not only over the land of Israel, but over all the earth, even those nations of the earth that do not know him, or own him, for his kingdom rules over all. These are great and unquestionable truths, but men will hardly be persuaded to know and believe them; therefore the psalmist prays that the destruction of some might be the conviction of others. The final ruin of all God's enemies, in the great day, will be the effectual proof of this, before angels and men; when the everlasting shame and contempt to which sinner shall rise, (Dan. 12. 2.) shall redound to the everlasting honour and praise of that God to whom vengeance belongs.

PSALM LXXXIV.

Though David's name be not in the title of this psalm, yet we have reason to think he was the penman of it, because it breathes so much of his excellent spirit, and is so like to the 63d psalm, which was penned by him; it is supposed that David penned this psalm when he was forced, by Absalom's rebellion, to quit his city, which he lamented his absence from, not so much because it was the royal city, as because it was the holy city, witness this psalm, which contains the pious breathings of a gracious soul after God, and communion with him. Though it be not entitled, yet it may fitly be looked upon as, a psalm or song for the sabbath-day, the day of our solemn assemblies. The psalmist here with great devotion expresses his affection, I. To the ordinances of God; his value for them, (v. 1.) his desire toward them, (v. 2, 3.) his conviction of the happiness of those that did enjoy them, (v. 4, 7.) and his placing of his own happiness so very much in the enjoyment of them, v. 10. II. To the God of the ordinances: his desire toward him, (v. 8, 9.) his faith in him, (v. 11.) and his conviction of the happiness of those that put their confidence in him, v. 12. In singing this psalm, we should have the same devout affections working toward God, that David had, and then the singing of it will be very pleasant.

To the chief musician upon Gittith. A psalm for the sons of Korah.

1. **H**OW amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! 2. My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. 3. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. 4. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah. 5. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them, 6. Who, passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. 7. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

The psalmist here, being by force restrained from waiting upon God in public ordinances, by the want of them is brought under a more sensible conviction than ever of the worth of them. Observe,

I. The wonderful beauty he saw in holy institutions; (v. 1.) *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!* Some think that he here calls God the *Lord of hosts*, that is, in a special manner of the angels, the heavenly hosts, because of the presence of the angels in God's sanctuary; they attended the Shechinah, and were (as some think) signified by the cherubim; God is the Lord of these hosts, and his tabernacle is: it is spoken of as more than one, (*thy tabernacles*,) because there were divers courts in which the people attended, and because the tabernacle itself consisted of a holy place, and a most holy. How amiable are these! How lovely is the sanctuary in the eyes of all that are truly sanctified! Gracious souls see a wonderful, an inexpressible, beauty in holiness, and in holy work. A tabernacle was a mean habitation, but the disadvantage of external circumstances makes holy ordinances not at all the less amiable, for the beauty of holiness is spiritual, and their glory is within.

II. The longing desire he had to return to the enjoyment of public ordinances, or rather of God in them, v. 2. It was an entire desire; body, soul, and spirit, concurred in it, he was not conscious to himself of any rising thought to the contrary; it was an intense desire; it was like the desire of the ambitious, or covetous, or voluptuous. He longed, he fainted, he cried out, importunate to be restored to his place in God's courts, and almost impatient of delay. Yet it was not so much the courts of the Lord that he coveted, but he cried out, in prayer, for the living God himself. Oh that I might know him, and be again taken into communion

with him! 1 John, 1. 3. Ordinances are empty things, if we meet not with God in the ordinances.

III. His grudging the happiness of the little birds that made their nests in the buildings that were adjoining to God's altars, v. 3. This is an elegant and surprising expression of his affection to God's altars; *The sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself.* These little birds, by the instinct and direction of nature, provide habitations for themselves in houses, as other birds do in the woods, both for their own repose, and in which to lay their young; some such David supposes there were in the buildings about the courts of God's house, and wishes himself with them. He would rather live in a bird's nest nigh God's altars, than in a palace at a distance from them. He sometimes wished for the wings of a dove, on which to fly into the wilderness; (55. 6.) here for the wings of a sparrow, that he might fly undiscovered into God's courts; and, though to watch as a sparrow alone upon the house-top, is the description of a very melancholy state and spirit, (102. 7.) yet David would be glad to take it for his lot, provided he might be near God's altars. It is better to be serving God in solitude, than serving sin with a multitude. The word for a sparrow signifies any little bird, and (if I may offer a conjecture) perhaps, when, in David's time, music was introduced so much into the sacred service, both vocal and instrumental, to complete the harmony, they had singing-birds in cages hung about the courts of the tabernacle, (for we find the singing of birds taken notice of to the glory of God, 104. 12.) and David envies the happiness of these, and would gladly change places with them. Observe, David envies the happiness not of those birds that flew over the altars, and had only a transient view of God's courts, but of those that had nests for themselves there; David will not think it enough to sojourn in God's house as a way-faring man that turns aside to tarry for a night, but let this be his rest, his home, here he will dwell. And he takes notice that these birds not only have nests for themselves there, but that there they lay their young; for those who have a place in God's courts themselves, cannot but desire that their children also may have in God's house, and within his walls, a place and a name, that they may feed their kids beside the shepherds' tents. Some give another sense of this verse; "Lord, by thy providence thou hast furnished the birds with nests and resting-places, agreeable to their nature, and to them they have free recourse; but thine altar, which is my nest, my resting-place, which I am desirous of as ever the wandering bird was of her nest, I cannot have access to. Lord, wilt thou provide better for thy birds than for thy babes? As a bird that wanders from her nest, so am I, now that I wander from the place of God's altars, for that is my place; (Prov. 27. 8.) I shall never be easy till I return to my place again." Note, They whose souls are at home, at rest, in God, cannot but desire a settlement near his ordinances. There were two altars, one for sacrifice, the other for incense, and David, in his desire of a place in God's courts, has an eye to both, as we also must, in all our attendance on God, have an eye both to the satisfaction and to the intercession of Christ. And, lastly, Observe how he eyes God in this address; Thou art the *Lord of hosts, my King, and my God.* Where should a poor distressed subject seek for protection but with his king? And should not a people seek unto their God? My King, my God, is Lord of hosts; by him and his altars let me live and die.

IV. His acknowledgment of the happiness both of the ministers and of the people that had liberty of attendance on God's altars; "Blessed are they; oh when shall I return to the enjoyment of that blessedness?"

1. Blessed are the ministers; the priests and Levites, who have their residence about the tabernacle, and are, in their courses, employed in the service of it; (v. 4.) *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house*, that are at home there, and whose business lies there. He is so far from pitying them as confined to a constant attendance, and obliged to perpetual seriousness, that he would sooner envy them than the greatest princes in the world. There are those that bless the covetous, but he blesses the religious. *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house*; (not because they have good wages, a

part of every sacrifice for themselves, which would enable them to keep a good table, but because they have good work;) *they will be still praising thee*; and if there be a heaven upon earth, it is in praising God, in continually praising him. Apply this to his house above; blessed are they that dwell there, angels and glorified saints, for they *rest not day or night from praising God*. Let us therefore spend as much of our time as may be in that blessed work in which we hope to spend a joyful eternity.

2. Blessed are the people, the inhabitants of the country, who, though they do not constantly dwell in God's house, as the priests do, yet have liberty of access to it, at the times appointed for their solemn feasts, the three great feasts, at which all the males were obliged to give their attendance, Deut. 16. 16. David was so far from reckoning this an imposition, and a hardship put upon them, that he envies the happiness of those who might thus attend, v. 5. . 7.

Those whom he pronounces blessed, are here described;

(1.) They are such as act in religion from a rooted principle of dependence upon God, and devotedness to him; *Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee*, who makes thee his Strength, and strongly stays himself upon thee; who makes thy name his strong Tower, into which he runs for safety, Prov. 18. 10. *Happy is the man whose hope is in the Lord his God*, Ps. 40. 4.—146. 5. Those are truly happy, who go forth, and go on, in the exercises of religion, not in their own strength, (for then the work is sure to miscarry,) but in the strength of the grace of Jesus Christ, from whom all our sufficiency is. David wished to return to God's tabernacles again, that there he might strengthen himself in the Lord his God for service and suffering.

(2.) They are such as have a love for holy ordinances, *in whose heart are the ways of them*, that is, who, having placed their happiness in God as their End, rejoice in all the ways that lead to him, all those means by which their graces are strengthened, and their communion with him kept up. They not only walk in these ways, but they have them in their hearts, they lay them near their hearts; no care or concern, no pleasure or delight, lies nearer than this. Note, Those who have the new Jerusalem in their eye, must have the ways that lead to it in their heart, must mind them, their eyes must look straight forward in them, must ponder the paths of them, must keep close to them, and be afraid of turning aside to the right hand or to the left. If we make God's promise our strength, we must make God's word our rule, and walk by it.

(3.) They are such as will break through difficulties and discouragements, in waiting upon God in holy ordinances, v. 6. When they come up out of the country to worship at the feasts, their way lies through many a dry and sandy valley, (so some,) in which they are ready to perish for thirst; but, to guard against that inconvenience, they dig little pits to receive and keep the rain water, which is ready to them and others for their refreshment. When they make the pools, the rain of heaven fills them; if we be ready to receive the grace of God, that grace shall not be wanting to us, but shall be sufficient for us at all times; their way lay through many a weeping valley, so Baca signifies, that is, as others understand it, many watery vallies, which, in wet weather, when the rain filled the pools, either through the rising of the waters, or through the dirtiness of the way, were unpassable; but, by draining and trenching them, they made a road through them for the benefit of those who went up to Jerusalem. Care should be taken to keep those roads in repair that lead to church, as well as those that lead to market. But all this is intended to shew, [1.] That they had a good will to the journey. When they were to attend the solemn feasts at Jerusalem, they would not be kept back by bad weather, or bad ways, nor make those an excuse for staying at home. Difficulties in the way of duty are designed to try our resolution; and *he that observes the wind shall not sow*. [2.] That they made the best of the way to Zion, contrived and took pains to mend it where it was bad, and bore, as well as they could, the inconveniences that could not be removed. Our way to heaven lies through a valley of Baca, but even that way may be made a well, if we make a due improvement of the comforts God has provided for the pilgrims to the heavenly city.

(4.) They are such as are still pressing forward till they come to their journey's end, at length, and do not take up short of it; (v. 7.) *They go from strength to strength*; their company increases by the accession of more out of every town they pass through, till they become very numerous; those that were near staid till those that were further off called on them, saying, *Come, and let us go to the house of the Lord*; (122. 1, 2.) that they might go together in a body, in token of their mutual love. Or, the particular persons, instead of being fatigued with the tediousness of their journey, and the difficulties they met with, the nearer they came to Jerusalem, were the more lively and cheerful, and so went *stronger and stronger*, Job, 17. 9. Thus it is promised that they that *wait on the Lord, shall renew their strength*, Isa. 40. 31. Even where they are weak, there they are strong. They go *from virtue to virtue*; (so some;) it is the same word that is used for the virtuous woman; they that press forward in their Christian course, shall find God adding grace to their graces, John, 1. 16. They shall be changed from glory to glory, (2 Cor. 3. 18.) from one degree of glorious grace to another; till, at length, *every one of them appears before God in Zion*, to give glory to him, and receive blessings from him. Note, They who grow in grace, shall, at last, be perfect in glory. The Chaldee reads it, *They go from the house of the sanctuary to the house of doctrine*; and the pains which they have taken about the law shall appear before God, whose majesty dwells in Zion. We must go from one duty to another, from prayer to the word, from practising what we have learned to learn more; which, if we do, the benefit of it will appear, to God's glory, and our own everlasting comfort.

8. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. 9. Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. 10. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. 11. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. 12. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

Here,

I. The psalmist prays for audience and acceptance with God, not mentioning particularly what he desired God would do for him; he needed to say no more, when he had professed such an affectionate esteem for the ordinances of God, which now he was restrained and banished from; all his desire was, in that profession, plainly before God, and his longing, his groaning, were not hid from him; therefore he prays, (v. 8, 9.) only that God would hear his prayer, and give ear, that he would behold his condition, behold his good affection, and look upon his face, which way it was set, and how his countenance discovered the longing desire he had toward God's courts; he calls himself (as many think) *God's anointed*, for David was anointed by him, and anointed for him. In this petition, 1. He has an eye to God, under several of his glorious titles. As *the Lord God of hosts*, who has all the creatures at his command, and therefore has all power both in heaven and in earth; as *the God of Jacob*, a God in covenant with his own people, a God who never said to the praying seed of Jacob, *Seek ye me, in vain*; and as *God our Shield*, who takes his people under special protection, pursuant to his covenant with Abraham their father, (Gen. 15. 1.) *Fear not, Abraham, I am thy Shield*. When David could not be hid in the secret of God's tabernacle, (Ps. 27. 5.) being at a distance from it, yet he hoped to find God his Shield ready to him, wherever he was. 2. He has an eye to the Mediator; for of him I rather understand those words, *Look upon the face of thy Messiah*, thine Anointed One; for of his anointing David spake, 45. 7. In all our addresses to God, we must desire that he would look upon the

face of Christ, accept us for his sake, and be well-pleased with us in him; we must look with an eye of faith, and then God will with an eye of favour look upon the face of the Anointed, who does shew his face, when we, without him, dare not shew our's.

II. He pleads his love to God's ordinances, and his dependence upon God himself.

1. God's courts were his choice, v. 10. A very great regard he had for holy ordinances, he valued them above any thing else, and he expresses his value for them, (1.) By preferring the time of God's worship before all other time; *A day spent in thy courts*, in attending on the services of religion, wholly abstracted from all secular affairs, *is better than a thousand*, not than a thousand in thy courts, but any where else in this world, though in the midst of all the delights of the children of men. Better than a thousand, he does not say *days*, you may supply it with years, with ages, if you will, and yet David will set his hand to it. "A day in thy courts, a sabbath-day, a holy-day, a feast-day, though but one day, would be very welcome to me; nay," (as some of the rabbins paraphrase it,) "though I were to die for it the next day, yet that would be more sweet than years spent in the business and pleasure of this world. One of these days shall, with its pleasure, *chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight*, to shame, as not worthy to be compared." (2.) By preferring the place of worship before any other place; *I had rather be a door-keeper*, rather be in the meanest place and office, *in the house of my God, than dwell in state, as master, in the tents of wickedness*. Observe, He calls even the tabernacle a *house*, for the presence of God in it made even those curtains more stately than a palace, and more strong than a castle. It is the house of my God; the covenant-interest he had in God as his God, was the sweet string on which he loved dearly to be harping; they, and they only, who can, upon good ground, call God their's, delight in the courts of his house. I would rather be a porter in God's house, than a prince in those tents where wickedness reigns; rather lie at the threshold, so the word is; that was the beggar's place, Acts, 3. 2. "No matter," (says David,) "let that be my place rather than none." The Pharisees loved synagogues well enough, provided they might have the uppermost seats there, (Matth. 23. 6.) that they might make a figure; holy David is not solicitous about that, if he may but be admitted to the threshold, he will say, *Master, it is good to be here*. Some read it, *I would rather be fixed to a post in the house of my God, than live at liberty in the tents of wickedness*, alluding to the law concerning servants, who, if they would not go out free, were to have their ear bored to the door-post, Exod. 21. 5, 6. David loved his master, and loved his work, so well, that he desired to be tied to this service for ever, to be more free to it, but never to go out free from it, preferring bonds to duty far before the greatest liberty to sin. Such a superlative delight have holy hearts in holy duties; no satisfaction in their account comparable to that in communion with God.

2. God himself was his Hope, and Joy, and all. Therefore he loved the house of his God, because his expectation was from his God, and there he used to communicate himself, v. 11. See (1.) What God is, and will be, to his people. *The Lord God is a Sun and Shield*; we are here in darkness, but if God be our God, he will be to us a Sun, to enlighten and enliven us, to guide and direct us; we are here in danger, but he will be to us a Shield, to secure us from the fiery darts that fly thick about us; *with his favour he will compass us as with a shield*. Let us therefore always walk in the light of the Lord, and never throw ourselves out of his protection, and we shall find him a Sun to supply us with all good, and a Shield to shelter us from all evil. (2.) What he does, and will, bestow upon them; *The Lord will give grace and glory*. Grace signifies both the good-will of God towards us, and the good work of God in us; glory signifies both the honour which he now puts upon us, in giving us the adoption of sons, and that which he has prepared for us in the inheritance of sons. God will give them grace in this world as a preparation for glory, and glory in the other world as the perfection of grace; both are God's gift, his free gift. And as, on the one hand, wherever God gives grace, he will give glory, (for grace is glory begun, and is an earnest of

it,) so, on the other hand, he will give glory hereafter to none to whom he does not give grace now, or who receive his grace in vain. And if God will give grace and glory, which are the two great things that concur to make us happy in both worlds, we may be sure that *no good thing will be withheld from them that walk uprightly*. (3.) It is the character of all good people, that they walk uprightly, that they worship God in spirit and in truth, and have their conversation in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity; and such may be sure that God will withhold *no good thing from them*, that is requisite to their comfortable passage through this world; make sure grace and glory and other things shall be added; this is a comprehensive promise, and is such an assurance of the present comfort of the saints, that, whatever they desire, and think they need, they may be sure, that, either Infinite Wisdom sees it is not good for them, or Infinite Goodness will give it them in due time. Let it be our care to walk uprightly, and then let us trust God to give us every thing that is good for us.

Lastly, He pronounces them blessed, who put their confidence in God, as he did, v. 12. They are blessed, who have the liberty of ordinances, and the privileges of God's house. But though we should be debarred from them, yet we are not therefore debarred from blessedness, if we trust in God. If we cannot go to the house of the Lord, we may go by faith to the Lord of the house, and in him we shall be happy, and may be easy.

PSALM LXXXV.

Interpreters are generally of opinion that this psalm was penned after the return of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon, when they still remained under some tokens of God's displeasure, which they here pray for the removal of. And nothing appears to the contrary, but that it might be penned then, as well as Ps. 137. They are the public interests that lie near the psalmist's heart here, and the psalm is penned for the great congregation. The church was here in a deluge; above were clouds, below were waves, every thing was dark and dismal; the church is like Noah in the ark, between life and death, between hope and fear; being so, I. Here is the dove sent forth in prayer. The petitions are, against sin and wrath, (v. 4.) and for mercy and grace, v. 7. The pleas are taken from former favours, (v. 1. 3.) and present distresses, v. 5, 6. II. Here is the dove returning with an olive-branch of peace and good tidings; the psalmist expects her return, (v. 8.) and then recounts the favours to God's Israel, which, by the spirit of prophecy, he gave assurance of to others, and, by the spirit of faith, he took the assurance of to himself, v. 9. 13. In singing this psalm, we may be assisted in our prayers to God both for his church in general, and for the land of our nativity in particular. The former part will be of use to direct our desires; the latter to encourage our faith and hope in those prayers.

To the chief musician. A psalm for the sons of Korah.

1. **L**ORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. 2. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah. 3. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. 4. Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. 5. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? 6. Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? 7. Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.

The church, in affliction and distress, is here, by direction from God, making her application to God; so ready is God to hear and answer the prayers of his people, that, by his Spirit in the word, and in the heart, he indites their petitions, and puts words into their mouths. The people of God, in a very low and weak condition, are here taught how to address themselves to God.

I. They are to acknowledge with thankfulness the great things God had done for them; (v. 1. 3.) "Thou hast done so and so

for us and our fathers." Note, The sense of present affliction should not drown the remembrance of former mercies; but even then when we are brought very low, we must call to remembrance past experiences of God's goodness, which we must take notice of, with thankfulness, to his praise. They speak of it here with pleasure, 1. That God had shewed himself propitious to their land, and had smiled upon it as his own; "*Thou hast been favourable to thy land*, as thine, with distinguishing favours." Note, The favour of God is the spring-head of all good, and the fountain of happiness, to nations, as well as to particular persons. It was by the favour of God that Israel got, and kept possession of, Canaan; (44. 3.) and if he had not continued very favourable to them, they had been ruined many a time. 2. That he had rescued them out of the hands of their enemies, and restored them to their liberty; "*Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob*, and settled those in their own land again, that had been driven out, and were strangers in a strange land, prisoners in the land of their oppressors." The captivity of Jacob, though it may continue long, will be brought back in due time. 3. That he had not dealt with them according to the desert of their provocations; (v. 2.) "*Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people*, and not punished them as in justice thou mightest. *Thou hast covered all their sin*." When God forgives sin he covers it; and when he covers the sin of his people, he covers it all. The bringing back of their captivity was then an instance of God's favour to them, when it was accompanied with the pardon of their iniquity. 4. That he had not continued his anger against them so far, and so long, as they had reason to fear; (v. 3.) "*Having covered all their sin*, thou hast taken away all thy wrath;" for when sin is set aside, God's anger ceases; God is pacified, if we are purified. See what the pardon of sin is; *Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people*, that is, "*Thou hast turned thine anger from waxing hot*, so as to consume us in the flame of it. In compassion to us, thou hast not stirred up all thy wrath; but, when an intercessor has stood before thee in the gap, thou hast turned away thine anger."

II. They are taught to pray to God for grace and mercy, in reference to their present distress; this is inferred from the former; "*Thou hast done well for our fathers; do well for us*, for we are the children of the same covenant. 1. They pray for converting grace; "*Turn us, O God of our salvation*, in order to the turning of our captivity; turn us from iniquity; turn us to thyself, and to our duty; turn us, and we shall be turned. All those whom God will save, sooner or later he will turn. If no conversion, no salvation. 2. They pray for the removal of the tokens of God's displeasure which they were under; "*Cause thine anger towards us to cease*, as thou didst many a time cause it to cease in the days of our fathers, when thou didst take away thy wrath from them." Observe the method, "*First turn us to thee*, and then cause thine anger to turn from us." When we are reconciled to God, then, and not till then, we may expect the comfort of his being reconciled to us. 3. They pray for the manifestation of God's good-will to them; (v. 7.) "*Shew us thy mercy, O Lord*; shew thyself merciful to us: not only have mercy on us, but let us have the comfortable evidences of that mercy; let us know that thou hast mercy on us, and mercy in store for us." 4. They pray that God would, graciously to them, and gloriously to himself, appear on their behalf; "*Grant us thy salvation*: grant it by thy promise, and then, no doubt, thou wilt work it by thy providence." Note, The vessels of God's mercy are the heirs of his salvation; he shews mercy to those to whom he grants salvation; for salvation is of mere mercy.

III. They are taught humbly to expostulate with God concerning their present troubles, v. 5, 6. Where observe, 1. What they dread and deprecate; "*Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?* We are undone if thou art, but we hope thou wilt not. *Wilt thou draw out thine anger unto all generations?* No; thou art gracious, slow to anger, and swift to shew mercy, and wilt not contend for ever. Thou wast not angry with our fathers for ever, but didst soon turn thyself from the fierceness of thy wrath; why then wilt thou be angry with us for ever? Are not thy

mercies and compassions as plentiful and powerful as ever they were? Impenitent sinners God will be angry with for ever; for, what is hell but the wrath of God drawn out unto endless generations? But shall a hell upon earth be the lot of thy people?" 2. What they desire and hope for; "*Wilt thou not revive us again*; (v. 6.) revive us with comforts spoken to us, revive us with deliverances wrought for us? Thou hast been favourable to thy land formerly, and that revived it; wilt thou not again be favourable, and so revive it again?" God had granted to the children of the captivity *some reviving in their bondage*, Ezra. 9. 8. Their return out of Babylon was as *life from the dead*, Ezek. 37. 11, 12. Now, Lord, (say they,) *wilt thou not revive us again*, and *put thy hand again the second time* to gather us in? Isa. 11. 11. Ps. 126. 1, 4. *Revive thy work in the midst of the years*, Hab. 3. 2. "Revive us again," (1.) "That thy people may rejoice; and so we shall have the comfort of it," Ps. 14. 7. Give them life, that they may have joy. (2.) "That they may rejoice in thee; and so thou wilt have the glory of it." If God be the Fountain of all our mercies, he must be the Centre of all our joys.

8. I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly. 9. Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. 10. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. 11. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. 12. Yea, the Lord shall give *that which is good*; and our land shall yield her increase. 13. Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.

We have here an answer to the prayers and expostulations in the foregoing verses.

1. In general, it is an answer of peace; this the psalmist is soon aware of, (v. 8.) for he *stands upon his watch-tower to hear what God will say unto him*, as the prophet, (Hab. 2. 1, 2.) *I will hear what God the Lord will speak*. This intimates, 1. The stilling of his passions, his grief, his fear, and the tumult of his spirit; "Compose thyself, O my soul, in an humble silence to attend upon God, and wait his motions. I have spoken enough, or too much; now I will hear what God will speak, and welcome his holy will; *What saith my Lord unto his servant?*" If we would have God to hear what we say to him by prayer, we must be ready to hear what he says to us by his word. 2. The raising of his expectation; now that he has been at prayer, he looks for something very great, and very kind, from the God that hears prayer. When we have prayed, we should look after our prayers, and stay for an answer. Now, observe here, (1.) What it is that he promises himself from God, in answer to his prayers; *He will speak peace to his people, and to his saints*. There are a people in the world who are God's people, set apart for him, subject to him, and who shall be saved by him. All his people are his saints, sanctified by his grace, and devoted to his glory; these may sometimes want peace, when without are fightings, and within are fears; but, sooner or later, God will speak peace to them; if he do not command outward peace, yet he will suggest inward peace; speaking that to their hearts by his Spirit, which he has spoken to their ears by his word and ministers, and making them to hear joy and gladness. (2.) What use he makes of this expectation. [1.] He takes the comfort of it; and so must we; "*I will hear what God the Lord will speak*, hear the assurances he gives of peace, in answer to prayer." When God speaks peace, we must not be deaf to it, but with all humility and thankfulness receive it. [2.] He cautions the saints to do the duty which this calls for; *But let them not turn again to folly*; for it is on these terms, and no other, that peace is to be expected. To

those, and those only, peace is spoken, who turn from sin; but if they return to it again, it is at their peril. All sin is folly, but especially backsliding; it is egregious folly to turn to sin after we have seemed to turn from it, to turn to it after God has spoken peace; God is for peace, but, when he speaks, such are for war.

II. Here are the particulars of this answer of peace; he doubts not but all will be well in a little time, and therefore gives us the pleasing prospect of the flourishing estate of the church in the five last verses of the psalm, which describe the peace and prosperity that God, at length, blessed the children of the captivity with, when, after a great deal of toil and agitation, at length they gained a settlement in their own land. But it may be taken, 1. As a promise also to all who fear God and work righteousness, that they shall be easy and happy. 2. As a prophecy of the kingdom of the Messiah, and the blessings with which that kingdom should be enriched. Here is,

(1.) Help at hand; (v. 9.) "*Surely his salvation is nigh*, nigh to us, nigher than we think it is; it will soon be effected, how great soever our difficulties and distresses are, when God's time is come, and that time is not far off." When the tale of bricks is doubled, then Moses comes. It is nigh to all who fear him; when trouble is nigh, salvation is nigh; for God is a very present Help in time of trouble to all who are his; whereas *salvation is far from the wicked*, 119. 155. This may fitly be applied to Christ the Author of eternal salvation: it was the comfort of the Old-Testament saints, that though they lived not to see that redemption in Jerusalem which they waited for, yet they were sure it was nigh, and would be welcome, to all that fear God.

(2.) Honour secured; "*That glory may dwell in our land*, that we may have the worship of God settled and established among us; for that is the glory of a land. When that goes, *Ichabod—the glory is departed*; when that stays, glory dwells." This may refer to the Messiah, who was to be the Glory of his people Israel, and who came and dwelt among them, (John, 1. 4.) for which reason their land is called *Immanuel's land*, Isa. 8. 8.

(3.) Graces meeting, and happily embracing; (v. 10, 11.) *Mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, kiss each other*. This may be understood, [1.] Of the reformation of the people and of the government, in the administration of which all those graces should be conspicuous and commanding. The rulers and ruled shall all be merciful and true, righteous and peaceable; when there is no truth nor mercy, all goes to ruin, Hos. 4. 1. Isa. 59. 14, 15. But when these meet in the management of all affairs, when these give aim, when these give law, when there is such plenty of truth, that it sprouts up like the grass of the earth, and of righteousness, that it is showered down like rain from heaven, then things go well. When in every congress mercy and truth meet, in every embrace righteousness and peace kiss, and common honesty is indeed common, then glory dwells in a land, as the sin of reigning dishonesty is a reproach to any people. [2.] Of the return of God's favour, and the continuance of it thereupon. When a people return to God, and adhere to him, in a way of duty, he will return to them, and abide with them, in a way of mercy. So some understand this, Man's truth, and God's mercy, man's righteousness and God's peace, meet together. If God finds us true to him, to one another, to ourselves, we shall find him merciful. If we make conscience of righteousness, we shall have the comfort of peace. If *truth spring out of the earth*, that is, (as Dr. Hammond expounds it,) out of the hearts of men, the proper soil for it to grow in, righteousness, God's mercy, shall look down from heaven, as the sun does upon the world, when it sheds its influences on the productions of the earth, and cherishes them. [3.] Of the harmony of the divine attributes in the Messiah's undertaking. In him, who is both our Salvation and our Glory, *mercy and truth are met together*; God's mercy and truth, and his *righteousness and peace, have kissed each other*; that is, the great affair of our salvation is so well contrived, so well concerted, that God may have mercy upon poor sinners, and be at peace with them, without any wrong to his truth and righteousness. He is true to the threatening, and just in his government,

and yet pardons sinners, and takes them into covenant with himself. Christ, as Mediator, brings heaven and earth together again, which sin had set at variance; through him *truth springs out of the earth*, that truth which God desires in the inward part, and then *righteousness looks down from heaven*, for God is just, and the Justifier of them which believe in Jesus, or it may denote, that, in the kingdom of the Messiah, these graces shall flourish and prevail, and have a universal command.

(4.) Great plenty of every thing desirable; (v. 12.) *The Lord shall give that which is good*, every thing that he sees to be good for us; all good comes from God's goodness; and when mercy, truth, and righteousness, have a sovereign influence on men's hearts and lives, all good may be expected; if we thus *seek the righteousness of God's kingdom, other things shall be added*; Matth. 6. 33. When the glory of the gospel dwells in our land, then it shall yield its increase, for soul-prosperity will either bring outward prosperity along with it, or sweeten the want of it. See Ps. 67. 6.

(5.) A sure guidance in the good way; (v. 13.) *The righteousness of his promise which he has made to us, assuring us of happiness—the righteousness of sanctification, that good work which he has wrought in us, these shall go before him to prepare his way, both to raise our expectations of his favour, and to qualify us for it; and this shall go before us also, and be our guide to set us in the way of his steps*, that is, to encourage our hopes, and guide our practice, that we may go forth to meet him when he is coming towards us in ways of mercy. Christ, the Sun of righteousness, shall bring us to God, and put us into the way that leads to him; John Baptist, a preacher of righteousness, shall go before Christ to prepare his way. Righteousness is a sure guide both in meeting God, and in following him.

PSALM LXXXVI.

This psalm is entitled a prayer of David; probably it was not penned upon any particular occasion, but was a prayer he often used himself, and recommended to others for their use, especially in a day of affliction. Many think that David penned this prayer as a type of Christ, who in the days of his flesh offered up strong cries, Heb. 5. 7. David, in this prayer, (according to the nature of that duty,) I. Gives glory to God, v. 8. 10, 12, 13. II. Seeks for grace and favour from God; that God would hear his prayers, (v. 1, 6, 7.) preserve and save him, and be merciful to him, (v. 2, 3, 16.) that he would give him joy, and grace, and strength, and put honour upon him, v. 4, 11, 17. He pleads God's goodness, (v. 5, 15.) and the malice of his enemies, v. 14. In singing this, we must, as David did, lift up our souls to God with application.

A prayer of David.

1. **B**OW down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I *am* poor and needy. 2. Preserve my soul; for I *am* holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee. 3. Be merciful unto me, O LORD: for I cry unto thee daily. 4. Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. 5. For thou, LORD, *art* good, and ready to forgive; and plentiful in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. 6. Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. 7. In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.

This psalm was published under the title of a *prayer of David*; not as if David sung all his prayers, but into some of his songs he inserted prayers; for a psalm will admit the expressions of any pious and devout affections. But it is observable how very plain the language of this psalm is, and how little there is in it of poetical flights or figures, in comparison with some other psalms; for the flourishes of wit are not the proper ornaments of prayer.

Now here we may observe,

I. The petitions he puts up to God. It is true, prayer accidentally may preach, but it is most fit that (as it is in this prayer) every passage should be directed to God, for such in the nature of prayer as it is here described, (v.4.) *Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul*, as he had said, 25.1. In all parts of prayer, the soul must ascend upon the wings of faith and holy desire, and be lifted up to God, to meet the communications of his grace, and in an expectation raised very high of great things from him.

1. He begs that God would give a gracious audience to his prayers; (v.1.) *Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me*. When God hears our prayers, it is fitly said that he *bows down his ear* to them, for it is admirable condescension in God that he is pleased to take notice of such mean creatures as we are, and such defective prayers as ours are. He repeats this again; (v.6.) *"Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer, a favourable ear, though it be whispered, though it be stammered, attend to the voice of my supplications."* Not that God needs to have his affections stirred up by any thing that we can say; but thus we must express our desire of his favour. The Son of David spake it with assurance and pleasure; (John, 11.41, 42.) *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me; and I know that thou hearest me always*.

2. He begs that God would take him under his special protection, and so be the Author of his salvation; (v.2.) *Preserve my soul, save thy servant*. It was David's soul that was God's servant; for those only serve God acceptably that *serve him with their spirits*. David's concern is about his soul; if we understand it of his natural life, it teaches us, That the best self-preservation is to commit ourselves to God's keeping, and by faith and prayer to make our Creator our Preserver. But it may be understood of his spiritual life; the life of the soul as distinct from the body; "Preserve my soul from that one evil and dangerous thing to souls, from sin; preserve my soul, and so save me." All those whom God will save he does preserve, and will, to his heavenly kingdom.

3. He begs that God would look upon him with an eye of pity and compassion; (v.3.) *Be merciful to me, O Lord*. It is mercy in God to pardon our sins, and to help us out of our distresses; both these are included in this prayer, *God be merciful to me*. "Men shew no mercy, we ourselves deserve no mercy, but, Lord, for mercy-sake, be merciful unto me."

4. He begs that God would fill him with inward comfort; (v.4.) *Rejoice the soul of thy servant*. It is God only that can *put gladness into the heart, and make the soul to rejoice*, and then, and not till then, the joy is full: as it is the duty of those who are God's servants to *serve him with gladness*, so it is their privilege to be *filled with joy and peace in believing*; and they may in faith pray, not only that God will *preserve* their souls, but that he will *rejoice their souls*, and the *joy of the Lord* will be *their strength*. Observe, When he prays, *Rejoice my soul*, he adds, *For unto thee do I lift up my soul*. Then we may expect comfort from God, when we take care to keep up our communion with God; prayer is the nurse of spiritual joy.

II. The pleas with which he enforces these petitions.

1. He pleads his relation to God and interest in him; "Thou art my God, to whom I have devoted myself, and on whom I depend, and I am thy servant, (v.2.) in subjection to thee, and therefore looking for protection from thee."

2. He pleads distress; "Hear me, for I am poor and needy, therefore I want thy help, therefore none else will hear me." God is the poor man's King, whose glory it is to *save the souls of the needy*; they who are poor in spirit, who see themselves empty and necessitous, are most welcome to the God of all grace.

3. He pleads God's good-will towards all that seek him; (v.5.) "To thee do I do I lift up my soul in desire and expectation; for thou, Lord, art good;" and whither should beggars go but to the door of the good house-keeper? The goodness of God's nature is a great encouragement to us in all our addresses to him. His goodness appears in two things, giving and forgiving. (1.) He is a sin-pardoning God; not only he can forgive, but he is ready to forgive; more ready to forgive than we are to repent. *I said,*

I will confess, and thou forgavest, 32.5. (2.) He is a prayer-hearing God; he is plenteous in mercy, very full, and very free, both rich and liberal unto *all them that call upon him*; he has wherewithal to supply all their needs, and is open-handed in granting that supply.

4. He pleads God's good work in himself, by which he had qualified him for the tokens of his favour. Three things were wrought in him by divine grace, which he looked upon as earnest of all good.

(1.) A conformity to God; (v.2.) *I am holy*, therefore preserve my soul; for those whom the Spirit sanctifies he will preserve. He does not say this in pride and vain-glory, but with humble thankfulness to God; *I am one whom thou favourest*, so the margin reads it, whom thou hast *set apart for thyself*; if God has begun a good work of grace in us, we must own that *the time was a time of love*; then *was I in his eyes as one that found favour*; and whom God hath taken into his favour he will take under his protection. *All his saints are in thy hand*, Deut. 33.3. Observe, *I am needy*, (v.1.) yet *I am holy*; (v.2.) holy and yet needy; *poor in the world, but rich in faith*. Those who preserve their purity in their greatest poverty may assure themselves that God will preserve their comforts, will preserve their souls.

(2.) A confidence in God; *Save thy servant that trusteth in thee*. They that are holy must, nevertheless, not trust in themselves, or in their own righteousness, but only in God and his grace. They that trust in God may expect salvation from him.

(3.) A disposition to communion with God; he hopes God will answer his prayers, because he had inclined him to pray. [1.] To be constant in prayer; *I cry unto thee daily, and all the day*, v.3. It is thus our duty to pray always, without ceasing, and to continue instant in prayer; and then we may hope to have our prayers heard, which we make in time of trouble, if we have made conscience of the duty at other times, at all times. It is comfortable if an affliction finds the wheels of prayer a-going, and that they are not then to be set a-going. [2.] To be inward with God in prayer; to *lift up his soul* to him, v.4. Then we may hope that God will meet us with his mercies, when we in our prayers send forth our souls as it were to meet him. [3.] To be, in a special manner, earnest with God in prayer, when he was in affliction; (v.7.) "In the day of my trouble, whatever others do, *I will call upon thee*, and commit my case to thee, for thou wilt hear and answer me, and I shall not seek in vain, as those did who cried, *O Baal, hear us, but there was no voice, nor any that regarded*, 1 Kings, 18.29.

8. Among the gods *there is none like unto thee, O LORD*; neither *are there any works* like unto thy works. 9. All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O LORD: and shall glorify thy name. 10. For thou *art* great, and doest wondrous things: thou *art* God alone. 11. Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. 12. I will praise thee, O LORD my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. 13. For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell. 14. O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them. 15. But thou, O LORD, *art* a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. 16. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid. 17. Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see

it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast helpen me, and comforted me.

David is here going on in his prayer.

1. He gives glory to God; for we ought in our prayers to praise him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory, to him, with the most humble and reverent adorations.

1. As a being of unparalleled perfection, such a one, that there is none like him, nor any to be compared with him, v. 8. Among the gods, the false gods, whom the heathens worshipped, the angels, the kings of the earth, among them all, *there is none like unto thee, O Lord*; none so wise, so mighty, so good; *neither are there any works like unto thy works*: which is an undeniable proof that there is none like him; his own works praise him, and the best way we have of praising him, is, by acknowledging that there is none like him.

2. As the Fountain of all being, and the Centre of all praise; (v. 9.) "*Thou hast made all nations*, made them all of one blood, they all derive their being from thee, and have a constant dependence on thee, and therefore *they shall come and worship before thee, and glorify thy name*." This was in part fulfilled in the multitude of proselytes to the Jewish religion in the days of David and Solomon, but was to have its full accomplishment in the days of the Messiah, when some out of every kingdom and nation should be effectually brought in to praise God, Rev. 7. 9. It was by Christ that God made all nations, for without him was not any thing made that was made, and therefore, through Christ, and by the power of his gospel and grace, all nations shall be brought to *worship before God*, Isa. 66. 23.

3. As a Being infinitely great; (v. 10.) "*Therefore all nations shall worship before thee*, because as *King of nations* thou art great, thy sovereignty absolute and incontestable, thy majesty terrible and insupportable, thy power universal and irresistible, thy riches vast and inexhaustible, thy dominion boundless and unquestionable; and, for the proof of this, *thou doest wondrous things*, which all nations admire, and whence they might easily infer that thou art God alone, not only none like thee, but none beside thee." Let us always entertain great thoughts of this great God, and be filled with holy admiration of this God who doeth wonders; and let him alone have our hearts, who is God alone.

4. As a Being infinitely good. Man is bad, very wicked and vile; (v. 14.) no mercy is to be expected from him; *but thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious*, v. 15. This is that attribute by which he proclaims his name, and by which we are therefore to proclaim it, Exod. 34. 6, 7. It is his goodness that is over all his works, and therefore should fill all our praises; and this is our comfort, in reference to the wickedness of the world we live in, that, however it be, God is good. Men are barbarous, but God is gracious; men are false, but God is faithful. God is not only compassionate, but full of compassion, and in him *mercy rejoiceth against judgment*. He is long-suffering towards us, though we forfeit his favour, and provoke him to anger, and he is *plenteous in mercy and truth*, as faithful in performing as he was free in promising.

5. As a kind Friend and bountiful Benefactor to him. We ought to praise God as good in himself, but we do it most feelingly, when we observe how good he has been to us. This therefore the psalmist dwells upon with most pleasure, v. 12, 13. He had said, (v. 9.) *All nations shall praise thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name*. It is some satisfaction to a good man, to think that others shall praise and glorify God, but it is his greatest care and pleasure to do it himself. "Whatever others do," (says David,) "*I will praise thee, O Lord my God*, not only as the Lord, but as my God; and I will do it with all mine heart; I will be ready to do it, and cordial in it; I will do it with cheerfulness and liveliness, with a sincere regard to thy honour; for *I will glorify thy name*, not for a time, but for evermore. I will do it as long as I live, and hope to be doing it to eternity." With good reason does he resolve to be thus particular in praising God, because God had shewed him particular favours; *For great is thy mercy toward me*.

The fountain of mercy is inexhaustibly full, the streams of

mercy are inestimably rich; when we speak of God's mercy to us, it becomes us thus to magnify it, *Great is thy mercy toward me*. Of the greatness of God's mercy, he gives this instance, *Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell*; from death, from so great a death, as St. Paul, (2 Cor. 1. 10.) from eternal death, so even some of the Jewish writers understand it. David knew he deserved to have been cast off for ever into the lowest hell for his sin in the matter of Uriah; but Nathan assured him that the Lord had *taken away his sin*; and by that word he was delivered from the lowest hell, and herein God's mercy was great toward him. Even the best saints owe it, not to their own merit, but to the mercy of God, that they are saved from the lowest hell: and the consideration of that should greatly enlarge their hearts in praising the mercy of God, which they are obliged to glorify for evermore. So glorious, so gracious, a rescue from everlasting misery, justly requires the return of everlasting praise.

II. He prays earnestly for mercy and grace from God. He complains of the restless and implacable malice of his enemies against him; (v. 14.) "*Lord, be thou for me*; for there are many against me." He then takes notice of their character; they were proud men, that looked with disdain upon poor David. (Many are made persecutors by their pride.) They were violent men, that would carry all before them by force, right or wrong; they were terrible, formidable, men, (so some,) that did what they could to frighten all about them. He notices their number; there are assemblies of them, they were men in authority, and met in councils and courts; or men for conversation, and met in clubs. But, being assembled, they were the more capable of doing mischief. He notices their enmity to David: "*They rise up against me in open rebellion*; they not only plot, but they put their plots in execution as far as they can; and the design is not only to depose David, but to destroy him; they seek after my life to slay me, after my soul to damn me, if it lay in their power." And, *lastly*, He notices their distance and estrangement from God, which were at the bottom of their enmity to David; "*They have not set thee before them*, and what good can be expected from those that have no fear of God before their eyes? Lord, appear against them, for they are thine enemies as well as mine."

His petitions are,

1. For the operations of God's grace in him, v. 11. He prays that God would give him, (1.) An understanding heart, that he would inform and instruct him concerning his duty; "*Teach me thy way, O Lord*, the way that thou hast appointed me to walk in; when I am in doubt concerning it, make it plain to me what I should do, let me hear thy voice, saying, *This is the way*," Isa. 30. 21. David was well-taught in the things of God, and yet was sensible he needed further instruction, and many a time could not trust his own judgment; *Teach me thy way, I will walk in thy truth*. One would think it should be, *Teach me thy truth, and I will walk in thy way*; but it comes all to one, it is the way of truth that God teaches, and that we must choose and walk in, Ps. 119. 30. Christ is the Way and the Truth, and we must both learn Christ and walk in him. We cannot walk in God's way and truth, unless he teach us; and, if we expect he should teach us, we must resolve to be governed by his teachings, Isa. 2. 3. (2.) An upright heart; "*Unite my heart to fear thy name*; make me sincere in religion; a hypocrite has a double heart, let mine be single, and entire for God; not divided between him and the world; not straggling from him." Our hearts are apt to wander, and hang loose; their powers and faculties scatter after a thousand foreign things; we have therefore need of God's grace to unite them, that we may serve God with all that is within us, and all little enough to be employed in his service. "Let my heart be fixed for God, and firm and faithful to him, and fervent in serving him, that is an united heart."

2. For the tokens of God's favour to him, v. 16, 17. Three things he here prays for, (1.) That God would speak peace and comfort to him; "*O turn unto me*, as to one thou lovest, and hast a kind and tender concern for; my enemies turn against me, my friends turn from me, Lord, do thou turn to me, and have mercy upon me; it will be a comfort to me to know that thou

pitiablest me." (2.) That God would work deliverance for him, and set him in safety; "Give me thy strength; put strength into me, that I may help myself, and put forth thy strength for me, that I may be saved out of the hands of those that seek my ruin." He pleads relation; "I am *thy servant*; I am so by birth, as the son of thine handmaid, born in thy house, and therefore thou art my rightful Owner and Proprietor, from whom I may expect protection. *I am thine, save me.*" The children of godly parents, who were betimes dedicated to the Lord, may plead it with him; if they come under the discipline of his family, they are entitled to the privileges of it. (3.) That God would put reputation on him; "*Show me a token for good*; make it to appear to others as well as to myself, that thou art doing me good, and designing further good for me. Let me have some unquestionable illustrious instances of thy favour to me, *that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed of their enmity to me*, as they will have reason to be, when they perceive that thou, Lord, hast holpen me, and comforted me; and that therefore they have been striving against God, opposing one whom he owns, and that they have been striving in vain to ruin and vex one whom God himself has undertaken to help and comfort." The joy of the saints shall be the shame of their persecutors.

PSALM LXXXVII.

The foregoing psalm was very plain and easy, but in this are things dark and hard to be understood. It is an encomium of Zion, as a type and figure of the gospel-church, to which what is here spoken is very applicable. Zion, for the temple's sake, is here preferred, 1. Before the rest of the land of Canaan, as being crowned with special tokens of God's favour, v. 1. 3. 11. Before any other place or country whatsoever, as being replenished with more eminent men, and with a greater plenty of divine blessings, v. 4. 7. Some think it was penned to express the joy of God's people when Zion was in a flourishing state; others think it was penned to encourage their faith and hope when Zion was in ruins, and was to be rebuilt, after the captivity; though no man cared for her; (Jer. 20. 17.) This is Zion whom no man seeketh after; yet God had done great things for her, and spoken glorious things of her, which should all have their perfection and accomplishment in the gospel-church; to that therefore we must have an eye, in singing this psalm.

A psalm or song for the sons of Korah.

1. **HIS** foundation is in the holy mountains. 2. The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. 3. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.

Some make the first words of the psalm to be part of the title; it is a psalm or song, whose subject is the holy mountains; the temple built in Zion upon mount Moriah. That is the foundation of the argument, or beginning of the psalm. Or, we may suppose the psalmist had now the tabernacle or temple in view, and was contemplating the glories of it, and at length he breaks out into this expression, which has reference, though not to what he had written before, yet to what he had thought of; every one knew what he meant when he had said thus abruptly, *Its foundation is in the holy mountains.*

Three things are here observed, in praise of the temple.

1. That it was founded on the holy mountains, v. 1. The church has a foundation, so that it cannot sink or totter; Christ himself is the Foundation of it, which God has laid. The Jerusalem above is a city that has foundations. The foundation is upon the mountains; it is built high, the mountain of the Lord's house is established upon the top of the mountains, Isa. 2. 2. It is built firm; the mountains are rocky, and on a rock the church is built. The world is founded upon the seas, (24. 2.) which are continually ebbing and flowing, and are a very weak foundation; Babel was built in a plain, where the ground was rotten; but the church is built upon the everlasting mountains, and the perpetual hills; for sooner shall the mountains depart, and the hills be removed, than the covenant of God's peace shall be disannulled, and on that the church is built, Isa. 54. 10. The foundation is upon the holy mountains. Holiness is the strength and stability of the church, that is it which will support it, and keep it from sinking; not so

much that it is built upon mountains, as that it is built upon *holy* mountains; upon the promise of God, for the confirming of which he has sworn by his holiness; upon the sanctification of the Spirit, which will secure the happiness of all the saints.

(2.) That God had expressed a particular affection for it; (v. 2.) *The Lord loveth the gates of Zion*, of the temple, of the houses of doctrine, (so the Chaldee,) more than all the dwellings of Jacob, whether in Jerusalem, or any where else in the country. God had said concerning Zion, *This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell*; there he met his people, and conversed with them, received their homage, and shewed them the tokens of his favour, and therefore we may conclude how well he loves those gates. Note, (1.) God has a love for the dwellings of Jacob, has a gracious regard to religious families, and accepts their family-worship. (2.) Yet he loves the gates of Zion better, not only better than any, but better than all, of the dwellings of Jacob. God was worshipped in the dwellings of Jacob, and family-worship is family-duty, which must by no means be neglected; yet, when they come in competition, public worship (*cæteris paribus—other things being equal*) is to be preferred before private.

3. That there was much said concerning it in the word of God; (v. 3.) *Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God*. We are to judge of things and persons by the figure they make, and the estimate put upon them, in and by the scripture. Many base things were spoken of the city of God by the enemies of it, to render it mean and odious, but by him whose judgment we are sure is according to truth, glorious things are spoken of it; God said of the temple, *Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually; I have sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever*, 2 Chron. 7. 16. *Beautiful for situation is mount Zion*, Ps. 48. 2. These are glorious things. Yet more glorious things are spoken of the gospel-church; it is the spouse of Christ, the purchase of his blood, it is a *peculiar people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood*, and the *gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. Let us not be ashamed of the church of Christ in its meanest condition, nor of any that belong to it, nor disown our relation to it, though it be turned ever so much to our reproach. Since such glorious things are spoken of it, and not one *iota* or tittle of what is said shall fall to the ground.

4. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this *man* was born there. 5. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the Highest himself shall establish her. 6. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, *that this man* was born there. Selah. 7. As well the singers as the players on instruments *shall be there*: all my springs are in thee.

Zion is here compared with other places, and preferred before them; the church of Christ is more glorious and excellent than the nations of the earth.

1. It is owned that other places have their glories; (v. 4.) "*I will make mention of Rahab*," that is, "*Egypt, and Babylon, to them that know me*, and are about me, and with whom I discourse about public affairs; behold Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia," or rather Arabia; we shall observe that this man was born there; here and there one famous man, eminent for knowledge and virtue, may be produced, that was a native of these countries; here and there one that becomes a proselyte, and a worshipper of the true God. But some give another sense of it; that it is a prophecy or promise of bringing the Gentiles into the church, and of uniting them in one body with the Jews. God says, "*I will reckon Egypt and Babylon with them that know me*. I will reckon them my people as much as Israel, when they shall receive the gospel of Christ, and own them as born in Zion, born again there, and admitted to the privileges of Zion as freely as

true-born Israelite." They that were strangers and foreigners, become fellow citizens with the saints, Eph. 2. 19. A Gentile convert shall stand upon a level with a native Jew; compare Isa. 19. 23. 25. *The Lord shall say, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.*

2. It is proved that the glory of Zion outshines them all, upon many accounts; for,

(1.) Zion shall produce many great and good men that shall be famous in their generation, v. 5. Of Zion it shall be said by all her neighbours, that *this and that man was born in her*, many men of renown for wisdom and piety, and especially for acquaintance with the words of God and the visions of the Almighty. Many prophets and kings, who should be greater favourites of Heaven, and greater blessings to the earth, than ever were bred in Egypt or Babylon. The worthies of the church far exceeded those of heathen nations, and their names will shine brighter than in perpetual records. *A man, a man was born in her*; by which some understand Christ, that Man, that Son of man, who is fairer than the children of men, he was born at Bethlehem near Zion, and was the Glory of his people Israel. The greatest honour that ever was put upon the Jewish nation, was, that of them, *as concerning the flesh, Christ came*, Rom. 9. 5. Or this also may be applied to the conversion of the Gentiles; Of Zion it shall be said, that the law which went forth out of Zion, the gospel of Christ, shall be an instrument to beget many souls to God, and the Jerusalem that is from above shall be acknowledged the mother of them all.

(2.) Zion's interest shall be strengthened and settled by an almighty power. The Highest himself shall undertake to establish her, who can do it effectually; the accession of proselytes out of divers nations, shall be so far from occasioning discord and division, that it shall contribute greatly to Zion's strength; for God himself, having founded her upon an everlasting foundation, whatever convulsions and revolutions there are of states and kingdoms, and however heaven and earth may be shaken, these are things which cannot be shaken, but must remain.

(3.) Zion's sons shall be registered with honour; (v. 6.) *The Lord shall count, when he writes up, the people*, and takes a catalogue of his subjects, that *this man was born there*, and so is a subject by birth, by the first birth, being born in his house—by the second birth, being born again of his Spirit. When God comes to return with the children of men, that he may render to every man according to his works, he shall observe who was born in Zion, and consequently enjoyed the privileges of God's sanctuary, to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the service, of God, Rom. 9. 4.—3. 1, 2. For to them much was given, and therefore of them much will be required, and the account will be accordingly; five talents must be improved by those that were intrusted with five. *I know thy works, and where thou dwellest*, and where thou wast born. Selah. Let those that dwell in Zion mark this, and live up to their profession.

(4.) Zion's songs shall be sung with joy and triumph. As well the singers, as the players on instruments, shall be there to praise God, v. 7. It was much to the honour of Zion, and is to the honour of the gospel-church, that there God is served and worshipped with rejoicing; his work is done, and done cheerfully; see 68. 25. *All my springs are in thee*, O Zion: so God says; he has deposited treasures of grace in his holy ordinances, there are the springs from which those streams take rise, *which make glad the city of our God*, 46. 4. So the psalmist says, reckoning the springs, from which his dry soul must be watered, to lie in the sanctuary, in the word and ordinances, and in the communion of saints; the springs of the joy of a carnal worldling lie in wealth and pleasure, but the springs of the joy of a gracious soul lie in the word of God and prayer. Christ is the true Temple; all our springs are in him, and from him all our streams flow; it pleased the Father, and all believers are well pleased with it too, that in him should all fulness dwell.

PSALM LXXXVIII.

This psalm is a lamentation; one of the most melancholy of all the psalms; and it does not conclude, as usually the melancholy psalms do, with the least

intimation of comfort or joy, but, from first to last, it is mourning and woe. It is not upon a public account that the psalmist here complains, (here is no mention of the afflictions of the church,) but only upon a personal account, especially trouble of mind, and the grief impressed upon his spirits, both by his outward afflictions, and by the remembrance of his sins, and the fear of God's wrath. It is reckoned among the penitential psalms, and it is well when our fears are thus turned into the right channel, and we take occasion from our worldly grievances to sorrow after a godly sort. In this psalm, we have, I. The great pressure of spirit that the psalmist was under, v. 3. 6. II. The wrath of God, which was the cause of that pressure, v. 7, 15. 17. III. The wickedness of his friends, v. 8, 18. IV. The application he made to God by prayer, v. 1, 2, 9, 13. V. His humble expostulations and pleadings with God, v. 10, 12, 14. Those who are in trouble of mind may sing this psalm feelingly; those that are not ought to sing it thankfully, blessing God that it is not their case.

A song or psalm for the sons of Korah, to the chief musician upon Mahalath Leannoth, Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite.

1. **O** LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: 2. Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; 3. For my soul is full of troubles; and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. 4. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: 5. Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. 6. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. 7. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. 8. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: *I am* shut up, and I cannot come forth. 9. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.

It should seem, by the titles of this and the following psalm, that Heman was the penman of the one, and Ethan of the other. There were two of these names, who were sons of Zerah the son of Judah, 1 Chron. 2. 4, 6. There were two others famed for wisdom, (1 Kings, 4. 31.) where, to magnify Solomon's wisdom, he is said to be *wiser than Heman and Ethan*. Whether the Heman and Ethan, who were Levites and precentors in the songs of Zion, were the same, we are not sure, nor which of these, nor whether any of these, were the penmen of these psalms; there was a Heman that was one of the chief singers, who is called *the king's seer or prophet*, in the words of God; (1 Chron. 25. 5.) it is probable that this also was a seer, and yet could see no comfort for himself, an instructor and comforter of others, and yet himself putting comfort away from him.

The very first words of the psalm are the only words of comfort and support in all the psalm. There is nothing about him but clouds and darkness; but, before he begins his complaint, he calls God *the God of his salvation*, which intimates, both that he looked for salvation, bad as things were, and that he looked up to God for the salvation, and depended upon him to be the Author of it.

Now here we have the psalmist,

1. A man of prayer, one that gave himself to prayer at all times, but especially now that he was in affliction: *for is any afflicted? Let him pray*. It is his comfort, that he had prayed, it is his complaint, that, notwithstanding his prayer, he was still in affliction. He was, (1.) Very earnest in prayer; "*I have cried unto thee*, (v. 1.) and have *stretched out my hands unto thee*, (v. 9.) as one that would take hold on thee, and even catch at the mercy, with a holy fear of coming short and missing of it." (2.) He was very frequent and constant in prayer; "*I have called upon thee daily*, (v. 9.) nay, *day and night*," v. 1. For thus men ought always to

pray, and not to faint; God's own elect cry day and night to him; not only morning and evening, beginning every day and every night with prayer, but spending the day and night in prayer. This is indeed praying always; and then we shall speed in prayer, when we continue instant in prayer. (3.) He directed his prayer to God, and from him expected and desired an answer; (v. 2.) "*Let my prayer come before thee*, to be accepted of thee, not before men, to be seen of them, as the Pharisees' prayers." He does not desire that men should hear them, but, "*Lord, incline thou thine ear unto my cry*, for to that I refer myself, give what answer to it thou pleasest."

2. He was a man of sorrows, and therefore some make him, in this psalm, a type of Christ, whose complaints on the cross, and sometimes before, were much to the same purport with this psalm. He cries out, (v. 3.) *My soul is full of troubles*; so Christ said, *Now is my soul troubled*; and, in his agony, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful*, like the psalmist's here, even unto death, for he says, *My life draws nigh unto the grave*. Heman was a very wise man, and a good man, a man of God, and a singer too, and one may therefore suppose him to be a man of a cheerful spirit, and yet now a man of a sorrowful spirit, troubled in mind, and upon the brink of despair. Inward trouble is the sorest trouble, and that which, sometimes, the best of God's saints and servants have been severely exercised with. *The spirit of man*, of the greatest of men, will not always sustain the infirmity, but will droop and sink under it; *who then can bear a wounded spirit*?

3. He looked upon himself as a dying man, whose heart was ready to break with sorrow; (v. 5.) "*Free among the dead*, one of that ghastly corporation; *like the slain that lie in the grave*, whose rotting and perishing nobody takes notice of, or is concerned for; nay, whom thou rememberest no more, to protect or provide for the dead bodies, but they become an easy prey to corruption and the worms, they are *cut off from thy hand*, which was once employed in supporting them, and reaching out to them; but now there is no more occasion for it, they are cut off from it, and cut off by it;" (for *God will not stretch out his hand to the grave*, Job, 30. 24.) "*thou hast laid me in the lowest pit*, as low as possible, my condition low, my spirits low, *in darkness, in the deep*, (v. 6.) sinking, and seeing no way open of escape, brought to the last extremity, and ready to give up all for gone." Thus greatly may good men be afflicted, and such dismal apprehensions may they have concerning their afflictions, and such dark conclusions may they sometimes be ready to make concerning the issue of them, through the power of melancholy and the weakness of faith.

4. He complained most of God's displeasure against him, which infused the wormwood and the gall into the affliction and the misery; (v. 7.) *Thy wrath lies hard upon me*: could he have discerned the favour and love of God in his affliction, it had lain light upon him; but it lay hard, very hard, upon him, so that he was ready to sink and faint under it. The impressions of this wrath upon his spirits, were God's waves with which he afflicted him, which rolled upon him, one on the neck of another, so that he scarcely recovered from one dark thought, before he was oppressed with another; these waves beat against him with noise and fury; not some, but all, of God's waves were made use of in afflicting him, and bearing him down. Even the children of God's love may sometimes apprehend themselves children of wrath, and no outward trouble can lie so hard upon them as that apprehension.

5. It added to this affliction, that his friends deserted him, and made themselves strange to him. When we are in trouble, it is some comfort to have those about us, that love us and sympathize with us, but this good man had none such; which gives him occasion not to accuse them, or charge them with treachery, ingratitude, and inhumanity, but to complain to God, with an eye to his hand in this part of the affliction; (v. 8.) *Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me*. Providence had removed them, or rendered them incapable of being serviceable to him, or alienated their affections from him, for every creature is that to us (and no more) that God makes it to be; if our old acquaintance be shy of us, and those we expect kindness from prove unkind, we must bear that with the same patient submission to the divine will

that we do other afflictions, Job, 19. 13. Nay, his friends were not only strange to him, but even hated him, because he was poor and in distress; "*Thou hast made me an abomination to them*; they are not only shy of me, but sick of me, and I am looked upon by them, not only with contempt, but with abhorrence." Let none think it strange concerning such a trial as this, when Heman, who was so famed for wisdom, was yet, when the world frowned upon him, neglected, as a vessel in which is no pleasure.

Lastly, He looked upon his case as helpless and deplorable; "*I am shut up, and I cannot come forth*, a close prisoner, under the arrests of divine wrath, and no way open of escape." He therefore lies down and sinks under his troubles, because he sees not any probability of getting out of them. For thus he bemoans himself; (v. 9.) *Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction*; sometimes giving vent to grief by weeping gives some ease to a troubled spirit. Yet weeping must not hinder praying; we must sow in tears; *Mine eye mourns*, but *I cry unto thee daily*; let prayers and tears go together, and they shall be accepted together; *I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears*.

10. Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. 11. Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in destruction? 12. Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? 13. But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. 14. LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? 15. I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. 16. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. 17. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. 18. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

In these verses,

I. The psalmist expostulates with God concerning the present deplorable condition he was in; (v. 10. . 12.) "*Wilt thou do a miraculous work to the dead*, and raise them to life again? Shall those that are dead and buried rise up to praise thee? No, they leave it to their children to rise up in their rooms to praise God, none expects that they should do it; and wherefore should they rise? Wherefore should they live, but to praise God? The life we are born to at first, and the life we hope to rise to at last, must thus be spent. But *shall thy loving-kindness to thy people be declared in the grave*, either by those, or to those, that lie buried there? And thy faithfulness to thy promise, shall that be told in destruction; shall thy wonders be wrought in the dark, or known there; and thy righteousness in the grave, which is the land of forgetfulness, where men remember nothing, nor are themselves remembered? Departed souls may indeed know God's wonders, and declare his faithfulness, justice, and loving-kindness, but deceased bodies cannot; they can neither receive God's favours in comfort, nor return them in praise." Now we will not suppose these expostulations to be the language of despair, as if he thought God could not help him, or would not, much less do they bespeak any disbelief of the resurrection of the dead at the last day; but he thus pleads with God for speedy relief; "*Lord, thou art good, thou art faithful, thou art righteous*; these attributes of thine will be made known in my deliverance, but, if it be not hastened, it will come too late; for I shall be dead, and past relief, dead, and not capable of receiving any comfort, very shortly." Job often pleaded this, Job, 7. 8.—10. 21.

II. He resolves to continue instant in prayer, and the more

because the deliverance was deferred; (v. 13.) "*Unto thee have I cried many a time, and found comfort in it, and therefore I will continue to do so; in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.*" Note, Though our prayers be not answered immediately, yet we must not therefore give over praying, because *the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak, and not lie.* God therefore delays the answer, that he may try our patience and perseverance in prayer. He resolves to seek God early, in the morning, when his spirits were lively, and before the business of the day began to crowd in; in the morning, after he had been tossed with cares, and sorrowful thoughts in the silence and solitude of the night; *My prayer shall prevent thee.* Not as if he could wake sooner to pray, than God to hear and answer, for He neither slumbers nor sleeps; but it intimates that he would be up earlier than ordinary to pray; would *prevent*, that is, go before his usual hour of prayer. The greater our afflictions are, the more solicitous and serious we should be in prayer. "My prayer shall present itself before thee, and be betimes with thee, and shall not stay for the encouragement of the beginning of mercy, but reach out towards it with faith and expectation, even before the day dawns." God often prevents our prayers and expectations with his mercies, let us prevent his mercies with our prayers and expectations.

III. He sets down what he will say to God in prayer.

1. He will humbly reason with God concerning the abject afflicted condition he was now in; (v. 14.) "*Lord, why castest thou off my soul? What is it that provokes thee to treat me as one abandoned? Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.*" He speaks it with wonder that God should cast off an old servant; should cast off one that was resolved not to cast him off; "No wonder men cast me off; but, Lord, why dost thou, whose gifts and callings are without repentance? *Why hidest thou thy face, as one angry at me, that either hast no favour for me, or wilt not let me know it.*" Nothing grieves a child of God so much as God's hiding his face from him, nor is there any thing he so much dreads as God's casting off his soul. If the sun be clouded, that darkens the earth; but if the sun should abandon the earth, and quite cast it off, what a dungeon would it be!

2. He will humbly repeat the same complaints he had before made, until God have mercy on him. Two things he represents to God as his grievances.

(1.) That God was a Terror to him; *I suffer thy terrors*, v. 15. He had continual frightful apprehensions of the wrath of God against him for his sins, and the consequences of that wrath. It terrified him to think of God, and of falling into his hands, appearing before him to receive his doom from him. He sweat and trembled at the apprehension of God's displeasure against him, and the terror of his majesty. Note, Even those that are designed for God's favours may yet, for a time, suffer his terrors. The spirit of adoption is first a spirit of bondage to fear. Poor Job complains of the terrors of God *setting themselves in array against him*, Job, 6. 4. The psalmist here explains himself, and tells us what he means by God's terrors, even his fierce wrath. Let us see what dreadful impressions those terrors made upon him, and how deep they wounded him. [1.] They had almost taken away his life; "I am so afflicted with them, that I am ready to die, and" (as the word is) "*to give up the ghost. Thy terrors have cut me off,*" v. 16. What is hell, that external excision, by which damned sinners are for ever cut off from God and all happiness, but God's terrors fastening and preying upon their guilty consciences? [2.] They had almost taken away the use of his reason; *When I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted*; that sad effect the terrors of the Lord have had upon many, and upon some good men, who have thereby been put quite out of the possession of their own souls; a most piteous case, and which ought to be looked upon with great compassion. [3.] This had continued long: *From my youth up, I suffer thy terrors*; he had been from his childhood afflicted with melancholy, and trained up in sorrow under the discipline of that school. If we begin our days with trouble, and the days of our mourning have been prolonged a great while, let us not think it strange, but let

tribulation work patience. It is observable that Heman, who became eminently wise and good, was *afflicted and ready to die*, and suffered God's terrors, *from his youth up*; thus many have found it was good for them to bear the yoke in their youth, that sorrow has been much better for them than laughter would have been, and that, being much afflicted, and often ready to die, when they were young, they have, by the grace of God, got such an habitual seriousness, and weariness from the world, as have been of great use to them all their days. Sometimes those whom God designs for eminent services, are prepared for them by exercises of this kind. [4.] His affliction was now extreme, and worse than ever. God's terrors now came round about him, so that from all sides he was assaulted with variety of troubles, and he had no comfortable gale from any point of the compass. They brake in upon him together like an inundation of water; and this daily, and all the day; so that he had no rest, no respite, not the least breathing time, no lucid intervals, nor any gleam of hope. Such was the calamitous state of a very wise and good man; he was so surrounded with terrors, that he could find no place of shelter, nor lie any where under the wind.

(2.) That no friend he had in the world was a comfort to him; (v. 18.) *Lover and friend hast thou put far from me*; some are dead, others at a distance, and perhaps many unkind. Next to the comforts of religion are those of friendship and society; therefore to be friendless is (as to this life) almost to be comfortless; and to those who have had friends, but have lost them, the calamity is the more grievous; with this the psalmist here closes his complaint, as if this were it that completed his woe, and gave the finishing stroke to this melancholy piece. If our friends are put far from us by scattering providences, nay, if by death our acquaintance are removed into darkness, we have reason to look upon it as a sore affliction, but must acknowledge and submit to the hand of God in it.

PSALM LXXXIX.

Many psalms that begin with complaint and prayer, end with joy and praise, but this begins with joy and praise, and ends with sad complaints and petitions; for the psalmist first recounts God's former favours, and then with the consideration of them aggravates the present grievances. It is uncertain when it was penned; only, in general, that it was at a time when the house of David was usefully eclipsed; some think it was at the time of the captivity of Babylon, when king Zedekiah was insulted over, and abused, by Nebuchadnezzar, and then they make the title to signify no more than that the psalm was set to the tune of a song of Ethan the son of Zerah, called Maschil; others suppose it to be penned by Ethan, who is mentioned in the story of Solomon, who, outliving that glorious prince, thus lamented the great disgrace done to the house of David in the next reign by the revolt of the ten tribes. I. The psalmist, in the joyful, pleasant, part of the psalm, gives glory to God, and takes comfort to himself and his friends. This he does more briefly, mentioning God's mercy and truth, (v. 1.) and his covenant; (v. 2. .4.) but more largely in the following verses, wherein, 1. He adores the glory and perfection of God, v. 5. .14. 2. He pleases himself in the happiness of those that are admitted into communion with him, v. 15. .18. 3. He builds all his hope upon God's covenant with David, as a type of Christ, v. 19. .57. II. In the melancholy part of the psalm, he laments the present calamitous state of the prince and royal family, (v. 38. .45.) expostulates with God upon it, (v. 46. .49.) and then concludes with prayer for redress, v. 50, 51. In singing this psalm, we must have high thoughts of God, a lively faith in his covenant with the Redeemer, and a sympathy with the afflicted parts of the church.

Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

1. **I** WILL sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. 2. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. 3. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant. 4. Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selan.

The psalmist has a very sad complaint to make of the deplorable condition of the family of David at this time, and yet he begins the psalm with songs of praise; for we must, in every thing, in every state, give thanks; thus we must glorify the Lord in the fire. We think, when we are in trouble, that we get ease by complaining; but we do more, we get joy, by praising. Let our complaints, therefore, be turned into thanksgivings; and in these verses we find that which will be matter of praise and thanksgiving for us in the worst of times, whether upon a personal or a public account.

1. However it be, the everlasting God is good and true, v. 1. Though we may find it hard to reconcile present dark providences with the goodness and truth of God, yet we must abide by this principle, That God's mercies are inexhaustible, and his truth inviolable; and these must be the matter of our joy and praise; "*I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever*; sing a praising song to God's honour, a pleasant song for my own solace, and *Maschil*, an instructing song, for the edification of others." We may be for ever singing God's mercies, and yet the subject will not be drawn dry. We must sing of God's mercies as long as we live, train up others to sing of them when we are gone, and hope to be singing of them in heaven, world without end; and this is *singing of the mercies of the Lord for ever*. With my mouth, and with my pen, (for by that also do we speak,) *will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations*; assuring posterity, from my own observation and experience, that God is true to every word that he has spoken, that they may learn to *put their trust in God*, 78. 6.

2. However it be, the everlasting covenant is firm and sure, v. 2. 4. Here we have,

(1.) The psalmist's faith and hope; "Things now look black, and threaten the utter extirpation of the house of David; but I have said, and I have warrant from the word of God to say it, that mercy shall be built up for ever." As the goodness of God's nature is to be the matter of our song, (v. 1.) so much more the mercy that is built for us in the covenant; it is still increasing, like a house in the building up, and shall still continue our rest for ever, like a house built up. It shall be built up for ever; for the everlasting habitations we hope for in the new Jerusalem are of this building. If mercy shall be built for ever, then the *tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, shall be raised out of its ruins, and built up as in the days of old*, Amos, 9. 11. Therefore mercy shall be built up for ever, because *thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens*. Though our expectations are, in some particular instances, disappointed, yet God's promises are not disannulled; they are *established in the very heavens*, that is, in his eternal counsels; they are above the changes of this lower region, and out of the reach of the opposition of hell and earth. The stability of the material heavens is an emblem of the truth of God's word; the heavens may be clouded by vapours arising out of the earth, but they cannot be touched, they cannot be changed.

(2.) An abstract of the covenant upon which this faith and hope are built; *I have said it*, says the psalmist, for *God hath sworn it*, that the heirs of promise might be entirely satisfied of the immutability of his counsel. He brings in God speaking, (v. 3.) owning, to the comfort of his people, "*I have made a covenant*, and therefore will make it good." The covenant is made with David, the covenant of royalty is made with him, as the father of his family, and with his seed through him, and for his sake; representing the covenant of grace made with Christ as Head of the church, and with all believers as his spiritual seed. David is here called *God's chosen*, and *his servant*; and, as God is not changeable to recede from his own choice, so he is not unrighteous to cast off one that served him. Two things encourage the psalmist to build his faith on this covenant; [1.] The ratification of it; it was confirmed with an oath; *The Lord has sworn, and he will not repent*. [2.] The perpetuity of it; the blessings of the covenant were not only secured to David himself, but were entailed on his family; it was promised that his family should continue; *Thy seed will I establish for ever*, so that *David shall not want a son to*

■; (Jer. 33. 20, 21.) and that it should continue a royal family;

I will build up thy throne to all generations, to all the generations of time. This has its accomplishment only in Christ, of the seed of David, who lives for ever, to whom God has given the throne of his father David, and of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end. Of this covenant the psalmist will return to speak more largely, v. 19, &c.

5. And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints. 6. For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? *who* among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD? 7. God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all *them that are about him*. 8. O LORD God of hosts, *who is a strong LORD like unto thee, or to thy faithfulness round about thee?* 9. Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. 10. Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm. 11. The heavens *are* thine, the earth also *is* thine: *as for* the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. 12. The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name. 13. Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, *and high is thy right-hand*. 14. Justice and judgment *are* the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

These verses are full of the praises of God. Observe,

1. Where, and by whom, God is to be praised.

1. God is praised by the angels above; *The heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord*; (v. 5.) that is, "the glorious inhabitants of the upper world continually celebrate thy praises;" *Bless the Lord, ye his angels*, 103. 20. The works of God are wonders even to them that are best acquainted, and most intimately conversant, with them; the more God's works are known, the more they are admired and praised. This should make us love heaven, and long to be there, that there we shall have nothing else to do than to praise God and his wonders.

2. God is praised by the assemblies of his saints on earth; (*praise waits for him in Zion*;) and though they fall so far short of the praises of angels, yet God is pleased to take notice of them, and accept of them, and reckons himself honoured by them. "Thy faithfulness, and the truth of thy promise, that rock on which the church is built, shall be praised in the congregation of the saints, who owe their all to that faithfulness, and whose constant comfort it is that there is a promise, and that he is faithful who has promised." It is expected from God's saints on earth that they praise him; who should, if they do not? Let every saint praise him, but especially the congregation of saints; when they come together, let them join in praising God; the more the better, it is the more like heaven. Of the honour done to God by the assembly of the saints, he speaks again; (v. 7.) *God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints*; saints should assemble for religious worship, that they may publicly own their relation to God, and may stir up one another to give honour to him, and, in keeping up communion with God, may likewise maintain the communion of saints. In religious assemblies, God has promised the presence of his grace, but we must also, in them, have an eye to his glorious presence, that the familiarity we are admitted to may not breed the least contempt; for he is terrible in his holy places, and therefore greatly to be feared. A holy awe of God must fall upon us, and fill us, in all our approaches to God, even in secret, to which something may very well be added by the

solemnity of public assemblies. God must be had in reverence of all that are about him, that attend him continually as his servants, or approach him upon any particular errand. See Lev. 10. 3. Those only serve God acceptably who serve him with reverence and godly fear, Heb. 12. 28.

H. What it is to praise God; it is to acknowledge him to be a Being of unparalleled perfection, such a one that there is none like him, nor any to be compared with him, v. 6. If there be any beings that can pretend to vie with God, surely they must be found among the angels; but they are all infinitely short of him; *Who in the heaven can be compared with the Lord*, so as to challenge any share of the reverence and adoration which are due to him only, or to set up in rivalry with him for the homage of the children of men? They are sons of the mighty, but which of them can be likened unto the Lord? Nobles are princes' peers; some parity there is between them, but none between God and the angels; they are not his peers. *To whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One*, Isa. 40. 25. This is insisted on again, (v. 8.) *Who is a strong Lord like unto thee?* No angel, no earthly potentate, whatsoever, is comparable to God, or *has an arm like him*, or can *thunder with a voice like him*. Thy faithfulness is round about thee; that is, "thine angels, who are round about thee, attending thee with their praises, and ready to go on thine errands, are all faithful." Or rather, "In every thing thou doest, on all sides, thou approvest thyself faithful to thy word, above whatever prince or potentate was." Among men, it is too often found that those who are most able to break their word are least careful to keep it; but God is both strong and faithful; he can do every thing, and yet will never do an unjust thing.

III. What we ought, in our praises, to give God the glory of. Several things are here mentioned.

1. The command God has of the most ungovernable creatures; (v. 9.) *Thou rulest the raging of the sea*, than which nothing is more frightful or threatening, nor more out of the power of man to give check to; it can swell no higher, roll no further, beat no harder, continue no longer, nor do any more hurt, than God suffers it. *"When the waves thereof arise, thou canst immediately hush them asleep, still them, and make them quiet, and turn the storm into a calm."* This coming in here as an act of omnipotence; what manner of man, then, was the Lord Jesus, whom the *winds and seas obeyed*?

2. The victories God has obtained over the enemies of his church; his ruling the raging of the sea, and quelling its billows, was an emblem of this; (v. 10.) *Thou hast broken Rahab*; many a proud enemy, so it signifies; Egypt in particular, which is sometimes called *Rahab*; broken it in pieces, as one that is slain, and utterly unable to make head again." The head being broken, thou hast scattered the remainder with the arm of thy strength." God has more ways than one to deal with his and his church's enemies; we think he should slay them immediately, but sometimes he scatters them, that he may send them abroad to be monuments of his justice, 59. 11. The remembrance of the breaking of Egypt in pieces is a comfort to the church, in reference to the present power of Babylon; for God is still the same.

3. The incontestable property he has in all the creatures of the upper and lower world; (v. 11, 12.) "Men are honoured for their large possessions; but *the heavens are thine, O Lord, the earth also is thine*; therefore we praise thee, therefore we trust in thee, therefore we will not fear what man can do against us. *The world and the fulness thereof*, all the riches contained in it, all the inhabitants of it, both the tenements and the tenants, they are all thine; for *thou hast founded them*." And the Founder may justly claim to be the Owner. He specifies, (1.) The remotest parts of the world, the north and south, the countries that lie under the two poles, which are uninhabited and little known; "*Thou hast created them*, and therefore knowest them, takest care of them, and hast tributes of praise from them." The north is said to be *hung over the empty place*; yet what fulness there is there, God is the owner of it. (2.) The highest parts of the world; he mentions the two highest hills in Canaan; "*Tabor and Hermon*," *one lying to the west, the other to the east*;) "these shall rejoice

in thy name, for they are under the care of thy providence, and they produce offerings for thine altar." The little hills are said to rejoice in their own fruitfulness, 65. 12. Tabor is commonly supposed to be that high mountain in Galilee, on the top of which Christ was transfigured; and then, indeed, it might be said to rejoice in that voice which was there heard, *This is my beloved Son*.

4. The power and justice, the mercy and truth, with which he governs the world, and rules in the affairs of the children of men, v. 13, 14. (1.) God is able to do every thing; for he is the Lord God Almighty. His arm, his hand, is mighty and strong, both to save his people, and to destroy his and their enemies; none can either resist the force, or bear the weight, of his mighty hand. *High is his right hand*, to reach the highest, even those that set their nets among the stars; (Amos, 9. 2, 3. Obad. 4.) his *right hand is exalted* in what he has done, for in thousands of instances he has signalized his power, 118. 16. (2.) He never did, nor ever will do, any thing that is either unjust or unwise; *for righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne*. None of all his dictates or decrees ever varied from the rules of equity and wisdom, nor could ever any charge God with unrighteousness or folly. Justice and judgment are the preparing of his throne, (so some,) the establishment of it, so others; the preparations for his government in his counsels from eternity, and the establishment of it in its consequences to eternity, are all justice and judgment. (3.) He always does that which is kind to his people, and consonant to the world which he has spoken; "*Mercy and truth shall go before thy face, to prepare thy way, as harbingers to make room for thee; mercy in promising, truth in performing; truth in being as good as thy word, mercy in being better.*" How praise-worthy are these in great men, much more in the great God, in whom they are in perfection!

15. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. 16. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. 17. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. 18. For the Lord is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our King.

The psalmist, having largely shewed the blessedness of the God of Israel, here shews the blessedness of the Israel of God. As *there is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, so, happy art thou, O Israel, there is none like unto thee, O people*, especially as a type of the gospel-Israel, consisting of all true believers, whose happiness is here described.

1. Glorious discoveries are made to them, and glad tidings of good brought to them; they hear, *they know, the joyful sound*, v. 15. This may allude, (1.) To the shout of a victorious army, the shout of a king, Numb. 23. 21. Israel have the tokens of God's presence with them in their wars; the sound of the *going in the top of the mulberry-trees* was indeed a joyful sound, (2 Sam. 5. 24.) and they often returned making the earth ring with their songs of triumph; these were joyful sounds. It may allude, (2.) To the sound that was made over the sacrifices, and on the solemn feast-day, 81. 1. 3. This was the happiness of Israel, that they had among them the free and open profession of God's holy religion, and abundance of joy in their sacrifices. It may allude, (3.) To the sound of the jubilee-trumpet; a joyful sound it was to servants and debtors, to whom it proclaimed release. The gospel is indeed a joyful sound; a sound of victory, of liberty, of communion with God, and the *sound of abundance of rain*; blessed are the people that hear it, and know it, and bid it welcome.

2. Special tokens of God's favour are granted them; "*They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance*; they shall govern themselves by thy conduct, guided by thine eye; and they shall delight themselves in thy consolations; they shall have the favour of God, they shall know that they have it, and it shall be

continual matter of joy and rejoicing to them; they shall go through all the exercises of a holy life under the powerful influences of God's loving-kindness, which shall make their duty pleasant to them, and make them sincere in it, aiming at this, as their end, to be accepted of the Lord." We then walk in the light of the Lord when we fetch all our comforts from God's favour, and are very careful to keep ourselves in his love.

3. They never want matter for joy; blessed are God's people, for, in his name, in all that whereby he has made himself known, if it be not their own fault, *they shall rejoice all the day*. They that rejoice in Christ Jesus, and make God their exceeding Joy, have enough to balance their grievances, and silence their griefs; and therefore their joy is full, (1 John, 1.4.) and constant; it is their duty to rejoice evermore.

4. Their relation to God is their honour and dignity; they are happy, for they are high. *Surely in the Lord*, in the Lord Christ, *they have righteousness and strength*, and so are recommended by him to the divine acceptance; and therefore *in him shall all the seed of Israel glory*, Isa. 45. 24, 25. So it is here, v. 16, 17. (1.) "*In thy righteousness shall they be exalted*, and not in any righteousness of their own." We are exalted out of danger, and into honour, purely by the righteousness of Christ, which is a clothing both for dignity and for defence. (2.) "*Thou art the Glory of their strength*," that is, "*thou art their Strength*, and it is their glory that thou art so, and what they glory in." *Thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph*. (3.) "*In thy favour*, which, through Christ, we hope for, *our horn shall be exalted*;" the horn denotes beauty, plenty, and power; these they have who are made accepted in the Beloved. What greater preferment are men capable of in this world than to be God's favourites?

5. Their relation to God is their protection and safety; (v. 18.) "*For our shield is of the Lord*," so the margin; "*and our king is from the Holy One of Israel*. If God be our Ruler, he will be our Defender; and who is he, then, that can harm us?" It was the happiness of Israel that God himself had the erecting of their bulwarks, and the nominating of their king, so some take it; or rather, that he was himself a *Wall of fire round about them*, and, as a Holy One, the Author and Centre of their holy religion; he was their King, and so their Glory in the midst of them. Christ is the Holy One of Israel, that Holy Thing; and in nothing was that peculiar people more blessed than in this, that *He* was born King of the Jews. Now this account of the blessedness of God's Israel comes in here as that to which it was hard to reconcile their present calamitous state.

19. Then thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon *one that is mighty*; I have exalted *one* chosen out of the people. 20. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: 21. With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. 22. The enemy shall not exact upon him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him. 23. And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. 24. But my faithfulness and my mercy *shall be* with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. 25. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. 26. He shall cry unto me, Thou *art* my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation. 27. Also I will make him *my* first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. 28. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. 29. His seed also will I make *to endure* for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

30. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; 31. If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; 32. Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. 33. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. 34. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. 35. Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David. 36. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. 37. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.

The covenant God made with David and his seed was mentioned before; (v. 3, 4.) but in these verses it is enlarged upon, and pleaded with God, for favour to the royal family, now almost sunk and ruined; yet certainly it looks at Christ, and has its accomplishment in him much more than in David; nay, some passages here are scarcely applicable at all to David, but must be understood of Christ only, who is therefore called *David our King*; (Hos. 3. 5.) and very great and precious promises they are which are here made to the Redeemer, which are strong foundations for the faith and hope of the redeemed to build upon. The comforts of our redemption flow from the covenant of redemption, all our springs are in that, Isa. 55. 3. *I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David*, Acts, 13. 34. Now here we have an account of those sure mercies. Observe,

I. What assurance we have of the truth of the promise, which may encourage us to build upon it. We are here told, 1. *How* it was spoken; (v. 19.) *Thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One*. God's promise to David, which is especially referred to here, was spoken in vision to Nathan the prophet, 2 Sam. 7. 12 . . 17. *Then* when the *Holy One of Israel was their King*, (v. 18.) then he appointed David to be his viceroy. But to all the prophets, those holy ones, he *spake in vision* concerning Christ, and to him himself especially, who had lain in his bosom from eternity, and was made perfectly acquainted with the whole design of redemption, Matth. 11. 27. 2. *How* it was sworn to, and ratified; (v. 35.) *Once have I sworn by my Holiness*, that darling attribute. In swearing by his Holiness, he swore by himself, for he will as soon cease to be as be otherwise than holy. His swearing once is enough, he needs not swear again, as David did; (1 Sam. 20. 17.) for his word and oath are two immutable things. As Christ was made a Priest, so he was made a King, *by an oath*; (Heb. 7. 21.) for his kingdom and priesthood are both unchangeable.

II. The choice made of the person to whom the promise is given, v. 19, 20. David was a king of God's own choosing, so is Christ, and therefore both are called *God's kings*, Ps. 2. 6. David was mighty, a man of courage, and fit for business; he was chosen out of the people; not out of the princes, but the shepherds. God found him out, exalted him, and laid help upon him, and ordered Samuel to anoint him. But this is especially to be applied to Christ; 1. He is one that is mighty, every way qualified for the great work he was to undertake, *able to save to the uttermost*; mighty in strength, for he is the Son of God; mighty in love, for he is able experimentally to compassionate those that are tempted. He is the *mighty God*, Isa. 9. 6. 2. He is *chosen out of the people*, one of us, bone of our bone, that takes part with us of flesh and blood; being ordained for men, he is taken from among men, that his terror might not make us afraid. 3. God has found him. He is a Saviour of God's own providing, for the salvation, from first to last, is purely the Lord's doing; *he has found the ransom*, Job, 33. 24. We could never have found a person fit to undertake this great work, Rev. 5. 3, 4. 4. God has *laid help upon him*; not only helped him, but treasured up help in him for us; laid it as a charge upon him to help fallen man up again, to help the

chosen remnant to heaven; *In me is thy help*, Hos. 13. 9. 5. He has exalted him, by constituting him the Prophet, Priest, and King, of his church; clothing him with power, raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand. Whom God chooses and uses he will exalt. 6. He has anointed him, has qualified him for his office, and so confirmed him in it, by giving him the Spirit, not by measure, but without measure, infinitely above his fellows. He is called *Messiah*, or *Christ*, the *Anointed*. 7. In all this he designed him to be his own servant, for the accomplishing of his eternal purpose, and the advancement of the interest of his kingdom among men.

III. The promises made to this chosen one, to David in the type, and the Son of David in the antitype, in which not only gracious, but glorious, things are spoken of him.

1. With reference to himself, as king and God's servant: and what makes for him, makes for all his loving subjects. It is here promised,

(1.) That God would stand by him and strengthen him in his undertaking; (v. 21.) *With him my hand* not only shall be, but shall be established by promise; shall be so established, that he shall by it be established and confirmed in all his offices, so that none of them shall be undermined and overthrown, though by the man of sin they shall all be usurped and fought against. Christ had a great deal of hard work to do, and hard usage to go through; but He that gave him commission gave him forces sufficient for the execution of his commission; "*Mine arm also shall strengthen him to break through and bear up under all his difficulties.*" No good work can miscarry in the hand of those whom God himself undertakes to strengthen.

(2.) That he should be victorious over his enemies, that they should not encroach upon him; (v. 22.) *The son of wickedness shall not exact upon him*, nor afflict him. He that at first brake the peace would set himself against him that undertook to make peace, and do what he could to blast his design; but he could only reach to bruise his heel, further he could not exact upon him or afflict him. Christ became a Surety for our debt, and thereby Satan and death thought to have gained advantage against him; but he satisfied the demands of God's justice, and then they could not exact upon him; *The prince of this world cometh, but he has nothing in me*, John. 14. 30. Nay, they not only shall not prevail against him, but they shall fall before him; (v. 23.) *I will beat down his foes before his face*; the prince of this world shall be cast out, principalities and powers spoiled, and he shall be the Death of death itself, and the Destruction of the grave, Hos. 13. 14. Some apply this to the ruin which God brought upon the Jewish nation, that persecuted Christ, and put him to death. But all Christ's enemies, who hate him and will not have him to reign over them, shall be brought forth, and slain before him, Luke, 19. 27.

(3.) That he should be the great Trustee of the covenant between God and men; that God would be gracious and true to him, and, in him, be gracious and true to us; (v. 24.) *My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him*. They were with David; God continued merciful to him, and so approved himself faithful; they were with Christ; God made good all his promises to him. But that is not all, God's mercy to us, and his faithfulness to us, are with Christ; he is not only pleased with him, but with us in him; and it is in him that all the promises of God are yea and amen. So that, if any poor sinners hope for benefit by the faithfulness and mercy of God, let them know it is with Christ, it is lodged in his hand, and to him they must apply themselves for it; (v. 28.) *My mercy will I keep for him*, to be disposed of by him for evermore; in the channel of Christ's mediation all the streams of divine goodness will for ever run. Therefore it is *the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ* which we look for unto eternal life, Jude, 21. John, 17. 2. And as the mercy of God flows to us through him, so the promise of God is, through him, firm to us; *My covenant shall stand fast with him*, both the covenant of redemption made with him, and the covenant of grace made with us in him. The new covenant is therefore always new, and firmly established, because it is lodged in the hands of a Mediator, Heb. 8. 6. The

covenant stands fast, because it stands upon this basis. And this redounds to the everlasting honour of the Lord Jesus, that to him the great cause between God and man is entirely referred, and the Father has committed all judgment to him, that *all men might honour him*; (John, 5. 22, 23.) therefore it is here said, *In my name shall his horn be exalted*; this shall be his glory, that God's name is in him, (Exod. 23, 21.) and that he acts in God's name; *As the Father gave me commandment, so I do*.

(4.) That his kingdom should be greatly enlarged; (v. 25.) *I will set his hand in the sea*; he shall have the dominion of the seas, and the isles of the sea, and *his right hand in the rivers*, the inland countries that are watered with rivers. David's kingdom extended itself to the great sea, and the Red sea, to the river of Egypt, and the river Euphrates. But it is in the kingdom of the Messiah that this has its full accomplishment, and shall have more and more, when *the kingdoms of this world shall become as the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ*, (Rev. 11. 15.) and *the isles shall wait for his law*.

(5.) That he should own God as his Father, and God would own him as his Son, his First-born, v. 26, 27. This is a comment upon these words in Nathan's message concerning Solomon: (for he also was a type of Christ as well as David;) *I will be his Father, and he shall be my Son*, (2 Sam. 7. 14.) and the relation shall be owned on both sides. [1.] *He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father*. It is probable that Solomon did so; but we are sure Christ did so, in the days of his flesh, when he offered up strong cries to God, and called him *holy Father, righteous Father*, and taught us to address ourselves to him as *our Father in heaven*. Christ, in his agony, cried unto God, *Thou art my Father*, (Matth. 26. 39, 42.) *O my Father*, and, upon the cross, *Father, forgive them; Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*. He looked upon him likewise as his God, and therefore he perfectly obeyed him, and submitted to his will in his whole undertaking; (he is *my God and your God*, John, 20. 17.) and as the Rock of his salvation, who would bear him up, and bear him out, in his undertaking, and make him more than a Conqueror, even a complete Saviour, and therefore, with an undaunted resolution, he *endured the cross, despising the shame*, for he knew he should be both justified and glorified. [2.] *I will make him my First-born*. I see not how this can be applied to David; it is Christ's prerogative to be the *First-born of every creature*, and, as such, the *Heir of all things*, Col. 1. 15. Heb. 1. 2, 6. When *all power was given to Christ both in heaven and in earth, and all things were delivered unto him by the Father*, then God made him his First-born, and far higher, more great and honourable, than the kings of the earth, for he is the King of kings, *angels, authorities, and powers, being made subject to him*, 1 Pet. 3. 22.

2. With reference to his seed. God's covenants always took in the seed of the covenanters, this does so; (v. 29. 36.) *His seed shall endure for ever*, and with it his throne; now this will be differently understood, according as we apply it to Christ or David.

(1.) If we apply it to David, by his seed we are to understand his successors, Solomon and the following kings of Judah, who descended from the loins of David; it is supposed that they might degenerate, and not walk in the spirit and steps of their father David; in such a case they must expect to come under divine rebukes, such as the house of David was at this time under, v. 38. But let this encourage them, that, though they were corrected, they should not be abandoned or disinherited. This refers to that part of Nathan's message, (2 Sam. 7. 14, 15.) *If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him, but my mercy shall not depart from him*. Thus far David's seed and throne did endure for ever, that, notwithstanding the wickedness of many of his posterity, who were the scandals of his house, yet his family continued, and continued in the imperial dignity, a very long time; that, as long as Judah continued a kingdom, David's posterity were kings of it, and the royalty of that kingdom was never in any other family, as that of the ten tribes was, in Jeroboam's first, then in Baasha's, &c.; and that the family of David continued a family of distinction till that Son of David came whose throne should endure for

ever. see Luke, 1. 27, 32.—2. 4, 11. If David's posterity, in after-times, should forsake God and their duty, and revolt to the ways of sin, God would bring desolating judgments upon them, and ruin the family; and yet he would not take away his loving-kindness from David, nor break his covenant with him, for, in the Messiah, who should come out of his loins, all these promises shall have their accomplishment to the full. Thus, when the Jews were rejected, the apostle shews that God's covenant with Abraham was not broken, because it was fulfilled in his spiritual seed, the heirs of the righteousness of faith, Rom. 11. 7.

(2.) If we apply it to Christ, by his seed we are to understand his subjects, all believers, his spiritual seed, the children which God has given him, Heb. 2. 13. This is that seed which shall be made to endure for ever, and his throne in the midst of them, in the church, in the heart, *as the days of heaven*. To the end Christ shall have a people in the world to serve and honour him; *He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days*. This holy seed shall endure for ever in a glorified state, when time and days shall be no more; and thus Christ's throne and kingdom shall be perpetuated; the kingdom of his grace shall continue through all the ages of time, and the kingdom of his glory to the endless ages of eternity.

[1.] The continuance of Christ's kingdom is here made doubtful by the sins and afflictions of his subjects; their iniquities and calamities threaten the ruin of it. This case is here put, that we may not be offended when it comes to be a case in fact, but that we may reconcile it with the stability of the covenant, and be assured of that notwithstanding.

First, It is here supposed that there will be much amiss in the subjects of Christ's kingdom. His children may *forsake God's law*, (v. 30.) by omissions, and *break his statutes*, (v. 31.) by commissions. There are spots, which are the spots of God's children, Dent. 32. 5. Many corruptions there are in the bowels of the church, as well as in the hearts of those who are the members of it, and these corruptions break out.

Secondly, They are here told that they must smart for it; (v. 32.) *I will visit their transgression with a rod, their transgression sooner than that of others; you only have I known, and therefore I will punish you*, Amos, 3. 2. Their being related to Christ, shall not excuse them from being called to an account. But observe what affliction is to God's people, 1. It is but a rod, not an axe, not a sword; it is for correction, not for destruction. This denotes gentleness in the affliction, it is the rod of men, such a rod as men use in correcting their children; and it denotes a design of good in and by the affliction, such a rod as yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. 2. It is a rod in the hand of God; (*I will visit them*;) he who is wise, and knows what he does, gracious, and will do what is best. 3. It is a rod which they shall never feel the smart of, but when there is great need; *If they break my law, then I will visit their transgression with the rod*, but not else. Then it is requisite that God's honour be vindicated, and that they be humbled and reduced.

[2.] The continuance of Christ's kingdom is made certain by the inviolable promise and oath of God, notwithstanding all this; (v. 33.) *Nevertheless, my kindness will I not totally and finally take from him*. *First*, "Notwithstanding their provocations, yet my covenant shall not be broken." Note, Afflictions are not only consistent with covenant-love, but to the people of God they flow from it. Though David's seed be chastened, it does not follow that they are disinherited; they may be cast down, but they are not cast off. God's favour is continued to his people, 1. For Christ's sake; in him the mercy is laid up for us, and God says, *I will not take it from him*; (v. 33.) *I will not lie unto David*, v. 35. We are unworthy, but he is worthy. 2. For the covenant's sake; *My faithfulness shall not fail, my covenant will I not break*. It was supposed that they had broken God's statutes, *profaned and polluted them*, so the word signifies, "But," says God, "I will not break, I will not profane and pollute, my covenant;" it is the same word. That which is said and sworn, is, that God will have a church in the world, as long as sun and moon endure, v. 36, 37. The sun and moon are faithful witnesses in heaven of the

wisdom, power, and goodness, of the Creator, and shall continue while time lasts, which they are the measurers of; but the *seed of Christ shall be established for ever*, as *lights of the world* while the world stands, to shine in it, and when it is at an end, they shall be established lights, shining in the firmament of the Father.

38. But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. 39. Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown *by casting it to the ground*. 40. Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin. 41. All that pass by the way spoil him: he is a reproach to his neighbours. 42. Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice. 43. Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in the battle. 44. Thou hast made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground. 45. The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame. Selah. 46. How long, LORD? Wilt thou hide thyself for ever? Shall thy wrath burn like fire? 47. Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? 48. What man is *he that liveth*, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah. 49. LORD, where *are* thy former loving-kindnesses, *which* thou swarest unto David in thy truth? 50. Remember, LORD, the reproach of thy servants; *how* I do bear in my bosom *the reproach of* all the mighty people; 51. Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed. 52. Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and amen.

In these verses, we have,

1. A very melancholy complaint of the present deplorable state of David's family, which the psalmist thinks hard to be reconciled to the covenant God made with David. Thou saidst thou wouldest not *take away thy loving-kindness*, but thou hast cast off. Sometimes, it is no easy thing to reconcile God's providences with his promises, and yet we are sure they are reconcilable, for God's works fulfil his word, and never contradict it.

1. David's house seemed to have lost its interest in God, which was the greatest strength and beauty of it. God had been pleased with his anointed, but now he was *wroth with him*; (v. 38.) had entered into covenant with the family, but now, for aught he could perceive, he had made void the covenant, not broken some of the articles of it, but cancelled it, v. 39. We misconstrue the rebukes of Providence, if we think they make void the covenant. When the great Anointed One, Christ himself, was upon the cross, God seemed to have cast him off, and was wroth with him, and yet did not make void his covenant with him, for that was established for ever.

2. The honour of the house of David was lost, and laid in the dust; *Thou hast profaned his crown*, (which was always looked upon as sacred,) *by casting it to the ground*, to be trampled on, v. 39. *Thou hast made his glory to cease*, (so uncertain is all earthly glory, and so soon does it wither,) and *thou hast cast his throne down to the ground*, not only dethroned the king, but put a period to the kingdom, v. 44. If it were penned in Rehoboam's time, it was true as to the greatest part of the kingdom, five parts of

six; if in Zedekiah's time, it was more remarkably true of the poor remainder. Note, Thrones and crowns are tottering things, and are often laid in the dust, but there is a crown of glory reserved for Christ's spiritual seed, which fadeth not away.

3. It was exposed, and made a prey to all the neighbours, who insulted over that ancient and honourable family; (v. 40.) *Thou hast broken down all his hedges*, all those things that were a defence to them, and particularly that hedge of protection which they thought God's covenant and promise had made about them, and *thou hast made even his strong-holds a ruin*, so that they were rather a reproach to them than any shelter. *All that pass by the way spoil him*, (v. 41.) and make an easy prey of him; see 80. 12, 13. The enemies talk insolently; *He is a reproach to his neighbours*, who triumph in his fall from so great a degree of honour. Nay, every one helps forward the calamity, (v. 42.) *"Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries"*, not only given them power, but inclined them to turn their power this way." If the enemies of the church lift up their hand against it, we must see God setting up their hand, for they could have no power, unless it were given them from above. But when God does permit them to do mischief to his church, it pleases them; *"Thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice"*; and is this for thy glory, that those who hate thee, shall have the pleasure to see the tears and troubles of those that love thee?"

4. It was disabled to help itself; (v. 43.) *"Thou hast turned the edge of his sword"*, and made it blunt, that it cannot do execution as it has done; and (which is worse) thou hast turned the edge of his spirit, and taken off his courage, and hast not made him to stand as he used to do in the battle." The spirit of men is what the Father and Former of spirits makes them, nor can we stand with any strength or resolution, further than God is pleased to uphold us. If men's hearts fail them, it is God that dispirits them, but it is sad with the church, when those cannot stand who should stand up for it.

5. It was upon the brink of an inglorious exit; (v. 45.) *The days of his youth hast thou shortened*; it is ready to be cut off, like a young man in the flower of his age. This should intimate that it was penned in Rehoboam's time, when the house of David, was but in the days of its youth, and yet waxed old, and began to decay already. Thus it was covered with shame, and it was turned very much to its reproach, that a family, which, in the first and second reign, looked so great, and made such a figure, should, in the third, dwindle and look so little as the house of David did in Rehoboam's time. But it may be applied to the captivity in Babylon, which, in comparison with what was expected, was but the day of the youth of that kingdom. However, the kings then had remarkably the *day of their youth shortened*, for it was in the days of their youth, when they were about thirty years old, that Jehoiachin and Zedekiah were carried captives to Babylon.

From all this complaint let us learn, (1.) What work sin makes with families, noble royal families, with families in which religion has been uppermost; when posterity degenerates, it falls into disgrace, and iniquity stains their glory. (2.) How apt we are to place the promised honour and happiness of the church in something external, and to think the promise fails, and the covenant is made void, if we be disappointed of that; a mistake which we now are inexcusable if we fall into, since our Master has so expressly told us that his kingdom is not of this world.

II. A very pathetic expostulation with God upon this. Four things they plead with God for mercy.

1. The long continuance of the trouble; (v. 46.) *How long, O Lord, wilt thou hide thyself? For ever?* That which grieved them most, was, that God himself, as one displeased, did not appear to them by his prophets to comfort them, did not appear for them by his providences to deliver them, and that he had kept them long in the dark; it seemed an eternal night, when God was withdrawn; *Thou hidest thyself for ever*. Nay, God not only hid himself from them, but seemed to set himself against them; *"Shall thy wrath burn like fire? How long shall it burn? Shall it never be put out? What is hell, but the wrath of God, burning for ever? And is that the lot of thine anointed?"*

2. The shortness of life, and the certainty of death; "Lord, let thine anger cease, and return thou, in mercy to us, remembering how short my time is, and how sure the period of my time. Lord, since my life is so transitory, and will, ere long, be at an end, let it not be always so miserable, that I should rather choose no being at all than such a being." Job pleads thus, *ch. 10, 20, 21*. And, probably, the psalmist here urges it in the name of the house of David, and the present prince of that house, the *days of whose youth were shortened*, v. 45.

(1.) He pleads the shortness and vanity of life; (v. 47.) *Remember how short my time is, how transitory I am*, say some; therefore unable to bear the power of thy wrath, and therefore a proper object of thy pity. *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?* or, *Unto what vanity hast thou created all the sons of Adam?* Now, this may be understood either, [1.] As speaking a great truth. If the ancient loving-kindnesses spoken of, (v. 49.) be forgotten, (those relating to another life,) man is indeed made in vain; considering man as mortal, if there were not a future state on the other side, we might be ready to think that man was made in vain, and was in vain endued with the noble powers and faculties of reason, and filled with such vast designs, and desires; but God would not make man in vain, therefore, Lord, *remember those loving-kindnesses*. Or, [2.] As bespeaking a strong temptation that the psalmist was in. It is certain, *God has not made all men*, nor any man, *in vain*, Isa. 45. 18. For, *First*, If we think that God has made man in vain, because so many have short lives, and long afflictions, in this world, it is true that God has made them so, but it is not true that *therefore* they are made in vain. For those whose days are few and full of trouble, may yet glorify God, and do some good, may keep their communion with God, and get to heaven, and then they are not made in vain. *Secondly*, If we think that God has made men in vain, because the most of men neither serve him, nor enjoy him, it is true, that, as to themselves, they were made in vain, better for them had they not been born, than not to be born again; but it was not owing to God that they were made in vain, it was owing to themselves; nor are they made in vain as to him; for he has *made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil*, and those whom he is not glorified by, he will be glorified upon.

(2.) He pleads the universality and unavoidableness of death; (v. 48.) *"What man"* (what *strong man*, so the word is) *"is he that liveth, and shall not see death?"* The king himself, of the house of David, is not exempted from the sentence, from the stroke: Lord, since he is under a fatal necessity of dying, let not his whole life be made thus miserable. *Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?* No, he shall not when his time is come. Let him not, therefore, be delivered into the hand of the grave, by the miseries of a dying life, till his time is come." We must learn here, that death is the end of all men; our eyes must shortly be closed to see death; there is no discharge from that war, nor will any bail be taken to save us from the prison of the grave. It concerns us, therefore, to make sure a happiness on the other side of death and the grave, that, *when we fail, we may be received into everlasting habitations*.

3. The next plea is taken from the kindness God had for, and the covenant he made with, his servant David; (v. 49.) *"Lord, where are thy former loving-kindnesses, which thou shewedst, nay, which thou swarest, to David in thy truth? Wilt thou fail of doing what thou hast promised? Wilt thou undo what thou hast done? Art not thou still the same? Why then may not we have the benefit of the former sure mercies of David?"* God's unchangeableness and faithfulness assure us that God will not cast off those whom he has chosen and covenanted with.

4. The last plea is taken from the insolence of the enemies, and the indignity done to God's anointed; (v. 50, 51.) *"Remember, Lord, the reproach"*, and let it be rolled away from us, and returned upon our enemies." (1.) They were God's servants that were reproached, and the abuses done to them reflected upon their Master, especially since it was for serving him that they were reproached. (2.) The reproach cast upon God's servants

was a very grievous burthen to all that were concerned for the honour of God; "*I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people, and am even overwhelmed with it; it is what I lay much to heart, and can scarcely keep up my spirits under the weight of.*" (3.) "*They are thine enemies who do thus reproach us; and wilt thou not appear against them as such?*" (4.) *They have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.* They reflected upon all the steps which the king had taken in the course of his administration, tracked him in all his motions, that they might make invidious remarks upon every thing he had said and done. Or, if we may apply it to Christ, the Lord's Messiah, they reproached the Jews with his footsteps, the slowness of his coming. They have reproached the delays of the Messiah; so Dr. Hammond. They called him, *He that should come*; but, because he was not yet come, because he did not now come to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, when they had none to deliver them, they told them he would never come, they must give over looking for him. The scoffers of the latter days do, in like manner, reproach the footsteps of the Messiah, when they ask, *Where is the promise of his coming?* 2Pet. 3. 3, 4. The reproaching of the footsteps of the anointed, some refer to the serpent's bruising of the heel of the Seed of the woman; or, to the sufferings of Christ's followers, who tread in his footsteps, and are reproached for his name's sake.

Lastly, The psalm concludes with praise, even after this sad complaint; (v. 52.) *Blessed be the Lord for evermore, Amen, and amen.* Thus he confronts the reproaches of his enemies; the more others blaspheme God, the more we should bless him. Thus he corrects his own complaints, chiding himself for quarrelling with God's providences, and questioning his promises; let both these sinful passions be silenced with the praises of God. However it be, yet God is good, and we will never think hardly of him; God is true, and we will never distrust him. Though the glory of David's house be stained and sullied, this shall be our comfort, that God is blessed for ever, and his glory cannot be eclipsed. If we would have the comfort of the stability of God's promise, we must give him the praise of it; in blessing God, we encourage ourselves. Here is a double *Amen*, according to the double signification *Amen*; so it is, God is blessed for ever, *Amen*; be it so, let God be blessed for ever. He began the psalm with thanksgiving, before he made his complaint; (v. 1.) and now he concludes it with a doxology. They who give God thanks for what he *has done*, may give him thanks also for what he *will do*; God will follow those with his mercies, who, in a right manner, follow him with their praises.

PSALM XC.

The foregoing psalm was supposed to be penned as late as the captivity in Babylon; this, it is plain, was penned as early as the deliverance out of Egypt, and yet they are put close together in this collection of divine songs. This psalm was penned by Moses, (as appears by the title,) the most ancient penman of sacred writ. We have upon record a praising song of his, (Exod. 15.) which is alluded to, (Rev. 15. 3.) and an instructing song of his, Deut. 32. But this is of a different nature from both, for it is called a prayer. It is supposed that this psalm was penned upon occasion of the sentence passed upon Israel in the wilderness for their unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion, that their carcases should fall in the wilderness, that they should be wasted away by a series of miseries for 38 years together, and that none of them that were then of age should enter Canaan. This was calculated for their wanderings in the wilderness, as that other song of Moses (Deut. 31. 19, 21.) was for their settlement in Canaan. We have the story to which this psalm seems to refer, Numb. 14. Probably, Moses penned this prayer, to be daily used, either by the people in their tents, or, at least, by the priests in the tabernacle service, during their tedious fatigue in the wilderness. In it, I. Moses comforts himself and his people with the eternity of God, and their interest in him, v. 1, 2. II. He humbles himself and his people with the consideration of the frailty of man, v. 3. .6. III. He submits himself and his people to the righteous sentence of God passed upon them, v. 7. .11. IV. He commits himself and his people to God by prayer for divine mercy and grace, and the return of God's favour, v. 12. .17. Though it seems to have been penned upon this particular occasion, yet it is very applicable to the frailty of human life in general, and, in singing it, we may easily apply it to the years of our passage through the wilderness of this world, and it furnishes us with meditations and prayers very suitable to the solemnity of a funeral.

A prayer of Moses, the man of God.

1. **L**ORD, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. 2. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. 3. Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. 4. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. 5. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. 6. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up: in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

This psalm is entitled a *prayer of Moses*; where, and in what volume, it was preserved from Moses's time till the collection of psalms was begun to be made, is uncertain; but, being divinely inspired, it was under a special protection: perhaps it was written in the book of Jasher, or the book of the wars of the Lord. Moses taught the people of Israel to pray, and put words into their mouths, which they might make use of in turning to the Lord. Moses is here called the *man of God*, because he was a prophet, the father of the prophets, and an eminent type of the great Prophet.

In these verses, we are taught,

1. To give God the praise of his care concerning his people at all times, and concerning us in our days; (v. 1.) *Lord, thou hast been to us a Habitation, or Dwelling-Place; a Refuge, or Help, in all generations.* Now that they were fallen under God's displeasure, and he threatened to abandon them, they plead his former kindnesses to their ancestors. Canaan was a land of pilgrimage to their fathers the patriarchs, who dwelt there in tabernacles; but then God was their Habitation, and, wherever they went, they were at home, at rest, in him. Egypt had been a land of bondage to them for many years, but even then God was their Refuge; and in him that poor oppressed people lived, and were kept in being. Note, True believers are at home in God, and that is their comfort, in reference to all the toils and tosses they meet with in this world. In him we may repose and shelter ourselves, as in our Dwelling-Place.

2. To give God the glory of his eternity; (v. 2.) *Before the mountains were brought forth, before he made the highest part of the dust of the world, (as it is expressed, Prov. 8. 26.) before the earth fell in travail, or, as we may read it, before thou hadst formed the earth and the world, that is, before the beginning of time, thou hadst a being, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God; an eternal God, whose existence has neither its commencement nor its period with time, nor is measured by the successions and revolutions of it; but who art the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, without beginning of days, or end of life, or change of time.* Note, Against all the grievances that arise from our own mortality, and the mortality of our friends, we may take comfort from God's immortality; we are dying creatures, and all our comforts in the world are dying comforts, but God is an ever-living God, and they shall find him so, who have him for their's.

3. To own God's absolute sovereign dominion over man, and his irresistible, incontestable, power to dispose of him as he pleases; (v. 3.) *Thou turnest man to destruction, with a word's speaking, when thou plearest, to the destruction of the body, of the earthly house; and thou sayest, Return, ye children of men.* (1.) When God is, by sickness, or other afflictions, turning men to destruction, he does thereby call men to return unto him, that is, to repent of their sins, and live a new life. This God *speaketh once, yea, twice, "Return unto me, from whom ye have revolted,"* Jer. 4. 1. (2.) When God is threatening to *turn men to destruction*, to bring them to death, and they have received a sentence of death within themselves, sometimes he wonderfully recovers them, and says, as

the old Translation reads it, *Again thou sayest, Return, to life and health again.* For God kills, and makes alive again, brings down to the grave, and brings up. (3.) When God turns men to destruction, it is according to the general sentence passed upon all, which is this, "*Return, ye children of men, one as well as another; return to your first principles, let the body return to the earth as it was, (dust to dust, Gen. 3. 19.) and let the soul return to God who gave it,*" Eccl. 12. 7. (4.) Though God turns all men to destruction, yet he will again say, *Return, ye children of men,* at the general resurrection, when, though a man dies, yet he shall live again; and *then shalt thou call, and I will answer;* (Job, 14. 14, 15.) thou shalt bid me return, and I shall return. The body, the soul, shall both return and unite again.

4. To acknowledge the infinite disproportion there is between God and men, v. 4. Some of the patriarchs lived near a thousand years; Moses knew it very well, and had recorded it; but what is their long life to God's eternal life? A thousand years, to us, are a long period, which we cannot expect to survive; or, if we could, it is what we could not retain the remembrance of; but it is, *in thy sight, as yesterday*, as one day, as that which is freshest in mind; nay, it is but as *a watch of the night*, which was but three hours. (1.) A thousand years are nothing to God's eternity, they are less than a day, than an hour, to a thousand years; betwixt a minute and a million of years there is some proportion, but betwixt time and eternity there is none. The long lives of the patriarchs were nothing to God, not so much as the life of a child (that is born and dies the same day) is to their's. (2.) All the events of a thousand years, whether past or to come, are as present to the Eternal Mind, as what was done yesterday, or the last hour, is to us, and more too. God will say, at the great day, to those whom he has *turned to destruction, Return, arise ye dead.* But it might be objected against the doctrine of the resurrection, that it is a long time since it was expected, and it is not yet come. Let that be no difficulty, for a thousand years in God's sight are but as one day. *Nullum tempus occurrit Regi—To the King all periods are alike.* To this purport these words are quoted, 2Pet. 3. 8.

5. To see the frailty of man, and his vanity, even at his best estate, (v. 5, 6.) look upon all the children of men, and we shall see, (1.) That their life is a dying life; *Thou carriest them away as with a flood*, that is, they are continually gliding down the stream of time into the ocean of eternity; the flood is continually flowing, and they are carried away with it; as soon as we are born, we begin to die, and every day of our life carries us so much nearer death; or we are carried away violently and irresistibly, as with a flood of waters, as with an inundation, which sweeps away all before it; or, as the old world was carried away with Noah's flood. Though God promised not so to drown the world again, yet death is a constant deluge. (2.) That it is a dreaming life. Men are carried away as with a flood, and yet they are as a sleep; they consider not their own frailty, nor are aware how near they approach to an awful eternity. Like men asleep, they imagine great things to themselves, till death wakes them, and puts an end to the pleasing dream. Time passes unobserved by us, as it does with men asleep; and, when it is over, it is as nothing. (3.) That it is a short and transient life, like that of the grass, which grows up and flourishes in the morning, looks green and pleasant, but in the evening the mowers cut it down, and it immediately withers, changes its colour, and loses all its beauty. Death will change us shortly, perhaps suddenly; and it is a great change that death will make with us in a little time. Man, in his prime, does but flourish as the grass, which is weak, and low, and tender, and exposed; and which, when the winter of old age comes, will wither of itself; but he may be mown down by disease or disaster, as the grass is, in the midst of summer. *All flesh is as grass.*

7. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. 8. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. 9. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as

a tale that is told. 10. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength *they be* fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, *so is thy wrath.*

Moses had, in the foregoing verses, lamented the frailty of human life in general; the children of men *are as a sleep, and as the grass*; but here he teaches the people of Israel to confess before God that righteous sentence of death which they were under in a special manner, and which by their sins they had brought upon themselves; their share in the common lot of mortality was not enough, but they are, and must live and die, under peculiar tokens of God's displeasure: here they speak of themselves; *We Israelites are consumed and troubled, and our days are passed away.*

1. They are here taught to acknowledge the wrath of God to be the cause of all their miseries; *We are consumed, we are troubled*, and it is *by thine anger, by thy wrath*; (v. 7.) *our days are passed away in thy wrath*, v. 9. The afflictions of the saints often come purely from God's love, as Job's; but the rebukes of sinners, and of good men for their sins, must be seen coming from the anger of God, who takes notice of, and is much displeased with, the sins of Israel. We are too apt to look upon death as no more than a debt owing to nature; whereas it is not so; if the nature of man had continued in its primitive purity and rectitude, there had been no such debt owing to it; it is a debt to the justice of God, a debt to the law. *Sin entered into the world, and death by sin.* Are we consumed by decays of nature, the infirmities of age, or any chronical disease? We must ascribe it to God's anger. Are we troubled by any surprising stroke? That also is the fruit of God's wrath, which is thus revealed from heaven against the *ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*

2. They are taught to confess their sins, which had provoked the wrath of God against them; (v. 8.) *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, even our secret sins.* It was not without cause that God was angry with them; he had said, *Provoke me not, and I will do you no hurt*; but they had provoked him, and will own that, in passing this severe sentence upon them, he justly punished them; (1.) For their open contempts of him, and the daring affronts they had given him; *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee.* God had herein an eye to their unbelief and murmuring, their distrusting of his power, and their despising of the pleasant land: these he set before him, when he passed that sentence on them; those kindled the fire of God's wrath against them, and kept good things from them. (2.) For their more hidden departures from him; *"Thou hast set our secret sins, those which go no further than the heart, and which are at the bottom of all the overt acts, thou hast set these in the light of thy countenance; thou hast discovered these, and brought these also to the account, and made us to see them, who before overlooked them."* Secret sins are known to God, and shall be reckoned for. Those who in heart return into Egypt, who set up idols in their heart, shall be dealt with as revolvers or idolaters. See the folly of those who go about to cover their sins, for they cannot cover them.

3. They are taught to look upon themselves as dying and passing away, and not to think either of a long life, or of a pleasant one; for the decree gone forth against them was irreversible; (v. 9.) *All our days are likely to be passed away in thy wrath*, under the tokens of thy displeasure; and, though we are not quite deprived of the residue of our years, yet we are likely to *spend them as a tale that is told.* The 38 years, which, after this, they wore away in the wilderness, were not the subject of the sacred history, for little or nothing is recorded of that which happened to them from the 2d year to the 40th. After they came out of Egypt, their time was perfectly trifled away, and was not worthy to be the subject of a history, but only of *a tale that is told*; for it was only to pass away time, like telling stories, that they spent those years

in the wilderness; all that while, they were in the consuming, and another generation was in the raising. When they came out of Egypt, *there was not one feeble person among the tribes*, (105. 37.) but now they were all feeble. Their joyful prospect of a prosperous glorious life in Canaan was turned into the melancholy prospects of a tedious inglorious death in the wilderness; so that their whole life was now as impertinent a thing as ever any winter-tale was. That is applicable to the state of every one of us in the wilderness of this world; *We spend our years, we bring them to an end*, each year, and all, at last, *as a tale that is told; as the breath of our mouth in winter*, (so some,) which soon disappears; *as a thought*, (so some,) than which nothing more quick; *as a word*, which is soon spoken, and then vanishes into air; or, *as a tale that is told*. The spending of our years is like the telling of a tale. A year, when it is past, is like a tale when it is told. Some of our years are as a pleasant story, others as a tragical one; most mixt, but all short and transient: that which was long in the doing may be told in a short time. Our years, when they are gone, can no more be recalled than the word that we have spoken can. The loss and waste of our time, which imply our fault and folly, may be thus complained of: we should spend our years, like the dispatch of business, with care and industry; but, alas! we do spend them like the telling of a tale, idle, and to little purpose, carelessly, and without regard.

Every year passed *as a tale that is told*; but what was the number of them? As they were vain, so they were few, (v. 10.) 70 or 80 at most, which may be understood, either, (1.) Of the lives of the Israelites in the wilderness; all those that were numbered when they came out of Egypt, above 20 years old, were to die within 33 years; they numbered those only that *were able to go forth to war*, most of whom, we may suppose, were between 20 and 40, who therefore must have all died before 80 years old, and many before 60, and, perhaps, much sooner, which was far short of the years of the lives of their fathers. And those that lived to 70 or 80, yet, being under a sentence of consumption, and a melancholy despair of ever seeing through this wilderness-state, their strength, their life, was nothing but *labour and sorrow*, which otherwise would have been made a new life, by the joys of Canaan. See what work sin made. Or, (2.) To the lives of men in general, ever since the days of Moses. Before Moses, it was usual for men to live about 100 years, or near 150; but since, 70 or 80 is the common stint, which few exceed, and multitudes never come near. We reckon those to have lived to the age of man, and to have had as large a share of life as they had reason to expect, who live to be 70 years old; and how short a time is that compared with eternity! Moses was the first that committed divine revelation to writing, which, before, had been transmitted by tradition; now also both the world and the church were pretty well peopled, and therefore there were not now the same reasons for men's living long that there had been. If, by reason of a strong constitution, some reach to 80 years, yet their strength then is what they have little joy of, it does but serve to prolong their misery, and make their death the more tedious; for even *their strength then is labour and sorrow*, much more their weakness; for the years are come which they have no pleasure in. Or, it may be taken thus: *Our years are 70, and the years of some, by reason of strength, are 80; but the breadth of our years*, (for so the latter words signify, rather than strength,) *the whole extent of them, from infancy to old age, is but labour and sorrow*. In the sweat of our face we must eat bread, our whole life is toilsome and troublesome; and, perhaps, in the midst of the years we count upon, *it is soon cut off, and we fly away*, and do not live out half our days.

4. They are taught by all this to stand in awe of the wrath of God; (v. 11.) *Who knows the power of thine anger?* (1.) None can perfectly comprehend it. The psalmist speaks as one afraid of God's anger, and amazed at the greatness of the power of it; who knows how far the power of God's anger can reach, and how deep it can wound? The angels that sinned knew experimentally the power of God's anger; damned sinners in hell know it; but which of us can fully comprehend or describe it? (2.) Few do seriously consider it as they ought. *Who knows it*, so as to improve

the knowledge of it? Those who make a mock at sin, and make light of Christ, surely do not know the power of God's anger. For, *according to thy fear, so is thy wrath*; God's wrath is equal to the apprehensions which the most thoughtful serious people have of it; let men have ever so great a dread upon them of the wrath of God, it is not greater than there is cause for, and than the nature of the thing deserves. God has not in his word represented his wrath more terrible than really it is; nay, what is felt in the other world is infinitely worse than what is feared in this world. *Who among us can dwell with that devouring fire?*

12. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. 13. Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. 14. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. 15. Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. 16. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. 17. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

These are the petitions of this prayer, grounded upon the foregoing meditations and acknowledgments. *Is any afflicted? Let him learn thus to pray.*

Four things they are here directed to pray for.

1. For a sanctified use of the sad dispensation they were now under. Being condemned to have our days shortened, "*Lord, teach us to number our days*"; (v. 12.) Lord, give us grace duly to consider how few they are, and how little a while we have to live in this world." Note, (1.) It is an excellent art rightly to *number our days*, so as not to be out in our calculation, as he was who counted upon many years to come, when, that night, his soul was required of him. We must live under a constant apprehension of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the near approach of death and eternity. We must so number our days, as to compare our work with them, and mind it accordingly with a double diligence, as those that have no time to trifle. (2.) Those that would learn this arithmetic, must pray for divine instruction, must go to God, and beg of him to teach them by his Spirit to put them upon considering, and to give them a good understanding. (3.) We then number our days to good purpose, when thereby our hearts are inclined and engaged to true wisdom, that is, to the practice of serious godliness. To be religious is to be wise; this is a thing to which it is necessary that we apply our hearts, and the matter requires and deserves a close application, to which frequent thoughts of the uncertainty of our continuance here, and the certainty of our removal hence, will very much contribute.

2. For the turning away of God's anger from them; that, though the decree was gone forth, and was past revocation, there was no remedy, but they must die in the wilderness; "*Yet return, O Lord, be thou reconciled to us, and let it repent thee concerning thy servants*"; (v. 13.) send us tidings of peace to comfort us again after these heavy tidings. How long must we look upon ourselves as under thy wrath, and when shall we have some token given us of our restoration to thy favour? *We are thy servants, thy people*; (Isa. 64. 9.) when wilt thou change thy way towards us?" In answer to this prayer, and upon their profession of repentance, (Numb. 14. 39, 40.) God, in the next chapter, proceeded with the laws concerning sacrifices, (Numb. 15. 1, &c.) which was a token that it repented him concerning his servants, for *if the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have shewed them such things as these*.

3. For comfort and joy in the returns of God's favour to them, v. 14. 15. They pray for the mercy of God, for they pretend not

to plead any merit of their own; *Have mercy upon us, O God*, is a prayer we are all concerned to say *Amen* to. Let us pray for early mercy, the seasonable communications of divine mercy; that *God's tender mercies may speedily prevent us, early in the morning* of our days, when we are young and flourishing, v.6. Let us pray for the true satisfaction and happiness which are to be had only in the favour and mercy of God; 4.6, 7. A gracious soul, if it may but be satisfied of God's loving-kindness, will be satisfied *with it*, abundantly satisfied; will take up with that, and will take up with nothing short of it. Two things are pleaded to enforce this petition for God's mercy.

(1.) That it would be a full fountain of future joys; "*O satisfy us with thy mercy*, not only that we may be easy and at rest within ourselves, which we can never be, while we lie under thy wrath; but that we *may rejoice and be glad*, not only for a time, upon the first indications of thy favour, but all our days, though we are to spend them in the wilderness." With respect to those that make God their chief Joy, as their joy may be full, (1 John, 1.4.) so it may be constant, even in this vale of tears; it is their own fault if they are not glad all their days, for his mercy will furnish them with joy in tribulation, and nothing can separate them from it. (2.) That it would be a sufficient balance to their former griefs; "*Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us*; let the days of our joy in thy favour be as many as the days of our pain for thy displeasure have been, and as pleasant as those have been gloomy. *Lord, thou usest to set the one over against the other*; (Eccl. 7.14.) do so in our case; let it suffice that we have drunk so long of the cup of trembling, now put into our hands the cup of salvation." God's people reckon the returns of God's loving-kindness a sufficient recompence for all their troubles.

4. For the progress of the work of God among them notwithstanding, v.16,17. (1.) That he would manifest himself in carrying it on; "*Let thy work appear upon thy servants*; let it appear that thou hast wrought upon us, to bring us home to thyself, and to fit us for thyself." God's servants cannot work for him, unless he work upon them, and work in them, both to will and to do: and then we may hope the operations of God's providence will be apparent for us, when the operations of his grace are apparent upon us. "*Let thy work appear*, and in it thy glory will appear to us and those that shall come after us." In praying for God's grace, God's glory must be our end; and we must therein have an eye to our children as well as to ourselves, that they also may experience God's glory appearing upon them, so as to change them into the same image, from glory to glory. Perhaps, in this prayer, they distinguish between themselves and their children, for so God distinguished in his late message to them; (Numb. 14.31.) *Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness, but your little ones will I bring into Canaan*; "*Lord*," say they, "*let thy work appear upon us*, to reform us, and bring us to a better temper, and then *let thy glory appear to our children*, in performing the promise to them which we have forfeited the benefit of." (2.) That he would countenance and strengthen them in carrying it on, in doing their part towards it. [1.] That he would smile upon them in it; *Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us*; let it appear that God favours us; let us have God's ordinances kept up among us, and the tokens of God's presence with his ordinances; so some. We may apply this petition both to our sanctification, and to our consolation; *Holiness is the beauty of the Lord our God*; let that be upon us in all we say and do; let the grace of God in us, produce the light of good works, make our faces to shine; that is the comeliness God puts upon us, and those are comely indeed who are so beautified. And then let divine consolations put gladness into our hearts, and a lustre upon our countenances, and that also will be the beauty of the Lord upon us, as our God. [2.] That he would succeed them in it: *Establish thou the work of our hands upon us*. God's working upon us, (v.16.) does not discharge us from using our utmost endeavours in serving him, and working out our salvation. But, when we have done all, we must wait upon God for the success, and beg of him to *prosper our handy works*, to give us to compass what we aim at for his glory. We are so unworthy of divine assistance, and yet so

utterly insufficient to bring any thing to pass without it, that we have need to be earnest for it, and to repeat the request; *Yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it*, and, in order to that, establish us in it.

PSALM XCI.

Some of the ancients were of opinion that Moses was the penman, not only of the foregoing psalm, which is expressly said to be his, but also of the 8 that next follow it; but that cannot be, for Ps.95. is expressly said to be penned by David, and long after Moses, Heb. 4.7. It is probable that this psalm also was penned by David; it is a writ of protection for all true believers, not in the name of king David, or under his broad seal, he needed it himself, especially if the psalm was penned, as some conjecture it was, at the time of the pestilence, which was sent for his numbering of the people, but in the name of the King of kings, and under the broad seal of Heaven. Observe, 1. The psalmist's own resolution to take God for his Keeper, (v.2.) from which he gives both direction and encouragement to others, v.9. 11. The promises which are here made, in God's name, to all those that do so in sincerity. 1. They shall be taken under the peculiar care of Heaven, v.1,4. 2. They shall be delivered from the malice of the powers of darkness, (v.3,5,6.) and that by a distinguishing preservation, v.7,8. 3. They shall be the charge of the holy angels, v.10..12. 4. They shall triumph over their enemies, v.13. 5. They shall be the special favourites of God himself, v.14.15. In singing this, we must shelter ourselves under, and then solace ourselves in, the divine protection. Many think, that to Christ, as Mediator, these promises do primarily belong, (Isa. 49.2.) not because to him the Devil applied one of these promises, (Matth. 4.6.) but because to him they are very applicable, and, coming through him, they are more sweet and sure to all believers.

1. **H**E that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2. I will say of the LORD, *He is my refuge and my fortress*; my God: in him will I trust. 3. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, *and from the noisome pestilence*. 4. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. 5. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; *nor* for the arrow that flieth by day; 6. *Nor* for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; *nor* for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. 7. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; *but* it shall not come nigh thee. 8. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

In these verses, we have,

I. A great truth laid down in general, That all those who live a life of communion with God, are constantly safe under his protection, and may therefore preserve a holy serenity, and security of mind, at all times; (v.1.) *He that dwells*, that sits down, *in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*; he that by faith chooses God for his Guardian shall find all that in him which he needs or can desire. Note, 1. It is the character of a true believer, that he *dwells in the secret place of the most High*; he is at home in God, returns to God, and reposes in him as his Rest; he acquaints himself with inside religion, and makes heart-work of the service of God; worships within the veil, and loves to be alone with God, to converse with him in solitude. 2. It is the privilege and comfort of those that do so, that they *abide under the shadow of the Almighty*; he shelters them, and comes between them and every thing that would annoy them, whether storm or sunshine. They shall not only have an admittance, but a residence, under God's protection; he will be their Rest and Refuge for ever.

II. The psalmist's comfortable application of this to himself; (v.2.) *I will say of the Lord*, whatever others say of him, "*He is my Refuge*; I choose him as such, and confide in him. Others made idols their refuge, but I will say of Jehovah, the true and living God, He is *my Refuge*: any other is a *refuge of lies*. He is a Re-

luge that will not fail me; for he is *my Fortress and Stronghold*." Idolaters called their idols *Mahuzzim*, their *most stronghold*; (Dan. 11. 39.) but therein they deceived themselves; those only secure themselves that make the Lord their God their Fortress. There being no reason to question his sufficiency, fitly does it follow, *In him will I trust*. If Jehovah be our God, our Refuge, and our Fortress, what can we desire, which we may not be sure to find in him? He is neither fickle, nor false, nor weak, nor mortal; he is God and not man, and therefore there is no danger of being disappointed in him. *We know whom we have trusted*.

III. The great encouragement he gives to others to do likewise; not only from his own experience of the comfort of it, (for in that there might be a fallacy,) but from the truth of God's promise, in which there neither is, nor can be, any deceit; (v. 3, 4. &c.) *Surely he shall deliver thee*. Those who have themselves found the comfort of making God their Refuge, cannot but desire that others may do so. Now here it is promised,

1. That believers shall be kept from those mischiefs which they are in imminent danger of, and which would be fatal to them; (v. 3.) *from the snare of the fowler*, which is laid unseen, and catches the unwary prey on a sudden; and *from the noisome pestilence*, which seizes men unawares, and against which there is no guard. This promise protects, (1.) The natural life, and is often fulfilled in our preservation from those dangers which are very threatening, and very near, while yet we ourselves are not apprehensive of them, any more than the bird is of the *snare of the fowler*. We owe it, more than we are sensible, to the care of the Divine Providence, that we have been kept from infectious diseases, and out of the hands of the wicked and unreasonable. (2.) The spiritual life, which is protected by Divine Grace from the temptations of Satan, which are as the *snare of the fowler*, and from the contagion of sin, which is the *noisome pestilence*. He that has given grace to be the glory of the soul, will create a defence upon all that glory.

2. That God himself will be their Protector; they must needs be safe who have him for their Keeper, and successful for whom he undertakes; (v. 4.) *He shall cover thee*, shall keep thee *secret*, (31. 20.) and so keep thee safe, 27. 5. God protects believers, (1.) With the greatest tenderness and affection; intimated in that, *He shall cover thee with his feathers, under his wings*, which alludes to the hen *gathering her chickens under her wings*, Matth. 23. 37. By natural instinct, she not only protects them, but calls them under that protection, when she sees them in danger; not only keeps them safe, but cherishes them and keeps them warm. To this the great God is pleased to compare his care of his people, who are helpless as the chickens, and easily made a prey of, but are invited to trust under the wings of the divine promise and providence, which is the periphrasis of a proselyte to the true religion, that he is come to *trust under the wings of the God of Israel*, Ruth. 2. 12. (2.) With the greatest power and efficacy; wings and feathers, though spread with the greatest tenderness, are yet weak, and easily broken through, and therefore it is added, *His truth shall be thy shield and buckler*, a strong defence. God is as willing to guard his people as the hen is to guard the chickens, and as able as a man of war in armour.

3. That he will not only keep them from evil, but from the fear of evil, v. 5, 6. Here is, (1.) Great danger supposed, the mention of it is enough to frighten us; night and day we lie exposed, and those that are apt to be timorous, will, in neither period, think themselves safe. When we are retired into our chambers, our beds, and have made all as safe as we can about us, yet there is terror by night, from thieves and robbers, winds and storms, beside those things that are the creatures of fancy and imagination, which are often most frightful of all; we read of *fear in the night*, Cant. 3. 8. There is also a *pestilence that walketh in darkness*, as that was which slew the first-born of the Egyptians, and the army of the Assyrians. No locks or bars can shut out diseases, while we tarry about with us in our bodies the seeds of them. But surely in the day-time, when we can look about us, we are not so much in danger; yes, there is an *arrow that flieth by day too*, and yet flies on; there is a *destruction that wasteth at high-noon*, when we

are awake, and have all our friends about us; even then we cannot secure ourselves, nor can they secure us. It was in the day-time that that pestilence wasted which was sent to chastise David for numbering the people, on occasion of which some think this psalm was penned. But, (2.) Here is great security promised to believers in the midst of this danger: "*Thou shalt not be afraid*, God by his grace will keep thee from disquieting distrustful fear, (that fear which hath torment,) in the midst of the greatest dangers. Wisdom shall keep thee from being causelessly afraid, and faith shall keep thee from being inordinately afraid. Thou shalt not be afraid of the arrow, as knowing that, though it may hit thee, it cannot hurt thee; if it take away the natural life, yet it shall be so far from doing any prejudice to the spiritual life, that it shall be its perfection." A believer needs not fear, and therefore *should not fear*, any arrow, because the point is off, the poison is out; *O death, where is thy sting?* It is also under divine direction, and will hit where God appoints, and not otherwise. Every bullet has its commission. Whatever is done, our heavenly Father's will is done; and we have no reason to be afraid of that.

4. That they shall be preserved in common calamities, in a distinguishing way; (v. 7.) "When death rides in triumph, and diseases rage, so that *thousands and ten thousands* fall, fall by sickness, or fall by the sword in battle, *fall at thy side, at thy right hand*, and the sight of their fall is enough to frighten thee, and if they fall by the pestilence, their falling so near thee may be likely to infect thee; yet it shall not come nigh thee, the death shall not, the fear of death shall not." Those that preserve their purity in times of general corruption, may trust God with their safety in times of general desolation. When multitudes die round about us, though thereby we must be awakened to prepare for our own death, yet we must not be *afraid with any amazement*, nor make ourselves subject to bondage, as many do all their lifetime, *through fear of death*, Heb. 2. 15. The sprinkling of blood secured the first-born of Israel, when thousands fell. Nay, it is promised to God's people, that they shall have the satisfaction of seeing, not only God's promises fulfilled to them, but his threatenings fulfilled upon those that hate them; (v. 8.) *Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the just reward of the wicked*, which perhaps refers to the destruction of the first-born of Egypt by the pestilence, which was both the punishment of the oppressors and the enlargement of the oppressed; this Israel saw, when they saw themselves unhurt, untouched. As it will aggravate the damnation of sinners, that with their eyes they shall behold and see the reward of the righteous, (Luke, 13. 28.) so it will magnify the salvation of the saints, that with their eyes they shall behold and see the destruction of the wicked, Isa. 66. 24. Ps. 58. 10.

9. Because thou hast made the LORD *which is* my refuge, *even* the most High, thy habitation; 10. There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. 11. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. 12. They shall bear thee up in *their* hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. 13. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. 14. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. 15. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: *I will be with him in trouble*; I will deliver him, and honour him. 16. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

Here are more promises to the same purport with those in the foregoing verses, and they are exceeding great and precious, and sure to all the seed.

I. The psalmist assures believers of divine protection, from his

own experience; and that which he says is the word of God, and what we may rely upon.

Observe, 1. The character of those who shall have the benefit and comfort of these promises; it is much the same with that, v. 1. They are such as make *the most High their Habitation*, (v. 9.) as are continually with God, and rest in him, as make his name both their Temple and their strong Tower, as dwell in love, and so dwell in God. It is our duty to be at home in God, to make our choice of him, and then to live our life in him as our Habitation; to converse with him, and delight in him, and depend upon him; and then it shall be our privilege to be at home in God; we shall be welcome to him as a man to his own habitation, without any let, hindrance, or molestation, from the arrests of the law, or the clamours of conscience; then too we shall be safe in him, shall be kept in *perfect peace*, Isa. 26. 3. To encourage us to make the Lord our Habitation, and to hope for safety and satisfaction in him, the psalmist intimates the comfort he had had in doing so; "He whom thou makest thy *Habitation is my Refuge*; and I have found him firm and faithful, and in him there is room enough, and shelter enough, both for thee and me." *In my father's house there are many mansions*, one needs not crowd another, much less crowd out another.

2. The promises that are sure to all those who have thus made *the most High their Habitation*.

(1.) That, whatever happens to them, nothing shall hurt them; (v. 10.) "*There shall no evil befall thee*; though trouble and affliction befall thee, yet there shall be no real evil in it, for it shall come from the love of God, and shall be sanctified; it shall come, not for thy hurt, but for thy good; and though, for *the present*, it be not joyous but grievous, yet, in the end, it shall yield so well, that thou thyself shalt own *no evil befall thee*. It is not an evil, an only evil, but there is a mixture of good in it, and a product of good by it. Nay, not thy person only, but thy dwelling, shall be taken under the divine protection; *there shall no plague come nigh that*; nothing to do thee or thine any damage." *Nihil accidere bono viro mali potest—No evil can befall a good man*. Seneca de Providentia.

(2.) That the angels of light shall be serviceable to them, v. 11, 12. This is a precious promise, and speaks a great deal both of honour and comfort to the saints, nor is it ever the worse for its being quoted and abused by the Devil in tempting Christ, Matth. 4. 6. Observe,

[1.] The charge given to the angels concerning the saints. He who is the Lord of the angels, who gave them their being, and gives laws to them, whose they are, and whom they were made to serve, *he shall give his angels a charge over thee*; not only over the church in general, but over every particular believer. The angels *keep the charge of the Lord their God*; and this is the charge they receive from him. It denotes the great care God takes of the saints, in that the angels themselves shall be charged with them, and employed for them. The charge is, *to keep thee in all thy ways*; here is a limitation of the promise; *They shall keep thee in thy ways*, that is, "as long as thou keepest in the way of thy duty;" they that go out of the way, put themselves out of God's protection; this word the Devil left out, when he quoted it to enforce a temptation, knowing how much it made against him. But observe the extent of the promise; it is *to keep thee in all thy ways*: even where there is no apparent danger, yet we need it, and where there is the most imminent danger, we shall have it. Wherever the saints go, the angels are charged with them, as the servants are with the children.

[2.] The care which the angels take of the saints, pursuant to this charge; *They shall bear thee up in their hands*, which denotes both their great ability and their great affection. They are able to bear up the saints out of the reach of danger, and they do it with all the tenderness and affection wherewith the nurse carries the little child about in her arms; it speaks us helpless, and them helpful. They are condescending in their ministrations; they keep the feet of the saints, lest they *dash them against a stone*, lest they stumble and fall into sin and into trouble.

[3.] That the powers of darkness shall be triumphed over by them; (v. 13.) *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder*; the

Devil is called *a roaring lion, the old serpent, the red dragon*; so that to this promise the apostle seems to refer in that, (Rom. 16. 20.) *The God of peace shall tread Satan under your feet*. Christ has broken the serpent's head, spoiled our spiritual enemies, (Col. 2. 15.) and through him *we are more than conquerors*; for Christ calls us, as Joshua called the captains of Israel, to come and set our feet on the necks of vanquished enemies. Some think that this promise had its full accomplishment in Christ, and the miraculous power which he had over the whole creation, healing the sick, casting out devils, and particularly putting it into his disciples' commission, that they should *take up serpents*, Mark, 16. 18. It may be applied to that care of the Divine Providence by which we are preserved from ravenous noxious creatures, (*The wild beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee*, Job, 5. 23.) nay, and have ways and means of taming them, Jam. 3. 7.

II. He brings in God himself speaking words of comfort to the saints, and declaring the mercy he has in store for them, v. 14. 16. Some make this to be spoken to the angels as the reason of the charge given them concerning the saints, as if he had said, "Take care of them, for they are dear to me, and I have a tender concern for them."

And now, as before, we must observe,

1. To whom these promises do belong; they are described by three characters. (1.) They are such as know God's name. His nature we cannot fully know; but by his name he has made himself known, and with that we must acquaint ourselves. (2.) They are such as have set their love upon him; and they who rightly know him, will love him, will place their love upon him, as the only adequate Object of it, will let out their love toward him with pleasure and enlargement, and will fix their love upon him with a resolution never to remove it to any rival. (3.) They are such as call upon him, as by prayer keep up a constant correspondence with him, and in every difficult case refer themselves to him.

2. What the promises are, which God makes to the saints.

(1.) That he will, in due time, deliver them out of trouble; *I will deliver him*, (v. 14.) and again, (v. 15.) denoting a double deliverance; living and dying; a deliverance in trouble, and a deliverance out of trouble. If God proportions the degree and continuance of our troubles to our strength, if he keeps us from offending him in our troubles, and makes our death our discharge, at length, from all our troubles, then this promise is fulfilled. See 34. 19. 2 Tim. 3. 11—4. 18.

(2.) That he will, in the mean time, *be with them in trouble*, v. 15. If he does not immediately put a period to their afflictions, yet they shall have his gracious presence with them in their troubles; he will take notice of their sorrows, and *know their souls in adversity*; will visit them graciously by his word and Spirit, and converse with them, will take their part, will support and comfort them, and sanctify their afflictions to them, which will be the surest token of his presence with them in their troubles.

(3.) That herein he will answer their prayers; *He shall call upon me*; I will pour upon him the spirit of prayer, and then I will answer, answer by promises, (85. 8.) answer by providences, bringing in seasonable relief, and answer by graces, *strengthening them with strength in their souls*, (138. 3.) thus he answered Paul with *grace sufficient*, 2 Cor. 12. 9.

(4.) That he will exalt and dignify them; *I will set him on high*, out of the reach of trouble, above the stormy region, on a rock *above the waves*, Isa. 33. 16. They shall be enabled, by the grace of God, to look down upon the things of this world with a holy contempt and indifference, and to look up to the things of the other world with a holy ambition and concern; and then they are set on high. *I will honour him*; those are truly honourable whom God puts honour upon, by taking them into covenant and communion with himself, and designing them for his kingdom and glory, John, 12. 26.

(5.) That they shall have a sufficiency of life in this world; (v. 16.) *With length of days will I satisfy him*; [1.] They shall live long enough; they shall be continued in this world till they have done the work they were sent into this world for, and are

ready for heaven; and that is long enough. Who would wish to live a day longer than God has some work to do, either *by* him or *upon* him? [2.] They shall think it long enough, for God by his grace shall wean them from the world, and make them willing to leave it. A man may die young, and yet die full of days, *satur diem—satisfied with living*. A wicked worldly man is not satisfied, no not with long life: he still cries, *Give, give*: but he that has his treasure and heart in another world, has soon enough of this, he would not live always.

(6.) That they shall have an eternal life in the other world: this crowns the blessedness; *I will shew him my salvation*; shew him *the Messiah*, so some; good old Simeon was then satisfied with long life, when he could say, *Mine eyes have seen thy salvation*; nor was there any greater joy to the Old-Testament saints, than to see Christ's day, though at a distance. More probably, the salvation may denote the better country, that is, the heavenly, which the patriarchs desired and sought; he *will shew him* that, bring him to that blessed state, the felicity of which consists so much in seeing that face to face which we here see through a glass darkly; and, in the mean time, he will give him a prospect of it. All these promises, some think, point primarily at Christ, and had their accomplishment in his resurrection and exaltation.

PSALM XCII.

It is a groundless opinion of some of the Jewish writers, (who are usually free of their conjectures,) that this psalm was penned and sung by Adam in innocence, on the first sabbath. It is inconsistent with the psalm itself, which speaks of the workers of iniquity, when as yet sin had not entered. It is probable that it was penned by David, and, being calculated for the sabbath-day, I. Praise, the business of the sabbath, is here recommended, v. 1. 3. II. God's works, which gave occasion for the sabbath, are here celebrated as great and unsearchable in general, v. 4. 6. In particular, with reference to the works both of providence and redemption, the psalmist sings unto God both of mercy and judgment, the ruin of sinners, and the joy of saints, three times counterchanged. 1. The wicked shall perish, (v. 7.) but God is eternal, v. 8. 2. God's enemies shall be cut off, but David shall be exalted, v. 9, 10. 3. David's enemies shall be confounded, (v. 11.) but all the righteous shall be fruitful and flourishing, v. 12. 15. In singing this psalm, we must take pleasure in giving to God the glory due to his name, and triumph in his works.

A psalm or song for the sabbath-day.

1. *It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:* 2. *To shew forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night,* 3. *Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound.* 4. *For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.* 5. *O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.* 6. *A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this.*

This psalm was appointed to be sung, at least, it usually was sung, in the house of the sanctuary on the sabbath-day, that day of rest, which was an instituted memorial of the work of creation, of God's rest from that work, and the continuance of it in his providence; for *the Father worsheth hitherto*. Note, 1. The sabbath-day must be a day not only of holy rest, but of holy work; and the rest is in order to the work. 2. The proper work of the sabbath is praising God; every sabbath-day must be a thanksgiving-day; and the other services of the day must be in order to this, and therefore must by no means thrust this into a corner. One of the Jewish writers refers it to the kingdom of the Messiah, and calls it, *A psalm or song for the age to come*, which shall be all sabbath. Believers, through Christ, enjoy that *sabbatism which remains for the people of God*, (Heb. 4. 9.) the beginning of the everlasting sabbath.

In these verses,

I. We are called upon and encouraged to praise God; (v. 1. 3.)

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord. Praising God is good work; it is good in itself, and good for us; it is our duty, the rent, the tribute, we are to pay to our great Lord; we are unjust if we withhold it; it is our privilege that we are admitted to praise God, and have hope to be accepted in it; it is good, for it is pleasant and profitable; work that is its own wages; it is the work of angels, the work of heaven. It is good to give thanks for the mercies we have received, for that is the way of fetching in further mercy; it is fit to sing to his name, who is Most High, exalted above all blessing and praise. Now observe here,

1. How we must praise God; we must do it by *shewing forth his loving-kindness and his faithfulness*. Being convinced of his glorious attributes and perfections, we must shew them forth, as those that are greatly affected with them ourselves, and desirous to affect others with them likewise. We must shew forth, not only his greatness and majesty, his holiness and justice, which magnify him, and strike an awe upon us, but his loving-kindness and his faithfulness; for his goodness is his glory, (Exod. 33. 18, 19.) and by these he proclaims his name. His mercy and truth are the great supports of our faith and hope, and the great encouragements of our love and obedience; these, therefore, we must shew forth as our pleas in prayer, and the matter of our joy. This was then done, not only by singing, but by music joined with it, *upon an instrument of ten strings*; (v. 3.) but then it was to be with a solemn sound, not that which was gay, and apt to dissipate the spirits, but that which was grave, and apt to fix them.

2. When we must praise God; *in the morning, and every night*, not only on sabbath-days, but every day; it is that which the duty of every day requires; we must praise God, not only in public assemblies, but in secret, and in our families; shewing forth, to ourselves and those about us, his loving-kindness and faithfulness. We must begin and end every day with praising God; must give him thanks every morning, when we are fresh, and before the business of the day comes in upon us; and, every night, when we are again composed and retired, and are recollecting ourselves; we must give him thanks every morning for the mercies of the night, and every night for the mercies of the day; going out and coming in, we must bless God.

II. We have an example set before us in the psalmist himself, both to move us to, and to direct us in, this work; (v. 4.) *Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work*. Note, 1. Those can best recommend to others the duty of praise, who have themselves experienced the pleasantness of it. "God's works are to be praised, for they have many a time rejoiced my heart; and therefore, whatever others may think of them, I must think well, and speak well, of them." 2. If God has given us the joy of his works, there is all the reason in the world why we should give him the honour of them. Has he made our hearts glad? Let us then make his praises glorious. Has God made us glad, through the works of his providence for us, and of his grace in us? and both through the great work of redemption?—

(1.) Let us then thence fetch encouragement for our faith and hope; so the psalmist does; *I will triumph in the works of thy hands*. From a joyful remembrance of what God has done for us, we may raise a joyful prospect of what he will do, and triumph in the assurance of it, triumph over all opposition, 2 Thess. 2. 13, 14.

(2.) Let us thence fetch matter for holy adorings and admirings of God; (v. 5.) *O Lord, how great are thy works!* Great beyond conception, beyond expression! The products of great power and wisdom, of great consequence and importance; men's works are nothing to them. We cannot comprehend the greatness of God's works, and therefore must reverently and awfully wonder at them, and even stand amazed at the magnificence of them. "Men's works are little and trifling, for their thoughts are shallow; but, Lord, thy works are great, and such as cannot be measured; for thy thoughts are very deep, and such as cannot be fathomed." God's counsels as much exceed the contrivances of our wisdom, as his works do the efforts of our power. *His thoughts are above our thoughts, as his ways are above our ways*, Isa. 55. 9. *Oh the depth of God's designs!* Rom. 11. 33. The greatness of God's works should lead us to consider the depth of his thoughts, that counsel

purpose which he purposed in himself. The chariots of Providence came down from between the mountains of brass, from those decrees which are fixed as the everlasting mountains; (Zech. 6. 1.) *Thou art from everlasting*, and therefore *thy throne is established of old*; because God himself was from everlasting, his throne and all the determinations of it were so too; for in an Eternal Mind there could not but be eternal thoughts.

4. He reigns triumphantly, v. 3, 4. We have here, (1.) A threatening storm supposed; *The floods have lifted up, O Lord*, (to God himself the remonstrance is made,) *the floods have lifted up their voice*, which speaks terror; nay, they have *lifted up their waves*, which speaks real danger. It alludes to a tempestuous sea, such as the wicked are compared to, Isa. 57. 20. *The heathen rage*, (Ps. 2. 1.) and think to ruin the church, to overwhelm it like a deluge, to sink it like a ship at sea. The church is said to *be tossed with tempests*, (Isa. 54. 11.) and the *floods of ungodly men make the saints afraid*, Ps. 18. 4. We may apply it to the tumults that are sometimes in our own bosoms, through prevailing passions and frights, which put the soul into disorder, and are ready to overthrow its graces and comforts; but, if the Lord reigns there, even the winds and seas shall obey him. (2.) An immovable anchor cast in this storm; (v. 4.) *The Lord himself is mightier*. Let this keep our minds fixed. [1.] That God is on high, above them, which denotes his safety; they cannot reach him; (29. 10.) it denotes also his sovereignty; they are ruled by him, they are over-ruled, and, wherein they rebel, overcome, Exod. 18. 11. [2.] That he is *mightier*, does more *wondrous things than the noise of many waters*; they cannot disturb his rest or rule; they cannot defeat his designs and purposes. Observe, The power of the church's enemies is but *as the noise of many waters*; there is more of sound than substance in it; *Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise*, Jer. 46. 17. The church's friends are commonly worse frightened than hurt; God is mightier than this noise; he is mighty to preserve his people's interests from being ruined by these many waters, and his people's spirits from being terrified by the noise of them. He can, when he pleases, command peace to the church, (65. 7.) peace in the soul, Isa. 26. 3. Note, The unlimited sovereignty and irresistible power of the great Jehovah are very encouraging to the people of God, in reference to all the noises and hurries they meet with in this world, Ps. 46. 1, 2.

5. He reigns in truth and holiness, v. 5. (1.) All his promises are inviolably faithful; *Thy testimonies are very sure*. As God is able to protect his church, so he is true to the promises he has made of its safety and victory. His word is past, and all the saints may rely upon it. Whatever was foretold concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, would certainly have its accomplishment in due time. Those testimonies upon which the faith and hope of the Old-Testament saints was built, were very sure, and would not fail them. (2.) All his people ought to be conscientiously pure; *Holiness becomes thy house, O Lord, for ever*. God's church is his house; it is a holy house, cleansed from sin, consecrated by God, and employed in his service. The holiness of it is its beauty; nothing better becomes the saints than conformity to God's image, and an entire devotedness to his honour; and it is its strength and safety. It is the holiness of God's house that secures it against the many waters, and their noise; where there is purity, there shall be peace. Fashions change, and what is becoming at one time, is not at another; but holiness always becomes God's house and family, and those who belong to it; it is perpetually decent; and nothing so ill becomes the worshippers of the holy God as unholiness.

PSALM XCIV.

This psalm was penned when the church of God was under hatches, oppressed and persecuted; and it is an appeal to God, as the Judge of heaven and earth, and an address to him, to appear for his people against his and their enemies. Two things this psalm speaks, I. Conviction and terror to the persecutors, (v. 1. 11.) shewing them their danger and folly, and arguing with them. II. Comfort and peace to the persecuted, (v. 12. 23.) assuring them, both from God's promise, and from the psalmist's own experience, that their troubles would end well, and God would, in due time, appear to their joy, and the confusion of those who set

themselves against them. In singing this psalm, we must look abroad upon the pride of oppressors with a holy indignation, and the tears of the oppressed with a holy compassion; but, at the same time, look upward to the righteous Judge, with an entire satisfaction, and look forward, to the end of all these things, with a pleasing hope.

1. **O LORD GOD**, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself. 2. Lift up thyself, thou Judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. 3. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? 4. *How long* shall they utter *and* speak hard things? *and* all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? 5. They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage. 6. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. 7. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. 8. Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? 9. He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? 10. He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? 11. The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.

In these verses we have,

I. A solemn appeal to God against the cruel oppressors of his people, v. 1, 2. This speaks terror enough to them, that they have the prayers of God's people against them, who cry day and night to him to avenge them of their adversaries; and shall not he avenge them speedily? Luke, 18. 3, 7. Observe here,

1. The titles they give to God, for the encouraging of their faith in this appeal; *O God, to whom vengeance belongeth*; and *thou Judge of the earth*. We may with boldness appeal to him; for, (1.) He is Judge, supreme Judge, Judge alone, from whom every man's judgment proceeds. He that gives law, gives sentence upon every man, according to his works, by the rule of that law. He has prepared his throne for judgment. He has indeed appointed magistrates to be avengers under him; (Rom. 13. 4.) but he is the Avenger in chief, to whom even magistrates themselves are accountable; his throne is the last refuge (the dernier resort, as the law speaks) of oppressed innocency. He is universal Judge, not of this city or country only, but *Judge of the earth*, of the whole earth: none are exempt from his jurisdiction; nor can it be alleged against an appeal to him in any court, that it is *coram non judice*—before a person not judicially qualified. (2.) He is just; as he has authority to avenge wrong, so it is his nature, and property, and honour. This also is implied in the title here given to him, and repeated with such an emphasis, *O God, to whom vengeance belongs*, who wilt not suffer might always to prevail against right. This is a good reason why we must not avenge ourselves, because God has said, *Vengeance is mine*; and it is daring presumption to usurp his prerogative, and step into his throne, Rom. 12. 19. Let this alarm those who do wrong, whether with a close hand, so as not to be discovered, or with a high hand, so as not to be controuled, There is a God, to whom vengeance belongs, who will certainly call them to an account; and let it encourage those who suffer wrong to bear it with silence, committing themselves to him who judges righteously.

2. What it is they ask of God; (1.) That he would *glorify himself*, and get honour to his own name. Wicked persecutors thought God was withdrawn, and had forsaken the earth; "Lord," say they, "shew thyself; make them know that thou art, and that thou art ready to shew thyself, strong on the behalf of those whose hearts are upright with thee." The enemies thought God was conquered, because his people were; "Lord," say they,

PSALMS, XCIV. The Folly of Atheists and Oppressors.

"*lift up thyself, be thou exalted in thy own strength. Lift up thyself, to be seen, to be feared; and suffer not thy name to be trampled upon and run down.*" (2.) That he would mortify the oppressors; *Render a reward to the proud; that is, "Reckon with them for all their insolence, and the injuries they have done to thy people."* These prayers are prophecies, which speak ærror to all the sons of violence. The righteous God will deal with them according to their merits.

II. A humble complaint to God of the pride and cruelty of the oppressors, and an expostulation with him concerning it, c. 3. .6. Where observe,

1. The character of the enemies they complain against; they are wicked, they are *workers of iniquity*, they are bad, very bad, themselves, and therefore they hate and persecute those whose goodness shames and condemns them. Those are wicked indeed, and *workers of the worst iniquity*, lost to all honour and virtue, who are cruel to the innocent, and hate the righteous.

2. Their haughty barbarous carriage which they complain of. (1.) They are insolent, and take a pleasure in magnifying themselves. They talk high, and talk big, they triumph, they speak loud things, they boast themselves, as if their tongues were their own, and their hands too, and they were accountable to none for what they say or do, and as if the day were their own, and they doubted not but to carry the cause against God and religion. They that speak highly of themselves, that triumph and boast, are apt to speak hardly of others; but there will come a day of reckoning for all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against God, his truths, and ways, and people, Jude, 15. (2.) They are impious, and take a pleasure in running down God's people because they are his; (v. 5.) "*They break in pieces thy people, O Lord; break their assemblies, their estates, their families, their persons, in pieces, and do all they can to afflict thine heritage, to grieve them, to crush them, to run them down, to root them out.*" God's people are his heritage; there are those that, for his sake, hate them, and seek their ruin. This is a very good plea with God, in our intercessions for the church; "Lord, it is thine, thou hast a property in it, it is thine heritage, thou hast a pleasure in it, and out of it the rent of thy glory in this world issues. And wilt thou suffer these wicked men to trample upon it thus?" (3.) They are inhuman, and take a pleasure in wronging those that are least able to help themselves; (v. 6.) they not only oppress and impoverish, but *they slay, the widow and the stranger*; not only neglect the fatherless, and make a prey of them, but murder them, because they are weak and exposed, and sometimes lie at their mercy. Those whom they should protect from injury, they are most injurious to; perhaps, because God has taken them into his particular care. Who would think it possible that any of the children of men should be thus barbarous?

3. A modest pleading with God concerning the continuance of the persecution; "Lord, how long shall they do thus?" And again, *How long?* When shall this wickedness of the wicked come to an end?

III. A charge of atheism exhibited against the persecutors, and an expostulation with them upon that charge.

1. Their atheistical thoughts are here discovered; (v. 7.) yet they say, *The Lord shall not see.* Though the cry of their wickedness is very great and loud, though they rebel against the light of nature, and the dictates of their own consciences, yet they have the confidence to say, "*The Lord shall not see*; he will not only wink at small faults, but shut his eyes at great ones too;" or they think they have managed it so artfully, under colour of justice and religion, perhaps, that it will not be adjudged murder. The God of Jacob, though his people pretend to have such an interest in him, does not regard it, either as against justice, or as against his own people; he will never call them to an account for it: thus denying God's government of the world; bantering his covenant with his people, and setting the judgment to come at defiance.

2. They are here convicted of folly and absurdity; he that says, either that Jehovah the living God shall not see, or that

the God of Jacob shall not regard, the injuries done to his people, *Nabal* is his name, and folly is with him; and yet here he is fairly reasoned with, for his conviction and conversion, to prevent his confusion; (v. 8.) "*Understand, ye brutish among the people, and let reason guide you.*" Note, The atheistical, though they set up for wits, and philosophers, and politicians, yet are really the *brutish among the people*; if they would but understand, they would believe. God, by the prophet, speaks, as if he thought the time long till men would be men, and shew themselves so by understanding and considering; "*Ye fools, when will ye be wise, so wise as to know that God sees and regards all you say and do, and to speak and act accordingly, as those that must give account?*" Note, None are so bad, but means are to be used for the reclaiming and reforming of them; none so brutish, so foolish, but it should be tried whether they may not yet be made wise; while there is life, there is hope.

To evidence the folly of those that question God's omniscience and justice, the psalmist argues,

(1.) From the works of creation, (v. 9.) the formation of human bodies, which, as it proves that there is a God, proves also that God has, infinitely and transcendently in himself, all those perfections that are in any creature. *He that planted the ear, (and it is planted in the head, as a tree in the ground,) shall he not hear?* No doubt, he shall, more and better than we can. *He that formed the eye, (and how curiously it is formed above any part of the body anatomists know, and let us know by their dissections,) shall he not see?* Could he give, would he give, that perfection to a creature which he has not in himself? Note, [1.] The powers of nature are all derived from the God of nature. See Exod. 4. 11. [2.] By the knowledge of ourselves we may be led a great way toward the knowledge of God; if, by the knowledge of our own bodies, and the organs of sense, so as to conclude, that, if we can see and hear, much more can God; then certainly by the knowledge of our own souls and their noble faculties. The gods of the heathen had eyes and saw not, ears and heard not; our God has no eyes or ears, as we have, and yet we must conclude he both sees and hears, because we have our sight and hearing from him, and are accountable to him for our use of them.

(2.) He argues from the works of providence, v. 10. *He that chastises the heathen* for their polytheism and idolatry, shall not he much more correct his own people for their atheism and profaneness? He that chastises the children of men for oppressing and wronging one another, shall not he correct those that profess to be his own children, and call themselves so, and yet persecute those that are really so? Shall not we be under his correction, under whose government the whole world is? Does he regard, as King of nations, and shall he not much more regard, as the God of Jacob? Dr. Hammond gives another very probable sense of this; *He that instructs the nations*, that is, gives them his law, *shall not he correct*, shall not he judge them according to that law, and call them to an account for their violations of it? In vain was the law given, if there will not be a judgment upon it. And it is true that the same word signifies to chastise and to instruct, because chastisement is intended for instruction, and instruction should go along with chastisement.

(3.) He argues from the works of grace; *He that teaches man knowledge, shall he not know?* He not only, as the God of nature, has given the light of reason, but, as the God of grace, has given the light of revelation, has shewed man what is true wisdom and understanding; and he that does this, shall he not know? Job, 28. 23, 28. The flowing of the streams is a certain sign of the fullness of the fountain. If all knowledge is from God, no doubt, all knowledge is in God. From this general doctrine of God's omniscience, he not only confutes the atheists, who said, "*The Lord shall not see*, (v. 7.) he will not take cognizance of what we do; but awakens us all to consider, that God will take cognizance even of what we think; (v. 11.) *The Lord knows the thoughts of man that they are vanity.* [1.] He knows those thoughts in particular, concerning God's conniving at the wickedness of the wicked, and knows them to be vain; and laughs at the folly of those, who by such fond conceits buoy themselves up in sin. [2.] He knows all

the thoughts of the children of men, and knows them to be, for the most part, vain; that the imaginations of the thoughts of men's hearts are evil, only evil, and that continually. Even in good thoughts there is a fickleness and inconstancy, which may well be called *vanity*. It concerns us to keep a strict guard upon our thoughts, because God takes particular notice of them. Thoughts are words to God, and vain thoughts are provocations.

12. Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; 13. That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. 14. For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance. 15. But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it. 16. Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? 17. Unless the LORD *had been* my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. 18. When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O LORD, held me up. 19. In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul. 20. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law? 21. They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. 22. But the LORD is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge. 23. And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; *yea*, the LORD our God shall cut them off.

The psalmist, having denounced tribulation to them that trouble God's people, here assures them that are troubled of rest. See 2 Thess. 1. 6, 7. He speaks comfort to suffering saints, from God's promises and his own experience.

I. From God's promises, which are such as not only save them from being miserable, but secure a happiness to them; (v. 12.) *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest*. Here he looks above the instruments of trouble, and eyes the hand of God, which gives it another name, and puts quite another colour upon it. The enemies break in pieces God's people, (v. 5.) they aim at no less; but the truth of the matter is, that God by them chastens his people, as the father the son in whom he delights, and the persecutors are only the rod he makes use of. Howbeit *they mean not so, neither doth their heart think so*, Isa. 10. 5, 7. Now it is here promised,

1. That God's people shall get good by their sufferings; when he chastens them, he will teach them, and blessed is the man who is thus taken under a divine discipline; for *none teaches like God*. Note, (1.) The afflictions of the saints are fatherly chastenings, designed for our instruction, reformation, and improvement. (2.) When the teachings of the word and Spirit go along with the rebukes of Providence, they then both bespeak men blessed, and help to make them so; for then they are marks of adoption, and means of sanctification. When we are chastened, we must pray to be taught, and look into the law as the best expositor of Providence. It is not the chastening itself that does good, but the teaching that goes along with it, and is the exposition of it.

2. That they should see through their sufferings; (v. 13.) *That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity*. Note, (1.) There is a rest remaining for the people of God after the days of their adversity, which, though they may be many and long, shall be numbered and finished in due time, and shall not last always. He that sends the trouble will send the rest, that he may comfort them according to the time that he has afflicted them. (2.) God

therefore teaches his people by their troubles, that he may prepare them for deliverance, and so give them rest from their troubles; that, being reformed, they might be relieved, and the affliction, having done its work, may be removed.

3. That they shall see the ruin of those that are the instruments of their sufferings; which is the matter of a promise, not as gratifying any passion of theirs, but as redounding to the glory of God; *Until the pit is digged*, or rather, while the pit is in digging, for the wicked, God is ordering peace for them at the same time that he is ordaining his arrows against the persecutors.

4. That though they may be cast down, yet certainly they shall not be cast off, v. 14. Let God's suffering people assure themselves of this, that, whatever their friends do, God will not cast them off, nor throw them out of his covenant or out of his care; he will not forsake them, because they are his inheritance, which he will not quit his title to, nor suffer himself to be disseised of. St. Paul comforted himself with this, Rom. 11. 1.

5. That, bad as things are, they shall mend, and though they are now out of course, yet they shall return to their due and ancient channel; (v. 15.) *Judgment shall return unto righteousness*; the seeming disorders of Providence (for real ones there never were) shall be rectified. God's judgment, his government, looks sometimes as if it were at a distance from righteousness, while the wicked prosper, and the best men meet with the worst usage; but it shall return to righteousness again, either in this world, or, at the furthest, in the judgment of the great day, which will set all to-rights. Then *all the upright in heart shall be after it*; they shall follow it with their praises, and with entire satisfaction; they shall return to a prosperous and flourishing condition, and shine forth out of obscurity; they shall accommodate themselves to the dispensations of Divine Providence, and with suitable affections attend all its motions. *They shall walk after the Lord*, Hos. 11. 10. Dr. Hammond thinks this was most eminently fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem first, and afterward of heathen Rome, the crucifiers of Christ, and persecutors of Christians, and the rest which the churches had thereby; *Then judgment returned even to righteousness*, to mercy and goodness, and favour to God's people, who, then, were as much countenanced as, before, they had been trampled on.

II. From his own experiences and observations.

1. He and his friends had been oppressed by cruel and imperious men that had power in their hands, and abused it by abusing all good people with it. They were themselves *evil-doers*, and *workers of iniquity*; (v. 16.) they abandoned themselves to all manner of impiety and immorality, and then their throne was a *throne of iniquity*, v. 20. Their dignity served to put a reputation upon sin, and their authority was employed to support it, and to bring about their wicked designs. It is pity that ever a throne, which should be a terror to evil-doers, and a protection and praise to them that do well, should be the seat and shelter of iniquity. That is a throne of iniquity which, by the policy of its council, *frames mischief*, and by its sovereignty enacts it, and turns it into a law. Iniquity is daring enough, even when human laws are against it, which often prove too weak to give an effectual check to it; but how insolent, how mischievous, is it when it is backed by a law! Iniquity is not the better, but much the worse, for being enacted by law; nor will it excuse those that practise it, to say, that they did but do as they were bidden. These workers of iniquity, having *framed mischief by a law*, take care to see the law executed; for they gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, who dare not keep the statutes of Omri, nor the law of the house of Ahab; and they condemned the innocent blood for violating their decrees. See an instance in Daniel's enemies; they *framed mischief by a law*, when they obtained an impious edict against prayer, (Dan. 6. 7.) which when Daniel would not obey, they assembled together against him, (v. 11.) and condemned his innocent blood to the lions. The best benefactors of mankind have often been thus treated, under colour of law and justice, as the worst of malefactors.

2. The oppression they were under bore very hard upon them, and oppressed their spirits too. Let not suffering saints despair, though, when they are persecuted, they find themselves perplexed and cast down; it was so with the psalmist here; *His soul had al-*

most dwell in silence; (v. 17.) he was at his wit's end, and knew not what to say or do; he was, in his own apprehension, at his life's end, ready to drop into the grave, that land of silence. St. Paul, in a like case, *received a sentence of death within himself, 2 Cor. 1. 8, 9.* He said, "*My foot slippeth; (v. 18.)* I am going irretrievably, there is no remedy, I must fall, I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul; my hope fails me, I do not find such firm footing for my faith as I have sometimes found." See Ps. 73. 2. He had a multitude of perplexed entangled thoughts within him concerning the case he was in, and the construction to be made of it; and concerning the course he should take, and what was likely to be the issue of it.

3. In this distress, they sought for help and succour, and some relief. (1.) They looked about for it, and were disappointed; (v. 16.) "*Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers? Have I any friend who, in love to me, will appear for me? Has justice any friend who, in a pious indignation at unrighteousness, will plead my injured cause?*" He looked, but there was none to save, there was none to uphold. Note, When on the side of the oppressors there is power, it is no marvel if the oppressed have no comforter, none that dare own them, or speak a good word for them, Eccl. 4. 1. When St. Paul was brought before Nero's throne of iniquity, *no man stood by him, 2 Tim. 4. 16.* (2.) They looked up for it, v. 20. They humbly expostulate with God; "*Lord, shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee? Wilt thou countenance and support these tyrants in their wickedness? We know thou wilt not.*" A throne has fellowship with God, when it is a throne of justice, and answers the end of the erecting of it; for by him kings reign, and when they reign for him, their judgments are his, and he owns them as his ministers, and whoever resists them, or rises up against them, shall receive to themselves damnation; but when it becomes a *throne of iniquity*, it has no longer fellowship with God. Far be it from the just and holy God, that he should be the Patron of unrighteousness, even in princes and those that sit in thrones; yea, though they be the *thrones of the house of David.*

4. They found succour and relief in God, and in him only; when other friends failed, in him they had a faithful and powerful Friend; and it is recommended to all God's suffering saints to trust in him.

(1.) God helps at a dead lift; (v. 17.) "*When I had almost dwelt in silence, then the Lord was my Help, kept me alive, kept me in heart; and unless I had made him my Help, by putting my trust in him, and expecting relief from him, I could never have kept possession of my own soul; but living by faith in him has kept my head above water, has given me breath, and something to say.*"

(2.) God's goodness is the great support of sinking spirits; (v. 18.) "*When I said, My foot slips into sin, into ruin, into despair, then thy mercy, O Lord, held me up, kept me from falling, and defeated the design of those who consulted to cast me down from mine excellency,*" 62. 4. We are beholden not only to God's power, but to his pity, for spiritual supports; *Thy mercy*, the gifts of thy mercy, and my hope in thy mercy, *held me up.* God's right hand sustains his people, when they look on their right hand and on their left, and there is none to uphold; and we are then prepared for his gracious supports, when we are sensible of our own weakness and inability to stand by our own strength, and come to God, to acknowledge it, and to tell him how *our foot slips.*

(3.) Divine consolations are the effectual relief of troubled spirits; (v. 19.) "*In the multitude of my thoughts within me, which are noisy like a multitude, crowding and jostling one another like a multitude, and very unruly and ungovernable; in the multitude of my sorrowful, solicitous, timorous, thoughts, thy comforts delight my soul; and they are never more delightful than when they come in so seasonably to silence my unquiet thoughts, and keep my mind easy.*" The world's comforts give but little delight to the soul, when it is hurried with melancholy thoughts, they are songs to a heavy heart; but God's comforts will reach the soul, and not the fancy only, and will bring with them that peace and that pleasure which the smiles of the world cannot give, and which the frowns of the world cannot take away.

5. God is, and will be, as a righteous Judge, the Patron and

Protector of right, and the Punisher and Avenger of wrong; this the psalmist had both the assurance of and the experience of.

(1.) He will *right the injured; (v. 22.)* "When none else will, or can, or dare, shelter me, *The Lord is my Defence*, to preserve me from the evil of my troubles, from sinking under them, and being ruined by them; and he is *the Rock of my refuge*, in the clefts of which I may take shelter, and on the top of which I may set my feet, to be out of the reach of danger." God is his people's Refuge; to whom they may flee, in whom they are safe, and may be secure; he is the Rock of their refuge, so strong, so firm, impregnable, immovable, as a rock: natural fastnesses sometimes exceed artificial fortifications.

(2.) He will *reckon with the injurious; (v. 23.)* *He shall render to them their own iniquity*; he shall deal with them according to their deserts; and that very mischief which they did and designed against God's people, shall be brought upon themselves: it follows, *He shall cut them off in their wickedness.* A man cannot be more miserable than his own wickedness will make him, if God visit it upon him: it will cut him in the remembrance of it; it will cut him off in the recompence of it. This the psalm concludes with the triumphant assurance of; *Yea, the Lord our God, who takes our part, and owns us for his, shall cut them off from any fellowship with him, and so shall make them completely miserable, and their pomp and power shall stand them in no stead.*

PSALM XCV.

For the expounding of this psalm we may borrow a great deal of light from the apostle's discourse, (Heb. 3. and 4.) where it appears both to have been penned by David, and to have been calculated for the days of the Messiah; for it is there said expressly, (Heb. 4. 7.) that the day here spoken of, (v. 7.) is to be understood of the gospel-day, in which God speaks to us by his Son, in a voice which we are concerned to hear, and proposes to us a rest beside that of Canaan. In singing psalms, it is intended, I. That we should make melody unto the Lord; this we are excited to do, and assisted in doing, being called upon to praise God, (v. 1, 2.) as a great God, (v. 3. 5.) and as our gracious Benefactor, v. 6, 7. II. That we should teach and admonish ourselves, and one another; and we are taught and warned to hear God's voice, (v. 7.) and not to harden our hearts, as the Israelites in the wilderness did, (v. 8, 9.) lest we fall under God's wrath, and fall short of his rest, as they did, v. 10, 11. This psalm must be sung with a holy reverence of God's majesty, and a dread of his justice, with a desire to please him, and a fear to offend him.

1. **O** COME, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. 2. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. 3. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. 4. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. 5. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. 6. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. 7. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

The psalmist here, as often elsewhere, stirs up himself and others to praise God; for it is a duty which ought to be performed with the most lively affections, and which we have great need to be excited to, being very often backward to it, and cold in it. Observe.

1. How God is to be praised. 1. With holy joy and delight in him. The praising song must be a *joyful noise; (v. 1.)* and again, v. 2. Spiritual joy is the heart and soul of thankful praise. It is the will of God, (such is the condescension of his grace,) that when we give glory to him, as a Being infinitely perfect and blessed, we should at the same time, *rejoice in him*, as our Father and King, and a God in covenant with us. 2. With humble reverence and a holy awe of him; (v. 6.) "*Let us worship, and bow down, and kneel before him*, as becomes those who know what an infinite distance there is between us and God, how much we are in danger of his wrath, and in need of his mercy." Though bodily exercise, alone, profits little, yet certainly it is our duty to glorify God with

our bodies by the outward expressions of reverence, seriousness, and humility, in the duties of religious worship. 3. We must praise God with our voice; we must speak forth, sing forth, his praises out of the abundance of a heart filled with love, and joy, and thankfulness; *Sing to the Lord, make a noise, a joyful noise to him, with psalms*; as those who are ourselves much affected with his greatness and goodness, are forward to own ourselves so, are desirous to be more and more affected therewith, and would willingly be instrumental to kindle and inflame the same pious and devout affection in others also. 4. We must praise God in concert, in the solemn assemblies; "*Come, let us sing*"; let us join in singing to the Lord; not others without me, nor I alone, but others with me. *Let us come together before his presence*, in the courts of his house, where his people are wont to attend him, and to expect his manifestations of himself." Whenever we come into God's presence, we must come with thanksgiving that we are admitted to such a favour; and whenever we have thanks to give, we must *come before God's presence*, set ourselves before him, and present ourselves to him in the ordinances which he has appointed.

II. Why God is to be praised, and what must be the matter of our praise; we do not want matter, it were well if we did not want a heart. We must praise God,

1. Because he is a *great God*, and Sovereign Lord of all, *v. 3*. He is great, and therefore *greatly to be praised*. He is infinite and immense, and has all perfection in himself. (1.) He has great power; *he is a great King above all gods*; above all deputed deities, all magistrates, to whom he said, *Ye are gods*; he manages them all, and serves his own purposes by them, and to him they are all accountable; above all counterfeit deities, all pretenders, all usurpers; he can do that which none of them can do; he can, and will, vanquish them all. (2.) He has great possessions. This lower world is here particularly specified; we reckon those great men who have large territories, which they call their own against all the world, which yet are a very inconsiderable part of the universe; how great then is that God whose *the whole earth is, and the fulness thereof*! not only under whose feet it is, as he has an incontestable dominion over all the creatures, and a propriety in them, but in whose hand it is, as he has the actual directing and disposing of all; (*v. 4.*) even *the deep places of the earth*, which are out of our sight, subterraneous springs and mines, *are in his hand*; and *the height of the hills*, which are out of our reach, whatever grows or feeds upon them, *is his also*. This may be taken figuratively; the meanest of the children of men, who are as the low places of the earth, are not beneath his cognizance; and the greatest, who are as the strength of the hills, are not above his controul. Whatever strength is in any creature, it is derived from God, and employed for him; (*v. 5.*) *The sea is his*, and all that is in it; (the waves fulfil his word;) it is his, for *he made it*, gathered its waters, and fixed its shores; *the dry land*, though given to the children of men, is his too, for he still reserved the property to himself; it is his, for *his hands formed it*, when his word made *the dry land* appear. His being the Creator of all makes him, without dispute, the Owner of all. This being a gospel psalm, we may very well suppose that it is the Lord Jesus whom we are here taught to praise; he is a *great God*; the *Mighty God* is one of his titles, and *God over all, blessed for evermore*; as Mediator, he is a *great King above all gods*; by him kings reign; and angels, principalities, and powers, are subject to him; *by him*, as the Eternal Word, *all things were made*, (*John, 1. 3.*) and it was fit he should be the Restorer and Reconciler of all, who was the Creator of all, *Col. 1. 16, 20*. To him all power is given both in heaven and in earth, and into his hand all things are delivered. It is he that sets one foot on the sea, and the other on the earth, as sovereign Lord of both; (*Rev. 10. 2.*) and therefore to him we must sing our songs of praise, and before him we must *worship and bow down*.

2. Because *he is our God*; not only has a dominion over us, as he has over all the creatures, but stands in special relation to us; (*v. 7.*) *He is our God*, and therefore it is expected we should praise him: who will, if we do not? What else did he make us for, but that we should *be to him for a name and a praise*?

(1.) *He is our Creator*, and the Author of our being; we must *kneel before the Lord our Maker, v. 6*. Idolaters kneel before gods which they themselves made; we kneel before a God who made us and all the world; and who is therefore our rightful Proprietor; for his we are, and not our own.

(2.) He is our Saviour, and the Author of our blessedness. He is here called *the Rock of our salvation*; (*v. 1.*) not only the Founder, but the very Foundation, of that Work of wonder, on whom it is built. *That Rock is Christ*; to him therefore we must sing our songs of praises, *to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb*.

(3.) We are therefore his, under all possible obligations; *we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand*; all the children of men are so; they are fed and led by his Providence, which cares for them, and conducts them, as the shepherd the sheep. We must praise him, not only because he made us, but because he preserves and maintains us, and our breath and ways are in his hand. All the church's children are in a special manner so; *Israel are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand*; and therefore he demands their homage in a special manner. The gospel-church is his flock, Christ is the great and good Shepherd of it; we, as Christians, are led by his hand into the green pastures, by him we are protected and well-provided for, to his honour and service we are entirely devoted as a peculiar people, and therefore to him must be *glory in the churches*, (whether it be in the world or no,) *throughout all ages*, *Eph. 3. 21*.

7. ——— To-day if ye will hear his voice,
8. Harden not your heart, as in the provocation,
and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness:
9. When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and
saw my work. 10. Forty years long was I grieved
with *this* generation, and said, It is a people that
do err in their heart, and they have not known
my ways: 11. Unto whom I swear in my wrath
that they should not enter into my rest.

The latter part of this psalm, which begins in the middle of a verse, is an exhortation to those that sing gospel-psalms to live gospel-lives, and to hear the voice of God's word; otherwise, how can they expect that he should hear the voice of their prayers and praises?

Observe,

I. The duty required of all those that *are the people of Christ's pasture, and the sheep of his hand*. He expects that they *hear his voice*, for he has said, *My sheep hear my voice*, *John, 10. 27*. *We are his people*, say they. Are you so? Then *hear his voice*. If you call him *Master*, or *Lord*, then *do the things which he says*, and be his willing obedient people. Hear the voice of his doctrine, of his law, and, in both, of his Spirit; hear and heed; hear and yield. *Hear his voice*, and not the *voice of a stranger*. *If ye will hear his voice*; some take it as a wish, *Oh that ye would hear his voice!* That ye would be so wise, and do so well for yourselves; like that, *If thou hadst known*; (*Luke, 19. 42.*) that is, *Oh that thou hadst known!* Christ's voice must be heard *to-day*; this the Apostle lays much stress upon, applying it to the gospel-day. While he is speaking to you, see that you attend to him, for this day of your opportunities will not last always; improve it therefore, *while it is called to-day*, *Heb. 3. 13, 15*. Hearing the voice of Christ is the same with believing; *To-day*, if by faith you accept the gospel offer, well and good, but to-morrow it may be too late. In a matter of such vast importance, nothing more dangerous than delay.

II. The sin they are warned against, as inconsistent with the believing obedient ear required, and that is, hardness of heart. *If ye will hear his voice*, and profit by what you hear, then do not *harden your hearts*; for the seed sown on the rock never brought any fruit to perfection. The Jews therefore believed not the gospel of Christ, because *their hearts were hardened*; they were not convinced of the evil of sin, and of their danger by reason of sin, and therefore they regarded not the offer of salvation; they would not

bend to the yoke of Christ, nor yield to his demands; and, if the sinner's heart be hardened, it is his own act and deed, (he hardening it himself,) and he alone shall bear the blame for ever.

III. The example they are warned by; which is that of the Israelites in the wilderness; "Take heed of sinning as they did, lest you be shut out of the everlasting rest, as they were out of Canaan." *Be not, as your fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation*, 78.8. Thus here, *Harden not your heart*, as you did, that is, your ancestors, in the provocation, or in *Meribah*, the place where they quarrelled with God and Moses, (Exod. 17.2..7.) and in the day of temptation in the wilderness, v.8. So often did they provoke God by their distrusts and murmurings, that the whole time of their continuance in the wilderness might be called a day of temptation, or *Massah*, the other name given to that place, (Exod. 17.7.) because they tempted the Lord, saying, *Is the Lord among us, or is he not?* This was in the wilderness, where they could not help themselves, but lay at God's mercy, and where God wonderfully helped them, and gave them such sensible proofs of his power, and tokens of his favour, as never any people had before or since. Note, 1. Days of temptation are days of provocation: nothing is more offensive to God than disbelief of his promise, and despair of the performance of it, because of some difficulties that seem to lie in the way. 2. The more experience we have had of the power and goodness of God, the greater is our sin, if we distrust him. What, to tempt him in the wilderness, where we live upon him! This is as ungrateful as it is absurd and unreasonable. 3. Hardness of heart is at the bottom of all our distrusts of God, and quarrels with him. That is a hard heart which receives not the impressions of divine discoveries, and conforms not to the intentions of the divine will, which will not melt, which will not bend. 4. The sins of others ought to be warnings to us not to tread in their steps. The murmurings of Israel were written for our admonition, 1 Cor. 10. 11.

Now here observe,

(1.) The charge drawn up, in God's name, against the unbelieving Israelites, v. 9, 10. God here, many ages after, complains of their ill conduct toward him, with the expressions of high resentment. [1.] Their sin was unbelief: they tempted God and proved him; they questioned whether they might take his word, and insisted upon further security, before they would go forward to Canaan, by sending spies; when those discouraged them, they protested against the sufficiency of the divine power and promise, and would make a captain, and return into Egypt, Numb. 14. 3, 4. This is called *rebellion*, Deut. 1.26, 32. [2.] The aggravation of this sin was, that they saw God's work; they saw what he had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt; nay, what he was now doing for them every day, this day, in the bread he rained from heaven for them, and the water out of the rock that followed them, than which they could not have more unquestionable evidences of God's presence with them: with them, even seeing was not believing, because they *hardened their hearts*, though they had seen what Pharaoh got by hardening his heart. [3.] The causes of their sin; see what God imputed it to, *It is a people that do err in their hearts, and they have not known my ways*. Men's unbelief and distrust of God, their murmurings and quarrels with him, are the effect of their ignorance and mistake. *First*, Of their ignorance; *They have not known my ways*. They saw his work, (v. 9.) and he made known his acts to them; (103. 7.) and yet they did not know his ways, the ways of his providence, in which he walked toward them, or the ways of his commandments, in which he would have them to walk toward him; they did not know, they did not rightly understand, and therefore did not approve of, these. Note, The reason why people slight and forsake the ways of God, is, because they do not know them. *Secondly*, Of their mistake; *They do err in their heart*; they wander out of the way, in heart they turn back. Note, Sins are errors, practical errors, errors in heart; such there are, and as fatal as errors in the head. When the corrupt affections pervert the judgment, and so lead the soul out of the ways of duty and obedience, there is an error of the heart. [4.] God's resentment of their sin; *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation*. Note, The sins of God's professing people do not only anger him, but grieve him,

especially their distrust of him; and God keeps an account how often, (Numb. 14. 22.) and how long, they grieve him. See the patience of God toward provoking sinners; he was grieved with them 40 years, and yet those years ended in a triumphant entrance into Canaan, made by the next generation. If our sins have grieved God, surely they should grieve us, and nothing in sin should grieve us so much as that.

(2.) The sentence past upon them for their sin; (v. 11.) "*Unto whom I swear in my wrath, If they shall enter into my rest, they say I am changeable and untrue:*" see the sentence at large, Numb. 14. 21, &c. Observe, [1.] Whence this sentence came; from the wrath of God; he *swore solemnly in his wrath*, his just and holy wrath; but let not men therefore swear profanely in their wrath, their sinful brutish wrath. God is not subject to such passions as we are; but he is said to be angry, very angry, at sin and sinners, to shew the malignity of sin, and the justice of God's government. That is certainly an evil thing, which deserves such a recompence of revenge as may be expected from a provoked Deity. [2.] What it was; *That they should not enter into his rest*, the rest which he had prepared and designed for them, a settlement for them and their's; that none of them who were enrolled when they came out of Egypt, should be found written in the roll of the living at their entering into Canaan, but Caleb and Joshua. [3.] How it was ratified; *I swore it*. It was not only a purpose, but a decree; the oath shewed the *immutability of his counsel*; the Lord swore, and will not repent: it cut off the thought of any reserve of mercy. God's threatenings are as sure as his promises.

Now this case of Israel may be applied to those of their posterity, that lived in David's time, when this psalm was penned; let them hear God's voice, and not harden their hearts as their fathers did, lest, if they were stiff-necked like them, God should be provoked to forbid them the privileges of his temple at Jerusalem, of which he had said, *This is my rest*: but it must be applied to us Christians, because so the apostle applies it. There is a spiritual and eternal rest set before us, and promised to us, of which Canaan was a type; we are all (in profession, at least) bound for this rest; yet many that seem to be so, come short, and shall never enter into it. And what is it that puts a bar in their door? It is sin, it is unbelief, that sin against the remedy, against our appeal. They that, like Israel, distrust God, and his power and goodness, and prefer the garlick and onions of Egypt before the milk and honey of Canaan, will justly be shut out from his rest: so shall their doom be, themselves have decided it. *Let us therefore fear*, Heb. 4. 1.

PSALM XCVI.

This psalm is part of that which was delivered into the hand of Asaph and his brethren; (1 Chron. 16. 7.) by which it appears, both that David was the penman of it, and that it has reference to the bringing up of the ark to the city of David. Whether that long psalm was made first, and this afterward taken out of it, or this made first, and afterward borrowed to make up that, is not certain; but this is certain, that, though it was sung at the translation of the ark, it looks further, to the kingdom of Christ, and is designed to celebrate the glories of that kingdom, especially the accession of the Gentiles to it. Here is, I. A call given to all people to praise God, to worship him, and give glory to him, as a great and glorious God, v. 1..9. II. Notice given to all people of God's universal government and judgment, which ought to be the matter of universal joy, v. 10..13. In singing this psalm, we ought to have our hearts filled with great and high thoughts of the glory of God and the grace of the gospel, and with an entire satisfaction in Christ's sovereign dominion, and in the expectation of the judgment to come.

1. **O** SING unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth. 2. Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day. 3. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. 4. For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. 5. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. 6. Honour and majesty are

before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. 7. Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. 8. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts. 9. O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.

These verses will be best expounded by pious and devout affections working in our souls toward God, with a high veneration for his majesty and transcendent excellency. The call here given us to praise God is very lively, the expressions are raised and repeated, to all which the echo of a thankful heart should make agreeable returns. We are here required to honour God,

I. With songs, v. 1, 2. Three times we are here called to *sing unto the Lord*; sing to the Father, to the Son, to the Holy Ghost; as it was *in the beginning*, when *the morning stars sang together*, *is now*, in the church militant, and *ever shall be*, in the church triumphant. We have reason to do it often, and we have need to be often reminded of it, and stirred up to it. *Sing unto the Lord*, that is, "*Bless his name*, speak well of him, that you may bring others to think well of him." 1. *Sing a new song*, an excellent song, the product of new affections, clothed with new expressions. We speak of nothing more despicable than an old song, but the newness of a song recommends it; for there we expect something surprising. A new song is a song for new favours, for those compassions which are new every morning. A new song is a New-Testament song, a song of praise for the new covenant, and the precious privileges of that covenant. A new song is a song that shall be ever new, and shall never wax old or vanish away; it is an everlasting song, that shall never be antiquated, or out of date. 2. Let all the earth *sing* this song, not the Jews only, to whom hitherto the service of God had been appropriated, who could not *sing the Lord's song* in (would not sing it to) a *strange land*; but let *all the earth*, all that are *redeemed from the earth*, learn and sing *this new song*, Rev. 14. 3. This is a prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles; all the earth shall have this *new song put into their mouths*, shall have both cause and call to sing it. 3. Let the subject-matter of this song be his salvation; the great salvation which was to be wrought out by the Lord Jesus; that must be shewed forth as the cause of this joy and praise. 4. Let these songs be sung constantly, and not only in the times appointed for the solemn feasts, but from day to day; it is a subject that can never be exhausted. Let day unto day utter this speech, that, under the influence of gospel-devotions, we may daily exemplify a gospel-conversation.

II. With sermons, (v. 3.) *Declare his glory among the heathen, even his wonders among all people*. 1. Salvation by Christ is here spoken of as a work of wonder, and that in which the glory of God shines very bright; in shewing forth that salvation, we declare God's glory as it shines in the face of Christ. 2. This salvation was, in the Old-Testament times, as heaven's happiness is now, a *glory to be revealed*; but, in the fulness of time, it was declared, and a full discovery made of that even to babes, which prophets and kings desired and wished to see, and might not. 3. What was then discovered was declared only among the Jews, but it is now declared *among the heathen, among all people*; the nations which long sat in darkness now see this great light. The apostles' commission to preach the gospel to every creature, is copied from this here; *Declare his glory among the heathen*.

III. With religious services, v. 7. . 9. Hitherto, though in every nation they that feared God, and wrought righteousness, were accepted of him, yet instituted ordinances were the peculiarities of the Jewish religion: but, in gospel-times, the kindreds of the people shall be invited and admitted into the service of God, and be as welcome as ever the Jews were. The court of the Gentiles shall no longer be an outward court, but shall be laid in common with the court of Israel. All the earth is here summoned to fear before the Lord, to worship him according to his appointment. *In every place incense shall be offered to his name*, Mal. 1. 11. Zech. 14. 17. Isa. 66. 23. This indeed spake mortification to the Jews, but

withal it gave a prospect of that which would redound very much to the glory of God, and to the happiness of mankind.

Now observe how the acts of devotion to God are here described. 1. We must give unto the Lord; not as if God needed any thing, or could receive any thing, from us or any creature, which was not his own before; much less be benefited by it; but we must, in our best affections, adorations, and services, return to him what we have received from him, and do it freely, as what we give; for *God loves a cheerful giver*. It is debt, it is rent, it is tribute, it is what must be paid, and, if not, will be recovered, and yet if it come from holy love, God is pleased to accept it as a gift. 2. We must acknowledge God to be the sovereign Lord, and pay homage to him accordingly; (v. 7.) *Give unto the Lord glory and strength, glory and empire, or dominion*, so some. As a king, he is clothed with robes of glory, and girt with the girdle of power, and we must subscribe to both; *Thine is the kingdom*, and therefore *thine is the power and the glory*. "Give the glory to God, do not take it to yourselves, nor give it to any creature." 3. We must *give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name*, that is, to the discovery he has been pleased to make of himself to the children of men. In all the acts of religious worship, this is that which we must aim at, to honour God, to pay him some of that reverence which we owe him as the best of beings, and the Fountain of our being. 4. We must *bring an offering into his courts*. We must bring ourselves in the first place; the *offering up of the Gentiles*, Rom. 15. 16. We must offer up the *sacrifices of praise continually*, (Heb. 13. 15.) must often appear before God in public worship, and never appear before him empty. 5. We must *worship him in the beauty of holiness*, in the solemn assembly where divine institutions are religiously observed, the beauty of which is their holiness, that is, their conformity to the rule: we must worship him with holy hearts, sanctified by the grace of God, devoted to the glory of God, and purified from the pollutions of sin. 6. We must *fear before him*; all the acts of worship must be performed from a principle of the fear of God, and with a holy awe and reverence.

In the midst of these calls to praise God, and give glory to him, glorious things are here said of him, both as motives to praise and matter of praise.

The Lord is great, and therefore greatly to be praised, (v. 4.) and *to be feared*; great and honourable to his attendants, great and terrible to his adversaries. Even the new song proclaims God great as well as good; for his goodness is his glory; and when the everlasting gospel is preached, this is it, *Fear God, and give glory to him*, Rev. 14. 6, 7.

(1.) He is great in his sovereignty over all that pretend to be deities; none dare vie with him; *He is to be feared above all gods*, all princes, who were often deified after their deaths, and even while they lived were adored as petty gods; or rather, all idols, *the gods of the nations*, v. 5. All the earth being called to sing the new song, they must be convinced that the Lord Jehovah, to whose honour they must sing it, is the One only living and true God, infinitely above all rivals and pretenders: he is great, and they are little; he is all, and they are nothing: so the word used for idols signifies; for we know that *an idol is nothing in the world*, 1 Cor. 8. 4.

(2.) He is great in his right, even to the noblest part of the creation; for it is his own work, and derives its being from him: *The Lord made the heavens*, and all their hosts; they are *the work of his fingers*, (8. 3.) so nicely, so curiously, are they made. The gods of the nations were all made-gods, the creatures of men's fancies; but our God is the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, those lights of heaven, which they imagined to be gods, and worshipped as such.

(3.) He is great in the manifestation of his glory both in the upper and lower world; among his angels in heaven, and his saints on earth; (v. 6.) *Splendour and majesty are before him*, in his immediate presence above, where the angels cover their faces, as unable to bear the dazzling lustre of his glory. *Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary*, both that above and this below. In God there is every thing that is awful, and yet every thing that is amiable. If we attend him in his sanctuary, we shall behold his beauty, for

God is Love, and experience his strength, for *he is our Rock*. Let us therefore go forth, in his strength, enamoured with his beauty.

10. Say among the heathen *that the LORD reigneth*: the world also shall be established, that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. 11. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. 12. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice. 13. Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.

We have here instructions given to those who were to preach the gospel to the nations, what to preach; or to those who had themselves received the gospel, what account to give of it to their neighbours, what to say among the heathen; and it is an illustrious prophecy of the setting up of the kingdom of Christ upon the ruins of the Devil's kingdom, which began immediately after his ascension, and will continue in the doing till the mystery of God be finished.

1. Let it be told *that the Lord reigns*, the Lord Christ reigns, that King whom God determined to set upon his holy hill of Zion. See how this was first said among the heathen by Peter, Acts, 10. 42. Some of the ancients added a gloss to this, which by degrees crept into the text, *The Lord reigneth from the tree*; so Justin Martyr, Austin, and others, quote it; meaning the cross, when he had this title written over him, *The King of the Jews*. It was because he became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, that God exalted him, and gave him a name above every name, a throne above every throne. Some of the heathen came betimes to inquire after him that was *born King of the Jews*, Matth. 2. 2. Now let them know that he is come, and his kingdom is set up.

2. Let it be told that Christ's government will be the world's happy settlement; *The world also shall be established, that it shall not be moved*. The natural world shall be established; the standing of the world, and its stability, are owing to the mediation of Christ. Sin had given it a shock, and still threatens it; but Christ, as Redeemer, upholds all things, and preserves the course of nature. The world of mankind shall be established, shall be preserved, till all that belong to the election of grace are called in, though a guilty provoking world. The Christian religion, as far as it is embraced, shall establish states and kingdoms, and preserve good order among men. The church in the world shall be established, (so some,) that it cannot be moved, for it is built upon a rock; and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it; it is a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

3. Let them be told that Christ's government will be incontestably just and righteous; *He shall judge the people righteously*, (v. 10.) *judge the world with righteousness and with his truth*, v. 13. Judging is here put for ruling; and though this may be extended to the general judgment of the world at the last day, which will be in righteousness, (Acts, 17. 31.) yet it refers more immediately to Christ's first coming, and the setting up of his kingdom in the world by the gospel. He says himself, *For judgment am I come into this world*; (John, 9. 39.—12. 31.) and declares that *all judgment was committed to him*, John, 5. 22, 27. His ruling and judging with righteousness and truth, signify, (1.) That all the laws and ordinances of his kingdom shall be consonant to the rules and principles of eternal truth and equity, that is, to the rectitude and purity of the divine nature and will. (2.) That all his administrations of government shall be just and faithful, and according to what he has said. (3.) That he shall rule in the hearts and consciences of men by the commanding power of truth, and the Spirit of righteousness and sanctification. When Pilate asked our Saviour, *Art thou a king?* he answered, *For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth*;

(John, 18. 37.) for he rules by truth, commands men's wills by informing their judgments aright.

4. Let them be told that his coming draws nigh; that this King, this Judge, *standeth before the door*; for he cometh, for he cometh. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, said so, *Behold, the Lord cometh*, Jude, 14. Between this and his first coming the revolutions of many ages intervened, and yet he came at the set time, and so sure will his second coming be; though it is now long since it was said, *Behold, he comes in the clouds*, (Rev. 1. 7.) and he is not yet come. See 2 Pet. 3. 4, &c.

5. Let them be called upon to rejoice in this honour that is put upon the Messiah, and this great trust that is to be lodged in his hand; (v. 11, 12.) *Let heaven and earth rejoice, the sea, the field, and all the trees of the wood*. The dialect here is poetical; the meaning is, (1.) That the days of the Messiah will be joyful days, and, as far as his grace and government are submitted to, will bring joy along with them; we have reason to give that place, that soul, joy, into which Christ was admitted. See an instance of both; (Acts, 8.) when Samaria received the gospel, *there was great joy in that city*; (v. 8.) and when the eunuch was baptized, *he went on his way rejoicing*, v. 39. (2.) That it is the duty of every one of us to bid Christ and his kingdom welcome; for though they come conquering and to conquer, yet they come peaceably. *Hosanna, Blessed is he that cometh*; and again, *Hosanna, Blessed be the kingdom of our father David*, Mark, 11. 9, 10. Not only let the daughter of Zion rejoice that her King comes, (Zech. 9. 9.) but let all rejoice. (3.) That the whole creation will have reason to rejoice in the setting up of Christ's kingdom, even the sea, and the field; for as by the sin of the first Adam the whole creation was made subject to vanity, so by the grace of the second Adam it shall, some way or other, first or last, be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God, Rom. 8. 20, 21. (4.) That there will, in the first place, be joy in heaven, joy in the presence of the angels of God; for when the First-begotten was brought into the world, they sang their anthems to his praise, Luke, 2. 14. (5.) That God will graciously accept the holy joys and praises of all the hearty well-wishers to the kingdom of Christ, be their capacity ever so mean. The sea can but roar, and how the trees of the wood can shew that they rejoice, I know not; but he that searches the heart knows what is the mind of the Spirit, and understands the language, the broken language, of the weakest.

PSALM XCVII.

This psalm dwells upon the same subject, and is set to the same tune, with the foregoing psalm. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of both; they are both penned, and are both to be sung, to his honour; and we make nothing of them, if we do not, in them, make melody with our hearts to the Lord Jesus. He it is that reigns, to the joy of all mankind; (v. 1.) and his government speaks, I. Terror to his enemies; for he is a Prince of inflexible justice, and irresistible power, v. 2. 7. II. Comfort to his friends and loyal subjects; arising from his sovereign dominion, the care he takes of his people, and the provision he makes for them, v. 8. 12. In singing this psalm, we must be affected with the glory of the exalted Redeemer, must dread the lot of his enemies, and think ourselves happy, if we are of those that kiss the Son.

1. **T**HE LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. 2. Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. 3. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. 4. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. 5. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the LORD of the whole earth. 6. The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory. 7. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods.

What was to be said among the heathen in the foregoing psalm, (v. 10.) is here said again, (v. 1.) and is made the subject of this psalm, and of psalm 99. *The Lord reigns*; that is the great truth here laid down. The Lord Jehovah reigns; he that made the world governs it; he that gave being gives motion and power, gives law and commission, gives success and event; every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord, from his counsel and providence, and in all affairs, both public and private, he performs the thing which he himself has appointed. The Lord Jesus reigns; the providential kingdom is twined in with the mediatorial, and the administration of both is in the hand of Christ; who therefore is both the *Head of the church*, and *Head over all things to the church*.

The kingdom of Christ is so constituted, that,

1. It may be matter of joy to all; and it will be so, if it be not their own fault. *Let the earth rejoice*, for hereby it is *established*; (96. 10.) it is honoured and enriched, and, in part, rescued from the vanity which by sin it is made subject to. Not only let the people of Israel rejoice in him, as King of the Jews, and the daughter of Zion, as her King, but let all the earth rejoice in his elevation; for the kingdoms of the world shall, more or less, sooner or later, become his kingdoms: *let the multitude of isles*, the many or great isles, *be glad thereof*. This is applicable to our country, which is a great isle, and has many belonging to it; however, it speaks comfort in general to the Gentiles, whose countries are called *the isles of the Gentiles*, Gen. 10. 5. There is enough in Christ for the multitude of the isles to rejoice in; for though many have been made happy in him, yet still there is room.

All have reason to rejoice in Christ's government.

1. In the equity of it. There is an incontestable justice in all the acts of his government, both legislative and judicial; sometimes indeed *clouds and darkness are round about him*, his dispensations are altogether unaccountable, *his way is in the sea*, and *his path in the great waters*; we are not aware of what he designs, what he drives at; nor is it fit that we should be let into the secrets of his government; there is a depth in his counsels which we must not pretend to fathom; but still *righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne*; a golden thread of justice runs through the whole web of his administration. In this he resides, for it is his habitation. In this he rules, for it is *the habitation of his throne*. *His commandments are*, and will be, *all righteous*. *Righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne*; (so Dr. Hammond,) *therefore his throne is for ever and ever*, because his *sceptre is a right sceptre*, 45. 6. *The throne is established in righteousness*. Even *the heavens declare his righteousness*; (v. 6.) it is as conspicuous and as illustrious as the heavens themselves. The angels of heaven will declare it, who are employed as messengers in the administration of his government, and therefore know more of it than any of his creatures. His righteousness is incontestable; for who can contradict or dispute what the *heavens declare*? 50. 6.

2. In the extent of it in the upper and lower world.

(1.) All the men on earth are under his government; either he is served by them, or he serves himself by them. *All the people see his glory*, or may see it. The glory of God, in the face of Christ, was made to shine in distant countries, among many people, more or less, among all people; the gospel was preached, for aught we know, in all languages, Acts. 2. 5, 11. Miracles were wrought in all nations, and so *all the people saw his glory*. *Have they not heard?* Rom. 10. 18.

(2.) All the angels in heaven are so; perhaps we should not have found this truth in those words, (v. 7.) *Worship him all ye gods*, if we had not been directed to it by the inspired apostle, who, from the Septuagint version of those words, makes the Messiah to be introduced into the upper world, at the ascension, with this charge, (Heb. 1. 0.) *Let all the angels of God worship him*; which helps us to a key to this whole psalm, and shews us that it must be applied to the exalted Redeemer, who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; which intimates that all power is given him both in heaven and earth; *angels authorities and powers being made subject unto him*, 1 Pet. 3. 22. This speaks

the honour of Christ, that he has such worshippers; and the honour of all good Christians, that they have such fellow-worshippers.

II. Christ's government, though it may be matter of joy to all, will yet be matter of terror to some, and it is their own fault that it is so, v. 3. . 5, 7. Observe,

1. When the kingdom of Christ was to be set up in the world, after his ascension, it would meet with many enemies, and much opposition would be given to it. He that reigns to the *joy of the whole earth*, yet, as he has his subjects, so he has *his enemies*, (v. 3.) that not only will not have him to reign over them, but would not have him to reign at all; that not only will not *enter into the kingdom of heaven themselves*, but do all they can to *hinder those that are entering*, Matth. 23. 13. This was fulfilled in the enmity of the unbelieving Jews to the gospel of Christ, and the violent persecution which in all places they stirred up against the preachers and professors of it. These enemies are here called *hills*, (v. 5.) for their height and strength, and immoveable obstinacy. They were the *princes of this world* that *crucified the Lord of glory*, 1 Cor. 2. 8. Ps. 2. 2.

2. The opposition which the Jews gave to the setting up of Christ's kingdom turned to their own ruin. Their persecuting of the apostles, and *forbidding them to speak to the Gentiles*, filled up their sin, and brought *wrath upon them to the uttermost*, 1 Thess. 2. 15, 16. That wrath is here compared, (1.) To consuming fire which *goes before him*, and *burns up his enemies*, that have made themselves like chaff and stubble, and have *set the briers and thorns before him in battle*, Isa. 27. 4. This fire of divine wrath will not only burn the rubbish upon the hills, but will even *melt the hills themselves like wax*, v. 5. When our God appears as a consuming Fire, even rocks will be wax before him. The most resolute and daring opposition will be baffled *at the presence of the Lord*. His very presence is enough to shame and sink it, for he is *the Lord of the whole earth*, by whom all the children of men are manageable, and to whom they are accountable. Men hate and persecute God's people, because they think him absent, that the Lord has *forsaken the earth*; but when he manifests his presence, they melt. (2.) To amazing *lightnings*, (v. 4.) which strike a terror upon many. The judgments of God brought upon the enemies of Christ's kingdom, were such as all the world took notice of with terror; *The earth saw and trembled*, and the ears of all that heard were made to tingle. This was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation by the Romans, about 40 years after Christ's resurrection, which, like fire, wholly destroyed that people, and, like lightning, astonished all their neighbours; (Deut. 29. 24.) but the heavens declare God's righteousness in it, and all the people, to this day, see his glory, in those lasting monuments of his justice, the scattered Jews.

3. Idolaters also would be put to confusion by the setting up of Christ's kingdom; (v. 7.) *Confounded be all they who serve graven images*, the Gentile world, who *did service to them that by nature are no gods*, (Gal. 4. 8.) who boast themselves of idols as their protectors and benefactors. Did they that served idols boast of them, and shall the servants of the living God distrust him, or be ashamed of him? *Let them be ashamed that serve graven images*. (1.) This is a prayer for the conversion of the Gentiles, that those who have been so long serving dumb idols may be convinced of their error, ashamed of their folly, and may, by the power of Christ's gospel, be brought to serve the only living and true God, and may be as much ashamed of their idols as ever they were proud of them. See Isa. 2. 20, 21. (2.) This is a prophecy of the ruin of those that would not be reformed and reclaimed from their idolatry; they shall be confounded by the destruction of paganism in the Roman empire, which was fulfilled about 300 years after Christ, so much to the terror of idolaters, that some think it was the revolution under Constantine that made even the mighty men say to the rocks, *Fall on us, and hide us*. Rev. 6. 15, 16. This prayer and prophecy are still in force against antichristian idolaters, who may here read their doom; *Confounded be all they that worship graven images*. See Jer. 48. 13.

8. Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters

of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD. 9. For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods. 10. Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. 11. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. 12. Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.

The kingdom of the Messiah, like the pillar of cloud and fire, as it has a dark side toward the Egyptians, so it has a bright side toward the Israel of God. It is set up in spite of opposition; and then the earth saw and trembled, (v. 4.) but Zion heard, and was glad, very glad, to hear of the conversion of some, and of the confusion of others, that is, the conquest of all that stood it out against Christ. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; for, behold, thy king comes unto thee, Zech. 9. 9.* And not Zion only, where the temple was, but even the daughters of Judah, rejoiced; the common people, the inhabitants of the villages, they shall triumph in Christ's victories. The command (v. 1.) is, *Let the earth rejoice*; but it is only the sons of Zion and the daughters of Judah that do rejoice. All should bid the kingdom of the Messiah welcome, but few do. Now here observe,

1. The reasons that are given for Zion's joy in the government of the Redeemer. The faithful servants of God may well rejoice and be glad;

1. Because God is glorified, and whatever redounds to his honour is very much his people's pleasure. They rejoice because of thy judgments, O Lord; which may take in both the judgments of his mouth, and the judgments of his hand, the word of his gospel, and his works wrought for the propagating of it, miracles and marvellous providences; for in these we must own, "*Thou, Lord, art high above all the earth*"; (v. 9.) thou hast manifested thy sovereignty in the kingdom of nature, and thy command of all its powers, and thy dominion over all nations, over all hearts; thou art exalted far above all gods; all deputed gods, that is, princes; all counterfeit gods, that is, idols. The exaltation of Christ, and the advancement of God's glory among men thereby, are the rejoicing of all the saints.

2. Because care is taken for their safety. Those that pay allegiance to Christ, as a King, shall be sure of his protection; princes are the shields of the earth, Christ is so to his subjects, they may put their trust under his shadow, and rejoice in it; for, (v. 10.) *He preserves the souls of the saints*; he preserves their lives as long as he has any work for them to do, and wonderfully delivers them many a time out of the hand of the wicked, their persecutors that thirst after their blood; for *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints*. But something more is meant than their lives; for they that will be his disciples must be willing to lay down their lives, and not indent for the securing of them. It is the immortal soul that Christ preserves, the inward man, which may be renewed more and more when the outward man decays. He will preserve the souls of his saints from sin, from apostacy, and despair, under their greatest trials; he will deliver them out of the hands of the wicked one that seeks to devour them; he will preserve them safe to his heavenly kingdom, 2 Tim. 4. 18. They have therefore reason to be glad, being thus safe.

3. Because provision is made for their comfort; those that rejoice in Christ Jesus, and in his exaltation, have fountains of joy treasured up for them, which will be opened sooner or later; (v. 11.) *Light is sown for the righteous*, that is, *gladness for the upright in heart*. The subjects of Christ's kingdom are bid to expect tribulation in the world; they must suffer by its malice, and must not share in its mirth; yet let them know, to their comfort, that light is sown for them, it is designed and prepared for them; what is sown will come up again in due time; though, like a winter seedness, it may lie long under the clods, and seem to be lost and buried, yet it will return in a rich and plentiful increase. God's

goodness shall be sure of a harvest in the appointed weeks. They that sow in tears, shall, without fail, reap in joy, 126. 5, 6. Christ told his disciples, at parting, (John, 16. 20.) *You shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy*. Gladness is sure to the upright in heart, to those only that are sincere in religion. *The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment*. There is no serenity without a lasting sincerity.

11. The rules that are given for Zion's joy.

1. Let it be a pure and holy joy; "*Ye that love the Lord Jesus, that love his appearing and kingdom, that love his word and his exaltation, see that ye hate evil, the evil of sin, every thing that is offensive to him, and will throw you out of his favour*." Note, A true love to God will shew itself in a real hatred of all sin, as that abominable thing which he hates. The joy of the saints should likewise confirm their antipathy to sin, and divine comforts should put their mouths out of taste for sensual pleasures.

2. Let the joy terminate in God; (v. 12.) *Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous*; let all the streams of comfort, which flow to us in the channel of Christ's kingdom, lead us to the Fountain, and oblige us to rejoice in the Lord. All the lines of joy must meet in him as in the Centre. See Phil. 3. 3.—4. 4.

3. Let it express itself in praise and thanksgiving; *Give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness*. Whatever is the matter of our rejoicing, ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving; and particularly the holiness of God. They that hate sin themselves, are glad that God does so, in hopes that therefore he will not suffer it to have dominion over them. Note, (1.) We ought to be much in the remembrance of God's holiness, the infinite purity, rectitude, and perfection, of the divine nature. We must be ever mindful of his holy covenant, which he has confirmed with an oath by his holiness. (2.) We ought to give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness; not only give him the glory of it as it is an honour to him, but give him thanks for it as it is a favour to us; and an unspeakable favour it will be, if, through grace, we are partakers of his holiness. It is God's holiness, which, above all his attributes, the angels celebrate; (Isa. 6. 3.) *Holy, holy, holy*. Sinners tremble, but saints rejoice, at the remembrance of God's holiness, Ps. 30. 4.

PSALM XCVIII.

This psalm is to the same purport with the two foregoing psalms; it is a prophecy of the kingdom of the Messiah, the setting of it up in the world, and the bringing of the Gentiles to it. The Chaldee entitles it a prophetic psalm. It sets forth, 1. The glory of the Redeemer, v. 1.—3. 11. The joy of the redeemed, v. 4.—9. If we in a right manner give to Christ this glory, and upon right grounds take to ourselves this joy, in singing this psalm, we sing it with understanding. If they who saw Christ's day at a distance, and in the promise only, must rejoice and triumph thus, much more reason have we to do so, who see these things accomplished, and share in the better things provided for us, Heb. 11. 40.

A psalm.

1. **O** SING unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. 2. The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. 3. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

We are here called upon again to sing unto the Lord a new song, as before, 96. 1. "Sing a most excellent song, the best song you have." Let the song of Christ's love be like Solomon's on that subject, a song of songs. A song of praise for redeeming love is a new song, such a song as had not been sung before; for this is a mystery which was hid from ages and generations. Converts sing a new song, very different from what they had sung; they change their wonder, and change their joy, and therefore change their note. If the grace of God put a new heart into our breasts, it

will therewith put a new song into our mouths. In the new Jerusalem there will be new songs sung, that will be new to eternity, and never wax old.

Let this new song be sung to the praise of God, in consideration of these four things:

1. The wonders he has wrought; *He has done marvellous things*, v.1. Note, The work of our salvation by Christ is a work of wonder. If we take a view of all the steps of it, from the contrivance of it, and the counsels of God concerning it before all time, to the consummation of it, and its everlasting consequences when time shall be no more, we shall say, God has in it *done marvellous things*; it is all his doing, and it is *marvellous in our eyes*. The more it is known, the more it will be admired.

2. The conquests he has won; *His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him the victory*. Our Redeemer has surmounted all the difficulties that lay in the way of our redemption, has broken through them all, and was not discouraged by the services or sufferings appointed him. He has subdued all the enemies that opposed it, has gotten the victory over Satan, disarmed him, and cast him out of his strong holds, has *spoiled principalities and powers*, (Col. 2. 15.) has *taken the prey from the mighty*, (Isa. 49. 24.) and given death his death's wound; he has gotten a clear and complete victory, not only for himself but for us also, for we through him are more than conquerors. He got this victory by his own power, there was *none to help, none to uphold, none that durst venture into the service*; but his *right hand and his holy arm*, which are *therefore* always stretched out with good success, because they are never stretched out but in a good cause; these have *gotten him the victory*, have *brought him relief or deliverance*. God's power and faithfulness, called here *his right hand and his holy arm*, brought relief to the Lord Jesus, in raising him from the dead, and exalting him personally to the right hand of God; so Dr. Hammond.

3. The discoveries he has made to the world of the work of redemption. What he has wrought for us he has revealed to us, and both by his Son; the gospel-revelation is that on which the gospel-kingdom is founded; *The word which God sent*, Acts, 10. 36. *The opening of the sealed book* is that which is to be celebrated with songs of praise, (Rev. 5. 8.) because by it was brought to light the mystery which had long been hid in God. Observe, (1.) The subject of this discovery; his salvation and his righteousness, v. 3. Righteousness and salvation are often put together, as Isa. 61. 10.—46. 13.—51. 5, 6, 8. Salvation denotes the redemption itself, and righteousness the way in which it was wrought, by the righteousness of Christ. Or, the salvation includes all our gospel-privileges, and the righteousness all our gospel-duties; both are made known, for God has joined them together, and we must not separate them. Or, righteousness is here put for the way of our justification by Christ, which is revealed in the gospel to be by faith, Rom. 1. 17. (2.) The plainness of this discovery; he has openly shewed it, not in types and figures as under the law, but it is written as with a sun-beam, that he that runs may read it. Ministers are appointed to preach it with all plainness of speech. (3.) The extent of this discovery; it is made in the sight of the heathen, and not of the Jews only; *All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God*; for to the Gentiles was the word of salvation sent.

4. The accomplishment of the prophecies and the promises of the Old Testament, in this; (v. 3.) *He has remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel*. God had mercy in store for the seed of Abraham, and had given them many and great assurances of the kindness he designed them in the latter days; and it was in pursuance of all those, that he raised up his Son Jesus to be not only a *Light to lighten the Gentiles*, but *the Glory of his people Israel*, for he sent him, in the first place, to bless them. God is said, in sending Christ, to *perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember the holy covenant*, Luke, 1. 72. It was in consideration of that, and not of their merit.

4. Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing

praise. 5. Sing unto the LORD with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. 6. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the LORD, the King. 7. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. 8. Let the floods clap *their* hands: let the hills be joyful together. 9. Before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.

The setting up of the kingdom of Christ is here represented as a matter of joy and praise.

1. Let all the children of men rejoice in it, for they all have, or may have, benefit by it. Again and again we are here called upon by all ways and means possible to express our joy in it, and give God praise for it; *Make a joyful noise*, as before, 95. 1, 2. *Make a loud noise*, as those that are affected with those glad tidings, and are desirous to affect others with them; *Rejoice and sing praise*; sing *Hosanna*; (Matth. 21. 9.) sing *Hallelujahs*, Rev. 19. 6. Let him be welcomed to the throne, as new kings are, with acclamations of joy and loud shouts, till the earth ring again, as when Solomon was proclaimed, 1 Kings, 1. 40. And let the shouts of the crowd be accompanied with the *singers and players on instruments*, (Ps. 87. 7.—68. 25.) as is usual in such solemnities. (1.) Let sacred songs attend the new King; "*Sing praise, sing with the voice of a psalm*. Express your joy; thus proclaim it, thus excite it yet more, and thus propagate it among others." (2.) Let these be assisted with sacred music, not only with the soft and gentle melody of the harp, but, since it is a victorious King, whose glory is to be celebrated, who goes forth conquering and to conquer, let him be proclaimed with the martial sound of the trumpet and cornet, v. 6. Let all this joy be directed to God, and expressed in a solemn religious manner; *Make a joyful noise to the Lord*, v. 4. *Sing to the Lord*; (v. 5.) *do it before the Lord, the King*, v. 6. Carnal mirth is an enemy to this holy joy. When David danced before the ark, he pleaded that *it was before the Lord*; and the piety and devotion of the intention not only vindicated what he did, but commended it. We must rejoice *before the Lord*, whenever we draw near to him, (Deut. 12. 12.) *before the Lord Jesus*, and before him, not only as the Saviour, but as the King, the King of kings, the church's King, and our King.

2. Let the inferior creatures rejoice in it, v. 7.. 9. This is to the same purport with what we had before; (96. 11.. 13.) *Let the sea roar*, and let that be called, not as it used to be, a *dreadful noise*, but a *joyful noise*; for the coming of Christ, and the salvation wrought out by him, have quite altered the property of the troubles and terrors of this world, so that when the floods *lift up their voice, lift up their waves*, we must not construe that to be the sea *roaring against us*, but rather *rejoicing with us*. Let the *floods* express their joy, as men do when they *clap their hands*; and let the hills that trembled for fear, before God, when he came down to give the law at mount Sinai, dance for joy, before him, when his gospel is preached, and that word of the Lord goes forth from Zion in a still small voice; *Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord*. This intimates that the kingdom of Christ would be a blessing to the whole creation; but that, as the inferior creatures declare the glory of the Creator, (19. 1.) so they declare the glory of the Redeemer, for by him all things not only *subsist* in their being, but *consist* in their order. It intimates likewise, that the children of men would be wanting in paying their due respects to the Redeemer, and therefore that he must look for his honour from *the sea and the floods*, which would shame the stupidity and ingratitude of mankind. And perhaps respect is here had to the *new heavens and the new earth*, which we yet, according to his promise, look for; (2 Pet. 3. 13.) and this second mention of his coming, after the like, (Ps. 96.) may principally refer to his second coming, when all these things shall be so dissolved as to be refined; then shall he come to *judge the world with righteousness*.

In the prospect of that day all that are sanctified do rejoice, and even the sea, and the floods, and the hills, would rejoice, if they could. One would think that Virgil had these psalms in his eye, as well as the oracles of the Cumæan Sibyl, in his fourth eclogue, where he either ignorantly, or basely, applies to Asinius Pollio the ancient prophecies, which at that time were expected to be fulfilled; for he lived in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, a little before our Saviour's birth. He owns they looked for the birth of a child from heaven, that should be a great blessing to the world, and restore the golden age;

Jam nova progenies cælo demittitur alto—
A new race descends from the lofty sky;

and that should take away sin;

Te duce, si qua manent sceleris vestigia nostri,
Irrita perpetuâ solvent formidine terras—
Thine influence shall efface every stain of corruption,
And free the world from alarm.

Many other things he says of this long-looked-for child, which Ludovicus Vives, in his notes on that eclogue, thinks applicable to Christ; and he concludes, as the psalmist here, with a prospect of the rejoicing of the whole creation herein:

Aspice, venturo lætentur ut omnia sæclo—
See, how this promis'd age makes all rejoice.

And if all rejoice, why should not we?

PSALM XCIX.

Still we are celebrating the glories of the kingdom of God among men, and are called upon to praise him, as in the foregoing psalms; but those psalms looked forward to the times of the gospel, and prophesied of the graces and comforts of those times; this psalm seems to dwell more upon the Old-Testament dispensation, and the manifestation of God's glory and grace in that. The Jews were not, in expectation of the Messiah's kingdom and the evangelical worship, to neglect the divine regimen they were then under, and the ordinances that were then given them, but in them to see God reigning, and to worship before him according to the law of Moses. Prophecies of good things to come, must not lessen our esteem of good things present. To Israel indeed pertained the promises, which they were bound to believe; but to them pertained also the giving of the law, and the service of God, which they were also bound dutifully and conscientiously to attend to, Rom. 9. 4. And this they are called to do, in this psalm; where yet there is much of Christ, for the government of the church was in the hands of the Eternal Word before he was incarnate; and, besides, the ceremonial services were types and figures of evangelical worship. The people of Israel are here required to praise and exalt God, and to worship before him, in consideration of these two things: I. The happy constitution of the government they were under, both in sacred and civil things, v. 1. .5. II. Some instances of the happy administration of it, v. 6. .9. In singing this psalm, we must set ourselves to exalt the name of God, as it is made known to us in the gospel, which we have much more reason to do than they had who lived under the law.

1. THE LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth *between* the cherubims; let the earth be moved. **2. The LORD is great in Zion;** and he is high above all the people. **3. Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy.** **4. The king's strength also loveth judgment;** thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob. **5. Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.**

The foundation of all religion is laid in this truth, That *the Lord reigns*. God governs the world by his providence, governs the church by his grace, and both by his Son. We are to believe not only that *the Lord lives*, but that *the Lord reigns*. This is the triumph of the Christian church, and here it was the triumph of the Jewish church, that Jehovah was their King; and hence it is inferred, *Let the people tremble*, that is, (1.) Let even the subjects of this kingdom tremble; for the Old-Testament dispensation had much of terror in it: at mount Sinai, Israel, and even Moses himself, did *exceedingly fear and quake*; and then God was *terrible in his holy places*; *עַל אֵת* when he appeared in his people's behalf, he

did terrible things. But we are not now come to *that mount that burned with fire*, Heb. 12. 18. Now that *the Lord reigns*, let the earth rejoice: then he ruled more by the power of holy fear, now of holy love. (2.) Much more let the enemies of this kingdom tremble; for he will either bring them into obedience to his golden sceptre, or crush them with his iron rod. *The Lord reigns, though the people be stirred with indignation at it*; though they fret away all their spirits, their rage is all in vain, he will set his King upon his holy hill of Zion, in despite of them; (2. 1. .6.) first, or last, he will make them tremble, Rev. 6. 15, &c. *The Lord reigns, let the earth be moved*. Those that submit to him, shall be established, and not moved; (96. 10.) but they that oppose him will be moved. Heaven and earth shall be shaken, and all nations; but the kingdom of Christ is what cannot be moved; *the things which cannot be shaken, shall remain*, Heb. 12. 27. In these is continuance, Isa. 64. 5.

God's kingdom, set up in Israel, is here made the subject of the psalmist's praise.

1. God presided in the affairs of religion; *He sitteth between the cherubims*, (v. 1.) as on his throne, to give law by the oracles thence delivered; as on the mercy-seat, to receive petitions. This was the honour of *Israel*, that they had among them the *Shechinah*, or special presence of God, attended by the holy angels: the temple was the royal palace, and the Holy of holies was the presence-chamber. *The Lord is great in Zion*; (v. 2.) there he is known and praised, (76. 1, 2.) there he is served as great, more than any where else; *he is high there above all people*; as that which is high is exposed to view, and looked up to, so in Zion the perfections of the divine nature appear more conspicuous and more illustrious than any where else. Therefore let them that dwell in Zion, and worship there, *praise thy great and terrible name*, and give thee the glory due unto it, *for it is holy*. The holiness of God's name makes it truly great to his friends, and terrible to his enemies, v. 3. This is that which they above adore, *Holy, holy, holy*.

2. He was all in all, in their civil government, v. 4. As in Jerusalem was the testimony of Israel, whither the tribes went up, so there were set *thrones of judgment*, (122. 4, 5.) their government was a theocracy: he raised up David to rule over them, (and some think this psalm was penned upon occasion of his quiet and happy settlement in the throne,) and he is *the king* whose strength loves judgment. He is strong, all his strength he has from God, and his strength is not abused for the support of any wrong, as the power of great princes often is, but it *loves judgment*; he does justice with his power, and does it with delight; and herein he was a type of Christ, to whom God would give *the throne of his father David, to do judgment and justice*. He has power to crush, but his strength loves judgment; he does not rule with rigour, but with moderation, with wisdom, and with tenderness. The people of Israel had a good king; but they are here taught to look up to God, as him by whom their king reigned; *Thou dost establish equity*; God gave them those excellent laws by which they were governed; and *thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob*; he not only by his immediate providences often executed and enforced his own laws, but took care for the administration of justice among them by civil magistrates, who reigned by him, and by him did decree justice. Their judges judged for God, and their judgment was his, 2 Chron. 19. 6.

Putting these two things together, we see what was the happiness of Israel above any other people, as Moses had described it, (Deut. 4. 7, 8.) that they had *God so nigh unto them*, sitting between the cherubims, and that they had *statutes and judgments so righteous*, by which equity was established, and God himself ruled in Jacob; from which he infers this command to that happy people; (v. 5.) "*Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool*"; give him the glory of the good government you are under, as it is now established, both in church and state." Note, (1.) The greater the public mercies are, which we have a share in, the more we are obliged to bear a part in the public homage paid to God: the setting up of the kingdom of Christ, especially, ought to be the matter of our praise. (2.) When we draw nigh

to God, to worship him, our hearts must be filled with high thoughts of him, and he must be exalted in our souls. (3.) The more we abase ourselves, and the more prostrate we are before God, the more we exalt him. We must *worship at his footstool*, at his ark, which was as the footstool to the mercy-seat between the cherubims; or, we must cast ourselves down upon the pavement of his courts; and good reason we have to be thus reverent, *for he is holy*; and his holiness should strike an awe upon us, as it does on the angels themselves, Isa. 6. 2, 3.

6. Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them. 7. He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar: they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them. 8. Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. 9. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy.

The happiness of Israel in God's government is here further made out by some particular instances of his administration, especially with reference to those that were, in their day, the prime leaders, and most active useful governors, of that people, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, in the former of whom the theocracy or divine government began, (for they were employed to form Israel into a people,) and in the last of whom that form of government, in a great measure, ended; for when the people rejected Samuel, and urged him to resign, they are said to reject God himself, that he should not be so immediately their King as he had been, (1 Sam. 8. 7.) for now they would have a king, like all the nations. Moses, as well as Aaron, is said to be *among his priests*, for he executed the priest's office till Aaron was settled in it, and he consecrated Aaron and his sons; therefore the Jews call him the *Priest of the priests*.

Now concerning these three chief rulers observe,

1. The intimate communion they had with God, and the wonderful favour to which he admitted them. None of all the nations of the earth could produce three such men as these, that had such an intercourse with Heaven, and whom God *knew by name*, Exod. 33. 17.

Here is, (1.) Their gracious observance of God: no kingdom had men that honoured God so as these three men of the kingdom of Israel did. They honoured him, [1.] By their prayers. Samuel, though not among his priests, yet was *among them that called on his name*; and for *this* they were all famous, *They called upon the Lord*; they relied not on their own wisdom or virtue, but in every emergency had recourse to God, toward him was their desire, and on him their dependence. [2.] By their obedience; *They kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them*; they made conscience of their duty; and in every thing made God's word and law their rule, as knowing, that, unless they did so, they could not expect their prayers should be answered, Prov. 28. 9. Moses did all according to the pattern shewed him; it is often repeated, *According to all that God commanded Moses, so did he*: Aaron and Samuel did likewise. Those were the greatest men and most honourable, that were most eminent for keeping God's testimonies, and conforming to the rule of his word.

(2.) God's gracious acceptance of them; *He answered them*, and granted them the things which they called upon him for: they all wonderfully prevailed with God in prayer; miracles were wrought at their special instance and request; nay, he not only condescended to do that for them which they desired, as a prince for a petitioner, but he communed with them as one friend familiarly converses with another; (v. 7.) *He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar*. He often spake to Samuel, from his childhood the word of the Lord came to him, and, probably, sometimes he spake to him by a bright cloud overshadowing him: however, to

Moses and Aaron he often spake out of the famous *cloudy pillar*, Exod. 16. 10. Numb. 12. 5. Israel are now reminded of this, for the confirming of their faith, that though they had not every day such sensible tokens of God's presence as the cloudy pillar was, yet to them that were their first founders, and to him that was their great reformer, God was pleased thus to manifest himself.

2. The good offices they did to Israel. They interceded for the people, and for them also they obtained many an answer of peace. *Moses stood in the gap*, and *Aaron between the living and the dead*; and when Israel was in distress, Samuel cried unto the Lord for them, 1 Sam. 7. 9. This is here referred to; (v. 8.) *Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God*, and, at their prayer, *thou wast a God that forgavest* the people they prayed for; and *though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions*, yet thou didst not cut them off from being a people, as their sin deserved. "*Thou wast a God that wast propitious for them*, (so Dr. Hammond,) for their sakes, and sparedst the people at their request, then, when thou wast about to *take vengeance of their inventions*, when thy wrath was so highly provoked against them, that it was just ready to break in upon them, to their utter overthrow." These were some of the many remarkable instances of God's dominion in Israel, more than in any other nation, for which the people are again called upon to praise God; (v. 9.) *Exalt the Lord our God*, on account of what he has done for us formerly, as well as of late, and *worship at his holy hill of Zion*, on which he has now set his temple, and will shortly *set his King*, (2. 6.) the former a type of the latter: there, as the centre of unity, let all God's Israel meet, with their adorations, *for the Lord our God is holy*, and appears so, not only in his holy law, but in his holy gospel.

PSALM C.

It is with good reason that many sing this psalm very frequently in their religious assemblies, for it is very proper both to express, and to excite, pious and devout affections toward God in our approach to him in holy ordinances: and if our hearts go along with the words, we shall make melody in it to the Lord. The Jews say it was penned to be sung with their thank-offerings; perhaps it was; but we say that as there is nothing in it peculiar to their economy, so its beginning with a call to all lands to praise God, plainly extends it to the gospel-church. Here, I. We are called upon to praise God, and rejoice in him, v. 1, 2, 4. II. We are furnished with matter for praise; we must praise him, considering his being and relation to us, (v. 3.) and his mercy and truth, v. 5. These are plain and common things, and therefore the more fit to be the matter of devotion.

A psalm of praise.

1. **M**AKE a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. 2. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. 3. Know ye that the LORD he is God; *it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture*. 4. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. 5. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth *endureth* to all generations.

Here,

I. The exhortations to praise are very importunate: the psalm does indeed answer to the title, *A psalm of praise*; it begins with that call which of late we have several times met with, (v. 1.) *Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands, or all the earth*, all the inhabitants of the earth. When all nations shall be disciples, and the gospel preached to every creature, then this summons will be fully answered to. But if we take the foregoing psalm to be (as we have opened it) a call to the Jewish church to rejoice in the administration of God's kingdom, which they were under, (as the four psalms before it were calculated for the days of the Messiah,) this psalm, perhaps, was intended for proselytes, that came over out of all lands to the Jews' religion. However, we have here,

1. A strong invitation to worship God; not that God needs us, or any thing we have or can do, but it is his will that we should *serve the Lord*, should devote ourselves to his service, and employ ourselves in it; and that we should not only serve him in all instances of obedience to his law, but that we should *come before his presence* in the ordinances which he has appointed, and in which he has promised to manifest himself, (v. 2.) that we should *enter into his gates, and into his courts*, (v. 4.) that we should attend upon him among his servants, and keep there where he keeps court. In all acts of religious worship, whether in secret or in our families, we come into God's presence, and serve him; but it is in public worship especially that we *enter into his gates, and into his courts*. The people were not permitted to enter into the holy place, there the priests only went in to minister; but let the people be thankful for their place in the courts of God's house, to which they were admitted, and where they gave their attendance.

2. Great encouragement given us, in worshipping God, to do it cheerfully; (v. 2.) *Serve the Lord with gladness*. This intimates a prediction that in gospel-times there should be special occasion for joy; and it prescribes this as a rule of worship; Let God be *served with gladness*. By holy joy we do really serve God; it is an honour to him to rejoice in him; and we ought to serve him with holy joy. Gospel-worshippers should be joyful worshippers; if we serve God in uprightness, let us serve him with gladness; we must be willing and forward to it; glad when we are called to *go up to the house of the Lord*, (122. 1.) looking upon it as the comfort of our lives to have communion with God; and we must be pleasant and cheerful in it, must say, *It is good to be here*; approaching to God, in every duty, as to *God our exceeding Joy*, 43. 4. We must *come before his presence with singing*, not only songs of joy, but songs of praise; (v. 4.) *Enter into his gates with thanksgiving*. We must not only comfort ourselves, but glorify God with our joy, and let him have the praise of that which we have the pleasure of. *Be thankful to him, and bless his name*; that is, (1.) We must take it as a favour to be admitted into his service, and give him thanks that we have liberty of access to him, that we have ordinances instituted, and opportunity continued of waiting upon God in those ordinances. (2.) We must intermix praise and thanksgiving with all our services; this golden thread must run through every duty, (Heb. 13. 15.) for it is the work of angels. *In every thing give thanks; in every ordinance, as well as in every providence*.

II. The matter of praise, and motives to it, are very important, v. 3, 5. Know ye what God is in himself, and what he is to you. Note, Knowledge is the mother of devotion, and of all obedience: blind sacrifices will never please a seeing God. "Know it; consider and apply it, and then you will be more close and constant, more inward and serious, in the worship of him." Let us know then these seven things concerning the Lord Jehovah, with whom we have to do, in all the acts of religious worship:

1. That *the Lord he is God*, the only living and true God; that he is a Being infinitely perfect, self-existent, and self-sufficient, and the Fountain of all being; he is God, and not a man as we are. He is an eternal Spirit, incomprehensible and independent; the first Cause, and last End. The heathen worshipped the creature of their own fancy; the workmen made it, therefore it is not God; we worship him that made us and all the world; he is God, and all other pretended deities are vanity and a lie, and such as he has triumphed over.

2. That he is our Creator; *It is he that has made us, and not we ourselves*. I find that I am, but cannot say, *I am that I am*, and therefore must ask, Whence am I? Who made me? *Where is God my Maker?* And it is the Lord Jehovah. He gave us being, gave us this being; he is both the Former of our bodies, and the Father of our spirits. We did not, we could not, make ourselves; it is God's prerogative to be his own Cause, our being is derived and depending.

3. That therefore he is our rightful Owner. The Mazonites, by altering one letter in the Hebrew, read it, *He made us, and his we are, or to him we belong*. Put both the readings together,

and we learn, that because God *made us, and not we ourselves*, therefore we are not our own, but his. He has an incontestable right to, and property in, us and all things. His we are, to be actuated by his power, disposed of by his will, and devoted to his honour and glory.

4. That he is our sovereign Ruler; *We are his people* or subjects, and he is our Prince, our Rector or Governor, that gives law to us as mortal agents, and will call us to an account for what we do. *The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver*; we are not at liberty to do what we will, but must always make conscience of doing as we are bidden.

5. That he is our bountiful Benefactor; we are not only his sheep, whom he is entitled to, but *the sheep of his pasture*, whom he takes care of; *the flock of his feeding*, so it may be read; therefore *the sheep of his hand*; at his disposal, because *the sheep of his pasture*, 95. 7. He that made us maintains us, and gives us all good things richly to enjoy.

6. That he is a God of infinite mercy and goodness; (v. 5.) *The Lord is good*, and therefore does good; *his mercy is everlasting*; it is a fountain that can never be drawn dry; the saints, who are now the sanctified vessels of mercy, will be, to eternity, the glorified monuments of mercy.

7. That he is a God of inviolable truth and faithfulness; *His truth endures to all generations*, and no word of his shall fall to the ground as antiquated or revoked; the promise is sure to all the seed, from age to age.

PSALM CI.

David was certainly the penman of this psalm, and it has in it the genuine spirit of the man after God's own heart; it is a solemn vow which he made to God, when he took upon him the charge of a family and of the kingdom. Whether it was penned when he entered upon the government, immediately after the death of Saul, as some think, or when he began to reign over all Israel, and brought up the ark to the city of David, as others think, is not material; it is an excellent plan or model for the good government of a court, or the keeping up of virtue and piety, and, by that means, good order, in it; but it is applicable to private families; it is the householder's psalm. It instructs all that are in any sphere of power, whether larger or narrower, to use their power so as to make it a terror to evil-doers, but a praise to them that do well. Here is, I. The general scope of David's vow, v. 1, 2. II. The particulars of it, that he would detest and discountenance all manner of wickedness, (v. 3., 5, 7, 8.) and that he would favour and encourage such as were virtuous, v. 6. Some think this may fitly be accommodated to Christ, the Son of David, who governs his church, the city of the Lord, by these rules, and who loves righteousness, and hates wickedness. In singing this psalm, families, both governors and governed, should teach and admonish, and engage themselves and one another to walk by the rule of it, that peace may be upon them, and God's presence with them.

A psalm of David.

1. **I** WILL sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing. 2. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. 3. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. 4. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. 5. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. 6. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. 7. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. 8. I will early destroy all the wicked

of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD.

David here cuts out to himself and others a pattern both of a good magistrate, and a good master of a family; if these were careful to discharge the duty of their place, it would contribute very much to a universal reformation. Observe,

I. The chosen subject of the psalm; (v. 1.) *I will sing of mercy and judgment*; that is, 1. Of God's mercy and judgment, and then it looks back upon the dispensations of Providence that had respected him since he was first anointed to be king; during which time he had met with many a rebuke, and much hardship, on the one hand, and yet, on the other hand, had many wonderful deliverances wrought for him, and favours bestowed upon him; of these he will sing unto God. Note, (1.) God's providences concerning his people are commonly mixed—*mercy and judgment*; God has set the one over-against the other, and appointed them April-days, showers and sun-shine. It was so with David and his family; when there was mercy in the return of the ark, there was judgment in the death of Uzzah. (2.) When God in his providence exercises us with a mixture of mercy and judgment, it is our duty to sing, and sing unto him, both of the one and of the other; we must be suitably affected with both, and make suitable acknowledgments to God for both. The Chaldee paraphrase of this is observable; *If thou bestowest mercy upon me, or if thou bring any judgment upon me, before thee, O Lord, will I sing my hymns for all*. Whatever our outward condition is, whether joyful or sorrowful, still we must give glory to God, and sing praises to him; neither the laughter of a prosperous condition, nor the tears of an afflicted condition, must put us out of tune for sacred songs. Or, 2. It may be understood of David's mercy and judgment; he would, in this psalm, promise to be merciful, and just, or wise, for judgment is often put for discretion. To do justly, and love mercy, is the sum of our duty; these he would covenant to make conscience of in that place and relation to which God had called him; and this, in consideration of the various providences of God that had occurred to him. Family-mercies, and family-afflictions, are both of them calls to family-religion. David puts his vow into a song or psalm, that he might the better keep it in his own mind, and frequently repeat it, and that it might the better be communicated to others, and preserved in his family, for a pattern to his sons and successors.

II. The general resolution David took up to conduct himself carefully and conscientiously in his court, v. 2. We have here, 1. A good purpose concerning his conversation—concerning his conversation in general, how he would behave himself in every thing; he would live by rule, and not at large, not walk at all adventures; he would, though a king, by a solemn covenant, bind himself to his good behaviour—and concerning his conversation in his family particularly, not only how he would walk when he appeared in public, when he sat in the throne, but how he would walk *within his house*, where he was more out of the eye of the world, but where he still saw himself under the eye of God. It is not enough to put on our religion when we go abroad, and appear before men; but we must govern ourselves by it in our families. Those that are in public stations are not thereby excused from care in governing their families; nay rather, they are more concerned to set a good example of *ruling their own houses well*, 1 Tim. 3. 4. When David had his hands full of public affairs, yet he returned to bless his house, 2 Sam. 6. 20. He resolves, (1.) To act conscientiously, and with integrity, to *walk in a perfect way*, in the way of God's commandments, that is a *perfect way*, for the law of the Lord is perfect. This he will walk in, *with a perfect heart*, with all sincerity, not dissembling either with God or men. When we make the word of God our rule, and are ruled by it, the glory of God our end, and aim at it, then we walk in a *perfect way, with a perfect heart*. (2.) To act considerably, and with discretion; *I will behave myself wisely; I will understand, or instruct myself in a perfect way*; so some. I will walk circumspectly. Note, We must all resolve to walk by the rules of Christian prudence, in the ways of Christian piety. We must never

turn aside out of the perfect way, under pretence of *behaving ourselves wisely*; but, while we keep to the good way, we must be *wise as serpents*. 2. Here is a good prayer; *O when wilt thou come unto me!* Note, It is a desirable thing, when a man has a house of his own, to have God come to him, and dwell with him in it; and those may expect God's presence, that walk with a *perfect heart, in a perfect way*. If we compare the account which the historian gives of David, (1 Sam. 18. 14.) we shall find how exactly it answers his purpose and prayer, and that neither was in vain. David, as he purposed, *behaved himself wisely in all his ways*; and, as he prayed, *the Lord was with him*.

III. His particular resolution to practise no evil himself; (v. 3.) *"I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I will not design or aim at any thing but what is for the glory of God, and the public welfare."* He will never have it in his eye to enrich himself by impoverishing his subjects, or enlarge his own prerogative by encroaching on their property. In all our worldly business, we must see that that be right and good which we set our eyes upon, and not any forbidden fruit; and that we never seek that which we cannot have without sin. It is the character of a good man, that he shuts his eyes from seeing evil, Isa. 33. 15. "Nay, I hate the works of them that turn aside from the paths of equity; (Job, 31. 7.) not only I avoid it, but I abhor it, it shall not cleave to me. If any blot of injustice should come on my hands, it shall be washed off quickly."

IV. His further resolution not to keep bad servants, nor to employ those about him that were vicious. He will not countenance them, nor shew them any favour, lest thereby he should harden them in their wickedness, and encourage others to do like them. He will not converse with them himself, nor admit them into the company of his other servants, lest they should spread the infection of sin in his family. He will not confide in them, nor put them in power under him; for they who hated to be reformed would certainly hinder every thing that is good.

When he comes to mention particulars, he does not mention drunkards, adulterers, murderers, or blasphemers; such gross sinners as these he was in no danger of admitting into his house; nor did he need to covenant particularly against having fellowship with them; but he mentions those sinners who were less scandalous, but no less dangerous, and in reference to whom he needed to stand upon his guard with caution, and to behave himself wisely.

1. He will have nothing to do with spiteful malicious people, who are ill-natured, and will bear a grudge a great while, and care not what mischief they do to those they have a pique against: (v. 4.) *"A froward heart, one that delights to be cross and perverse, shall depart from me, as not fit for society, the bond of which is love. I will not know,"* that is, "I will have no acquaintance or conversation, if I can help it, with such a wicked person; for a little of the leaven of malice and wickedness will leaven the whole lump."

2. Nor with slanderers, and those who take a pleasure in wounding their neighbour's reputation secretly; (v. 5.) *"Whoso privily slanders his neighbour, either raises, or spreads, false stories, to the prejudice of his good name, him will I cut off from my family and court."* Many endeavour to raise themselves into the favour of princes by unjust representations of persons and things, which they think will please their prince; *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked*, Prov. 29. 12. But David will not only not hearken to them, but will prevent the preferment of those that hope thus to curry favour with him; he will punish not only those that falsely accuse one another in open court, but those that privily slander one another. I wish David had remembered this vow, in the case of Mephibosheth and Ziba.

3. Nor with haughty, conceited, ambitious, people; none do more mischief in a family, in a court, in a church, for *only by pride comes contention*; "Therefore, him that has a *high look, and a proud heart, will I not suffer*; I will have no patience with them that are still grasping at all preferments, for it is certain that they do not aim at doing good, but only at aggrandizing themselves and their families." God resists the proud, and so will David.

4. Nor with false deceitful people, that he not to tell lies,

or commit frauds; (v. 7.) "*He that worketh deceit*, though he may insinuate himself into my family, yet, as soon as he is discovered, he shall not dwell within my house." Some great men know how to serve their own purposes by such as are skilful to deceive, and they are fit tools for them to work by; but David will make use of no such as agents for him; *He that tells lies, shall not tarry in my sight*, but shall be expelled the house with indignation. Herein David was a man after God's own heart, for a proud look and a lying tongue are things which God hates; and he was also a type of Christ, who will, in the great day, banish from his presence all that love and make a lie, Rev. 22. 15.

V. His resolution to put those in trust under him that were honest and good; (v. 6.) *Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful in the land*. In choosing his servants, and ministers of state, he kept to the laud of Israel, and would not employ foreigners; none shall be preferred but true-born Israelites, and those such as were Israelites indeed, the faithful in the land, for even in that land there were those that were unfaithful. These faithful ones his eyes shall be upon, to discover them and find them out, for they were modest, did not crowd into the city to court preferment, but lived retired in the land, in the country, out of the way of it. Those are commonly most fit for places of honour and trust that are least fond of them; and therefore wise princes will spy out such in their recesses and privacies, and take them to dwell with them, and act under them. *He that walks in a perfect way*, that makes conscience of what he says and does, he shall serve me: the kingdom must be searched for honest men to make courtiers of; and if any man is better than another, he must be preferred. This was a good resolution of David's; but either he did not keep to it, or else his judgment was imposed upon, when he made Abithophel his right hand. It should be the care and endeavour of all masters of families, for their own sakes and their children's, to take such servants into their families as they have reason to hope fear God. The Son of David has his eyes upon the faithful in the land; his secret is with them, and they shall dwell with him. Saul chose servants for their goodliness, (1 Sam. 8. 16.) but David for their goodness.

Lastly, His resolution to extend his zeal to the reformation of the city and country, as well as of the court; (v. 8.) "*I will early destroy all the wicked of the land*, all that are discovered and convicted; the law shall have its course against them." He would do his utmost to destroy all the wicked, so that there might be none left that were notoriously wicked. He would do it early; he would lose no time, and spare no pains, he would be forward and zealous in promoting the reformation of manners and suppression of vice; and those must rise betimes that will do any thing to purpose in that work. That which he aimed at, was, not only the securing of his own government, and the peace of the country, but the honour of God in the purity of his church, *That I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord*: not Jerusalem only, but the whole land was the city of the Lord: so is the gospel-church. It is the interest of the city of the Lord to be purged from wicked doers, who both blemish it and weaken it; and it is therefore the duty of all to do what they can, in their places, toward so good a work, and to be zealously affected in it. The day is coming when the Son of David shall cut off all wicked doers from the New Jerusalem, for there shall not enter into it any that do iniquity.

PSALM CII.

Some think that David penned this psalm at the time of Absalom's rebellion; others that Daniel, Nehemiah, or some other prophet, penned it for the use of the church, when it was in captivity in Babylon, because it seems to speak of the ruin of Zion, and of a time set for the rebuilding of it, which Daniel understood by books, Dan. 9. 2. Or perhaps the psalmist was himself in great affliction, which he complains of in the beginning of this psalm, but (as in Ps. 77. and elsewhere) he comforts himself under it with the consideration of God's eternity, and the church's prosperity and perpetuity, how much soever it was now distressed and threatened. But it is clear, from the application of v. 25, 26, to Christ, (Heb. 1. 10. 12.) that the psalm has reference to the days of the Messiah, and speaks either of his affliction, or of the afflictions of his church for his sake. In the psalm we have, I. A sorrowful complaint, which the psalmist makes either for himself or in the name of the church, of great afflictions, which were

very pressing, v. 1. 11. II. Seasonable comfort fetched in against these grievances, 1. From the eternity of God, v. 12, 24, 27. 2. From a believing prospect of the deliverance which God would, in due time, work for his afflicted church, (v. 13. 22.) and the continuance of it in the world, v. 28. In singing this psalm, if we have not occasion to make the same complaints, yet we may take occasion to sympathize with those that have, and then the comfortable part of this psalm will be the more comfortable to us in the singing of it.

A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD.

1. **H**EAR my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. 2. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble: incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily. 3. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burnt as an hearth. 4. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. 5. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. 6. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. 7. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top. 8. Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are wad against me are sworn against me. 9. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping. 10. Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down. 11. My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass

The title of this psalm is very observable: it is a prayer of the afflicted; it was composed by one that was himself afflicted, afflicted with the church, and for it; on those that are of a public spirit, afflictions of that kind lie heavier than any other. It is calculated for an afflicted state, and is intended for the use of others that may be in the like distress; for whatsoever things were written before time, were written designedly for our use. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but here, as often elsewhere, the Holy Ghost has drawn up our petition for us, has put words into our mouths; (Hos. 14. 2.) *Take with you words*. Here is a prayer put into the hands of the afflicted; let them set, not their hands, but their hearts, to it, and present it to God. Note, 1. It is often the lot of the best saints in this world to be sorely afflicted. 2. Even good men may be almost overwhelmed with their afflictions, and may be ready to faint under them. 3. When our state is afflicted, and our spirits overwhelmed, it is our duty and interest to pray, and by prayer to pour out our complaints before the Lord; which intimates the leave God gives us to be free with him, and the liberty of speech we have before him, as well as liberty of access to him; it intimates, also, what an ease it is to an afflicted spirit to unburthen itself by an humble representation of its grievances and griefs.

Such a representation we have here; in which,

I. The psalmist humbly begs of God to take notice of his affliction, and of his prayer in his affliction, v. 1, 2. When we pray in our affliction, 1. It should be our care that God would graciously hear us; for, if our prayers be not pleasing to God, they will be to no purpose to ourselves. Let this therefore be in our eye, that our prayer may come unto God, even to his ears, (18. 6.) and, in order to that, let us lift up the prayer, and our souls with it. 2. It may be our hope that God will graciously hear us, because he has appointed us to seek him, and has promised we shall not seek him in vain. If we put up a prayer in faith, we may in faith say, *Hear my prayer, O Lord*; (1.) "*Manifest thyself to me; hide not thy face from me in displeasure, when*

I am in trouble. If thou dost not immediately free me, yet let me know that thou favourest me; if I see not the operations of thy hand for me, yet let me see the smiles of thy face upon me." God's hiding his face is trouble enough to a good man, even in his prosperity; (30. 7.) *Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled;* but if, when we are in trouble, God hides his face, the case is sad indeed. (2.) "Manifest thyself for me; not only hear me, but answer me; grant me the deliverance I am in want of, and in pursuit of; answer me speedily, even in the day when I call." When troubles press hard upon us, God gives us leave to be thus pressing in prayer, yet with humility and patience.

II. He makes a lamentable complaint of the low condition to which he was reduced by his afflictions.

1. His body was macerated and emaciated, and he was become a perfect skeleton, nothing but skin and bones. As prosperity and joy are represented by *making fat the bones*, and the *bones flourishing like an herb*, so great trouble and grief are here represented by the contrary; *My bones are burnt as a hearth*, (v. 3.) *they cleave to my skin*, (v. 5.) *nay, my heart is smitten, and withered like grass*; (v. 4.) it touches the vitals, and there is a sensible decay there. *I am withered like grass*, (v. 11.) scorched with the burning heat of my troubles. If we be thus brought low by bodily distempers, let us not think it strange; the body is like grass, weak, and of the earth, no wonder then that it withers.

2. He was very melancholy, and of a sorrowful spirit. He was so taken up with the thoughts of his troubles, that he *forgot to eat his bread*; (v. 4.) he had no appetite to his necessary food, nor could he relish it. When God hides his face from a soul, the delights of sense will be sapless things. He was always *sighing and groaning*, as one pressed above measure, (v. 5.) and this wasted him, and exhausted his spirits; he affected solitude, as melancholy people do; his friends deserted him, and were shy of him, and he cared as little for their company; (v. 6, 7.) "*I am like a pelican of the wilderness, or a bittern*, (so some,) *that make a doleful noise; I am like an owl*, that affects to lodge in deserted ruined buildings; *I watch, and am as a sparrow upon the house-top*. I live in a garret, and there spend my hours in poring on my troubles and bemoaning myself." Those who do thus, when they are in sorrow, humour themselves indeed; but they prejudice themselves, and know not what they do, nor what advantage they hereby give to the tempter. In affliction, we should *sit alone*, to consider our ways, (Lam. 3. 28.) but not *sit alone*, to indulge an inordinate grief.

3. He was evil spoken of by his enemies, and all manner of evil was said against him. When his friends went off from him, his foes set themselves against him; (v. 8.) *Mine enemies reproach me all the day*; designing thereby both to create vexation to himself, (for an ingenuous mind regrets reproach,) and to bring an odium upon him before men. When they could not otherwise reach him, they shot these arrows at him, even *bitter words*; in this they were unwearied, they did it *all the day*, it was a continual dropping. His enemies were very outrageous; *They are mad against me*, and very obstinate and implacable; *They are sworn against me*; as the Jews that bound themselves with an oath that they would kill Paul; or, *They have sworn against me* as accusers, to take away my life.

4. He fasted and wept under the tokens of God's displeasure; (v. 9, 10.) "*I have eaten ashes like bread*; instead of eating my bread, I have laid down in dust and ashes, and *I have mingled my drink with weeping*; when I should have refreshed myself with drinking, I have only eased myself with weeping." And what is the matter? He tells us; (v. 10.) *Because of thy wrath*. It was not so much the trouble itself that troubled him, as the wrath of God which he was under the apprehensions of, as the cause of the trouble. This, this was the *wormwood and the gall*, in the affliction and the misery; *Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down*; as that which we cast to the ground, with a design to dash it to pieces, we lift up first, that we may throw it down with the more violence; or, "Thou hast formerly lifted me up in honour, and joy, and uncommon prosperity; but the remembrance of that aggravates the present grief, and makes it the more grievous." We must eye the hand of God both in lifting us up, and casting us

down, and say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord, who both gives and takes away."

5. He looked upon himself as a *dying man*, *My days are consumed like smoke*, (v. 3.) which vanishes away quickly. Or, *They are consumed in smoke*, of which nothing remains; they are *like a shadow that declines*, (v. 11.) like the evening-shadow, or a forerunner of approaching night. Now all this, though it seems to speak the psalmist's personal calamities, and therefore is properly a prayer for a particular person afflicted, yet is supposed to be a description of the afflictions of the church of God, with which the psalmist sympathizes, making public grievances his own. The mystical body of Christ is sometimes like the psalmist's body here, *withered and parched*, nay, like *dead and dry bones*. The church sometimes is forced *into the wilderness*, seems lost, and gives up herself for gone, under the tokens of God's displeasure.

12. But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations. 13. Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. 14. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. 15. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. 16. When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. 17. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. 18. This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD. 19. For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; 20. To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death; 21. To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem; 22. When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD.

Many exceeding great and precious comforts are here thought of, and mustered up, to balance the foregoing complaints; for *unto the upright there arises light in the darkness*, so that though they are cast down, they are not in despair. It is bad with the psalmist himself, bad with the people of God; but he has many considerations to revive himself with.

I. We are dying creatures, and our interests and comforts dying, but God is an everliving, everlasting, God; (v. 12.) "*My days are like a shadow*; there is no remedy, night is coming upon me; but thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever. Our life is transient, but thine is permanent; our friends die, but thou our God diest not; what threatened us cannot touch thee; our names will be written in the dust, and buried in oblivion, but *thy remembrance shall be unto all generations*, to the end of time, nay, to eternity, thou shalt be known and honoured." A good man loves God better than himself, and therefore can balance his own sorrow and death with the pleasing thought of the unchangeable blessedness of the Eternal Mind. God *endures for ever*, his church's faithful Patron and Protector; and his honour and perpetual remembrance being very much bound up in her interests, we may be confident that they shall not be neglected.

II. Poor Zion is now in distress, but there will come a time for her relief and succour; (v. 13.) *Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion*; the hope of deliverance is built upon the goodness of God; "*Thou wilt have mercy upon Zion*; for she is become an object of thy pity;" and upon the power of God, "*Thou shalt arise and have mercy, shalt stir up thyself to do it, shalt do it in contempt of all the opposition made by the church's enemies*;" *the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this*. That which is very encouraging, is, that there is a time set for the deliver-

ance of the church, which not only will come some time, but will come at the time appointed, the time which Infinite Wisdom has appointed, and therefore it is the best time; at the time which Eternal Truth has fixed it to, and therefore it is a certain time, and shall not be forgotten or further adjourned. At the end of 70 years, the time to favour Zion, by delivering her from the daughter of Babylon, was to come, and at length it did come.

Zion was now in ruins, that is, the temple that was built in the city of David; the favouring of Zion is the building of the temple up again, as it is explained, v. 16. This is expected from the favour of God; that will set all to rights, and nothing but that, and therefore Daniel prays, (Dan. 9. 17.) *Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary, which is desolate.* The building up of Zion is as great a favour to any people as they can desire. No blessing more desirable to a ruined state than the restoring and re-establishing of their church-privileges.

Now this is here wished for, and longed for,

1. Because it would be a great rejoicing to Zion's friends; (v. 14.) *Thy servants take pleasure even in the stones of the temple, though they were thrown down and scattered, and favour the dust, the very rubbish and ruins, of it.* Observe here, that when the temple was ruined, yet the stones of it were to be had for a new building, and there were those who encouraged themselves with that, for they had a favour even for the dust of it. Those who truly love the church of God, love it when it is in affliction as well as when it is in prosperity; and it is a good ground to hope that God will favour the ruins of Zion, when he puts it into the heart of his people to favour them, and to shew that they do so by their prayers and by their endeavours; as it is also a good plea with God for mercy for Zion, that there are those who are so affectionately concerned for her, and are *waiting for the salvation of the Lord.*

2. Because it would have a good influence upon Zion's neighbours, v. 15. It will be a happy means perhaps of their conversion, at least, of their conviction; for *so the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord*, shall have high thoughts of him and his people, and even the kings of the earth shall be affected with his glory; they shall have better thoughts of the church of God than they have had, when God by his providence thus puts an honour upon it; they shall be afraid of doing any thing against it, when they see God taking its part; nay, they shall say, We will go with you, for we have *seen that God is with you*, Zech. 8. 23. Thus it is said, (Esth. 8. 17.) *that many of the people of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.*

3. Because it would redound to the honour of Zion's God; (v. 16.) *When the Lord shall build up Zion: they take it for granted it will be done, for God himself has undertaken it, and he shall then appear in his glory;* and, for that reason, all that have made his glory their highest end desire it and pray for it. Note, The edifying of the church will be the glorifying of God, and therefore we may be assured it will be done in the set time. They that pray in faith, *Father, glorify thy name*, may receive the same answer to that prayer which was given to Christ himself by a voice from heaven, *I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it yet again*, though now for a time it may be eclipsed.

III. The prayers of God's people now seem to be slighted, and no notice taken of them, but they will be reviewed, and greatly encouraged; (v. 17.) *He will regard the prayer of the destitute.* It was said, (v. 16.) that God will *appear in his glory*, such a glory as kings themselves shall *stand in awe of*, v. 15. When great men *appear in their glory*, they are apt to look with disdain upon the poor that apply themselves to them; but the great God will not do so. Observe, 1. The meanness of the petitioners; they are the *destitute*: it is an elegant word that is here used, which signifies the heath in the wilderness, a low shrub, or bush, like the hyssop of the wall. They are supposed to be in a low and broken state, enriched with spiritual blessings, but destitute of temporal good things; the poor, the weak, the desolate, the stript; thus variously is the word rendered; or it may signify that low and broken spirit which God looks for in all that draw nigh to him, and which he will graciously look upon. This will

bring them to their knees; destitute people should be praying people, 1 Tim. 5. 5. 2. The favour of God to them, notwithstanding their meanness; He will regard their prayer, and will look at it, will peruse their petition, (2 Chron. 6. 40.) and he *will not despise their prayer*. More is implied than is expressed: he will value it, and be well-pleased with it, and will return an answer of peace to it, which is the greatest honour that can be put upon it. But it is thus expressed, because others despise their praying; they themselves fear God will despise it; and he was thought to despise it, while their affliction was prolonged, and their prayers lay unanswered. When we consider our own meanness and vileness, our darkness and deadness, and the manifold defects in our prayers, we have cause to suspect that our prayers will be received with disdain in heaven; but we are here assured of the contrary, for we have an Advocate with the Father, and are under grace, not under the law.

This instance of God's favour to his praying people, though they are destitute, will be a lasting encouragement to prayer; (v. 18.) *This shall be written for the generation to come, that none may despair*, though they be destitute, nor think their prayers forgotten, because they have not an answer to them immediately. The experiences of others should be our encouragements to seek unto God and trust in him. And, if we have the comfort of the experiences of others, it is fit that we should give God the glory of them; *The people which shall be created shall praise the Lord* for what he has done both for them and for their predecessors; many that are now unborn, by reading the history of the church, shall be wrought upon to turn proselytes. The people that shall be created anew by divine grace, that are a kind of *first-fruits of his creatures*, shall praise the Lord for his answers to their prayers when they were more destitute.

IV. The prisoners under condemnation unjustly, seem as sheep appointed for the slaughter, but care shall be taken for their discharge; (v. 19, 20.) God has *looked down from the height of his sanctuary, from heaven*, where he has prepared his throne, that high place, that holy place; thence did *the Lord behold the earth*, for it is a place of prospect, and nothing on this earth is, or can be, hid from his all-seeing eye; he looks down, not to take a view of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, but to do acts of grace, to hear the groaning of the prisoners; (which we should desire to be out of the hearing of;) and not only to hear them, but to help them, to loose those that are appointed to death, then when there is but a step between them and it. Some understand it of the release of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon; God *heard their groaning* there, as he did when they were in Egypt, (Exod. 3. 7, 9.) and came down to deliver them. God takes notice not only of the prayers of his afflicted people, which are the language of grace, but even of their groans, which are the language of nature. See the divine pity in hearing the prisoners' groans, and the divine power in loosing the prisoners' bonds, even when they are appointed to death, and are pinioned and double-shackled. We have an instance in Peter, Acts, 12. 6.

Such instances as these of the divine condescension and compassion, will help, 1. *To declare the name of the Lord in Zion*, and to make it appear that he answers his name which he himself proclaimed, *The Lord God, gracious and merciful*; and this declaration of his name in Zion shall be the matter of his praise in Jerusalem, v. 21. If God by his providences declare his name, we must by our acknowledgments of them declare his praise, which ought to be the echo of his name. God will discharge his people that were prisoners and captives in Babylon, *that they may declare his name in Zion*, the place he has chosen to put his name there, and his praise in Jerusalem, at their return thither; in the land of their captivity they could not sing the songs of Zion, (137. 3, 4.) and therefore God brought them again to Jerusalem, that they might sing them there. For this end, God gives liberty from bondage; *Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name*; (142. 7.) for this, he gives life from the dead; *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee*, 119. 175. 2. They will help to draw in others to the worship of God; (v. 22.) *When the people of God are gathered together at Jerusalem*, (as they were, after their

return out of Babylon,) many out of the kingdoms joined with them to serve the Lord. This was fulfilled, (Ezra, 6. 21.) where we find that not only the children of Israel that were come out of captivity, but many that had separated themselves from them among the heathen, did keep the feast of unleavened bread with joy. But it may look further, at the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ in the latter days. Christ has proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound, that they may declare the name of the Lord in the gospel-church, in which Jews and Gentiles shall unite.

23. He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. 24. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations. 25. Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the works of thy hands. 26. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: 27. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. 28. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.

We may here observe,

I. The imminent danger that the Jewish church was in, of being quite extirpated and cut off by the captivity in Babylon; (v. 23.) *He weakened my strength in the way.* They were for many ages in the way to the performance of the great promise made to their fathers concerning the Messiah, longing as much for it as ever a traveller did to be at his journey's end; the legal institutions led them in the way; but when the ten tribes were lost in Assyria, and the two almost lost in Babylon, the strength of that nation was weakened, and, in all appearance, its day shortened, for they said, *Our hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts,* Ezek. 37. 11. And then what comes of the promise, that Shiloh should arise out of Judah, the star out of Jacob, and the Messiah out of the family of David? If these fail, the promise fails. This the psalmist speaks of as in his own person, and it is very applicable to two of the common afflictions of this time. 1. To be sickly; bodily distempers soon *weaken our strength in the way*, make the keepers of the house to tremble, and the strong men to bow themselves. 2. To be short-lived; where the former is felt, this is feared; when, in the midst of our days, according to a course of nature, our strength is weakened, what can we expect but that the *number of our months should be cut off in the midst*; and what should we do but provide accordingly? We must own God's hand in it, for in his hand our strength and time are; and must reconcile it to his love, for it has often been the lot of those that have used their strength well, to have it weakened; and of those that could very ill be spared, to have their days shortened.

II. A prayer for the continuance of it; (v. 24.) *"O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days;* let not this poor church be cut off in the midst of the days assigned it by the promise; let it not be cut off till the Messiah is come, *Destroy it not, for that blessing is in her,*" Isa. 65. 8. She is a criminal, but, for the sake of that blessing which is in her, she pleads for a reprieve. This is a prayer for the afflicted, and which, with submission to the will of God, we may in faith put up, that God would not *take us away in the midst of our days*, but that, if it be his will, he would spare us to do him further service, and to be made ripper for heaven.

III. A plea to enforce this prayer, taken from the eternity of the Messiah promised, v. 25..27. The apostle quotes these verses, (Heb. 1. 10..12.) and tells us; *He saith this to the Son,* and in that exposition we must acquiesce. It is very comfortable, in reference to all the changes that pass over the church, and all

the dangers it is in, that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* *Thy years are throughout all generations,* and cannot be shortened. It is likewise comfortable, in reference to the decay and death of our own bodies, and the removal of our friends from us, that God is an everlasting God, and that therefore, if he be our's, in him we may have everlasting consolation. In this plea observe how to illustrate the eternity of the Creator; he compares it with the mutability of the creature; for it is God's sole prerogative to be unchangeable.

1. God made the world, and therefore had a being before it from eternity; the Son of God, the Eternal Word, made the world. It is expressly said, *All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made;* and therefore the same was in the beginning, from eternity, with God, and was God, John, 1. 1..3. Col. 1. 16. Eph. 3. 9. Heb. 1. 2. Earth and heaven, and the hosts of both, include the universe and its fulness, and these derive their being from God by his Son; (v. 25.) *"Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth,* that is founded on the seas, and on the floods, and yet it abides; much more shall the church, which is built upon a rock. *The heavens are the work of thy hands,* and by thee are all their motions and influences directed;" God is therefore the Fountain, not only of all being, but of all power and dominion. See how fit the great Redeemer is to be intrusted with all power, both in heaven and in earth, since he himself, as Creator of both, perfectly knows both, and is entitled to both.

2. God will unmake the world again, and therefore shall have a being to eternity; (v. 26, 27.) *They shall perish,* for thou shalt change them by the same almighty power that made them, and therefore, no doubt, *thou shalt endure; thou art the same.* God and the world, Christ and the creature, are rivals for the innermost and uppermost place in the soul of man, the immortal soul; now what is here said, one would think, were enough to decide the controversy immediately, and to determine, as for God and Christ. For, (1.) A portion in the creature is fading and dying; *They shall perish,* they will not last so long as we shall last; the day is coming when *the earth and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up;* and then what will become of those that have laid up their treasure in it; Heaven and earth shall *wax old as a garment;* not by a gradual decay, but, when the set time comes, they shall be set aside like an old garment that we have no more occasion for; *As a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed;* not annihilated, but altered, it may be, so that they shall not be at all the same, but *new heavens and a new earth.* See God's sovereign dominion over heaven and earth; he can change them as he pleases, and when he pleases, and the constant changes they are subject to, in the revolutions of day and night, summer and winter, are earnest of their last and final change, when *the heavens and time shall be no more.* (2.) A portion in God is perpetual and everlasting; *Thou art the same,* subject to no change; and *thy years have no end,* v. 27. Christ will be the same in the performance that he was in the promise; the same to his church in captivity that he was to his church at liberty. Let not the church fear the weakening of her strength, or the shortening of her days, while Christ himself is both her Strength and her Life; he is the same, and has said, *Because I live, ye shall live also.* Christ came in the fulness of time, and set up his kingdom in spite of the power of the Old-Testament Babylon, and he will keep it up in spite of the New-Testament Babylon.

IV. A comfortable assurance of an answer to this prayer; (v. 28.) *The children of thy servants shall continue;* since Christ is the same, the church shall continue from one generation to another; from the eternity of the Head, we may infer the perpetuity of the body, though often weak and distempered, and even at death's door. They that hope to wear out the saints of the Most High will be mistaken. Christ's servants shall have children; those children shall have a seed, a succession, of professing people the church, as well as the world, is under the influence of that blessing, *Be fruitful and multiply.* These children shall continue, not in their own persons, by reason of death, but in their seed, which shall be established before God, that is, in his service, and

by his grace; the entail of religion shall not be cut off while the world stands, but, as one generation of good people passes away, another shall come, and thus the throne of Christ shall endure.

PSALM CIII.

This psalm calls more for devotion than exposition; it is a most excellent psalm of praise, and of general use. The psalmist, 1. Stirs up himself and his own soul to praise God, (v. 1, 2.) for his favour to him in particular, (v. 3, 5.) to the church in general, and to all good men, to whom he is, and will be, just, and kind, and constant, (v. 6, 18.) and for his government of the world, v. 19. 11. He desires the assistance of the holy angels, and all the works of God, in praising him, v. 20, 22. In singing this psalm, we must in a special manner get our hearts affected with the goodness of God, and enlarged in love and thankfulness.

A psalm of David.

1. **B**LESS the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, *ble*ss his holy name. 2. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: 3. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; 4. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; 5. Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

David is here communing with his own heart, and he is no fool that thus talks to himself, and excites his own soul to that which is good. Observe,

1. How he stirs up himself to the duty of praise, v. 1, 2. 1. It is the Lord that is to be blessed and spoken well of, for he is the Fountain of all good, whatever are the channels or cisterns; it is to his name, his holy name, that we are to consecrate our praise, *giving thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.* 2. It is the soul that is to be employed in blessing God, *and all that is within us.* We make nothing of our religious performances, if we do not make heart-work of them; if *that* which is *within* us, nay, if *all that is within* us, be not engaged in them. The work requires the inward man, the whole man, and all little enough. 3. In order to our return of praises to God, there must be a grateful remembrance of the mercies we have received from him; *Forget not all his benefits.* If we do not give thanks for them, we do forget them; and that is unjust as well as unkind; since in all God's favours there is so much that is memorable; "O my soul, to thy shame be it spoken, thou hast forgotten many of his benefits; but surely thou wilt not forget them all, for thou shouldest not have forgotten any."

II. How he furnishes himself with abundant matter for praise, and that which is very affecting; "Come, my soul, consider what God has done for thee."

1. "He has pardoned thy sins, (v. 3.) he has forgiven, and *does forgive, all thine iniquities.*" This is mentioned first, because, by the pardon of sin, that is taken away which kept good things from us, and we are restored to the favour of God, which bestows good things on us. Think what the provocation was, it was iniquity, and yet pardoned; how many the provocations were, and yet all pardoned; *He has forgiven all our trespasses.* It is a continued act; he is still forgiving, as we are still sinning and repenting.

2. "He has cured thy sickness." The corruption of nature is the sickness of the soul, it is its disorder, and threatens its death; this is cured in sanctification; when sin is mortified, the disease is healed; though complicated, it is all healed. Our crimes were capital, but God saves our lives by pardoning them; our diseases were mortal, but God saves our lives by healing them. These two go together, for as for God, his work is perfect, and not done by halves; if God take away the guilt of sin by pardoning mercy, he will break the power of it by renewing grace. Where Christ is made Righteousness to any soul, he is made Sanctification, 1 Cor. 1. 30.

3. "He has rescued thee from danger." A man may be in peril of life, not only by his crimes, or his diseases, but by the power of his enemies; and therefore here also we experience the divine goodness; *Who redeemeth thy life from destruction,* (v. 4.) from the destroyer; from hell, so the Chaldee; from the second death. The redemption of the soul is precious, we cannot compass it, and therefore are the more indebted to divine grace that has wrought it out, to him who has obtained *eternal redemption for us.* See Job, 33, 24, 28.

4. "He has not only saved thee from death and ruin, but has made thee truly and completely happy, with honour, pleasure, and long life."

(1.) "He has given thee true honour and great honour; no less than a crown; *He crowns thee with his loving-kindness and tender mercies;*" and what greater dignity is a poor soul capable of, than to be advanced into the love and favour of God? *This honour have all his saints.* What is the crown of glory but God's favour?

(2.) "He has given thee true pleasure; *He satisfies thy mouth with good things;*" (v. 5.) It is only the favour and grace of God, that can give satisfaction to a soul, can suit its capacities, supply its needs, and answer to its desires; nothing but divine wisdom can undertake to *fill its treasures;* (Prov. 8, 21.) other things will surfeit, but not *satisfiate,* Eccl. 6, 7. Isa. 55, 2.

(3.) "He has given thee a prospect and pledge of long life; *Thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.*" The eagle is long-lived, and, as naturalists say, when she is near 100 years old, casts all her feathers, (as indeed she changes them in a great measure every year at moulting time,) and fresh ones come, so that she becomes young again. When God, by the graces and comforts of his Spirit, recovers his people from their decays, and fills them with new life and joy, which is to them an earnest of eternal life and joy, then they may be said to *return to the days of their youth,* Job, 33, 25.

6. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. 7. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. 8. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. 9. He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* for ever. 10. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. 12. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. 13. Like as a father pitieth *his* children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. 14. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we *are* dust. 15. *As for* man, his days *are* as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. 16. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. 17. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; 18. To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

Hitherto the psalmist had only looked back upon his own experiences, and thence fetched matter for praise; here he looks abroad, and takes notice of his favour to others also, for in them we should rejoice, and give thanks for them: all the saints being fed at a common table, and sharing in the same blessings.

I. Truly God is good to all; (v. 6.) *He executes righteousness*

and judgment, not only for his own people, but for all that are oppressed; for, even in common providence, he is the Patron of wronged innocency, and, one way or other, will plead the cause of those that are injured against their oppressors. It is his honour to humble the proud, and help the helpless.

II. He is in a special manner good to Israel, to every Israelite indeed, that is of a clean and upright heart.

1. He has revealed himself and his grace to us; (v. 7.) *He made known his ways unto Moses*, and by him *his acts to the children of Israel*; not only by his rod to those who then lived, but by his pen to succeeding ages. Note, Divine revelation is one of the first and greatest of divine favours with which the church is blessed; for God restores us to himself by revealing himself to us, and gives us all good by giving us knowledge. He has made known his acts and his ways, his nature, and the methods of his dealing with the children of men, that they may know both what to conceive of him, and what to expect from him; so Dr. Hammond. Or, by his *ways* we may understand his *precepts*, the way which he requires us to walk in; and by his acts, or designs, (as the word signifies,) his promises and purposes as to what he will do with us. Thus fairly does God deal with us.

2. He has never been rigorous and severe with us, but always tender, full of compassion, and ready to forgive.

(1.) It is in his nature to be so; (v. 8.) *The Lord is merciful and gracious*; this was his way which he made known unto Moses at mount Horeb, when he thus proclaimed his name, (Exod. 34.6,7.) in answer to Moses's request, (ch. 33.13.) *I beseech thee, shew me thy way, that I may know thee*. It is my way, says God, to pardon sin. [1.] He is not soon angry, v. 8. He is *slow to anger*, not extreme to mark what we do amiss, nor ready to take advantage against us. He bears long with those that are very provoking, defers punishing, that he may give space to repent, and does not speedily execute the sentence of his law. He could not be thus *slow to anger*, if he were not *plenteous in mercy*, the very *Father of mercies*. [2.] He is not long angry; for, (v. 9.) *He will not always chide*, though we always offend, and deserve chiding. Though he signify his displeasure against us for our sins, by the rebukes of Providence, and the reproaches of our own consciences, and thus cause grief, yet he will have compassion, and will not always keep us in pain and terror, no not for our sins, but, after the spirit of bondage, will give the spirit of adoption. How unlike are those to God, who always chide, who take every occasion to chide, and never know when to cease! What would become of us, if God should deal so with us? *He will not keep his anger for ever*, against his own people, but will gather them with *everlasting mercies*, Isa. 54.8.—57.16.

(2.) We have found him so: we, for our parts, must own that *he has not dealt with us after our sins*, v.10. The scripture says a great deal of the mercy of God, and we may all set to our seal, that it is true, that we have experienced it. If he had not been a God of patience, we had been in hell long ago; but *he has not rewarded us after our iniquities*; so they will say who know what sin deserves. He has not inflicted the judgments which we have merited, nor deprived us of the comforts which we have forfeited; which should make us think the worse, and not the better, of sin; for *God's patience should lead us to repentance*, Rom. 2.4.

3. He has pardoned our sins; not only mine *iniquity*, (v. 3.) but our *transgressions*; (v. 12.) though it is of our own benefit, by the pardoning mercy of God, that we are to take the comfort, yet of the benefit others have by it we must give him the glory. Observe, (1.) The transcendent riches of God's mercy; (v. 11.) *As the heaven is high above the earth*, (so high, that the earth is but a point to the vast expanse,) so God's mercy is above the merits of those that fear him most: so much above and beyond them, that there is no proportion at all between them; the greatest performances of man's duty cannot demand the least tokens of God's favour as a debt, and therefore all the seed of Jacob will join with him in owning themselves *less than the least of all God's mercies*, Gen. 32.10. Observe, God's mercy is thus great *toward them that fear him*, not toward them that trifle with him. We must fear the Lord and his goodness. (2.) The fulness of his

pardons, an evidence of the riches of his mercy; (v. 12.) *As far as the east is from the west*, (which two quarters of the world are of greatest extent, because all known and inhabited, and therefore geographers that way reckon their longitudes,) *so far has he removed our transgressions from us*, so that they shall never be laid to our charge, nor rise up in judgment against us. The sins of believers shall be remembered no more, shall not be mentioned unto them, they shall be sought for, and not found. If we thoroughly forsake them, God will thoroughly forgive them.

4. He has pitied our sorrows, v.13,14. Observe, (1.) Whom he pities; *them that fear him*, all good people, who in this world may become objects of pity on account of the grievances to which they are not only born, but born again. Or it may be understood of those who have not yet *received the spirit of adoption*, but are yet *trembling at his word*; those he pities, Jer. 31.18,20. (2.) How he pities; *as a father pities his children*, and does them good as there is occasion. God is a Father to them that fear him, and owns them for his children, and he is tender of them as a father. The father pities his children that are weak in knowledge, and instructs them; pities them when they are froward, and bears with them; pities them when they are sick, and comforts them; pities them (Isa. 66.13.) when they are fallen, and helps them up again; pities them when they have offended, and, upon their submission, forgives them; pities them when they are wronged, and rights them; thus *the Lord pitieth them that fear him*. (3.) Why he pities; *for he knows our frame*. He has reason to know our frame, for he framed us; and, having himself made man of the dust, *he remembered that he is dust*, not only by constitution, but by sentence; *Dust thou art*. He considers the frailty of our bodies, and the folly of our souls, how little we can do, and expects accordingly from us, how little we can bear, and lays accordingly upon us; in all which appears the tenderness of his compassion.

5. He has perpetuated his covenant-mercy, and thereby provided relief for our frailty, v.15..18. See here,

(1.) How short man's life is, and of what uncertain continuance; the lives even of great men and good men are so; and neither their greatness nor their goodness can alter the property of them; *As for man, his days are as grass*, which grows out of the earth, rises but a little way above it, and soon withers, and returns to it again. See Isa. 40.6,7. Man, in his best estate, seems somewhat more than grass, he flourishes and looks gay; yet then he is but *like a flower of the field*, which, though distinguished a little from the grass, will wither with it. The flower of the garden is commonly more choice and valuable, and, though in its own nature withering, will last the longer for its being sheltered by the garden-wall, and the gardener's care; but the flower of the field (to which life is here compared) is not only withering in itself, but exposed to the cold blasts, and liable to be cropt and trod on by the beasts of the field. Man's life is not only wasting of itself, but its period may be anticipated by a thousand accidents. When the flower is in its perfection, a blasting wind, unseen, unlooked for, *passes over it, and it is gone*; it hangs the head, drops the leaves, dwindles into the ground again, and the *place thereof*, which was proud of it, now *knows it no more*. Such a thing is man: God considers it, and pities him; let him consider it himself, and be humble, dead to this world, and thoughtful of another.

(2.) How long and lasting God's mercy is to his people; (v.17,18.) it will continue longer than their lives, and will survive their present state. Observe,

[1.] The description of those to whom this mercy belongs; they are such as fear God, such as are truly religious, from principle. First, They live a life of faith; for they *keep God's covenant*, having taken hold of it, they keep hold of it, fast hold, and will not let it go. They keep it as a treasure, keep it as their portion, and would not for all the world part with it, for it is their life. Secondly, They live a life of obedience; they *remember his commandments to do them*, else they do not *keep his covenant*. Those only shall have the benefit of God's promises that make *conscience of his precepts*. See who they are that have a good

memory, as well as a *good understanding*, (111. 10.) those that *remember God's commandments*, not to talk of them, but to *do* them, and to be ruled by them.

[2.] The continuance of the mercy which belongs to such as these: it will last them longer than their lives on earth, and therefore they need not be troubled though their lives be short, since death itself will be no abridgment, no infringement, of their bliss. God's mercy is better than life, for it will out-live it; *First*, To their souls, which are immortal, to them the mercy of the Lord is *from everlasting to everlasting*; from everlasting in the councils of it, to everlasting in the consequences of it; in their election before the world was, and their glorification when this world shall be no more; for they are predestinated to the inheritance, (Eph. 1. 11.) and *look for the mercy of the Lord*, the Lord Jesus, unto eternal life. *Secondly*, To their seed, which shall be kept up to the end of time: (102. 28.) *His righteousness*, the truth of his promise, shall be *unto children's children*; provided they tread in the steps of their predecessors' piety, and *keep his covenant*, as they did, then shall mercy be preserved to them, even to a *thousand generations*.

19. The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. 20. Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. 21. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. 22. Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.

Here is,

I. The doctrine of universal providence laid down, v. 19. He has secured the happiness of his peculiar people by promise and covenant, but the order of mankind, and the world in general, he secures by common providence. *The Lord has a throne of his own*, a throne of glory, a throne of government; he that made all, rules all, and both by a word of power; *he has prepared his throne*, has fixed and established it that it cannot be shaken; he has fore-ordained all the measures of his government, and does all according to the counsel of his own will. *He has prepared it in the heavens*, above us, and out of sight; for he *holds back the face of his throne*, and *spreads a cloud upon it*, (Job. 26. 9.) yet can himself *judge through the dark cloud*, Job. 22. 13. Hence *the heavens are said to rule*, (Dan. 4. 26.) and we are led to consider this by the influence which even the visible heavens have upon this earth, their *dominion*, Job. 38. 33. Gen. 1. 16. But though God's throne is in heaven, and there he keeps his court, and thither we are to direct to him, (*Our Father which art in heaven*;) yet *his kingdom rules over all*. He takes cognizance of all the inhabitants, and all the affairs, of this lower world, and disposes all persons and things according to the counsel of his will, to his own glory; (Dan. 4. 35.) *His kingdom rules over all kings*, and all kingdoms, and from it there is no exempt jurisdiction.

II. The duty of universal praise inferred from it: if all are under God's dominion, all must do him homage.

1. Let the holy angels praise him; (v. 20, 21.) *Bless the Lord, ye his angels*; and again, *Bless the Lord, all ye his hosts, ye ministers of his*. David had been stirring up himself and others to praise God, and here, in the close, he calls upon the angels to do it: not as if they needed any excitement of ours to praise God, they do it continually; but thus he expresses his high thoughts of God as worthy of the adorations of the holy angels; thus he quickens himself and others to the duty, with this consideration, That it is the work of angels; and comforts himself, in reference to his own weakness and defect in the performance of this duty, with this consideration, That there is a world of holy angels who dwell in God's house, and are still praising him. In short, the blessed angels are glorious attendants upon the blessed God.

Observe, (1.) How well qualified they are for the post they are in. They are able; for they *excel in strength*; they are *mighty in strength*, so the word is: they are able to bring great things to pass, and to abide in their work without weariness. And they are as willing as they are able; they are willing to *know* their work; for they *hearken to the voice of his word*; they stand expecting commission and instructions from their great Lord, and *always behold his face*, (Matth. 18. 10.) that they may take the first intimation of his mind. They are willing to *do* their work; they *do his commandments*, (v. 20.) they *do his pleasure*, (v. 21.) they dispute not any divine commands, but readily address themselves to the execution of them: nor do they delay, but fly swiftly. *They do his commandments at hearing*; or, as soon as they hear the voice of his word: so Dr. Hammond. *To obey is better than sacrifice*; for angels obey, but do not sacrifice. (2.) What their service is; they are *his angels*, and *ministers of his*; his, for he made them, and made them for himself; his, for he employs them, though he does not need them; his, for he is their Owner and Lord, they belong to him, and he has them at his beck. All the creatures are his servants, but not as the angels that attend the presence of his glory. Soldiers, and seamen, and all good subjects, serve the king, but not as the courtiers do, the ministers of state, and those of the household. [1.] The angels occasionally serve God in this lower world; they *do his commandments*, go on his errands, (Dan. 9. 21.) fight his battles, (2 Kings, 6. 17.) and minister for the good of his people, Heb. 1. 14. [2.] They *continually praise him* in the upper world; they began betimes to do it, (Job. 38. 7.) and it is still their business, from which they rest not *day or night*, Rev. 4. 8. It is God's glory, that he has such attendants, but more his glory, that he neither needs them, nor is benefited by them.

2. Let all his works praise him; (v. 22.) all, in all places of his dominion; for, because they are his works, they are under his dominion; and they were made, and are ruled, that they may be unto him for a name and a praise. All his works, that is, all the children of men, in all parts of the world, let them all praise God; yea, and the inferior creatures too, which are God's works also, let them praise him objectively, though they cannot actually do it; (145. 10.) yet all this shall not excuse David from doing it, but rather excite him to do it the more cheerfully, that he may bear a part in this concert; for he concludes, *Bless the Lord, O my soul*, as he began, v. 1. Blessing God, and giving him glory, must be the alpha and the omega of all our services. He began with *Bless the Lord, O my soul*; and, when he had penned and sung this excellent hymn to his honour, he does not say, Now, O my soul, thou hast blessed the Lord, sit down and rest thee, but, *Bless the Lord, O my soul*, yet more and more. When we have done ever so much in the service of God, yet still we must stir up ourselves to do more. God's praise is a subject that will never be exhausted, and therefore we must never think this work done till we come to heaven, where it will be for ever in the doing.

PSALM CIV.

It is very probable that this psalm was penned by the same hand, and at the same time, as the former; for as that ended, this begins, with *Bless the Lord, O my soul*, and concludes with it too. The style, indeed, is somewhat different, because the matter is so: the scope of the foregoing psalm was to celebrate the goodness of God, and his tender mercy and compassion, to which a soft and sweet style was most agreeable: the scope of this is to celebrate his greatness and majesty, and sovereign dominion, which ought to be done in the most stately lofty strains of poetry. David, in the former psalm, gave God the glory of his covenant-mercy and love to his own people, in this, he gives him the glory of his works of creation and providence, his dominion over, and his bounty to, all the creatures. God is there praised as the God of grace, here as the God of nature. And this psalm is wholly bestowed on that subject; not as Ps. 19, which begins with it, but passes from it to the consideration of the divine law; nor as Ps. 8, which speaks of this but prophetically, and with an eye to Christ. This noble poem is thought, by very competent judges, greatly to excel, not only for piety and devotion, (that is past dispute,) but for flight of fancy, brightness of ideas, surprising turns, and all the beauties and ornaments of expression, any of the Greek or Latin poets upon any subject of this nature. Many great things the psalmist here gives God the glory of, I. The splendour of his majesty in the upper world, v. 1. 4. II. The creation of the sea, and the dry land, v. 5. 9. III. The provision he makes for the maintenance of all the creatures according

to their nature, (v. 10..18.) and again, v. 27, 28. IV. The regular course of the sun and moon, v. 19..24. V. The furniture of the sea, v. 25, 26. VI. God's sovereign power over all the creatures, v. 29..32. And, lastly, he concludes with a pleasant and firm resolution to continue praising God; (v. 33..35.) with which we should heartily join, in singing this psalm.

1. **B**LESS the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. 2. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: 3. Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: 4. Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire: 5. Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. 6. Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. 7. At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away. 8. They go up by the mountains; they go down by the vallies unto the place which thou hast founded for them. 9. Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth.

When we are addressing ourselves to any religious service, we must stir up ourselves to take hold on God in it; (Isa. 64. 7.) so David does here. "Come, my soul, where art thou? What art thou thinking of? Here is work to be done, good work, angels' work; set about it in good earnest, let all thy powers and faculties be engaged and employed in it; Bless the Lord, O my soul."

In these verses,

I. The psalmist looks up to the divine glory shining in the upper world, of which, though it is one of the things not seen, faith is the evidence. With what reverence and holy awe does he begin his meditation with that acknowledgment, *O Lord my God, thou art very great!* It is the joy of the saints, that he who is their God is a great God; the grandeur of the prince is the pride and pleasure of all his good subjects. The majesty of God is here set forth by divers instances, alluding to the figure which great princes in their public appearances covet to make; their equipage, compared with his, (even of the eastern kings, who most affected pomp,) is but as the light of a glow-worm, compared with that of the sun when he goes forth in his strength. Princes appear great,

1. In their robes; and what are God's robes? *Thou art clothed with honour and majesty*, v. 1. God is seen in his works, and these bespeak him infinitely wise and good, and all that is great. *Thou coverest thyself with light, as with a garment*, v. 2. God is light, (1 John, 1. 5.) the Father of lights; (Jam. 1. 17.) he dwells in light, (1 Tim. 6. 16.) he clothes himself with it. The residence of his glory is in the highest heaven, that light which was created the first day, Gen. 1. 3. Of all visible beings, light comes nearest to the nature of a spirit, and therefore with that God is pleased to cover himself, that is, to reveal himself under that similitude, as men are seen in the clothes with which they cover themselves; and so only, for his face cannot be seen.

2. In their palaces, or pavilions, when they take the field: and what is God's palace, and his pavilion? He stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain; (v. 2.) so he did at first, when he made the firmament, which in the Hebrew has its name from its being expanded or stretched out, Gen. 1. 7. He made it to divide the waters as a curtain divides between two apartments: so he does still; he now stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain, keeps them upon the stretch, and they continue to this day according to his ordinance. The regions of the air are stretched out about the earth, like a curtain about a bed, to keep it warm, and drawn between us and the upper world, to break its dazzling light; for though God

covers himself with light, yet, in compassion to us, he makes darkness his pavilion; thick clouds are a covering to him. The vastness of this pavilion may lead us to consider how great, how very great, he is, that fills heaven and earth. He has his chambers, his upper rooms, so the word signifies, the beams whereof he lays in the waters, the waters that are above the firmament, (v. 3.) as he has founded the earth upon the seas and floods, the waters beneath the firmament. Though air and water are fluid bodies, yet, by the divine power, they are kept as tight and as firm in the place assigned them, as a chamber is with beams and rafters. How great a God is he, whose presence-chamber is thus reared, thus fixed!

3. In their coaches of state, and their stately horses, which add much to the magnificence of their entries: but God makes the clouds his chariots, in which he rides strongly, swiftly, and far above out of the reach of opposition, when at any time he will act by uncommon providences in the government of this world. He descended in a cloud, as in a chariot, to mount Sinai, to give the law, and to mount Tabor, to proclaim the gospel, (Matth. 17. 5.) and he walks (a gentle pace indeed, yet stately) upon the wings of the wind. See 18. 10, 11. He commands the winds, directs them as he pleases, and serves his own purposes by them.

4. In their retinue or train of attendants: and here also God is very great; for (v. 4.) he maketh his angels spirits. This is quoted by the apostle, (Heb. 1. 7.) to prove the pre-eminence of Christ above the angels. The angels are here said to be his angels and his ministers, for they are under his dominion, and at his disposal; they are winds, and a flame of fire, that is, they appeared in wind and fire, so some; or, they are as swift as winds, and pure as flames; or he maketh them spirits, so the apostle quotes it. They are spiritual beings; and, whatever vehicles they may have proper to their nature, it is certain they have not bodies, as we have. Being spirits, they are so much the further removed from the incumbrances of the human nature, and so much the nearer allied to the glories of the divine nature. And they are bright and quick, and ascending as fire, as a flame of fire. In Ezekiel's vision, they ran and returned like a flash of lightning, Ezek. 1. 14. Thence they are called Seraphim, burners. Whatever they are, they are what God made them, what he still makes them; they derive their being from him, having the being he gave them, are held in being by him, and he makes what use he pleases of them.

II. He looks down, and looks about, to the power of God shining in this lower world. He is not so taken up with the glories of his court, as to neglect even the remotest of his territories; no, not the sea and dry land.

1. He has founded the earth; (v. 5.) though he has hung it upon nothing, (Job, 26. 2.) ponderibus librata suis—balanced by its own weight; yet it is as immovable as if it had been laid upon the surest foundations. He has built the earth upon her basis, so that though it has received a dangerous shock by the sin of man, and the malice of hell strikes at it, yet it shall not be removed for ever, that is, not till the end of time, when it must give way to the new earth. Dr. Hammond's paraphrase of this is worth noting. "God has fixed so strange a place for the earth, that, being a heavy body, one would think it should fall every minute; and yet, which way soever we would imagine it to stir, it must, contrary to the nature of such a body, fall upwards, and so can have no possible ruin but by tumbling into heaven."

2. He has set bounds to the sea; for that also is his.

(1.) He brought it within bounds in the creation. At first, the earth, which, being the more ponderous body, would subside of course, was covered with the deep, (v. 6.) the waters were above the mountains; and so it was unfit to be, as it was designed, a habitation for man; and therefore, on the third day, God said, *Let the waters under the heaven be gathered unto one place, and let the dry land appear*, Gen. 1. 9. This command of God is here called his rebuke, as if he gave it because he was displeased that the earth was thus covered with water, and not fit for man to dwell on. Power went along with this word, and therefore it is also called here the voice of his thunder, which is a mighty voice, and produces strange effects, v. 7. At thy rebuke, as if they were made sensible that they were out of their place, they fled, they hasted away;

(they called, and not in vain, to the rocks and mountains to cover them;) as it is said, on another occasion, (77.16.) *The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee, they were afraid.* Even those fluid bodies received the impression of God's terror. But *was the Lord displeased against the rivers?* No, it was for the salvation of his people, Hab. 3.8, t3. So here, God rebuked the waters for man's sake, to prepare room for him; for *men must not be made as the fishes of the sea*, (Hab. 1.14.) they must have air to breathe in. Immediately, therefore, with all speed, the waters retired, v. 8. *They go over hill and dale*, (as we say,) *go up by the mountains, and down by the vallies*; they will neither stop at the former, nor lodge in the latter, but make the best of their way to the place which thou hast founded for them, and there they make their bed. Let the obsequiousness even of the unstable waters teach us obedience to the word and will of God: for shall man alone of all the creatures be obstinate? Let their retiring to, and resting in, the place assigned them, teach us to acquiesce in the disposals of that wise providence which appoints us the bounds of our habitation.

(2.) He keeps it within bounds, (v.9.) The waters are forbidden to pass over the limits set them; they may not, and therefore they do not, *turn again to cover the earth.* Once they did, in Noah's flood, because God bade them, but never since, because he forbids them, having promised not to drown the world again. God himself glories in this instance of his power, (Job, 38.8, &c.) and uses it as an argument with us to fear him, Jer. 5.22. This, if duly considered, would keep the world in awe of the Lord and his goodness, That the waters of the sea would soon cover the earth, if God did not restrain them.

10. He sendeth the springs into the vallies, *which* run among the hills. 11. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. 12. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, *which* sing among the branches. 13. He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. 14. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; 15. And wine *that* maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make *his* face to shine, and bread *which* strengtheneth man's heart. 16. The trees of the LORD are full of *sap*; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; 17. Where the birds make their nests: *as for* the stork, the fir trees *are* her house. 18. The high hills *are* a refuge for the wild goats; *and* the rocks for the conies.

Having given glory to God, as the powerful Protector of this earth, in saving it from being deluged, here he comes to acknowledge him as its bountiful Benefactor, who provides conveniencies for all the creatures.

I. He provides fresh water for their drink; *He sends the springs into the vallies*, v.10. There is water enough indeed in the sea, that is, enough to drown us, but not one drop to refresh us, be we ever so thirsty, it is all so salt; and therefore God has graciously provided water fit to drink. Naturalists dispute about the origin of fountains; but, whatever are their second causes, here is their first Cause; it is God that *sends the springs into the brooks, which* walk by easy steps between *the hills*, and receive increase from the rain-water that descends from them. These *give drink*, not only to man, and those creatures that are immediately useful to him, but to *every beast of the field*; (v.11.) for where God has given life, he provides a livelihood, and takes care of all the creatures; even *the wild asses*, though untameable, and therefore of no use to man, *are welcome to quench their thirst*; and we have no reason to

grudge it them, for we are better provided for, though *born like the wild ass's colt.* We have reason to thank God for the plenty of fair water with which he has provided the habitable part of his earth, which otherwise would not be habitable. That ought to be reckoned a great mercy, the want of which would be a great affliction: and the more common it is, the greater mercy it is; *Usus communis aquarum—Water is for common use.*

II. He provides food convenient for them, both for man and beast; *the heavens drop fatness*; they *hear the earth*, but God *hears them*, Hos. 2.21. *He waters the hills from his chambers*, (v.13.) from those chambers spoken of, (v.3.) *the beams of which he lays in the waters*, those store-chambers, the clouds that distil the fruitful showers. The hills that are not watered by the rivers, as Egypt was by Nile, are watered by the rain from heaven, which is called *the river of God*, (65.9.) as Canaan was, Deut. 11.11,12. Thus *the earth is satisfied with the fruit of his works*; either with the rain it drinks in, (the earth knows when it has enough, it is pity that any man should not,) or with the products it brings forth. It is a satisfaction to the earth to bear the fruit of God's works for the benefit of man, for thus it answers the end of its creation. The food which God brings forth out of the earth, (v.14.) is *the fruit of his works, which the earth is satisfied with.* Observe how various and how valuable its products are; for the cattle there is grass, and the beasts of prey, that live not on grass, feed on those that do. For man there is herb, a better sort of grass, (and a dinner of herbs and roots is not to be despised,) nay, he is furnished with *wine, and oil, and bread*, v.15.

We may observe here, concerning our food, that which will help to make us both humble and thankful. 1. To make us humble, let us consider that we have a necessary dependence upon God for all the supports of this life; we live upon alms, we are at his finding, for our own hands are not sufficient for us: that our food comes all out of the earth, to remind us whence we ourselves were taken, and whither we must return; and that, therefore, we must not think to *live by bread alone*, for that will feed the body only, but must look into the word of God for the meat that endures to eternal life; and, further, that we are in this respect fellow-commoners with the beasts: the same earth, the same spot of ground, that brings grass for the cattle, brings corn for man. 2. To make us thankful, let us consider, (1.) That God not only provides for us, but for our servants: the cattle that are of use to man are particularly taken care of; grass is made to grow in great abundance for them, when the *young lions*, that are not for the service of man, often *lack, and suffer hunger.* (2.) That our food is nigh us, and ready to us: having our habitation on the earth, there we have our storehouse, and depend not on the *merchant-ships that bring food from afar*, Prov. 31.14. (3.) That we have even from the products of the earth, not only for necessity, but for ornament and delight; so good a Master do we serve. [1.] Does nature call for something to support it, and repair its daily decays? Here is *bread, which strengthens man's heart*, and is therefore called *the staff of life*; let none who have that complain of want. [2.] Does nature go further, and covet something pleasant? Here is *wine, that makes glad the heart*, refreshes the spirits, and exhilarates them, when it is soberly and moderately used; that we may not only go through our business, but go through it cheerfully. It is pity that that should be abused to overcharge the heart, and unfit men for their duty, which was given to revive their heart, and quicken them in their duty. [3.] Is nature yet more humoursome, and does it crave something for ornament too? Here is that also out of the earth; *oil to make the face to shine*, that the countenance may not only be cheerful but beautiful, and we may be the more acceptable to one another.

Nay, the Divine Providence not only furnishes animals with their proper food, but vegetables also with their's; (v.16.) *The trees of the Lord are full of sap*; not only men's trees, which they take care of, and have an eye to, in their orchards, and parks, and other inclosures, but God's trees, which grow in the wildernesses, and are taken care of only by his providence, they *are full of sap*, and want no nourishment; even *the cedars of Lebanon*, an open forest, though they are high and bulky, and require a great deal of

asp to feed them, have enough from the earth; they are trees *which he has planted*, and which therefore he will protect and provide for. We may apply this to the trees of righteousness, which are the planting of the Lord, planted in his vineyard; these *are full of sap*; for what God plants he will water; and they that *are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God*, 92. 13.

III. He takes care that they shall have suitable habitations to dwell in. To men God has given discretion to build for themselves, and for the cattle that are serviceable to them; but there are some creatures which God more immediately provides a settlement for.

1. The birds. Some birds, by instinct, make their nests in the bushes near rivers; (v. 12.) *By the springs that run among the hills*, some of the *fowls of heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches*. They sing, according to their capacity, to the honour of their Creator and Benefactor; and their singing may shame our silence. Our *heavenly Father feeds them*, (Matth. 6. 26.) and therefore they are easy and cheerful, and take no thought for the morrow. The birds being made to *fly above the earth*, (as we find, Gen. 1. 20.) they *make their nests on high*, in the tops of trees; (v. 17.) it should seem as if nature had an eye to this in *planting the cedars of Lebanon*, that they might be receptacles for the birds. Those that fly heaven-ward shall not want resting-places. *The stork* is particularly mentioned; *the fir-trees*, which are very high, are *her house*, her castle.

2. The lesser sort of beasts; (v. 18.) *The wild goats*, having neither strength nor swiftness to secure themselves, are guided by instinct to *the high hills*, which are a refuge to them; and the rabbits, which are also helpless animals, find a shelter in the rocks, where they can set the beasts of prey at defiance. Does God provide thus for the inferior creatures, and will he not himself be a Refuge and Dwelling-Place to his own people?

19. He appointeth the moon for seasons: *the sun knoweth his going down*. 20. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. 21. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. 22. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. 23. Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening. 24. O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. 25. *So is this great and wide sea*, wherein *are things creeping innumerable*, both small and great beasts. 26. There go the ships: *there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein*. 27. These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give *them* their meat in due season. 28. *That* thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. 29. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. 30. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.

We are here taught to praise and magnify God,

I. For the constant revolutions and succession of day and night, and the dominion of sun and moon over them. The heathen were so affected with the light and influence of the sun and moon, and their serviceableness to the earth, that they worshipped them as deities; and therefore the scripture takes all occasions to shew that the gods they worshipped are the creatures and servants of the true God; (v. 19.) *He appointed the moon for seasons*, for the

measuring of the months, the directing of the seasons for the business of the husbandman, and the governing of the tides. The full and change, the increase and decrease, of the moon, exactly observe the appointment of the Creator; so does the sun, for he keeps as punctually to the time and place of his going down as if he were an intellectual being, and knew what he did.

God herein consults the comfort of man.

1. The shadows of the evening befriend the repose of the night; (v. 20.) *Thou makest darkness, and it is night*, which, though black, contributes to the beauty of nature, and is as a foil to the light of the day; and under the protection of the night *all the beasts of the forest creep forth* to feed, which they are afraid to do in the day, God having put the *fear and dread of man upon every beast of the earth*, (Gen. 9. 2.) which contributes as much to man's safety as to his honour. See how nearly allied they are to the disposition of the wild beasts, who *wait for the twilight*, (Job, 24. 15.) and have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; and compare to this the danger of ignorance and melancholy, which are both as darkness to the soul; when, either of those ways, *it is night*, then *all the beasts of the forest creep forth*, Satan's temptations then assault us, and have advantage against us. Then the *young lions roar after their prey*; and, as naturalists tell us, their roaring terrifies the timorous beasts, so that they have not strength or spirit to outrun them, which otherwise they might do, and so they become an easy prey to them. They are said to *seek their meat from God*, because it is not prepared for them by the care and forecast of man, but more immediately by the providence of God. The *roaring* of the young lions, like the *crying* of the young ravens, is interpreted, *asking their meat of God*. Does God put this construction upon the language of mere nature, even in venomous creatures, and shall he not much more interpret favourably the language of grace in his own people, though it be *weak and broken groanings which cannot be uttered*?

2. The light of the morning befriends the business of the day; (v. 22, 23.) *The sun arises*, (for, as he *knows his going down*, so, thanks be to God, he knows his rising again,) and then the wild beasts betake themselves to their rest, even they have some society among them, for they *gather themselves together*, and *lay them down in their dens*, which is a great mercy to the children of men, that while they are abroad, as become honest travellers, between sun and sun, care is taken that they shall not be set upon by wild beasts, for they are then drawn out of the field, and the sluggard shall have no opportunity to excuse himself from the business of the day, with this, That there is *a lion in the way*. Therefore, then *man goes forth to his work and to his labour*; the beasts of prey creep forth with fear, man goes forth with boldness, as one that has dominion. The beasts creep forth to spoil and do mischief, man goes forth to work and do good. There is the work of every day, which is to be done in its day, which man must apply to every morning, for the lights are set up for us to work by, not to play by; and which we must stick to till evening; it will be time enough to rest when the night comes, in which *no man can work*.

II. For the replenishing of the ocean; (v. 25, 26.) *As the earth is full of God's riches*, well-stocked with animals, and those well provided for, so that it is seldom that any creature dies merely for want of food; *so is this great and wide sea*, which seems a useless part of the globe, at least, not to answer the room it takes up; yet God has appointed it its place, and made it serviceable to man, both for navigation, (there go the ships, in which goods are conveyed to countries vastly distant, speedily, and much cheaper than by land-carriage,) and also to be his store-house for fish; God made not the sea in vain, any more than the earth, he *made it to be inherited*, for *there are things swimming innumerable, both small and great animals*, which serve for man's dainty food. The whale is particularly mentioned in the history of the creation, (Gen. 1. 21.) and is here called the *Leviathan*, as Job, 41. 1. He is made to *play in the sea*; he has nothing to do, as man has, who *goes forth to his work*; he has nothing to fear, as the beasts have, that lie down in their dens; and therefore he plays with the waters. It is pity that any of the children of men, who have nobler powers, and were made for nobler purposes, should live as if they

were sent into the world, like Leviathan into the waters, to play therein; spending all their time in pastime. The Leviathan is said to *play in the waters*, because he is so well armed against all assaults, that he sets them at defiance, and *laughs at the shaking of a spear*, Job, 41. 29.

III. For the seasonable and plentiful provision which is made for all the creatures, v. 27, 28. 1. God is a bountiful Benefactor to them; he *gives them their meat*; he *opens his hand, and they are filled with good*. He supports the armies both of heaven and earth; even the meanest creatures are not below his cognizance. He is open-handed in the gifts of his bounty, and is a great and good Housekeeper that provides for so large a family. 2. They are patient expectants from him. They all wait upon him; they seek their food, according to the natural instinct God has put into them, and in the proper season for it; and affect not any other food, or at any other time, than nature has ordained; they do their part for the obtaining of it; what God gives them they gather, and expect not that Providence should put it into their mouths; and what they gather they are satisfied with; they are filled with good; they desire no more than what God sees fit for them, which may shame our murmurings and discontent, and dissatisfaction with our lot.

IV. For the absolute power and sovereign dominion which he has over all the creatures, by which every species of each is still continued, though the individuals of each are daily dying and dropping off. See here, 1. All the creatures perishing; (v. 29.) *Thou hidest thy face, withdrawest thy supporting power, thy supplying bounty, and they are troubled immediately*. Every creature has as necessary a dependence upon God's favours as every saint is sensible he has, and therefore says with David, (Ps. 30. 7.) *Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled*. God's displeasure against this lower world for the sin of man is the cause of all the vanity and burthen which the whole creation groans under. *Thou takest away their breath, which is in thy hand, and then, and not till then, they die and return to their dust, to their first principles*. The spirit of the beast, which goes downward, is at God's command, as well as the spirit of a man, which goes upward. The death of cattle was one of the plagues of Egypt, and is particularly taken notice of in the drowning of the world. 2. All preserved notwithstanding, in a succession; (v. 30.) *Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; the same spirit, the same divine will and power, by which they were all created at first, still preserves the several sorts of creatures in their being, and place, and usefulness; so that, though one generation of them passes away, another comes, and from time to time they are created; new ones rise up instead of the old ones, and this is a continual creation*. Thus the *face of the earth is renewed* from day to day by the light of the sun, which beautifies it anew every morning; from year to year by the products of it, which enrich it anew every spring, and put quite another face upon it from what it had all winter. The world is as full of creatures as if none died, for the place of those that die is filled up. This (the Jews say) is to be applied to the resurrection, which every spring is an emblem of, when a new world rises out of the ashes of the old one.

In the midst of this discourse the psalmist breaks out into wonder at the works of God; (v. 24.) *O Lord, how manifold are thy works!* They are numerous, they are various, of many kinds, and many of every kind; and yet *in wisdom hast thou made them all*. When men undertake many works, and of different kinds, commonly some of them are neglected, and not done with due care; but God's works, though many, and of very different kinds, are all made in wisdom, and with the greatest exactness; there is not the least flaw or defect in them. The works of art, the more closely they are looked upon with the help of microscopes, the more rough they appear; the works of nature through these glasses appear more fine and exact. They are all made in wisdom, for they are all made to answer the end they were designed to serve, the good of the universe, in order to the glory of the universal Monarch.

31. The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever:

the LORD shall rejoice in his works. 32. He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth: he toucheth the hills, and they smoke. 33. I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise unto my God while I have my being. 34. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD. 35. Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the LORD, O my soul. Praise ye the LORD.

The psalmist concludes this meditation with speaking,

1. Praise to God, which is chiefly intended in the psalm.

(1.) He is to be praised, [1.] As a great God, and a God of matchless perfection; *The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever*, v. 31. It shall endure to the end of time, in his works of creation and providence; it shall endure to eternity, in the felicity and adorations of saints and angels. Man's glory is fading, God's glory is everlasting; creatures change, but with the Creator there is no variableness. [2.] As a gracious God; *The Lord shall rejoice in his works*. He continues that complacency in the products of his own wisdom and goodness which he had when he *saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good, and rested the seventh day*. We often do that which, upon the review, we cannot rejoice in, but are displeased at, and wish undone again, blaming our own management. But God always *rejoices in his works*, because they are all done in wisdom. We regret our bounty and beneficence, but God never does; he rejoices in the works of his grace, his *gifts and callings are without repentance*. [3.] As a God of almighty power; (v. 32.) *He looks on the earth, and it trembles*, as unable to bear his frowns; trembles, as Sinai did, *at the presence of the Lord. He toucheth the hills, and they smoke*. The volcanoes, or burning mountains, such as Ætna, are emblems of the power of God's wrath fastening upon proud unhumiliated sinners. If an angry look and a touch have such effects, what will the weight of his heavy hand do, and the operations of his outstretched arm? *Who knows the power of his anger?* Who then dares set it at defiance? God *therefore* rejoices in his works, because they are all so observant of him; and he will in like manner *take pleasure in them that fear him, and that tremble at his word*.

(2.) The psalmist will himself be much in praising him; (v. 33.) *"I will sing unto the Lord, unto my God, will praise him as Jehovah, the Creator, and as my God, a God in covenant with me, and this not now only, but as long as I live, and while I have my being."* Because we have our life and being from God, and depend upon him for the support and continuance of it, as long as we live and have our being, we must continue to praise God; and when we have no life, no being on earth, we hope to have a better life and better being in a better world, and there to be doing this work in a better manner, and in better company.

2. Joy to himself; (v. 34.) *My meditation of him shall be sweet*; it shall be fixed and close, it shall be affecting and influencing, and therefore it shall be sweet. Thoughts of God will *then* be most pleasing when they are most powerful. Note, Divine meditation, is a very sweet duty to all that are sanctified. *"I will be glad in the Lord"*, it shall be a pleasure to me to praise him; I will be glad of all opportunities to set forth his glory; and *I will rejoice in the Lord always, and in him only*. All my joys shall centre in him, and in him they shall be full.

3. Terror to the wicked; (v. 35.) *Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more*. (1.) They that oppose the God of power, and fight against him, will certainly be consumed: none can prosper that harden themselves against the Almighty. (2.) They that rebel against the light of such convincing evidence of God's being, and refuse to serve him, whom all the creatures serve, will justly be consumed. They that make that earth to groan under the burthen of their impieties, which God thus fills with his riches, deserve to be consumed out of it, and that it should spue them out. (3.) They that heartily desire to praise God themselves, cannot but have a holy indignation at

those that blaspheme and dishonour him, and a holy satisfaction in the prospect of their destruction, and the honour that God will get to himself upon them. Even this ought to be the matter of their praise; "While *sinner*s are consumed out of the earth, let my soul bless the Lord that I am not cast away with the workers of iniquity, but distinguished from them by the special grace of God. When the wicked are no more, I hope to be praising God world without end: and therefore *Praise ye the Lord*; let all about me join with me in praising God. *Hallelujah*; sing praise to Jehovah." This is the first time that we meet with *Hallelujah*; and it comes in here upon occasion of the destruction of the wicked; and the last time we meet with it is upon the like occasion; when the New-Testament Babylon is consumed, this is the burthen of the song, *Hallelujah*, Rev. 19.1, 3, 4, 6.

PSALM CV.

Some of the psalms of praise are very short, others very long, to teach us, that, in our devotions, we should be more observant how our hearts work than how the time passes; and neither over-stretch ourselves, by coveting to be long, nor over-stint ourselves, by coveting to be short, but either the one or the other, as we find in our hearts to pray. This is a long psalm; the general scope is the same with most of the psalms, to set forth the glory of God, but the subject-matter is particular. Every time we come to the throne of grace, we may, if we please, furnish ourselves out of the Word of God (out of the history of the New Testament, as this out of the history of the Old) with new songs, with fresh thoughts—so copious, so various, so inexhaustible, is the subject. In the foregoing psalm, we are taught to praise God for his wondrous work of common providence with reference to the world in general; in this, we are directed to praise him for his special favours to his church. We find the eleven first verses of this psalm in the beginning of that psalm which David delivered to Asaph to be used (as it should seem) in the daily service of the sanctuary, when the ark was fixed in the place he had prepared for it; by which it appears both who penned it, and when, and upon what occasion, it was penned, 1 Chron. 16.7, &c. David by it designed to instruct his people in the obligations they lay under to adhere faithfully to their holy religion. Here is the preface, (v.1. .7.) and the history itself in several articles. I. God's covenant with the patriarchs, v.8. .11. II. His care of them while they were strangers, v.12. .15. III. His raising up Joseph to be the shepherd and stone of Israel, v.16. .22. IV. The increase of Israel in Egypt, and their deliverance out of Egypt, v.23. .38. V. The care he took of them in the wilderness, and their settlement in Canaan, v.39. .45. In singing this, we must give to God the glory of his wisdom and power, his goodness and faithfulness; must look upon ourselves as concerned in the affairs of the Old-Testament church, both because to it were committed the oracles of God, which are our treasure, and out of it Christ arose, and these things happened to it for ensamples.

1. **O** GIVE thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. 2. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. 3. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. 4. Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his face evermore. 5. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth; 6. O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen. 7. He is the LORD our God: his judgments are in all the earth.

Our devotion is here warmly excited; and we are stirred up, that we may stir up ourselves to praise God.

Observe, 1. The duties we are here called to, and they are many; but the tendency of them all is to give unto God the glory due unto his name. (1.) We must give thanks to him, as one who has always been our bountiful Benefactor, and requires only that we give him thanks for his favours; poor returns for rich receivings. (2.) Call upon his name; as one whom you depend upon for further favours. Praying for further mercies is accepted as an acknowledgment of former mercies; *Because he has inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him*. (3.) Make known his deeds, (v.1.) that others may join with you in praising him. Talk ye of all his wondrous works, (v.2.) as we talk of things that

we are full of and much affected with, and desire to fill others with. God's wondrous works ought to be the subject of our familiar discourses with our families and friends, and we should talk of them as we sit in the house, and as we go by the way; (Deut. 6.7.) not merely for entertainment, but for the exciting of devotion, and the encouraging of our own and others' faith and hope in God. Even sacred things may be the matter of common talk, provided it be with due reverence. (4.) Sing psalms to God's honour, as those that rejoice in him, and desire to testify that joy for the encouragement of others, and to transmit it to posterity, as memorable things anciently were handed down by songs, when writing was scarce. (5.) Glory in his holy name; let those that are disposed to glory not boast of their own accomplishments and achievements, but of their acquaintance with God, and their relation to him, Jer. 9.23,24. Praise ye his holy name, so some; but it comes all to one, for in glorying in him we give glory to him. (6.) Seek him; place your happiness in him, and then pursue that happiness in all the ways that he has appointed. Seek the Lord and his strength, that is, the ark of his strength; seek him in the sanctuary, in the way wherein he has appointed us to seek him. Seek his strength, that is, his grace, the strength of his Spirit, to work in you that which is good, which we cannot do but by strength derived from him, for which he will be inquired of. Seek the Lord, and be strengthened; so divers ancient versions read it. They that would be strengthened in the inward man, must fetch in strength from God by faith and prayer. Seek his strength, and then seek his face; for by his strength we hope to prevail with him for his favour, as Jacob did, Hos.12.3. "Seek his face evermore; seek to have his favour to eternity, and therefore continue seeking it to the end of the time of your probation. Seek it while you live in this world, and you shall have it while you live in the other world, and even there shall be for ever seeking it, in an infinite progression, and yet be for ever satisfied in it." (7.) Let the hearts of those rejoice that do seek him, (v.3.) for they have chosen well, are well-fixed, and well-employed, and they may be sure that their labour will not be in vain; for he will not only be found, but he will be found the Rewarder of those that diligently seek him. If those have reason to rejoice that seek the Lord, much more those that have found him.

2. Some arguments to quicken us to these duties.

(1.) Consider both what he has said, and what he has done, to engage us for ever to him; you will see yourselves under all possible obligations to give thanks to him, and call upon his name, if you remember the wonders which should make deep and durable impressions upon you; the wonders of his providence which he has wrought for you, and those who are gone before you, the marvellous works that he has done, which will be had in everlasting remembrance with the thoughtful and with the grateful; the wonders of his law, which he has written to you, and intrusted you with; the judgments of his mouth, as well as the judgments of his hand, v.5.

(2.) Consider the relation you stand in to him; (v.6.) *Ye are the seed of Abraham his servant*; you are born in his house, and being thereby entitled to the privilege of his servants, protection and provision, you are also bound to do the duty of servants, to attend your Master, consult his honour, obey his commands, and do what you can to advance his interests. You are the children of Jacob his chosen, and are chosen and beloved for the fathers' sake, and therefore ought to tread in the steps of those whose honours you inherit. You are the children of godly parents, do not degenerate; you are God's church upon earth, and if you do not praise him, who should?

(3.) Consider your interest in him; *He is the Lord our God*, v.7. We depend upon him, are devoted to him, and from him our expectation is. Should not a people seek unto their God, (Isa. 8.19.) and praise their God? Dan. 5.4. He is Jehovah, our God; he that is our God is self-existent and self-sufficient, has an irresistible power and incontestable sovereignty. His judgments are in all the earth; he governs the whole world in wisdom, and gives law to all nations, even to those that know him not. The earth is full of the proofs of his power.

8. He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word *which* he commanded to a thousand generations. 9. Which *covenant* he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac: 10. And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, *and* to Israel *for* an everlasting covenant: 11. Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance: 12. When they were *but* a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it. 13. When they went from one nation to another, from *one* kingdom to another people; 14. He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes; 15. *Saying*, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm. 16. Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. 17. He sent a man before them, *even* Joseph, *who* was sold for a servant: 18. Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: 19. Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. 20. The king sent and loosed him; *even* the ruler of the people, and let him go free. 21. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: 22. To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom. 23. Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourn'd in the land of Ham. 24. And he increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies.

We are here taught, in praising God, to look a great way back, and to give him the glory of what he did for his church in former ages, especially when it was in the founding and forming, which those in its latter ages enjoy the benefit of, and therefore should give thanks for. Doubtless we may fetch as proper matter for praise from the histories of the gospels, and the acts of the apostles, which relate the birth of the Christian church, as the psalmist here does from the histories of Genesis and Exodus, which relate the birth of the Jewish church; and our histories greatly outshine their's.

Two things are here made the subject of praise;

I. God's promise to the patriarchs, that great promise, that he would give to their seed the land of Canaan for an inheritance, which was a type of the promise of eternal life made in Christ to all believers. In all the marvellous works which God did for Israel, *he remembered his covenant*, (v. 8.) and he will remember it *for ever*; it is *the word which he commanded to a thousand generations*. See here the power of the promise; it is the word which he commanded, and which will take effect: see the perpetuity of the promise; it is commanded *to a thousand generations*, and the entail of it shall not be cut off. In the parallel place it is expressed as our duty; (1 Chron. 16. 15.) *Be ye mindful always of his covenant*. God will not forget it, and therefore we must not. The promise is here called a *covenant*, because there was something required on man's part as the condition of the promise. Observe, 1. The persons with whom this covenant was made—with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, grandfather, father, and son, all eminent believers, Heb. 11. 8, 9. 2. The ratifications of the covenant; it was made sure by all that is sacred. Is that sure which is sworn to? It is his oath to Isaac and to Abraham. See to whom God *swore by himself*, Heb. 6. 13, 14. Is that sure which is passed *into a law*? He *confirmed the same for a law*, a law never to be repealed. Is that sure which is reduced to a mutual contract and stipulation? This is confirmed *for an everlasting covenant*, inviolable. 3. The covenant itself; *Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan*,

v. 11. The patriarchs had a right to it, not by providence, but by promise; and their seed should be put in possession of it, not by the common ways of settling nations, but by miracles; God will give it them himself, as it were with his own hand; it shall be given them as their lot, which God assigns them, and measures out to them; as the lot of their inheritance, a sure title, by virtue of their birth; it shall come to them by descent, not by purchase; by the favour of God, and not any merit of their own. Heaven is the *inheritance* we have obtained, Eph. 1. 11. And *this is the promise which God has promised us*, (as Canaan was the promise he promised them,) *even eternal life*, 1 John. 2. 25. Tit. 1. 2.

II. His providences concerning the patriarchs, while they were waiting for the accomplishment of this promise; which represent to us the care God takes of his people in this world, while they are yet on this side the heavenly Canaan; for these things *happened unto them for examples*, and encouragements to all the heirs of promises that live by faith as they did.

1. They were *wonderfully protected and sheltered*, and (as the Jewish masters express it) *gathered under the wings of the Divine Majesty*. This is accounted for, v. 12..15. Where we may observe,

(1.) How they were exposed to injuries from men. To the three renowned patriarchs, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, God's promises were very rich; again and again he told them he would be their God; but his performances in this world were so little proportionable, that, if he had not *prepared for them a city in the other world*, he would have been *ashamed to have been called their God*, (see Heb. 11. 16.) because he was always generous; and yet, even in this world, he was not wanting to them, but, that he might appear to do uncommon things for them, he exercised them with uncommon trials. [1.] They were few, very few: Abraham was called alone; (Isa. 51. 2.) he had but two sons, and one of them he cast out; Isaac had but two, and one of them was forced for many years to run his country; Jacob had more, but some of them, instead of being a defence to him, exposed him, when (as he himself pleads, Gen. 34. 30.) he was but few in number, and therefore might easily be destroyed by the natives, he and his house. God's chosen are but a little flock, few, very few; and yet upheld. [2.] They were strangers, and therefore were the more likely to be abused and to meet with strange usage, and the less able to help themselves. Their religion made them to be looked upon as strangers, (1 Pet. 4. 4.) and to be hooted at as *speckled birds*, Jer. 12. 9. Though the whole land was their's by promise, yet they were so far from producing and pleading their grant, that they *confessed themselves strangers in it*, Heb. 11. 13. [3.] They were unsettled; (v. 13.) *They went from one nation to another*, from one part of that land to another, (for it was then in the holding and occupation of divers nations, Gen. 12. 8.—13. 3, 18.) *from one kingdom to another people*, from Canaan to Egypt, from Egypt to the land of the Philistines, which could not but weaken and expose them; yet they were forced to it by famine. Note, Though frequent removals are neither desirable nor commendable, yet sometimes there is a just and necessary occasion for them, and they may be the lot of some of the best men.

(2.) How they were guarded by the special providence of God, the wisdom and power of which were the more magnified by their being so many ways exposed, v. 14, 15. They were not able to help themselves, and yet, [1.] No men were suffered to wrong them, but even those that hated them, and would gladly have done them a mischief, had their hands tied, and could not do what they would. This may refer to Gen. 35. 5. where we find that *the terror of God* (an unaccountable restraint) *was upon the cities that were round about them*, so that, though provoked, *they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob*. [2.] Even crowned heads, that did offer to wrong them, were not only checked and chidden for it, but controuled and baffled; *He reprov'd kings for their sakes*, in dreams and visions, *saying*, "Touch not mine anointed, it is at your peril if you do, nay, it shall not be in your power to do it; do my prophets no harm." Pharaoh king of Egypt was plagued, (Gen. 12. 17.) and Abimelech king of Gerar was sharply rebuked, (Gen. 20. 6.) for doing wrong to Abraham. Note, *First, Even*

kings themselves are liable to God's rebukes, if they do wrong. *Secondly*, God's prophets are his anointed, for they have the unction of the Spirit, that oil of gladness, 1 John, 2. 27. *Thirdly*, They that offer to touch God's prophets, with design to harm them, may expect to hear of it one way or other. God is zealous for his prophets; whoso touches them, touches the apple of his eye. *Fourthly*, Even they that touch the prophets, nay, that kill the prophets, (as many did,) cannot do them any harm, any real harm. *Lastly*, God's anointed prophets are dearer to him than anointed kings themselves. Jeroboam's hand was withered when it was stretched out against a prophet.

2. They were wonderfully provided for and supplied. And here also, (1.) They were reduced to great extremity; even in Canaan, the land of promise, he called for a famine, v. 16. Note, All judgments are at God's call, and no place is exempt from their visitation and jurisdiction, when God sends them forth with commission. To try the faith of the patriarchs, God brake the whole staff of bread, even in that good land, that they might plainly see God designed them a better country than that was. (2.) God graciously took care for their relief. It was in obedience to his precept, and in dependence upon his promise, that they were now sojourners in Canaan, and therefore he could not in honour suffer any evil thing to befall them, or any good thing to be wanting to them. As he restrained one Pharaoh from doing them wrong, so he raised up another to do them a kindness, by preferring and intrusting Joseph, of whose story we have here an abstract. He was to be the shepherd and stone of Israel, and to save that holy seed alive, Gen. 49. 24.—50. 20. In order to this,

[1.] He was humbled, greatly humbled; (v. 17, 18.) *God sent a man before them, even Joseph*; many years before the famine began, he was sent before them, to nourish them in the famine; so vast are the foresights and forecasts of Providence, and so long its reaches. But in what character did he go to Egypt, who was to provide for the reception of the church there? He went not in quality of an ambassador, no, nor so much as a factor or commissary; but he was sold thither for a servant, a slave for term of life, without any prospect of being ever set at liberty. This was low enough, and, one would think, set him far enough from any probability of being great; and yet he was brought lower, he was made a prisoner, (v. 18.) *His feet they hurt with fetters*, being unjustly charged with a crime no less heinous than a rape upon his mistress; *the iron entered into his soul*, was very painful to him; and the false accusation, which was the cause of his imprisonment, did in a special manner grieve him, and went to his heart; yet all this was the way to his preferment.

[2.] He was exalted, highly exalted; he continued a prisoner, neither tried nor bailed, until the time appointed of God for his release, (v. 19.) when his word came, his interpretations of dreams came to pass, and the report thereof came to Pharaoh's ears by the chief butler; and then the word of the Lord cleared him; the power God gave him to foretell things to come, rolled away the reproach his mistress had loaded him with; for it could not be thought that God would give such a power to so bad a man as he was represented to be. *God's word tried him*, tried his faith and patience, and then it came in power to give command for his release. There is a time set when God's word will come for the comfort of all that trust in it, Hab. 2. 3. *At the end, it shall speak, and not lie*. God gave the word, and then the king sent and loosed him; for the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. Pharaoh, finding him to be a favourite of heaven, *First*, Discharged him from his imprisonment; (v. 20.) he let him go free. God has often, by wonderful turns of providence, pleaded the cause of oppressed innocency. *Secondly*, He advanced him to the highest posts of honour, v. 21, 22. He made him lord high chamberlain of his household; (he made him lord of his house;) nay, he put him into the office of lord treasurer, the ruler of all his substance. He made him prime minister of state, lord president of his council, to command his princes at his pleasure, and teach them wisdom; general of his forces; *According to thy word shall all my people be ruled*, Gen. 41. 40, 43, 44. He made him lord chief justice, to judge even his senators, and punish those that were disobedient.

In all this, Joseph was designed to be, 1. A father to the church that then was, to save the house of Israel from perishing by the famine. He was made great, that he might do good, especially in the household of faith. 2. A figure of Christ that was to come; who, because he humbled himself, and took upon him the form of a servant, was highly exalted, and has all judgment committed to him.

Joseph being thus sent before, and put into a capacity of maintaining all his father's house, *Israel also came into Egypt*, (v. 23.) where he and all his were very honourably and comfortably provided for many years. Thus the New-Testament church has a place provided for her, even in the wilderness, where she is nourished for a time, times, and half a time; (Rev. 12. 14.) verily she shall be fed.

3. They were wonderfully multiplied, according to the promise made to Abraham, that his seed should be as the sand of the sea for multitude, v. 24. In Egypt he increased his people greatly; they multiplied like fishes, so that in a little time they became stronger than their enemies, and formidable to them. Pharaoh took notice of it; (Exod. 1. 9.) *The children of Israel are more and mightier than we*; when God pleases, a little one shall become a thousand: and God's promises, though they work slowly, work surely.

25. He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants. 26. He sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen. 27. They shewed his signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. 28. He sent darkness, and made it dark; and they rebelled not against his word. 29. He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish. 30. Their land brought forth frogs in abundance, in the chambers of their kings. 31. He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies, and lice in all their coasts. 32. He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land. 33. He smote their vines also and their fig-trees; and brake the trees of their coasts. 34. He spake, and the locusts came, and caterpillars, and that without number. 35. And did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground. 36. He smote also all the first-born in their land, the chief of all their strength. 37. He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. 38. Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them. 39. He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night. 40. The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. 41. He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river. 42. For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. 43. And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness. 44. And gave them the lands of the heathen; and they inherited the labour of the people; 45. That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise ye the LORD.

After the history of the patriarchs, follows here the history of the people of Israel, when they grew into a nation.

I. Their affliction in Egypt; (v.25.) *He turned the heart of the Egyptians, who had protected them, to hate them, and dealt subtilly with them.* God's goodness to his people exasperated the Egyptians against them; and though their old antipathy to the Hebrews (which we read of, Gen. 43. 32. — 46. 34.) was laid asleep for a while, yet now it revived with more violence than ever: formerly they hated them, because they despised them, now because they feared them. *They dealt subtilly with them, set all their politics on work, to find out ways and means to weaken them, and waste them, and prevent their growth; they made their burthens heavy, and their lives bitter, and slew their male children as soon as they were born.* Malice is crafty to destroy: Satan has the serpent's subtlety, with his venom. It was God that turned the hearts of the Egyptians against them; for every creature is that to us that he makes it to be, a friend or an enemy. Though God is not the Author of the sins of men, yet he serves his own purposes by them.

II. Their deliverance out of Egypt, that work of wonder, which, that it might never be forgotten, is put into the preface to the ten commandments. Observe,

1. The instruments employed in that deliverance; (v.26.) *He sent Moses his servant on this errand, and joined Aaron in commission with him.* Moses was designed to be their lawgiver and chief magistrate, Aaron to be their chief priest; and therefore, that they might respect them the more, and submit to them the more cheerfully, God made use of them as their deliverers.

2. The means of accomplishing that deliverance; these were the plagues of Egypt. Moses and Aaron observed their orders, in summoning them just as God appointed them, and *they rebelled not against his word,* (v.28.) as Jonah did, who, when he was sent to denounce God's judgments against Nineveh, went to Tarshish. Moses and Aaron were not moved, either with a foolish fear of Pharaoh's wrath, or a foolish pity of Egypt's misery, to relax or retard any of the plagues which God ordered them to inflict on the Egyptians, but stretched forth their hand to inflict them as God appointed. They that are intrusted to execute judgment, will find their remissness construed into a rebellion against God's word. The plagues of Egypt are here called God's signs, and his wonders; (v.27.) they were not only proofs of his power, but tokens of his wrath, and to be looked upon with admiration and holy awe. *They shewed the words of his signs,* so it is in the original; for every plague had an exposition going along with it; they were not, as the common works of creation and providence, silent signs, but speaking ones, and they spake aloud. They are all, or most, of them here specified, though not in the order in which they were inflicted.

(1.) The plagues of darkness, v. 28. This was one of the last, though here mentioned first. God *sent darkness*, and, coming with commission, it came with efficacy; his command *made it dark.* And then they, that is, the people of Israel, *rebelled not against God's word*, a command which some think was given them to circumsise all among them that had not been circumsised; in doing which, the three days' darkness would be a protection to them. The Old Translation follows the Septuagint, and reads it, *They were not obedient to his word*; which may be applied to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who, notwithstanding the terror of this plague, *would not let the people go*; but there is no ground for it in the Hebrew.

(2.) The turning of the river Nilus (which they idolized) into blood, and all their other waters, which *slew their fish*; (v.29.) and so they were deprived, not only of their drink, but the daintiest of their meat, Numb. 11. 5.

(3.) The frogs, shoals of which their land brought forth, which poured in upon them, not only in such numbers, but with such fury, that they could not keep them out of the *chambers of their kings* and great men, whose hearts had been full of vermin, more nauseous, and more noxious—contempt of, and enmity to, both God and his Israel.

(4.) Flies of divers sorts swarmed in their air, and lice in their clothes, v.31. Exod. 8. 17, 24. Note, God can make use of the meanest, and weakest, and most despicable, animals, for the

punishing and humbling of proud oppressors, to whom the impotency of the instrument cannot but be a great mortification, as well as an undeniable conviction of the divine omnipotence.

(5.) Hail-stones shattered their trees, even the strongest timber-trees in *their coasts*, and killed their vines, and their other fruit-trees, v. 32, 33. Instead of rain to cherish their trees, he gave them hail to crush them, and with it thunder and lightning, to that degree, that the *fire ran along upon the ground*, as if it had been a stream of kindled brimstone, Exod. 9. 23.

(6.) *Locusts and caterpillars* destroyed all the *herbs* which were made for the service of man, and ate the bread out of their mouths, v. 34, 35. See what variety of judgments God has, wherewith to plague proud oppressors, that will not let his people go. God did not bring the same plague twice, but, when there was occasion for another, it was still a new one; for he has many arrows in his quiver. Locusts and caterpillars are God's armies; and, how weak soever they are singly, he can raise such numbers of them as to make them formidable, Joel. 1. 4, 6.

(7.) Having mentioned all the plagues, but those of the murrain and boils, he concludes with that which gave the conquering stroke, and that was the death of the *first-born*, v.36. In the dead of the night, the joys and hopes of their families, the *chief of their strength*, and flower of their land, were all struck dead by the destroying angel. They would not release God's first-born, and therefore God seized their's by way of reprisal, and thereby forced them to dismiss his too, when it was too late to retrieve their own; for *when God judges, he will overcome*, and they will certainly sit down losers at last, that contend with him.

3. The mercies that accompanied this deliverance. In their bondage, (1.) They had been impoverished, and yet they came out rich and wealthy. God not only brought them forth, but he *brought them forth with silver and gold*, v. 37. God impowered them to ask and collect the contributions of their neighbours, (which were indeed but part of payment for the service they had done them,) and inclined the Egyptians to furnish them with what they asked. Their wealth was his, and therefore he *might*, their hearts were in his hand, and therefore he *could*, give it to the Israelites. (2.) Their lives had been made bitter to them, and their bodies and spirits broken by their bondage; and yet, when God brought them forth, *there was not one feeble person*, none sick, none so much as sickly, *among their tribes*. They went out that very night that the plague swept away all the first-born of Egypt, and yet they came out all in good health, and brought not with them any of the diseases of Egypt. Surely never was the like, that among so many thousands there was not one sick! So false was the representation which the enemies of the Jews, in after-ages, gave of this matter, that they were all sick of a leprosy, or some loathsome disease, and that therefore the Egyptians thrust them out of their land. (3.) They had been trampled upon, and insulted over; and yet they were brought out with honour; (v. 38.) *Egypt was glad when they departed*; for God had so wonderfully owned them, and pleaded their cause, that *the fear of Israel fell upon them*, and they owed themselves baffled and overcome. God can and will make his church a *burthensome stone* to all that *heave at it*, and seek to displace it, so that they shall think themselves happy, that get out of its way; (Zech. 12. 3.) *when God judges, he will overcome*. (4.) They had spent their days in sorrow and in sighing, by reason of their bondage; but now he brought them forth *with joy and gladness*, v. 43. When Egypt's cry for grief was loud, their first-born being all slain, Israel's shouts for joy were as loud; both when they looked back upon the land of slavery out of which they were rescued, and when they looked forward to the pleasant land to which they were hastening. God now put a new song into their mouth.

4. The special care God took of them in the wilderness. (1.) For their shelter; beside the canopy of heaven, he provided them another heavenly canopy; he *spread a cloud for a covering*, (v. 39.) which was to them not only a screen and umbrella, but a cloth of state. A cloud was often God's pavilion, (18. 11.) and now it was Israel's; for they also were his hidden ones. (2.) For their guidance and refreshment in the dark, he appointed a

pillar of fire to give light in the night, that they might never be at a loss. Note, God graciously provides against all the grievances of his people, and furnishes them with convenient succours for every condition, for day and night, till they come there where it will be all day to eternity. (3.) He fed them both with necessaries and dainties. Sometimes he furnished their tables with wild fowl; (v. 40.) *The people asked, and he brought quails*; and when they were not thus feasted, yet they were abundantly satisfied with the bread of heaven; those are curious and covetous indeed, who will not be so satisfied. Man did eat angels' food, and that constantly, and on free cost. And as every bit they ate, had miracle in it, so had every drop they drank; *He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out, v. 41.* Common providence fetches waters from heaven, and bread out of the earth; but for Israel the Divine Power brings bread from the clouds, and water from the rocks: so far is the God of nature from being tied to the laws and courses of nature. The water did not only gush out at once, but it ran *like a river*, plentifully and constantly, and attended their camp in all their removes; hence they are said to have the rock follow them; (1 Cor. 10. 4.) and, which increased the miracle, this river of God (so it might be truly called) ran in dry places, and yet was not drunk in and lost, as one would expect it should have been, by the sands of the desert of Arabia. To this that promise alludes, *I will give rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen, Isa. 43. 19, 20.*

5. Their entrance, at length, into Canaan; (v. 44.) *He gave them the lands of the heathen*; put them in possession of that which they had long been put in hopes of; and what the Canaanites had taken pains for, God's Israel had the enjoyment of; *they inherited the labour of the people*, and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just. The Egyptians had long inherited their labours, and now they inherited the labours of the Canaanites. Thus sometimes one enemy of the church is made to pay another's scores.

6. The reasons why God did all this for them.

(1.) Because he would himself perform the promises of the word, v. 42. They were unworthy and unthankful, yet he did those great things in their favour, *because he remembered the word of his holiness* (his covenant) *with Abraham his servant*, and he would not suffer one iota or tittle of that to fall to the ground. See Dent. 7. 8.

(2.) Because he would have them to perform the precepts of the word, to bind them to which was the greatest kindness he could put upon them. He put them in possession of Canaan, not that they might live in plenty and pleasure, in ease and honour, and might make a figure among the nations, but *that they might observe his statutes and keep his laws*; that, being formed into a people, they might be under God's immediate government, and revealed religion might be the basis of their national constitution; that, having a good land given them, they might out of the profits of it bring sacrifices to God's altar; and that, God having thus done them good, they might the more cheerfully receive his law, concluding that also designed for their good, and might be sensible of their obligations in gratitude to live in obedience to him. We are *therefore* made, maintained, and redeemed, that we may live in obedience to the will of God; and the hallelujah, with which the psalm concludes, may be taken both as a thankful acknowledgment of God's favours, and as a cheerful concurrence with this great intention of them. Has God done so much for us, and yet does he expect so little from us? *Praise ye the Lord.*

PSALM CVI.

We must give glory to God by making confession, not only of his goodness, but our own badness, which serve as foils to each other: our badness makes his goodness appear the more illustrious, as his goodness makes our badness the more heinous and scandalous. The foregoing psalm was a history of God's goodness to Israel; this is a history of their rebellions and provocations, and yet it begins and ends with Hallelujah; for even sorrow for sin must not put us out of tune for praising God. Some think it was penned at the time of the captivity in Babylon, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation thereupon, because of that prayer in the close, v. 17. I rather think it was penned by

David at the same time with the foregoing psalm, because we find the first verse and the two last in that psalm which David delivered to Asaph, at the bringing up of the ark to the place he had prepared for it; (1 Chron. 16. 34. 36.) Gather us from among the heathen; for we may suppose that in Saul's time there was a great dispersion of pious Israelites, when David was forced to wander. In this psalm, we have, I. The preface to the narrative, speaking honour to God, (v. 1, 2.) comfort to the saints, (v. 3.) and the desire of the faithful toward God's favour, v. 4, 5. II. The narrative itself of the sins of Israel, aggravated by the great things God did for them, an account of which is intermixed. Their provocations at the Red sea; (v. 6. 12.) lust; (v. 13. 15.) mutiny; (v. 16. 18.) worshipping the golden calf; (v. 19. 23.) murmuring; (v. 24. 27.) joining themselves to Baal-peor; (v. 28. 31.) quarrelling with Moses; (v. 32, 33.) incorporating themselves with the nations of Canaan, v. 34. 39. To which is added an account how God had rebuked them for their sins, and yet saved them from ruin, v. 40. 46. III. The conclusion of the psalm with prayer and praise, v. 47, 48. It may be of use to us to sing this psalm, that, being put in mind by it of our sins, the sins of our land, and the sins of our fathers, we may be humbled before God, and yet not despair of mercy, which even rebellious Israel often found with God.

1. **PRAISE** ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for *he is good*: for his mercy endureth for ever. 2. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? *who* can shew forth all his praise? 3. Blessed *are* they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times. 4. Remember me, O LORD, with the favour *that thou bearest unto thy people*; O visit me with thy salvation; 5. That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.

We are here taught,

1. To bless God; (v. 1, 2.) *Praise ye the Lord*, that is, (1.) Give him thanks for his goodness, the manifestation of it to us, and the many instances of it. *He is good*, and *his mercy endures for ever*; let us therefore own our obligations to him, and make him a return of our best affections and services. (2.) Give him the glory of his greatness; his *mighty acts*, proofs of his almighty power, wherein he has done great things, and such as would be opposed. *Who can utter these?* Who is worthy to do it? Who is able to do it? They are so many, that they cannot be numbered, so mysterious, that they cannot be described; when we have said the most we can of the mighty acts of the Lord, the one half is not told, still there is more to be said; it is a subject that cannot be exhausted. We must *shew forth his praise*; we may shew forth some of it, but *who can shew forth all?* Not the angels themselves. This will not excuse us in not doing what we can, but should quicken us to do all we can.

2. To bless the people of God, to call and count them happy; (v. 3.) *They that keep judgment are blessed*, for they are fit to be employed in praising God. God's people are they whose principles are sound; *they keep judgment*, they adhere to the rules of wisdom and religion, and their practices are agreeable; they *do righteousness*, are just to God, and to all men; and herein they are steady and constant; they do it *at all times*, in all manner of conversation, at every turn, in every instance, and herein persevering to the end.

3. To bless ourselves in the favour of God, to place our happiness in it, and to seek it, accordingly, with all seriousness; as the psalmist here, v. 4, 5. (1.) He has an eye to the loving-kindness of God, as the fountain of all happiness; *"Remember me, O Lord, to give me that mercy and grace which I stand in need of, with the favour which thou bearest to thy people."* As there are a people in the world who are in a peculiar manner God's people, so there is a peculiar favour which God bears to that people, which all gracious souls desire an interest in; and we need desire no more to make us happy. (2.) He has an eye to the salvation of God, the great salvation, that of the soul, as the foundation of happiness; *O visit me with thy salvation.* "Afford me (says Dr. Hammond) that pardon and that grace which I stand in need of, and can hope for from none but thee." Let that salvation be my

portion for ever, and the pledges of it my present comfort. (3.) He has an eye to the blessedness of the righteous, as that which includes all good; (v. 5.) "*That I may see the good of thy chosen, and be as happy as thy saints are; and happier I do not desire to be.*" God's people are here called his *chosen*, his *nation*, his *inheritance*; for he has set them apart for himself, incorporated them under his own government, is served by them, and glorified in them. The chosen people of God have a good which is peculiar to them, which is the matter both of their gladness, and of their glorying; which is their pleasure, and their praise. God's people have reason to be a cheerful people, and to boast in their God all the day long; and they who have that gladness, that glory, need not envy any of the children of men their pleasure or pride. The gladness of God's nation, and the glory of his inheritance, are enough to satisfy any man; for they have everlasting joy and glory at the end of them.

6. We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. 7. Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked *him* at the sea, *even* at the Red sea. 8. Nevertheless, he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known. 9. He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. 10. And he saved them from the hand of him that hated *them*, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. 11. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. 12. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise.

Here begins a penitential confession of sin, which was in a special manner seasonable, now that the church was in distress: for thus we must justify God in all that he brings upon us, acknowledging that *therefore* he has done right, because *we have done wickedly*: and the remembrance of former sins, notwithstanding which God did not cast off his people, is an encouragement to us to hope that though we are justly corrected for our sins, yet we shall not be utterly abandoned.

I. God's afflicted people here own themselves guilty before God; (v. 6.) "*We have sinned with our fathers*, like our fathers, after the similitude of their transgression. We have added to the stock of hereditary guilt, and filled up the measure of our fathers' iniquity, to *augment yet the fierce anger of the Lord*," Numb. 32. 14. Matth. 23. 32. And see how they lay load upon themselves, as becomes penitent; "*We have committed iniquity*, that which is in its own nature sinful; and *we have done wickedly*; we have sinned with a high hand, presumptuously." Or, this is a confession, not only of their imitation of, but their interest in, their fathers' sins; *We have sinned with our fathers*, for we were in their loins, and we *bear their iniquity*, Lam. 5. 7.

II. They bewail the sins of their fathers, when they were first formed into a people; which, since children often smart for, they are concerned to sorrow for, even further than to the third and fourth generation. Even we now ought to take occasion, from the history of Israel's rebellions, to lament the pravity and perverseness of man's nature, and its unaptness to be amended by the most probable means. Observe here,

1. The strange stupidity of Israel in the midst of the favours God bestowed upon them; (v. 7.) *They understood not thy wonders in Egypt*. They saw them, but they did not rightly apprehend the meaning and design of them. *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have understood*. They thought the plagues of Egypt were intended for their deliverance, whereas they were intended also for their instruction and conviction, not

only to force them out of their Egyptian slavery, but to cure them of their inclination to Egyptian idolatry, by evidencing the sovereign power and dominion of the God of Israel above all gods, and his particular concern for them. We lose the benefit of providences for want of understanding them. And as their understandings were dull, so their memories were treacherous; though one would think such astonishing events should never have been forgotten, yet they remembered them not, at least, *they remembered not the multitude of God's mercies* in them. *Therefore* God is distrusted, because his favours are not remembered.

2. Their perverseness, arising from this stupidity; *They provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea*. The provocation was, despair of deliverance, (because the danger was great,) and wishing they had been left in Egypt still, Exod. 14. 11, 12. Quarrelling with God's providence, and questioning his power, goodness, and faithfulness, are as great provocations to him as any whatsoever. The place aggravated the crime; it was *at the sea, at the Red sea*, when they were newly come out of Egypt, and the wonders God had wrought for them were fresh in their minds; yet they reproach him, as if all that power had no mercy in it, but that he brought them out of Egypt on purpose to *kill them in the wilderness*. They never lay at God's mercy so immediately as in their passage through the Red sea, yet there they affront it, and provoke his wrath.

3. The great salvation God wrought for them, notwithstanding their provocations, v. 8.. 11. (1.) He forced a passage for them through the sea; *He rebuked the Red sea* for standing in their way and *retarding their march, and it was dried up* immediately; as in the creation, *at God's rebuke the waters fled*, 104. 7. Nay, he not only prepared them a way, but, by the pillar of cloud and fire, he *led them* into the sea, and, by the conduct of Moses, led them through it as readily *as through the wilderness*; he encouraged them to take those steps, and subdued their fears, when those were their most dangerous and threatening enemies. See Isa. 63. 12.. 14. (2.) He interposed between them and their pursuers, and prevented them from cutting them off, as they designed. The Israelites were all on foot, and the Egyptians had all of them chariots and horses, with which they were likely to overtake them quickly, but God *saved them from the hand of him that hated them*, Pharaoh, who never loved them, but now hated them the more for the plagues he had suffered on their account; *from the hand of his enemy*, which was just ready to seize them, *God redeemed them*, (v. 10.) interposing himself, as it were, in the pillar of fire, between the persecuted and the persecutors. (3.) To complete the mercy, and turn the deliverance into a victory, the Red sea, which was a lane to them, was a grave to the Egyptians; (v. 11.) *The waters covered their enemies*, so as to slay them, but not so as to conceal their shame; for, the next tide, they were thrown up dead upon the shore, Exod. 14. 30. *There was not one of them left alive*, to bring tidings of what was become of the rest. And why did God do this for them? Nay, why did he not cover them, as he did their enemies, for their unbelief and murmuring? He tells us, (v. 8.) it was *for his name's sake*; though they did not deserve this favour, he designed it; and their undeservings should not alter his designs, nor break his measures, or make him withdraw his promise, or fail in the performance of it. He did this for his own glory, *that he might make his mighty power to be known*, not only in dividing the sea, but in doing it notwithstanding their provocations. Moses prays, (Numb. 14. 17, 19.) *Let the power of my Lord be great, and pardon the iniquity of this people*. The power of the God of grace, in pardoning sin and sparing sinners, is as much to be admired as the power of the God of nature in dividing the waters.

4. The good impression this made upon them for the present; (v. 12.) *Then believed they his words*, and acknowledged that God was with them of a truth, and had, in mercy to them, brought them out of Egypt, and not with any design to slay them in the wilderness; then *they feared the Lord, and his servant Moses*, Exod. 14. 31. Then *they sang his praise*, in that song of Moses penned on this great occasion, Exod. 15. 1. See in what a gracious and merciful way God sometimes silences the unbelief of his

people, and turns their fears into praises; and so it is written, *They that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine*, Isa. 29. 24.

13. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: 14. But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. 15. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul. 16. They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD. 17. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. 18. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burnt up the wicked. 19. They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. 20. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. 21. They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; 22. Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. 23. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them. 24. Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: 25. But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD. 26. Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness: 27. To overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands. 28. They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. 29. Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them. 30. Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. 31. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore. 32. They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: 33. Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.

This is an abridgment of the history of Israel's provocations in the wilderness, and of the wrath of God against them for those provocations: and this abridgment is abridged by the apostle, with application to us Christians; (1 Cor. 10. 5, &c.) for these things were written for our admonition, that we sin not like them, lest we suffer like them.

I. The cause of their sin, was, disregard to the works and word of God, v. 13. 1. They minded not what he had done for them; *They soon forgot his works*, and lost the impressions they had made upon them. They that do not improve God's mercies to them, nor endeavour in some measure to render according to the benefit done unto them, do indeed forget them. This people soon forgot them; God took notice of this; (Exod. 32. 8.) *They have turned aside quickly.* *They made haste, they forgot his works*, so it is in the margin; which some make to be two several instances of their sin. *They made haste*, their expectations anticipated God's promises; they expected to be in Canaan shortly, and, because they were not, they questioned whether they should ever be there, and quarrelled with all the difficulties they met with in their way: whereas he that believeth, *shall not make haste*, Isa. 23. 16. And

withal, *they forgot his works*, which were the undeniable evidences of his wisdom, power, and goodness, and denied the conclusion as confidently as if they had never seen the premises proved. This is mentioned again; (v. 21, 22.) *They forgot God their Saviour*; they forgot that he had been their Saviour: those that forget the works of God, forget God himself, who makes himself known by his works. They forgot what was done but a few days before, which we may suppose they could not but talk of, even then, when, because they did not make a good use of it, they are said to forget it: it was what God did for them in Egypt, in the land of Ham, and by the Red sea, things which we at this distance cannot, or should not, be unmindful of. They are called *great things*, (for though the great God does nothing mean, yet he does some things that are in a special manner great,) *wondrous works*, out of the common road of Providence, therefore observable, therefore memorable, and *terrible things*, awful to them, and dreadful to their enemies, and yet soon forgotten; even miracles that were seen, passed away with them as tales that are told. 2. They minded not what God had said to them, nor would they depend upon it; *They waited not for his counsel*, did not attend his word, though they had Moses to be his mouth to them; they took up resolves about which they did not consult him, and made demands without calling upon him. They would be in Canaan directly, and had not patience to tarry God's time; the delay was intolerable, and therefore the difficulties were looked upon as insuperable. This is explained, (v. 24.) *They believed not his word*, his promise that he would make them masters of Canaan; and (v. 25.) *They hearkened not to the voice of the Lord*, who gave them counsel which they would not wait for, not only by Moses and Aaron, but by Caleb and Joshua, Numb. 14. 6, 7, &c. Those that will not wait for God's counsel, shall justly be given up to their own hearts' lusts, to walk in their own counsels.

II. Many of their sins are here mentioned, together with the tokens of God's displeasure which they fell under for those sins.

1. They would have flesh, and yet would not believe that God could give it them; (v. 14.) *They lusted a lust*, (so the word is,) *in the wilderness*; they had bread enough and to spare, yet nothing would serve them but they must have flesh to eat. They were now supported entirely by miracles, so that this was a reflection upon the wisdom and goodness of their Creator: they were also, in all probability, within a step of Canaan, yet had no patience to stay for dainties till they came thither; they had flocks and herds of their own, but they will not kill them; God must give them flesh, as he gave them bread, or they will never give him credit, or their good word: they did not only wish for flesh, but they lusted exceedingly after it. A desire, even of lawful things, when it is inordinate and violent, becomes sinful; and therefore this is called *lusting after evil things*, (1 Cor. 10. 6.) though the quails, as God's gift, were good things, and were so spoken of, Ps. 105. 40. Yet this was not all; *They tempted God in the desert*, where they had had such experience of his goodness and power, and questioned whether he could and would gratify them herein. See 78. 19, 20.

Now, how did God shew his displeasure against them for this? We are told how; (v. 15.) *He gave them their request*, but gave it them in anger; and with a curse, for he sent leanness into their soul; he filled them with uneasiness of mind, and terror of conscience, and a self-reproach, occasioned by their bodies being sick with the surfeit, such as sometimes drunkards experience after a great debauch. Or this is put for that great plague with which the Lord smote them, *while the flesh was yet between their teeth*, as we read, Numb. 11. 33. It was the consumption of the life. Note, (1.) What is asked in passion, is often given in wrath. (2.) Many that fare deliciously every day, and whose bodies are healthful and fat, have at the same time leanness in their souls: no love to God, no thankfulness, no appetite to the bread of life, and then the soul must needs be lean. Those wretchedly forget themselves, that feast their bodies, and starve their souls. Then God gives the good things of this life in love, when with them he gives grace to glorify him in the use of them; for then *the soul delights itself in fatness*, Isa. 55. 2.

2. They quarrelled with the government which God had set over them, both in church and state; (v. 16.) *They envied Moses* his authority *in the camp*, as generalissimo of the armies of Israel, and chief-justice in all their courts; they envied *Aaron* his power, as *saint of the Lord*, consecrated to the office of High-Priest; and Korah would needs put in for the pontificate, while Dathan and Abiram, as princes of the tribe of Reuben, Jacob's eldest son, would claim to be chief magistrates, by the so-much-admired right of primogeniture. Note, *They* are preparing ruin for themselves, who envy those whom God has put honour upon, and usurp the dignities they were never designed for. And justly will contempt be poured upon them who put contempt upon any of the saints of the Lord.

How did God shew his displeasure for this? We are told how, and it is enough to make us tremble; (v. 17, 18.) we have the story, Numb. 16. 32, 35. (1.) They that flew in the face of the civil authority were punished by *the earth*, which *opened and swallowed them up*, as not fit to go upon God's ground, because they would not submit to God's government. (2.) They that would usurp the ecclesiastical authority, in things pertaining to God, suffered the vengeance of Heaven, for *fire came out from the Lord, and consumed them*; and the pretending sacrificers were themselves sacrificed to divine justice. *The flame burnt up the wicked*; for though they vied with *Aaron, the saint of the Lord*, for holiness, (Numb. 16. 3, 5.) yet God adjudged them wicked, and, as such, cut them off, as, in due time, he will destroy the man of sin, that wicked one, notwithstanding his proud pretensions to holiness.

3. They made, and worshipped, the golden calf, and this in Horeb, there where the law was given, and God had expressly said, *Thou shalt neither make any graven image, nor bow down to it*; they did both; *They made a calf, and worshipped it*, v. 19. Herein they bid defiance to, and put an affront upon, the two great lights which God has made to rule the little world; (1.) That of human reason; for *they changed their glory*, their God, at least, the manifestation of him, which always had been in a cloud, (either a dark cloud or a bright one,) without any manner of visible similitude, *into the similitude of Apis*, one of the Egyptian idols, *an ox that eateth grass*, than which nothing could be more grossly and scandalously absurd, v. 20. Idolaters are perfectly besotted, and put the greatest disparagement possible, both upon God, in representing him by the image of a beast, and upon themselves, in worshipping it when they have done so. That which is here said to be the changing of their glory, is explained by St. Paul, (Rom. 1. 23.) to be the *changing of the glory of the incorruptible God*. (2.) That of divine revelation, which was afforded to them, not only in the words God spake to them, but in the works he wrought for them, *wondrous works*, which spake aloud that the Lord Jehovah is the only true and living God, and is alone to be worshipped, v. 21, 22.

For this, God shewed his displeasure by declaring the decree, that he would cut them off from being a people, as they had, as far as lay in their power, in effect cut him off from being a God; he *spoke of destroying them*, (v. 23.) and certainly he had done it, if *Moses his chosen had not stood before him in the breach*, (v. 23.) if he had not seasonably interposed to deal with God as an advocate, about the breach or ruin God was about to devote them to, and wonderfully prevailed to turn away his wrath. See here the mercy of God, and how easily his anger is turned away, even from a provoking people. See the power of prayer, and the interest which God's chosen have in heaven. See a type of Christ, God's *Chosen*, his *Elect*, in *whom his soul delights*; who *stood before him in the breach to turn away his wrath* from a provoking world, and ever lives, for this end, making intercession.

4. They gave credit to the report of the evil spies concerning the land of Canaan, in contradiction to the promise of God; (v. 24.) *They despised the pleasant land*; Canaan was a pleasant land, Deut. 8. 7. They undervalued it, when they thought it not worth venturing for, no, not under the guidance of God himself, and therefore were for making a captain, and returning to Egypt again. *They believed not God's word* concerning it, but *murmured in their tents*, basely charging God with a design upon them, in bringing

them thither, that they might become a prey to the Canaanites, Numb. 14. 2, 3. And when they were reminded of God's power and promise, they were so far from hearkening to that voice of the Lord, that they attempted to stone those who spake to them, Numb. 14. 10. The heavenly Canaan is a pleasant land; a promise is left us of entering into it, but there are many that despise it, that neglect and refuse the offer of it, that prefer the wealth and pleasure of this world before it, and grudge the pains and hazards of this life to obtain that.

This also was so displeasing to God, that *he lifted up his hand against them*, in a way of threatening, *to destroy them in the wilderness*, nay, in a way of swearing, for he sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest; (95. 11. Numb. 14. 28.) nay, and he threatened that their children also should be *overthrown and scattered*, (v. 26, 27.) and the whole nation dispersed and disinherited; but Moses prevailed for mercy for their seed, that they might enter Canaan. Note, Those who despise God's favours, and particularly the pleasant land, forfeit his favours, and will be shut out for ever from the pleasant land.

5. They were guilty of a great sin in the matter of Peor; and this was the sin of the new generation, when they were within a step of Canaan; (v. 28.) *They joined themselves to Baal-peor*, and so were entangled both in idolatry and in adultery, in corporal and in spiritual whoredom, Numb. 25. 1. . 3. They that did often partake of the altar of the living God, now *ate the sacrifices of the dead*, of the idols of Moab, that were dead images, or dead men canonized or deified; or sacrifices to the infernal deities, on the behalf of their dead friends. *Thus they provoked God to anger with their inventions*, (v. 29.) in contempt of him and his institutions, his commands, and his threatenings. The iniquity of Peor was so great, that, long after, it is said, *They were not cleansed from it*, Josh. 22. 17.

God testified his displeasure at this, (1.) By sending a plague among them, which in a little time swept away 24,000 of those impudent sinners. (2.) By stirring up Phinehas to use his power as a magistrate, for the suppressing of the sin, and checking the contagion of it. He stood up, in his zeal for the Lord of hosts, and executed judgment upon Zimri and Cozbi, sinners of the first rank, genteel sinners; he put the law in execution upon them, and this was a service so pleasing to God, that upon it *the plague was stayed*, v. 30. By this, and some other like acts of public justice on that occasion, (Numb. 25. 4, 5.) the guilt ceased to be national, and the general controversy was let fall; when the proper officers did their duty, God left it to them, and did not any longer keep the work in his own hands by the plague. Note, National justice prevents national judgments. But Phinehas herein signaling himself, a special mark of honour was put upon him, for what he did was *counted to him for righteousness to all generations*, (v. 31.) and, in recompence of it, the priesthood was entailed on his family. *He shall make an atonement* by offering up the sacrifices, who had so bravely made an atonement (so some read it, v. 30.) by offering up the sinners. Note, It is the honour of saints to be zealous against sin.

6. They continued their murmurings to the very last of their wanderings; for in the fortieth year they *angered God at the waters of strife*, (v. 32.) which refers to that story, Numb. 20. 3. . 5. And that which aggravated it now, was, that *it went ill with Moses for their sakes*; for though he was the meekest of all the men in the earth, yet their clamours at that time were so peevish and provoking, that they put him into a passion, and, being now grown very old, and off his guard, *he spake unadvisedly with his lips*, (v. 33.) and not as became him on that occasion; for he said in a heat, *Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch water out of this rock for you?* This was Moses's infirmity, and is written for our admonition, that we may learn, when we are in the midst of provocation, to keep our mouth as with a bridle, (39. 1. . 3.) and to *take heed to our spirits*, that they admit not resentments too much; for, when the spirit is provoked, it is much ado, even for those that have a great deal of wisdom and grace, not to *speak unadvisedly*. But it is charged upon the people as their sin; *They provoked his spirit* with that with which they angered God himself.

Note, We must answer not only for our own passions, but for the provocation which, by them, we give to the passions of others, especially of those, who, if not greatly provoked, would be meek and quiet.

God shews his displeasure against this sin of their's by shutting Moses and Aaron out of Canaan, for their misconduct upon this occasion; by which, (1.) God discovered his resentment of all such intemperate heats, even in the dearest of his servants. If he deals thus severely with Moses for one unadvised word, what does their sin deserve, who had spoken so many presumptuous wicked words? *If this was done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* (2.) God deprived them of the blessing of Moses's guidance and government, at a time when they most needed it, so that his death was more a punishment to them than to himself. It is just with God to remove those relations from us that are blessings to us, when we are peevish and provoking to them, and grieve their spirits.

34. They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: 35. But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. 36. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. 37. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, 38. And shed innocent blood, *even* the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. 39. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a-whoring with their own inventions. 40. Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. 41. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them. 42. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. 43. Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked *him* with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. 44. Nevertheless, he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: 45. And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies. 46. He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives. 47. Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, *and* to triumph in thy praise. 48. Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.

Here,

I. The narrative concludes with an account of Israel's conduct in Canaan, which was of a piece with that in the wilderness, and God's dealings with them, wherein, as all along, both justice and mercy appeared.

1. They were very provoking to God. The miracles and mercies which settled them in Canaan, made no more deep and durable impressions upon them than those which fetched them out of Egypt; for by the time they were just settled in Canaan, they corrupted themselves, and forsook God. Observe the steps of their apostacy.

(1.) They spared the nations which God had doomed to

destruction; (v. 34.) when they had got the good land God had promised them, they had no zeal against the wicked inhabitants, whom the Lord commanded them to extirpate, pretending pity; but so merciful is God that no man needs to be in any case more compassionate than he.

(2.) When they spared them, they promised themselves, that, notwithstanding this, they would not join in any dangerous affinity with them; but the way of sin is down-hill; omissions make way for commissions; when they neglect to *destroy the heathen*, the next news we hear is, They were *mingled among the heathen*, made leagues with them, and contracted an intimacy with them, so that they *learned their works*, v. 35. That which is rotten will sooner corrupt that which is sound, than be cured or made sound by it.

(3.) When they mingled with them, and learned some of their works that seemed innocent diversions and entertainments, yet they thought they would never join with them in their worship; but, by degrees, they learned that too; (v. 36.) *They served their idols*, in the same manner, and with the same rites, that they served them; and they became a *snare to them*; that sin drew on many more, and brought the judgments of God upon them, which they themselves could not but be sensible of, and yet knew not how to recover themselves.

(4.) When they joined with them in some of their idolatrous services, which they thought had least harm in them, they little thought that ever they should be guilty of that barbarous and inhuman piece of idolatry, the sacrificing of their living children to their dead gods; but they came to that at last; (v. 37, 38.) in which Satan triumphed over his worshippers, and regaled himself in blood and slaughter; *They sacrificed their sons and daughters*, pieces of themselves, to devils, and added murder, the most unnatural murder, to their idolatry; one cannot think of it without horror; They *shed innocent blood*, the most innocent, for it was infant-blood, nay, it was the *blood of their sons and their daughters*. See the power of the spirit that works in the children of disobedience, and see his malice. The beginning of idolatry and superstition, like that of strife, is as the letting forth of water, and there is no villany which they that venture upon it can be sure they shall stop short of, for God justly gives them up to a reprobate mind, Rom. 1. 28.

Their sin was, in part, their own punishment; for by it, [1.] They wronged their country; *The land was polluted with blood*, v. 38. That pleasant land, that holy land, was rendered uncomfortable to themselves, and unfit to receive those kind tokens of God's favour and presence in it, which were designed to be its honour. [2.] They wronged their consciences; (v. 39.) *They went a-whoring with their own inventions*, and so debauched their own minds, and were *defiled with their own works*, and rendered odious in the eyes of the holy God, and perhaps of their own consciences.

2. God brought his judgments upon them; and what else could be expected; For his name is Jealous, and he is a jealous God.

(1.) He fell out with them for it, (v. 40.) he was angry with them; *The wrath of God*, that consuming fire, *was kindled against his people*; for from them he took it worse than from the heathen that never knew him; nay, he was sick of them, he abhorred his own inheritance, which once he had taken pleasure in; yet the change was not in him, but in them. This is the worst thing in sin, that it makes us loathsome to God; and the nearer any are to God in profession, the more loathsome are they, if they rebel against him, like a dunghill at our door.

(2.) Their enemies then fell upon them, and, their Defence being departed, made an easy prey of them; (v. 41, 42.) *He gave them into the hands of the heathen*. Observe here how the punishment answered to the sin; they *mingled themselves with the heathen*, and *learned their works*; from them they willingly took the infection of sin, and therefore God justly made use of them as the instruments of their correction. Sinners often see themselves ruined by those by whom they have snuffed themselves to be debauched. Satan, who is a tempter, will be a tormentor. The heathen hated them; apostates lose all the love on God's side, and

get none on Satan's; and when they that *hated them ruled over them*, and they were brought in subjection under them, no marvel that they oppressed them, and ruled them with rigour; and thus God made them know the difference between *his service and the service of the kings of the countries*, 2 Chron. 12. 8.

(3.) When God granted them some relief, yet they went on in their sins, and their troubles also were continued, v. 43. This refers to the days of the Judges, when God often raised up deliverers, and wrought deliverances for them, and yet they relapsed to idolatry, and *provoked God with their counsels*, their idolatrous inventions, to deliver them up to some other oppressor, so that at last they were brought very low for their iniquity. Those that by sin disparage themselves, and will not by repentance humble themselves, are justly debased, and humbled, and brought low, by the judgments of God.

(4.) At length they cried unto God, and God returned in favour to them, v. 44. 46. They were chastened for their sins, but not destroyed, *cast down*, but not *cast off*; God appeared for them, [1.] As a God of mercy, who looked upon their grievances, *regarded their affliction, beheld when distress was upon them*; so some; who looked over their complaints, for he *heard their cry* with tender compassion, (Exod. 3. 7.) and overlooked their provocations; for though he had said, and had reason to say it, that he would destroy them, yet he *repented according to the multitude of his mercies*, and reversed the sentence; though he is not a man that he should repent, so as to change his mind, yet he is a gracious God, who pities us, and changes his way. [2.] As a God of truth, who *remembered for them his covenant*, and made good every word that he had spoken; and therefore, bad as they were, he would not break with them, because he would not break his own promise. [3.] As the God of power, who has all hearts in his hand, and turns them which way soever he pleases. *He made them to be pitied, even of those that carried them captives*, and had hated them and ruled them with rigour. He not only restrained the remainder of their enemies' wrath, that it should not utterly consume them, but he infused compassion even into their stony hearts, and made them relent, which was more than any art of man could have done with the utmost force of rhetoric. Note, God can change lions into lambs, and, *when a man's ways please the Lord*, will make even his enemies to pity him, and be at peace with him. When God pities, men shall. *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat omnia—A God at peace with us makes every thing else at peace.*

II. The psalm concludes with prayer and praise.

1. Prayer for the completing of his people's deliverance; even then when the Lord brought back the captivity of his people, still there was occasion to pray, *Lord turn again our captivity*; (126. 1. 4.) so here, (v. 47.) *Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen*. We may suppose, that many who were forced into foreign countries, in the times of the Judges, (as Naomi was, Ruth, 1. 1.) were not returned in the beginning of David's reign, Saul's time being discouraging, and therefore it was seasonable to pray, Lord, gather the dispersed Israelites from among the heathen, to give thanks to thy holy name; not only that they may have cause to give thanks, and hearts to give thanks, but that they may have opportunity to do it in the courts of the Lord's house, from which they were now banished, and so may triumph in thy praise, over those that had, in scorn, challenged them to sing the Lord's song in a strange land.

2. Praise for the beginning and progress of it; (v. 48.) *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting*. He is a blessed God from eternity, and will be so to eternity, and so let him be praised by all his worshippers. Let the priests say this, and then let all the people say, Amen, Hallelujah, in token of their cheerful concurrence in all these prayers, praises, and confessions. According to this rubric or directory, we find, that, when this psalm (or at least the closing verses of it) was sung, all the people said, Amen, and praised the Lord by saying, Hallelujah. By these two comprehensive words, it is very proper, in religious assemblies, to testify their joining with their ministers in the prayers and praises which, as their mouth, they offer up to God, according to his will, saying Amen to the prayers, and Hallelujah to the praises.

PSALM CVII.

The psalmist, having in the two foregoing psalms celebrated the wisdom, power, and goodness, of God, in his dealings with his church in particular, here observes some of the instances of his providential care of the children of men in general, especially in their distresses; for he is not only King of saints, but King of nations, not only the God of Israel, but the God of the whole earth, and a common Father to all mankind. Though this may especially refer to Israelites in their personal capacity, yet there were those who pertained not to the commonwealth of Israel, and yet were worshippers of the true God; and even those who worshipped images had some knowledge of a supreme Numen, to whom, when they were in earnest, they looked above all their false gods. And of these, when they prayed in their distresses, God took a particular care. 1. He specifies some of the most common calamities of human life, and shews how God succours those that labour under them, in answer to their prayers. 1. Banishment and dispersion, v. 2. 3. 2. Captivity and imprisonment, v. 10. 16. 3. Sickness and distemper of body, v. 17. 22. 4. Danger and distress at sea, v. 23. 32. These are put for all similar evils, in which those that cry unto God have ever found him a very present Help. 11. He specifies the varieties and vicissitudes of events concerning nations and families; in all which, God's hand is to be eyed by his own people, with joyful acknowledgments of his goodness, v. 33. 43. When we are in any of these or the like distresses, it will be comfortable to sing this psalm, with application; but if we be not, others are, and have been, of whose deliverance it becomes us to give God the glory, for we are members one of another.

1. **O** GIVE thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.
2. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;
3. And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.
4. They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.
5. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.
6. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.
7. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.
8. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!
9. For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

Here is,

I. A general call to all to give thanks to God, v. 1. Let all that sing this psalm, or pray it over, set themselves herein to give thanks to the Lord; and those that have not any special matter for praise, may furnish themselves with matter enough from God's universal goodness; in the fountain *he is good*, in the streams *his mercy endures for ever*, and never fails.

II. A particular demand hereof from the redeemed of the Lord; which may well be applied spiritually to those that have an interest in the great Redeemer, and are saved by him from sin and hell. They have, of all people, most reason to say that God is good, and his mercy everlasting; these are the children of God that were scattered abroad, whom Christ died to gather together in one, out of all lands, John, 11. 52. Matth. 24. 31. But it seems here to be meant of a temporal deliverance, wrought for them when in their distress they cried unto the Lord, v. 6. *Is any afflicted? Let him pray*. Does any pray? God will certainly hear and help. When troubles arrive at an extreme, that is man's time to cry; those who but whispered prayer before, then cry aloud; and then it is God's time to succour; in the mount he will be seen.

1. They were in an enemy's country, but God wrought out their rescue; *He redeemed them from the hand of the enemy*, (v. 2.) not by might or power, it may be, (Zech. 4. 6.) nor by price or reward, (Isa. 45. 13.) but by the spirit of God working on the spirits of men.

2. They were dispersed as outcasts; but God gathered them out of all the countries whither they were scattered in the cloudy

and dark day, that they might again be incorporated, v. 3. See Dent. 30. 4. Ezek. 34. 12. God knows those that are his, and where to find them.

3. They were bewildered, had no road to travel in, no dwelling-place to rest in, v. 4. *When they were redeemed out of the hand of the enemy, and gathered out of the lands, they were in danger of perishing in their return home through the dry and barren deserts, They wandered in the wilderness, where there was no trodden path, no company, but a solitary way; no lodging, no conveniences, no accommodations, no inhabited city where they might have quarters of refreshment. But God led them forth by the right way, (v. 7.) directed them to an inn, nay, directed them to a home, that they might go to a city of habitation, which was inhabited; nay, which they themselves should inhabit. This may refer to poor travellers in general, those particularly, whose way lay through the wilds of Arabia, where we may suppose they were often at a loss; and yet many in that distress were wonderfully relieved, so that few perished. Note, We ought to take notice of the good hand of God's providence over us in our journeys, going out, and coming in, directing us in our way, and providing for us places, both to bait in, and rest in. Or (as some think) it has an eye to the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years; it is said, (Deut. 32. 10.) *God led them about, and yet here he led them by the right way.* God's way, though to us it seems about, will appear, at last, to have been the right way. It is applicable to our condition in this world; we are here as in a wilderness, have here *no continuing city*, but dwell in tents as strangers and pilgrims: but we are under the guidance of his wise and good providence, committing ourselves to which, we shall be led in the right way to the city that has foundations.*

4. They were ready to perish for hunger; (v. 5.) *Their soul even fainted in them*, spent with the fatigues of their journey, and ready to drop down for want of refreshment. They that have constant plenty, and are, every day, fed to the full, know not what a miserable case it is to be hungry and thirsty, and to have no supply. This was sometimes the case of Israel in the wilderness, and perhaps of other poor travellers; but God's providence finds out ways to satisfy the longing soul, and fill the hungry soul with goodness, v. 9. Israel's wants were seasonably supplied, and many have been wonderfully relieved when they were ready to perish. The same God that has led us, has fed us, all our life long, unto this day; has fed us with food convenient; has provided food for the soul, and filled the hungry soul with goodness. *They that hunger and thirst after righteousness*, after God, the living God, and communion with him, shall be abundantly replenished with the goodness of his house, both in grace and glory.

Now for all this, they who receive mercy are called upon to return thanks; (v. 8.) *Oh that men* (it is meant especially of those men whom God has graciously relieved) *would praise the Lord for his goodness to them in particular, and for his wonderful works to others of the children of men.* Note, (1.) God's works of mercy are wonderful works, works of wonderful power, considering the weakness, and of wonderful grace, considering the unworthiness, of those he shews mercy to. (2.) It is expected of those who receive mercy from God, that they return praise to him. (3.) We must acknowledge God's goodness to the children of men, as well as to the children of God: to others as well as to ourselves.

10. Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *being bound in affliction and iron*; 11. Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High; 12. Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and *there was none to help.* 13. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, *and he saved them out of their distresses.* 14. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. 15. Oh that *men* would praise the Lord for his

goodness, and *for his wonderful works to the children of men!* 16. For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.

We are to take notice of the goodness of God toward prisoners and captives. Observe,

1. A description of this affliction. Prisoners are said to *sit in darkness*, (v. 10.) in dark dungeons, close prisons. It intimates that they are desolate and disconsolate, they sit *in the shadow of death*; which intimates not only great distress and trouble, but great danger. Prisoners are many times appointed to die; they sit despairing to get out, but resolving to make the best of it. They are *bound in affliction*, and many times *in iron*, as Joseph. Thus sore a calamity is imprisonment, which should make us prize liberty, and be thankful for it.

2. The cause of this affliction, (v. 11.) It is, *because they rebelled against the words of God.* Wilful sin is rebellion against the works of God; it is a contradiction to his truths, and a violation of his laws. *They contemned the counsel of the Most High*, and thought they neither needed it, nor could be the better for it; and they that will not be counselled, cannot be helped. They that despise prophesying, that regard not the admonitions of their own consciences, nor the just reproofs of their friends, *contemn the counsel of the most High*, and for this they are *bound in affliction*, both to punish them for, and to reclaim them from, their rebellions.

3. The design of this affliction, and that is, to bring down their heart, (v. 12.) to humble them for sin, to make them low in their own eyes, to cast down every high, proud, aspiring, thought. Afflicting providences must be improved as humbling providences; and we not only lose the benefit of them, but thwart God's designs, and walk contrary to him, in them, if our hearts be unhumiliated and unbroken, as high and hard as ever under them. Is the estate brought down with labour, the honour sunk? Are those that exalted themselves fallen down, and is there none to help them? Let this bring down the spirit to confess sin, to accept the punishment of it, and humbly to sue for mercy and grace.

4. The duty of this afflicted state, and that is, to pray; (v. 13.) *Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble*, though before perhaps they had neglected him. Prisoners have time to pray, who, when they were at liberty, could not find time; they see they have need of God's help, who formerly thought they could do well enough without him. Sense will make men cry when they are in trouble, but grace will direct them to cry unto the Lord, from whom the affliction comes, and who alone can remove it.

5. Their deliverance out of the affliction; *They cried unto the Lord, and he saved them*, v. 13. *He brought them out of darkness into light*, welcome light, and then doubly sweet and pleasant; *brought them out of the shadow of death* to the comforts of life; and their liberty was to them life from the dead, v. 14. Were they fettered? *He brake their bands asunder.* Were they imprisoned in strong castles? *He brake the gates of brass*, and the bars of iron, wherewith those gates were made fast, he did not put back, but *cut in sunder.* Note, When God will work deliverance, the greatest difficulties that lie in the way shall be made nothing of. Gates of brass, and bars of iron, as they cannot keep him out from his people, (he was with Joseph in the prison,) so they cannot keep them in, when the time, the set-time, for their enlargement is come.

6. The return that is required from those whose bands God has loosed; (v. 15.) *Let them praise the Lord for his goodness*, and take occasion from their own experience of it, and share in it, to bless him for that goodness which the earth is full of, *the world and they that dwell therein.*

17. Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. 18. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. 19. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, *and he saveth them out*

of their distresses. 20. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions. 21. Oh that *men* would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! 22. And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.

Bodily sickness is another of the calamities of this life, which gives us an opportunity of experiencing the goodness of God in recovering us; and of that the psalmist speaks in these verses, where we may observe,

1. That we, by our sins, bring sickness upon ourselves, and then it is our duty to pray, v. 17. . 19.

(1.) It is the sin of the soul that is the cause of sickness; we bring it upon ourselves both meritoriously and efficiently; *Fools, because of their transgression, are thus afflicted*; they are thus corrected for the sins they have committed, and thus cured of their evil inclinations to sin. If we knew no sin, we should know no sickness; but the transgression of our life, and the iniquity of our heart, make it necessary. Sinners are fools, they wrong themselves, and all against their own interest; not only their spiritual, but their secular, interest. They prejudice their bodily health by their intemperance, and endanger their lives by indulging their appetites. This their way is their folly, and they need the rod of correction to drive out their foolishness that is bound up in their hearts.

(2.) The weakness of the body is the effect of sickness; (v. 18.) when people are sick, *their soul abhors all manner of meat*; they not only have no desire to eat, nor power to digest it, but they nauseate it, and their stomach is turned against it: and here they may read their sin in their punishment; they that doted most on the meat that perished; when they come to be sick, are sick of it, and the dainties they loved are loathed; what they took too much of, now they can take nothing of, which commonly follows upon the overcharging of the heart with surfeiting and drunkenness. And when the stomach is gone the life is as good as gone; *They draw near unto the gates of death*; they are, in their own apprehension, and in the apprehension of all about them, at the brink of the grave, as ready to be turned to destruction.

(3.) Then is a proper time for prayer; *Then they cry unto the Lord, v. 19.* Is any sick? Let him pray; let him be prayed for: prayer is a salve for every sore.

2. That it is by the power and mercy of God that we are recovered from sickness, and then it is our duty to be thankful. Compare with this Job, 33. 18, 28.

(1.) When those that are sick call upon God, he returns them an answer of peace. They cry unto him, and he *saves them out of their distresses*; (v. 19.) he removes their griefs, and prevents their fears. [1.] He does it easily; *He sent his word and healed them, v. 20.* This may be applied to the miraculous cures which Christ wrought when he was upon earth, by a word's speaking; he said, *Be clean, Be whole*, and the work was done; it may also be applied to the spiritual cures which the Spirit of grace works in regeneration; he sends his word, and heals souls; convinces, converts, sanctifies, them, and all by the word. In the common instances of recovery from sickness, God in his providence does but speak it, and it is done. [2.] He does it effectually; he *delivereth them out of their destructions*, that they shall neither be destroyed, nor distressed with the fear of being so. Nothing is too hard for that God to do, who kills and makes alive again, brings down to the grave, and raises up; who *turneth man almost to destruction*, and yet saith, *Return*.

(2.) When those that have been sick are recovered, they must return to God an answer of praise; (v. 21, 22.) *Let all men praise the Lord for his goodness*, and let *them* particularly, to whom God has thus granted a new life, spend it in his service; let them *sacrifice with thanksgiving*; not only bring a thank-offering to the altar, but a thankful heart to God. Thanksgivings

are the best thank-offerings, and shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock. *And let them declare his works with rejoicing*, to his honour, and for the encouragement of others. *The living, the living, they shall praise him.*

23. They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; 24. These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. 25. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. 26. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. 27. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. 28. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. 29. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. 30. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. 31. Oh that *men* would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! 32. Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

The psalmist here calls upon *them* to give glory to God, who are delivered from dangers at sea. Though the Israelites dealt not, much in merchandise, yet their neighbours the Tyrians and Zidonians did, and for them perhaps this part of the psalm was especially calculated.

1. Much of the power of God appears at all times in the sea v. 23, 24. It appears to them *that go down to the sea in ships, as mariners, merchants, fishermen, or passengers, that do business in great waters*; and surely none will expose themselves there but those that have business; among all Solomon's pleasant things, we do not read of any pleasure-boat he had; but those that go on business, lawful business, may, in faith, put themselves under the divine protection. *These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders*, which are the more surprising, because most are born and bred upon land; and what passes at sea is new to them. The deep itself is a wonder, its vastness, its saltiness, its ebbing and flowing. The great variety of living creatures in the sea is wonderful. Let those that go to sea, by all the wonders they observe there, be led to consider and adore the infinite perfections of that God whose the sea is, for he made it, and manages it.

2. It especially appears in storms at sea, which are much more terrible than at land. Observe here,

(1.) How dangerous and dreadful a tempest at sea is. *Then wonders begin to appear in the deep, when God commands and raises the strong wind, which fulfils his word, 148. 8.* He raises the winds, as a prince by his commission raises forces. Satan pretends to be the *prince of the power of the air*; but he is a pretender; the powers of the air are at God's command, not at his. When the wind becomes stormy, it *lifts up the waves of the sea, v. 25.* Then the ships are kicked like tennis-balls on the tops of the waves; they seem to *mount up to the heavens*, and then couch again, as if they would *go down to the depths, v. 26.* A stranger, who had never seen it, would not think it possible for a ship to live at sea, as it will in a storm, and ride it out, but would expect that the next wave would bury it, and it would never come up again; and yet God, who taught man discretion to make ships that should so strangely keep above water, does by his special providence preserve them, that they answer the end to admiration. When the ships are thus tossed, the *soul of the seaman melts because of trouble*; and when the storm is very

high, even those that are used to the sea, can neither shake off nor dissemble their fears, but *they reel to and fro*, the tossing makes them giddy, and they *stagger* and are sick, it may be, *like a drunken man*; the whole ship's crew are in confusion, and quite at their wit's end, (v. 27.) not knowing what to do more for their own preservation; all their wisdom is swallowed up, and they are ready to give up themselves for gone, Jonah, 1. 5, &c.

(2.) How seasonable it is at such a time to pray. They that go to sea must expect such perils as are here described, and the best preparation they can make for them, is, to make sure a liberty of access to God by prayer, for *then they will cry unto the Lord*, v. 28. We have a saying, "Let them that would learn to pray, go to sea;" I say, Let them that will go to sea, learn to pray, and accustom themselves to pray, that they may come with the more boldness to the throne of grace when they are in trouble. Even heathen mariners, in a storm, *cried every man to his god*; but they that have the Lord for their God, have a present and powerful Help in that and every other time of need, so that when they are at their wit's end, they are not at their faith's end.

(3.) How wonderfully God sometimes appears for those that are in distress at sea, in answer to their prayers; *He brings them out of the danger*; and, [1.] The sea is still; *He makes the storm a calm*, v. 29. The winds fall, and only by their soft and gentle murmurs serve to lull the waves asleep again, so that the surface of the sea becomes smooth and smiling. By this Christ proved himself to be more than a man, *that even the winds and the seas obeyed him*. [2.] The seaman are made easy; *They are glad, because they be quiet*; quiet from the noise, quiet from the fear, of evil. Quietness after a storm is a very desirable thing, and sensibly pleasant. [3.] The voyage becomes prosperous and successful; *so he brings them to their desired haven*, v. 30. Thus he carries his people safe through all the storms and tempests that they meet with in their voyage heaven-ward; and lands them, at length, in the desired harbour.

(4.) How justly it is expected that all those who have had a safe passage over the sea, and especially who have been delivered from remarkable perils at sea, should acknowledge it with thankfulness, to the glory of God. Let them do it privately, in their closets and families. Let them *praise the Lord for his goodness to themselves and others*, v. 31. Let them do it publicly, (v. 32.) *in the congregation of the people, and in the assembly of the elders*; there let them erect the memorials of their deliverance, to the honour of God, and for the encouragement of others to trust him.

33. He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the water-springs into dry ground: 34. A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. 35. He turneth the wilderness into a standing-water, and dry ground into water-springs. 36. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; 37. And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase. 38. He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease. 39. Again they are diminished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. 40. He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, *where there is no way*. 41. Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh *him* families like a flock. 42. The righteous shall see *it*, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. 43. Whoso is wise, and will observe these *things*, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the LORD.

The psalmist, having given God the glory of the providential reliefs granted to persons in distress, here gives him the glory of the revolutions of providence, and the surprising changes it sometimes makes in the affairs of the children of men.

1. He gives some instances of these revolutions;

1. Fruitful countries are made barren, and barren countries are made fruitful. Much of the comfort of this life depends upon the soil in which our lot is cast. Now, (1.) The sin of man has often marred the fruitfulness of the soil, and made it unserviceable, v. 33, 34. Land watered with *rivers* is sometimes *turned into a wilderness*, and that which had been full of water-springs, now has not so much as water-streams; it is turned *into dry and sandy ground*, that has not consistency and moisture enough to produce any thing valuable. Many a *fruitful land* is turned into saltness, not so much from natural causes as from the just judgment of God, who thus punishes *the wickedness of them that dwell therein*; as the vale of Sodom became a salt sea. Note, If the land be bad, it is because the inhabitants are so. Justly is the ground made unfruitful to them that bring not forth fruit unto God, but serve Baal with their corn and wine. (2.) The goodness of God has often mended the barrenness of the soil, and turned a *wilderness*, a land of drought, *into water-springs*, v. 35. The land of Canaan, which was once the glory of all lands for fruitfulness, is said to be, at this day, a fruitless, useless, worthless, spot of ground, as was foretold, Deut. 29. 23. This land of our's, which formerly was much of it an uncultivated desert, is now full of all good things, and *more abundant honour is given to that part which lacked*. Let the plantations in America, and the colonies settled there, compared with the desolations of many countries in Asia and Europe, that formerly were famous, expound this.

2. Necessitous families are raised and enriched, while prosperous families are impoverished, and go to decay. If we look abroad in the world, (1.) We see many greatly increasing, whose beginning was small, and whose ancestors were mean, and made no figure, v. 36. . 38. Those that were *hungry*, are made to *dwell* in fruitful lands; there they take root, gain a settlement, and *prepare a city for habitation* for themselves and their's after them. Providence puts good land under their hands, and they build upon it. Cities took rise from rising families. But as lands will not serve for men without lodgings, and therefore they must *prepare a city of habitation*, so lodgings, though ever so convenient, will not serve without lands, and therefore they must *sow the fields, and plant vineyards*; (v. 37.) for the king himself is served of the field. And yet the fields, though favoured with water-springs, will not *yield fruits of increase*, unless they be sown; nor will vineyards be had, unless they be planted; man's industry must attend God's blessing, and then God's blessing will crown man's industry. The fruitfulness of the soil should engage, for it does encourage, diligence; and, ordinarily, *the hand of the diligent*, by the blessing of God, *makes rich*, v. 38. *He blesses them also, so that they are*, in a little time, *multiplied greatly*, and he *diminishes not their cattle*. As in the beginning, so still it is, by the blessing of God, that the earth and all the creatures *increase and multiply*; (Gen. 1. 22.) and we depend upon God for the increase of the cattle as well as for the increase of the ground. Cattle would decrease many ways, if God should but permit it, and men would soon suffer by it. (2.) We see many that have thus suddenly risen, as suddenly sunk and brought to nothing; (v. 39.) *Again they are minished and brought low* by adverse providences, and end their days as low as they began them; or their families after them lose as fast as they got, and scatter what they heaped together. Note, Worldly wealth is an uncertain thing; and often those that are filled with it, ere they are aware, grow so secure and sensual with it, that, ere they are aware, they lose it again. Hence it is called *deceitful riches*, and the *manum of unrighteousness*. God has many ways of making men poor; he can do it by *oppression, affliction, and sorrow*, as he tempted Job, and brought him low.

3. Those that are high and great in the world, are abased, and those that were mean and despicable, are advanced to honour, v. 40, 41. We have seen, (1.) Princes dethroned and reduced to

straits. *He poured contempt upon them*, even among those that have idolized them. *Them that exalt themselves God will abase*; and, in order thereunto, will infatuate; he makes *them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way*. He baffles those counsels by which they thought to support themselves, and their own power and pomp, and drives them headlong, so that they know not what course to steer, or what measures to take. We met with this before, Job, 12. 24, 25. (2.) Those of low degree advanced to the posts of honour; (v. 41.) *Yet setteth he the poor on high, raiseth from the dust, to the throne of glory*, 1 Sam. 2. 8. Ps. 113. 7, 8. Those that were afflicted, and trampled on, are not only delivered, but set on high out of the reach of their troubles, above their enemies, and have dominion over those to whom they had been in subjection. That which adds to their honour, and strengthens them in their elevation, is, the multitude of their children; *He maketh him families like a flock of sheep*, so numerous, so useful, so sociable with one another, and so meek and peaceable. He that sent them meat, sent them mouths, *Happy is the man that has his quiver filled with arrows*, for he shall boldly speak with the enemy in the gate, 127. 5. God is to be acknowledged both in setting up families, and in building them up. Let not princes be envied, nor the poor despised, for God has many ways of changing the condition of both.

II. He makes some improvement of these remarks; such surprising turns as these, are of use,

1. For the solacing of saints; they observe these dispensations with pleasure; (v. 42.) *The righteous shall see it, and rejoice in the glorifying of God's attributes, and the manifesting of his dominion over the children of men*. It is a great comfort to a good man to see how God manages the children of men, as the potter does the clay, so as to serve his own purposes by them; to see despised virtue advanced, and impious pride brought low to the dust; to see it evinced beyond dispute, that verily there is a God that judges in the earth.

2. For the silencing of sinners; *All iniquity shall stop her mouth*; it shall be a full conviction of the folly of atheists, and of those that deny the Divine Providence; and, forasmuch as practical atheism is at the bottom of all sin, it shall in effect stop the mouth of all iniquity. When sinners see how their punishment answers to their sin, and how justly God deals with them in taking away from them those gifts of his which they had abused, they shall not have one word to say for themselves; for God will be justified, he will be clear.

3. For the satisfying of all concerning the divine goodness, (v. 43.) *Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, these various dispensations of Divine Providence, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord*. Here is, (1.) A desirable end proposed; and that is, rightly to understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. It is of great use to us, in religion, to be fully assured of God's goodness; to be experimentally acquainted and duly affected with it; that his loving-kindness may be before our eyes, 26. 3. (2.) A proper means prescribed for attaining this end; and that is, a due observing of God's providence. We must lay up these things, mind them, and keep them in mind, Luke, 2. 19. (3.) A commendation of the use of this means, as an instance of true wisdom; *Whoso is wise*, let him by this both prove his wisdom, and improve it. A prudent observation of the providences of God will contribute very much to the accomplishing of a good Christian.

PSALM CVIII.

This psalm begins with praise, and concludes with prayer, and faith is at work in both. I. David here gives thanks to God for mercies to himself, v. 1. 5. II. He prays to God for mercies for the land, pleading the promises of God, and putting them in suit, v. 6. 13. The former part is taken out of Ps. 57. 7, &c, the latter out of Ps. 60. 5, &c, and both with very little variation; to teach us, that we may in prayer use the same words that we have formerly used, provided it be with new affections. It intimates likewise that it is not only allowable, but sometimes convenient, to gather some verses out of one psalm, and some out of another, and to put them together, to be sung to the glory of God. In singing this psalm, we must give glory to God, and take comfort to ourselves.

A song or psalm of David.

1. **O** GOD, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. 2. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. 3. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. 4. For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. 5. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth;

We may here learn to praise God from the example of one who was master of the art.

1. We must praise God with fixedness of heart; our heart must be employed in the duty, (else we make nothing of it,) and engaged to the duty; (v. 1.) *O God, my heart is fixed*, and then *I will sing and give praise*. Wandering straggling thoughts must be gathered in, and kept close to the business; for they must be told that here is work enough for them all.

2. We must praise God with freeness of expression; I will praise him *with my glory*, with my tongue; our tongue is our glory, and never more so than when it is employed in praising God. When the heart is inditing this good matter, our tongue must be as the pen of a ready writer, 45. 1. David's skill in music was his glory, it made him famous, and this should be consecrated to the praise of God; and therefore it follows, *Awake, my psaltery and harp*. Whatever gift we excel in, we must praise God with.

3. We must praise God with fervency of affection, and must stir up ourselves to do it, that it may be done in a lively manner, and not carelessly; (v. 2.) *Awake, psaltery and harp*; let it not be done with a dull and sleepy tune, but let the airs be all lively. *I myself will awake early* to do it, with all that is within me, and all little enough. Warm devotions honour God.

4. We must praise God publicly, as those that are not ashamed to own our obligations to him, and our thankful sense of his favours, but desire that others also may be in like manner affected with the divine goodness; (v. 3.) *I will praise thee among the people of the Jews*; nay, *I will sing to thee among the nations of the earth*. Whatever company we are in, we must take all occasions to speak well of God; and we must not be shy of singing psalms, though our neighbours hear us; for it looks like being ashamed of our Master.

5. We must, in our praises, magnify the mercy and truth of God in a special manner; (v. 4.) mercy in promising, truth in performing. The heavens are vast, but the mercy of God is more capacious; the skies are high and bright, but the truth of God is more eminent, more illustrious. We cannot see further than the heavens and clouds; whatever we see of God's mercy and truth, there is still more to be seen, more reserved to be seen in the other world.

6. Since we find ourselves so defective in glorifying God, we must beg of him to glorify himself, to do all, to dispose all, to his own glory, to get himself honour, and make himself a name; (v. 5.) *Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens*, higher than the angels themselves can exalt thee with their praises; and let thy glory be spread over all the earth. *Father, glorify thine own name; thou hast glorified it, glorify it again*. It is to be our first petition, *Hallowed be thy name*.

6. That thy beloved may be delivered: save with thy right hand, and answer me. 7. God hath spoken in holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. 8. Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver; 9. Moab is my washpot; over

Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph. 10. Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom? 11. *Wilt not thou, O God, who hast cast us off? and wilt not thou, O God, go forth with our hosts?* 12. Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. 13. Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.

We may here learn how to pray as well as praise.

1. We must be public-spirited in prayer, and bear upon our hearts, at the throne of grace, the concerns of the church of God, v. 6. It is God's beloved, and therefore must be our's; and therefore we must pray for its deliverance, and reckon we are answered, if God grant what we ask for his church, though he delay to give us what we ask for ourselves. *Save thy church, and thou answerest me; I have what I would have. Let the earth be filled with God's glory, and the prayers of David are ended;* (72. 19, 20.) he desires no more.

2. We must, in prayer, act faith upon the power and promise of God; upon his power, *Save with thy right hand*, which is mighty to save; and upon his promise, *God has spoken in his holiness*, in his holy word, to which he has sworn by his holiness, and therefore *I will rejoice*, v. 7. What he has promised he will perform, for it is the word both of his truth and of his power. An active faith can rejoice in what God has said, though it be not yet done; for with him saying and doing are not two things, whatever they are with us.

3. We must, in prayer, take the comfort of what God has secured to us and settled upon us, though we are not yet put in the possession of it. God had promised David to give him, (1.) The hearts of his subjects; and therefore he surveys the several parts of the country as his own already, *Shechem and Succoth, Gilead and Manasseh, Ephraim and Judah*, they are all my own, v. 8. With such assurance as this we may speak of the performance of what God has promised to the Son of David; he will, without fail, give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession; for so has he spoken in his holiness; nay, of all the particular persons that were given him, he will lose none; he also, as David, shall have the hearts of his subjects, John. 6. 37. And, (2.) The necks of his enemies; these are promised, and therefore David looks upon *Moab, and Edom, and Philistia*, as his own already; (v. 9.) *Over Philistia will I triumph*, which explains 60. 8. *Philistia, triumph thou because of me*; which some think should be read, *O my soul, triumph thou over Philistia*. Thus the exalted Redeemer is set down at God's right hand, in a full assurance that all his enemies shall in due time be made his footstool, though all things are not yet put under him, Heb. 2. 8.

4. We must take encouragement from the beginning of mercy, to pray and hope for the perfecting of it; (v. 10, 11.) *"Who will bring me into the strong cities, that are yet unconquered? Who will make me master of the country of Edom, which is yet unsubdued?"* The question, probably, was to be debated in his privy council, or a council of war, What methods they should take to subdue the Edomites, and to reduce that country? but he brings it into his prayers, and leaves it in God's hands, *Wilt not thou, O God? Certainly thou wilt.* It is probable that he spake with the more assurance concerning the conquest of Edom, because of the ancient oracle concerning Jacob and Esau, that the elder should serve the younger, and the blessing of Jacob, by which he was made Esau's lord, Gen. 27. 37.

5. We must not be discouraged in prayer, nor beaten off from our hold of God, though Providence has, in some instances, frowned upon us; "Though thou hast cast us off, yet thou wilt now go forth with our hosts, v. 11. Thou wilt comfort us again, after the time that thou hast afflicted us." Adverse events are sometimes intended for the trial of the constancy of our faith and prayer, which we ought to persevere in, whatever difficulties we meet with, and not to faint.

6. We must seek help from God, renouncing all confidence in the creature; (v. 12.) *"Lord, give us help from trouble, prosper our designs, and defeat the designs of our enemies against us."* It is not unseasonable to talk of trouble at the same time that we talk of triumphs, especially when it is to quicken prayer for help from Heaven: and it is a good plea, *Vain is the help of man.* "It is really so, and therefore we are undone if thou do not help us; we apprehend it to be so, and therefore depend upon thee for help, and have the more reason to expect it."

7. We must depend entirely upon the favour and grace of God, both for strength and success in our work and warfare, v. 13. (1.) We must do our part, but we can do nothing of ourselves, it is only through God that we shall do valiantly. Blessed Paul will own that even he can do nothing, nothing to purpose, but through Christ strengthening him, Phil. 4. 13. (2.) When we have acquitted ourselves ever so well, yet we cannot speed by any merit or might of our own; it is God himself that treads down our enemies, else we, with all our valour, cannot do it. Whatever we do, whatever we gain, God must have all the glory.

PSALM CIX.

Whether David penned this psalm when he was persecuted by Saul, or when his son Absalom rebelled against him, or upon occasion of some other trouble that was given him, is uncertain; and whether the particular enemy he prays against, was Saul, or Doeg, or Ahithophel, or some other not mentioned in the story, we cannot determine; but it is certain that in penning it he had an eye to Christ, his sufferings, and his persecutors, for that imprecation (v. 8.) is applied to Judas, Acts, 1. 20. The rest of the prayers here against his enemies were the expressions, not of passion, but of the Spirit of prophecy. I. He lodges a complaint in the court of heaven for the malice and base ingratitude of his enemies, and with it an appeal to the righteous God, v. 1. 5. II. He prays against his enemies, and devotes them to destruction, v. 6. 20. III. He prays for himself, that God would help and succour him in his low condition, v. 21. 29. IV. He concludes with a joyful expectation that God would appear for him, v. 30, 31. In singing this psalm, we must comfort ourselves with the believing foresight of the certain destruction of all the enemies of Christ and his church, and the certain salvation of all those that trust in God, and keep close to him.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **H**OLD not thy peace, O God of my praise; 2. For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. 3. They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. 4. For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer. 5. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love.

It is the unspeakable comfort of all good people, that, whoever is against them, God is for them, and to him they may apply themselves as to one that is pleased to concern himself for them. Thus David here.

1. He refers himself to God's judgment; (v. 1.) *"Hold not thy peace, but let my sentence come forth from thy presence, 17. 2. Delay not to give judgment upon the appeal made to thee."* God saw what his enemies did against him, but seemed to connive at it, and to keep silence; "Lord," says he, "do not always do so." The title he gives to God, is observable, *"O God of my praise"*; the God in whom I glory, and not in any wisdom or strength of my own; from whom I have every thing that is my praise; the God whom I have praised, and will praise, and hope to be for ever praising." He calls God the *God of his mercy*, (59. 10.) here the *God of his praise*; forasmuch as God is the *God of our mercies*, we must make him the *God of our praises*; if all is of him and from him, all must be to him and for him.

2. He complains of his enemies, shewing that they were such as it was fit for the righteous God to appear against. (1.) They were very spiteful and malicious; they are wicked, they delight

in doing mischief, (v.2.) their words are *words of hatred*, v.3. They had an implacable enmity to a good man, because of his goodness. "They open their mouths against me to swallow me up, and *fight against me* to cut me off, if they could." (2.) They were notorious liars; now a liar is one of the seven things which the Lord hates. "They are *deceitful* in their protestations and professions of kindness, while at the same time they speak against me behind my back, *with a lying tongue*." They were equally false in their flatteries and in their calumnies. (3.) They were both politic and restless in their designs; "They *compassed me about* on all sides, so that, which way soever I looked, I could see nothing but what made against me." (4.) They were unjust; their accusations of him, and sentence against him, were all groundless; "They *have fought against me without a cause*, I never gave them any provocation;" nay, which was worst of all, (5.) They were very ungrateful, and *rewarded him evil for good*, v.5. Many a kindness he had done them, and was upon all occasions ready to do them, and yet he could not work upon them to abate their malice against him; but, on the contrary, they were the more exasperated, because they could not provoke him to give them some occasion against him; (v.4.) *For my love they are my adversaries*. The more he endeavoured to gratify them, the more they hated him. We may wonder that it is possible that any should be so wicked; and yet, since there have been so many instances of it, we should not wonder if any be so wicked against us.

3. He resolves to keep close to his duty, and take the comfort of that; *But I give myself unto prayer*, (v.4.) *I pray*, so it is in the original; "I am for prayer, I am a man of prayer, I love prayer, and prize prayer, and practise prayer, and make a business of prayer, and am in my element when I am at prayer." A good man is made up of prayer, *gives himself to prayer*, as the apostles, Acts, 6. 4. When David's enemies falsely accused him, and misrepresented him, he applied himself to God, and by prayer committed his cause to him. Though they were his adversaries for his love, yet he continued to pray for them; if others are abusive and injurious to us, yet let not us fail to do our duty to them, nor *sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for them*, 1 Sam. 12. 23. Though they hated and persecuted him for his religion, yet he kept close to it; they laughed at him for his devotion, but they could not laugh him out of it: Let them say what they will, *I give myself unto prayer*. Now, herein David was a type of Christ, who was compassed about with *words of hatred* and lying words; whose enemies not only persecuted him without cause, but for his love and his *good works*; (John, 10. 32.) and yet he *gave himself to prayer*, to pray for them; *Father, forgive them*.

6. Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand. 7. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; and let his prayer become sin. 8. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. 9. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. 10. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek *their bread* also out of their desolate places. 11. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the stranger spoil his labour. 12. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children. 13. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. 14. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. 15. Let them be before the Lord continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth. 16. Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted

the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart. 17. As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. 18. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones. 19. Let it be unto him as the garment *which* covereth him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually. 20. *Let this be* the reward of mine adversaries from the Lord, and of them that speak evil against my soul.

David here fastens upon some one particular person that was worse than the rest of his enemies, and the ringleader of them; and, in a devout and pious manner, not from a principle of malice and revenge, but in a holy zeal for God, and against sin, and with an eye to the enemies of Christ, particularly Judas who betrayed him, whose sin was greater than Pilate's that condemned him, (John, 19. 11.) he imprecates and predicts his destruction, foresees and pronounces him completely miserable, and such a one as our Saviour calls him, *A son of perdition*. Calvin speaks of it as a detestable piece of sacrilege, common in his time among Franciscan friars and other monks, that, if any one had malice against a neighbour, he might hire some of them to curse him every day, which he would do in the words of these verses; and particularly he tells of a lady in France, who, being at variance with her own and only son, hired a parcel of friars to curse him in these words. Greater impiety can scarcely be imagined than to vent a devilish passion in the language of sacred writ; to kindle strife with coals snatched from God's altar, and to call for fire from heaven with a tongue set on fire of hell.

1. The imprecations here are very terrible; woe, and a thousand woes, to that man against whom God says *Amen* to them; and they are all in full force against the implacable enemies and persecutors of God's church and people, that *will not repent, to give him glory*. It is here foretold concerning this bad man,

1. That he should be cast and sentenced as a criminal, with all the dreadful pomp of a trial, conviction, and condemnation; (v.6,7.) *Set thou a wicked man over him*, to be as cruel and oppressive to him as he has been to others; for God often makes one wicked man a scourge to another, to spoil the spoilers, and to deal treacherously with those that have dealt treacherously. *Set the wicked one over him*, so some; that is, Satan, as it follows; and then it was fulfilled in Judas, into whom Satan entered, to hurry him into sin first, and then into despair. Set his own wicked heart over him, set his own conscience against him, let that fly in his face. *Let Satan stand on his right hand*, and be let loose against him to deceive him, as he did Ahab to his destruction, and then to accuse him and resist him, and then he is certainly cast, having no interest in that Advocate who alone can say, *The Lord rebuke thee, Satan*; (Zech.3.1,2.) when he shall be judged at men's bar, let not his usual arts to evade justice do him any service, but let his sin find him out, and *let him be condemned*; nor shall he escape before God's tribunal, but he condemned there when the day of inquisition and recompence shall come. *Let his prayer become sin*, as the clamours of a condemned malefactor not only find no acceptance, but are looked upon as an affront to the court. The prayers of the wicked now become sin, because soured with the leaven of hypocrisy and malice; and so they will in the great day, because then it will be too late to cry, *Lord, Lord, open to us*. Let every thing be turned against him and improved to his disadvantage, even his prayers.

2. That, being condemned, he should be executed as a most notorious malefactor. (1.) That he should lose his life, and the number of his months be cut off in the midst, by the sword of justice; *Let his days be few*, or shortened, as a condemned criminal has but a few days to live; (v.8.) such bloody and *deceitful men shall not live out half their days*. (2.) That, consequently, all his

places should be disposed of to others, and they should enjoy his preferments and employments; *Let another take his office.* This St. Peter applies to the filling up of Judas's room in the truly sacred college of the apostles, by the choice of Matthias, Acts, 1. 20. Those that mismanage their trusts will justly have their office taken from them, and given to those that will approve themselves faithful. (3.) That his family should be beheaded and beggared; that *his wife* should be made a widow, and *his children fatherless*, by his untimely death, v. 9. Wicked men, by their wicked courses, bring ruin upon their wives and children, whom they ought to take care of and provide for. Yet his children, if, when they lost their father, they had a competency to live upon, might still subsist in comfort; but they shall be *vagabonds, and shall beg*; they shall not have a house of their own to live in, nor any certain dwelling-place, nor know where to have a meal's meat, but shall creep out of their desolate places with fear and trembling, like beasts out of their dens, to seek their bread, (v. 10.) because they are conscious to themselves that all mankind have reason to hate them for their father's sake. (4.) That his estate should be ruined, as the estates of malefactors are confiscated; (v. 11.) *Let the extortioner, the officer, seize all that he has, and let the stranger, who was nothing akin to his estate, spoil his labour*, either for his crimes or for his debts, Job, 5. 4, 5. (5.) That his posterity should be miserable. Fatherless children, though they have nothing of their own, yet sometimes are well provided for by the kindness of those whom God inclines to pity them; but this wicked man having never shewed mercy, *there shall be none to extend mercy to him*, by favouring his fatherless children, when he is gone, v. 12. The children of wicked parents often fare the worse for their parents' wickedness this way; the bowels of men's compassion are shut up from them, which yet ought not to be; for why should children suffer for that which was not their fault, but their infelicity? (6.) That his memory should be infamous, and buried in oblivion and disgrace; (v. 13.) *Let his posterity be cut off; let his end be to destruction*, so Dr. Hammond; and in the next generation let their name be blotted out, or remembered with contempt and indignation, and (v. 15.) let an indelible mark of disgrace be left upon it.

See here what hurries some to shameful deaths, and brings the families and estates of others to ruin; makes them and their's despicable and odious, and entails poverty, and shame, and misery, upon their posterity; it is sin, that mischievous destructive thing. The learned Dr. Hammond applies this to the final dispersion and desolation of the Jewish nation for their crucifying Christ: their princes and people were cut off, their country laid waste, their posterity made fugitives and vagabonds.

II. The ground of these imprecations bespeaks them very just, though they sound very severe.

1. To justify the imprecations of vengeance upon the sinner's posterity, the sin of his ancestors is here brought into the account, (v. 14, 15.) *the iniquity of his fathers, and the sin of his mother.* These God often visits, even upon the children's children, and is not unrighteous therein: when wickedness has long run in the blood, justly does the curse run along with it. Thus all the innocent blood that had been shed upon the earth, from that of righteous Abel, was required from that persecuting generation, who, by putting Christ to death, filled up the measure of their fathers, and left as long a train of vengeance to follow them as the train of guilt was that went before them, which they themselves agreed to by saying, *His blood be upon us, and on our children.*

2. To justify the imprecations of vengeance upon the sinner himself, his own sin is here charged upon him, which called aloud for it.

(1.) He had loved cruelty, and therefore give him blood to drink; (v. 16.) *He remembered not to shew mercy*, remembered not those considerations which would have induced him to shew mercy; remembered not the objects of compassion that had been presented to him; but persecuted the poor, whom he should have protected and relieved; and *slew the broken in heart*, whom he should have comforted and healed. Here is a barbarous man indeed, not fit to live.

(2.) He had loved cursing, and therefore let the curse come upon his head, v. 17. 19. Those that were out of the reach of his cruelty, he let fly at with his curses, which were impotent and ridiculous; but they shall return upon him. *He delighted not in blessing*; he took no pleasure in wishing well to others, nor in seeing others do well; he would give no body a good word or a good wish, much less would he do any body a good turn; and so let all good be far from him. *He clothed himself with cursing*; he was proud of it as an ornament, that he could frighten all about him with the curses he was liberal of; he confided in it as armour, which would secure him from the insults of those he feared. And let him have enough of it. Was he fond of cursing? *let God's curse come into his bowels like water*, and swell him as with a dropsy, and let it soak like oil into his bones. The word of the curse is quick and powerful, and divides between the joints and the marrow: it works powerfully and effectually; it fastens on the soul; it is a piercing thing, and there is no antidote against it. Let it compass him on every side as a garment, v. 19. Let God's cursing him be his shame, as his cursing his neighbour was his pride; let it cleave to him as a girdle, and let him never be able to get clear of it. Let it be to him like the waters of jealousy, which caused the belly to swell and the thigh to rot. This points at the utter ruin of Judas, and the spiritual judgments which fell on the Jews for crucifying Christ. The psalmist concludes his imprecations with a terrible *Amen*, which signifies not only, "I wish it may be so," but "I know it shall be so;" *Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the Lord*, v. 20. And this will be the reward of all the adversaries of the Lord Jesus: his enemies, that will not have him to reign over them, shall be brought forth and slain before him. And he will one day recompense tribulation to them that trouble his people.

21. But do thou for me, O God the LORD, for thy name's sake: because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me. 22. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. 23. I am gone like the shadow when it declineth: I am tossed up and down as the locust. 24. My knees are weak through fasting, and my flesh faileth of fatness. 25. I became also a reproach unto them: when they looked upon me they shook their heads. 26. Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy: 27. That they may know that this is thy hand; that thou, LORD, hast done it. 28. Let them curse, but bless thou: when they arise, let them be ashamed; but let thy servant rejoice. 29. Let mine adversaries be clothed with shame, and let them cover themselves with their own confusion, as with a mantle. 30. I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth; yea, I will praise him among the multitude. 31. For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.

David, having denounced God's wrath against his enemies, here takes God's comforts to himself, but in a very humble manner, and without boasting.

1. He pours out his complaint before God concerning the low condition he was in, which probably gave advantage to his enemies to insult over him; "*I am poor and needy*, and therefore a proper object of pity, and one that needs and craves thy help." (1.) He was troubled in mind; (v. 22.) *My heart is troubled within me*; not only broken with outward troubles, which sometimes prostrate and sink the spirits, but wounded with a sense of guilt; and a wounded spirit who can bear? who can heal? (2.) He appre

hended himself drawing near to his end; *I am gone like the shadow when it declines*; as good as gone already. Man's life, at best, is like a shadow, sometimes it is like the evening shadow, the presage of night approaching, *like the shadow when it declines*. (3.) He was unsettled; *tossed up and down like the locust*; his mind fluctuating and unsteady, still putting him upon new counsels; his outward condition far from any fixation, but still upon the remove, hunted like a partridge on the mountains. (4.) His body was wasted, and almost worn away; (v. 24.) *My knees are weak through fasting*; either forced fasting, for want of food when he was persecuted, or for want of appetite when he was sick; or voluntary fasting, when he chastened his soul either for sin or affliction, his own or other's, 35. 13.—69. 10. "*My flesh fails of fatness*; it has lost the fatness it had, so that I am become a skeleton, nothing but skin and bones." But it is better to have this leanness in the body, while the soul prospers and is in health, than, like Israel, to have leanness sent into the soul, while the body is feasted. (5.) He was ridiculed and reproached by his enemies; (v. 25.) his devotions and his afflictions they made the matter of their laughter; upon both those accounts, God's people have been exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that were at ease. In all this David was a type of Christ, who in his humiliation was thus wounded, thus weakened, thus reproached; he was also a type of the church, which is often *afflicted, tossed with tempests, and not comforted*.

2. He prays for mercy for himself; in general, (v. 21.) "*Do thou for me, O God the Lord; appear for me, act for me.*" If God be for us, he will do for us, will do *more abundantly for us than we are able either to ask or think*. He does not prescribe to God what he should do for him, but refers himself to his wisdom; "Lord, do for me what seems good in thine eyes. Do that which thou knowest will be for me, really for me, in the issue for me, though, for the present, it may seem to make against me." More particularly, he prays, (v. 26.) "*Help me, O Lord my God, O save me.*" Help me under my trouble, save me out of my trouble: save me from sin, help me to do my duty." He prays, (v. 28.) "Though they curse, *bless thou*. Here, (1.) He despises the causeless curses of his enemies; *Let them curse*. He said of Shimei, *So let him curse*. They can but shew their malice; they can do him no more mischief than *the bird by wandering, or the swallow by flying*, Prov. 26. 2. (2.) He values the blessing of God as sufficient to balance their curses; *Bless thou*, and then it is no matter though they curse. If God bless us, we need not care who curses us; for *how can they curse whom God has not cursed*, nay, whom he has blessed? Num. 23. 8. Men's curses are impotent, God's blessings are omnipotent; and those whom we unjustly curse, may in faith expect, and pray for, God's blessing, his special blessing. When the Pharisees cast out the poor man for confessing Christ, Christ *found him*, John, 9. 35. When men, without cause, say all the ill they can of us, and wish all the ills they can to us, we may with comfort lift up our heart to God in this petition, *Let them curse, but bless thou*. He prays, (v. 28.) *Let thy servant rejoice*. They that know how to value God's blessing, let them but be sure of it, and they will be glad of it.

3. He prays that his enemies might be *ashamed*, (v. 28.) *clothed with shame*; (v. 29.) that they might *cover themselves with their own confusion*; that they might be left to themselves to do that which would expose them, and *manifest their folly before all men*; or rather, that they might be disappointed in their designs and enterprises against David, and thereby might be *filled with shame*, as the adversaries of the Jews were, Neh. 6. 16. Nay, this he prays, that they might be brought to repentance, which is the chief thing we should beg of God for our enemies: sinners, indeed, bring shame upon themselves, but they are true penitents that take shame to themselves, and *cover themselves with their own confusion*.

4. He pleads God's glory, the honour of his name; *Do for me, for thy name's sake*, (v. 21.) especially the honour of his goodness, by which he has proclaimed his name; "*Deliver me, because thy mercy is good*; it is what thou thyself dost delight in, and it is what I do depend upon. Save me, not according to my merit,

for I have none to pretend to, but according to thy mercy; let that be the fountain, the reason, the measure, of my salvation."

Lastly, He concludes the psalm with joy, the joy of faith; joy, in assurance that his present conflicts would end in triumphs. (1.) He promises God that he will praise him; (v. 30.) "*I will greatly praise the Lord*, not only with my heart, but *with my mouth*; *I will praise him*, not in secret only, but *among the multitude*." (2.) He promises himself that he shall have cause to praise God; (v. 31.) *He shall stand at the right hand of the poor*, nigh to him, a present Help: he shall stand at his right hand, as his Patron and Advocate, to plead his cause against his accusers, and to bring him off; *to save him from those that condemn his soul*, and would execute it, if they could. God was David's Protector in his sufferings, and was present also with the Lord Jesus in his, *stood at his right hand*, so that he was *not moved*, (16. 8.) saved his soul from those that pretended to be the judges of it, and received it into his own hands. Let all those that *suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him*.

PSALM CX.

This psalm is pure gospel; it is only, and wholly, concerning Christ, the Messiah, promised to the fathers, and expected by them. It is plain that the Jews of old, even the worst of them, so understood it, however the modern Jews have endeavoured to pervert it, and to rob us of it; for when the Lord Jesus proposed a question to the Pharisees upon the first words of this psalm, where he takes it for granted that David, in spirit, calls Christ his Lord, though he was his Son, they chase rather to say nothing, and to own themselves grieved, than to make it a question whether David does indeed speak of the Messiah or no; for they freely yield so plain a truth, though they foresee it will turn to their own disgrace, Matth. 22. 41, &c. Of him therefore, no doubt, the prophet here speaks, of him, and of no other man. Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the office of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, with reference both to his humiliation and his exaltation; and of each of these we have here an account. I. His prophetic office, v. 2. II. His priestly office, v. 4. III. His kingly office, v. 1, 3, 5, 6. IV. His estates of humiliation and exaltation, v. 7. In singing this psalm, we must act faith upon Christ, submit ourselves entirely to him, to his grace and government, and triumph in him as our Prophet, Priest, and King, by whom we hope to be ruled, and taught, and saved, for ever; and as the Prophet, Priest, and King, of the whole church, who shall reign till he has put down all opposing rule, principality, and power, and delivered up the kingdom to God the Father.

A psalm of David.

1. **THE LORD** said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. 2. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. 3. Thy people *shall be* willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. 4. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Some have called this psalm *David's creed*, almost all the articles of the Christian faith being found in it: the title calls it *David's psalm*: for, in the believing foresight of the Messiah, he both praised God and solaced himself; much more may we, in singing it, to whom that is fulfilled, and therefore more clearly revealed, which is here foretold.

Glorious things are here spoken of Christ, and such as oblige us to consider how great he is.

I. He is David's Lord; we must take special notice of this, because he himself does; (Matth. 22. 43.) *David, in spirit, calleth him Lord*. And as the apostle proves the dignity of Melchizedek, and in him of Christ, by this, that so great a man as Abraham was paid him *tithes*, (Heb. 7. 4.) so we may by this prove the dignity of the Lord Jesus, that David, that great man, *called him his Lord*: by him that king acknowledges himself to reign, and to him to be acceptable as a servant to his Lord. Some think he

calls him his *Lord*, because he was the Lord that was to descend from him; his Son, and yet his Lord. Thus his immediate mother calls him her *Saviour*; (Luke, 1. 47.) even his parents were his subjects, his saved ones.

II. He is constituted a sovereign Lord by the counsel and decree of God himself: *The Lord, Jehovah, said unto him, Sit as a king. He receives of the Father this honour and glory*; (2 Pet. 1. 17.) from him who is the Fountain of honour and power, and *takes it not to himself*. He is therefore rightful Lord, and his title is incontestable; for what God has said cannot be gainsaid. He is therefore everlasting Lord; for what God has said shall not be unsaid. He will certainly take and keep possession of that kingdom which the Father has committed to him, and none can hinder.

III. He was to be advanced to the highest honour, and intrusted with an absolute sovereign power, both in heaven and in earth; *Sit thou at my right hand*. Sitting is a resting posture: after his services and sufferings, he entered into rest from all his labours. It is a ruling posture; he sits to give law, to give judgment: it is a remaining posture; he sits like a king for ever: sitting at the right hand of God denotes both his dignity and his dominion, the honour put upon him, and the trusts reposed in him, by the Father. All the favours that come from God to man, and all the service that comes from man to God, pass through his hand.

IV. All his enemies were in due time to be made his footstool, and not till then; but then also he must reign in the glory of the Mediator, though the work of the Mediator will be, in a manner, at an end. Note, 1. Even Christ himself has enemies that fight against his kingdom and subjects, his honour and interest, in the world: there are those that will not have him to reign over them, and thereby they join themselves to Satan, who will not have him to reign at all. 2. These enemies will *be made his footstool*; he will subdue them, and triumph over them; he will do it easily, as easily as we put a footstool in its proper place, and such a propriety there will be in it; he will make himself easy by the doing of it, as a man that sits with a footstool under his feet; he will subdue them in such a way as shall be most for his honour, and their perpetual disgrace; he will *tread down the wicked*, Mal. 4. 3. 3. God the Father has undertaken to do it; *I will make them thy footstool*, who can do it. 4. It will not be done immediately. All his enemies are now in a chain, but not yet made his footstool: this the apostle observes, (Heb. 2. 8.) *We see not yet all things put under him*. Christ himself must wait for the completing of his victories and triumphs. 5. He shall reign till it is done; and all their might and malice shall not give the least disturbance to his government. His sitting at God's right hand is a pledge to him of his setting his feet, at last, on the necks of all his enemies.

V. That he should have a kingdom set up in the world, beginning at Jerusalem; (v. 2.) "*The Lord shall send the rod or sceptre of thy strength out of Zion*, by which thy kingdom shall be erected, maintained, and administered." The Messiah, when he sits on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, will have a church on earth, and will have an eye to it; for he is *King upon the holy hills of Zion*, (2. 6.) in opposition to mount Sinai, that frightful mountain on which the law was given, Heb. 12. 18, 24. Gal. 4. 24, 25. The kingdom of Christ took rise from Zion, the city of David; for he was the Son of David, and was to have *the throne of his father David*. By the rod of his strength, or his strong rod, is meant his everlasting gospel, and the power of the Holy Ghost going along with it; the report of the word, and the arm of the Lord accompanying it, (Isa. 53. 1. Rom. 1. 16.) the gospel coming in word, and in power, and *in the Holy Ghost*, 1 Thess. 1. 5. By the word and Spirit of God, souls were to be reduced first, and brought into obedience to God, and then ruled and governed according to the will of God. This strong rod God sent forth; he poured out the Spirit, and gave both commissions and qualifications to them that preached the word, and *ministered the Spirit*, Gal. 3. 5. It was sent out of Zion, for there the Spirit was given, and there the preaching of the gospel among all nations must begin, at Jerusalem. See Luke, 24. 47, 49. *Out of Zion must go forth the law of faith*, Isa. 2. 3. Note, The gospel of Christ,

being sent of God, is *mighty through God* to do wonders, 2 Cor. 10. 4. It is *the rod of Christ's strength*. Some make it to allude not only to the sceptre of a prince, denoting the glory of Christ shining in the gospel, but to a shepherd's crook, his rod and staff, denoting the tender care Christ takes of his church; for he is both *the great and good Shepherd*.

VI. That his kingdom, being set up, shall be maintained and kept up in the world, in despite of all the oppositions of the power of darkness. 1. Christ shall rule, shall give laws, and govern his subjects by them; shall perfect them, and make them easy and happy; shall do his own will, fulfil his own counsels, and maintain his own interests among men. His kingdom is of God, and it shall stand; his crown sits fast on his head, and there it shall flourish. 2. He shall rule *in the midst of his enemies*. He sits in heaven in the midst of his friends; his throne of glory there is surrounded with none but faithful worshippers of him, Rev. 5. 11. But he rules on earth in the midst of his enemies, and his throne of government here is surrounded with those that hate him, and fight against him. Christ's church is a lily among thorns, and his disciples are sent forth *as sheep in the midst of wolves*; he knows *where they dwell, even where Satan's seat is*; (Rev. 2. 13.) and this redounds to his honour, that he not only keeps his ground, but gains his point, notwithstanding all the malignant policies and powers of hell and earth, which cannot shake the rock on which the church is built. *Great is the truth, and will prevail*.

VII. That he should have a great number of subjects, who should be to him for a name and a praise, v. 3.

1. That they should be his own people, and such as he should have an incontestable title to. They are given to him by the Father, who gave them their lives and beings, and to whom their lives and beings were forfeited; *Thine they were, and thou gavest them me*, John, 17. 6. They are redeemed by him; he has purchased them to be to himself *a peculiar people*, Tit. 2. 14. They are his by right, antecedent to their consent; he *had much people in Corinth* before they were converted, Acts, 18. 10.

2. That they should be a willing people, a people of willingness; alluding to servants that choose their service, and are not brought like captives to it; they love their masters, and would not go out free: or there may be an allusion to soldiers that are volunteers, and not pressed men; "Here am I, send me;" or to sacrifices that are free-will offerings, and not offered of necessity; we *present ourselves living sacrifices*. Note, Christ's people are a willing people. The conversion of a soul consists in its being willing to be Christ's, coming under his yoke, and into his interests, with an entire complacency and satisfaction.

3. That they should be so *in the day of his power*; *In the day of thy muster*, so some; When thou art enlisting soldiers, thou shalt find a multitude of volunteers forward to be listed; let but the standard be set up, and the *Gentiles will seek to it*, Isa. 11. 10. — 60. 3. Or, When thou art drawing them out to battle, they shall be willing to *follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes*, Rev. 14. 4. *In the day of thine armies*, so some; When the first preachers of the gospel were sent forth, as Christ's armies, to reduce apostate men, and to ruin the kingdom of apostate angels, then all that are *thy people shall be willing*; that will be thy time of setting up thy kingdom. *In the day of thy strength*, so we take it. There is a general power which goes along with the gospel to all, proper to make them willing to be Christ's people, arising from the supreme authority of its great Author, and the intrinsic excellency of the things themselves contained in it, beside the undeniable miracles that were wrought for the confirmation of it. And there is also a particular power, the power of the Spirit, going along with the power of the word, to the people of Christ, which is effectual to make them willing. The former leaves sinners without matter of excuse, this leaves saints without matter of boasting. Whoever are willing to be Christ's people, it is the free and mighty grace of God that makes them so.

4. That they should be so *in the beauty of holiness*; that is, (1.) They shall be allured to him by the beauty of holiness; they shall be charmed into a subjection to Christ by the sight given them of his beauty, who is the holy Jesus, and the Beauty of the church,

which is the holy nation. (2.) They shall be admitted by him into the beauty of holiness, as spiritual priests, to minister in his sanctuary; for by the blood of Jesus we have boldness to enter into the holiest. (3.) They shall attend upon him in the beautiful attire or ornaments of grace and sanctification. Note, Holiness is the livery of Christ's family, and that which becomes his house for ever. Christ's soldiers are all thus clothed; these are the colours they wear: the armies of heaven follow him in fine linen, clean and white, Rev. 19. 14.

5. That he should have great numbers of people devoted to him; the multitude of the people is the honour of the prince, and that shall be the honour of this prince; *From the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth*, abundance of young converts, like the drops of dew in a summer's morning. In the early days of the gospel, in the morning of the New Testament, the youth of the church, great numbers flocked to Christ, and there were multitudes that believed; a remnant of Jacob, that was as a dew from the Lord, Mic. 5. 7. Isa. 64. 4, 8. Or thus, "*From the womb of the morning, from their very childhood, thou hast the dew of thy people's youth*, their hearts and affections when they are young; it is thy youth, because it is dedicated to thee." *The dew of the youth* is a numerous, illustrious, hopeful, shew of young people's flocking to Christ, which would be to the world as dew to the ground, to make it fruitful. Note, The dew of our youth, even in the morning of our days, ought to be consecrated to our Lord Jesus.

6. That he should be not only a King, but a Priest, v. 4. The same Lord that said, *Sit thou at my right hand, secure, and will not repent, Thou art a priest*, that is, *Be thou a priest*; for by the word of his oath he was consecrated. Note, (1.) Our Lord Jesus Christ is a Priest; he was appointed to that office, and faithfully executes it; he is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin, (Heb. 5. 1.) to make atonement for our sins, and to recommend our services to God's acceptance. He is God's Minister to us, and our Advocate with God, and so is a Mediator between us and God. (2.) He is a Priest for ever; he was designed for a Priest, in God's eternal counsels; he was a Priest to the Old-Testament saints, and will be a Priest for all believers to the end of time, Heb. 13. 8. He is said to be a Priest for ever; not only because we are never to expect any other dispensation of grace than this by the priesthood of Christ, but because the blessed fruits and consequences of it will remain to eternity. (3.) He is made a Priest with an oath, which the apostle argues, to prove the pre-eminence of his priesthood above that of Aaron, Heb. 7. 20, 21. *The Lord has sworn*, to shew that in the commission there was no implicit reserve of a power of revocation; for he will not repent, as he did concerning Eli's priesthood, 1 Sam. 2. 30. This was intended for the honour of Christ, and the comfort of Christians: the priesthood of Christ is confirmed by the highest ratifications possible, that it might be an unshaken foundation for our faith and hope to build upon. (4.) He is a Priest, not of the order of Aaron, but of that of Melchizedek, which, as it was prior, so it was, upon many accounts, superior, to that of Aaron, and a more lively representation of Christ's priesthood: Melchizedek was a priest upon his throne, so is Christ, (Zech. 6. 13.) King of righteousness, and King of peace: Melchizedek had no successor, nor has Christ, his is an unchangeable priesthood. The apostle comments largely upon these words, (Heb. 7.) and builds on them his discourse of Christ's priestly office; which he shews was no new notion, but built upon this most sure word of prophecy. For, as the New Testament explains the Old, so the Old Testament confirms the New, and Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega of both.

5. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. 6. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. 7. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.

Here we have our great Redeemer,

1. Conquering his enemies, (v. 5, 6.) in order to the making of them his footstool, v. 1. Our Lord Jesus will certainly bring to nought all the opposition made to his kingdom, and bring to ruin all those who make that opposition, and persist in it. He will be too hard for those, whoever they may be, that fight against him, against his subjects, and the interest of his kingdom, among men, either by persecutions or by perverse disputings. Observe here,

1. The Conqueror; *The Lord, Adonai*; the Lord Jesus, he to whom all judgment is committed; he shall make his own part good against his enemies; *The Lord at thy right hand, O church*, so some; that is, the Lord that is nigh unto his people, and a very present Help to them, that is at their right hand, to strengthen and succour them, shall appear for them against his and their enemies. See 109. 31. *He shall stand at the right hand of the poor*, 16. 8. Some observe, that, when Christ is said to do his work at the right hand of his church, it intimates, that if we would have Christ to appear for us, we must bestir ourselves, 2 Sam. 5. 24. Or rather, *At thy right hand, O God*, referring to v. 1. in the dignity and dominion to which he is advanced. Note, Christ's sitting at the right hand of God speaks as much terror to his enemies, as happiness to his people.

2. The time fixed for this victory; *in the day of his wrath*; that is, the time appointed for it; when the measure of their iniquities is full, and they are ripe for ruin. When the day of his patience is expired, then the day of his wrath comes. Note, (1.) Christ has wrath of his own, as well as grace. It concerns us to kiss the Son, for he can be angry, 2. 12. And we read of the wrath of the Lamb, Rev. 5. 16. (2.) There is a day of wrath set, a year of recompences for the controversy of Zion, the year of the redeemed. The time is set for the destruction of particular enemies, and when that time is come, it shall be done, how unlikely soever it may seem: but the great day of his wrath will be at the end of time, Rev. 6. 17.

3. The extent of this victory. (1.) It shall return very high; *He shall strike through kings*. The greatest of men, that set themselves against Christ, shall be made to fall before him; though they be kings of the earth, and rulers, accustomed to carry their point, they cannot carry it against Christ, they do but make themselves ridiculous by the attempt, 2. 2. 5. Be their power among men ever so despotic, Christ will call them to an account; be their strength ever so great, their policies ever so deep, Christ will be too hard for them; and above them, wherein they deal proudly. Satan is the prince of this world, Death the king of terrors, and we read of kings that make war with the Lamb; but they shall all be brought down and broken. (2.) It shall reach very far. The trophies of Christ's victories will be set up among the heathen, and in many countries, wherever any of his enemies are, not his eye only, but his hand, shall find them out, (21. 8.) and his wrath shall follow them. He will plead with all nations, Joel, 3. 2.

4. The equity of this victory; *He shall judge among them*. It is not a military execution, which is done in fury, but a judicial one; before he condemns and slays, he will judge; he will make it appear that they have brought this ruin upon themselves, and have themselves rolled the stone which returns upon them, that he may be justified when he speaks, and the heavens may declare his righteousness. See Rev. 19. 1, 2.

5. The effect of this victory; it shall be the complete and utter ruin of all his enemies. He shall strike them through, for he strikes home, and gives an incurable wound; he shall wound the heads, which seems to refer to the first promise of the Messiah, (Gen. 3. 15.) that he should bruise the serpent's head. He shall wound the head of his enemies; (Ps. 68. 21.) some read it, *He shall wound him that is the head over many countries*; either Satan, or Antichrist, whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of his mouth. He shall make such destruction of his enemies, that he shall fill the places with the dead bodies. The slain of the Lord shall be many. See Isa. 34. 3, &c. Ezek. 39. 12, 14. Rev. 14. 20.—19. 17, 18. The filling of the vallies (for so some read it)

with dead bodies, perhaps, denotes the filling of hell (which is sometimes compared to the valley of Hinnom, Isa. 30. 33. Jer. 7. 32.) with damned souls, for that will be the portion of those that persist in their enmity to Christ.

II. We have here the Redeemer saving his friends and comforting them, (v. 7.) for their benefit.

1. He shall be humbled; *He shall drink of the brook in the way*, that bitter cup which the Father put into his hand. He shall be so abased and impoverished, and withal so intent upon his work, that he shall drink puddle-water out of the lakes in the highway; so some. The wrath of God, running in the channel of the curse of the law, was the brook in the way, in the way of his undertaking, which he must go through; or which ran in the way of our salvation and obstructed it, which lay between us and heaven. Christ drank of this brook, when he was made a Curse for us, and therefore, when he entered upon his suffering, he went over the brook Kidron; (John, 18. 1.) he drank deep of this black brook, (so Kidron signifies,) this bloody brook, so drank of the brook in the way, as to take it out of the way of our redemption and salvation.

2. He shall be exalted; *Therefore shall he lift up the head*. When he died, he bowed the head; (John, 19. 30.) but he soon lifted up the head by his own power in his resurrection. He lifted up the head as a Conqueror, yea, more than a Conqueror. This denotes not only his exaltation, but his exultation; not only his elevation, but his triumph in it; (Col. 2. 15.) *Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them*. David spake as a type of him in this, (Ps. 27. 6.) *Now shall my head be lifted up above mine enemies*. His exaltation was the reward of his humiliation; because he humbled himself, therefore God also has highly exalted him, Phil. 2. 9. Because he drank of the brook in the way, therefore he lifted up his own head, and so, lifted up the heads of all his faithful followers, who, if they suffer with him, shall also reign with him.

PSALM CXI.

This, and divers of the psalms that follow it, seem to have been penned by David for the service of the church in their solemn feasts, and not upon any particular occasion. This is a psalm of praise, the title of it is Hallelujah, Praise ye the Lord; intimating that we must address ourselves to the use of this psalm, with hearts disposed to praise God. It is composed alphabetically, each sentence beginning with a several letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in order exactly; two sentences to each verse, and three a piece to the two last. The psalmist, exhorting to praise God, I. Sets himself for an example, v. 1. II. Furnishes us with matter for praise from the works of God. 1. The greatness of his works, and the glory of them. 2. The righteousness of them. 3. The goodness of them. 4. The power of them. 5. The conformity of them to his word of promise. 6. The perpetuity of them. These observations are intermixed, v. 2. .9. III. He recommends the holy fear of God, and a conscientious obedience to his commands, as the most acceptable way of praising God, v. 10.

1. PRAISE ye the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation. 2. The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. 3. His work is honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever. 4. He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion. 5. He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant.

The title of the psalm being Hallelujah, the psalmist (as every author ought to have) has an eye to his title, and keeps to his text.

1. He resolves to praise God himself, v. 1. What duty we call others to, we must oblige and excite ourselves to; nay, whatever others do, whether they will praise God or no, we and our houses must determine to do it, we and our hearts; for such is the

psalmist's resolution here. *I will praise the Lord with my whole heart*. My heart, my whole heart, being devoted to his honour, shall be employed in this work; and this in the assembly, or secret, of the upright, in the cabinet council, and in the congregation of Israelites. Note, We must praise God both in private and in public, in lesser and greater assemblies, in our own families and in the courts of the Lord's house; but in both it is most comfortable to do it in concert with the upright, who will heartily join in it. Private meetings for devotion should be kept up as well as more public and promiscuous assemblies.

2. He recommends to us the works of the Lord, as the proper subject of our meditations when we are praising him—the dispensations of his providence toward the world, the church, and particular persons.

(1.) God's works are very magnificent; great like himself, there is nothing in them that is mean or trifling: they are the products of infinite wisdom and power, and we must say this upon the first view of them, before we come to inquire more particularly into them, that the works of the Lord are great, v. 2. There is something in them surprising, and that strikes an awe upon us. All the works of the Lord are spoken of as one; (v. 3.) it is his work, such is the beauty and harmony of Providence, and so admirably do all its dispensations centre in one design; it was cried to the wheels, O wheel, Ezek. 10. 13. Take all together, and it is honourable and glorious, and such as becomes him.

(2.) They are entertaining and exercising to the inquisitive: sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. Note, [1.] All that truly love God have pleasure in his works, and reckon all well that he does; nor do their thoughts dwell upon any subject with more delight than on the works of God, which the more they are looked into, the more they give us of a pleasing surprise. [2.] They that have pleasure in the works of God will not take up with a superficial transient view of them, but will diligently search into them and observe them. In studying both natural and political history, we should have this in our eye, to discover the greatness and glory of God's works. [3.] These works of God, that are humbly and diligently sought into, shall be sought out; they that seek shall find; (so some read it;) they are found of all them that have pleasure in them, or found in all their parts, designs, purposes, and several concernments; (so Dr. Hammond;) for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, 25. 14.

3. They are all just and holy; His righteousness endures for ever. Whatever he does, he never did, nor ever will, do any wrong to any of his creatures; and therefore his works endure for ever, (Eccl. 3. 14.) because the righteousness of them does.

4. They are admirable and memorable, fit to be registered and kept on record. Much that we do is so trifling that it is not fit to be spoken of or told again; the greatest kindness is to forget it; but notice is to be taken of God's works, and an account to be kept of them; (v. 4.) He has made his wonderful works to be remembered; he has done that which is worthy to be remembered, which cannot but be remembered; and he has instituted ways and means for the keeping of some of them in remembrance, as the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt by the passover. He has made him a memorial by his wonderful works; so some read it: see Isa. 63. 10. By that which God did with his glorious arm, he made himself an everlasting name.

5. They are kind; in them the Lord shews that he is gracious and full of compassion. As of the works of creation, so of the works of Providence, we must say, They are not only all very great, but all very good. Dr. Hammond takes this to be the name which God has made to himself by his wonderful works, the same with that which he proclaimed to Moses, The Lord God is gracious and merciful, Exod. 24. 6. God's pardoning sin is the most wonderful of all his works, and which ought to be remembered to his glory. It is a further instance of his grace and compassion, that he has given meat to them that fear him, v. 5. He gives them their daily bread, food convenient for them: so he does to others by common providence; but to them that fear him he gives it by covenant, and in pursuance of the promise; for it follows, He will be ever mindful of his covenant; so that they can taste cove-

nant-love even in common mercies. Some refer this to the manna with which God fed his people Israel in the wilderness. Others to the spoil they got from the Egyptians when they came out with great substance, according to the promise, Gen. 15. 14. When God brake the heads of the leviathan, he gave him to be meat to his people, Ps. 74. 14. *He has given prey to them that fear him*; so the margin has it, not only fed them, but enriched them, and given their enemies to be a prey to them.

6. They are earnest of what he will do, according to his promise: *He will ever be mindful of his covenant*, for he has ever been so; and as he never did, so he never will, 'et one jot or tittle of it fall to the ground. Though God's people have their infirmities, and are often unmindful of his commands, yet he *will ever be mindful of his covenant*.

6. He hath shewed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen. 7. The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure. 8. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. 9. He sent redemption unto his people, he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name. 10. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.

We are taught to give glory to God,

1. For the great things he has done for his people, for his people of Israel, of old and of late; *He has shewed his people the power of his works*, (v. 6.) in what he has wrought for them; many a time he has given proofs of his omnipotence, and shewed them what he can do, and that there is nothing too hard for him to do. Two things are specified, to shew the power of his works.

(1.) The possession God gave to Israel in the land of Canaan, that he might give them, or in giving them, the heritage of the heathen. This he did in Joshua's time, when the seven nations were subdued; and in David's time, when the neighbouring nations were many of them brought into subjection to Israel, and became tributaries to David. Herein God shewed his sovereignty, in disposing of kingdoms as he pleases, and his might, in making good his disposals. If God will make the heritage of the heathen to be the heritage of Israel, who can either arraign his counsel, or stay his hand?

(2.) The many deliverances which he wrought for his people, when by their iniquities they had sold themselves into the hand of their enemies; (v. 9.) *He sent redemption unto his people*; not only out of Egypt at first, but often afterward; and these redemptions were typical of the great redemption, which in the fulness of time was to be wrought out by the Lord Jesus, that redemption in Jerusalem which so many waited for.

2. For the stability both of his word and of his works, which assure us of the great things he will do for them.

(1.) What God has done shall never be undone. He will not undo it himself, and men and devils cannot; (v. 7.) *The works of his hand are verity and judgment*; (v. 8.) *they are done in truth and uprightness*; all he does is consonant to the eternal rules and reasons of equity, all according to the counsel of his wisdom, and the purpose of his will; all well-done; and therefore there is nothing to be altered or amended, but it is firm and unchangeable. Upon the beginning of his works we may depend for the perfecting of them; work that is true will last, will neither go to decay, nor sink under the stress that is laid upon it.

(2.) What God has said shall never be unsaid; *All his commandments are sure*; all straight, and therefore all steady. His purposes, the rule of his actions, shall all have their accomplishment; *Has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* No doubt, he shall; whether he commands light or darkness, it is done as

he commands. His precepts, the rule of our actions, are unquestionably just and good, and therefore unchangeable, and not to be repealed. His promises and threatenings are all sure, and will be made good; nor shall the unbelief of man make either the one or the other of no effect. They are established, and therefore *they stand fast for ever and ever*, and the scripture cannot be broken. The wise God is never put upon new counsels, nor obliged to take new measures, either in his laws or in his providences. All is said, as all is done, in truth and uprightness, and therefore it is immutable. Men's folly and falsehood make them *unstable in all their ways*, but infinite wisdom and truth for ever exclude retraction and revocation; *He has commanded his covenant for ever*. God's covenant is commanded, for he has made it as one that has an incontestable authority to prescribe both what we must do, and what we must expect, and an unquestionable ability to perform both what he has promised in the blessings of the covenant, and what he has threatened in the curses of it, 105. 8.

3. For the setting up and establishing of religion among men. Because *holy and reverend is his name, and the fear of him is the beginning of wisdom*, therefore *his praise endureth for ever*; he is to be everlastingly praised.

(1.) Because the discoveries of religion tend so much to his honour. Review what he has made known of himself in his word and in his works, and you will see, and say, that God is great, and greatly to be feared; for his name is holy, his infinite purity and rectitude appear in all that whereby he has made himself known, and because it is holy, therefore it is reverend, and to be thought of, and mentioned, with a holy awe. Note, What is holy, is reverend; the angels have an eye to God's holiness when they cover their faces before him, and nothing is more man's honour than his sanctification. It is in his holy places that God appears most terrible, 68. 35. Lev. 10. 3.

(2.) Because the dictates of religion tend so much to man's happiness. We have reason to praise God, that the matter is so well contrived, that our reverence of him, and obedience to him, are as much our interest as they are our duty.

[1.] Our reverence of him is so; *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*. It is not only reasonable that we should fear God, because his name is reverend, and his nature holy, but it is advantageous to us. It is wisdom, it will direct us to speak and act as becomes us, in a consistency with ourselves, and for our own benefit. It is the head of wisdom, that is, as we read it, it is the beginning of wisdom; men never begin to be wise, till they begin to fear God; all true wisdom takes its rise from true religion, and has its foundation in it: or, as some understand it, it is the chief wisdom, and the most excellent: the first in dignity. It is the principal wisdom, and the principle of wisdom, to worship God, and give honour to him, as our Father and Master. They manage well who always act under the government of his holy fear.

[2.] Our obedience to him is so; *A good understanding have all they that do his commandments*. Where the fear of the Lord rules in the heart, there will be a constant conscientious care to keep his commandments; not to talk of them, but to do them; and such have a good understanding; First, They are well-understood, their obedience is graciously accepted as a plain indication of their mind, that they do indeed fear God. Compare Prov. 3. 4. *So shalt thou find favour and good understanding*. God and man will look upon those as meaning well, and approve of them, who make conscience of their duty, though they have their mistakes; what is honestly intended shall be well-taken. Secondly, They understand well. 1. It is a sign that they do understand well. The most obedient are accepted as the most intelligent; those understand themselves and their interest best, that make God's law their rule, and are in every thing ruled by it. A great understanding they have, that know God's commandments, and can discourse learnedly of them; but a good understanding have they that do them, and walk according to them. 2. It is the way to understand better; *A good understanding are they to all that do them*; the fear of the Lord, and the laws of that give men a good understanding, and are able to make them wise unto salvation

If any man will do his will, he shall know more and more clearly of the doctrine of Christ, John, 7. 17. *Good success have all they that do them*, so the margin; according to what was promised Joshua, if he would observe to do according to the law, (Josh. 1. 8.) *Then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and shalt have good success.* We have reason to praise God, to praise him for ever, for putting man into such a fair way to happiness. Some apply the last words rather to the good man who fears the Lord, than to the good God; *His praise endures for ever*: it is not of men, perhaps, but it is of God; (Rom. 2. 29.) and that praise which is of God endures for ever, when the praise of men is withered and gone.

PSALM CXII.

This psalm is composed alphabetically, as the former is, and is (like the former) entitled, Hallelujah, though it treats of the happiness of the saints, because it redounds to the glory of God, and whatever we have the pleasure of, he must have the praise of. It is a comment upon the last verse of the foregoing psalm, and fully shews how much it is our wisdom to fear God, and do his commandments. We have here, I. The character of the righteous, v. 1. II. The blessedness of the righteous. 1. There is a blessedness entailed upon their posterity, v. 2. 2. There is a blessing conferred upon themselves. (1.) Prosperity outward and inward, v. 3. (2.) Comfort, v. 4. (3.) Wisdom, v. 5. (4.) Stability, v. 6. 8. (5.) Honour, v. 6, 9. III. The misery of the wicked, v. 10. So that good and evil are set before us, the blessing and the curse. In singing this psalm, we must not only teach and admonish ourselves and one another to answer to the characters here given of the happy, but comfort and encourage ourselves and one another with the privileges and comforts here secured to the holy.

1. **P**RAISE ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. 2. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. 3. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever. 4. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. 5. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion.

The psalmist begins with a call to us to praise God, but immediately applies himself to praise the people of God; for whatever glory is acknowledged to be on them, it comes from God, and must return to him; as he is their Praise, so they are his. We have reason to praise the Lord, that there are a people in the world who fear him and serve him, and that they are a happy people; both which are owing entirely to the grace of God.

Now here we have,

1. A description of those who are here pronounced blessed, and to whom these promises are made.

(1.) They are well-principled with pious and devout affections. Those have the privileges of God's subjects, not who cry, *Lord, Lord*, but who are indeed well-affected to his government. [1.] They are such as stand in awe of God, and have a constant reverence for his majesty, and deference to his will. The happy man is he that *fears the Lord*, v. 1. [2.] They are such as take a pleasure in their duty. He that *fears the Lord*, as a Father, with the disposition of a child, not of a slave, *delights greatly in his commandments*, is well-pleased with them, and with the equity and goodness of them, they are written in his heart, it is his choice to be under them, and he calls them an easy, a pleasant, yoke; it is his delight to be searching into, and conversing with, God's commandments, by reading, hearing, and meditation, Ps. 1. 2. He delights not only in God's promises, but in his precepts, and thinks himself happy, under God's government, as well as in his favour. It is a pleasure to him to be found in the way of his duty, and he is in his element when he is in the service of God. Herein he delights greatly, more than in any of the

employments and enjoyments of this world. And what he does in religion is done from principle, because he sees amiableness in religion, and advantage by it.

(2.) They are honest and sincere in their professions and intentions. They are called *the upright*, (v. 2, 4.) who are really as good as they seem to be, and deal faithfully both with God and man. There is no true religion without sincerity; that is gospel-perfection.

(3.) They are both just and kind in all their dealings; *He is gracious, full of compassion, and righteous*, (v. 4.) dares not do any wrong to any man, but does to every man all the good he can, and that from a principle of compassion and kindness. It was said of God, in the foregoing psalm, (v. 4.) *He is gracious, and full of compassion*; and here it is said of the good man, that he is so; for herein we must be *followers of God, as dear children*; be merciful as he is. He is *full of compassion*, and yet *righteous*; what he does good with, is what he came honestly by; God hates robbery for burnt-offerings, and so does he. One instance is given of his beneficence; (v. 5.) *He shews favour, and lends*. Sometimes there is as much charity in lending as in giving, as it obliges the borrower both to industry and honesty. He is *gracious, and lends*; (37. 26.) he does it from a right principle, not as the usurer lends for his own advantage, nor merely out of generosity, but out of pure charity: he does it in a right manner, not grudgingly, but pleasantly, and with a cheerful countenance.

2. The blessedness that is here entailed upon those that answer to these characters; Happiness, all happiness, to the man that *feareth the Lord*. Whatever men think or say of them, God says that they are blessed; and his saying so makes them so.

(1.) The posterity of good men shall fare the better for his goodness; (v. 2.) *His seed shall be mighty on earth*; perhaps he himself shall not be so great in the world, nor make such a figure, as his seed after him shall, for his sake. Religion has been the raising of many a family, if not so as to advance it high, yet so as to fix it firmly. When good men themselves are happy in heaven, their seed perhaps are considerable on earth, and will themselves own that it is by virtue of a blessing descending from them. *The generation of the upright shall be blessed*: if they tread in their steps, they shall be the more blessed for their relation to them; *beloved for the Father's sake*; (Rom. 11. 28.) for so runs the covenant; *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed*; (Gen. 17. 7.) while *the seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned*; (Isa. 14. 20.) Let the children of godly parents value themselves upon it, and take heed of doing any thing to forfeit the blessing entailed upon the generation of the upright.

(2.) They shall prosper in the world, and especially their souls shall prosper, v. 3. [1.] They shall be blessed with outward prosperity, as far as is good for them; *Wealth and riches shall be in the upright man's house*, not in his heart; for he is none of those in whom the love of money reigns; perhaps not so much in his hand, (for he only begins to raise the estate,) but in his house; his family shall grow rich when he is gone. But, [2.] That which is much better, is, that they shall be blessed with spiritual blessings, which are the true riches. *His wealth shall be in his house*, for he must leave that to others; but *his righteousness* he himself shall have the comfort of to himself, it *endures for ever*. Grace is better than gold, for it will outlast it. He shall have wealth and riches, and yet shall keep up his religion, and in a prosperous condition, shall *still hold fast his integrity*, which many, who kept it in the storm, threw off and let go in the sunshine. Then worldly prosperity is a blessing, when it does not make men cool in their piety, but they still persevere in that; and when this endures in the family, and goes along with the wealth and riches, and the heirs of the father's estate inherit his virtues too, that is a happy family indeed. However, the good man's *righteousness endures for ever*, in the crown of righteousness which *fades not away*.

(3.) They shall have comfort in affliction; (v. 4.) *Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness*. It is here implied, that good men may be in affliction, the promise does not exempt them from that, they shall have their share in the common cala-

miseries of human life; but, *when they sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a Light to them*, Mic. 7. 8. They shall be supported and comforted under their troubles; their spirits shall be lightsome when their outward condition is clouded; *Sat lucis intus—There is light enough within*. Surrounded by Egyptian darkness, the Israelites had *light in their dwellings*. They shall be, in due time, and perhaps when they least expect it, delivered out of their troubles; when the night is darkest, the day dawns; nay, at evening time, when night was looked for, it shall be light.

(4.) They shall have wisdom for the management of all their concerns, v. 5. He that does good with his estate, shall, through the providence of God, increase it, not by miracle, but by his prudence; *He shall guide his affairs with discretion*; and his God *instructs him to discretion, and teaches him*, Isa. 28. 26. It is part of the character of a good man, that he will use his discretion in managing his affairs, in getting and saving, that he may have to give. It may be understood of the affairs of his charity; *He shews favour and lends*; but then it is *with discretion*, that his charity may not be misplaced; he gives to proper objects what is proper to be given, and in due time and proportion. And it is part of the promise to him who thus uses discretion, that God will give him more. They who most use their wisdom, see most of their need of it, and *ask it of God*, who has promised to *give it liberally*, Jam. 1. 5. *He will guide his words with judgment*; so it is in the original; and there is nothing in which we have more occasion for wisdom, than in the government of the tongue; blessed is he to whom God gives that wisdom.

6. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. 7. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. 8. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see *his desire* upon his enemies. 9. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour. 10. The wicked shall see *it*, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.

In these verses we have,

1. The satisfaction of saints, and their stability. It is the happiness of a good man, that *he shall not be moved for ever*, v. 6. Satan and his instruments endeavour to move him, but his foundation is firm, and *he shall never be moved*; at least, *not moved for ever*; if he be shaken for a time, yet he settles again quickly.

(1.) A good man will have a settled reputation, and that is a great satisfaction. A good man shall have a good name, a name for good things, with God and good people. *The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance*; (v. 6.) in this sense, *his righteousness* (the memorial of it) *endures for ever*, v. 9. There are those that do all they can to sully his reputation, and to load him with reproach; but his integrity shall be cleared up, and the honour of it shall survive him. Some, that have been eminently righteous, are *had in a lasting remembrance*, on earth; wherever the scripture is read, their good deeds are *told for a memorial* of them. And the memory of many a good man, that is dead and gone, is still blessed; but in heaven their remembrance shall be truly everlasting, and the honour of their righteousness shall there endure for ever, with the reward of it, in the *crown of glory that fades not away*. They that are forgotten on earth, and despised, are remembered there, and honoured, and their *righteousness found unto praise, and honour, and glory*; (1 Pet. 1. 7.) then, at furthest, shall the horn of a good man *be exalted with honour*, as that of the unicorn when he is a conqueror. Wicked men, now in their pride, *lift up their horns on high*, but they shall all be *cut off*, Ps. 75. 5, 10. The godly, in their humility and humiliation, have *defiled their horn in the dust*; (Job, 16. 15.)

but the day is coming when it *shall be exalted with honour*. That which shall especially turn to the honour of good men, is, their liberality and bounty to the poor; *He has dispersed, he has given to the poor*; he has not suffered his charity to run all in one channel, or directed it to some few objects that he had a particular kindness for, but he has dispersed it, *given a portion to seven, and also to eight, has sown beside all waters*, and by thus scattering he has increased: and this is *his righteousness, which endures for ever*. Alms are called *righteous*, not because they will justify us by making atonement for our evil deeds, but because they are good deeds, which we are bound to perform; so that, if we are not charitable, we are not just; we *withhold good from those to whom it is due*. The honour of this endures for ever, for it shall be taken notice of in the great day; *I was an hungry, and ye gave me meat*. This is quoted as an inducement and encouragement to charity, 2 Cor. 9. 9.

(2.) A good man shall have a settled spirit, and that is a much greater satisfaction than the former; for *so shall a man have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another*. Surely he shall not be moved, whatever happens, not moved either from his duty, or from his comfort; for *he shall not be afraid, his heart is established*, v. 7, 8. This is a part both of the character, and of the comfort, of good people. It is their endeavour to keep their minds stayed upon God, and so to keep them calm, and easy, and undisturbed; and God has promised them both cause to do so, and grace to do so. Observe, [1.] It is the duty and interest of the people of God, not to *be afraid of evil tidings*; not to be afraid of hearing bad news; and when they do, not to be put into confusion by it, and into an amazing expectation of worse and worse; but, whatever happens, whatever threatens, to be able to say, with blessed Paul, *None of these things move me*, neither will I fear, *though the earth be removed*, 46. 2. [2.] The fixedness of the heart is a sovereign remedy against the disquieting fear of evil tidings. If we keep our thoughts composed, and ourselves masters of them, our wills resigned to the holy will of God, our temper sedate, and our spirits even, under all the unevenness of Providence, we are well-fortified against the agitations of the timorous. [3.] Trusting in the Lord is the best and surest way of fixing and establishing the heart. By faith we must cast anchor in the promise, in the word of God, and so return to him, and repose in him as our Rest. The heart of man cannot fix any where, to its satisfaction, but in the truth of God, and there it finds firm footing. [4.] They whose hearts are established by faith, will patiently wait till they have gained their point; *He shall not be afraid, till he see his desire upon his enemies*, till he come to heaven, where he shall see Satan, and all his spiritual enemies, trodden under his feet, and, as Israel saw the Egyptians, dead on the sea-shore. *Till he look upon his oppressors*, so Dr. Hammond; till he behold them securely, and look boldly in their faces, as being now no longer under their power. It will complete the satisfaction of the saints, when they shall look back upon their troubles and pressures, and be able to say with St. Paul, when he had recounted the persecutions he endured, (2 Tim. 3. 11.) *But out of them all the Lord delivered me*.

2. The vexation of sinners, v. 10. Two things shall fret them. (1.) The felicity of the righteous; *The wicked shall see the righteous in prosperity and honour, and shall be grieved*. It will vex them to see their innocency cleared, and their low estate regarded, and those whom they hated and despised, and whose ruin they sought, and hoped to see, the favourites of Heaven, and advanced to have *dominion over them*; (49. 14.) this will wake them *gnash with their teeth, and pine away*. This is often fulfilled in this world. The happiness of the saints is the envy of the wicked, and that envy is the *rotteness of their bones*. But it will most fully be accomplished in the other world, when it shall make damned sinners *gnash with their teeth*, to see *Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom*; to see *all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and themselves thrust out*. (2.) Their own disappointment; *The desire of the wicked shall perish*; their desire was wholly to the world and the flesh, and they ruled over them; and therefore, when these perish, their joy is gone, and

their expectations from them are cut off, to their everlasting confusion; their hope is as a spider's web.

PSALM CXIII

This psalm begins and ends with Hallelujah; for, as many others, it is designed to promote the great and good work of praising God. I. We are here called upon, and urged, to praise God, v. 1. 3. II. We are here furnished with matter for praise, and words are put into our mouths; in singing which, we must, with holy fear and love, give to God the glory of, 1. The elevations of his glory and greatness, v. 4. 5. 2. The condescensions of his grace and goodness, (v. 6. 9.) which very much illustrate one another, that we may be duly affected with both.

1. **PRAISE** ye the LORD. Praise, O ye servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. 2. Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. 3. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD's name is to be praised. 4. The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. 5. Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, 6. Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! 7. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; 8. That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. 9. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD.

In this psalm,

1. We are exhorted to give glory to God, to give him the glory due to his name. The invitation is very pressing; *Praise ye the Lord*, and again, *Praise him, praise him; blessed be his name*, for it is to be praised, v. 1. 3. This intimates, 1. That it is a necessary and most excellent duty, greatly pleasing to God, and has a large room in religion. 2. That it is a duty we should much abound in, in which we should be frequently employed and enlarged. 3. That it is work which we are very backward to, and which we need to be engaged and excited to by precept upon precept, and line upon line. 4. That those who are much in praising God themselves, will court others to it, both because they find the weight of the work, and that there is need of all the help they can fetch in, (there is employment for all hearts, all hands, and all little enough,) and because they find the pleasure of it, which they wish all their friends may share in.

Observe, (1.) From whom God has praise; from his own people; they are here called upon to praise to God, as those that will answer the call, *Praise, O ye servants of the Lord*. They have most reason to praise him; for they that attend him as his servants know him best, and receive most of his favours, and it is their business to praise him; that is the work required of them as his servants; it is easy pleasant work to speak well of their Master, and do him what honour they can; if they do not who should? Some understand it of the Levites; but if so, all Christians are a royal priesthood, to shew forth the praises of him that has called them, 1 Pet. 2. 9. The angels are the servants of the Lord; they need not be called upon by us to praise God, yet it is a comfort to us that they do it better than we can.

(2.) From whom he ought to have praise:

[1.] From all ages; (v. 2.) *from this time forth for evermore*; let not this work die with us, but let us be doing it in a better world, and let those that come after us be doing it in this. Let not our seed degenerate, but let God be praised through all the generations of time, and not in this only. We must bless the Lord in our day, by saying, with the psalmist, *Blessed be his name now and ahays*.

[2.] From all places; *from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same*, throughout the habitable world; let all that enjoy the benefit of the sun rising, (and those that do so must count upon it that the sun will set,) give thanks for that light to the Father of lights. God's name is to be praised; it ought to be praised by all nations; for in every place, from East to West, there appear the manifest proofs and products of his wisdom, power, and goodness; and it is to be lamented that so great a part of mankind are ignorant of him, and give that praise to others which is due to him alone. But perhaps there is more in it; as the former verse gave us a glimpse of the kingdom of glory, intimating that God's name shall be blessed for ever, (when time shall be no more, that praise shall be the work of heaven,) so this verse gives us a glimpse of the kingdom of grace in the gospel-dispensation of it, when the church shall no longer be confined to the Jewish nation, but shall spread itself all the world over, when in every place spiritual incense shall be offered to our God; (Mal. 1. 11.) then, from the rising to the setting of the sun, the Lord's name shall be praised, by some in all countries.

II. We are here directed what to give him the glory of.

1. Let us look up with an eye of faith, and see how high his glory is in the upper world, and mention that, to his praise, v. 4, 5. We are, in our praises, to exalt his name, for he is high, his glory is high. (1.) *High above all nations*; their kings, though ever so pompous; their people, though ever so numerous. Whether it be true of an earthly king or no, that though he is *major singulis*—greater than individuals, he is *minor universis*—less than the whole, we will not dispute; but we are sure it is not true of the Kings of kings. Put all the nations together, and he is above them all; they are before him as the drop of the bucket, and the small dust of the balance, Isa. 40. 15, 17. Let all the nations think and speak highly of God, for he is high above them all. (2.) *High above the heavens*; the throne of his glory is in the highest heavens; which should raise our hearts in praising him, Lam. 3. 41. His glory is above the heavens, above the angels; he is above what they are, their brightness is nothing to his; above what they do, for they are under his command, and do his pleasure; and above what even they can speak him to be. He is exalted above all blessing and praise, not only all our's, but all their's. We must therefore say, with holy admiration, *Who is like unto the Lord our God?* Who of all the princes and potentates of the earth? Who of all the bright and blessed spirits above? None can equal him, none dare compare with him. God is to be praised, as transcendently, incomparably, and infinitely great; for he dwells on high, and from on high sees all, and rules all, and justly attracts all praise to himself.

2. Let us look round with an eye of observation, and see how extensive his goodness is in the lower world, and mention that to his praise. He is a God who exalts himself to dwell, who humbles himself in heaven, and in earth. Some think there is a transposition, *He exalts himself to dwell in heaven, he humbles himself to behold on earth*: but the sense is plain enough, as we take it; only observe, God is said to exalt himself, and to humble himself, both are his own act and deed; as he is self-existent, so he is both the Fountain of his own honour, and the Spring of his own grace; God's condescending goodness appears,

(1.) In the cognizance he takes of the world below him; his glory is above the nations, and above the heavens, and yet neither is neglected by him; *God is great, yet he despises not any*, Job. 36. 5. *He humbles himself to behold* all his creatures, all his subjects, though he is infinitely above them. Considering the infinite perfection, sufficiency, and felicity, of the divine nature, it must be acknowledged as an act of wonderful condescension, that God is pleased to take into the thoughts of his eternal counsel, and into the hand of his universal providence, both the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth; (Dan. 4. 35.) even in this dominion he humbles himself. [1.] It is condescension in him to behold the things in heaven, to support the beings, direct the motions, and accept the praises and services, of the angels themselves; for he needs them not, nor is benefited by them. [2.] Much more is it condescension in him to behold the things that are in the earth, to

visit the sons of men, and regard them, to order and over-rule their affairs, and to take notice of what they say and do, that he may fill the earth with his goodness, and so set us an example of stooping to do good, of taking notice of, and concerning ourselves about, our inferiors. If it be such condescension for God to behold things in heaven and earth, what an amazing condescension was it for the Son of God to come from heaven to earth, and take our nature upon him, that he might *seek and save them that were lost!* Here indeed he humbled himself.

(2.) In the particular favour he sometimes shews to the least and lowest of the inhabitants of this lesser lower world. He not only beholds the great things in the earth, but the meanest, and those things which great men commonly overlook. Nor does he only behold them, but does wonders for them, and things that are very surprising, out of the common road of Providence, and chain of causes; which shews that the world is governed, not by a course of nature, for that would always run in the same channel, but by a God of nature, who delights in doing things we looked not for.

[1.] Those that have been long despicable, are sometimes, on a sudden, made honourable; (v. 7, 8.) *He raises up the poor out of the dust, that he may set him with princes.* First, Thus God does sometimes magnify himself, and his own wisdom, power, and sovereignty; when he has some great work to do, he chooses to employ those in it that were least likely, and least thought of for it, by themselves or others, to the highest post of honour: Gideon is fetched from threshing, Saul from seeking the asses, and David from keeping the sheep; the apostles are sent from fishing to be *fishers of men*. The treasure of the gospel is put into earthen vessels, and the weak and foolish ones of the world pitched upon to be preachers of it, to confound the *wise and mighty*, (1 Cor. 1. 27, 28.) that the excellency of the power may be of God, and all may see that promotion comes from him. Secondly, Thus God does sometimes reward the eminent piety and patience of his people who have long groaned under the burthen of poverty and disgrace. When Joseph's virtue was tried and manifested, he was raised from the prison-dust, and *set with princes*. They that are wise will observe such returns of Providence, and will understand by them the *loving-kindness of the Lord*. Some have applied this to the work of redemption by Jesus Christ, and not unfitly; for through him poor fallen men are raised out of the dust, (one of the Jewish rabbins applies it to the resurrection of the dead,) nay, out of the dunghill of sin, and *set among princes*, among angels, those princes of his people. Hannah had sung to this purport, 1 Sam. 2. 6, 8.

[2.] Those that have been long barren, are sometimes, on a sudden, made *fruitful*, v. 9. This may look back to Sarah and Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah, and Sampson's mother, or forward to Elizabeth; and many such instances there have been, in which God has looked on the affliction of his handmaids, and taken away their reproach. *He makes the barren woman to keep house*, not only builds up the family, but thereby finds the heads of the family something to do. Note, They that have the comfort of a family, must take the care of it; *bearing children and guiding the house* are put together, 1 Tim. 5. 14. When God sets the barren in a family, he expects that she *look well to the ways of her household*, Prov. 31. 27. She is said to be a *joyful mother of children*, not only because, even in common cases, the pain is forgotten, for *joy that a man-child is born into the world*, but there is particular joy when a child is born to those that have been long childless, (as Luke; 1. 14.) and therefore there ought to be particular thanksgiving; *Praise ye the Lord*. Yet, in this case *rejoice with trembling*; for, though the sorrowful mother be made joyful, the joyful mother may be made sorrowful again, if the children be either removed from her, or imbittered to her. This therefore may be applied to the gospel-church among the Gentiles, the building of which is illustrated by this similitude, (Isa. 54. 1.) *Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear*: (Gal. 4. 27.) for which we (who, being sinners of the Gentiles, are children of the desolate) have reason to say, *Praise ye the Lord*.

PSALM CXIV.

The deliverance of Israel out of Egypt gave birth to their church and nation, which were then founded, then formed; that work of wonder ought therefore to be had in everlasting remembrance. God gloried in it, in the preface to the ten commandments, and Hos. 11. 1. Out of Egypt have I called my son. In this psalm, it is celebrated in lively strains of praise; it was fitly therefore made a part of the great Hallelujah, or song of praise, which the Jews were wont to sing at the close of the passover-supper. It must never be forgotten, I. That they were brought out of slavery, v. 1. II. That God set up his tabernacle among them, v. 2. III. That the sea and Jordan were divided before them, v. 3, 5. IV. That the earth shook at the giving of the law, when God came down on mount Sinai, v. 4, 6, 7. V. That God gave them water out of the rock, v. 8. In singing this psalm, we must acknowledge God's power and goodness in what he did for Israel, applying it to the much greater work of wonder, our redemption by Christ, and encouraging ourselves and others to trust in God in the greatest straits.

1. **W**HEN Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; 2. Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. 3. The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back. 4. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. 5. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? 6. Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? 7. Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; 8. Which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

The psalmist is here remembering the days of old, the years of the right hand of the Most High, and the wonders which their fathers told them of; (Judg. 6. 13.) for time, as it does not wear out the guilt of sin, so it should not wear out the sense of mercy.

Let it never be forgotten,

1. That God brought Israel out of the house of bondage with a *high hand and stretched out arm*. *Israel went out of Egypt*, v. 1. They did not steal out clandestinely, nor were they driven out, but fairly went out, marched out with all the marks of honour: they went out from a barbarous people, that had used them barbarously, from a *people of a strange language*, 81. 5. The Israelites, it seems, preserved their own language pure among them, and cared not for learning the language of their oppressors. By this distinction from them, they kept up an earnest of their deliverance.

2. That he himself framed their civil and sacred constitution; (v. 2.) *Judah and Israel were his sanctuary, his dominion*. When he delivered them out of the hand of their oppressors, it was that *they might serve him*, both in holiness and in righteousness, in the duties of religious worship, and in obedience to the moral law, in their whole conversation. *Let my people go, that they may serve me*. In order to this, (1.) He set up his *sanctuary* among them, in which he gave them the special tokens of his presence with them, and promised to receive their homage and tribute. Happy the people that have God's sanctuary among them; (see Exod. 25. 8. Ezek. 37. 26.) much more they that, like Judah here, are his *sanctuaries*, his living temples, on whom *Holiness to the Lord* is written! (2.) He set up his *dominion* among them, was himself their Lawgiver, and their Judge; and their government was a theocracy; *The Lord was their King*. All the world is God's dominion, but Israel was so in a peculiar manner. What is God's sanctuary must be his dominion; those only have the privileges of his house that submit to the laws of it; and for this end Christ has redeemed us, that he might bring us into God's service, and engage us for ever in it.

3. That the Red sea was divided before them at their coming out of Egypt, both for their rescue, and the ruin of their enemies; and the river Jordan, when they entered into Canaan, for their

honour, and the confusion and terror of their enemies; (v. 3.) *The sea saw it*, saw there that *Judah was God's sanctuary, and Israel his dominion, and therefore fled*; for nothing could have been more awful. This was it that *drove Jordan back*, and was an invincible dam to his streams; God was at the head of that people, and therefore they must give way to them, must make room for them; they must retire, contrary to their nature, when God speaks the word. To illustrate this, the psalmist asks, in a poetical strain, (v. 5.) *What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest?* and furnishes the sea with an answer; (v. 7.) it was *at the presence of the Lord*. This is designed to express, (1.) The reality of the miracle, that it was not by any power of nature, or from any natural cause, but it was *at the presence of the Lord*, who gave the word. (2.) The mercy of the miracle; *What ailed thee?* Was it in a frolic? Was it only to amuse men? No, it was *at the presence of the God of Jacob*; it was in kindness to the Israel of God, for the salvation of that chosen people, that God was thus *displeased against the rivers*, and his *wrath was against the sea*, as the prophet speaks, Hab. 3. 8. . 13. Isa. 51. 10.—63. 11, &c. (3.) The wonder and surprise of the miracle. Who would have thought of such a thing? Shall the course of nature be changed, and its fundamental laws dispensed with, to serve a turn for God's Israel? Well may the *dukes of Edom be amazed*, and the *mighty men of Moab tremble*, Exod. 15. 15. (4.) The honour hereby put upon Israel, who are taught to triumph over the sea, and Jordan, as unable to stand before them. Note, There is no sea, no Jordan, so deep, so broad, but, when God's time is come for the redemption of his people, it shall be divided and driven back, if it stand in their way. Apply this, [1.] To the planting of the Christian church in the world. What ailed Satan and the powers of darkness, that they trembled and truckled as they did? Mark, 1. 24. v. 7. What ailed the heathen oracles, that they were silenced, struck dumb, struck dead? What ailed their idolatries and witchcrafts, that they died away before the gospel, and melted like snow before the sun? What ailed the persecutors and opposers of the gospel, that they gave up their cause, to hide their guilty heads, and call to rocks and mountains for shelter? Rev. 6. 15. It was *at the presence of the Lord*, and that power which went along with the gospel. [2.] To the work of grace in the heart. What turns the stream in a regenerate soul? What ails the lusts and corruptions, that they fly back, that the prejudices are removed, and the whole man become new? It is at the presence of God's Spirit that imaginations are *cast down*, 2 Cor. 10. 5.

4. That the earth shook and trembled, when God came down on mount Sinai to give the law; (v. 4.) *The mountains skipped like rams*, and then the *little hills* might well be excused if they skipped *like lambs*, either when they are frightened, or when they sport themselves. The same power that fixed the fluid waters, and made them stand still, shook the stable mountains, and made them tremble; for all the powers of nature are un'er the check of the God of nature. Mountains and hills are, before God, but like rams and lambs; even the bulkiest and the most rocky are as manageable by him as *they* are by the shepherd. The trembling of the mountains before the Lord may shame the stupidity and obduracy of the children of men, who are not moved at the discoveries of his glory. The psalmist asks the mountains and hills, *What ailed them to skip thus?* He answers for them, as for the seas, It was *at the presence of the Lord*, before whom, not only those mountains, but the earth itself, may well tremble, (v. 7.) since it has lain under a curse for man's sin. See Ps. 104. 32. Isa. 64. 3, 4. He that made the hills and mountains to skip thus, can, when he pleases, dissipate the strength and spirit of the proudest of his enemies, and make them tremble.

5. That God supplied them with water out of the rock, which flowed them through the dry and sandy deserts. Well may the earth and all its inhabitants tremble before that God who *turned the rock into a standing water*; (v. 8.) and what cannot he do, who did that? The same almighty power that turned waters into a rock to be a wall to Israel, (Exod. 14. 22.) turned the rock into waters to be a well to Israel: as they were protected, so they

were provided for, by miracles, standing miracles; for such was the standing water, that fountain of waters into which the rock, the flinty rock, was turned, *and that Rock was Christ*, 1 Cor. 10. 4. For he is a Fountain of living waters to his Israel, from whom they receive grace for grace.

PSALM CXV.

Many ancient translations join this psalm to that which goes next before it, the Septuagint particularly, and the vulgar Latin; but it is, in the Hebrew, a distinct psalm. In it, we are taught to give glory, 1. To God, and not to ourselves, v. 1. 11. To God, and not to idols, v. 2. . 8. We must give glory to God, 1. By trusting in him, and in his promise and blessing, v. 9. . 15. 2. By blessing him, v. 16. . 18. Some think this psalm was penned upon occasion of some great distress and trouble that the church of God was in, when the enemies were insolent and threatening, in which case the church does not so much pour out her complaint to God, as place her confidence in God, and triumph in doing so; and with such a holy triumph we ought to sing this psalm.

1. **N**OT unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. 2. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? 3. But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he pleased. 4. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. 5. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: 6. They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: 7. They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. 8. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

Sufficient care is here taken to answer both the pretensions of self, and the reproaches of idolaters.

I. Boasting is here for ever excluded, v. 1. Let no opinion of our own merits have any room either in our prayers or in our praises, but let both centre in God's glory. 1. Have we received any mercy, gone through any service, or gained any success? We must not assume the glory of it to ourselves, but ascribe it wholly to God. We must not imagine that we do any thing for God by our own strength, or deserve any thing from God by our own righteousness; but all the good we do is done by the power of his grace, and all the good we have is the gift of his mere mercy, and therefore he must have all the praise. Say not, *The power of my hand has gotten me this wealth*, Deut. 8. 17. Say not, *For my righteousness the Lord has done these great and kind things for me*, Dent. 9. 4. No, all our songs must be sung to this humble tune, *Not unto us, O Lord*, and again, *Not unto us, but to thy name*, let all the glory be given; for whatever good is wrought in us, or wrought for us, it is for his mercy, and his truth's sake, because he will glorify his mercy, and fulfil his promise. All our crowns must be cast at the feet of *him that sits upon the throne*, for that is the proper place for them. 2. Are we in pursuit of any mercy, and wrestling with God for it? We must take our encouragement, in prayer, from God only, and have an eye to his glory more than to our own benefit in it. "Lord, do so and so for us; not that we may have the credit and comfort of it, but that thy mercy and truth may have the glory of it." This must be our highest and ultimate end in our prayers, and therefore it is made the first petition in the Lord's prayer, as that which guides all the rest; *Hallowed be thy name*; and, in order to that, *Give us our daily bread*, &c. This also must satisfy us, if our prayers be not answered in the letter of them; Whatever becomes of us, *unto thy name give glory*. See John, 12. 27, 28.

II. The reproach of the heathen is here for ever silenced, and justly retorted.

1. The psalmist complains of the reproach of the heathen; (v. 2.) *Wherefore should they say, Where is now their God?* (1.) "Why

do they say so? Do they not know that our God is every where by his providence, and always nigh to us by his promise and grace?" (2.) "Why does God permit them to say so? Nay, why is Israel brought so low, that they have some colour for saying so? Lord, appear for our relief, that thou mayest vindicate thyself, and glorify thine own name."

2. He gives a direct answer to their question; (v. 3.) "Do they ask where is our God? We can tell where he is." (1.) "In the upper world is the presence of his glory; *Our God is in the heavens*, where the gods of the heathen never were; *in the heavens*, and therefore out of sight; but, though his majesty be unapproachable, it does not therefore follow that his being is questionable." (2.) "In the lower world are the products of his power; *He has done whatsoever he pleased*, according to the counsel of his will; he has a sovereign dominion, and a universal uncontrollable influence. Do you ask where he is? He is at the beginning and end of every thing, *and not far from any of us*."

3. He returns their question upon themselves. They asked, Where is the God of Israel? because he is not seen. He does in effect ask, What are the gods of the heathen? because they are seen.

(1.) He shews that their gods, though they are not shapeless things, are senseless things. Idolaters, at first, worshipped the sun and moon, (Job, 31. 26.) which was bad enough, but not so bad as that which they were now come to, (for evil men grow worse and worse,) which was the worshipping of images, v. 4. The matter of them was *silver and gold*, digged out of the earth; (*Man found them poor and dirty in a mine*, Herbert;) proper things to make money of, but not to make gods of. The make of them was from the artificer; they are creatures of men's vain imaginations, and *the works of men's hands*, and therefore can have no divinity in them. If man is the work of God's hands, (as certainly he is, and it was his honour that he was made *in the image of God*,) it is absurd to think that that can be God which is the work of men's hands; or that it can be any other than a dishonour to God to make him in the image of man. The argument is irrefragable; *The workman made it, and therefore it is not God*, Hos. 8. 6. These idols are represented here as the most ridiculous things, a mere jest, that would seem to be something, but were really nothing; fitter for a toy-shop than a temple; for children to play with than for men to pray to. The painter, the carver, the statuary, did their part well enough; they made them with *mouths and eyes, ears and noses, hands and feet*, but they could put no life into them, and therefore no sense. They had better have worshipped a dead carcase (for that had life in it once) than a dead image, which neither has life, nor can have. *They speak not*, in answer to those that consult them; the crafty priest must do it for them. In Baal's image there was *no voice, neither any that answered*. *They see not* the prostrations of their worshippers before them, much less their burthens and wants. *They hear not* their prayers, though ever so loud; *they smell not* their incense, though ever so strong, ever so sweet; *they handle not* the gifts presented to them, much less have they any gifts to bestow on their worshippers; they cannot *stretch forth their hands to the needy*. *They walk not*, they cannot stir a step for the relief of those that apply to them. Nay, they do not so much as *breathe through their throat*; they have not the least sign or symptom of life, but are as dead, after the priest has pretended to consecrate them, and call a deity into them, as they were before.

(2.) He thence infers the sottishness of their worshippers (v. 8.) *They that make them images shew their ingenuity*, and doubtless are sensible men; but *they that make them gods*, shew their stupidity and folly, and *are like unto them*, as senseless blockish things; *they see not* the invisible things of the true and living God in the works of creation; *they hear not* the voice of the day and the night, which in every speech and language declare his glory, 19. 2, 3. By worshipping these foolish puppets, they make themselves more and more foolish *like them*, and set themselves at a greater distance from every thing that is spiritual, sinking themselves deeper into the mire of sense; and withal they provoke God to *give them up to a reprobate mind, a mind void of*

judgment, Rom. 1. 28. *They that trust in them* act very absurdly and very unreasonably; are senseless, helpless, useless, like them; and they will find it so themselves, to their own confusion. We shall know where our God is, and so shall they, to their cost when their gods are gone, Jer. 10. 3.. 11. Isa. 44. 9, &c.

9. O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. 10. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. 11. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. 12. The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron. 13. He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great. 14. The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children. 15. Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. 16. The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men. 17. The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence. 18. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD.

In these verses,

I. We are earnestly exhorted, all of us, to repose our confidence in God, and not suffer our confidence in him to be shaken by the heathen's insulting over us, upon the account of our present distresses. It is folly to trust in dead images, but it is wisdom to trust in the living God, for he is a *Help and a Shield* to those that do trust in him; a Help to furnish them with, and forward them in, that which is good, and a Shield to fortify them against, and protect them from, every thing that is evil. Therefore, 1. Let Israel trust in the Lord; the body of the people, as to their public interests, and every particular Israelite, as to his own private concern, let them leave it to God to dispose of all for them, and believe he will dispose of all for the best, and will be *their Help and Shield*. 2. Let the priests, the Lord's ministers, and all the families of the house of Aaron, trust in the Lord; (v. 10.) they are most maligned and struck at by the enemies, and therefore of them God takes particular care. They ought to be examples to others of a cheerful confidence in God, and a faithful adherence to him, in the worst of times. 3. Let the proselytes, who are not of the seed of Israel, but *fear the Lord*, who worship him, and make conscience of their duty to him, let them trust in him, for he will not fail nor forsake them, v. 11. Note, Wherever there is an awful fear of God, there may be a cheerful faith in him: they that reverence his word, may rely upon it.

II. We are greatly encouraged to trust in God, and good reason is given us why we should stay ourselves upon him with an entire satisfaction. Consider,

1. What we have experienced; (v. 12.) *The Lord has been mindful of us*, and never unmindful; has been so constantly, has been so remarkably, upon special occasions. He has been mindful of our case, our wants and burthens; mindful of our prayers to him, his promises to us, and the covenant-relation between him and us. All our comforts are derived from God's thoughts to us-ward; he has been *mindful of us*, though we have forgotten him. Let this engage us to trust in him, that we have found him faithful.

2. What we may expect. From what he has done for us, we may infer, *He will bless us*; he that has been our *Help and our Shield*, will be so; he that has *remembered us in our low estate*, will not forget us; but he is still the same, his power and goodness the same, and his promise inviolable; so that we have reason to hope that he who has delivered, and does, will yet deliver. Yet this is not all; *he will bless us*; he has promised that he will;

he has pronounced a blessing upon all his people. God's blessing is not only speaking good to us, but doing well for us; those whom he blesses, are blessed indeed. It is particularly promised that *he will bless the house of Israel*; he will bless the common-wealth, will bless his people in their civil interests; *he will bless the house of Aaron*, the church, the ministry; will bless his people in their religious concerns. The priests were to bless the people, it was their office; (Numb. 6. 23.) but God blessed them, and so blessed their blessings. Nay, (v. 13.) *he will bless them that fear the Lord*, though they be not of the house of Israel, or the house of Aaron; for it was a truth, before Peter perceived it, *That, in every nation, he that fears God, is accepted of him*, and blessed, Acts, 10. 34, 35. *He will bless them, both small and great*, both young and old; God has blessings in store for them that are good betimes, and for them that are old disciples; both those that are poor in the world, and those that make a figure. The greatest need his blessing, and it shall not be denied to the meanest that fear him. Both the weak in grace and the strong shall be blessed of God, the lambs and the sheep of his flock.

It is promised, (v. 14.) *The Lord shall increase you*. Whom God blesses he increases; that was one of the earliest and most ancient blessings, *Be fruitful, and multiply*. God's blessing gives an increase; increase in number, building up the family; increase in wealth, adding to the estate and honour; especially an increase in spiritual blessings, with the increasings of God. He will bless you with the increase of knowledge and wisdom, of grace, holiness, and joy; those are blessed indeed, whom God thus increases, who are made wiser and better, and fitter for God and heaven. It is promised that this shall be, (1.) A constant continual increase; *"He shall increase you more and more"*; so that, as long as you live, you shall be still increasing, till you come to perfection, as the shining light," Prov. 4. 18. (2.) An hereditary increase; *"You and your children; you in your children."* It is a comfort to parents to see their children increasing in wisdom and strength. There is a blessing entailed upon the seed of those that fear God, even in their infancy. For, (v. 15.) *You are blessed of the Lord*, you and your children are so; *all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord has blessed*, Isa. 59. 9. They that are the blessed of the Lord have encouragement enough to *trust in the Lord, as their Help and Shield*, for it is he that *made heaven and earth*; therefore his blessings are free, for he needs not any thing himself; and therefore they are rich, for he has all things at command for us, if we fear him and trust in him. He that *made heaven and earth*, can doubtless make those happy that trust in him, and will do it.

III. We are stirred up to praise God by the psalmist's example, who concludes the psalm with a resolution to persevere in his praises.

1. God is to be praised; (v. 16.) *He is greatly to be praised*; for, (1.) His glory is high. See how stately his palace is, and the throne he has prepared in the heavens; *The heaven, even the heavens are the Lord's*; he is the rightful Owner of all the treasures of light and bliss in the upper and better world, and is in the full possession of them, for he is himself infinitely bright and happy. (2.) His goodness is large, for *the earth he has given to the children of men*, having designed it, when he made it, for their use, to find them with meat, drink, and lodging. Not but that still he is Proprietor in chief; *the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*; but he has let out that vineyard to these unthankful husbandmen, and from them he expects the rents and services: for though he has given them the earth, his eye is upon them, and he will call them to render an account how they use it. Calvin complains that profane wicked people, in his days, perverted this scripture, and made a jest of it, which some in our days do, arguing, in banter, that God, having given the earth to the children of men, will no more look after it, nor after them upon it, but they may do what they will with it, and make the best of it as their portion; it is as it were thrown like a prey among them, Let him seize it that can. It is pity that such an instance as this gives of God's bounty to man, and such a proof as arises from it of man's obligation to God, should be thus abused. From the highest heavens,

it is certain God beholds all the children of men; to them he has given the earth; but to the children of God heaven is given.

2. The dead are not capable of praising him, (v. 17.) nor *any that go into silence*. The soul indeed lives in a state of separation from the body, and is capable of praising God; and *the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burthens of the flesh*, do praise God, are still praising him; for they go up to the land of perfect light and constant business; but the dead body cannot praise God; death puts an end to our glorifying God in this world of trial and conflict, to all our services in the field; the grave is a land of darkness and silence, where there is no work or device. This they plead with God, for deliverance out of the hand of their enemies, "Lord, if they prevail to cut us off, the idols will carry the day, and there will be none to praise thee, to bear thy name, and to bear a testimony against the worshippers of idols." *The dead praise not the Lord*, so as we do in the business and for the comforts of this life. See Ps. 30. 9.—88. 10.

3. Therefore it concerns us to praise him; (v. 18.) *But we*, we that are alive, *will bless the Lord*; we and those that shall come after us will do it, *from this time forth and for evermore*, to the end of time; we and those we shall remove to, *from this time forth*, and to eternity. *The dead praise not the Lord*, therefore we will do it the more diligently. (1.) Others are dead, and an end is thereby put to their service, and therefore we will lay out ourselves to do so much the more for God, that we may fill up the gap. *Moses my servant is dead, now therefore, Joshua, arise*. (2.) We ourselves must shortly go to the land of silence: *but while we do live, we will bless the Lord*, will improve our time, and work that work of him that sent us into the world to praise him, before the night comes, and because *the night comes wherein no man can work*. *The Lord will bless us*; (v. 12.) he will do well for us, and therefore *we will bless him*, we will speak well of him. Poor returns for such receivings! Nay, we will not only do it ourselves, but will engage others to do it; *Praise the Lord*; praise him with us, praise him in your places, as we in ours; praise him when we are gone, that he may be praised for evermore. *Hallelujah*.

PSALM CXVI.

This is a thanksgiving psalm; it is not certain whether David penned it upon any particular occasion, or upon a general review of the many gracious deliverances God had wrought for him, out of six troubles and seven, which deliverances drew from him many very lively expressions of devotion, love, and gratitude; with the like pious affections our souls should be lifted up to God, in singing it. Observe, I. The great distress and danger that the psalmist was in, which almost drove him to despair, v. 3, 10, 11. II. The application he made to God, in that distress, v. 4. III. The experience he had of God's goodness to him, in answer to prayer; God heard him, (v. 1, 2.) pitied him, (v. 5, 6.) delivered him, v. 8. IV. His care respecting the acknowledgments he should make of the goodness of God to him, v. 12. 1. He will love God, v. 1. 2. He will continue to call upon him, v. 2, 13, 17. 3. He will rest in him, v. 7. 4. He will walk before him, v. 9. 5. He will pay his vows of thanksgiving, in which he will own the tender regard God had to him, and this publicly, v. 13, 15, 17, 19. Lastly, He will continue God's faithful servant to his life's end, v. 16. These are such breathings of a holy soul as bespeak it very happy.

1. **I** LOVE the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. 2. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. 3. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. 4. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. 5. Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. 6. The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. 7. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee. 8. For thou hast delivered

my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. 9. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

In this part of the psalm, we have,

I. A general account of David's experience, and his pious resolutions, (v. 1, 2.) which are as the contents of the whole psalm, and give an idea of it.

1. He had experienced God's goodness to him, in answer to prayer; *He has heard my voice and my supplications*. David, in straits, had humbly and earnestly begged mercy of God, and God had heard him, had graciously accepted his prayer, taken cognizance of his cause, and granted him an answer of peace. *He has inclined his ear to me*; this intimates his readiness and willingness to hear prayer; he lays his ear, as it were, to the mouth of prayer, to hear it, though it be but whispered *in groanings that cannot be uttered*. He *hearkens and hears*, Jer. 8. 6. Yet it implies, also, that it is wonderful condescension in God to hear prayer; it is bowing his ear. Lord, what is man, that God should thus stoop to him!

2. He resolved, in consideration thereof, to devote himself entirely to God, and to his honour.

(1.) He will love God the better. He begins the psalm somewhat abruptly with a profession of that which his heart was full of; *I love the Lord*; (as 13. 1.) and fitly does he begin with this, in compliance with the first and great commandment, and with God's end in all the gifts of his bounty to us. "I love him only, and nothing beside him, but what I love for him." God's love of compassion towards us justly requires our love of complacency in him.

(2.) He will love prayer the better; *Therefore I will call upon him*. The experiences we have had of God's goodness to us, in answer to prayer, are great encouragements to us to continue praying; we have sped well, notwithstanding our unworthiness and our praying infirmities, and therefore why may we not? God answers prayer, to make us love it, and expects this from us, in return for his favour. Why should we glean in any other field, when we have been so well treated in this? Nay, *I will call upon him as long as I live*; Hebrew, *In my days*; every day, to the last day. Note, As long as we continue living, we must continue praying: this breath we must breathe till we breathe our last, because then we shall take our leave of it, and till then we have continual occasion for it.

II. A more particular narrative of God's gracious dealings with him, and the good impressions thereby made upon him.

1. God, in his dealings with him, shewed himself a good God, and therefore he bears this testimony to him, and leaves it upon record; (v. 5.) "*Gracious is the Lord, and righteous*. He is righteous, and did me no wrong in afflicting me; he is gracious, and was very kind in supporting and delivering me." Let us all speak of God as we have found; and have we ever found him otherwise than just and good? No, *our God is merciful*, merciful to us; and *it is of his mercies that we are not consumed*. Review David's experiences;

(1.) He was in great distress and trouble; (v. 3.) *The sorrows of death compassed me*; that is, such sorrows as were likely to be his death, such as were thought to be the very pangs of death; perhaps the extremity of bodily pain, or trouble of mind, is called here *the pains of hell*; terror of conscience arising from sense of guilt. Note, The sorrows of death are great sorrows, and the pains of hell great pains. Let us therefore give diligence to prepare for the former, that we may escape the latter. These compassed him on every side, they arrested him, *gat hold upon him*, so that he could not escape; *without were fightings, within were fears*. "*I found trouble and sorrow*; not only they found me, but I found them." Those that are melancholy have a great deal of sorrow of their own finding, trouble which they create to themselves, by indulging fancy and passion; this has sometimes been the infirmity of good men. When God's providence makes our condition bad, let us not by our own imprudence make it worse.

(2.) In his trouble he had recourse to God by faithful and fervent prayer, v. 4. He tells us that he prayed; *Then called I upon the name of the Lord*: then, when he was brought to the last extremity, then he made use of this, not as the last remedy, but as the old and only remedy, which he had found a salve for every sore. He tells us what his prayer was; it was short, but to the purpose; "*O Lord, I beseech thee deliver my soul*; save me from death, and save me from sin, for that is it that is killing to the soul." Both the humility and the fervency of his prayer are intimated in these words, *O Lord, I beseech thee*; when we come to the throne of grace, we must come as beggars for an alms, for necessary food. The following words, (v. 5.) *Gracious is the Lord*, may be taken as part of his prayer, as a plea to enforce his request and encourage his faith and hope; "*Lord, deliver my soul*, for thou art *gracious and merciful*, and that only I depend upon for relief."

(3.) God, in answer to this prayer, came in with seasonable and effectual relief. He found by experience that God is gracious and merciful, and in his compassion *preserves the simple*, v. 6. *Because they are simple, sincere, and upright, and without guile*, therefore God preserves them, as he preserved Paul, who had his conversation in the world, *not with fleshly wisdom, but in simplicity and godly sincerity*. Though they are simple, weak, and helpless, who cannot shift for themselves, men of no depth, no design, yet God preserves them, because they commit themselves to him, and have no confidence in their own sufficiency. Those who by faith put themselves under God's protection shall be safe.

Let David speak his own experience.

[1.] God supported him under his troubles; "*I was brought low*, was plunged into the depth of misery, and then *he helped me*; helped me both to bear the worst, and to hope the best: helped me to pray, else desire had failed; helped me to wait, else faith had failed. I was one of the simple ones whom God preserved; the poor man who *cried, and the Lord heard him*," 34. 6. Note, God's people are never brought so low, but that everlasting arms are under them, and *they cannot sink who are sustained*. Nay, it is in the time of need, at the dead lift, that God chooses to help, Deut. 32. 36.

[2.] God saved him out of his troubles; (v. 8.) *Thou hast delivered*; which means either the preventing of the distress he was ready to fall into, or the recovering of him from the distress he was already in. God graciously delivered, *First, His soul from death*. Note, It is God's great mercy to us that we are alive; and the mercy is the more sensible, if we have been at death's door, and yet have been spared and raised up, just turned to destruction and yet ordered to return; that a life so often forfeited, and so often exposed, should yet be lengthened out, is a miracle of mercy. The deliverance of the soul from spiritual and eternal death is especially to be acknowledged by all those who are now sanctified, and shall be shortly glorified. *Secondly, His eyes from tears*; that is, his heart from inordinate grief. It is a great mercy to be kept either from the occasions of sorrow, the evil that causes grief, or, however, from being swallowed up with over-much sorrow. When God comforts those that are cast down, looses the mourners' sackcloth, and girds them with gladness, then he delivers *their eyes from tears*, which yet will not be perfectly done till we come to that world where God shall *wipe away all tears from our eyes*. *Thirdly, His feet from falling*, from falling into sin, and so into misery. It is a great mercy, when our feet are almost gone, to have God *hold us by the right hand*, (72. 2, 23.) so that, though we enter into temptation, we are not overcome and overthrown by the temptation. Or, "*Thou hast delivered my feet from falling into the grave*, when I had one foot there already."

2. David, in his returns of gratitude to God, shewed himself a good man. God had done all this for him; and therefore,

(1.) He will live a life of delight in God; (v. 7.) *Return unto thy rest, O my soul*, [1.] "*Repose thyself and be easy, and do not agitate thyself so with distrustful disquieting fears, as thou hast sometimes done*. Quiet thyself, and then enjoy thyself; God has dealt kindly with thee, and therefore thou needest not

fear that ever he will deal hardly with thee." [2.] "Repose thyself in God. Return to him as thy Rest, and seek not for that rest in the creature, which is to be had in him only." God is the soul's Rest; in him only it can dwell at ease; to him therefore it must retire, and rejoice in him. He has dealt bountifully with us; he has provided sufficiently for our comfort and refreshment, and encouraged us to come to him for the benefit of it, at all times, upon all occasions; let us therefore be satisfied with that. Return to that rest which Christ gives to the weary and heavy-laden, Matth. 11. 28. Return to thy Noah; his name signifies rest, as the dove, when she found no rest, returned to the ark. I know no word more proper to close our eyes with at night, when we go to sleep, nor to close them with at death, that long sleep, than this, *Return to thy Rest, O my soul.*

(2.) He will live a life of devotedness to God; (v. 9.) *I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living*, that is, in this world, as long as I continue to live in it. Note, [1.] It is our great duty to walk before the Lord, to do all we do as becomes us in his presence, and under his eye; to approve ourselves to him, as a holy God, by conformity to him as our sovereign Lord, by subjection to his will, and, as a God all-sufficient, by a cheerful confidence in him. *I am the Almighty God, walk before me*, Gen. 17. 1. *We must walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing.* [2.] The consideration of this, that we are in the land of the living, should engage and quicken us to do so. We are spared and continued in the land of the living, by the power, and patience, and tender mercy, of our God, and therefore must make conscience of our duty to him. The land of the living is a land of mercy, which we ought to be thankful for; it is a land of opportunity, which we should improve. Canaan is called the land of the living, (Ezek. 26. 20.) and they whose lot is cast in such a valley of vision, are in a special manner concerned to set the Lord always before them. If God has delivered our soul from death, we must walk before him. A new life must be a new life indeed.

10. I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: 11. I said in my haste, All men are liars. 12. What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? 13. I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. 14. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. 15. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. 16. O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. 17. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. 18. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, 19. In the courts of the LORD's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.

The Septuagint and some other ancient versions make these verses a distinct psalm separate from the former; and some have called it the *Martyr's psalm*, I suppose for the sake of v. 15.

Three things here David makes confession of:

I. His faith; (v. 10.) *I believed, therefore have I spoken.* Which is quoted by the apostle, (2 Cor. 4. 13.) with application to himself and his fellow-ministers, who, though they suffered for Christ, were not ashamed to own him. David believed the being, providence, and promise, of God, particularly the assurance God had given him by Samuel, that he should exchange his crook for a sceptre: a great deal of hardship he went through, in the belief of this, and therefore he spake, spake to God by prayer, (v. 4.) by praise, v. 12. Those that believe in God will address themselves to him. He spake to himself; because he believed, he said to his soul, *Return to thy Rest.* He spake to others, told his

friends what his hope was, and what the ground of it, though it exasperated Saul against him, and he was greatly afflicted for it. Note. They that believe with the heart must confess with the mouth, for the glory of God, the encouragement of others, and to evidence their own sincerity, Rom. 10. 10. Acts, 9. 19, 20. They that live in hope of the kingdom of glory must neither be afraid nor ashamed to own their obligation to him that purchased it for them, Matth. 10. 22.

II. His fear; (v. 11.) *I was greatly afflicted*, and then *I said in my haste*, (somewhat rashly and inconsiderately, in my amazement, so some; when I was in a consternation; in my flight, so others; when Saul was in pursuit of me,) *All men are liars*; all with whom he had to do, Saul and all his courtiers; his friends, who, he thought, would have stood by him, deserted him and disowned him, when he fell into disgrace at court. And some think it is especially a reflection on Samuel, who had promised him the kingdom, but deceived him; for, says he, *I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul*, 1 Sam. 27. 1. Observe, 1. The faith of the best of saints is not perfect, nor always alike strong and active. David believed, and spake well, (v. 10.) but now, through unbelief, he spake amiss. 2. When we are under great and sore afflictions, especially if they continue long, we are apt to grow weary, to despond, and almost to despair of a good issue. Let us not therefore be harsh in censuring others, but carefully watch over ourselves when we are in trouble, 39. 1. 3. If good men speak amiss, it is in their haste, through the surprise of a temptation, not deliberately and with premeditation, as the wicked man, who sits in the seat of the scornful; (Ps. 1. 1.) sits, and speaks against his brother, 50. 19, 20. 4. What we speak amiss in haste, we must by repentance unsay again, (as David, 31. 22.) and then it shall not be laid to our charge. Some make this to be no rash word of David's. He was greatly afflicted, and forced to fly, but he did not trust in man, nor make flesh his arm. "No," he said, "*all men are liars*; as men of low degree are vanity, so men of high degree are a lie, and therefore my confidence was in God only, and in him I cannot be disappointed." In this sense the apostle seems to make it; (Rom. 3. 4.) *Let God be true, and every man a liar*, in comparison with God. All men are fickle and inconstant, and subject to change; and therefore let us cease from men, and cleave to God.

III. His gratitude, v. 12, &c. God had been better to him than his fears, and had graciously delivered him out of his distresses; and, in consideration hereof,

1. He inquires what returns he shall make; (v. 12.) *What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?* Here he speaks, (1.) As one sensible of many mercies received from God; *all his benefits*. This psalm seems to have been penned upon occasion of some one particular benefit, (v. 6, 7.) but in that one he saw many, and that one brought many to mind; and therefore now he thinks of all God's benefits toward him. Note, When we speak of God's mercies, we should magnify them, and speak highly of them. (2.) As one solicitous and studious how to express his gratitude, *What shall I render unto the Lord?* Not as if he thought he could render anything proportionable, or as a valuable consideration, for what he had received; we can no more pretend to give a recompence to God, than we can to merit any favour from him; but he desired to render something acceptable, something that God would be pleased with as the acknowledgment of a grateful mind. He asks God, *What shall I render?* Asks the priest, asks his friends, or rather, asks himself, and communes with his own heart about it. Note, Having received many benefits from God, we are concerned to inquire, *What we shall render?*

2. He resolves what returns he will make.

(1.) He will in the most devout and solemn manner offer up his praises and prayers to God, v. 13, 17.

[1.] "*I will take the cup of salvation*; I will offer the drink-offerings appointed by the law, in token of my thankfulness to God, and rejoice with my friends in God's goodness to me;" this is called the *cup of deliverance*, because drunk in memory of the deliverance. The pious Jews had sometimes a *cup of blessing*, at

their private meals, which the master of the family drank first of, with thanksgiving to God, and all at his table drank with him. But some understand it not of the cup that he would present to God, but of the cup that God would put into his hand. *I will receive, First, The cup of affliction.* Many good interpreters understand it of that cup, that bitter cup, which is yet sanctified to the saints, so that to them it is a *cup of salvation*, Phil. 1. 19. *This shall turn to my salvation*; it is a means of spiritual health. David's sufferings were typical of Christ's, and we, in our's, have communion with his, and his cup was indeed a *cup of salvation*. "God, having bestowed so many benefits upon me, whatever cup he shall put into my hands, I will readily take it, and not dispute it; welcome his holy will." Herein David spake the language of the Son of David; (John, 18. 11.) *The cup that my Father has given me, shall I not take it, and drink it?* Secondly, The cup of consolation; "I will receive the benefits God bestows upon me as from his hand, and taste his love in them, as that which is the portion not only of mine inheritance in the other world, but of my cup in this."

[2.] *I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving*; the thank-offerings which God required, Lev. 7. 11, 12, &c. Note, Those whose hearts are truly thankful, will express it in thank-offerings. We must first *give our ourselves* to God, as *living sacrifices*, (Rom. 12. 1. 2 Cor. 8. 5.) and then lay out of what we have, for his honour, in works of piety and charity; *doing good and communicating* are sacrifices with which God is well-pleased, (Heb. 13. 15, 16.) and this must accompany our *giving thanks to his name*. If God has been bountiful to us, the least we can do, in return, is, to be bountiful to the poor, Ps. 16. 2, 3. Why should we offer that to God which cost us nothing?

[3.] *I will call upon the name of the Lord.* This he had promised, (v. 2.) and here he repeats it, (v. 13.) and again, v. 17. If we have received kindness from a man like ourselves, we tell him that we hope we shall never trouble him again; but God is pleased to reckon the prayers of his people an honour to him, and a delight, and no trouble; and therefore, in gratitude for former mercies, we must seek to him for further mercies, and continue to *call upon him*.

(2.) He will always entertain good thoughts of God, as very tender of the lives and comforts of his people; (v. 15.) *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints*; so precious, that he will not gratify Saul, or Absalom, or any of David's enemies, with his death, how earnestly soever they desire it. This truth David had comforted himself with, in the depth of his distress and danger; the event having confirmed it, he comforts others with it, who might be in like manner exposed. God has a people, even in this world, that are his saints, his merciful ones, or men of mercy; that have received mercy from him, and shew mercy for his sake. The saints of God are mortal and dying; nay, there are those that desire their death, and labour all they can to hasten it, and sometimes prevail to be the death of them; but it is *precious in the sight of the Lord*; their life is so, (2 Kings, 1. 13.) their blood is so, Ps. 72. 14. God often wonderfully prevents the death of his saints, where there is but a step between them and it; he takes special care about their death, to order it for the best, in all the circumstances of it; and whoever kills them, how light soever they may make of it, they shall be made to pay dear for it, when inquisition is made for the blood of the saints, Matth. 23. 35. Though *no man lays it to heart*, when the *righteous perish*, God will make it to appear that he *lays it to heart*. This should make us willing to die, to die for Christ, if we are called to it, that our death shall be registered in heaven; and let that be precious to us which is so to God.

(3.) He will oblige himself to be God's servants all his days. Having asked, *What shall I render?* Here he surrenders himself, which was *more than all burnt-offerings and sacrifice*; (v. 16.) *O Lord, truly I am thy servant.* Here is, [1.] The relation in which David professes to stand to God; "*I am thy servant*; I choose to be so, I resolve to be so, I will live and die in thy service." He had called God's people, who are dear to him, *his saints*; but, when he comes to apply it to himself, he does not say, *Truly I am*

thy saint; (that looked too high a title for himself;) but, *I am thy servant.* David was a king, and yet he glories in this, that he was God's servant. It is no disparagement, but an honour, to the greatest kings on earth, to be the servants of the God of heaven. David does not here compliment with God, as it is common among men to say, *I am your servant*, Sir; No, Lord, I am *truly thy servant, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I am so.* And he repeats it, as that which he took pleasure in the thoughts of, and which he was resolved to abide by; "*I am thy servant, I am thy servant.* Let others serve what master they will, *truly I am thy servant.*" [2.] The ground of that relation: two ways men came to be servants, *First*, By birth; "Lord, I was born in thy house, I am *the son of thine handmaid*, and therefore thine." It is a great mercy to be the children of godly parents, as it obliges us to duty, and is pleadable with God for mercy. *Secondly*, By redemption. He that procured the release of a captive took him for his servant. "*Lord, thou hast loosed my bonds*, those sorrows of death that compassed me, thou hast discharged me from them, and therefore *I am thy servant*, and entitled to thy protection, as well as obliged to thy work." *The very bonds which thou hast loosed shall tie me faster unto thee.* Patrick.

(4.) He will make conscience of paying his vows, and making good what he had promised; not only that he would offer the sacrifices of praise, which he had vowed to bring, but perform all his other engagements to God, which he had laid himself under in the day of his affliction; (v. 14.) *I will pay my vows*; and again, (v. 18.) *now in the presence of all his people.* Note, Vows are debts that must be paid, for it is better not vow than vow and not pay. He will pay his vows, [1.] *Presently*; he will not, like sorry debtors, delay the payment of them, or beg a day; but, "*I will pay them now,*" Eccl. 5. 4. [2.] *Publicly*; he will not huddle up his praises in a corner, but what service he has to do for God, he will do it *in the presence of all his people*; not for ostentation, but to shew that he was not ashamed of the service of God, and that others might be invited to join with him. He will pay his vows, in the courts of the tabernacle, where there was a cloud of Israelites attending, *in the midst of Jerusalem*, that he might bring devotion into more reputation.

PSALM CXVII.

This psalm is short and sweet; I doubt the reason why we sing it so often as we do, is, for the shortness of it; but, if we rightly understood and considered it, we should sing it oftener for the sweetness of it, especially to us sinners of the Gentiles, on whom it casts a very favourable eye. Here is, I. A solemn call to all nations to praise God, v. 1. II. Proper matter for that praise suggested, v. 2. We are soon weary indeed of well doing, if, in singing this psalm, we keep not up those pious and devout affections with which the spiritual sacrifice of praise ought to be kindled and kept burning.

1. **O** PRAISE the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. 2. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD.

There is a great deal of gospel in this psalm. The apostle has furnished us with a key to it, (Rom. 15. 11.) where he quotes it as a proof that the gospel was to be preached to, and would be entertained by, the Gentile nations, which yet was so great a stumbling-block to the Jews. Why should that offend them, when it is said, and they themselves had often sung it, *Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles, and laud him, all ye people.* Some of the Jewish writers confess that this psalm refers to the kingdom of the Messiah; nay, one of them has a fancy that it consists of two verses, to signify that in the days of the Messiah God should be glorified by two sorts of people; by the Jews, according to the law of Moses, and by the Gentiles, according to the seven precepts of the sons of Noah, which yet should make one church, as these two verses make one psalm. We have here,

1. The vast extent of the gospel-church, v. 1. For many ages, in Judah only was God known, and his name praised. The sons of Levi and the seed of Israel praised him, but the rest of the

nations praised gods of wood and stone, (Dan. 5. 4.) while there was no devotion at all paid, at least, none openly that we know of, to the living and true God. But here *all nations* are called upon to praise the Lord, which could not be applied to the Old-Testament times, both because this call was not then given to any of the Gentile nations, much less to all, in a language they understood; and because, unless the people of the land became Jews, and were circumcised, they were not admitted to praise God with them. But the gospel of Christ is ordered to be preached to all nations, and by him the partition-wall is taken down, and those that were *afar off* are made *nigh*. This was the mystery which was hid in prophecy for many ages, but was at length revealed in the accomplishment, *That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs*, Eph. 3. 3, 6. Observe here,

(1.) Who should be admitted into the church; *all nations*, and *all people*. The original words are the same that are used for the *heathen that rage*, and *the people that imagine* against Christ; (2. 1.) they that had been enemies to his kingdom should become his willing subjects. The gospel of the kingdom was to be preached to all the world, for a witness to all nations, Matth. 24. 14. Mark, 16. 15. *All nations shall be called, and to some of all nations the call shall be effectual, and they shall be disciples.*

(2.) How their admission into the church is foretold; by a repeated call to *praise him*. The tidings of the gospel, being sent to all nations, should give them cause to praise God; the institution of gospel-ordinances would give them leave and opportunity to praise God; and the power of gospel-grace would give them hearts to praise him. Those are highly favoured whom God invites by his word, and inclines by his Spirit, to praise him, and so makes to be to him for a *name* and a *praise*. See Jer. 13. 11.

2. The unsearchable riches of *gospel-grace*, which are to be the matter of our praise, v. 2. In the gospel, those celebrated attributes of God, his mercy and his truth, shine most bright in themselves, and most comfortably to us: and the apostle, where he quotes this psalm, takes notice of these as the two great things for which the Gentiles should glorify God, (Rom. 15. 8, 9.) for *the truth of God*, and for *his mercy*. We, that enjoy the gospel, have reason to *praise the Lord*, (1.) For the power of his mercy; *His merciful kindness is great toward us: it is strong*, so the word signifies; it is *mighty* for the pardon of mighty sins, (Amos, 5. 12.) and for the working out of a mighty salvation. (2.) For the perpetuity of his truth; *The truth of the Lord endures for ever*. It was mercy, mere mercy to the Gentiles, that the gospel was sent among them; it was merciful kindness prevailing toward them above their deserts; and in it the *truth of the Lord*, of his promise made unto the fathers, *endures for ever*; for though the Jews were hardened and expelled, yet the promise took its effect in the believing Gentiles, the spiritual seed of Abraham. God's mercy is the fountain of all our comforts, and his truth the foundation of all our hopes, and therefore for both we must *praise the Lord*.

PSALM CXVIII.

It is probable that David penned this psalm when he had, after many a storm, weathered his point at last, and gained a full possession of the kingdom to which he had been anointed. He then invites and stirs up his friends to join with him, not only in a cheerful acknowledgment of God's goodness, and a cheerful dependence upon that goodness for the future, but in a believing expectation of the promised Messiah, of whose kingdom and his exaltation to it his were typical: to him, it is certain, the prophet here bears witness, in the latter part of the psalm: Christ himself applies it to himself, (Matth. 21. 42.) and the former part of the psalm may, fairly, and without forcing, be accommodated to him and his undertaking. Some think it was first calculated for the solemnity of the bringing of the ark to the city of David, and was afterward sung at the feast of tabernacles. In it, I. David calls upon all about him to give to God the glory of his goodness, v. 1. 4. II. He encourages himself and others to trust in God, from the experience he had had of God's power and pity in the great and kind things he had done for him, v. 5. 18. III. He gives thanks for his advancement to the throne, as it was a figure of the exaltation of Christ, v. 19. 22. IV. The people, the priests, and the psalmist himself, triumph in the prospect of the Redeemer's kingdom, v. 21. 29. In singing this psalm, we must glorify God for his goodness, his goodness to us, and especially his goodness to us in Jesus Christ.

1. **O** GIVE thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy *endureth* for ever. 2. Let Israel now say, that his mercy *endureth* for ever. 3. Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy *endureth* for ever. 4. Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy *endureth* for ever. 5. I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place. 6. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? 7. The LORD taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. 8. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. 9. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes. 10. All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them. 11. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. 12. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. 13. Thou hast thrust sore at me, that I might fall: but the LORD helped me. 14. The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. 15. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. 16. The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. 17. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. 18. The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.

It appears here, as often elsewhere, that David had his heart full of the goodness of God; he loved to think of it, loved to speak of it, and was very solicitous that God might have the praise of it, and others the comfort of it. The more our hearts are impressed with a sense of God's goodness, the more they will be enlarged in all manner of obedience. In these verses,

I. He celebrates God's mercy in general, and calls upon others to acknowledge it, from their own experience of it; (v. 1.) *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is not only good in himself, but good to you, and his mercy endures for ever*, not only in the everlasting Fountain, God himself, but in the never-failing streams of that mercy which shall run parallel with the longest line of eternity, and in the chosen vessels of mercy, who will be everlasting monuments of it. Israel, and the house of Aaron, and all that fear God, were called upon to trust in God; (115. 9. 11.) here, they are called upon to confess that *his mercy endures for ever*, and so to encourage themselves to trust in him: (v. 2. 4.) priests and people, Jews and proselytes, must all own God's goodness, and all join in the same thankful song; if they can say no more, let them say this for him, that *his mercy endures for ever*, that they have had experience of it all their days, and confide in it for good things that shall last for ever. The praises and thanksgivings of all that truly fear the Lord, shall be as pleasing to him as those of the house of Israel, or the house of Aaron.

II. He preserves an account of God's gracious dealings with him in particular, which he communicates to others, that they might thence fetch both songs of praise, and supports of faith, and both ways God would have glory. David had, in his time, waded through a great deal of difficulty, which gave him great experience of God's goodness.

Let us therefore observe here,

1. The great distress and danger that he had been in, which he reflects upon, for the magnifying of God's goodness to him in his present advancement. There are many who, when they are lifted up, care not for hearing or speaking of their former depressions; but David takes all occasions to remember his own low estate. He was in distress, (v. 5.) greatly straitened and at a loss: there were many that *hated him*; (v. 7.) and that could not but be a grief to one of an ingenuous spirit, that strove to gain the good affections of all. *All nations compassed me about*, v. 10. All the nations adjacent to Israel set themselves to give disturbance to David, when he was newly come to the throne, Philistines, Moabites, Syrians, Ammonites, &c. We read of *his enemies round about*; they were confederate against him, and thought to cut off all succours from him. This endeavour of his enemies to surround him is repeated; (v. 11.) *They compassed me about, yea, they compassed me about*, which intimates that they were virulent and violent, and, for a time, prevalent, in their attempts against him, and that, when put into disorder, they rallied again, and pushed on their design. *They compassed me about like bees*, so numerous were they, so noisy, so vexatious; they came flying upon him, came upon him in swarms, set upon him with their malignant stings; but it was to their own destruction, as the bee, they say, loses her life with her sting, *Animamque in vulnere ponit*—*She lays down her life in the wound*. Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!

Two ways, David was brought into trouble; (1.) By the injuries that men did him; (v. 13.) *Thou (O enemy) hast thrust sore at me*, with many a desperate push, *that I might fall into sin and into ruin*. *Thrusting, thou hast thrust at me*, (so the word is,) so that I was ready to fall. Satan is the great enemy that thrusts sore at us by his temptations, to cast us down from our excellency, that we may fall from our God, and from our comfort in him; and, if God had not upheld us by his grace, his thrusts had been fatal to us. (2.) By the afflictions which God laid upon him; (v. 18.) *The Lord has chastened me sore*. Men thrust at him for his destruction, God chastened him for his instruction; they thrust at him with the malice of enemies, God chastened him with the love and tenderness of a Father. Perhaps he refers to the same trouble which God, the Author of it, designed for his profit, that by it he *might partake of his holiness*; (Heb. 12. 10, 11.) howbeit, men, who were the instruments of it, meant not so, *neither did their heart think so, but it was in their heart to cut off and destroy*, Isa. 10. 7. What men intend for the greatest mischief, God intends for the greatest good, and it is easy to say whose counsel shall stand. God will sanctify the trouble to his people, as it is his chastening, and secure the good he designs; and he will guard them against the troubles, as it is the enemies' thrusting, and secure them from the evil they design, and then we need not fear.

This account which David gives of his troubles is very applicable to our Lord Jesus; many there were that *hated him*, hated him without a cause; they *compassed him about*, Jews and Romans surrounded him; they *thrust sore at him*; the Devil did so when he tempted him, his persecutors did so when they reviled him; nay, the Lord himself chastened him sore, bruised him, and put him to grief, that *by his stripes we might be healed*.

2. The favour God vouchsafed to him in his distress. (1.) God heard his prayer; (v. 5.) *He answered me with enlargements*, he did more for me than I was able to ask; he enlarged my heart in prayer, and yet gave more largely than I desired." *He answered me, and set me in a large place*, (so we read it,) where I had room to bestir myself, room to enjoy myself, and room to thrive; and the *large place* was the more comfortable, because he was brought to it *out of distress*, 4.1. (2.) God baffled the designs of his enemies against him; They are *quenched as the fire of thorns*, (v. 12.) which burns furiously for a while, makes a great noise and a great blaze, but is presently out, and cannot do the mischief that it threatened: such was the fury of David's enemies; such is *the laughter of the fool*, like the *crackling of thorns under a pot*, (Eccl. 7. 6.) and such is the anger of the fool,

which therefore is not to be feared, any more than his laughter is to be envied, but both to be pitied. They thrust sore at him, but *the Lord helped him*, (v. 13.) helped him to keep his feet, and maintain his ground. Our spiritual enemies had long before this been our ruin, if God had not been our Helper. (3.) God preserved his life when there was but a step between him and death; (v. 18.) *He that chastened me*, but he has not *given me over unto death*, for he has not given me over to the will of my enemies." To this St. Paul seems to refer, (2 Cor. 6. 9.) *As dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed*. We ought not therefore, when we are chastened sore, immediately to despair of life, for God sometimes, in appearance, *turns men to destruction*, and yet saith, *Return; saith unto them, Live*.

This also is applicable to Jesus Christ; God *answered him*, and *set him in a large place*, quenched the fire of his enemies' rage, which did but consume themselves, for *through death he destroyed him that had the power of death*; he helped him through his undertaking; and thus far he did not *give him over unto death*, that he did not leave him in the grave, nor suffer him to see corruption. *Death had no dominion over him*.

3. The improvement he made of this favour.

(1.) It encouraged him to trust in God: from his own experience he can say, *It is better*, more wise, more comfortable, and more safe; there is more reason for it, and it will speed better, *to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man*, yea, though it be in princes, v. 8, 9. He that devotes himself to God's guidance and government, with an entire dependence upon God's wisdom, power, and goodness, has a better security to make him easy, than if all the kings and potentates of the earth should undertake to protect him.

(2.) It enabled him to triumph in that trust.

[1.] He triumphs in God, and in his relation to him, and interest in him; (v. 6.) *"The Lord is on my side*. He is a righteous God, and therefore espouses my righteous cause, and will plead it." If we are on God's side, he is on our's; if we be for him and with him, he will be for us and with us; (v. 7.) *"The Lord takes my part, and stands up for me, with them that help me*. He is to me among my helpers, and so one of them; he is all in all, both to them and me, and without him I could not help myself, nor could any friend I have in the world help me." Thus, (v. 14.) *"The Lord is my Strength, and my Song; I make him so; without him I am weak and sad, but on him I stay myself as my Strength, both for doing and suffering; and in him I solace myself as my Song, by which I both express my joy, and ease my grief; and, making him so, I find him so: he strengthens my heart with his graces, and rejoices my heart with his comforts."* If God be our Strength, he must be our Song; if he work all our works in us, he must have all praise and glory from us. God is sometimes the Strength of his people, when he is not their Song; they have spiritual supports, when they want spiritual delights; but if he be both to us, we have abundant reason to triumph in him; for if he be our Strength and our Song, he is become not only our Saviour, but our Salvation; for his being our Strength is our protection to the salvation, and his being our Song is an earnest and foretaste of the salvation.

[2.] He triumphs over his enemies; now shall his head be lifted up above them; for,

First, He is sure they cannot hurt him; "God is for me, and then *I will not fear what man can do against me*," v. 6. He can set them all at defiance, and is not disturbed at any of their attempts. "They can do nothing to me, but what God permits them to do; they can do me no real damage, for they cannot separate between me and God, they cannot do any thing but what God can make to work for my good. The enemy is a man, a depending creature, whose power is limited, and subordinate to a higher power, and therefore I will not fear him." *Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die?* Isa. 51. 12. The apostle quotes this, with application to all Christians; (Heb. 13. 6.) they may boldly say, as boldly as David himself, *The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me; let him do his worst*.

Secondly, He is sure that he shall be too hard for them at last; "*I shall see my desire upon them that hate me; (v. 7.) I shall see them defeated in their designs against me; nay, In the name of the Lord I will destroy them; (v. 10..12.) I trust in the name of the Lord that I shall destroy them; and in his name I will go forth against them, depending on his strength, by warrant from him, and with an eye to his glory, not confiding in myself, or taking vengeance for myself.*" Thus he went forth against Goliath, *in the name of the God of Israel*, 1 Sam. 17. 45. David says this as a type of Christ, who triumphed over the powers of darkness, destroyed them, and *made a shew of them openly*.

[3.] He triumphs in an assurance of the continuance of his comfort, his victory, and his life.

First, Of his comfort; (v. 15.) *The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous*, and in mine particularly, in my family. The dwellings of the righteous in this world are but tabernacles, mean and moveable; here we have no city, *no continuing city*. But these tabernacles are more comfortable to them than the palaces of the wicked are to them; for in the house where religion rules, 1. There is salvation; safety from evil, earnest of eternal salvation, which *is come to this house*, Luke, 19. 9. 2. Where there is salvation, there is cause for rejoicing, for continual joy in God. Holy joy is called *the joy of salvation*, for in that there is abundant matter for joy. 3. Where there is rejoicing, there ought to be *the voice of rejoicing*, praise, and thanksgiving. Let God be served with joyfulness and gladness of heart, and let the voice of that rejoicing be heard daily in our families, to the glory of God, and the encouragement of others.

Secondly, Of his victory; *The right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly*, (v. 15.) and is exalted; for (as some read it) *it has exalted me*. The right hand of God's power is engaged for his people, and it acts vigorously for them, and therefore victoriously. For what difficulty can stand before the divine valour? We are weak, and act but cowardly for ourselves; but God is mighty, and acts valiantly for us, with jealousy and resolution, Isa. 63. 5, 6. There is spirit, as well as strength, in all God's operations for his people. And when God's right hand doeth valiantly for our salvation, it ought to be exalted in our praises.

Thirdly, Of his life; (v. 17.) "*I shall not die by the hands of my enemies that seek my life, but live, and declare the works of the Lord; I shall live a monument of God's mercy and power; his works shall be declared in me, and I will make it the business of my life to praise and magnify God, looking upon that as the end of my preservation.*" Note, It is not worth while to live for any other purpose than to *declare the works of God*, for his honour, and the encouragement of others to serve him and trust in him. Such as these were the triumphs of the Son of David, in the assurance he had of the success of his undertaking, and that the *good pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand*.

19. Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go in to them, and I will praise the LORD: 20. This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter. 21. I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. 22. The stone *which* the builders refused is become the head-stone of the corner. 23. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. 24. This is the day *which* the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. 25. Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. 26. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. 27. God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, *even* unto the horns of the altar. 28. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: *thou*

art my God, I will exalt thee. 29. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

We have here an illustrious prophecy of the humiliation and exaltation of our Lord Jesus, his sufferings, and the glory that should follow. Peter thus applies it directly to the chief priests and scribes; and none of them could charge him with misapplying it, Acts, 4. 11. Now observe here,

1. The preface with which this precious prophecy is introduced, v. 19..21. 1. The psalmist desires admission into the sanctuary of God, there to celebrate the glory of him *that cometh in the name of the Lord; Open to me the gates of righteousness*. So the temple-gates are called, because they were shut against the uncircumcised, and forbade the stranger to come nigh; as the sacrifices there offered are called *sacrifices of righteousness*. Those that would enter into communion with God in holy ordinances, must become humble suitors to God for admission. And when the gates of righteousness are opened to us, we must *go into them*, must enter into the holiest, as far as we have leave, and *praise the Lord*. Our business within God's gates, is, to praise God; *therefore* we should long till the gates of heaven be opened to us, that we may go into them to dwell in God's house above, where we shall be still praising him. 2. He sees admission granted him; (v. 20.) *This is the gate of the Lord*, the gate of his appointing, *into which the righteous shall enter*; as if he had said, "The gate you knocked at is opened, and you are welcome, *Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*" Some by this gate understand Christ, by whom we are taken into fellowship with God, and our praises are accepted; he is *the Way*; there is no coming to the Father but by him; (John, 14. 6.) he is the *Door of the sheep*; (John, 10. 9.) he is the Gate of the temple, by whom, and by whom only, the righteous, and they only, shall enter, and *come into God's righteousness*, as the expression is, 69. 27. The psalmist triumphs in the discovery, that the gate of righteousness, which had been so long shut, and so long knocked at, was now at length opened. 3. He promises to give thanks to God for this favour; (v. 21.) *I will praise thee*. They that saw Christ's day at so great a distance, saw cause to praise God for the prospect; for in him they saw that God had heard them, had heard the prayers of the Old-Testament saints, for the coming of the Messiah, and would be their Salvation.

II. The prophecy itself, v. 22, 23. This may have some reference to David's preferment; he was the stone whom Saul and his courtiers rejected, but was by the wonderful providence of God advanced to be the head-stone of the building; but its principal reference is to Christ: and here we have,

1. His humiliation; he is *the Stone which the builders refused*; he is the *Stone cut out of the mountain without hands*, Dan. 2. 34. He is a stone, not only for strength, and firmness, and duration, but for life, in the building of the spiritual temple; and yet a *precious Stone*; (1 Pet. 2. 6.) for the foundation of the gospel-church must be *sapphires*, Isa. 54. 2. This Stone was *rejected by the builders*, by the rulers and people of the Jews; (Acts, 4. 8, 10, 11.) they refused to own him as the Stone, the Messiah promised; they would not build their faith upon him, nor join themselves to him; they would make no use of him, but go on in their building without him; they *denied him in the presence of Pilate*, (Acts, 3. 13.) when they said, *We have no king but Caesar*. They trampled upon this Stone, threw it among the rubbish out of the city; nay, they stumbled at it. This was a disgrace to Christ, but it proved the ruin of those that thus made light of him. Rejecters of Christ are rejected of God.

2. His exaltation; he *is become the Head-stone of the corner*; he is advanced to the highest degree both of honour and usefulness, to be above all, and all in all. He is the chief Corner-stone in the foundation, in whom Jew and Gentile are united, that they may be built up one holy house. He is the chief Top-stone in the corner, in whom the building is completed, and who must in all things have the pre-eminence, as the *Author and Finisher of our*

faith. Thus highly has God exalted him, because he humbled himself; and we, in compliance with God's design, must make him the Foundation of our hope, the Centre of our unity, and the End of our living. *To me to live is Christ.*

3. The hand of God in all this; *This is the Lord's doing*, it is from the Lord, it is with the Lord; it is the product of his counsel, it is his contrivance; both the humiliation and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus were his work, Acts, 2. 23.—4. 27, 28. He sent him, sealed him, his hand went with him throughout his whole undertaking, and from first to last he did his Father's will; and this ought to be *marvellous in our eyes*. Christ's name is *Wonderful*; and the redemption he wrought out is the most amazing of all God's works of wonder; it is what the angels desire to look into, and will be admiring to eternity; much more ought we to admire it, who owe our all to it. *Without controversy, great is this mystery of godliness.*

III. The joy wherewith it is entertained, and the acclamations which attend this prediction.

1. Let the day be solemnized to the honour of God with great joy; (v. 24.) *This is the day the Lord has made*. The whole time of the gospel-dispensation, that *accepted time*, that *day of salvation*, is what the Lord has made so; it is a continual feast, which ought to be kept with joy. Or it may very fitly be understood of the Christian sabbath, which we sanctify in remembrance of Christ's resurrection, when the rejected Stone began to be exalted; and so, (1.) Here is the doctrine of the Christian sabbath; *It is the day which the Lord has made*, has made remarkable, made holy, has distinguished it from other days; he has made it for man; it is therefore called *the Lord's day*, for it bears his image and superscription. (2.) The duty of the sabbath; the work of the day, that it is to be done in his day; *We will rejoice and be glad in it*; not only in the institution of the day, that there is such a day appointed, but in the occasion of it, Christ's becoming the *Head of the corner*. This we ought to rejoice in, both as his honour and our advantage. Sabbath days must be rejoicing days, and then they are to us as the days of heaven. See what a good Master we serve, who, having instituted a day for his service, appoints it to be spent in holy joy.

2. Let the exalted Redeemer be met, and attended, with joyful hosannas, v. 25, 26.

(1.) Let him have the acclamations of the people, as is usual at the inauguration of a prince; let every one of his loyal subjects shout for joy; *Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord*. This is like *Vivat Rex—Long live the King*, and speaks a hearty joy for his accession to the crown, an entire satisfaction in his government, and a zealous affection to the interests and honour of it. *Hosanna* signifies, *Save now, I beseech thee*. [1.] "Lord, save me, I beseech thee; let this Saviour be my Saviour, and, in order to that, my Ruler; let me be taken under his protection, and owned as one of his willing subjects. His enemies are my enemies; Lord, I beseech thee, save me from them. Send me an interest in that prosperity which his kingdom brings with it to all those that entertain it. Let my soul prosper and be in health, in that peace and righteousness which his government brings, 72. 3. Let me have victory over those lusts that war against my soul, and let divine grace go on in my heart, conquering, and to conquer." [2.] "Lord, preserve him, I beseech thee, even the Saviour himself, and send him prosperity in all his undertakings; give success to his gospel, and let it be mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong-holds, and reducing souls to their allegiance to him. Let his name be sanctified, his kingdom come, his will be done;" thus let prayer be made for him continually, 72. 15. On the Lord's day, when we rejoice and are glad in his kingdom, we must pray for the advancement of it more and more, and its establishment upon the ruins of the Devil's kingdom. When Christ made his public entry into Jerusalem, he was thus met by his well-wishers, (Matth. 21. 9.) *Hosanna to the Son of David; long live King Jesus*; let him reign for ever.

(2.) Let the priests, the Lord's ministers, do their part in this

great solemnity, v. 26. [1.] Let them bless the prince with their praises; *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*. Jesus Christ is he that cometh; *ὁ ἐρχόμενος*, he that was to come, and is yet to come again, Rev. 1. 8. *He comes in the name of the Lord*, with a commission from him, to act for him, to do his will, and to seek his glory; and therefore we must say, *Blessed be he that cometh*; we must rejoice that he is come, we must speak well of him, admire him, and esteem him highly, as one we are eternally obliged to; call him blessed Jesus, blessed for ever, 45. 2. We must bid him welcome into our hearts, saying, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; come in by thy grace and Spirit, and take possession of me for thine own." We must bless his faithful ministers that come in his name, and receive them for his sake, Isa. 52. 7. John, 13. 20. We must pray for the enlargement and edification of his church; for the ripening of things for his second coming; and then, that he who has said, *Surely I come quickly, would even so come*. [2.] Let them bless the people with their prayers; *We have blessed you out of the house of the Lord*. Christ's ministers are not only warranted, but appointed, to pronounce a blessing, in his name, upon all his loyal subjects that love him and his government in sincerity, Eph. 6. 24. We assure you that, in and through Jesus Christ, you are blessed; for he came to bless you; "You are *blessed out of the house of the Lord with spiritual blessings in heavenly places*, (Eph. 1. 3.) and therefore have reason to bless him who hath thus blessed you."

3. Let sacrifices of thanksgiving be offered to his honour, who offered for us the great atoning sacrifice, v. 27. Here is, (1.) The privilege we enjoy by Jesus Christ; *God is the Lord which has shewed us light*; God is Jehovah, is known by that name, a God performing what he has promised, and perfecting what he has begun, Exod. 6. 3. *He has shewed us light*, he has given us the knowledge of himself and his will; he *has shined upon us*, so some; has favoured us, and lifted up upon us the light of his countenance; he has given us occasion for joy and rejoicing, which is light to the soul, by giving us a prospect of everlasting light in heaven. *The day which the Lord has made* brings light with it, true light. (2.) The duty which this privilege calls for; *Bind the sacrifice with cords*, that, being killed, the blood of it may be sprinkled upon the horns of the altar, according to the law; or perhaps it was the custom (though we read not of it elsewhere) to bind the sacrifice to the horns of the altar, while things were getting ready for the slaying of it. Or this may have a peculiar significancy here; the sacrifice we are to offer to God, in gratitude for redeeming love, is, ourselves, not to be slain upon the altar, but *living sacrifices*, (Rom. 12. 1.) to be bound to the altar; spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, in which our hearts must be fixed and engaged, as the sacrifice was bound *with cords to the horns of the altar*, not to start back.

Lastly, The psalmist concludes with his own thankful acknowledgments of divine grace, in which he calls upon others to join with him, v. 28, 29. (1.) He will praise God himself, and endeavour to exalt him in his own heart, and in the hearts of others, and this because of his covenant-relation to him, and interest in him; "Thou art my God, on whom I depend, and to whom I am devoted, who ownest me, and art owned by me; and therefore I will praise thee." (2.) He will have all about him to give thanks to God for these glad tidings of great joy to all people, that there is a Redeemer, even Christ the Lord; in him it is that God is good to man, and that *his mercy endures for ever*; in him the covenant of grace is made, and in him it is made sure, made good, and made an everlasting covenant. He concludes this psalm as he began it; (v. 1.) for God's glory must be the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, of all our addresses to him. *Hallowed be thy name, and thine is the glory*. And this fitly closes a prophecy of Christ. The angels give thanks for man's redemption. *Glory to God in the highest*, (Luke, 2. 14.) for there is on earth peace, to which we must echo with our hosannas, as they did, Luke, 19. 38. *Peace in heaven to us through Christ*, and therefore *Glory in the highest*.

PSALM CXIX.

This is a psalm by itself, like none of the rest, it excels them all, and shines brightest in this constellation. It is much longer than any of them; more than twice as long as any of them. It is not making long prayers that Christ censures, but making them for a pretence; which intimates that they are in themselves good and commendable. It seems to me to be a collection of David's pious and devout ejaculations, the short and sudden breathings and elevations of his soul to God, which he wrote down as they occurred, and, toward the latter end of his time, gathered out of his day-book, where they lay scattered, added to them many like words, and digested them into this psalm, in which there is seldom any coherence between the verses, but, like Solomon's proverbs, it is a chest of gold rings, not a chain of gold links. And we may not only learn, by the psalmist's example, to accustom ourselves to such pious ejaculations, which are an excellent means of maintaining constant communion with God, and keeping the heart in frame for the more solemn exercises of religion, but we must make use of the psalmist's words, both for the exciting, and for the expressing, of our devout affections; what some have said of this psalm is true, He that shall read it considerably, it will either warm him or shame him.

I. The composition of it is singular, and very exact. It is divided into twenty-two parts, according to the number of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and each part consists of eight verses; all the verses of the first part beginning with Aleph, all the verses of the second with Beth, and so on, without any flaw, throughout the whole psalm. Archbishop Tillotson says, It seems to have more of poetical skill and number in it, than we at this distance can easily understand. Some have called it the saints' alphabet; and it were to be wished we had it as ready in our memories, as the very letters of our alphabet, as ready as our A B C. Perhaps the penman found it of use to himself to observe this method, as it obliged him to seek for thoughts, and search for them, that he might fill up the quota of every part; and the letter he was to begin with might lead him to a word which might suggest a good sentence; and all little enough to raise any thing that is good in the barren soil of our hearts. However, it would be of use to the learners, a help to them, both in committing it to memory, and in calling it to mind upon occasion; by the letter the first word would be got, and that would bring in the whole verse; thus young people would the more easily learn it by heart, and retain it the better even in old age. If any censure it as childish and trifling, because acrostics are now quite out of fashion, let them know that the royal psalmist despises their censure; he is a teacher of babes, and if this method may be beneficial to them, he can easily stoop to it; if this be to be vile, he will be yet more vile.

II. The general scope and design of it is to magnify the law, and make it honourable; to set forth the excellency and usefulness of divine revelation, and to recommend it to us, not only for the entertainment, but for the government, of ourselves, by the psalmist's own example, who speaks by experience of the benefit of it, and of the good impressions made upon him by it; for which he praises God, and earnestly prays, from first to last, for the continuance of God's grace with him, to direct and quicken him in the way of his duty. There are ten several words by which divine revelation is called in this psalm; and they are synonymous, each of them expressive of the whole compass of it. (both that which tells us what God expects from us, and that which tells what we may expect from him,) and of the system of religion which is founded upon it, and guided by it. The things contained in the scripture, and drawn from it, are here called, 1. God's law, because they are enacted by him as our Sovereign. 2. His way, because they are the rule both of his providence and of our obedience. 3. His testimonies, because they are solemnly declared to the world, and attested beyond contradiction. 4. His commandments, because given with authority, and (as the word signifies) lodged with us as a trust. 5. His precepts, because prescribed to us, and not left indifferent. 6. His word, or saying, because it is the declaration of his mind, and Christ, the essential Eternal Word, is all in all in it. 7. His judgments, because framed in infinite wisdom, and because by them we must both judge and be judged. 8. His righteousness, because it is all holy, just, and good, and the rule and standard of righteousness. 9. His statutes, because they are fixed and determined, and of perpetual obligation. 10. His truth, or faithfulness, because the principles upon which the divine law is built are eternal truths. And I think there is but one verse, (it is v. 122.) in all this long psalm, in which there is not one or other of these ten words; only in three or four they are used concerning God's providence, or David's practice, as v. 75, 84, 121: and, v. 132. they are called God's name. The great esteem and affection David had for the word of God, is the more admirable, considering how little he had of it, in comparison with what we have; no more perhaps, in writing, than the first books of Moses, which were but the dawning of this day; which may shame us who enjoy the full discoveries of divine revelation, and yet are so cold towards it. In singing this psalm, there is work for all the devout affections of a sanctified soul; so copious, so various, is the matter of it. We here find that in which we must give glory to God, both as our Ruler and great Benefactor; that in which we are to teach and admonish ourselves and one another; (so many are the instructions which we here find about a religious life;) and that in which we are to comfort and encourage ourselves and one another; so many are the sweet experiences of one that lived such a life. Here is something or other to suit the case of every Christian. Is any afflicted? Is any merry? Each will find that here which is proper for them. And it is so far from being a tedious repetition of the same thing, as may seem to those who look over it cursorily, that, if we duly meditate upon it, we shall find almost every verse has a new thought, and something in it very lively. And this, as many other of David's psalms, teaches us to be sententious in our devotions, both alone, and when others join with us; for, ordinarily, the affections, especially of weaker Christians, are more likely to be raised and kept by short expressions, the sense of which lies in a little room, than by long and laboured periods.

1. ALEPH.

1. **BLESSED** are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. 2. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. 3. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.

The psalmist here shews that godly people are happy people: they are, and shall be, blessed indeed. Felicity is the thing we all pretend to aim at and pursue; he does not say here wherein it consists; it is enough for us to know what we must do and be, that we may attain to it, and that we are here told. All men would be happy, but few take the right way; God has here laid before us the right way, which we may be sure will end in happiness, though it be strait and narrow. Blessednesses are to the righteous; all manner of blessednesses.

Now observe the characters of the happy people. They are happy,

1. Who make the will of God the rule of all their actions, and govern themselves, in their whole conversation, by that rule; they walk in the law of the Lord, v. 1. God's word is a law to them, not only in this or that particular instance, but in the whole course of their conversation; they walk within the hedges of that law, which they dare not break through, by doing any thing it forbids; and they walk in the paths of that law, which they will not trifle in, but press forward in them toward the mark, taking every step by rule, and never walking at all adventures. This is walking in God's ways, (v. 3.) the ways which he has marked out to us, and has appointed us to walk in. It will not serve us to make religion the subject of our discourse, but we must make it the rule of our walk; we must walk in his ways, not in the way of the world, or of our own hearts, Job, 23. 10, 11.—31. 7.

2. Who are upright and honest in their religion; *Undefiled in the way*; not only who keep themselves pure from the pollutions of actual sin, *unspotted from the world*, but who are habitually sincere in their intentions; *in whose spirit there is no guile*; who are really as good as they seem to be, and row the same way as they look.

3. Who are true to the trust reposed in them, as God's professing people. It was the honour of the Jews, that to them were committed the oracles of God; and blessed are they who preserve pure and entire that sacred deposit; who keep his testimonies as a treasure of inestimable value, keep them as the apple of their eye, so keep them as to carry the comfort of them themselves to another world, and leave the knowledge and profession of them to those who shall come after them in this world. They who would walk in the law of the Lord must keep his testimonies, his truths: those will not long make conscience of good practices, who do not adhere to good principles. Or, his testimonies may denote his covenant; the ark of the covenant is called the ark of the testimony; those do not keep covenant with God who do not keep the commandments of God.

4. Who have a single eye to God as their chief Good and highest End in all they do in religion; (v. 2.) They seek him with their whole heart. They do not seek themselves and their own things, but God only; this is that which they aim at, that God may be glorified in their obedience, and that they may be happy in God's acceptance. He is, and will be, the Rewarder, the Reward, of all those who thus seek him diligently, seek him with the heart; for that is it that God looks at and requires; and with the whole heart; for if the heart be divided between him and the world, it is faulty.

5. Who carefully avoid all sin; (v. 3.) They do no iniquity; they do not allow themselves in any sin, they do not commit it as those do who are the servants of sin; they do not make a practice of it, do not make a trade of it; they are conscioes to themselves of much iniquity that clogs them in the ways of God, but not of that iniquity which draws them out of those ways. Blessed and holy are they who thus exercise themselves to have always consciences void of offence.

4. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. 5. O that my ways were directed to

keep thy statutes! 6. Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.

We are here taught,

1. To own ourselves under the highest obligations to walk in God's law. The tempter would possess men with an opinion that they are at their liberty whether they will make the word of God their rule or no, that though it may be good, yet it is not so necessary as they are made to believe it is. He taught our first parents to question the command; *Hath God said, ye shall not eat?* And therefore we are concerned to be well-established in this: (v. 4.) *Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts*, to make religion our rule; and to *keep them diligently*, to make religion our business, and to mind it carefully and constantly. We are bound, and must obey at our peril.

2. To look up to God for wisdom and grace to do so; (v. 5.) *Oh that my ways were directed* accordingly; not only that all events concerning us may be so ordered and disposed by the providence of God, as not to be in any thing a hinderance to us, but a furtherance rather, in the service of God, but that our hearts may be so guided and influenced by the Spirit of God, that we may not in any thing transgress God's commandments: not only that our eyes may be directed to behold God's statutes, but our hearts directed to keep them. See how the desire and prayer of a good man exactly agree with the will and command of a good God; "Thou wouldest have me keep thy precepts, and, Lord, I fain would keep them." *This is the will of God, even our sanctification*; and it should be our will.

3. To encourage ourselves in the way of our duty, with a prospect of the comfort we shall find in it, v. 6. Note, (1.) It is the undoubted character of every good man, that he has a *respect to all God's commandments*. He has a respect to the command, eyes it as his copy, aims to conform to it, is sorry wherein he comes short; and what he does in religion, he does with a conscientious regard to the command, because it is his duty. He has *respect to all the commandments*, one as well as another, because they are all backed with the same authority, (Jam. 2. 10, 11.) and all levelled at the same end, the glorifying of God in our happiness. Those who have a sincere respect to any command will have a general respect to every command; to the commands of both testaments and both tables; to the prohibitions and the precepts; to those that concern both the inward and the outward man, both the head and the heart; to those that forbid the most pleasant and gainful sins, and to those that require the most difficult and hazardous duties. (2.) Those who have a sincere *respect to all God's commandments, shall not be ashamed*; not only they will thereby be kept from doing that which will turn to their shame, but they shall have *confidence toward God*, and boldness of access to the throne of his grace, 1 John, 3. 21. They shall have credit before men, their honesty will be their honour; and they shall have clearness and courage in their own souls, they shall not be ashamed to retire into themselves, nor to reflect upon themselves, for their hearts shall not condemn them. David speaks this with application to himself; they that are upright may take the comfort of their uprightness; "As, if I be wicked, woe to me; so, if I be sincere, it is well with me."

7. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. 8. I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.

Here is,

1. David's endeavour to perfect himself in his religion, and to make himself (as we say) master of his business. He hopes to *learn God's righteous judgments*; he knew much, but he was still pressing forward, and desired to know more, as knowing this, that he *had not yet attained*; but, as far as perfection is attainable in this life, he reached towards it, and will not take up short of it. As long as we live, we must be scholars in Christ's school, and sit at his feet; but we should aim to be head-scholars, and to

get into the highest form. God's judgments are all righteous, and therefore it is desirable not only to learn them, but to be learned in them, *mighty in the scriptures*.

2. The use he would make of his divine learning. He coveted to be learned in the laws of God, not that he might make himself a name and interest among men, or fill his own head with entertaining speculations, but, (1.) That he might give God the glory of his learning; *I will praise thee, when I have learned thy judgments*; intimating, that he could not learn, unless God taught him; and that divine instructions are special blessings, which we have reason to be thankful for. Though Christ keeps a free-school, and teaches without money and without price, yet he expects his scholars should give him thanks both for his word and for his Spirit; surely it is a mercy worth thanks, to be taught so gainful a calling as religion is. Those have learned a good lesson who have learned to praise God, for that is the work of angels, the work of heaven. It is an easy thing to praise God in word and tongue; but those only are well learned in this mystery who have learned to *praise him with uprightness of heart*, are inward with him in praising him, and sincerely aim at his glory in the course of their conversation, as well as in the exercises of devotion. God accepts only the praises of the upright. (2.) That he might himself come under the government of that learning; *When I shall have learned thy righteous judgments, I will keep thy statutes*. We cannot keep them, unless we learn them; but we learn them in vain, if we do not keep them. Those have well-learned God's statutes who are come up to a full resolution, in the strength of his grace, to keep them.

3. His prayer to God not to leave him; "O forsake me not; leave me not to myself, withdraw not thy Spirit and grace from me, for then *I shall not keep thy statutes*." Good men see themselves undone if God forsakes them; for then the tempter will be too hard for them. "Though thou seem to forsake me, and threaten to forsake me, and dost, for a time, withdraw from me, yet let not the desertion be total and final; for that is hell. O forsake me not utterly; for woe unto me, if God departs from me."

2. BETH.

9. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed *thereto* according to thy word.

Here is, 1. A weighty question asked; By what means may the next generation be made better than this? *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?* Cleansing implies that it is polluted. Beside the original corruption we all brought into the world with us, (from which we are not cleansed unto this day,) there are many particular sins which young people are subject to, by which they defile their way; *youthful lusts*; (2 Tim. 2. 22.) these render their way offensive to God and disgraceful to themselves. Young men are concerned to cleanse their way—to get their hearts renewed, and their lives reformed; to make clean, and keep clean, from the *corruption that is in the world through lust*, that they may have both a good conscience and a good name. Few young people do themselves inquire by what means they may recover and preserve their purity; and therefore David asks the question for them.

2. A satisfactory answer given to this question. Young men may effectually *cleanse their way, by taking heed thereto according to the word of God*; and it is the honour of the word of God, that it has such power and is of such use both to particular persons, and to communities, whose happiness lies much in the virtue of their youth. (1.) Young men must make the word of God their rule, must acquaint themselves with it, and resolve to conform themselves to it: that will do more toward the cleansing of young men, than the laws of princes, or the morals of philosophers. (2.) They must carefully apply that rule, and make use of it; they must take heed to their way, must examine it by the word of God, as a touchstone and standard; must rectify what is amiss in it by that regulator, and steer by that chart and compass. God's word will not do without our watchfulness, and a constant regard both to it and to our way, that we may compare them together. The

rain of young men is either living at large, or by no rule at all, or choosing to themselves false rules; let them ponder the path of their feet, and walk by scripture-rules; so their way shall be clean, and they shall have the comfort and credit of it here and for ever.

10. With my whole heart have I sought thee :
O let me not wander from thy commandments.

Here is, 1. David's experience of a good work God had wrought in him, which he takes the comfort of, and pleads with God; "*I have sought thee, sought to thee as my Oracle, sought after thee as my Happiness, sought thee as my God; for should not a people seek unto their God? If I have not yet found thee, I have sought thee, and thou never saidst, Seek, in vain, nor wilt say so to me, for I have sought thee with my heart, with my whole heart; sought thee only, sought thee diligently.*"

2. His prayer for the preservation of that work; "*Thou that hast inclined me to seek thy precepts, never suffer me to wander from them.*" The best are sensible of their aptness to wander; and the more we have found of the pleasure there is in keeping God's commandments, the more afraid we shall be of wandering from them, and the more earnest we shall be in prayer to God for his grace to prevent our wanderings.

11. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Here is, 1. The close application which David made of the word of God to himself; *he hid it in his heart*, laid it up there, that it might be ready to him whenever he had occasion to use it: he laid it up as that which he valued highly, and had a warm regard for, and which he was afraid of losing and being robbed of. God's word is a treasure worth laying up, and there is no laying it up safe but in our hearts; if we have it only in our houses and hands, enemies may take it from us; if only in our heads, our memories may fail us; but if our hearts be delivered into the mould of it, and the impressions of it remain on our souls, it is safe.

2. The good uses he designed to make of it; *that I might not sin against thee.* Good men are afraid of sin, and are in care to prevent it; and the most effectual way to prevent it, is, to hide God's word in our hearts, that we may answer every temptation, as our Master did, with, *It is written*; may oppose God's precepts to the dominion of sin, his promises to its allurements, and his threatenings to its menaces.

12. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.

Here, 1. David gives glory to God; "*Blessed art thou, O Lord.*" Thou art infinitely happy in the enjoyment of thyself, and hast no need of me or my services; yet thou art pleased to reckon thyself honoured by them; assist me, therefore, and then accept me." In all our prayers we should intermix praises.

2. He asks grace from God; "*Teach me thy statutes*; give me to know and do my duty in every thing. Thou art the Fountain of all blessedness; O let me have this drop from that Fountain, this blessing from that Blessedness; *Teach me thy statutes*, that I may know how to bless thee, who art a blessed God, and that I may be blessed in thee."

13. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. 14. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. 15. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. 16. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

Here, 1. David looks back with comfort upon the respect he had paid to the word of God. He had the testimony of his conscience for him;

(1.) That he had edified others with what he had been taught out of the word of God; (v. 13.) *With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.* This he did, not only as a king in making orders, and giving judgment, according to the word of God, nor only as a prophet by his psalms, but in his common discourse. Thus he shewed how full he was of the word of God, and what a holy pride* he took in his acquaintance with it; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. Thus he did good with his knowledge; he did not hide God's word from others, but hid it for them; and, out of that good treasure in his heart, brought forth good things, as the householder out of his store, things new and old. They whose hearts are fed with the bread of life, should with their lips feed many. He had prayed, (v. 12.) that God would teach him; and here he pleads, "*Lord, I have endeavoured to make a good use of the knowledge thou hast given me, therefore increase it;*" for *to him that has shall be given.*

(2.) That he had entertained himself with it; "*Lord, teach me thy statutes*; for I desire no greater pleasure than to know and do them, v. 14. *I have rejoiced in the way of thy commandments*, in a constant even course of obedience to thee; not only in the speculations and histories of thy word, but in the precepts of it, and in that path of serious godliness which they chalk out to me. *I have rejoiced in this, as much as in all riches*; as much as ever any worldlying rejoiced in the increase of his wealth. In the way of God's commandments I can truly say, *Soul, take thine ease.*" In true religion there is all riches, the unsearchable riches of Christ.

2. He looks forward with a holy resolution never to cool in his affection to the word of God; what he does, that he will do, 2 Cor. 11. 12. They that have found pleasure in the ways of God, are likely to proceed and persevere in them.

(1.) He will dwell much upon them in his thoughts; (v. 15.) *I will meditate in thy precepts.* He not only discoursed of them to others, (many do that only to shew their knowledge and authority,) but he communed with his own heart about them, and took pains to digest in his own thoughts what he had declared, or had to declare, to others. Note, God's words ought to be very much the subject of our thoughts.

(2.) He will have them always in his eye; *I will have respect unto thy ways*, as the traveller has to his road, which he is in care not to miss, and always aims and endeavours to hit. We do not meditate on God's precepts to good purposes, unless we have respect to them as our rule, and our good thoughts produce good works, and good intentions in them.

(3.) He will take a constant pleasure in communion with God, and obedience to him. It is not for a season that he rejoices in this light, but *I will still, I will for ever, delight myself in thy statutes*; not only think of them, but do them with delight, v. 16. David took more delight in God's statutes than in the pleasures of his court, or the honours of his camp; more than in his sword or in his harp: when the law is written in the heart, duty becomes a delight.

(4.) He will never forget what he has learned of the things of God; "*I will not forget thy word*; not only I will not quite forget it, but I will be mindful of it, when I have occasion to use it." They that meditate in God's word, and delight in it, are in no great danger of forgetting it.

3. GIMEL.

17. Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.

We are here taught,

1. That we owe our lives to God's mercy. David prays, *Deal bountifully with me, that I may live.* It was God's bounty that gave us life, that gave us this life; and the same bounty that gave it continues it, and gives all the supports and comforts of it; if withheld, we die; or, which is equivalent, our lives are embittered, and we become weary of them. If God deals in strict justice with us, we die, we perish, we all perish; if these forfeited lives be preserved

* The use of the term *pride*, in a favourable sense, has already been pointed out as an inadvertency.—ED.

and prolonged, it is because God deals bountifully with us, according to his mercy, not according to our deserts. The continuance of the most useful life is owing to God's bounty, and on that we must have a continual dependence.

2. That therefore we ought to spend our lives in God's service. Life is *therefore* a choice mercy, because it is an opportunity of obeying God in this world, where there are so few that do glorify him; and this David had in his eye; "Not that *I may live* and grow rich, live and be merry; but that *I may live and keep thy word*, may observe it myself, and transmit it to those that shall come after, which, the longer I live, the better I shall do."

18. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

Observe here,

1. That there are *wondrous things* in God's law, which we are all concerned, and should covet, to behold; not only strange things, which are very surprising and unexpected, but excellent things, which are to be highly esteemed and valued, and things which were long *hid from the wise and prudent*, but are now *revealed unto babes*. If there were wonders in the law, much more in the gospel, where Christ is all in all, whose name is *Wonderful*. Well may we, who are so nearly interested, desire to behold these wondrous things, when the angels themselves reach to look into them, 1 Pet. 1. 12.

2. Those that would see the wondrous things of God's law and gospel, must beg of him to *open their eyes*, and to give them an understanding. We are by nature blind to the things of God, till his grace cause the scales to fall from our eyes; and even those in whose hearts God has said, *Let there be light*, have yet need to be further enlightened, and must still pray to God to open their eyes yet more and more, that they who at first *saw men as trees walking*, may come to *see all things clearly*: and the more God opens our eyes, the more wonders we see in the word of God which we saw not before.

19. I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.

Here we have,

1. The acknowledgment which David makes of his own condition; *I am a stranger in the earth*. We all are so, and all good people confess themselves to be so; for heaven is their home, and the world is but their inn, the land of their pilgrimage. David was a man that knew as much of the world, and was as well known in it, as most men. God built him a house, established his throne; strangers submitted to him, and people that he had not known served him; he had a name like the names of the great men, and yet he calls himself a *stranger*. We are all strangers on earth, and must so account ourselves.

2. The request he makes to God thereupon; *Hide not thy commandments from me*; he means more; "Lord, shew thy commandments to me; let me never know the want of the word of God, but, as long as I live, give me to be growing in my acquaintance with it. *I am a stranger*, and therefore stand in need of a guide, a guard, a companion, a comforter; let me have thy commandments always in view, for they will be all this to me, all that a poor stranger can desire. *I am a stranger* here, and must be gone shortly; by thy commandments let me be prepared for my removal hence."

20. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.

David had prayed that God would open his eyes, (v. 18.) and open the law; (v. 19.) now here he pleads the earnestness of his desire for knowledge and grace, for it is the fervent prayer that avails much.

1. His desire was importunate; *My soul breaketh for the longing it hath unto thy judgments*; or, as some read it, "*It is taken up, and wholly employed, in longing for thy judgments*; the whole

stream of its desires runs in this channel. I shall think myself quite broken and undone, if I want the word of God, the direction, converse, and comfort, of it."

2. It was constant; *at all times*; it was not now and then, in a good humour, that he was so fond of the word of God; but it is the habitual temper of every sanctified soul to hunger after the word of God, as its necessary food, which there is no living without.

21. Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.

Here is, 1. The wretched character of wicked people. The temper of their minds is bad; they are proud, they magnify themselves above others; and yet that is not all; they magnify themselves against God, and set up their wills in competition with, and opposition to, the will of God, as if their hearts, and tongues, and all, were their own. There is something of pride at the bottom of every wilful sin, and the tenor of their laws is no better; They *do err from thy commandments*, as Israel, that did *always err in their hearts*; they err in judgment, and embrace principles contrary to thy commandments, and then no wonder that they err in practice, and wilfully turn aside out of the good way. This is the effect of their pride; for they say, *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?* As Pharaoh, *Who is the Lord?*

2. The wretched case of such. They are certainly cursed, for God *resists the proud*; and they that throw off the commands of the law lay themselves under its curse; (Gal. 3. 10.) and he that now *beholds them afar off*, will shortly say to them, *Go, ye cursed*. The proud sinners bless themselves, God curses them; and though the most direful effects of this curse are reserved for the other world, yet they are often severely rebuked in this world: Providence crosses them, vexes them, and, wherein they dealt proudly, God shews himself above them: and these rebukes are earnestness of worse. David took notice of the rebukes proud men were under, and it made him cleave the more closely to the word of God, and pray the more earnestly that he might not *err from God's commandments*. Thus saints get good by God's judgments on sinners.

22. Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.

Here, 1. David prays against the reproach and contempt of men; that they might be *removed*, or, as the word is, *rolled, from off him*. This intimates that they lay upon him, and that neither his greatness nor his goodness could secure him from being libelled and lampooned: some despised him, and endeavoured to make him mean, others reproached him, and endeavoured to make him odious. It has often been the lot of those that do well, to be ill-spoken off. It intimates that they lay heavy upon him. Hard and foul words do not indeed break bones, and yet they are very grievous to a tender and ingenuous spirit; therefore David prays, "Lord, *remove* them from me, that I may not be thereby either driven from my duty, or discouraged in it." God has all men's hearts and tongues in his hand, and can silence lying lips, and raise up a good name that is trodden in the dust; to him we may appeal as the Assertor of right and Avenger of wrong, and may depend on his promise, that he will clear up our *righteousness as the light*, 37. 6. Reproach and contempt may humble us and do us good, and then it shall be removed.

2. He pleads his constant adherence to the word and way of God; *For I have kept thy testimonies*. He not only pleads his innocency, that he was unjustly censured, but, (1.) That he was jeered for well-doing; he was despised and abused for his strictness and zeal in religion: so that it was for God's name's sake that he suffered reproach, and therefore he could with the more assurance beg of God to appear for him. The reproach of God's people, if it be not removed now, will be turned into the greater honour shortly. (2.) That he was not jeered out of well-doing; "Lord, *remove it from me, for I have kept thy testimonies notwithstanding*."

If in a day of trial we still retain our integrity, we may be sure it will end well.

25. Princes also did sit *and* speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.

See here, 1. How David was abused even by great men, who should have known better his character and his case, and have been more generous; *Princes did sit*, sit in council, sit in judgment, and *speak against me*. What even princes say is not always right; but it is sad when judgment is thus turned to wormwood, when those that should be the protectors of the innocent are their betrayers. Herein David was a type of Christ, for they were the princes of this world that vilified and crucified the Lord of glory, 1 Cor. 2. 8.

2. What method he took to make himself easy under these abuses; he *meditated in God's statutes*, went on in his duty, and did not regard them; as a deaf man, he heard not: when they spake against him, he found that in the word of God which spake for him, and spake comfort to him, and then none of these things moved him. They that have pleasure in communion with God, may easily despise the censures of men, even of princes.

24. Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counsellors.

Here David explains his meditating in God's statutes, (v. 23.) which was of such use to him when princes sat and spake against him.

1. Did the affliction make him sad? The word of God comforted him, and was *his delight*, more his delight than any of the pleasures either of court or camp, of city or country. Sometimes it proves that the comforts of the word of God are most pleasant to a gracious soul then when other comforts are imbittered.

2. Did it perplex him? Was he at a loss what to do when the princes spake against him? God's statutes were *his counsellors*, and they counselled him to bear it patiently, and commit his cause to God. God's *testimonies* will be the best counsellors, both to princes and private persons; *They are the men of my counsel*; so the word is. There will be found more safety and satisfaction in consulting them than in the multitude of other counsellors. Observe here, Those that would have God's testimonies to be their delight, must take them for their counsellors, and be advised by them; and let those that take them for their counsellors in close walking, take them for their delight in comfortable walking.

4. DALETH.

25. My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.

Here is, 1. David's complaint. We should have thought his soul soaring to heaven; but he says himself, *My soul* not only rolls in the dust, but *cleaves to the dust*; which is a complaint, either, (1.) Of his corruptions, his inclination to the world and the body, (both which are dust,) and that which follows upon it, a deadness to holy duties; when he would *do good, evil was present with him*. God intimated that Adam was not only mortal, but sinful, when he said, *Dust thou art*, Gen. 3. 19. David's complaint here is like St. Paul's, of a body of death that he carried about with him. The remainders of in-dwelling corruption are a very grievous burthen to a gracious soul. Or, (2.) Of his afflictions, either trouble of mind or outward trouble; *without were fightings, within were fears*, and both together brought him even to the *dust of death*, (22. 15.) and his soul clave inseparably to it.

2. His petition for relief, and his plea to enforce that petition; *"Quicken thou me according to thy word"*. By thy providence put life into my affairs, by thy grace put life into my affections; cure me of my spiritual deadness, and make me lively in my devotion." Note, When we find ourselves dull, we must go to God, and beg of him to quicken us; he has an eye to God's word as a means of quickening, (for the words which God speaks, *they are spirit and*

they are life to those that receive them,) and as an encouragement to hope that God would quicken him, having promised grace and comfort to all the saints, and to David in particular. God's word must be our guide and plea in every prayer.

26. I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes. 27. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

We have here,

1. The great intimacy and freedom that had been between David and his God. David had opened his case, opened his very heart to God; *"I have declared my ways*, and acknowledged thee in them all, have taken thee along with me in all my designs and enterprises." Thus *Jephthah uttered all his words*, and Hezekiah spread his letters before the Lord. *"I have declared my ways*, my wants, and burthens, and troubles, that I meet with in my way; or my sins, my by-ways, I have made an ingenuous confession of them, and *thou heardest me*, heardest patiently all I had to say, and tookest cognizance of my case." It is an unspeakable comfort to a gracious soul to think with what tenderness all its complaints are received by a gracious God, 1 John, 5. 14, 15.

2. David's earnest desire of the continuance of that intimacy; not by visions and voices from heaven, but by the word and Spirit in an ordinary way; *Teach me thy statutes*, that is, *Make me to understand the way of thy precepts*. When he knew God had heard his declaration of his ways, he does not say, "Now, Lord, tell me my lot, and let me know what the event will be;" but, "Now, Lord, tell me my duty, let me know what thou wouldest have me to do, as the case stands." Note, Those who in all their ways acknowledge God, may pray in faith that he will *direct their steps* in the right way. And the surest way of keeping up our communion with God, is, by learning his statutes, and walking intelligently in the *way of his precepts*. See 1 John, 1. 6, 7.

3. The good use he would make of this, for the honour of God and the edification of others; "Let me have a good understanding of the *way of thy precepts*, give me a clear, distinct, and methodical, knowledge of divine things; so shall I talk, with the more assurance, and more to the purpose, of thy wondrous works." We can talk with a better grace of God's wondrous works, the wonders of providence, and especially the wonders of redeeming love, when we understand the way of God's precepts, and walk in that way.

28. My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word. 29. Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.

Here is, 1. David's representation of his own griefs; *My soul melteth for heaviness*, which is to the same purport with v. 25. *My soul cleaveth to the dust*. Heaviness in the heart of man makes it to melt, to drop away like a candle that wastes. The penitent soul melts in sorrow for sin, and even the patient soul may melt in the sense of affliction, and it is then its interest to pour out its soul before God.

2. His request for God's grace.

(1.) That God would enable him to bear his affliction well, and graciously support him under it; *"Strengthen thou me with strength in my soul, according to thy word*, which, as the bread of life, strengthens man's heart to undergo whatever God is pleased to inflict. Strengthen me to do the duties, resist the temptations, and bear up under the burthens, of an afflicted state, that the spirit may not fail. *Strengthen me according to that word*, (Deut. 33. 25.) *As thy day, so shall thy strength be."*

(2.) That God would keep him from using any unlawful, indirect, means for the extricating of himself out of his troubles; (v. 29.) *Remove from me the way of lying*. David was conscious to himself of a proneness to this sin; he had, in a strait, cheated Ahi-

melech, (1 Sam. 21. 2.) and Achish, v. 13. and *ch.* 27. 10. Great difficulties are great temptations to palliate a lie with colour of a pious fraud, and a necessary self-defence; therefore David prays, that God would prevent him from falling into this sin any more, lest he should settle in the way of it. A course of lying, of deceit, and dissimulation, is that which every good man dreads, and which we are all concerned to beg of God by his grace to keep us from.

(3.) That he might always be under the conduct and protection of God's government; *Grant me thy law graciously*; grant me that to keep me from the way of lying. David had the law written with his own hand; for the king was obliged to transcribe a copy of it for his own use; (Deut. 17. 18.) but he prays that he might have it written in his heart; for then, and then only, we have it indeed, and to good purpose. "Grant it me more and more." They that know and love the law of God, cannot but desire to know it more, and love it better. Grant it me *graciously*; he begs it as a special token of God's favour. Note, We ought to reckon God's law a grant, a gift, an unspeakable gift, to value it, and pray for it, and to give thanks for it accordingly. The divine code of institutes and precepts is indeed a charter of privileges; and God is truly gracious to those whom he makes truly gracious by giving them his law.

30. I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me. 31. I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame. 32. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

1. That those who will make any thing to purpose of their religion must first make it their serious and deliberate choice: so David did; *I have chosen the way of truth*. Note, (1.) The way of serious godliness is the way of truth; the principles it is founded on are of eternal truth, and it is the only true way to happiness. (2.) We must therefore choose to walk in this way, not because we know no other way, but because we know no better; nay, we know no other safe and good way. Let us choose that way for our way, which we will walk in, though it be narrow.

2. That those who have chosen the way of truth must have a constant regard to the word of God as the rule of their walking; *Thy judgments have I laid before me*; as he who learns to write lays his copy before him, that he may write according to it, as the workman lays his model and platform before him, that he may do his work exactly. As we must have the word in our heart, by an habitual conformity to it, so we must have it in our eye, by an actual regard to it upon all occasions, that we may walk accurately and by rule.

3. That those who make religion their choice and rule are likely to adhere to it faithfully; *"I have stuck to thy testimonies with an unchanged affection, and an unshaken resolution; stuck to them at all times, through all trials. I have chosen them, and therefore I have stuck to them."* Note, The choosing Christian is likely to be the steady Christian; those that are Christians by chance tack about, if the wind turn.

4. That those who stick to the word of God may in faith expect and pray for acceptance with God; for David means that, when he begs, *"Lord, put me not to shame"*; never leave me to do that by which I shall shame myself, and do thou not reject my services, which will put me to the greatest confusion."

5. That the more comfort God gives us, the more duty he expects from us, v. 32. Here we have, (1.) His resolution to go on vigorously in religion; *I will run the way of thy commandments*. Those that are going to heaven should make haste thither, and be still pressing forward. It concerns us to redeem time and take pains, and to go on in our business with cheerfulness; we then run the way of our duty when we are ready to it, and pleasant in it, and lay aside every weight, Heb. 12. 1. (2.) His dependence upon God for grace to do so; *"I shall then abound in thy works, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."* God, by his Spirit,

enlarges the hearts of his people, when he gives them wisdom; for that is called largeness of heart, 1 Kings, 4. 29. When he sheds abroad the love of God in the heart, and puts gladness there. The joy of our Lord should be wheels to our obedience.

5. IIE.

33. Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. 34. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

Here, 1. David prays earnestly that God himself would be his Teacher; he had prophets, and wise men, and priests, about him, and was himself well-instructed in the law of God, yet he begs to be taught of God, as knowing that *none teaches like him*, Job, 36. 22. Observe here, (1.) What he desires to be taught; not the notions or language of God's statutes, but the way of them; "The way of applying them to myself, and governing myself by them; teach me the way of my duty which thy statutes prescribe, and in every doubtful case let me know what thou wouldst have me to do, let me hear the word behind me, saying, *This is the way, walk in it*," Isa. 30. 21. (2.) How he desires to be taught; in such a way as no man could teach him; *Lord, give me understanding*. As the God of nature, he has given us intellectual powers and faculties; but here we are taught to pray, that, as the God of grace, he would give us understanding to use those powers and faculties about the great things which belong to our peace, which, through the corruption of nature, we are averse to; *Give me understanding*, an enlightened understanding; for it is as good to have no understanding at all as not to have it sanctified. Nor will the spirit of revelation in the word answer the end, unless we have the spirit of wisdom in the heart. This is that which we are indebted to Christ for; for the *Son of God is come, and has given us understanding*, 1 John, 5. 20.

2. He promises faithfully that he would be a good scholar; if God would teach him, he was sure he should learn to good purpose; *"I shall keep thy law, which I shall never do unless I be taught"*. If God, by his Spirit, gives us a right and good understanding, we shall be, (1.) Constant in our obedience; *"I shall keep it to the end, to the end of my life, which will be the surest proof of sincerity."* It will not avail the traveller to keep the way for a while, if he do not keep it to the end of his journey. (2.) Cordial in our obedience; *I shall observe it with my whole heart*, with pleasure and delight, and with vigour and resolution. That way which the whole heart goes, the whole man goes; and that should be the way of God's commandments, for the keeping of them is the whole of man.

35. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. 36. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.

He had before prayed to God to enlighten his understanding, that he might know his duty, and not mistake concerning it; here he prays to God to bow his will, and quicken the active powers of his soul, that he might do his duty; for it is God that works in us both to will and to do, as well as to understand, what is good, Phil. 2. 13. Both the good head and the good heart are from the good grace of God, and both are necessary to every good work. Observe here,

1. The grace he prays for; (1.) That God would make him able to do his duty; *"Make me to go"*, strengthen me for every good work." Since we are not sufficient of ourselves, our dependence must be upon the grace of God, for from him all our sufficiency is. God puts his Spirit within us, and so causes us to walk in his statutes; (Ezek. 36. 27.) and this is that which David here begs. (2.) That God would make him willing to do it, and would, by his grace, subdue the aversion he naturally had to it; *"Incline my heart to thy testimonies"*, to those things which thy

testimonies prescribe; not only make me willing to do my duty, as that which I must do, and therefore am concerned to make the best of, but make me desirous to do my duty, as that which is agreeable to the new nature, and really advantageous to me." Duty is then done with delight, when the heart is inclined to it: it is God's grace that inclines us, and the more backward we find ourselves to it, the more earnest we must be for that grace.

2. The sin he prays against, and that is, *covetousness*; "*Incline my heart to keep thy testimonies, and restrain and mortify the inclination there is in me to covetousness.*" That is a sin which stands opposed to all God's testimonies; for the love of money is such a sin as is the root of much sin, of all sin: those therefore that would have the love of God rooted in them, must get the love of the world rooted out of them; for *the friendship of the world is enmity with God*. See in what way God deals with men; not by compulsion, but he draws with the cords of a man, working in them an inclination to that which is good, and an aversion to that which is evil.

3. His plea to enforce this prayer; "Lord, bring me to, and keep me in, *the way of thy commandments, for therein do I delight*; and therefore I pray thus earnestly for grace to walk in that way. Thou hast wrought in me this delight in the way of thy commandments; wilt thou not work in me an ability to walk in them, and so crown thine own work?"

37. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

Here, 1. David prays for *restraining* grace, that he might be prevented and kept back from that which would hinder him in the way of his duty; *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity*. The honours, pleasures, and profits, of the world, are the vanities, the aspect and prospect of which draw multitudes away from the paths of religion and godliness; the eye, when fastened on these, infects the heart with the love of them, and so it is alienated from God and divine things; and therefore, as we ought to *make a covenant with our eyes*, and lay a charge upon them, that they shall not wander after, much less fix upon, that which is dangerous, (Job, 31. 1.) so we ought to pray that God by his providence would keep vanity out of our sight, and that by his grace he would keep us from being enamoured with the sight of it.

2. He prays for *constraining* grace, that he might not only be kept from every thing that would obstruct his progress heavenward, but might have that grace which was necessary to forward him in that progress; "*Quicken thou me in thy way*; quicken me to redeem time, to improve opportunity, to press forward, and to do every duty with liveliness and fervency of spirit." Beholding vanity deadens us, and slackens our pace; a traveller that stands gazing upon every object that presents itself to his view, will not rid ground; but if our eyes be kept from that which would divert us, our hearts will be kept to that which will excite us.

38. Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.

Here is, 1. The character of a good man, which is the work of God's grace in him; he is *God's servant*, subject to his law, and employed in his work, that is, *devoted to his fear*, given up to his direction and disposal, and taken up with high thoughts of him, and all those acts of devotion which have a tendency to his glory. Those are truly God's servants, who, though they have their infirmities and defects, are sincerely *devoted to the fear of God*, and have all their affections and motions governed by that fear; they are engaged and addicted to religion.

2. The confidence that a good man has toward God, in dependence upon the word of his grace to him. They that are God's servants may, in faith and with humble boldness, pray that God would *establish his word to them*, that he would fulfil his promises to them in due time, and in the mean time give them an assurance that they shall be fulfilled. What God has promised we must pray for; we need not be so aspiring as to ask more; we need not be so modest as to ask less.

39. Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.

Here, 1. David prays against *reproach*, as before, v. 22. David was conscious to himself that he had done that which might give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, which would blemish his own reputation, and turn to the dishonour of his family; now he prays that God, who has all men's hearts and tongues in his hands, would be pleased to prevent this, to *deliver him from all his transgressions*, that he *might not be the reproach of the foolish*, which he feared; (39. 8.) or he means that reproach which his enemies unjustly loaded him with. Let their *lying lips be put to silence*.

2. He pleads the goodness of God's judgments; "Lord, thou sittest in the throne, and *thy judgments are right and good*, just and kind, to those that are wronged, and therefore to thee I appeal from the unjust and unkind censures of men." It is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment, while *he that judges us is the Lord*. Or thus, "Thy word, and ways, and thy holy religion, are very good, but the reproaches cast on me will fall on them; therefore, *Lord, turn them away*; let not religion be wounded through my side."

40. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

Here, 1. David professes the ardent affection he had to the word of God; "*I have longed after thy precepts*; not only loved them, and delighted in what I have already attained, but I have earnestly desired to know them more, and do them better; and am still pressing forward toward perfection." Tastes of the sweetness of God's precepts will but set us a longing after a more intimate acquaintance with them. He appeals to God concerning this passionate desire after his precepts; "*Behold, I have thus loved, thus longed*; thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I am thus affected."

2. He prays for grace to enable him to answer this profession, "Thou hast wrought in me this languishing desire, put life into me, that I may prosecute it; *quicken me in thy righteousness*, in thy righteous ways, according to thy righteous promise." Where God has wrought to will, he will work to do, and where he has wrought to desire, he will satisfy the desire.

6. VAU.

41. Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word. 42. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.

Here is, 1. David's prayer for the salvation of the Lord. "Lord, thou art my Saviour, I am miserable in myself, and thou only canst make me happy; *let thy salvation come to me*; hasten temporal salvation to me from my present distresses, and hasten me to the eternal salvation, by giving me the necessary qualifications for it, and the comfortable pledges and foretastes of it."

2. David's dependence upon the grace and promise of God for that salvation. These are the two pillars on which our hope is built, and they will not fail us. (1.) The grace of God; *Let thy mercies come, even thy salvation*: our salvation must be attributed purely to God's mercy, and not to any merit of our own. Eternal life must be expected as the *mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ*, Jude, 21. "Lord, I have by faith thy mercies in view; let me by prayer prevail to have them come to me." (2.) The promise of God; "*Let it come according to thy word*, thy word of promise: *I trust in thy word*, and therefore may expect the performance of the promise." We are not only allowed to trust in God's word, but our trusting in it is the condition of our benefit by it.

3. David's expectation of the good assurance which that grace and promise of God would give him; "*So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproaches me* for my confidence in God, as if it would deceive me." When God saves those out of their troubles who trusted in him, he effectually silences those who would

have shamed that counsel of the poor, (14.6.) and their reproaches will be for ever silenced, when the salvation of the saints is completed; then it will appear, beyond dispute that it was not in vain to trust in God.

43. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.
44. So shall I keep thy law continually, for ever and ever.

Here is, 1. David's humble petition for the tongue of the learned, that he might know how to *speaking a word in season* for the glory of God; *Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth.* He means, "Lord, let the word of truth be always in my mouth, let me have the wisdom and courage which are necessary to enable me both to use my knowledge for the instruction of others, and, like the good householder, to bring out of my treasury *things new and old*, and to make profession of my faith whenever I am called to it." We have need to pray to God, that we may never be afraid or ashamed to own his truths and ways, nor deny him before men. David found that he was sometimes at a loss, the *word of truth* was not so ready to him as it should have been, but he prays, "Lord, let it not be taken utterly from me; let me always have so much of it at hand as will be necessary to the due discharge of my duty."

2. His humble profession of the heart of the upright, without which, the tongue of the learned, however it may be serviceable to others, will stand us in no stead. (1.) David professes his confidence in God; "Lord, make me ready and mighty in the scriptures, for I have *hoped in those judgments* of thy mouth, and if they be not at hand, my support and defence are departed from me." (2.) He professes his resolution to adhere to his duty in the strength of God's grace; "*So shall I keep thy law continually.* If I have thy word not only in my heart, but in my mouth, I shall do all I should do, stand complete in thy whole will." Thus shall the *man of God be perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good word and work*, 2Tim. 3.17. Col. 3.16. Observe how he resolves to keep God's law, [1.] *Continually*, without trifling; God must be served in a constant course of obedience every day, and all the day long. [2.] *For ever and ever*, without backsliding; we must never be weary of well-doing. If we serve him to the end of our time on earth, we shall be serving him in heaven to the endless ages of eternity; so shall we *keep his law for ever and ever*. Or thus, "Lord, let me have the word of truth in my mouth, that I may commit that sacred deposit to the rising generation, (2Tim. 2.2.) and by them it may be transmitted to succeeding ages; so shall thy law be kept *for ever and ever*, from one generation to another," according to that promise, (Isa. 59.21.) *My word in thy mouth shall not depart out of the mouth of thy seed, nor thy seed's seed.*

45. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts. 46. I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. 47. And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. 48. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

We may observe in these verses,

1. What David experienced of an affection to the law of God; "*I seek thy precepts*, v. 45. I desire to know and do my duty, and consult thy word accordingly; I do all I can to *understand what the will of the Lord is*, and to discover the intimations of his mind. *I seek thy precepts, for I have loved them*, v. 47, 48. I not only give consent to them as good, but take complacency in them as good for me." All that love God, love his government, and therefore love all his commandments.

2. What he expected from this. Five things he promises himself here in the strength of God's grace.

(1.) That he should be free and easy in his duty; "*I will walk at liberty*, freed from that which is evil, not hampered with the fetters of my own corruptions, and free to that which is good, doing it not by constraint, but willingly." The service of sin is perfect slavery, the service of God is perfect liberty. Licentiousness is bondage to the greatest of tyrants, conscientiousness is freedom to the meanest of prisoners, John, 8. 32, 36. Luke, 1. 74, 75.

(2.) That he should be bold and courageous in his duty: *I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings.* Before David came to the crown, kings were sometimes his judges, as Saul, and Achish; but, if he were called before them to give a reason of the hope that was in him, he would *speak of God's testimonies*, and profess to build his hope upon them, and make them his council, his guards, his crown, his all. We must never be afraid to own our religion, though it should expose us to the wrath of kings, but speak of it as that which we will live and die by, like the three children before Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 3. 16. Acts, 4. 20. After David came to the crown, kings were sometimes his companions, they visited him, and he returned their visits; but he did not, in complaisance to them, talk of every thing but religion, for fear of affronting them, and making his conversation uneasy to them: no, God's testimonies shall be the principal subject of his discourse with the kings, not only to shew that he was not ashamed of his religion, but to instruct them in it, and bring them over to it. It is good for kings to hear of *God's testimonies*, and it will adorn the conversation of princes themselves to speak of them.

(3.) That he should be cheerful and pleasant in his duty; (v. 47.) "*I will delight myself in thy commandments*, in conversing with them, in conforming to them; I will never be so well pleased with myself, as when I do that which is pleasing to God." The more delight we take in the service of God, the nearer we come to the perfection we should aim at.

(4.) That he should be diligent and vigorous in his duty; *I will lift up my hands to thy commandments*; which denotes not only a vehement desire toward them, (143. 6.) "*I will lay hold of them as one afraid of missing them, or letting them go*;" but a close application of mind to the observance of them; "*I will lay my hands to the command, not only praise it, but practise it*; yea, I will lift up my hands to it, I will put forth all the strength I have to do it." The hands that hang down, through sloth and discouragement, shall be *lifted up*, Heb. 12. 12.

(5.) That he should be thoughtful and considerate in his duty; (v. 48.) "*I will meditate in thy statutes*"; not only entertain myself with thinking of them, as matters of speculation, but contrive how I may observe them in the best manner." By this it will appear that we truly love God's commandments, if we apply both our minds and our hands to them.

7. ZAIN.

49. Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.

Two things David here pleads with God, in prayer for that mercy and grace which he hoped for, according to the word, by which his requests were guided.

1. That God had given him the promise on which he hoped; "Lord, I desire no more than that thou wouldest *remember thy word unto thy servant, and do as thou hast said*;" (see 1 Chron. 17. 23.) "Thou art wise, and therefore wilt perfect what thou hast purposed, and not change thy counsel. Thou art faithful, and therefore wilt perform what thou hast promised, and not break thy word." Those that make God's promises their portion may with humble boldness make them their plea. "Lord, is not that the word which thou hast spoken; and wilt thou not make it good?" Gen. 32. 9. Exod. 33. 12.

2. That God, who had given him the promise in the word, had by his grace wrought in him a hope in that promise, and enabled

him to depend upon it, and had raised his expectations of great things from it. Has God kindled in us desires toward spiritual blessings more than toward any temporal good things; and will he not be so kind as to satisfy those desires? Has he filled us with hopes of those blessings; and will he not be so just as to accomplish these hopes? He that did by his Spirit work faith in us, will, according to our faith, work for us, and will not disappoint us.

50. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.

Here is David's experience of benefit by the word:

1. As a means of his sanctification; "*Thy word hath quickened me.* It made me alive when I was dead in sin; it has many a time made me lively when I was dead in duty; it has quickened me to that which is good, when I was backward and averse to it; and it has quickened me in that which is good, when I was cold and indifferent."

2. Therefore as a means of his consolation, then when he was in affliction, and needed something to support him; "Because thy word has quickened me at other times, it has comforted me then." The word of God has much in it that speaks *comfort in affliction*; but those only may apply it to themselves who have experienced in some measure the quickening power of the word. If through grace it makes us holy, there is enough in it to make us easy, in all conditions, under all events.

51. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.

David here tells us, and it will be of use to us to know it,

1. That he had been jeered for his religion. Though he was a man of honour, a man of great prudence, and had done eminent services to his country, yet, because he was a devout conscientious man, *the proud had him greatly in derision*, they ridiculed him, bantered him, and did all they could to expose him to contempt; they laughed at him for his praying, and called it *cant*; for his seriousness, and called it *mopishness*; for his strictness, and called it *needless preciseness*. They were the proud that sat in the scorner's seat, and valued themselves on it.

2. That yet he had not been jeered out of his religion; "They have done all they could to make me quit it for shame, but none of these things move me; *I have not declined from thy law* for all this; but, *if this be to be vile*," (as he said when Michal had him greatly in derision,) "*I will be yet more vile*." He not only had not quite forsaken the law, but had not so much as declined from it. We must never shrink from any duty, nor let slip an opportunity of doing good, for fear of the reproach of men, or their revilings. The traveller goes on his way, though the dogs bark at him. Those can bear but little for Christ, that cannot bear a hard word for him.

52. I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself.

When David was derided for his godliness, he not only held fast his integrity, but,

1. He comforted himself: he not only bore reproach, but bore it cheerfully; it did not disturb his peace, nor break in upon the repose of his spirit in God. It was a comfort to him to think that it was for God's sake that he bore reproach, and that his worst enemies could find *no occasion against him, save only in the matters of his God*, Dan. 6. 5. They that are derided for their adherence to God's law, may comfort themselves with this, that *the reproach of Christ* will prove, in the end, *greater riches to them than the treasures of Egypt*.

2. That which he comforted himself with, was, the remembrance of God's judgments of old, the providences of God concerning his people formerly, both in mercy to them, and in justice against their persecutors. God's judgments of old, in our own early days, and in the days of our fathers, are to be remembered by us for

our comfort and encouragement in the way of God, for he is still the same.

53. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.

Here is, 1. The character of wicked people; he means those that are openly and grossly wicked; they *forsake thy law*. Every sin is a transgression of the law, but a course and way of wilful and avowed sin is downright forsaking it and throwing it off.

2. The impression which the wickedness of the wicked made upon David; it frightened him, it put him into an amazement; he trembled to think of the dishonour thereby done to God, the gratification thereby given to Satan, and the mischiefs thereby done to the souls of men. He dreaded the consequences of it, both to the sinners themselves, (and cried out, *O gather not my soul with sinners, let mine enemy be as the wicked*;) and to the interests of God's kingdom among men, which he was afraid would be hereby sunk and ruined. He does not say, "*Horror has taken hold on me*, because of their cruel designs against me," but "because of the contempt they put on God and his law." Sin is a monstrous horrible thing in the eyes of all that are sanctified, Jer. 5. 30.—23. 14. Hos. 6. 10. Jer. 2. 12.

54. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

Here is, 1. David's state and condition; he was *in the house of his pilgrimage*, which may be understood either as his peculiar trouble; he was often tossed and hurried, and forced to fly; or as his lot, in common with all; this world is *the house of our pilgrimage*, the house in which we are pilgrims; it is our tabernacle, it is our inn; we must confess ourselves *strangers and pilgrims upon earth*, who are not at home here, nor must be here long. Even David's palace is but *the house of his pilgrimage*.

2. His comfort in this state; "*Thy statutes have been my songs*, with which I here entertained myself; as travellers are wont to divert the thoughts of their weariness, and take off something of the tediousness of their journey, by singing a pleasant song now and then. David was the sweet singer of Israel, and here we are told whence he fetched his songs; they were all borrowed from the word of God; God's statutes were as familiar to him as the songs which a man is accustomed to sing; and he conversed with them in his pilgrimage-solitudes. They were as pleasant to him as songs, and *put gladness into his heart*, more than they have that *chant to the sound of the viol*, Amos, 6. 5. *Is any afflicted then?* Let him sing over God's statutes, and try if he cannot so *sing away sorrow*, Ps. 138. 5.

55. I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law. 56. This I had, because I kept thy precepts.

Here is, 1. The converse David had with the word of God; he kept it in mind, and upon every occasion he called it to mind. God's name is the discovery he has made of himself to us in and by his word. *This is his memorial unto all generations*, and therefore we should always keep it in memory; remember it *in the night*, upon a waking bed, when we are communing with our own hearts. When others were sleeping, David was remembering God's name, and, by repeating that lesson, increasing his acquaintance with it; in the night of affliction, this he called to mind.

2. The conscience he made of conforming to it. The due remembrance of God's name, which is prefixed to his law, will have a great influence upon our observance of the law; *I remembered thy name in the night*, and therefore was careful to *keep thy law* all day. How comfortable will it be in the reflection, if our own hearts can witness for us, that we have thus remembered God's name, and kept his law!

3. The advantage he got by it; (v. 56.) *This I had, because I kept thy precepts*. Some understand this indefinitely; *This I had*; I had that which satisfied me, I had every thing that is comfort-

able, because *I kept thy precepts*. Note, All that have made a business of religion will own that it has turned to a good account, and that they have been unspeakable gainers by it. Others refer it to what goes immediately before; "I had the comfort of keeping thy law, because I kept it." Note, God's work is its own wages: a heart to obey the will of God is a most valuable reward of obedience; and the more we do, the more we may do, and shall do, in the service of God; the branch that bears fruit is made *more fruitful*, John, 15. 2.

8. CHETII.

57. *Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words.*

We may hence gather the character of a godly man.

1. He makes the favour of God his felicity; *Thou art my Portion, O Lord*. Others place their happiness in the wealth and honours of this world; their portion is in this life, they look no further, they desire no more, these are *their good things*; (Luke, 16. 25.) but all that are sanctified take the Lord for the Portion of their inheritance and their Cup, and nothing less will satisfy them. David can appeal to God in this matter; "Lord, thou knowest that I have chosen thee for my Portion, and depend upon thee to make me happy."

2. He makes the law of God his rule; "*I have said, that I would keep thy words*; and what I have said, by thy grace I will do, and will abide by it to the end." Note, Those that take God for their Portion, must take him for their Prince, and swear allegiance to him; and, having promised to *keep his word*, we must often put ourselves in mind of our promise, 39. 1.

58. *I entreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.*

David, having in the foregoing verse reflected upon his covenants with God, here reflects upon his prayers to God, and renews his petition. Observe,

1. What he prayed for; having taken God for his Portion, he *entreated his favour*, as one that knew he had forfeited it, was unworthy of it, and yet undone without it, but for ever happy if he could obtain it. We cannot demand God's favour as a debt, but must be humble supplicants for it, that God will not only be reconciled to us, but accept us, and smile upon us. He prays, "*Be merciful to me*, in the forgiveness of what I have done amiss, and in giving me grace to do better for the future."

2. How he prayed; *with his whole heart*; as one that knew how to value the blessing he prayed for: the gracious soul is entirely set upon the favour of God, and is therefore importunate for it; *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*.

3. What he pleaded; the promise of God; "*Be merciful to me, according to thy word*. I desire thy mercy promised, and depend upon the promise for it." They that are governed by the precepts of the word, and are resolved to keep them, (v. 57.) may plead the promises of the word, and take the comfort of them.

59. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. 60. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

David had said he *would keep God's word*, (v. 57.) and it was well said; now here he tells us how and in what method he pursued that resolution.

1. He *thought on his ways*; he thought beforehand what he should do, pondering the path of his feet, (Prov. 4. 26.) that he might walk surely, and not at all adventures; he thought after what he had done, reflected upon his life past, and recollected the paths he had walked in, and the steps he had taken. The word signifies a fixed, abiding, thought. Some make it an allusion to those who work embroidery, who are very exact and careful to cover the least flaw; or, to those who cast up their accounts, who reckon with themselves, What do I owe? What am I worth? *I thought not on my wealth, (as the covetous man, 49. 11.) but on*

my ways; not what I have, but what I do: what we do will follow us into another world, when what we have must be left behind. Many are critical enough in their remarks upon other people's ways, who never think of their own; but *let every man prove his own work*.

2. He *turned his feet to God's testimonies*; he determined to make the word of God his rule, and to walk by that rule. He turned from the by-paths to which he had turned aside, and returned to God's testimonies; he turned not only his eye to them, but his feet; his affections to the love of God's word, and his conversation to the practice of it. The bent and inclinations of his soul were toward God's testimonies, and his conversation was governed by them. Penitent reflections must produce pious resolutions.

3. He did this immediately, and without demur; (v. 60.) *I made haste, and delayed not*. When we are under convictions of sin, we must strike while the iron is hot, and not think to defer the prosecution of them, as Felix did, *to a more convenient season*; when we are called to duty, we must lose no time, but set about it *to-day, while it is called to-day*.

Now, this account, which David here gives of himself, may refer to his constant practice every day; he reflected on his ways at night, directed his feet to God's testimonies in the morning, and what his hand found to do that was good, he did it without delay; or it may refer to his first acquaintance with God and religion, when he began to throw off the vanity of childhood and youth, and to remember his Creator; that blessed change was, by the grace of God, thus wrought. Note, (1.) Conversion begins in serious consideration, Ezek. 18. 28. Luke, 15. 17. (2.) Consideration must end in a sound conversion. To what purpose have we thought on our ways, if we do not turn our feet with all speed to God's testimonies?

61. *The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.*

Here is, 1. The malice of David's enemies against him; they were wicked men, who hated him for his godliness; there were bands or troops of them confederate against him; they did him all the mischief they could, they robbed him; having endeavoured to take away his good name, (v. 51.) they set upon his goods, and spoiled him of them, either by plunder in time of war, or by fines and confiscations under colour of law. Saul (it is likely) seized his effects; Absalom his palace; the Amalekites rifled Ziklag. Worldly wealth is what we may be robbed of. David, though a man of war, could not keep his own. *Thieves break through and steal*.

2. The testimony of David's conscience for him, that he had held fast his religion when he was stript of every thing else, as Job did, when the bands of the Chaldeans and Sabaeans had robbed him; *But I have not forgotten thy law*. No care or grief should drive God's word out of our minds, or hinder our comfortable relish of it, and converse with it. Nor must we ever think the worse of the ways of God for any trouble we meet with in those ways, nor fear being losers by our religion at last, however we may be losers for it now.

62. *At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.*

Though David is, in this psalm, much in prayer, yet he did not neglect the duty of thanksgiving; for those that pray much will have much to give thanks for.

See, 1. How much God's hand was eyed in his thanksgivings; he does not say, "*I will give thanks*, because of thy favours to me, which I have the comfort of," but, "*Because of thy righteous judgments*; all the disposals of thy providence in wisdom and equity, which thou hast the glory of." We must give thanks for the asserting of God's honour, and the accomplishing of his word in all he does in the government of the world.

2. How much David's heart was set upon his thanksgivings; he *would rise at midnight, to give thanks to God*. Great and good

thoughts kept him awake, and refreshed him, instead of sleep; and so zealous was he for the honour of God, that, when others were in their beds, he was upon his knees at his devotions. He did not affect to be seen of men in it, but gave thanks in secret, where our heavenly Father sees. He had praised God *in the courts of the Lord's house*, and yet he will do it in his bed-chamber. Public worship will not excuse us from secret worship. When David found his heart affected with God's judgments, he immediately offered up those affections to God, in actual adorations, not deferring, lest they should cool. Yet observe his reverence; he did not lie still and give thanks, but rose out of his bed, perhaps, in the cold and in the dark, to do it the more solemnly. And see what a good husband he was of time; when he could not lie and sleep, he would rise and pray.

63. *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.*

David had often expressed the great love he had to God, here he expresses the great love he had to the people of God; and observe,

1. Why he loved them; not so much because they were his best friends, most firm to his interest, and most forward to serve him, but because they were such as *feared God*, and *kept his precepts*, and so did him honour, and helped to support his kingdom among men. Our love to the saints is *then* sincere, when we love them for the sake of what we see of God in them, and the service they do to him.

2. How he shewed his love to them; he was *a companion of them*. He had not only a spiritual communion with them in the same faith and hope, but he joined with them in holy ordinances in the courts of the Lord, where rich and poor, prince and peasant, meet together; he sympathized with them in their joys and sorrows, (Heb. 10. 33.) he conversed familiarly with them, communicated his experiences to them, and consulted their's. He not only took such to be his companions as did fear God, but he vouchsafed himself to be a companion with all, with any, that did so, wherever he met with them. Though he was a king, he would associate with the poorest of his subjects that feared God, Ps. 15. 4. Jam. 2. 1.

64. The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.

Here, 1. David pleads that God is good to all the creatures, according to their necessities and capacities; as the heaven is full of God's glory, so the earth is full of his mercy, full of the instances of his pity and bounty. Not only the land of Canaan, where God is known and worshipped, but the whole earth, in many parts of which he has no homage paid him, *is full of his mercy*: not only the children of men upon the earth, but even the inferior creatures, taste of God's goodness; *his tender mercies are over all his works*.

2. He therefore prays that God would be good to him according to his necessity and capacity; *Teach me thy statutes*. Thou feedest the young ravens that cry, with food proper for them; and wilt thou not feed me with spiritual food, the bread of life, which my soul needs and craves, and cannot subsist without? *The earth is full of thy mercy*; and is not heaven too? Wilt thou not then give me spiritual blessings in heavenly places? A gracious heart will fetch an argument from any thing, to enforce a petition for divine teaching. Surely he that will not let his birds be unfed, will not let his children be untaught.

9. TETH.

65. Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word. 66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.

Here, 1. David makes a thankful acknowledgment of God's gracious dealings with him all along; *Thou hast dealt well with thy servant*. However God has dealt with us, we must own he

has dealt *well* with us, better than we deserve; and all in love, and with design to work for our good. In many instances, God has done well for us, beyond our expectations; he has done well for all his servants; never any of them complained that he had used them hardly. *Thou hast dealt well with me*, not only according to thy mercy, but *according to thy word*. God's favours look best when they are compared with the promise, and are seen flowing from that fountain.

2. Upon these experiences he grounds a petition for divine instructions; *Teach me good judgment and knowledge*, that, by thy grace, I may render again, in some measure, according to the benefit done unto me. *Teach me a good taste*, (so the word signifies,) a good relish, to discern things that differ, to distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil; for *the ear tries words, as the mouth tastes meat*. We should pray to God for a sound mind, that we may have *spiritual senses exercised*, Heb. 5. 14. Many have knowledge, who have little judgment; they who have both, are well-fortified against the snares of Satan, and well-furnished for the service of God, and their generation.

3. This petition is backed with a plea; *For I have believed thy commandments*; received them, and consented to them that they are good, and submitted to their government; therefore, Lord, *teach me*. Where God has given a good heart, a good head too may in faith be prayed for.

67. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

David here tells us what he had experienced,

1. Of the temptations of a prosperous condition; *Before I was afflicted*, while I lived in peace and plenty, and knew no sorrow, *I went astray* from God and my duty. Sin is going astray; and then we are most apt to wander from God, when we are easy and think ourselves at home in the world. Prosperity is the unhappy occasion of much iniquity; it makes people conceited of themselves, indulgent of the flesh, forgetful of God, in love with the world, and deaf to the reproofs of the word. See 30. 6. It is good for us, when we are afflicted, to remember how, and wherein, we went astray, *before we were afflicted*, that we may answer the end of the affliction.

2. Of the benefit of an afflicted state; *Now have I kept thy word*, and so have been recovered from my wanderings. God often makes use of afflictions as a means to reduce those to himself, who have wandered from him. Sanctified afflictions humble us for sin, and shew us the vanity of the world; they soften the heart, and open the ear to discipline. The prodigal's distress brought him to himself first, and then to his father.

68. Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

Here, 1. David praises God's goodness, and gives him the glory of it; *Thou art good, and doest good*. All who have any knowledge of God, and dealings with him, will own that he does good, and therefore will conclude that he is good. The streams of God's goodness are so numerous, and run so full, so strong, to all the creatures, that we must conclude the fountain that is in himself to be inexhaustible. We cannot conceive how much good our God does every day, much less can we conceive how good he is. Let us acknowledge it with admiration, and with holy love and thankfulness.

2. He prays for God's grace, and begs to be under the guidance and influence of it; *Teach me thy statutes*. "Lord, thou doest good to all, art the bountiful Benefactor of all the creatures; this is the good I beg thou wilt do to me,—Instruct me in my duty, incline me to it, and enable me to do it. *Thou art good, and doest good*; Lord, *teach me thy statutes*, that I may be good, and do good, may have a good heart, and live a good life. It is an encouragement to poor sinners to hope that God will *teach them his way*, because he is *good and upright*, 25. 3.

* 69. The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart. 70

Thy heart is as fat as grease; *but* I delight in thy law.

David here tells us how he was affected as to the proud and wicked people that were about him.

1. He did not fear their malice, nor was he by it deterred from his duty; *They have forged a lie against me*; thus they aimed to take away his good name: nay, all we have in the world, even life itself, may be brought into danger by those who make no conscience of forging a lie. They that were proud, envied David's reputation, because it eclipsed them; and therefore did all they could to blemish him: they took a pride in trampling upon him: they therefore persuaded themselves it was no sin to tell a deliberate lie, if it might but expose him to contempt. Their wicked wit forged lies, invented stories, which there was not the least colour for, to serve their wicked designs. And what did David do, when he was thus belied? He will bear it patiently; he will keep that precept which forbids him to render railing for railing, and will with all his heart sit down silent. He will go on in his duty with constancy and resolution; "Let them say what they will, *I will keep thy precepts*, and not dread their reproach."

2. He did not envy their prosperity, nor was he by it allured from his duty; *Their heart is as fat as grease*. The proud are *at ease*; (123. 4.) they are full of the world, and the wealth and pleasures of it; and this makes them, (1.) Senseless, secure, and stupid; they are past feeling; thus the phrase is used, (Isa. 6. 10.) *Make the heart of this people fat*. They are not sensible of the touch of the word of God, or his rod. (2.) Sensual and voluptuous; "*Their eyes stand out with fatness*; (Ps. 73. 7.) they roll themselves in the pleasures of sense, and take up with them as their chief good; and much good may it do them, I would not change conditions with them; *I delight in thy law*; I build my security upon the promises of God's word, and have pleasure enough in communion with God, infinitely preferable to all their delights." The children of God, who are acquainted with spiritual pleasures, need not envy the children of this world their carnal pleasures.

71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

See here, 1. That it has been the lot of the best saints to be afflicted. The proud and the wicked live in pomp and pleasure, while David, though he kept close to God and his duty, was still in affliction. *Waters of a full cup are wrung out to God's people*, 73. 10.

2. That it has been the advantage of God's people to be afflicted. David could speak experimentally; *It was good for me*; many a good lesson he had learnt by his afflictions, and many a good duty he had been brought to, which otherwise had been unlearned and undone. Therefore God visited him with affliction, *that he might learn God's statutes*; and the intention was answered, the afflictions had contributed to the improvement of his knowledge and grace. He that chastened him taught him. *The rod and reproof give wisdom*.

72. *The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.*

This is a reason why David reckoned, that, when by his afflictions he learned God's statutes, and the profit did so much balance the loss, he was really a gainer by them; for God's law, which he got acquaintance with by his affliction, was *better* to him than all the gold and silver which he lost by his affliction.

1. David had but a little of the word of God, in comparison with what we have, yet see how highly he valued it; how inexcusable then are we, who have both the Old and New Testament complete, and yet account them as a strange thing! Observe, Therefore he valued the law, because it is *the law of God's mouth*, the revelation of his will, and ratified by his authority.

2. He had a great deal of gold and silver, in comparison with what we have, yet see how little he values it; his riches increased, and yet he did not set his heart upon them, but upon the word of

God. That was better to him, yielded him better pleasures, and better maintenance, and a better inheritance, than all the treasures he was master of. Those that have read, and believe, David's *Psalms* and Solomon's *Ecclesiastes*, cannot but prefer the word of God far before the wealth of this world.

10. JOD.

73. *Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.*

Here, 1. David adores God as the God of nature, and the Author of his being; *Thy hands have made me and fashioned me*, Job, 10. 8. Every man is as truly the work of God's hands as the first man was, Ps. 139. 15, 16. "*Thy hands have not only made me, and given me a being, otherwise I had never been, but fashioned me, and given me this being, this noble and excellent being, endued with these powers and faculties*;" and we must own that we are *fearfully and wonderfully made*.

2. He addresses himself to God as the God of grace, and begs he will be the Author of his new and better being. God made us to serve him and enjoy him; but by sin we have made ourselves unable for his service, and indisposed for the enjoyment of him; and we must have a new and divine nature, otherwise we had the human nature in vain; therefore David prays, "Lord, since thou hast made me by thy power for thy glory, make me anew by thy grace, that I may answer the ends of my creation, and live to some purpose; *give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments*." The way in which God recovers and secures his interest in men, is, by giving them an understanding; for by that door he enters into the soul, and gains possession of it.

74. *They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.*

Here is, 1. The confidence of this good man in the hope of God's salvation; *I have hoped in thy word*; and I have not found it in vain to do so; it has not failed me, nor have I been disappointed in my expectations from it. It is a hope that *maketh not ashamed*; but is present satisfaction, and fruition at last.

2. The concurrence of other good men with him in the joy of that salvation; "*They that fear thee, will be glad when they see me* relieved by my hope in thy word, and delivered according to my hope." The comforts which some of God's children have in God, and the favours they have received from him, should be matter of joy to others of them. St. Paul often expressed the hope that for God's grace to him thanks would be rendered by many, 2 Cor. 1. 11.—4. 15. Or it may be taken more generally; good people are glad to see one another; they are especially pleased with those (and, as I may say, proud of them) who are eminent for their hope in God's word.

75. *I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.*

Still David is in affliction, and, being so, he owns, 1. That his sin was justly corrected; *I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right*, are righteousness itself. However God is pleased to afflict us, he does us no wrong, nor can we charge him with any iniquity, but must acknowledge that it is less than we have deserved. We know that God is holy in his nature, and wise and just in all the acts of his government, and therefore we cannot but know, in the general, that his *judgments are right*, though, in some particular instances, there may be difficulties which we cannot easily resolve.

2. That God's promise was graciously performed. The former may silence us under our afflictions, and forbid us to repine, but this may satisfy us, and enable us to rejoice; for afflictions are in the covenant, and therefore they are not only not meant for our hurt, but they are really intended for our good; "*In faithfulness thou hast afflicted me*, pursuant to the great design of my salvation." It is easier to own, in general, that God's *judgments are right*, than to own it when it comes to be our own case; but David subscribes to it with application, "Even my afflictions are just and kind."

76. Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant. 77. Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.

Here is, 1. An earnest petition to God for his favour. They that own the justice of God in their afflictions, (as David had done, (v. 75.) may, in faith, and with humble boldness, be earnest for the mercy of God, and the tokens and fruits of that mercy, in their affliction. He prays for God's *merciful kindness*, (v. 76.) his *tender mercies*, v. 77. He can claim nothing as his due, but all his supports under his affliction must come from mere mercy and compassion to one in misery, one in want. "Let these *come to me*," that is, "the evidence of them; clear it up to me, that thou hast a kindness for me, and mercy in store; and let the effects of them come; let them work my relief and deliverance."

2. The benefit he promised himself from God's loving-kindness; "Let it *come to me for my comfort*; (v. 76.) that will comfort me, when nothing else will; that will comfort me, whatever grieves me." Gracious souls fetch all their comfort from a gracious God, as the Fountain of all happiness and joy; "Let it *come to me, that I may live*, that I may be revived, and my life may be made sweet to me, for I have no joy of it while I am under God's displeasure. *In his favour is life*, in his frowns are death." A good man cannot live, with any satisfaction, any longer than he has some tokens of God's favour to him.

3. His pleas for the benefits of God's favour. He pleads, (1.) God's promise; "Let me have thy kindness, according to thy word unto thy servant; the kindness which thou hast promised, and because thou hast promised it." Our Master has passed his word to all his servants, that he will be kind to them, and they may plead it with him. (2.) His own confidence and complacency in that promise; "Thy law is my delight; I hope in thy word, and rejoice in that hope." Note, Those that delight in the law of God, may depend upon the favour of God, for it shall certainly make them happy.

78. Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause; *but I will meditate in thy precepts*. 79. Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.

Here David shews,

1. How little he valued the ill-will of sinners. There were those that dealt perversely with him, that were peevish and ill-conditioned toward him, that sought advantages against him, and misconstrued all he said and did. Even those that deal most fairly may meet with those that deal perversely. But David mattered it not, for, (1.) He knew it was *without cause*, and that for his love they were his adversaries. The causeless reproach, like the curse causeless, may be easily slighted; it does not hurt us, and therefore should not move us. (2.) He could pray, in faith, that they might be ashamed of it; God's dealing favourably with him might make them ashamed to think that they had dealt perversely with him. "Let them be ashamed; let them be brought either to repentance or to ruin." (3.) He could go on in the way of his duty, and find comfort in that. "However they deal with me, *I will meditate in thy precepts*, and entertain myself with them."

2. How much he valued the good-will of saints, and how desirous he was to stand right in their opinion, and keep up his interest in them, and communion with them: *Let those that fear thee, turn to me*. He does not mean so much that they might side with him, and take up arms in his cause, as that they might love him, and pray for him, and associate with him. Good men desire the friendship and society of those that are good. Some think it intimates, that, when David had been guilty of that foul sin in the murder of Uriah, though he was a king, they that feared God grew strange to him, and turned from him, for they were ashamed of him; this troubled him, and therefore he prays, Lord, let them

turn to me again. He desires especially the company of those that were not only honest, but intelligent, *that have known thy testimonies*, have good heads as well as good hearts, and whose conversation will be edifying. It is desirable to have an intimacy with such.

80. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.

Here is, 1. David's prayer for sincerity, that his heart might be brought to God's statutes, and that it might be sound in them, not rotten and deceitful; that he might not rest in the form of godliness, but be acquainted with, and subject to, the power of it; that he might be hearty and constant in religion, and that his soul might be in health.

2. His dread of the consequences of hypocrisy; *that I be not ashamed*. Shame is the portion of hypocrites, either here, if it be repented of, or hereafter, if it be not; "Let my heart be sound, that I fall not into scandalous sin, that I fall not quite off from the ways of God, and so shame myself. Let my heart be sound, that I may come boldly to the throne of grace, and may lift up my face without spot at the great day."

11. CAPH.

81. My soul fainteth for thy salvation; *but I hope in thy word*. 82. Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?

Here we have the psalmist,

1. Longing for help from heaven; *My soul faints, mine eyes fail*. He longs for the salvation of the Lord, and for his word, that is, salvation according to the word. He is not thus eager for the creatures of fancy, but for the objects of faith; salvation from the present calamities under which he was groaning, and the doubts and fears which he was oppressed with. It may be understood of the coming of the Messiah, and so he speaks in the name of the Old-Testament church; the souls of the faithful even *fainted to see* that salvation of which the prophets testified; (1 Pet. 1. 10.) their eyes failed for it. Abraham saw it at a distance, and so did others, but at such a distance that it put their eyes to the stretch, and they could not steadfastly see it. David was now under prevailing dejections, and, having been long so, his eyes cried out, *When wilt thou comfort me?* Comfort me with thy salvation, comfort me with thy word. Observe, (1.) The salvation and consolation of God's people are secured to them by the word, which will certainly be fulfilled in its season. (2.) The promised salvation and comfort may be, and often are, long-deferred, so that they are ready to faint and fall in the expectation of them. (3.) Though we think the time long, ere the promised salvation and comfort come, yet we must still keep our eye upon it, and resolve to take up with nothing short of it. "Thy salvation, thy word, thy comfort, are what my heart is still upon."

2. Waiting for that help; assured that it will come, and tarrying till it doth come; *But I hope in thy word*; and, but for hope, the heart would break. When the eyes fail, yet the faith must not; for the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak, and shall not lie.

83. For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.

David begs God would make haste to comfort him:

1. Because his affliction was great, and therefore he was an object of God's pity; Lord, make haste to help me, for *I am become like a bottle in the smoke*, a leathern bottle, which, if it hung any while in the smoke, was not only blackened with soot, but dried, and parched, and shrivelled up. David was thus wasted by age, and sickness, and sorrow. See how affliction will mortify the strongest and stoutest of men! David had been of a ruddy countenance, as fresh as a rose; but now he is withered, his colour is gone, his cheeks are furrowed. Thus does man's beauty consume under God's rebukes, as a moth fretting a garment. A bottle, when

it is thus wrinkled with the smoke, is thrown by, and there is no more use of it. Who will put wine into such old bottles? Thus was David, in his low estate, looked upon as a despised, broken, vessel, and as a vessel in which there was no pleasure. Good men, when they are drooping and melancholy, sometimes think themselves more slighted than really they are.

2. Because, though his affliction was great, yet it had not driven him from his duty, and therefore he was within the reach of God's promise; *Yet do I not forget thy statutes.* Whatever our outward condition is, we must not cool in our affection to the word of God, nor let that slip out of our minds; no care, no grief, must crowd that out. As some *drink and forget the law*, (Prov. 31. 5.) so others weep and forget the law; but we must, in every condition, both prosperous and adverse, have the things of God in remembrance; and, if we be mindful of God's statutes, we may pray and hope that he will be mindful of our sorrows, though for a time he seems to forget us.

84. How many *are* the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?

Here, 1. David prays against the instruments of his troubles, that God would make haste to execute judgment on those that persecuted him. He prays not for power to avenge himself, (he bore no malice to any,) but that God would take to himself the vengeance that belonged to him, and *would repay*, (Rom. 12. 19.) as the God that *sits in the throne, judging right*. There is a day coming, and a great and terrible day it will be, when God will execute judgment on all the proud persecutors of his people; *tribulation to them that troubled them*; Enoch foretold it, (Jude, 14.) whose prophecy perhaps David here had an eye to; and that day we are to look for, and pray for the hastening of; *Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly*.

2. He pleads the long continuance of his trouble; "*How many are the days of thy servant? The days of my life are but few*;" so some; "therefore let them not all be miserable; and therefore make haste to appear for me against my enemies, *before I go hence, and shall be seen no more*." Or rather, "*The days of my affliction are many*, thou seest, Lord, how many they be; when wilt thou return in mercy to me? Sometimes, for the elects' sake, *the days of trouble are shortened*. Oh let the days of my trouble be shortened; I am *thy servant*; and therefore, as the eyes of a servant are to the hand of his master, so are mine to thee, until that thou have mercy on me."

85. The proud have digged pits for me, which *are not after thy law*. 86. All thy commandments *are faithful*; they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me. 87. They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.

David's state was *herein* a type and figure of the state both of Christ and Christians, that he was grievously persecuted: as there are many of his psalms, so there are many of the verses of this psalm, which complain of this, as those here. Where observe,

1. The account he gives of his persecutors, and their malice against him. (1.) They were *proud*, and *in their pride they persecuted him*, glorying in this, that they could trample upon one who was so much cried up, and hoping to raise themselves on his ruins. (2.) They were unjust; *they persecuted him wrongfully*; so far was he from giving them any provocation, that he had studied to oblige them; but *for his love they were his adversaries*. (3.) They were spiteful; they *digged pits for him*; which shewed that they were deliberate in their designs against him, and that what they did was of malice prepense: it intimates likewise, that they were subtle and crafty, and had the serpent's head as well as the serpent's venom; that they were industrious, and would refuse no pains to do him a mischief; and treacherous, laying snares in secret for him, as hunters do to take wild beasts, 35. 7. Such has been the enmity of the serpent's seed to the seed

of the woman. (4.) They herein shewed their enmity to God himself; the pits they *digged for him* were *not after God's law*; he means, they were very much against his law, which forbids to *devise evil to our neighbour*, and has particularly said, *Touch not mine anointed*. The law appointed, that if a man digged a pit which occasioned any mischief, he should answer for the mischief, (Exod. 21. 33, 34.) much more, when it was digged with a mischievous design. (5.) They carried on their designs against him so far, that *they had almost consumed him upon earth*; they went near to ruin him and all his interests. It is possible that those who shall shortly be consummate in heaven, may be, for the present, *almost consumed on earth*; and it is of the Lord's mercies, (and, considering the malice of their enemies, it is a miracle of mercy,) *that they are not quite consumed*. But the bush in which God is, though it burns, shall not be burnt up.

2. His application to God in his persecuted state. (1.) He acknowledges the truth and goodness of his religion, though he suffered; "However it be, *all thy commandments are faithful*, and therefore, whatever I lose for my observance of them, I know I shall not lose *by it*." True religion, if it be worth any thing, is worth every thing, and therefore worth suffering for. "Men are false, I find them so; men of low degree, men of high degree, are so, there is no trusting them; but *all thy commandments are faithful*, on them I may rely." (2.) He begs that God would stand by him, and succour him; "*They persecute me, help thou me*; help me under my troubles, that I may bear them patiently, and as becomes me, and may still hold fast my integrity, and in due time help me out of my troubles." *God help me*, is an excellent comprehensive prayer; it is pity that it should ever be used lightly, and as a by-word.

3. His adherence to his duty, notwithstanding all the malice of his persecutors; (v. 87.) *But I forsook not thy precepts*. That which they aimed at, was, to frighten him from the ways of God, but they could not prevail; he would sooner forsake all that was dear to him in this world, than forsake the word of God; would sooner lose his life, than lose the comfort of doing his duty.

88. Quicken me after thy loving-kindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.

Here is, 1. David in care to be found in the way of his duty; his constant desire and design are, to *keep the testimony of God's mouth*, to keep to it as his rule, and to keep hold of it as his confidence and portion for ever. This we must keep, whatever we lose.

2. David at prayer for divine grace to assist him therein; "*Quicken me after thy loving-kindness*; make me alive, and make me lively, *so shall I keep thy testimonies*; implying, that otherwise he should not keep them. We cannot proceed, nor persevere, in the good way, unless God quicken us, and put life into us; we are therefore here taught to depend upon the grace of God for strength to do every good work, and to depend upon it as grace, as purely the fruit of God's favour. He had prayed before, *Quicken me in thy righteousness*; (v. 40.) but here, *Quicken me after thy loving-kindness*. The surest token of God's good-will toward us, is his good work in us.

12. LAMED.

89. For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. 90. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. 91. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all *are* thy servants.

Here, 1. The psalmist acknowledges the unchangeableness of the word of God, and of all his counsels. "*For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled*. Thou art for ever *thyself*, so some read it; thou art the same, and with thee there is no variableness, and this is a proof of it. *Thy word*, by which the heavens were made, *is settled* there in the abiding products of it;" or the settling of God's word in heaven, is opposed to the changes and revolutions

that are here upon earth. *All flesh is grass; but the word of the Lord endures for ever.* It is settled in heaven, in the secret counsel of God, which is hid in himself, and is far above out of our sight, and is immovable, as *mountains of brass*. And his revealed will is as firm as his secret will; as he will fulfil the thoughts of his heart, so no word of his shall *fall to the ground*; for it follows here, *Thy faithfulness is unto all generations*; the promise is sure to every age of the church, and it cannot be antiquated by track of time. The promises that look ever so far forward shall be performed in their season.

2. He produces, for proof of it, the constancy of the course of nature; *Thou hast established the earth, and it abides*; it is what it was at first made, and where it was at first placed, poised with its own weight, and, notwithstanding the convulsions in its own bowels, the agitations of the sea that is interwoven with it, and the violent concussions of the atmosphere that surrounds it, remains unmoved. "*They*" (the heavens and the earth, and all the hosts of both) "*continue to this day according to thine ordinances*; they remain in the posts wherein thou hast set them, they fill up the place assigned them, and answer the purposes for which they were intended." The stability of the ordinances of day and night, of heaven and earth, is produced, to prove the perpetuity of God's covenant, Jer. 31. 35, 36.—33. 20, 21. It is by virtue of God's promise to Noah, (Gen. 8. 22.) that *day and night, summer and winter*, observe a steady course. "They have continued to this day, and shall still continue to the end of time, acting according to the ordinances which were at first given them; for all are thy servants, they do thy will, and set forth thy glory, and in both are thy servants." All the creatures are, in their places, and according to their capacities, serviceable to their Creator, and answer the ends of their creation; and shall man be the only rebel, the only revolter from his allegiance, and the only unprofitable burthen of the earth?

92. Unless thy law *had been* my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.

Here is, 1. The great distress that David was in; he was in affliction, and ready to *perish in his affliction*; not likely to die, so much as likely to despair; he was ready to give up all for gone, and to look upon himself as cut off from God's sight; he therefore admires the goodness of God to him, that he had not perished, that he kept the possession of his own soul, and was not driven out of his wits by his troubles, but especially that he was enabled to keep close to his God, and was not driven off from his religion by them. Though we are not kept from affliction, yet, if we are kept from perishing in our affliction, we have no reason to say, *We have cleansed our hands in vain*; or, *What profit is it that we have served God?*

2. His support in this distress. God's law was his delight, (1.) It had been so formerly, and the remembrance of that was a comfort to him, as it afforded him a good evidence of his integrity. (2.) It was so now in his affliction; it afforded him abundant matter of comfort, and from these fountains of life he drew living waters, when the cisterns of the creature were broken or dried up. His converse with God's law, and his meditations on it, were his delightful entertainment in solitude and sorrow. A Bible is a pleasant companion at any time, if we please.

93. I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.

Here is, 1. A very good resolution; "*I will never forget thy precepts*, but will always retain a remembrance of, and regard to, thy word as my rule." It is a resolution for perpetuity, never to be altered. Note, The best evidence of our love to the word of God, is, never to forget it. We must resolve that we will never, at any time, cast off our religion, and never, upon any occasion, lay aside our religion, but that we will be constant to it, and persevere in it.

2. A very good reason for it; "*For by them thou hast quickened me*; not only they are quickening, but," (1.) "They have been

so to me, I have found them so." Those speak best of the things of God who speak by experience, who can say, that by the word the spiritual life has been begun in them, maintained and strengthened in them, excited and comforted in them. (2.) "Thou hast made them so;" the word of itself, without the grace of God, would not quicken us; ministers can but prophesy upon the dry bones, they cannot put life into them; but, ordinarily, the grace of God works by the word, and makes use of it as a means of quickening; and this is a good reason why we should never forget it, but should highly value what God has put such honour upon, and dearly love what we have found such benefit by, and hope still to find. See here what is the best help for bad memories, namely, *good affections*; if we are quickened by the word, we shall never forget it; nay, that word that does really quicken us to, and in, our duty, is not forgotten; though the expressions be lost, if the impressions remain, it is well.

94. I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts.

Here, 1. David claims relation to God; "*I am thine*, devoted to thee, and owned by thee, thine in covenant." He does not say, *Thou art mine*, (as Dr. Manton observes,) though that follows of course, because that were a higher challenge; but, *I am thine*, expressing himself in a more humble and dutiful way of resignation; nor does he say, *I am thus*, but, *I am thine*, not pleading his own good property or qualification, but God's propriety in him; "*I am thine*, not my own, not the world's."

2. He proves his claim; "*I have sought thy precepts*, I have carefully inquired concerning my duty, and diligently endeavoured to do it." This will be the best evidence that we belong to God; all that are his, though they have not found perfection, are seeking it.

3. He improves his claim; "*I am thine; save me*, save me from sin, save me from ruin." Those that have, in sincerity, given up themselves to God, to be his, may be sure that he will protect them, and preserve them to his heavenly kingdom, Mal. 3. 18.

95. The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.

Here, 1. David complains of the malice of his enemies; *The wicked* (and none but such would be enemies to so good a man) *have waited for me, to destroy me*; they were very cruel, and aimed at no less than his destruction; they were very crafty, and sought all opportunities to do him a mischief; and they were *confident*, they *expected*, (so some read it,) that they should destroy him, they thought themselves sure of their prey.

2. He comforts himself in the word of God, as his protection; "While they are contriving my destruction, *I consider thy testimonies*, which secure to me my salvation." God's testimonies are then likely to be our support, when we consider them, and dwell in our thoughts upon them.

96. I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

Here we have David's testimony, from his own experience,

1. Of the vanity of the world, and its insufficiency to make us happy; *I have seen an end of all perfection*. Poor perfection which one sees an end of! Yet such are all those things in this world which pass for perfections. David, in his time, had seen Goliath, the strongest, overcome; Asahel, the swiftest, overtaken; Alithophel, the wisest, befooled; Absalom, the fairest, deformed; and, in short, he had *seen an end of perfection, of all perfection*; he saw it by faith, he saw it by observation, he saw an end of the perfection of the creature, both in respect of sufficiency, it was scanty and defective, (there is that to be done for us which the creature cannot do,) and, in respect of continuance, it will not last our time, for it will not last to eternity, as we must. The glory of man is but as the flower of the grass.

2. Of the fulness of the word of God, and its sufficiency for our satisfaction; *But thy commandment is broad, exceeding broad.* The word of God reaches to all cases, to all times. The divine law lays a restraint upon the whole man, is designed to sanctify us wholly. There is a great deal required and forbidden in every commandment. The divine promise (for that also is commanded) extends itself to all our burthens, wants, and grievances, and has that in it which will make a portion and happiness for us when we have seen an end of all perfection.

13. MEM.

97. O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.

Here is, 1. David's inexpressible love to the word of God; *O how love I thy law!* He protests his affection to the word of God with a holy vehemency; he found that love to it in his heart, which, considering the corruption of his nature, and the temptation of the world, he could not but wonder at, and at that grace which had wrought it in him. He not only loved the promises, but loved the law, and delighted in it after the inner man.

2. An unexceptionable evidence of this. What we love, we love to think of; by *this* it appeared that David loved the word of God, it was his *meditation*. He not only read the book of the law, but digested what he read in his thoughts, and was delivered into it as into a mould: it was his meditation, not only in the night, when he was silent and solitary, and had nothing else to do, but in the day, when he was full of business and company; nay, and *all the day* some good thoughts were interwoven with his common thoughts; so full was he of the word of God.

98. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. 99. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. 100. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.

We have here an account of David's learning, not that of the Egyptians, but of the *Israelites indeed*.

1. The good method by which he got it. *In his youth*, he minded business in the country, as a shepherd; *from his youth*, he minded business in the court and camp; which way, then, could he get any great stock of learning? He tells us here how he came by it; he had it from God as the Author; *Thou hast made me wise*: all true wisdom is from God. He had it by the word of God, as the means; by *his commandments and his testimonies*. These are able to *make us wise to salvation*, and *to furnish the man of God for every good work*. (1.) These David took for his constant companions; *"They are ever with me, ever in my mind, ever in my eye."* A good man, wherever he goes, carries his Bible along with him, if not in his hands, yet in his head and in his heart. (2.) These he took for the delightful subject of his thoughts; they were his *meditation*, not only as matters of speculation for his entertainment, as scholars meditate on their notions, but as matters of concern, for his right management, as men of business think of their business, that they may do it in the best manner. (3.) These he took for the commanding rules of all his actions; *I keep thy precepts*; I make conscience of doing my duty in every thing. The best way to improve in knowledge is, to abide and abound in all the instances of serious godliness; for, *if any man do his will, he shall know of the doctrine of Christ*, shall know more and more of it, John, 7. 17. The love of the truth prepares for the light of it; the *pure in heart shall see God* here.

2. The great eminency he attained to in it. By studying and practising God's commandments, and making them his rule, he learnt to *behave himself wisely in all his ways*, 1 Sam. 18. 14. (1.) He outwitted his enemies; God, by these means, made him wiser to baffle and defeat their designs against him than they were to lay them. Heavenly wisdom will carry the point, at last, against

carnal policy. By keeping the commandments, we secure God on our side, and make him our Friend, and therein are certainly wiser than those that make him their Enemy: by keeping the commandments, we preserve to ourselves that peace and quiet of mind which our enemies would rob us of, and so are wise for ourselves, wiser than they are for themselves, for this world as well as for the other. (2.) He outstript his teachers, and had more understanding than all of them. He means either those who would have been his teachers, who blamed his conduct, and undertook to prescribe to him: by keeping God's commandments, he managed his matters so, that it appeared, in the event, he had taken the right measures, and they had taken the wrong. Or, he may mean those who should have been his teachers, the priests and Levites, who sat in Moses's chair, and whose lips ought to have kept knowledge, but who neglected the study of the law, and minded their honours and revenues, and the formalities only of their religion; and so David, who conversed much with the scriptures, by that means became more intelligent than they. Or, he may mean those who had been his teachers when he was young; he built so well upon the foundation which they had laid, that, with the help of his Bible, he became able to teach them, to teach them all. He was not now a babe that needed milk, but had *spiritual senses exercised*, Heb. 5. 14. It is no reflection upon our teachers, but rather an honour to them, to improve so as really to excel them, and not to need them. By *meditation* we preach to ourselves, and so we come to *understand more than our teachers*, for we come to understand our own hearts, which they cannot. (3.) He outdid the ancients; either those of his day, he was young, like Elihu, and they were very old, (but his keeping of God's precepts taught him more wisdom than the multitude of their years, Job, 32. 7, 8.) or those of former days: he himself quotes the proverb of the ancients; (1 Sam. 24. 13.) but the word of God gave him to understand things better than he could do by tradition, and all the learning that was handed down from preceding ages. In short, the written word is a surer guide to heaven than all the doctors and fathers, the teachers and ancients, of the church; and the sacred writings kept, and kept to, will teach us more wisdom than all their writings.

101. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.

Here is, 1. David's care to avoid the ways of sin; *"I have refrained my feet from the evil ways* they were ready to step aside into; I checked myself, and drew back, as soon as I was aware that I was entering into temptation." Though it was a broad way, a green way, a pleasant way, and a way that many walked in, yet, being a sinful way, it was an evil way, and he *refrained his feet from it*, foreseeing the end of that way. And his care was universal; he shunned every evil way. *By the words of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer*, 17. 4.

2. His care to be found in the way of duty; *That I might keep thy word*, and never transgress it. His abstaining from sin was, (1.) An evidence that he did conscientiously aim to *keep God's word*, and had made that his rule. (2.) It was a means of his keeping God's word in the exercises of religion; for we cannot, with any comfort or boldness, attend on God in holy duties, so as in them to keep his word, while we are under guilt, or in any by-way.

102. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.

Here is, 1. David's constancy in his religion. He had *not departed from God's judgments*; he had not chosen any other rule than the word of God, nor had he wilfully deviated from that rule. A constant adherence to the ways of God, in trying times, will be a good evidence of our integrity.

2. The cause of his constancy; *"For thou hast taught me*, they were divine instructions that I learned; I was satisfied that the doctrine was of God, and therefore I stuck to it." Or rather,

"It was divine grace in my heart that enabled me to receive those instructions." All the saints are taught of God, for he it is that gives the understanding; and those, and those only, that are taught of God, will continue to the end in the things that they have learned.

103. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, *sweeter* than honey to my mouth. 104. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

Here is, 1. The wonderful pleasure and delight which David took in the word of God; it was *sweet to his taste, sweeter than honey*. There is such a thing as a spiritual taste, an inward savour and relish of divine things; such an evidence of them to ourselves, by experience, as we cannot give to others. We have *heard him ourselves*, John, 4. 42. To this scripture-taste the word of God is sweet, very sweet, sweeter than any of the gratifications of sense, even those that are most delicious. David speaks as if he wanted words to express the satisfaction he took in the discoveries of the divine will and grace; no pleasure was comparable to it.

2. The unspeakable profit and advantage he gained by the word of God; (1.) It helped him to a good head; "*Through thy precepts I get understanding*, to discern between truth and falsehood, good and evil, so as not to mistake either in the conduct of my own life, or in advising others." (2.) It helped him to a good heart; "*Therefore, because I have got understanding of the truth, I hate every false way*, and am steadfastly resolved not to turn aside into it." Observe here, The way of sin is a *false way*, it deceives, and will ruin, all that walk in it; it is the wrong way, and yet it seems to a man right, Prov. 14. 12. It is the character of every good man, that he hates the way of sin, and hates it because it is a *false way*; he not only refrains his feet from it, (v. 101.) but he *hates it*, has an antipathy to it, and a dread of it. Those who hate sin as sin, will hate all sin, hate *every false way*, because every false way leads to destruction. And the more understanding we get by the word of God, the more rooted will our hatred of sin be; for, *to depart from evil, that is understanding*; (Job, 28. 28.) and the more ready we are in the scriptures, the better furnished we are with answers to temptation.

14. NUN.

105. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Observe here, 1. The nature of the word of God, and the great intention of giving it to the world; it is a *lamp* and a *light*, it discovers to us *that*, concerning God and ourselves, which otherwise we could not have known; it shews us what is amiss, and will be dangerous; it directs us in our work and way, and a dark place indeed the world would be without it; it is a lamp which we may set up by us, and take into our hands for our own particular use, Prov. 6. 23. The commandment is a lamp kept burning with the oil of the Spirit; it is like the lamps in the sanctuary, and the pillar of fire, to Israel.

2. The use we should make of it. It must be not only a *light to our eyes*, to gratify them, and fill our heads with speculations, but a *light to our feet* and *to our path*, to direct us in the right ordering of our conversation; both in the choice of our way in general, and in the particular steps we take in that way; that we may not take a *false way*, nor a false step in the right way. We are then truly sensible of God's goodness to us in giving us such a lamp and light, when we make it a guide to our feet, our path.

106. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

Here is, 1. The notion David had of religion; it is, *keeping God's righteous judgments*. God's commands are his judgments, the dictates of infinite wisdom. They are *righteous judgments*,

consonant to the eternal rules of equity, and it is our duty to keep them carefully.

2. The obligation he here laid upon himself to be religious, binding himself, by his own promise, to that which he was already bound to by the divine precept, and all little enough. "*I have sworn*, I have lifted up my hand to the Lord, and I cannot go back; and therefore must go forward, *I will perform it*." Note, (1.) It is good for us to bind ourselves with a solemn oath to be religious. We must swear to the Lord as subjects swear allegiance to their sovereign, promising fealty, appealing to God concerning our sincerity in this promise, and owning ourselves liable to the curse, if we do not perform it. (2.) We must often call to mind the vows of God that are upon us, and remember that we have sworn. (3.) We must make conscience of performing unto the Lord our oaths; (an honest man will be as good as his word;) nor have we sworn to our own hurt, but it will be unspeakably to our hurt, if we do not perform.

107. I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.

Here is, 1. The presentation David makes of the sorrowful condition he was in; *I am afflicted very much*, afflicted in spirit; he seems to mean that especially: he laboured under many discouragements; without were fightings, within were fears: this is often the lot of the best saints, therefore think it not strange if sometimes it be our's.

2. The recourse he has to God in this condition; he prays for his grace, "*Quicken me, O Lord*; make me lively, make me cheerful, quicken me, by afflictions, to greater diligence in my work: *quicken me*; deliver me out of my afflictions, which will be as life from the dead." He pleads the promise of God, guides his desires by it, and grounds his hopes upon it; *Quicken me according to thy word*. David resolved to perform his promises to God, (v. 106.) and therefore could, with humble boldness, beg of God to make good his word to him.

108. Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill-offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments.

Two things we are here taught to pray for, in reference to our religious performances.

1. Acceptance of them; this we must aim at in all we do in religion, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of the Lord. That which David here earnestly prays for the acceptance of, is, the *freewill-offerings*, not of his purse, but of his mouth, his prayers and praises; *the calves of our lips*, (Hos. 14. 2.) *the fruit of our lips*, (Heb. 1. 15.) these are the spiritual offerings which all Christians, as spiritual priests, must offer to God; and they must be *freewill-offerings*, for we must offer them abundantly and cheerfully; and it is this willing mind that is accepted. The more there is of freeness and willingness in the service of God, the more pleasing it is to him.

2. Assistance in them; *Teach me thy judgments*. We cannot offer any thing to God, which we have reason to think he will accept of, but what he is pleased to instruct us in the doing of; and we must be as earnest for the grace of God in us, as for the favour of God towards us.

109. My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law. 110. The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.

Here is, 1. David in danger of losing his life. There is but a step between him and death, for the *wicked have laid a snare* for him; Saul did so many a time, because he hated him for his piety. Wherever he was, he found some design or other laid against him to take away his life, for that was it they aimed at; what they could not effect by open force, they hoped to compass by

treachery, which made him say, *My soul is continually in my hand*: it was not so with him, only as a *man*, (so it is true of us all; wherever we are, we lie exposed to the strokes of death, what we carry in our hands is easily snatched away from us by violence, or, if sandy, as our life is, it easily of itself slips through our fingers,) but as a *man of war*, a soldier, who often jeopardized his life in the high places of the field; and especially as a *man after God's own heart*, and, as such, hated and persecuted, and always delivered to death, (2 Cor. 4. 11.) *killed all the day long*.

2. David in no danger of losing his religion, notwithstanding this. Thus, in jeopardy every hour, and yet constant to God and his duty, none of these things move him: for, (1.) *He does not forget the law*, and therefore he is likely to persevere. In the multitude of his cares for his own safety, he finds room in his head and heart for the word of God, and has that in his mind as fresh as ever; and, where that dwells richly, it will be a *well of living water*. (2.) He has not yet erred from God's precepts, and therefore it is to be hoped he will not. He had stood many a shock, and kept his ground, and surely that grace which had helped him hitherto would not fail him, but would still prevent his wanderings.

111. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they *are* the rejoicing of my heart. 112. I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes alway, *even unto* the end.

The psalmist here, in a most affectionate manner, like an Israelite indeed, resolves to stick to the word of God, and to live and die by it.

1. He resolves to portion himself in it, and there to seek his happiness, nay, there to enjoy it; "*Thy testimonies*, the truths, the promises, of thy word, *have I taken as a heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart*." The present delight he took in them was an evidence that the good things contained in them were, in his account, the best things, and the treasure which he set his heart upon. (1.) He expected an eternal happiness in God's testimonies; the covenant God had made with him was an everlasting covenant, and therefore he took it as a *heritage for ever*. If he could not yet say, *They are my heritage*, yet he could say, "*I have made choice of them for my heritage*, and will never take up with a *portion in this life*," 17. 14, 15. God's testimonies are a heritage to all that have received the Spirit of adoption; for, *if children, then heirs*; they are a *heritage for ever*, and that no earthly heritage is; (1 Pet. 1. 4.) all the saints accept them as such, take up with them, live upon them, and can therefore be content with but little of this world. (2.) He enjoyed a present satisfaction in them; *They are the rejoicing of my heart*, because they will be *my heritage for ever*. It requires the heart of a good man to see his portion in the promise of God, and not in the possession of this world.

2. He resolves to govern himself by it, and thence to take his measures; *I have inclined my heart to do thy statutes*. They that would have the blessings of God's testimonies, must come under the bonds of his statutes. We must look for comfort only in the way of duty, and that duty must be done, (1.) With full consent and complacency; "*I have*, by the grace of God, *inclined my heart to it*, and conquered the aversion I had to it." A good man brings his heart to his work, and then it is done well. A gracious disposition to do the will of God is the acceptable principle of all obedience. (2.) With constancy and perseverance. He would perform God's statutes always, in all instances, in the duty of every day, in a constant course of holy walking, and this *to the end*, without weariness. This is following the Lord fully.

15. SAMECH.

113. I hate *vain* thoughts: but thy law do I love.

Here is, 1. David's dread of the risings of sin, and the first

beginnings of it; *I hate vain thoughts*. He does not mean that he hated them in others, for there he could not discern them, but he hated them in his own heart. Every good man makes conscience of his thoughts, for they are words to God: vain thoughts, how light soever most make of them, are sinful and hurtful, and therefore we should account them hateful and dreadful, for they not only divert the mind from that which is good, but open the door to all evil, Jer. 4. 14. Though David could not say that he was free from vain thoughts, yet he could say that he *hated them*; he did not countenance them, or give them any entertainment, but did what he could to keep them out, at least to keep them under. *The evil I do, I allow not*.

2. David's delight in the rule of duty; but *thy law do I love*, which forbids those vain thoughts, and threatens them. The more we love the law of God, the more we shall get the mastery of our vain thoughts, the more hateful they will be to us, as being contrary to the whole law, and the more watchful we shall be against them, lest they draw us from that we love.

114. Thou *art* my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.

Here is, 1. God's care of David to protect and defend him, which he comforts himself with, when his enemies were very malicious against him; *Thou art my Hiding-place, and my Shield*. David, when Saul pursued him, often betook himself to close places for shelter. In war, he guarded himself with his shield, now God was both these to him; a Hiding-place to preserve him from danger, and a Shield to preserve him in danger, his life from death, and his soul from sin. Good people are safe under God's protection. He is their *Strength and their Shield*, their *Help and their Shield*; their *Sun and their Shield*; their *Shield and their great Reward*; and here, their *Hiding-place and their Shield*. They may by faith retire to him, and repose in him as their Hiding-place, where they are kept in secret. They may by faith oppose his power to all the might and malice of their enemies, as their shield to quench every fiery dart.

2. David's confidence in God; he is safe, and therefore he is easy, under the divine protection. "*I hope in thy word*, which has acquainted me with thee, and assured me of thy kindness to me." They who depend on God's promise shall have the benefit of his power, and be taken under his special protection.

115. Depart from me, ye evil doers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.

Here is, 1. David's firm and fixed resolution to live a holy life; *I will keep the commandments of my God*. Bravely resolved! like a saint, like a soldier; for true courage consists in a steady resolution against all sin, and for all duty. Those that would keep God's commandments, must be often renewing their resolutions to do so; "*I will keep them*: whatever others do, this I will do; though I be singular, though all about me be evil-doers, and desert me; whatever I have done hitherto, I will for the future walk closely with God. They are the commandments of God, of my God, and therefore I will keep them. He is God, and may command me; my God, and will command me nothing but what is for my good."

2. His farewell to bad company, pursuant to this resolution; *Depart from me, ye evil doers*. Though David, as a good magistrate, was a terror to evil-doers, yet there were many such, even about court, intruding near his person; these he here abdicates, and resolves to have no conversation with them. Note, They that resolve to keep the commandments of God, must have no society with evil-doers; for bad company is a great hinderance to a holy life. We must not choose wicked people for our companions, nor be intimate with them; we must not do as they do, nor do as they would have us do, Ps. 1. 1. Eph. 5. 11.

116. Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my

hope. 117. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.

Here, 1. David prays for sustaining grace; for this grace sufficient he besought the Lord twice; *Uphold me*, and again, *Hold thou me up*. He sees himself, not only unable to go on in his duty by any strength of his own, but in danger of falling into sin, unless he was prevented by divine grace; and therefore he is thus earnest for that grace to uphold him in his integrity, (41.12.) to keep him from falling, and to keep him from tiring, that he might neither turn aside to evil-doing, nor be weary of well-doing. We stand no longer than God holds us, and go no further than he carries us.

2. He pleads earnestly for this grace.

(1.) He pleads the promise of God, his dependence upon the promise, and his expectation from it; "*Uphold me, according to thy word*, which word I hope in; and if it be not performed, I shall be made *ashamed of my hope*, and be called a fool for my credulity." But they that hope in God's word may be sure that the word will not fail them, and therefore their hope will not make them ashamed.

(2.) He pleads the great need he had of God's grace, and the great advantage it would be of to him; *Uphold me, that I may live*; intimating, that he could not live without the grace of God; he should fall into sin, into death, into hell, if God did not hold him up; but, supported by his hand, he shall live; his spiritual life shall be maintained, and be an earnest of eternal life. *Hold me up, and I shall be safe*; out of danger, and out of the fear of danger. Our holy security is grounded on divine supports.

(3.) He pleads his resolution, in the strength of this grace, to proceed in his duty; "*Hold me up*, and then *I will have respect unto thy statutes continually*, and never turn my eyes or feet aside from them." *I will employ myself*, so some; *I will delight myself, so others, in thy statutes*. If God's right hand uphold us, we must, in his strength, go on in our duty, both with diligence and with pleasure.

118. Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.

119. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.

120. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

Here is, 1. God's judgments on wicked people, on those that *wander from his statutes*, that take their measures from other rules, and will not have God to reign over them. All departure from God's statutes is certainly an error, and will prove a fatal one. These are *the wicked of the earth*; they mind earthly things, and lay up their treasures in the earth, and live in pleasure on the earth, and are strangers and enemies to heaven and heavenly things. Now, see how God deals with them, that you may neither fear them, nor envy them. (1.) He *treads them all down*; he brings them to ruin, to utter ruin, to shameful ruin; he makes them his footstool. Though they are ever so high, he can bring them low; (Amos, 2.9.) he has done it many a time, and he will do it, for he resists the proud, and will triumph over those that oppose his kingdom. Proud persecutors trample upon his people, but, sooner or later, he will trample upon them. (2.) He *puts them all away like dross*. Wicked people are as dross, which, though it be mingled with the good metal in the ore, and seems to be of the same substance with it, must be separated from it. And, in God's account, they are worthless things, the scum and refuse of the earth, and no more to be compared with the righteous, than dross with fine gold. There is a day coming which will put them away from among the righteous, (Matth. 13.49.) so that they shall have no place in *their congregation*; (Ps. 1.5.) which will put them away into everlasting fire, the fittest place for the dross. Sometimes, in this world, the wicked are, by the censures

of the church, or the sword of the magistrate, or the judgments of God, *put away as dross*, Prov. 25.4,5.

2. The reasons of these judgments. God casts them off, because they *err from his statutes*; they that will not submit to the commands of the word, shall feel the curses of it. And because *their deceit is falsehood*, because they deceive themselves by setting up false rules, in opposition to God's statutes, which they err from; and because they go about to deceive others with their hypocritical pretences of good, and their crafty projects of mischief. *Their cunning is falsehood*, so Dr. Hammond. The utmost of their policy is treachery and perfidiousness; this the God of truth hates, and will punish.

3. The improvement David made of these judgments; he took notice of them, and received instruction from them. The ruin of the wicked helped to increase, (1.) His love to the word of God; "*I see what comes of sin; therefore I love thy testimonies*, which warn me to take heed of those dangerous courses, and *keep me from the paths of the destroyer*." We see the word of God fulfilled in his judgments on sin and sinners, and therefore we should love it. (2.) His fear of the wrath of God; *My flesh trembles for fear of thee*. Instead of insulting over those who fell under God's displeasure, he humbled himself. What we read and hear of the judgments of God upon wicked people, should make us, [1.] To reverence his terrible majesty, and to stand in awe of him; *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?* 1 Sam. 6.20. [2.] To fear lest we offend him, and become obnoxious to his wrath. Good men have need to be restrained from sin by *the terrors of the Lord*; especially when judgment begins at the house of God, and hypocrites are discovered, and *put away as dross*.

16. AIN.

121. I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors. 122. Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.

David here appeals to God,

1. As his Witness, that he had not done wrong; he could truly say, "*I have done judgment and justice*; I have made conscience of rendering to all their due, and have not, by force or fraud, hindered any of their right." Take him as a king, he *executed judgment and justice to all his people*; (2 Sam. 8.15.) take him in a private capacity, he could appeal to Saul himself, that *there was no evil or transgression in his hand*, 1 Sam. 24.11. Note, Honesty is the best policy, and will be our rejoicing in the day of evil.

2. As his Judge, that he might not be wronged; he, having done justice for others that were oppressed, begs that God would do him justice, and avenge him of his adversaries; "*Be surety for thy servant for good*; undertake for me against those that would run me down, and ruin me." He is sensible that he cannot make his part good himself, and therefore begs that God would appear for him. Christ is our Surety with God; and, if he be so, Providence shall be our Surety against all the world; who, or what, shall harm us, if God's power and goodness be engaged for our protection and rescue? He does not prescribe to God what he should do for him; only let it be *for good*, in such way and manner as Infinite Wisdom sees best; only *let me not be left to mine oppressors*. Though David had *done judgment and justice*, yet he had many enemies; but, having God for his Friend, he hoped they should not have their will against him; and in that hope he prayed again, *Let not the proud oppress me*. David, one of the best of men, was oppressed by the proud, whom God beholds afar off: the condition, therefore, of the persecuted is better than that of the persecutors, and will appear so at last.

123. Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.

David, being oppressed, is here waiting and wishing for the salvation of the Lord, which would make him easy.

1. He cannot but think that it comes slowly; *Mine eyes fail for thy salvation*. His eyes were towards it, and had been long so: he looked for help from heaven, and we deceive ourselves if we

look for it any other way; but it did not come so soon as he expected, so that his eyes began to fail, and he was sometimes ready to despair, and to think that, because the salvation did not come when he looked for it, it would never come. It is often the infirmity even of good men, to be weary of waiting *God's* time, when *their* time is elapsed.

2. Yet he cannot but hope that it comes surely; for he expects *the word of God's righteousness*, and no other salvation than what is secured by that word, which cannot fall to the ground, because it is a word of righteousness. Though our eyes fail, yet God's word does not, and therefore those that build upon it, though now discouraged, shall in due time see his salvation.

124. Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes. 125. I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.

Here is, 1. David's petition for divine instruction; "*Teach me thy statutes*"; give me to know all my duty; when I am in doubt, and know not for certain what is my duty, direct me, and make it plain to me; now that I am afflicted, oppressed, and *mine eyes* ready to fail for thy salvation, let me know what my duty is, in this condition." In difficult times, we should desire more to be told what we must do, than what we may expect; and should pray more to be led into the knowledge of scripture-precepts than of scripture-prophecies. If God, who gave us his statutes, do not teach us, we shall never learn them. How God teaches, is implied in the next petition, *Give me understanding*, a renewed understanding, apt to receive divine light, *that I may know thy testimonies*. It is God's prerogative to give an understanding, that understanding without which we cannot know God's testimonies. Those who know most of God's testimonies desire to know more, and are still earnest with God to teach them, never thinking they know enough.

2. His pleas to enforce this petition.

(1.) He pleads God's goodness to him; *Deal with me according to thy mercy*. The best saints count this their best plea for any blessing, "Let me have it according to thy mercy;" for we deserve no favour from God, nor can we claim any as a debt, but we are then most likely to be easy, when we cast ourselves upon God's mercy, and refer ourselves to it. Particularly, when we come to him for instruction, we must beg it as a mercy, and reckon that in being taught we are well dealt with.

(2.) He pleads his relation to God; "*I am thy servant*, and have work to do for thee, therefore *teach me* to do it, and to do it well." The servant has reason to expect, that, if he be at a loss about his work, his master should teach him, and, if it were in his power, give him an understanding. "Lord," says David, "I desire to serve thee, shew me how." If any man resolve to do God's will as his servant, he shall be made to know his testimonies, John, 7. 17. Ps. 25. 14.

126. It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law.

Here is, 1. A complaint of the daring impiety of the wicked; David, having in himself a holy indignation at it, humbly represents it to God. "Lord, there are those that *have made void thy law*, have set thee and thy government at defiance, and have done what in them lay to cancel and vacate the obligation of thy commands." They that sin through infirmity transgress the law, but presumptuous sinners do, in effect, *make void the law*, saying, *Who is the Lord? What is the Almighty, that we should fear him?* It is possible a godly man may sin against the commandment, but a wicked man would sin away the commandment; would repeal God's laws, and enact his own lusts. This is the sinfulness of sin, and the malignity of the carnal mind.

2. A desire that God would appear for the vindication of his own honour. "*It is time for thee, Lord, to work*, to do something for the effectual confutation of atheists and infidels, and the

silencing of those that set their mouth against the heavens." God's time to work, is, when vice is become most daring, and the measure of iniquity is full. *Now will I arise, saith the Lord*. Some read it, and the original will bear it, *It is time to work for thee, O Lord*; it is time for every one in his place to appear on the Lord's side, against the threatening growth of profaneness and immorality. We must do what we can for the support of the sinking interests of religion, and, after all, we must beg of God to take the work into his own hands.

127. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. 128. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.

David here, as often in this psalm, professes the great love he had to the word and law of God; and, to evidence the sincerity of it, observe,

1. The degree of his love. He loved his Bible better than he loved his money; *above gold, yea, above fine gold*. Gold, fine gold, is what most men set their hearts upon; nothing charms them and dazzles their eyes so as gold does; it is fine gold, a fine thing in their eyes; they will venture their souls, their God, their all, to get and keep it: but David saw that the word of God answers all purposes better than money does; for it enriches the soul toward God, and therefore he loved it better than gold; for it had done that for him which gold could not do, and would stand him in stead when the wealth of the world would fail him.

2. The ground of his love. *Therefore* he loved all God's commandments, because he esteemed them to be right, all reasonable and just, and suited to the end for which they were made. They are all as they should be, and no fault can be found with them; and *therefore* we must love them, because they bear God's image, and are the revelations of his will. If we thus *consent to the law*, *that it is good*, we shall delight in it after the inner man.

3. The fruit and evidence of this love; *He hated every false way*. The way of sin being directly contrary to God's precepts, which are right, is a false way, and therefore they that have a love and esteem for God's law, hate it, and will not be reconciled to it.

17. PE.

129. Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.

See here, how David was affected toward the word of God.

1. He admired it, as most excellent in itself; *Thy testimonies are wonderful*. The word of God gives us admirable discoveries of God, and Christ, and another world; admirable proofs of divine love and grace. The majesty of the style, the purity of the matter, the harmony of the parts, are all wonderful; its effects upon the consciences of men, both for conviction and comfort, are wonderful; and it is a sign that we are not acquainted with God's testimonies, or do not understand them, if we do not admire them.

2. He adhered to it, as of constant use to him; "*Therefore doth my soul keep them*, as a treasure of inestimable value, which I cannot be without." We do not keep them to any purpose, unless our souls keep them; there they must be deposited, as the tables of testimony in the ark, there they must have the innermost and uppermost place. They that see God's word to be admirable, will prize it highly, and preserve it carefully, as that which they promise themselves great things from.

130. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.

Here is, 1. The great use for which the word of God was intended; to give light, that is, to give understanding; to give us to understand that which will be of use to us in our travels through this world; and it is the outward and ordinary means by which the Spirit of God enlightens the understanding of all that are sanctified. God's testimonies are not only wonderful, for the greatness of them, but useful, as a light in a dark place.

2. Its efficacy for this purpose; it admirably answers the end; for, (1.) *Even the entrance of God's word gives light.* If we begin at the beginning, and take it before us, we shall find, that the very first verses of the Bible give us surprising, and yet satisfying, discoveries of the origin of the universe, about which, without that, the world is utterly in the dark. As soon as the word of God enters into us, and has a place in us, it enlightens us; we find we begin to see, when we begin to study the word of God. The very first principles of the oracles of God, the plainest truths, the milk appointed for the babes, bring a great light into the soul, much more will the soul be illuminated by the sublime mysteries that are found there. The exposition or explication of thy word giveth light; then it is most profitable, when ministers do their part *in giving the sense*, Neh. 3. 8. Some understand it of the New Testament, which is the opening or unfolding of the Old, which would give light concerning life and immortality. (2.) It would *give understanding even to the simple*, to the weakest capacities; for it shews us a way to heaven, so plain, that the *wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.*

131. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.

Here is, 1. The desire David had toward the word of God; *I longed for thy commandments.* When he was under a forced absence from God's ordinances, he longed to be restored to them again; when he enjoyed ordinances, he greedily sucked in the word of God, *as new-born babes desire the milk.* When Christ is formed in the soul, there are gracious longings, unaccountable to one that is a stranger to the work.

2. The degree of that desire, appearing in the expressions of it; *I opened my mouth, and panted;* as one, overcome with heat, or almost stifled, pants for a mouthful of fresh air. Thus strong, thus earnest, should our desires be toward God, and the remembrance of his name, 42. 1, 2. Luke, 12. 50.

132. Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.

Here is, 1. David's request for God's favour to himself; *"Look graciously upon me;* let me have thy smiles, and the light of thy countenance; take cognizance of me and my affairs, *and be merciful to me;* let me taste the sweetness of thy mercy, and receive the gifts of thy mercy." See how humble his petition is; he asks not for the operations of God's hand, only for the smiles of his face; a good look is enough; and for that he does not plead merit, but implores mercy.

2. His acknowledgment of his favour to all his people; *As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.* Which speaks, either, (1.) A plea for mercy; "Lord, I am one of those that love thy name, love thee and thy word, and thou usest to be kind to those that do so; and wilt thou be worse to me than to others of thy people?" Or, (2.) A description of the favour and mercy he desired; that which *thou usest to bestow on those that love thy name*, which *thou bearest to thy chosen*, 106. 4, 5. He desires no more, no better, than neighbour's fare, and he will take up with no less; common looks and common mercies will not serve, but such as are reserved for those that love him; which are such as *cye has not seen*, 1 Cor. 2. 9. Note, The dealings of God with them that love him, are such, that a man needs not desire to be any better dealt with, for he will make them truly and eternally happy. And as long as God deals with us no otherwise than as he uses to deal with those that love him, we have no reason to complain, 1 Cor. 10. 13.

133. Order my steps in thy word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

Here David prays for two great spiritual blessings, and is, in this verse, as earnest for the good work of God in him, as, in the verse before, for the good-will of God toward him. He prays,

1. For direction in the paths of duty; *"Order my steps in thy word;* having led me into the right way, let every step I take in that way be under the conduct of thy grace." We ought to walk by rule; all the motions of the soul must not only be kept within the bounds prescribed by the word, so as not to transgress them, but carried out in the paths prescribed by the word, so as not to trifle in them. And therefore we must beg of God, that, by his good Spirit, he would order our steps accordingly.

2. For deliverance from the power of sin; *"Let not iniquity have dominion over me,* so as to gain my consent to it, and that I should be led captive by it." The dominion of sin is to be dreaded and deprecated by every one of us; and if in sincerity we pray against it, we may receive that promise as an answer to the prayer, (Rom. 6. 14.) *Sin shall not have dominion over you.*

134. Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.

Here, 1. David prays that he might live a quiet and peaceable life, and might not be harassed and discomposed by those that studied to be vexatious; *"Deliver me from the oppression of man;* man, whom God can controul, and whose power is limited; let them know themselves to be *but men*, (9. 20.) and let me be delivered *out of the hands of unreasonable men.*"

2. He promises that then he would live *in all godliness and honesty.* Let me be delivered out of the hands of my enemies, that I may serve God without fear; *so will I keep thy precepts.* Not but that he would keep God's precepts, though he should be continued under oppression; but so shall I keep thy precepts more cheerfully, and with more enlargement of heart, my bonds being loosed." Then we may expect temporal blessings, when we desire them with this in our eye, that we may serve God the better.

135. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.

David here, as often elsewhere, writes himself God's servant, a title he gloried in, though he was a king: now here, as became a good servant,

1. He is very ambitious of his Master's favour, accounting that his happiness and chiefest good. He asks not for corn and wine, for silver and gold, but, *"Make thy face to shine upon thy servant;* let me be accepted of thee, and let me know that I am so. Comfort me with the light of thy countenance in every cloudy and dark day; if the world frown upon me, yet do thou smile."

2. He is very solicitous about his Master's work, accounting that his business and chief concern; this he would be instructed in, that he might do it, and do it well, so as to be accepted in the doing of it; *Teach me thy statutes.* Note. We must pray as earnestly for grace as for comfort. If God hides his face from us, it is because we have been careless in keeping his statutes; and therefore, that we may be qualified for the returns of his favour, we must pray for wisdom to do our duty.

136. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

Here we have David in sorrow,

1. It is a great sorrow; to that degree, that he weeps *rivers of tears;* commonly, where there is a gracious heart, there is a weeping eye; in conformity to Christ, who was a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. David had prayed for comfort in God's favour; (v. 135.) now he pleads that he was qualified for that comfort, and had need of it, for he was one of them that mourned in Zion, and they that do so shall be comforted, Isa. 61. 3.

2. It is godly sorrow. He wept not for his troubles, though they were many, but for the dishonour to God, *Because they keep not thy law.* Either, *because mine eyes keep not thy law*, so some. The eye is the inlet and outlet of a great deal of sin, and therefore it ought to be a weeping eye. Or rather, *they, those about me,*

v. 139. Note, The sins of sinners are the sorrows of saints. We must mourn for that which we cannot mend.

18. TZADDI.

137. Righteous *art* thou, O LORD, and upright *are* thy judgments. 138. Thy testimonies *that* thou hast commanded *are* righteous and very faithful.

Here is, 1. The righteousness of God, the infinite rectitude and perfection of his nature: as he is what he is, so he is *what* he should be, and in every thing acts as becomes him; there is nothing wanting, nothing amiss, in God: his will is the eternal rule of equity, and he is righteous, for he doeth all according to it.

2. The righteousness of his government. He rules the world by his providence, according to the principles of justice, and never did, nor ever can, do any wrong to any of his creatures; *Upright are thy judgments*, the promises and threatenings are executions of both. Every word of God is pure, and he will be true to it; he perfectly knows the merits of every cause, and will judge accordingly.

3. The righteousness of his commands, which he has given to be the rule of our obedience; "*Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded*, which are backed with thy sovereign authority, and to which thou dost require our obedience, *are exceeding righteous and faithful*: righteousness and faithfulness itself." As he acts like himself, so his law requires that we act like ourselves, and like him; that we be just to ourselves and to all we deal with, true to all the engagements we lay ourselves under both to God and man. That which we are commanded to practise is righteous; that which we are commanded to believe is faithful. It is necessary to our faith and obedience that we be convinced of this.

139. My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.

Here is, 1. The great contempt which wicked men put upon religion; *Mine enemies have forgotten thy words*. They have often heard them, but so little did they heed them, that they soon forgot them, they willingly forgot them; not only, through carelessness, let them slip out of their minds, but contrived how to cast them behind their backs. This is at the bottom of all the wickedness of the wicked, and particularly of their malignity and enmity to the people of God; they have forgotten the words of God, else those would give check to their sinful courses.

2. The great concern which godly men shew for religion. David reckoned those his enemies who forgot the words of God, because they were enemies to religion, which he had entered into a league with, offensive and defensive. And therefore his *zeal* even *consumed him*, when he observed their impieties. He conceived such an indignation at their wickedness as preyed upon his spirits, *ate them up*, (as Christ's zeal, John, 2. 17.) swallowed up all inferior considerations, and made him forget himself. *My zeal has pressed or constrained me*; so Dr. Hammond reads it, Acts, 18. 5. Zeal against sin should constrain us to do what we can against it in our places, at least, to do so much the more in religion ourselves. The worse others are, the better we should be.

140. Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.

Here is, 1. David's great affection for the word of God; *Thy servant loves it*. Every good man, being a servant of God, loves the word of God, because it lets him know his Master's will, and directs him in his Master's work. Wherever there is grace, there is a warm attachment to the word of God.

2. The ground and reason of that affection; he saw it to be *very pure*, and therefore he loved it. Our love to the word of God is *then* an evidence of our love to God, when we love it for the sake of its purity; because it bears the image of God's holiness

and is designed to make us partakers of his holiness. It commands purity; and as it is itself refined from all corrupt mixture, so, if we receive it in the light and love of it, it will refine us from the dross of worldliness and fleshly-mindedness.

141. I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts.

Here is, 1. David pious, and yet poor. He was a man after God's own heart, one whom the King of kings did delight to honour, and yet *small and despised*, in his own account, and in the account of many others. Men's real excellency cannot always secure them from contempt; nay, it often exposes them to the scorn of some, and always makes them low in their own eyes. *God has chosen the foolish things of the world*, and it has been the common lot of his people to be a despised people.

2. David poor, and yet pious; *small and despised* for his strict and serious godliness; yet his conscience can witness for him, that he did *not forget God's precepts*. He will not throw off his religion, though it exposed him to contempt, for he knew that was designed to try his constancy. When we are *small and despised*, we have the more need to remember God's precepts, that we may have them to support us under the pressures of a low condition.

142. Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.

Observe, 1. That God's word *is righteousness*, and it is *an everlasting righteousness*; it is the rule of God's judgment, and it is consonant to his counsels from eternity, and will direct his sentence for eternity. The word of God will judge us, it will judge us in righteousness, and by it our everlasting state will be determined. This should possess us with a very great reverence for the word of God, that it is righteousness itself, the standard of righteousness, and it is everlasting in its rewards and punishments.

2. That God's word is a law, and that law is truth. See the double obligation we are under to be governed by the word of God; we are reasonable creatures, and as such we must be ruled by truth, acknowledging the force and power of it. If the principles be true, the practices must be agreeable to them, else we do not act rationally. We are creatures, and therefore subjects, and must be ruled by our Creator; and whatever he commands we are bound to obey as a law. See how these obligations are here twisted, these cords of a man: here is truth brought to the understanding, there to sit chief, and direct the motions of the whole man. But, lest the authority of that should become weak through the flesh, here is a law to bind the will, and bring that into subjection. God's truth is a law, (John, 18. 37.) and God's law is the truth; surely we cannot break such words as these asunder.

143. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.

144. The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.

These two verses are almost a repetition of the two foregoing verses, but with improvements.

1. He again professes his constant adherence to God and his duty, notwithstanding the many difficulties and discouragements he met with. He had said, (v. 141.) *I am small and despised*, and yet adhere to my duty; here he finds himself not only mean, but miserable, as far as this world could make him so. *Trouble and anguish have laid hold on me*; trouble without, anguish within; they surprised him, they seized him, they held him. Sorrows are often the lot of saints in this vale of tears; they are *in heaviness through manifold temptations*. There he had said, *Yet do I not forget thy precepts*; here he carries his constancy much higher; *Yet thy commandments are my delights*. All this trouble and anguish did not put his mouth out of taste for the comforts of the word of God, but he could still relish them, and find that peace

and pleasure in them, which all the calamities of this present time could not deprive him of. There are delights, variety of delights, in the word of God, which the saints have often the sweetest enjoyment of, when they are in trouble and anguish, 2 Cor. 1. 5.

2. He again acknowledges the everlasting righteousness of God's word as before; (v. 142.) *The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting*, and cannot be altered; and when it is admitted in its power into a soul, it is there an abiding principle, *a well of living water*, John, 4. 14. We ought to meditate much and often upon the equity and the eternity of the word of God. Here he adds, by way of inference, (1.) His prayer for grace; *Give me understanding*. Those that know much of the word of God, should still covet to know more; for there is more to be known. He does not say, "Give me a further revelation," but, *Give me a further understanding*; what is revealed, we should desire to understand, and what we know, to know better; and we must go to God for a heart to know. (2.) His hope of glory; "Give me this renewed understanding, and then *I shall live*; shall live for ever, shall be eternally happy, and shall be comforted, for the present, in the prospect of it." *This is life eternal, to know God*, John, 17. 3.

19. KOPH.

145. I cried with my whole heart: hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes. 146. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.

Here is, 1. David's good prayers, by which he sought to God for mercy; these he mentions here, not as boasting of them, or trusting to any merit in them, but reflecting upon them with comfort, that he had taken the appointed way to comfort. Observe here, (1.) That he was inward with God in prayer, he prayed *with his heart*; and the prayer is acceptable no further than the heart goes along with it. Lip-labour, if that be all, is lost labour. (2.) He was importunate with God in prayer; he cried, as one in earnest, with fervour of affection, and a holy vehemence and vigour of desire. He *cried with his whole heart*; all the powers of his soul were not only engaged and employed, but exerted to the utmost, in his prayers. Then we are likely to speed, when we thus strive and wrestle in prayer. (3.) That he directed his prayer to God; *I cried unto thee*. Whither should the child go but to his father, when any thing ails him? (4.) That the great thing he prayed for was salvation; *Save me*. A short prayer; for we mistake, if we think we shall be heard for our much speaking; but a comprehensive prayer; "Not only rescue me from ruin, but make me happy." We need desire no more than *God's salvation*, (50. 23.) and the *things that accompany it*, Heb. 6. 9. (5.) That he was earnest for an answer; and not only looked up in his prayers, but looked up after them, to see what became of them; (Ps. 5. 3.) "LORD, hear me, and let me know that thou hearest me."

2. David's good purposes, by which he bound himself to duty, when he was in the pursuit of mercy. "I will keep thy statutes; I am resolved that by thy grace I will;" for, *if we turn away our ear from hearing the law*, we cannot expect an answer of peace to our prayers, Prov. 28. 9. This purpose is used as a humble plea; (v. 146.) "Save me from my sins, my corruptions, my temptations, all the hindrances that lie in my way; that I may keep thy testimonies." We must cry for salvation, not that we may have the ease and comfort of it, but that we may have an opportunity of serving God the more cheerfully.

147. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. 148. Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate in thy word.

David goes on here to relate how he had abounded in the duty of prayer, much to his comfort and advantage: he cried unto God, offered up to him his pious and devout affections with all seriousness. Observe,

1. The handmaids of his devotion. The two great exercises that attended his prayers, and were helpful to them, were, (1.) Hope in God's word, which encouraged him to continue instant in prayer, though the answer did not come immediately; "I cried, and hoped that at last I should speed, because *the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak, and not lie*. I hoped in thy word, which I knew would not fail me." (2.) Meditation in God's word. The more intimately we converse with the word of God, and the more we dwell upon it in our thoughts, the better able we shall be to speak to God in his own language, and the better we shall know what to pray for as we ought. Reading the word will not serve, but we must meditate in it.

2. The hours of his devotion; *he prevented the dawning of the morning; nay, and the night-watches*. See here, (1.) That David was an early riser, which perhaps contributed to his eminency. He was none of those that say, *Yet a little sleep*. (2.) That he began the day with God; the first thing he did in the morning, before he admitted any business, was, to pray; when his mind was most fresh, and in the best frame. If our first thoughts in the morning be of God, it will help to keep us in his fear all the day long. (3.) That his mind was so full of God, and the cares and delights of his religion, that a little sleep served his turn; even in the *night-watches*, when he awaked from his first sleep, he would rather meditate and pray, than turn him and go to sleep again. He *esteemed the words of God's mouth more than his necessary repose*, which we can as ill spare as our food, Job, 23. 12. (4.) That he would redeem time for religious exercises; he was full of business all day, but that will excuse no man from secret devotion; it is better to take time from sleep, as David did, than not to find time for prayer. And this is our comfort, when we pray in the night, that we can never come unseasonably to the throne of grace; for we may have access to it at all hours. Baal may be asleep, but Israel's God never slumbers, nor are there any hours in which he may not be spoken with.

149. Hear my voice according unto thy loving-kindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.

Here, 1. David applies himself to God for grace and comfort, with much solemnity. He begs of God to *hear his voice*; "LORD, I have something to say to thee; shall I obtain a gracious audience?" Well, what has he to say? What is his petition, and what is his request? It is not long, but it has much in a little; "LORD, quicken me; stir me up to that which is good, and make me vigorous and lively, and cheerful in it. Let habits of grace be drawn out into act."

2. He encourages himself to hope that he shall obtain his request; for he depends, (1.) Upon God's loving-kindness; "He is good, therefore he will be good to me, who hope in his mercy. His loving-kindness manifested to me will help to quicken me, and put life into me." 2. Upon God's judgment, that is, his wisdom; "He knows what I need, and what is good for me, and therefore will quicken me." Or his promise, the word which he has spoken, mercy secured by the new covenant; *Quicken me, according to the tenor of that covenant*.

150. They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law. 151. Thou art near, O LORD; and all thy commandments are truth.

Here is, 1. The apprehension David was in of danger from his enemies. (1.) They were very malicious, and industrious in prosecuting their malicious designs; they *follow after mischief*, any mischief they could do to David or his friends; they would let slip no opportunity, nor let fall any pursuit, that might be to his hurt. (2.) They were very impious, and had no fear of God before their eyes; *They are far from thy law*; setting themselves as far as they can out of the reach of its convictions and commands. The persecutors of God's people are such as make light of God himself; we may therefore be sure that God will take his people's part against

them. (3.) They followed him close, and he was just ready to fall into their hands; *They draw nigh*, nigher than they were; so that they got ground of him: they were at his heels, just upon his back. God sometimes suffers persecutors to prevail very far against his people, so that, as David said, (1 Sam. 20. 3.) *There is but a step between them and death.* Perhaps this comes in here as a reason why David was so earnest in prayer, v. 149. God brings us into imminent perils, as he did Jacob, that, like him, we may wrestle for a blessing.

2. The assurance David had of protection with God; *"They draw nigh to destroy me, but thou art near, O Lord, to save me; not only mightier than they, and therefore able to help me against them, but nearer than they, and therefore ready to help."* It is the happiness of the saints, that, when trouble is near, God is near, and no trouble can separate between them and him. He is never far to seek, but he is within our call, and means are within his call, Deut. 4. 7. *All thy commandments are truth.* The enemies thought to defeat the promises God had made to David, but he was sure it was out of their power, they were inviolably true, and would be infallibly performed.

152. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.

This confirms what he had said in the close of the foregoing verses, *All thy commandments are truth*; he means the covenant, the word which God has commanded to a thousand generations. This is firm, as true as truth itself. For,

1. God has founded it so; he has framed it for a perpetuity; such is the constitution of it, and so well ordered is it in all things, that it cannot but be sure. The promises are *founded for ever*, so that, when heaven and earth are passed away, every iota and tittle of the promise shall stand firm, 2 Cor. 1. 20.

2. David had found it so; both by a work of God's grace upon his heart, (begetting in him a full persuasion of the truth of God's word, and enabling him to rely upon it with a full satisfaction,) and by the works of his providence on his behalf, fulfilling the promise beyond what he expected. Thus he *knew of old*, from the days of his youth, ever since he began to look toward God, that the word of God is what one may venture one's all upon. This assurance was confirmed by the observations and experiences of his own life, all along, and of others that had gone before him in the ways of God. All that ever dealt with God, and trusted in him, will own that they have found him faithful.

20. RESH.

153. Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law. **154.** Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.

Here, 1. David prays for succour in distress. *Is any afflicted? Let him pray*; let him pray as David does here. (1.) He has an eye to God's pity, and prays, *"Consider mine affliction*; take it into thy thoughts, and all the circumstances of it, and sit not by as one unconcerned." God is never unmindful of his people's afflictions, but he will have us to *put him in remembrance*, (Isa. 43. 26.) to spread our case before him, and then leave it to his compassionate consideration to do in it as in his wisdom he shall think fit, in his own time and way. (2.) He has an eye to God's power, and prays, *Deliver me*; and again, *"Deliver me*; consider my troubles, and bring me out of them." God has promised deliverance; (50. 15.) and we may pray for it, with submission to his will, and with regard to his glory, that we may serve him the better. (3.) He has an eye to God's righteousness, and prays, *"Plead my cause*; be thou my Patron and Advocate, and take me for thy client." David had a just cause, but his adversaries were many and mighty, and he was in danger of being run down by them; he therefore begs of God to clear his integrity, and silence their false accusations. *If God do not plead his people' cause, who will? He is righteous, and they commit*

themselves to him, and therefore he will do it, and do it effectually, Isa. 51. 22. Jer. 50. 34. (4.) He has an eye to God's grace, and prays, *"Quicken me*; Lord, I am weak, and unable to hear my troubles; my spirit is apt to droop and sink. O that thou wouldest revive and comfort me, till the deliverance is wrought!"

2. He pleads his dependence upon the word of God, and upon his guidance; *Quicken, and deliver me, according to thy word of promise, for I do not forget thy precepts.* The closer we cleave to the word of God, both as our rule, and as our stay, the more assurance we may have of deliverance in due time.

155. Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.

Here is, 1. The description of wicked men; they do not only not do God's statutes, but they do not so much as seek them; they do not acquaint themselves with them, nor so much as desire to know their duty, or in the least endeavour to do it. Those are wicked indeed, who do not think the law of God worth inquiring after, but are altogether regardless of it, being resolved to live at large, and to walk in the way of their heart.

2. Their doom; *Salvation is far from them.* They cannot upon any good grounds promise themselves temporal deliverance. *Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.* How can they expect to seek God's favour with success, when they are in adversity, who never sought his statutes, when they were in prosperity? But eternal salvation is certainly far from them. They flatter themselves with a conceit that it is near, and that they are going to heaven; but they are mistaken, it is far from them, they thrust it from them, by thrusting the Saviour from them; it is so far from them, that they cannot reach it, and the longer they persist in sin, the further it is; nay, while salvation is far from them, damnation is near; it slumbers not; *Behold, the Judge stands before the door.*

156. Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments.

Here, 1. David admires God's grace; *Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord.* The goodness of God's nature, as it his glory, so it is the joy of all the saints; his mercies are tender, for he is full of compassion; they are many, they are great, a fountain that can never be exhausted; he is rich in mercy to all that call upon him. He had spoken of the misery of the wicked, (v. 155.) but God is good notwithstanding; there were tender mercies sufficient in God to have saved them, if they had not *despised the riches of those mercies.* They that are delivered from the sinner's doom, are bound for ever to own the greatness of God's mercies which delivered them.

2. He begs for God's grace, reviving, quickening, grace, *according to his judgments*, according to the tenor of the new covenant, that established rule by which he goes in dispensing that grace. Or, according to his manner, his custom or usage with those that love his name, v. 132.

157. Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.

Here is, 1. David surrounded with difficulties and dangers; *Many are my persecutors and mine enemies.* When Saul, the king, was his persecutor and enemy, no marvel that many more were so; multitudes will follow the pernicious ways of abused authority. David, being a public person, had many enemies, but withal he had many friends, who loved him and wished him well, let him set the one over against the other. In this, David was a type both of Christ and his church. The enemies, the persecutors of both, are many, very many.

2. David established in the way of his duty, notwithstanding; *"Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies*, as knowing that, while I adhere to them, God is for me; and then no matter who is against me." A man who is steady in the way of his duty, though he may have many enemies, needs fear none.

158. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.

Here is, 4. David's sorrow for the wickedness of the wicked. Though he conversed much at home, yet sometimes he looked abroad, and could not but see the wicked walking on every side. He beheld the transgressors, those whose sins were open before all men, and it grieved him to see them dishonour God, serve Satan, debauch the world, and ruin their own souls; to see the transgressors so numerous, so daring, so very impudent, and so industrious to draw unstable souls into their snares. All this cannot but be a grief to those who have any regard to the glory of God, and the welfare of mankind.

2. The reason of that sorrow. He was grieved, not because they were vexatious to him, but because they were provoking to God; *They kept not thy word.* They that hate sin truly, hate it as sin, as a transgression of the law of God, and a violation of his word.

159. Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy loving-kindness.

Here is, 1. David's appeal to God concerning his love to his precepts; "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love them; consider it then, and deal with me as thou usest to deal with those that love thy word, which thou hast magnified above all thy name." He does not say, "Consider how I fulfil thy precepts;" he was conscious to himself, that in many things he came short; but, "Consider how I love them." Our obedience is then only pleasing to God, and pleasant to ourselves, when it comes from a principle of love.

2. His petition thereupon; "Quicken me, to do my duty with vigour; revive me, keep me alive; not according to any merit of mine, though I love thy word, but according to thy loving kindness;" to that we owe our lives, nay, that is better than life itself. We need not desire to be quickened any further than God's loving-kindness will quicken us.

160. Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

David here comforts himself with the faithfulness of God's word, for the encouragement of himself and others to rely upon it.

1. It has always been found faithful hitherto, and never failed any that ventured upon it. *It is true from the beginning.* Ever since God began to reveal himself to the children of men, all he said was true, and to be trusted. The church, from its beginning, was built upon this rock. It has not gained its validity by track of time, as many governments, whose best plea is prescription and long usage. *Quod initio non valet, traetu temporis convalescit—That which, at first, wanted validity, in the progress of time, acquired it.* But the beginning of God's word was true, so some read it; his government was laid on a sure foundation. And all, in every age, that have received God's word in faith and love, have found every saying in it faithful and well worthy of all acceptance.

2. It will be found faithful to the end, because righteous; Every one of the judgments endures for ever unalterable, and of perpetual obligation; adjusting men's everlasting doom.

21. SCHIN.

161. Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.

David here lets us know,

1. How he was discouraged in his duty by the fear of man; *Princes persecuted him.* They looked upon him as a traitor and an enemy to the government, and under that notion sought his life, and bid him go serve other gods, 1 Sam. 26. 19. It has been the common lot of the best men to be persecuted; and the case is the worse, if princes be the persecutors, for they have not only the sword in their hand, and therefore can do the more hurt, but

they have the law on their side, and can do it with reputation and a colour of justice. It is sad that the power which magistrates have from God, and should use for him, should ever be employed against him. But, *marvel not at the matter*, Eccl. 5. 8. It was a comfort to David, that, when princes persecuted him, he could truly say it was without cause, he never gave them any provocation.

2. How he was kept to his duty, notwithstanding, by the fear of God; "They would make me stand in awe of them and their word, and do as they bid me; but *my heart stands in awe of thy word*, and I was resolved to please God, and keep in with him, whoever is displeased, and falls out with me." Every gracious soul stands in awe of the word of God, of the authority of its precepts, and the terror of its threatenings; and to those that do so, nothing appears, in the power and wrath of man, at all formidable. We ought to obey God rather than men, and to make sure of God's favour, though we throw ourselves under the frowns of all the world, Luke, 12. 4, 5. The heart that stands in awe of God's word, is armed against the temptations that arise from persecution.

162. I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.

Here is, 1. The pleasure David took in the word of God. He rejoiced at it, rejoiced that God had made such a discovery of his mind, that Israel was blessed with that light, when other nations sat in darkness; that he was himself let into the understanding of it, and had had experience of the power of it. He took a pleasure in reading it, hearing it, and meditating on it, and every thing he met with in it was agreeable to him. He had just now said, that his heart stood in awe of his word, and yet here, that he rejoiced in it; the more reverence we have for the word of God, the more joy we shall find in it.

2. The degree of that pleasure, *as one that finds great spoil.* This supposes a victory over the enemy. It is through much opposition that a soul comes to this, to rejoice in God's word. But, besides the pleasure and honour of a conquest, there is great advantage gained by the plunder of the field, which adds much to the joy. By the word of God we become more than conquerors, that is, unspeakable gainers.

163. I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.

Love and hatred are the leading affections of the soul; if those be fixed right, the rest move accordingly. Here we have them fixed right in David.

1. He had a rooted antipathy to sin, he could not endure to think of it; *I hate and abhor lying*; which may be taken for all sin, inasmuch as by it we deal treacherously and perfidiously with God, and put a cheat upon ourselves. Hypocrisy is lying; false doctrine is lying; breach of faith is lying. Lying, in commerce or conversation, is a sin, which every good man hates and abhors, hates and doubly hates, because of the seven things which the Lord hates, *one is a lying tongue*, and *another is a false witness that speaks lies*, Prov. 6. 16. Every man hates to have a lie told him; but we should more hate telling a lie, because by the former we only receive an affront from men, by the latter we give an affront to God.

2. He had a rooted affection to the word of God; *Thy law do I love.* And therefore he abhorred lying, for lying is contrary to the whole law of God; and the reason why he loved the law of God, was, because of the truth of it. The more we see of the amiable beauty of truth, the more we shall see of the detestable deformity of a lie.

164. Seven times a day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments.

David, in this psalm, is full of complaints, yet those did neither jumble out his praises, nor put him out of tune for them; whatever condition a child of God is in, he does not want matter for praise, and therefore should not want a heart. See here,

1. How often David praised God; *Seven times a day*, very frequently; not only every day, but often every day. Many think that once a week will serve, or once or twice a day, but David would praise God *seven times a day* at least. Praising God is a duty which we should very much abound in.

We must praise God at every meal, praise him upon all occasions, in every thing give thanks. We should praise God *seven times a day*, for the subject can never be exhausted, and our affections should never be tired. See v. 62.

2. What he praised God for; *because of thy righteous judgments*. We must praise God for his precepts, which are all just and good, for his promises and threatenings, and the performance of both in his providence. We are to praise God even for our afflictions, if through grace we get good by them.

165. Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

Here is an account of the happiness of good men, who are governed by a principle of love to the word of God, that make it their rule, and are ruled by it.

1. They are easy, and have a holy serenity: none enjoy themselves more than they do; *Great peace have they that love thy law*, abundant satisfaction in doing their duty, and pleasure in reflecting upon it. *The work of righteousness is peace*, (Isa. 32. 17.) such peace as the world can neither give nor take away. They may be in great troubles without, and yet enjoy great peace within; *sat lucis intus—abundance of internal light*. They that love the world have great vexation, for it does not answer their expectation; they that love God's word have great peace, for it outdoes their expectation, and in it they have sure footing.

2. They are safe, and have a holy security; *Nothing shall offend them*; nothing shall be scandal, snare, or stumbling-block, to them, to entangle them either in guilt or grief. No event of providence shall be either an invincible temptation or an intolerable affliction to them, but their love to the word of God shall enable them both to hold fast their integrity and to preserve their tranquillity. They will make the best of that which is, and not quarrel with any thing that God does. *Nothing shall offend or hurt them*, for every thing shall work for good to them, and therefore shall please them, and they reconcile themselves to it. They, in whom this holy love reigns, will not be apt to perplex themselves with needless scruples, or to take offence at their brethren, 1 Cor. 13. 6, 7.

166. LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.

Here is the whole duty of man; for we are taught,

1. To keep our eye upon God's favour as our end; "*Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation*, not only temporal but eternal salvation. I have hoped for that as my happiness, and laid up my treasure in it; I have hoped for it as thine, as a happiness of thy preparing, thy promising, and which consists in being with thee. Hope of this has raised me above the world, and borne me up under all my burthens in it."

2. To keep our eye upon God's word as our rule, *I have done thy commandments*; I have made conscience of conforming myself to thy will in every thing. Observe here how God has joined these two together, and let no man put them asunder. We cannot, upon good grounds, hope for God's salvation, unless we set ourselves to do his commandments, Rev. 22. 14. But those that sincerely endeavour to do his commandments, ought to keep up a good hope of the salvation; and that hope will both engage and enlarge the heart in doing the commandments. The more lively the hope is, the more lively the obedience will be.

167. My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly. 168. I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.

David's conscience here witnesses for him,

1. That his practices were good. (1.) He loved God's testimonies, he loved them exceedingly. Our love to the word of God must be a superlative love; we must love it better than the wealth and pleasure of this world; and it must be a victorious love, such as will subdue and mortify our lusts, and extirpate carnal afflictions. (2.) He kept them, his soul kept them; bodily exercise profits little in religion, we must make heart-work of it, or we make nothing of it. The soul must be sanctified and renewed, and delivered into the mould of the word; the soul must be employed in glorifying God, for he will be worshipped in the spirit. We must keep both the precepts and the testimonies, the commands of God by our obedience to them, and his promises by our reliance on them.

2. That he was governed herein by a good principle; "*Therefore I have kept thy precepts, because by faith I have seen thine eye always upon me, all my ways are before thee*; thou knowest every step I take, and strictly observest all I say and do. Thou dost see and accept all that I say and do well; thou dost see and art displeased with all I say and do amiss." Note, The consideration of this, that God's eye is upon us at all times, should make us very careful in every thing to keep his commandments, Gen. 17. 1.

22. TAU.

169. Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word. 170. Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.

Here is, 1. A general petition for audience repeated; *Let my cry come near before thee*; and again, *Let my supplication come before thee*. He calls his prayer his *cry*, which denotes the fervency and vehemence of it; and his *supplication*, which denotes the humility of it; we must come to God as beggars come to our doors for an alms. He is concerned that his prayer might come before God, might come near before him, that he might have grace and strength by faith and fervency to lift up his prayers; that no guilt might interpose to shut out his prayers, and to separate between him and God, and that God would graciously receive his prayers and take notice of them. His prayer, that his supplication might come before God, implies a deep sense of his unworthiness, and a holy fear that his prayer should come short or miscarry, as not fit to come before God; nor would any of our prayers have had access to God, if Jesus Christ had not approached to him as an Advocate for us.

2. Two particular requests, which he is thus earnest to present. (1.) That God, by his grace, would give him wisdom to conduct himself well under his troubles; *Give me understanding*; he means that wisdom of the prudent, which is, to understand his way; "*Give me to know thee and myself, and my duty to thee*." (2.) That God, by his providence, would rescue him out of his troubles. *Deliver me*; with the temptation make a way to escape, 1 Cor. 10. 13.

3. The same general plea to enforce these requests, *according to thy word*. This directs and limits his desires; "*Lord, give me such an understanding as thou hast promised, and such a deliverance as thou hast promised, I ask for no other*." It also encourages his faith and expectation; "*Lord, that which I pray for is what thou hast promised, and wilt not thou be as good as thy word?*"

171. My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.

Here is, 1. A great favour which David expects from God, that he will teach him *his statutes*. This he had often prayed for in this psalm, and urged his petition for it with various arguments; and, now that he is drawing toward the close of the psalm, he speaks of it as taken for granted. They that are humbly earnest with God for his grace, and resolve with Jacob that they will not let him go unless he bless them with spiritual blessings, may be

humbly confident that they shall, at length, obtain what they are so importunate for. The God of Israel will grant them those things which they request of him.

2. The grateful sense he promises to have of that favour; *My lips shall utter praise when thou hast taught me.* (1.) Then he shall have cause to praise God. Those that are taught of God have a great deal of reason to be thankful, for this is the foundation of all these spiritual blessings, which are the best blessings, and the earnest of eternal blessings. (2.) Then he shall know how to praise God, and have a heart to it. All that are taught of God are taught this lesson; when God opens the understanding, opens the heart, and so opens the lips, it is that the mouth may shew forth his praise. We have learned nothing to purpose, if we have not learned to praise God. (3.) *Therefore* he is thus importunate for divine instructions, that he might praise God. They that pray for God's grace, must aim at God's glory, Eph. 1.12.

172. My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.

Observe here, 1. The good knowledge David had of the word of God; he knew it so well, that he was ready to own, with the utmost satisfaction, that all God's commandments are not only righteous, but righteousness itself, the rule and standard of righteousness. 2. The good use he resolved to make of that knowledge; *My tongue shall speak of thy word*; not only utter praise for it to the glory of God, but discourse of it for the instruction and edification of others; as that which he was himself full of, (for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak,) and as that which he desired others also might be filled with. The more we see of the righteousness of God's commandments, the more industrious we should be to bring others acquainted with them, that they may be ruled by them. We should always make the word of God the governor of our discourse, so as never to transgress it by sinful speaking, or sinful silence; and we should often make it the subject-matter of our discourse, that it may feed many, and *minister grace to the hearers*.

173. Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. 174. I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight.

Here, 1. David prays that divine grace would work for him; *Let thine hand help me.* He finds his own hands are not sufficient for him, nor can any creature lend him a helping hand to any purpose; therefore he looks up to God in hopes that the hand that had made him would help him; for if the Lord do not help us, whence can any creature help us? All our help must be expected from God's hand, from his power and his bounty.

2. He pleads what divine grace had already wrought in him, as a pledge of further mercy, being a qualification for it. Three things he pleads;

(1.) That he had made religion his serious and deliberate choice; *"I have chosen thy precepts."* I took them for my rule, not because I knew no other, but because, upon trial, I knew no better. Those are good, and do good indeed, who are good and do good, not by chance, but by choice; and those who have thus chosen God's precepts, may depend upon God's helping hand in all their services, and under all their sufferings.

(2.) That his heart was upon heaven; *I have longed for thy salvation.* David, when he was got to the throne, met with enough in the world to court his stay, and to make him say, "It is good to be here;" but, still he was looking further, and longing for something better in another world. There is an eternal salvation which all the saints are longing for, and therefore pray that God's hand would help them forward in their way to it.

(3.) That he took pleasure in doing his duty; *"Thy law is my delight."* Not only I delight in it, but it is my delight, the greatest delight I have in this world. Those that are cheerful in their obedience may in faith beg help of God to carry them on in their obedience; and those that expect God's salvation must take delight in his law, and their hopes must increase their delight.

175. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.

David's heart is still upon praising God; and therefore, 1. He prays that God would give him time to praise him; *"Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee"*; let my life be prolonged, that I may live to thy glory. The reason why a good man desires to live, is, that he may praise God in the land of the living, and do something to his honour. Not, "Let me live and serve my country, live and provide for my family;" but, "Let me live, that, in doing this, I may praise God here in this world of conflict and opposition." When we die, we hope to go to a better world to praise him; and that is more agreeable for us, but here there is more need of us. And therefore one would not desire to live any longer than we may do God some service here. *Let my soul live*: let me be sanctified and comforted; these are the life of the soul, and then it shall praise thee. Our souls must be employed in praising God, and *therefore* we must pray for grace and peace, that we may be fitted to praise God.

2. He prays that God would give him strength to praise him; *"Let thy judgments help me"*; let all ordinances and all providences (both are God's judgments) "further me in glorifying God; let them be the matter of my praise, and let them help to fit me for that work."

176. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

Here is, 1. A penitent confession; *I have gone astray, or wander up down like a lost sheep.* As unconverted sinners are like lost sheep, (Luke, 15.4.) so weak unsteady saints are like lost sheep, Matth. 18.12,13. We are apt to wander like the sheep, and very unapt, when we have gone astray, to find the way again. By going astray we lose the comfort of the green pastures, and expose ourselves to a thousand mischiefs.

2. A believing petition; *Seek thy servant*, as the good shepherd seeks a wandering sheep to bring it back again, Ezek. 34.12. "Lord, seek me, as I used to seek my sheep when they went astray;" for David had been himself a tender shepherd. "Lord, own me for one of thine; for though I am a stray sheep, I have thy mark; concern thyself for me, send after me by the word, and conscience, and providences; bring me back by thy grace." *Seek me*, that is, *Find me*; for God never seeks in vain. *Turn me, and I shall be turned*

3. An obedient plea; "Though I have gone astray, yet I have not wickedly departed, *I do not forget thy commandments.*" Thus he concludes the psalm with a penitent sense of his own sin, and a believing dependence on God's grace. With these a devout Christian will conclude his duties, will conclude his life; he will live and die, repenting and praying. Observe here, (1.) It is the character of good people, that they do not forget God's commandments, being well-pleased with their convictions, and well-settled in their resolutions. (2.) Even those who, through grace, are mindful of their duty, cannot but own that they have in many instances wandered from it. (3.) Those that have wandered from their duty, if they continue mindful of it, may with a humble confidence commit themselves to the care of God's grace.

PSALM CXX.

This psalm is the first of those fifteen which are here put together under the title of songs of degrees. It is well that it is not material what the meaning of that title should be, for nothing is offered toward the explication of it, no, not by the Jewish writers themselves, but what is conjectural. These psalms do not seem to be composed all by the same hand, much less all at the same time. Four of them are expressly ascribed to David, and one said to be designed for Solomon, and perhaps penned by him; yet Ps. 126. and 129. seem to be of a much later date; some of them are calculated for the closet, (as 120, 130.) some for the family, (as 127, 128.) some for the public assembly, (as 122, 131.) and some occasional, as 121, 132. So that, it should seem, they had not this title from the author, but from the publisher. Some conjecture that they are so called from their singular excellency; as the song of songs, so the song of degrees, is a most excellent song, in the highest degree. Others, from the tune they were set to, or the musical instruments they were sung to, or the raising of the voice in singing them. Some think they were sung on the fifteen steps or stairs, by which they went up from the outward court of the

temple to the inner; others, at so many stages of the people's journey, when they returned out of captivity. I shall only observe, 1. That they are all short psalms, (all but one very short, three of them have but three verses apiece,) and that they are placed next to Ps. 119. which is by much the longest of all. Now as that was one psalm divided into many parts, so these were many psalms, which, being short, were sometimes sung altogether, and made, as it were, one psalm, observing only a pause between each; as many steps make one pair of stairs. 2. That, in the composition of them, we frequently meet with the figure they call climax or an ascent; the preceding word repeated, and then rising to something further, as 120. With him that hated peace, I peace. 121. From whence cometh my help, my help cometh. He that keepeth thee, shall not slumber, he that keepeth Israel. 122. Within thy gates, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem is builded. 123. Until he that have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us. And the like in most of them, if not all. Perhaps for one of these reasons they are called songs of degrees.

This psalm is supposed to have been penned by David upon occasion of Doeg's accusing him and the priests to Saul, because it is like Ps. 52. which was penned on that occasion; and because the psalmist complains of his being driven out of the congregation of the Lord, and his being forced among barbarous people. I. He prays to God to deliver him from the mischief designed him by false and malicious tongues, v. 1, 2. II. He threatens the judgments of God against such, v. 3, 4. III. He complains of his wicked neighbours that were quarrelsome and vexatious, v. 5, 7. In singing this psalm, we may comfort ourselves in reference to the scourge of the tongue, when at any time we fall unjustly under the lash of it, that better than we have smarted for it.

A song of degrees.

1. **I**N my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me. 2. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue. 3. What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.

Here is,

1. Deliverance from a false tongue obtained by prayer; David records his own experience of this.

(1.) He was brought into distress, into great distress, by *lying lips, and a deceitful tongue*. There were those that sought his ruin, and had almost effected it by lying. [1.] By telling lies to him. They flattered him with professions and protestations of friendship, and promises of kindness and service to him, that they might the more securely, and without suspicion, carry on their designs against him, and might have an opportunity, by betraying his counsels, to do him a mischief. They smiled in his face and kissed him, then when they were aiming to smite him under the fifth rib. The most dangerous enemies, and those which it is most hard to guard against, are such as carry on their malicious designs under the colour of friendship. The Lord deliver every good man from such lying lips. [2.] By telling lies of him. They forged false accusations against him, and *laid to his charge things that he knew not*.

This has often been the lot not only of the innocent, but of the excellent, ones of the earth, who have been greatly distressed by lying lips, and have not only had their names blackened and made odious by calumnies in conversation, but their lives, and all that is dear to them in this world, endangered by false-witness bearing in judgment. David was herein a type of Christ, who was distressed by lying lips and deceitful tongues.

(2.) In this distress he had recourse to God by faithful and fervent prayer; *I cried unto the Lord*. Having no fence against false tongues, he appealed to him who has all men's hearts in his hand, who has power over the consciences of bad men, and can, when he pleases, bridle their tongues. His prayer was, "*Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips*, that my enemies may not by these cursed methods work my ruin." He that had prayed so earnestly to be kept from lying, (119. 29.) and hated it so heartily in himself, (v. 163.) might with the more confidence pray to be kept from being belied by others, and from the ill consequences of it.

(3.) He obtained a gracious answer to this prayer; God heard him; so that his enemies, though they carried their designs very far, were baffled at last, and could not prevail to do him the mischief they intended. The God of truth is, and will be, the Protector of his people from lying lips, 37. 6.

2. The doom of a false tongue foretold by faith, v. 3, 4. As

God will preserve his people from this mischievous generation, so he will reckon with their enemies, 12. 3, 7. The threatening is addressed to the sinner himself, for the awakening of his conscience, if he have any left; "*Consider what shall be given unto thee, and what shall be done unto thee*, by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, *thou false tongue*." Surely sinners durst not do as they do, if they knew, and would be persuaded to think, what will be in the end thereof. Let liars consider what shall be given to them; *Sharp arrows of the Almighty, with coals of juniper*; they will fall and lie for ever under the wrath of God, and will be made miserable by the tokens of his displeasure, which will fly swiftly like arrows, and will strike the sinner ere he is aware, and when he sees not who hurts him. This is threatened against liars, (64. 7.) *God shall shoot at them with an arrow, suddenly shall they be wounded*. They set God at a distance from them, but from afar his arrows can reach them. They are *sharp arrows, and arrows of the mighty*, the Almighty; for they will pierce through the strongest armour, and strike deep into the hardest heart. The terrors of the Lord are his arrows, (Job, 6. 4.) and his wrath is compared to *burning coals of juniper*, which do not flame or crackle, like thorns under a pot, but have a vehement heat, and keep fire very long; some say a year round, even when they seem to be gone out. This is the portion of the false tongue; for all that love and make a lie shall have their portion in the lake that burns eternally, Rev. 22. 15.

5. Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents Kedar! 6. My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. 7. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.

The psalmist here complains of the bad neighbourhood into which he was driven; and some apply the two foregoing verses to this; What shall the deceitful tongue give, what shall it do to those that lie open to it? What shall a man get by living among such malicious deceitful men? Nothing but *sharp arrows, and coals of juniper*, all the mischiefs of a false and spiteful tongue, 57. 4. *Woe is me*, says David, that I am forced to dwell among such, *that I sojourn in Mesech and Kedar*! Not that David dwelt in the country of Mesech or Kedar; we never find him so far off from his own native country; but he dwelt among rude and barbarous people, like the inhabitants of Mesech and Kedar: as when we would describe an ill neighbourhood, we say, *We dwell among Turks and heathens*: this made him cry out, *Woe is me*!

1. He was forced to live at a distance from the ordinances of God. While he was in banishment, he looked upon himself as a sojourner, never at home but when he was near God's altars; and he cries out, "*Woe is me*, that my sojourning is prolonged, that I cannot get home to my resting-place, but am still kept at a distance!" So some read it. Note, A good man cannot think himself at home while he is banished from God's ordinances, and has not them within reach. And it is a great grief to all that love God, to want the means of grace, and of communion with God: when they are under a force of that kind, they cannot but cry out, as David here, *Woe is me*!

2. He was forced to live among wicked people, who were, upon many accounts, troublesome to him. He *dwelt in the tents of Kedar*, where the shepherds were probably in an ill name for being litigious, like the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot. It is a very grievous burthen to a good man to be cast into, and kept in, the company of those whom he hopes to be for ever separated from; (like Lot in Sodom; 2 Pet. 2. 8.) to dwell long with such is grievous indeed, for they are thorns, vexing, and scratching, and tearing, and who will shew the old enmity that is in the *seed of the serpent*, against the *seed of the woman*. Those that David dwelt with, were such as not only hated him, but hated peace, and proclaimed war with it; who might write on their weapons of war, not *Sic sequimur pacem*—*Thus we aim at peace*, but *Sic persequimur*—*Thus we persecute*. Perhaps Saul's court was the Mesech and Kedar in which David dwelt, and Saul was the man he means that hated peace, whom David studied to oblige, and could not;

but the more service he did him, the more exasperated he was against him.

See here, (1.) The character of a very good man in David, who could truly say, though he was a man of war, *I am for peace*, for living peaceably with all men, and unpeaceably with none. *I peace*, so it is in the original; "I love peace, and pursue peace; my disposition is to peace, and my delight is in it. I pray for peace, and strive for peace, will do any thing, submit to any thing, part with any thing, in reason, for peace. *I am for peace*, and have made it to appear that I am so." *The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable.*

(2.) The character of the worst of bad men in David's enemies, who would pick quarrels with those that were most peaceably disposed; "When *I speak*, they are for war; and the more forward for war, the more they find me inclined to peace." He spake with all the respect and kindness that could be; proposed methods of accommodation, spake reason, spake love; but they would not so much as hear him patiently, but cried out, "To arms, to arms;" so fierce and implacable were they, and so bent to mischief. Such were Christ's enemies: for his love they were his adversaries, and for his good words and good works they stoned him. If we meet with such enemies, we must not think it strange, nor love peace the less for our seeking it in vain. *Be not overcome of evil*, no not of such evil as this, but, even when thus tried, still try to overcome evil with good.

PSALM CXXI.

Some call this the soldier's psalm, and think it was penned in the camp, when David was jeoparding his life in the high-places of the field, and thus trusted God to cover his head in the day of battle. Others call it the traveller's psalm. (for there is nothing in it of military dangers,) and think David penned it when he was going abroad, and designed it, pro vehiculo—for the carriage, for a good man's convoy and companion in a journey or voyage. But we need not thus appropriate it; wherever we are, at home or abroad, we are exposed to danger more than we are aware of; and this psalm directs and encourages us to repose ourselves and our confidence in God, and by faith to put ourselves under his protection, and commit ourselves to his care, which we must do, with an entire resignation and satisfaction, in singing this psalm. I. David here assures himself of help from God, v. 1, 2. II. He assures others of it, v. 3..8.

A song of degrees.

I WILL lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. 2. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. 3. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. 4. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. 5. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. 6. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. 7. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. 8. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

This psalm teaches us,

I. To stay ourselves upon God as a God of power, and a God all-sufficient for us. David did so, and found the benefit of it.

1. We must not rely upon creatures, upon men and means, instruments and second causes, nor make flesh our arm: "Shall I lift up mine eyes to the hills? (so some read it.) "Does my help come from thence? Shall I depend upon the powers of the earth; upon the strength of the hills; upon princes and great men, who, like hills, fill the earth, and mount their heads toward heaven? No; *in vain is salvation hoped for from hills and mountains*, Jer. 3. 23. I never expect help to come from them, my confidence is in God only." *We must lift up our eyes above the hills*, so some read it; we must look beyond instruments to God, who makes them that to us which they are. 2. We must see all our help laid up in God, in his power and goodness, his providence and grace; and from him we must expect it to come; "My help comes from the

Lord: the help I desire is what he sends, and from him I expect it in his own way and time. If he do not help, no creature can help; if he do, no creature can hinder, can hurt." 3. We must fetch in help from God, by faith in his promises, and a due regard to all his institutions; "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills;" (probably he means the hills on which the temple was built, mount Moriah, and the holy hill of Zion, where the ark of the covenant is, the oracle, and the altars;) "I will have an eye to the special presence of God in his church, and with his people, (his presence by promise,) and not only to his common presence." When he was at a distance, he would look toward the sanctuary; (28. 2.—42. 6.) *from thence cometh our help*, from the word and prayer, from the secret of his tabernacle. *My help cometh from the Lord*, so the word is, (v. 2.) *from before the Lord, or from the sight and presence of the Lord*. "Which (says Dr. Hammond) may refer to Christ incarnate, with whose humanity the Deity being inseparably united, God is always present with him, and through him with us, for whom, sitting at God's right hand, he constantly maketh intercession." Christ is called the *angel of his presence*, that saved his people, Isa. 63. 9. 4. We must encourage our confidence in God with this, that he made heaven and earth, and he who did that can do any thing. He made the world out of nothing, himself alone, by a word's speaking, in a little time, and all very good, very excellent and beautiful; and therefore, how great soever our straits and difficulties are, he has power sufficient for our succour and relief. He that made heaven and earth is sovereign Lord of all the hosts of both, and can make use of them as he pleases for the help of his people, and restrain them when he pleases from hurting his people.

II. To comfort ourselves in God, when our difficulties and dangers are greatest. It is here promised, that if we put our trust in God, and keep in the way of our duty, we shall be safe under his protection, so that no real evil, no mere evil, shall happen to us, nor any affliction, but what God sees good for us, and will do us good by.

1. God himself has undertaken to be our Protector; *The Lord is thy Keeper*, v. 5. Whatever charge he gives his angels to keep his people, he has not thereby discharged himself, so that whether every particular saint has an angel for his guardian or no, we are sure he has God himself for his Guardian. It is infinite wisdom that contrives, and infinite power that works, the safety of those that have put themselves under God's protection. Those must needs be well kept, that have the Lord for their Keeper. If, by affliction, they be made his prisoners, yet still he is their Keeper.

2. The same that is the Protector of the church in general, is engaged for the preservation of every particular believer; the same wisdom, the same power, the same promises. *He that keepeth Israel*, (v. 4.) *is thy Keeper*, v. 5. The Shepherd of the flock is the Shepherd of every sheep, and will take care, that not one, even of the little ones, shall perish.

3. He is a wakeful, watchful, Keeper; "He that keepeth Israel, that keepeth thee, O Israelite, shall neither slumber nor sleep; he never did, or ever will, for he is never weary; he not only does not sleep, but he does not so much as slumber; he has not the least inclination to sleep."

4. He not only protects those whom he is the Keeper of, but he refreshes them; *He is their Shade*. The comparison has a great deal of gracious condescension in it; the eternal Being who is infinite Substance, is what he is, in order that he may speak sensible comfort to his people, promises to be their *Umbra*—their *Shadow*, to keep as close to them as the shadow does to the body, and to shelter them from the scorching heat, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, Isa. 32. 2. Under this shadow they may sit with delight and assurance, Cant. 2. 3.

5. He is always near to his people for their protection and refreshment, and never at a distance; he is their *Keeper* and *Shade on their right hand*; so that he is never far to seek. The right hand is the working hand; let them but turn themselves dexterously to their duty, and they shall find God ready to them, to assist them, and give them success, Ps. 16. 8.

He is not only at their right hand, but he will also keep the

feet of his saints, 1 Sam. 2. 9. He will have an eye upon them in their motions; *he will not suffer thy foot to be moved.* God will provide that his people shall not be tempted above what they are able, shall not fall into sin, though they may be very near it, (73. 2, 23.) shall not fall into trouble, though there be many endeavouring to undermine them by fraud, or overthrow them by force. He will keep them from being frightened, as we are when we slip or stumble, and are ready to fall.

7. He will protect them from all the malignant influences of the heavenly bodies; (v. 6.) *The sun shall not smite thee, with his heat by day, nor the moon, with her cold and moisture, by night.* The sun and moon are great blessings to mankind, and yet (such a sad change has sin made in the creation) even the sun and moon, though worshipped by a great part of mankind, are often instruments of hurt and distemper to human bodies; God by them often smites us; but his favour shall interpose so, that they shall not damage his people. He will keep them *night and day*, (Isa. 27. 3.) as he kept Israel in the wilderness by a *pillar of cloud by day*, which screened them from the heat of the sun, and of *fire by night*, which probably diffused a gentle warmth over the whole camp, that they might not be prejudiced by the cold and damp of the night; their father Jacob having complained, (Gen. 31. 40.) that *by day the drought consumed him, and the frost by night.* It may be understood figuratively; "Thou shalt not be hurt either by the open assaults of thine enemies, which are as visible as the scorching beams of the sun, or by their secret treacherous attempts, which are like the insensible insinuations of the cold by night."

8. His protection will make them safe in every respect; "*The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil*, the evil of sin, and the evil of trouble. He shall prevent the evil thou fearest, and shall sanctify, remove, or lighten, the evil thou feelest. He will keep thee from *doing evil*, (2 Cor. 13. 7.) and so far from suffering evil, that, whatever affliction happens to thee, there shall be no evil in it. Even that which kills, shall not hurt."

9. It is the spiritual life especially that God will take under his protection; *He shall preserve thy soul.* All souls are his; and the soul is the man, and therefore he will with a peculiar care preserve them, that they be not defiled by sin, and disturbed by affliction. He will keep them, by keeping us in the possession of them; and he will preserve them from perishing eternally.

10. He will keep us in all our ways; "*He shall preserve thy going out and coming in.*" Thou shalt be under his protection in all thy journeys and voyages, outward-bound or homeward-bound, as he kept Israel in the wilderness, in their removes and rests. He will prosper thee in all thy affairs at home and abroad, in the beginning and in the conclusion of them. He will keep thee in life and death, thy going out and going on while thou livest, and thy coming in when thou diest; going out to thy labour in the morning of thy days, and coming home to thy rest when the evening of old age calls thee in," 104. 23.

11. He will continue his care over us *from this time forth and even for evermore.* It is a protection for life, never out of date. "He will be thy Guide *even unto death*, and will then hide thee in the grave, hide thee in heaven. He will *preserve thee in his heavenly kingdom.*" God will protect his church and his saints always, *even to the end of the world.* The Spirit, who is their Preserver and Comforter, shall abide with them for ever.

PSALM CXXII.

This psalm seems to have been penned by David for the use of the people of Israel, when they came up to Jerusalem, to worship at the three solemn feasts. It was in David's time that Jerusalem was first chosen to be the city where God would record his name. It being a new thing, this, among other means, was used to bring the people to be in love with Jerusalem, as the Holy city, though it was but the other day in the hands of the Jebusites. Observe, 1. The joy with which they were to go up to Jerusalem, v. 1, 2. 11. The great esteem they were to have of Jerusalem, v. 3. 15. 111. The great concern they were to have for Jerusalem, and the prayers they were to put up for its welfare, v. 6. 9. In singing this psalm, we must have an eye to the gospel-church, which is called the Jerusalem that is from above.

A song of degrees of David.

1. **I** WAS glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. 2. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. 3. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: 4. Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD. 5. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

Here is, 1. The pleasure which David, and other pious Israelites, took in approaching to, and attending upon, God in public ordinances, v. 1, 2.

(1.) The invitation to them was very welcome. David was himself glad, and would have every Israelite to say that he *was glad*, when he was called upon to go up to the house of the Lord. Note, [1.] It is the will of God that we should worship him in concert; that many should join together to wait upon him in public ordinances. We ought to worship God in our own houses, but that is not enough, we must go into the house of the Lord, to pay our homage to him there, and not forsake the assembling ourselves together. [2.] We should not only agree with one another, but excite and stir up one another, to go to worship God in public. Let us go; not, "Do you go and pray for us, and we will stay at home;" but, *We will go also*; (Zech. 8. 21.) not, "Do you go before, and we will follow at our leisure;" or, "We will go first, and you shall come after us;" but, "*Let us go together*, for the honour of God, and for our mutual edification and encouragement." We ourselves are slow and backward, and others are so too, and therefore we should thus quicken and sharpen one another to that which is good, as iron sharpens iron. [3.] They that rejoice in God will rejoice in calls and opportunities to wait upon him. David himself, though he had as little need of a spur to his zeal in religious exercises as any, yet was so far from taking it as an affront, that he was glad of it as a kindness, when he was called upon to go up to the house of the Lord, with the meanest of his subjects. We should desire our Christian friends, when they have any good work in hand, to call for us and take us along with them.

(2.) The prospect of them was very pleasing. They speak it with a holy triumph; (v. 2.) *Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.* They that came out of the country, when they found the journey tedious, comforted themselves with this, that they should be in Jerusalem shortly, and that would make amends for all the fatigues of their travel. We shall stand there as servants; it is desirable to have a place in Jerusalem, though it be among those that stand by, (Zech. 3. 7.) though it be the door-keeper's place, Ps. 84. 10. We have now got a resting-place for the ark, and where it is there will we be.

2. The praises of Jerusalem, as 48. 12.

(1.) It is the beautiful city, not only for situation, but for building. It is built into a city, the houses not scattered, but contiguous, and the streets fair and spacious. It is built uniform, compact together, the houses strengthening and supporting one another. Though the city was divided into the higher and lower town, yet the Jebusites being driven out, and it being entirely in the possession of God's people, it is said to be compact together. It was a type of the gospel-church, which is compact together in holy love and Christian communion, so that it is all as one city.

(2.) It is the holy city; (v. 4.) it is the place where all Israel meet one another; *Thither the tribes go up*, from all parts of the country, as one man, under the character of the tribes of the Lord, in obedience to his command. It is the place appointed for their general rendezvous; and they come together, [1.] To receive instruction from God; they come to the testimony of Israel, to hear what God has to say to them, and to consult his oracle. [2.] To ascribe the glory to God, to give thanks to the name of the Lord; which we have all reason to do, especially those that

have the testimony of Israel among them. If God speak to us by his word, we have reason to answer him by our thanksgivings. See on what errand we go to public worship, to give thanks.

(3.) It is the royal city; (v.5.) *There are set thrones of judgment; therefore* the people had reason to be in love with Jerusalem, because justice was administered there by a man after God's own heart. The civil interests of the people were as well secured as their ecclesiastical concerns; and very happy they were in their courts of judicature, which were erected in Jerusalem, as with us in Westminster-hall. Observe, What a goodly sight it was to see *the testimony of Israel* and the *thrones of judgment* such near neighbours; and they are good neighbours, which may greatly befriend one another. Let *the testimony of Israel* direct the *thrones of judgment*, and the *thrones of judgment* protect the *testimony of Israel*.

6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. 7. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. 8. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. 9. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.

Here,

1. David calls upon others to wish well to Jerusalem, v.6,7. *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem*, for the welfare of it, for all good to it, particularly for the uniting of the inhabitants among themselves, and their preservation from the incursions of enemies. This we may truly desire, that in the peace thereof we may have peace; and this we must earnestly pray for, for it is the gift of God, and for it he will be inquired of. Those that can do nothing else for the peace of Jerusalem, can pray for it, which is something more than shewing their good-will, it is the appointed way of fetching in mercy. The peace and welfare of the gospel church, particularly in our land, is to be earnestly desired and prayed for by every one of us.

Now, (1.) We are here encouraged in our prayers for Jerusalem's peace: *They shall prosper that love thee*. We must pray for Jerusalem, not out of custom, or for fashion's sake, but out of a principle of love to God's government of man, and man's worship of God: and in seeking the public welfare, we seek our own; for so well does God *love the gates of Zion*, that he will love all those that do love them; and therefore they cannot but prosper; at least their souls shall prosper by the ordinances they so dearly love.

(2.) We are here directed in our prayers for it, and words are put into our mouths, v.7. *Peace be within thy walls*. He teaches us to pray, [1.] For all the inhabitants in general; all within the walls, from the least to the greatest. Peace be in thy fortifications, let them never be attacked; or, if they be, let them never be taken, but be an effectual security to the city. [2.] For the princes and rulers especially; Let *prosperity be in the palaces* of the great men that sit at the helm, and have the direction of public affairs; for if they prosper, it will be well for the public. The poorer sort are apt to envy the prosperity of the palaces, but they are here taught to pray for it.

2. He resolves, that, whatever others do, he will approve himself a faithful friend to Jerusalem; (1.) In his prayers; "*I will now say*, now I see the tribes so cheerfully resorting hither to the *testimony of Israel*, and the matter settled, that Jerusalem must be the place where God will record his name, now I will say, *Peace be within thee*." He did not say, "Let others pray for the public peace, the priests and the prophets, whose business it is, and the people, that have nothing else to do, and I will fight for it, and rule for it." No; "I will pray for it too." (2.) In his endeavours, with which he will second his prayers; "*I will*, to the utmost of my power, *seek thy good*." Whatever lies within the sphere of our activity to do for the public good, we must do it, else we are not sincere in praying for it.

Now it might be said, No thanks to David to be so solicitous

for the welfare of Jerusalem, it was his own city, and the interests of his family were lodged in it. It is true; yet he professes that was not the reason why he was in such care for the welfare of Jerusalem; but it proceeded from the warm regard he had, [1.] To the communion of saints: It is *for my brethren and companions' sakes*, that is, for the sake of all true-hearted Israelites, whom I look upon as my brethren, (so he calls them, 1 Chron. 28.2.) and who have often been my companions in the worship of God, which hath knit my heart to them. [2.] To the ordinances of God: He had *set his affection to the house of his God*; (1 Chron. 29.3.) he took a great pleasure in public worship, and for that reason would pray for the good of Jerusalem. Then our concern for the public welfare is right, when it is the effect of a sincere love to God's institutions and his faithful worshippers.

PSALM CXXIII.

This psalm was penned at a time when the church of God was brought low and trampled upon; some think it was when the Jews were captives in Babylon; though that was not the only time that they were insulted over by the proud. The psalmist begins as if he spoke for himself only, (v.1.) but presently speaks in the name of the church. Here is, I. Their expectation of mercy from God, v.1,2. II. Their plea for mercy with God, v.3,4. In singing it, we must have our eye up to God's favour, with a holy concern, and then an eye down to men's reproach, with a holy contempt.

A song of degrees.

1. **U**NTO thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. 2. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us. 3. Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt. 4. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.

We have here,

1. The solemn profession which God's people make of faith and hope in God, v.1,2. Observe,

1. The title here given to God; *O thou that dwellest in the heavens*. Our Lord Jesus has taught us, in prayer, to have an eye to God, as *our Father in heaven*; not that he is confined there, but there especially he manifests his glory, as the King in his court. Heaven is a place of prospect, and a place of power; he that dwells there, thence beholds all the calamities of his people, and from thence can send to save them. Sometimes God seems to have forsaken the earth, and the enemies of God's people ask, *Where is now your God?* But then they can say with comfort, *Our God is in the heavens*. *O thou that sittest in the heavens*, so some; sittest as Judge there; for *the Lord has prepared his throne in the heavens*, and to that throne injured innocence may appeal.

2. The regard here had to God; the psalmist himself *lifted up his eyes* to him. The eyes of a good man are *ever toward the Lord*; (25.15.) in every prayer we lift up our soul, the eye of our soul, to God; especially in trouble, which was the case here. The eyes of the people *waited on the Lord*, v.2. We find mercy coming toward a people, *when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, are toward the Lord*, Zech.9.1. The eyes of the body are heaven-ward. *Os homini sublime dedit*—To man he gave an erect mien, to teach us which way to direct the eyes of the mind. *Our eyes wait on the Lord*; the eye of desire and prayer; the begging eye, and the eye of dependence; hope and expectation; the longing eye. Our eyes must wait upon God as *the Lord*, and *our God*, until that he have mercy upon us. We desire mercy from him, we hope he will shew us mercy, and we will continue our attendance on him till it come.

This is illustrated (v.2.) by a similitude; Our eyes are to God, as the eyes of a servant, or handmaid, to the hand of their master and mistress. The eyes of a servant are, (1.) To his master's di-

recting hand, expecting that he will appoint him his work, and cut it out for him, and shew him how he must do it; *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* (2.) To his supplying hand. Servants look to their master, or their mistress, for their portion of meat in due season, Prov. 31. 15. And to God must we look for daily bread, for grace sufficient; from him we must receive it thankfully. (3.) To his assisting hand. If the servant cannot do his work himself, where must he look for help but to his master? And in the strength of the Lord God we must go forth and go on. (4.) To his protecting hand. If the servant meet with opposition in his work, if he be questioned for what he does, if he be wronged and injured, who should bear him out and right him, but his master that set him on work? The people of God, when they are persecuted, may appeal to their Master, *We are thine, save us.* (5.) To his correcting hand. If the servant have provoked his master to beat him, he does not call for help against his master, but looks at the hand that strikes him, till it shall say, "It is enough, I will not contend for ever." The people of God were now under his rebukes; and whither should they turn but to him that *smote them*? Isa. 9. 13. To whom should they make supplication but to their Judge? They will not do as Hagar did, who ran away from her mistress, when she put some hardships upon her, (Gen. 16. 6.) but they submit themselves to, and humble themselves under, God's mighty hand. (6.) To his rewarding hand. The servant expects his wages, his *well-done*, from his master. Hypocrites have their eye to the world's hand, *thence they have their reward*; (Matth. 6. 2.) but true Christians have their eye to God as their Rewarder.

II. The humble address which God's people present to him in their calamitous condition, (v. 3, 4.) wherein,

1. They sue for mercy; not prescribing to God what he shall do for them, nor pleading any merit of their own, why he should do for them, but, *Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us.* We find little mercy with men, their *tender mercies are cruel*, there are *cruel mockings*; but this is our comfort, that *with the Lord there is mercy*, and we need desire no more to relieve us, and make us easy, than the mercy of God. Whatever the troubles of the church are, God's mercy is a sovereign remedy.

2. They set forth their grievances; *We are exceedingly filled with contempt.* Reproach is the wound, the burthen, they complain of. Observe, (1.) Who were reproached; "We, who have our eyes up to thee." Those who are owned of God are often despised and trampled on by the world. Some translate the words which we render, *those that are at ease*, and *the proud*, so as to signify the persons that are scorned and contemned. "Our soul is troubled to see how those that are at peace, and the excellent ones, are scorned and despised." The saints are a peaceable people, and yet are abused; (35. 20.) the excellent ones of the earth, and yet undervalued, Lam. 4. 1, 2. (2.) Who did reproach them; taking the words as we read them, they were the epicures who lived at ease, carnal, sensual, people, Job, 12. 5. The scoffers are such as walk after their own lusts, and serve their own bellies: and the proud, such as set God himself at defiance, and had a high opinion of themselves; they trampled on God's people, thinking they magnified themselves by vilifying them. (3.) To what degree they were reproached; *We are filled*, we are surfeited with it; *Our soul is exceedingly filled with it.* The enemies thought they could never jeer them enough, nor say enough to make them despicable; and they could not but lay it to heart; it was a sword in their bones, Ps. 42. 10. Note, [1.] Scorning and contempt have been, and are, and are likely to be, the lot of God's people in this world. Ishmael mocked Isaac, which is called *persecuting* him; and so it is now, Gal. 4. 29. [2.] In reference to the scorn and contempt of men, it is matter of comfort, that there is mercy with God; mercy to our good names when they are barbarously used: *Hear, O our God, for we are despised.*

PSALM CXXIV.

David penned this psalm (we suppose) upon occasion of some great deliverance which God wrought for him and his people from some very threatening danger, which was likely to have involved them all in ruin; whether by foreign inva-

sion, or intestine insurrection, is not certain; whatever it was, he seems to have been himself much affected, and very desirous to affect others, with the goodness of God, in making a way for them to escape: to him he is careful to give all the glory, and takes none to himself, as conquerors usually do. 1. He here magnifies the greatness of the danger they were in, and of the ruin they were at the brink of, v. 1. 5. 11. He gives God the glory of their escape, (v. 6, 7.) compared with v. 1, 2. 111. He takes encouragement from thence to trust in God, v. 8. In singing this psalm, beside the application of it to any particular deliverance wrought for us and our people, in our days and days of our fathers, we may have in our thoughts the great work of our redemption by Jesus Christ, by which we were rescued from the powers of darkness.

A song of degrees of David.

1. **I**F it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say; 2. If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: 3. Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us. 4. Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: 5. Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.

The people of God, being here called upon to praise God for their deliverance, are to take notice,

1. Of the malice of men, by which they were reduced to the very brink of ruin. Let Israel say, that there was but a step between them and death: the more desperate the disease appears to have been, the more does the skill of the Physician appear in the cure.

Observe, (1.) Whence the threatening danger came; *Men rose up against us*; creatures of our own kind, and yet bent upon our ruin: *Homo homini lupus—Man is a wolf to man.* No marvel that the red dragon, the roaring lion, should seek to swallow us up; but that men should thirst after the blood of men, Absalom after the blood of his own father; that a woman should be drunk with the blood of saints, is what, with St. John, we may wonder at with great admiration. From men we may expect humanity, yet there are those whose *tender mercies are cruel*. But what was the matter with these men? Why, *their wrath was kindled against us*; (v. 3.) something or other they were angry at, and then no less would serve than the destruction of those they had conceived a displeasure against. *Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous.* Their wrath was kindled as fire ready to consume us; they were proud; and *the wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor.* They were daring in their attempt, they *rose up against us*; rose in rebellion, with a resolution to *swallow us up* alive. (2.) How far it went, and how fatal it had been if it had gone a little further; "We had been devoured as a lamb by a lion; not only slain, but *swallowed up*, so that there should have been no relics of us remaining; *swallowed up* with so much haste, ere we were aware, that we should have gone down alive to the pit. We had been deluged as the low grounds by a land-flood, or the sands by a high spring-tide." This similitude he dwells upon, with the ascents, which bespeak this a song of degrees, or risings, like the rest. *The waters had overwhelmed us.* What of us? Why, *the stream had gone over our souls*, our lives, our comforts; all that is dear to us. What waters? Why, *the proud waters.* God suffers the enemies of his people sometimes to prevail very far against them, that his own power may appear the more illustrious in their deliverance.

2. Of the goodness of God, by which they were rescued from the very brink of ruin; "The Lord was on our side; and if he had not been so, we had been undone." (1.) "God was on our side; he took our part, espoused our cause, and appeared for us: he was our Helper, and a very present Help, a Help on our side, nigh at hand. He was with us; not only for us, but among us, and Commander in chief of our forces." (2.) That God was Jehovah; there the emphasis lies. "If it had not been Jehovah himself, a God of infinite power and perfection, that had undertaken our deliverance, our enemies had overpowered us." Happy the people, therefore, whose God is Jehovah, a God all-sufficient. Let Israel say this, to his honour, and resolve never to forsake him.

6. Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. 7. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. 8. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Here the psalmist further magnifies the great deliverance God had lately wrought for them.

1. That their hearts might be the more enlarged in thankfulness to him; (v. 6.) *Blessed be the Lord.* God is the Author of all our deliverances, and therefore he must have the glory of them. We rob him of his due, if we do not return thanks to him. And we are the more obliged to praise him, because we had such a narrow escape. We were delivered, (1.) Like a lamb out of the very jaws of a beast of prey; *God has not given us as a prey to their teeth*; intimating, that they had no power against God's people, but what was given them from above. They could not be a prey to their teeth, unless God gave them up, and therefore they were rescued, because God would not suffer them to be ruined. (2.) Like a bird, a little bird, (the word signifies a sparrow,) out of the snare of the fowler. The enemies are very subtle and spiteful; they lay snares for God's people, to bring them into sin and trouble, and to hold them there. Sometimes they seem to have prevailed so far as to gain their point; God's people are taken in the snare, and are as unable to help themselves out as any weak and silly bird is; and then is God's time to appear for their relief, when all other friends fail; then God breaks the snare, and turns the counsel of the enemies into foolishness; *The snare is broken, and so we are delivered.* Isaac is saved when he lay ready to be sacrificed. *Jehovah-jireh; in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.*

2. That their hearts, and the hearts of others, might be more encouraged to trust in God in the like dangers; (v. 8.) *Our help is in the name of the Lord.* David had directed us (121. 2.) to depend upon God for help as to our personal concerns; *My help is in the name of the Lord*; here, as to the concerns of the public; *Our help is so.* It is a comfort to all that lay the interests of God's Israel near their hearts, that Israel's God is the same that made the world, and therefore will have a church in the world, and can secure that church in the times of the greatest danger and distress. In him therefore let the church's friends put their confidence, and they shall not be put to confusion.

PSALM CXXV.

This short psalm may be summed up in those words of the prophet, (Isa. 3. 10, 11.) Say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with him. Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him. Thus are life and death, the blessing and the curse, set before us often in the psalms, as well as in the law and the prophets. 1. It is certainly well with the people of God; for, 1. They have the promises of a good God, that they shall be fixed, (v. 1.) and safe, (v. 2.) and not always under the hatches, v. 3. 2. They have the prayers of a good man, which shall be heard for them, v. 4. 11. It is certainly ill with the wicked, and particularly with the apostates, v. 5. Some of the Jewish rabbins are of opinion that it has reference to the days of the Messiah; however, we that are members of the gospel-church may certainly, in singing this psalm, take the comfort of these promises, and the more so, if we stand in awe of the threatening.

A song of degrees.

1. **T**HEY that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. 2. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever. 3. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.

Here are three very precious promises made to the people of God, which, though they are designed to secure the welfare of the church in general, may be applied by particular believers to themselves, as other promises of this nature may.

Here is, 1. The character of God's people to whom these promises belong. Many call themselves God's people who have no part nor lot in this matter. But those shall have the benefit of them, and may take the comfort of them, (1.) Who are *righteous*, (v. 3.) righteous before God, righteous to God, and righteous to all men; for his sake justified and sanctified. (2.) Who *trust in the Lord*, who depend upon his care, and devote themselves to his honour. All that deal with God must deal upon trust, and he will give comfort to those only that give credit to him, and make it to appear they do so, by quitting other confidences, and venturing to the utmost for God. The closer our expectations are confined to God, the higher our expectations may be raised from him.

2. The promises themselves.

(1.) That their hearts shall be established by faith: those minds shall be truly stayed that are stayed on God; *They shall be as mount Zion.* The church in general is called *mount Zion*; (Heb. 12. 22.) and it shall in this respect be like *mount Zion*, it shall be built upon a rock, and its interests shall be so well secured, that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* The stability of the church is the satisfaction of all its well-wishers. Particular persons, who trust in God, shall be established; s. 112. 7.) their faith shall be their fixation, Isa. 7. 9. *They shall be as mount Zion*, which is firm, as it is a mountain supported by providence, much more as a holy mountain supported by promise. [1.] *They cannot be removed* by the prince of the power of the air, nor by all his subtlety and strength. *They cannot be removed* from their integrity, nor from their confidence in God. [2.] *They abide for ever* in that grace which is the earnest of their everlasting continuance in glory.

(2.) That, committing themselves to God, they shall be safe, under his protection, from all the insults of their enemies. As Jerusalem had a natural fastness and fortification in the mountains that were round about it, v. 2. (those mountains not only sheltered it from winds and tempests, and broke the force of them, but made it also very difficult of access for an enemy,) such a defence is God's providence to his people! Observe, [1.] The compass of it; *The Lord is round about his people* on every side; there is no gap in the hedge of protection which he makes round about his people, at which the enemy, who goes about them, seeking to do them a mischief, can find entrance, Job. 1. 10. [2.] The continuance of it; *from henceforth even for ever.* Mountains may moulder and come to nought, and rocks be removed out of their place, (Job. 14. 18.) but God's covenant with his people cannot be broken, (Isa. 54. 10.) nor his care of them cease. Their being said to stand fast *for ever*, (v. 1.) and here to have God round about them *for ever*, intimates, that the promises of the stability and security of God's people will have their full accomplishment in their everlasting state. In heaven they shall stand fast *for ever*, shall be as pillars in the temple of our God, and go no more out; (Rev. 3. 12.) and there God himself with his glory and favour, will be round about them *for ever*.

(3.) That their troubles shall last no longer than their strength will serve to bear them up under them, v. 3. (1.) It is supposed that the rod of the wicked may come, may fall, upon the lot of the righteous. The rod of their power may oppress them, the rod of their anger may vex and torment them. It may fall upon their persons, their estates, their liberties, their families, their names, any thing that falls to their lot; only it cannot reach their souls. (2.) It is promised, that, though it may come upon their lot, it shall not rest there, it shall not continue so long as the enemies design, and as the people of God fear, but God will cut the work short in righteousness; so short, that even with the temptation he will make a way for them to escape. (3.) It is considered as a reason of this promise, that, if the trouble should continue over-long, the righteous themselves would be in temptation to put forth their hands to iniquity, to join with wicked people in their wicked practices; to say as they say, and do as they do. There is danger lest, being long persecuted for their religion, at length they grow weary of it, and willing to give it up; being kept long in expectation of promised mercies, they begin to distrust the promise, and to

think of casting God off, upon suspicion of his having cast them off. See 73. 13, 14. Note, God considers the frame of his people, and will proportion their trials to their strength, by the care of his providence, as well as their strength to their trials, by the power of his grace. *Oppression makes a wise man mad*, especially if it continue long; therefore *for the elects' sake* the days shall be shortened, that, whatever goes with their lot in this world, they may not lose their lot among the chosen.

4. Do good, O LORD, unto *those that be good*, and to *them that are upright* in their hearts. 5. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: *but peace shall be upon Israel*.

Here is,

1. The prayer the psalmist puts up for the happiness of those that are sincere and constant; (v. 4.) *Do good, O Lord, unto those that are good*. This teaches us to pray for all good people, to make supplication for all saints; and we may pray in faith for them, being assured that those who do well shall certainly be well dealt with. They that are as they should be, shall be as they would be, provided they be *upright in heart*, that they be really as good as they seem to be; *with the upright God will shew himself upright*. He does not say, Do good, O Lord, to them that are perfect, that are *sinless* and *spotless*; but, to them that are *sincere* and *honest*. God's promises should quicken our prayers. It is comfortable wishing well to those for whom God has engaged to do well.

2. The prospect he has of the rum of hypocrites and deserters; he does not pray for it, *I have not desired the woeful day, thou knowest*, but he predicts it; *As for those who, having known the way of righteousness, for fear of the rod of the wicked, basely turn aside out of it to their wicked ways*, use indirect ways to prevent trouble, or extricate themselves out of it; or those who, instead of reforming, grow worse and worse, and are more obstinate and daring in their impieties, God shall *send them away, cast them out, and lead them forth, with the workers of iniquity*, he shall appoint them their portion with the worst of sinners. Note, (1.) Sinful ways are *crooked ways*; sin is the perverting of that which is right. (2.) The doom of those who turn aside to those crooked ways, out of the right way, will be the same with their's who have all along walked in them; nay, and more grievous, for if any place in hell be hotter than another, that shall be the portion of hypocrites and apostates. God shall *lead them forth*, as prisoners are led forth to execution, *Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire*; and *these shall go away*, all their former righteousness shall not be mentioned unto them. The last words, *Peace upon Israel*, may be taken as a prayer; God preserve his Israel in peace, when his judgments are abroad reckoning with evil-doers. We read them as a promise, *Peace shall be upon Israel*; that is, [1.] When those who have treacherously deserted the ways of God meet with their own destruction, those who faithfully adhere to them, though they may have trouble in their way, their end shall be peace. [2.] The destruction of those who walk in crooked ways will contribute to the peace and safety of the church; when Herod was cut off, *the word of God grew*, Acts, 12. 23, 24. [3.] The peace and happiness of God's Israel will be the vexation, and will add much to the torment, of those who perish in their wickedness, Luke, 13. 28. Isa. 65. 13. *My servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed*.

PSALM CXXVI.

It was with reference to some great and surprising deliverance of the people of God out of bondage and distress, that this psalm was penned; most likely their return out of Babylon in Ezra's time. Though Babylon be not mentioned here, as it is, (Ps. 137.) their captivity there was the most remarkable captivity, both in itself, and as their return out of it was typical of our redemption by Christ. Probably, it was penned by Ezra, or some of the prophets that came up with the first. We read of singers of the children of Asaph, that famous psalmist who returned then, Ezra, 2. 41. *It being a song of*

ascents, in which twice the same things are repeated with advancement, (c. 2, 3. and v. 4, 5.) it is put here among the rest of the psalms that bear that title. I. Those that were returned out of captivity are here called upon to be thankful, v. 1, 3. II. Those that were yet remaining in captivity are here prayed for, (v. 4.) and encouraged, v. 5, 6. It will be easy, in singing this psalm, to apply it either to any particular deliverance wrought for the church, or our own land, or to the great work of our salvation by Christ.

A song of degrees.

1. **W**HEN the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. 2. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. 3. The LORD hath done great things for us; *whereof* we are glad.

While the people of Israel were captives in Babylon, their harps were hung upon the willow-trees, for then God called to weeping and mourning, then he mourned unto them, and they lamented; but, now that their captivity is turned, they resume their harps; Providence pipes to them, and they dance. Thus must we accommodate ourselves to all the dispensations of Providence, and be suitably affected with them. And the harps are never more melodiously tunable than after such a melancholy disuse. The long want of mercies greatly sweetens their return.

Here is, 1. The deliverance God had wrought for them; He *turned again the captivity of Zion*. It is possible that Zion may be in *captivity* for the punishment of her degeneracy; but her captivity shall be *turned again*, when the end is answered, and the work designed by it is effected. Cyrus, for reasons of state, proclaimed liberty to God's captives, and yet it was *the Lord's doing*, according to his word many years before. God sent them into captivity, not as dross is put into the fire to be consumed, but as gold to be refined. Observe, The release of Israel is called *the turning again of the captivity of Zion*, the holy hill, where God's tabernacle and dwelling-place were; for the restoring of their sacred interests, and the reviving of the public exercise of their religion, were the most valuable advantage of their return out of captivity.

2. The pleasing surprise that this was to them. They were amazed at it; it came so suddenly, that at first they were in confusion, not knowing what to make of it, nor what it was tending to; "We thought ourselves like men that dream, we thought it too good news to be true, and began to question whether we were well awake or no, and whether it was not still," (as sometimes it had been to the prophets,) "only a representation of it in vision;" as St. Peter for a while thought his deliverance was, Acts, 12. 9. Sometimes the people of God are thus prevented with the blessings of his goodness before they are aware. *We were like them that are recovered to health*, so Dr. Hammond reads it; such a comfortable happy change it was to us, as life from the dead, or sudden ease from exquisite pain; we thought ourselves in a new world. And the surprise of it put them into an ecstasy and transport of joy, that they could scarcely contain themselves within the bounds of decency in the expressions of it; *Our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing*. Thus they gave vent to their joy, gave glory to their God, and gave notice to all about them what wonders God had wrought for them. They that were laughed at now laugh, and a *new song is put into their mouths*. It was a laughter of joy in God, not scorn of their enemies.

3. The notice which their neighbours took of it; *They said among the heathen, Jehovah, the God of Israel, has done great things* for that people, such as our gods cannot do for us. The heathen had observed their calamity, and had triumphed in it, Jer. 22. 8, 9. Ps. 137. 7. Now they could not but observe their deliverance, and admire that. It put a reputation upon those that had been scorned and despised, and made them look considerable; besides, it turned greatly to the honour of God, and extorted from those that set up other gods in competition with him, an acknowledgment of his wisdom, power, and providence.

saint in particular; thus shall the man be blessed; not only the nation, the church in its public capacity, but the particular person in his private interests. 3. We are here encouraged to apply it to ourselves; (v. 2.) "*Happy shalt thou be; thou mayest take the comfort of the promise, and expect the benefit of it, as if it were directed to thee by name, if thou fear God, and walk in his ways. Happy shalt thou be; that is, It shall be well with thee; whatever befalls thee, good shall be brought out of it; it shall be well with thee while thou livest, better when thou diest, and best of all to eternity.*" It is asserted, (v. 4.) with a note commanding attention, *Behold, thus shall the man be blessed; behold it by faith in the promise; behold it by observation in the performance of the promise; behold it with assurance that it shall be so, for God is faithful; and with admiration that it should be so, for we merit no favour, no blessing, from him.*

II. Particular promises are here made to godly people, which they may depend upon, as far as is for God's glory and their good; and that is enough.

1. That, by the blessing of God, they shall get an honest livelihood, and live comfortably upon it. It is not promised that they shall live at ease, without care or pains, but, *Thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands.* Here is a double promise, (1.) That they shall have something to do, (for an idle life is a miserable uncomfortable life,) and shall have health and strength, and capacity of mind, to do it, and shall not be forced to be beholden to others for necessary food, and to live, as the disabled poor do, upon the labours of other people. It is as much a mercy, as it is a duty, *with quietness to work and eat our own bread,* 2 Thess. 3. 12. (2.) That they shall succeed in their employments, and they and theirs shall enjoy what they get; others shall not come and eat the bread out of their mouths, nor shall it be taken from them either by oppressive rulers or invading enemies; God will not blast it and blow upon it, as he did; (Hag. 1. 9.) and his blessing will make a little go a great way. It is very pleasant to enjoy the fruits of our own industry; as the sleep, so the food, of a labouring man is sweet.

2. That they shall have abundance of comfort in their family-relations. As a wife and children are very much a man's care, so, if by the grace of God they are such as they should be, they are very much a man's delight, as much as any creature-comfort. (1.) *The wife shall be as a vine by the sides of the house,* not only as a spreading vine, which serves for an ornament, but as a fruitful vine, which is for profit, and with the fruit whereof both God and man are honoured, Judg. 9. 13. The vine is a weak and tender plant, and needs to be supported and cherished, but it is a very valuable plant, and some think (because all the products of it were prohibited to the Nazarites) it was the *tree of knowledge* itself. The wife's place is the *husband's house*; there her business lies, and that is her castle; *Where is Sarah thy wife? Behold, in the tent;* where should she be else? Her place is *by the sides of the house*, not under foot to be trampled on, nor yet upon the house-top to domineer; if she be so, she is but *as the grass upon the house-top*, in the next psalm; but *on the side of the house*, being a rib out of the side of the man; she shall be a loving wife, as the vine, which cleaves to the house-side, an obedient wife, as the vine, which is pliable, and grows as it is directed. She shall be fruitful as the vine, not only in children, but in the fruits of wisdom, and righteousness, and good management, the *branches of which run over the wall*, (Gen. 49. 22. Ps. 80. 11.) *like a fruitful vine*, not cumbering the ground, or bringing forth sour grapes, or grapes of Sodom, but good fruit. (2.) *The children shall be as olive-plants*, likely in time to be olive-trees, and, though *wild by nature*, yet grafted into the good olive, and partaking of its *root and fatness*, Rom. 11. 17. It is pleasant to parents, who have a table spread, though but with ordinary fare, to see their children round about it; to have many children, enough to surround it, and those with them, and not scattered, or the parents forced from them; Job makes it one of the first instances of his former prosperity, that *his children were about him*, Job. 29. 5. Parents love to have their children at table, to keep up the pleasantness of the table-talk; to have them in health, craving food, and not phisic; to have them like *olive-plants*, straight and green, sucking in the sap of their good education, and likely in due time to be serviceable.

3. That they shall have those good things which God has promised, and which they pray for; *The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion*, where the ark of the covenant was, and where the pious Israelites attended with their devotions. *Blessings out of Zion* are the best blessings, which flow, not from common providence, but from special grace, Ps. 20. 2.

4. That they shall live long, to enjoy the comforts of the rising generations; *Thou shalt see thy children's children*, as Joseph, Gen. 50. 23. Thy family shall be built up and continued, and thou shalt have the pleasure of seeing it. *Children's children*, if they be good children, are the crown of old men, (Prov. 17. 6.) who are apt to be fond of their grandchildren.

5. That they shall see the welfare of God's church, and the land of their nativity, which every man who fears God is no less concerned for than for the prosperity of his own family. *Thou shalt be blessed in Zion's blessing, and wilt think thyself so.* Thou shalt see the *good of Jerusalem* as long as thou livest, though thou livest long; and shalt not have thy private comforts allayed and embittered by public troubles. A good man can have little comfort in seeing his *children's children*, unless withal he see peace upon Israel, and have hopes of transmitting the entail of religion pure and entire to those that shall come after him, for that is the best inheritance.

PSALM CXXIX.

This psalm relates to the public concerns of God's Israel. It is not certain when it was penned, probably when they were in captivity in Babylon, or about the time of their return. I. They look back with thankfulness for the former deliverances God had wrought for them and their fathers, out of the many distresses they had been in from time to time, v. 1. . 4. II. They look forward with a believing prayer for, and prospect of, the destruction of all the enemies of Zion, v. 5. . 8. In singing this psalm, we may apply it both ways to the Gospel-Israel, which, like the Old-Testament Israel, has weathered many a storm, and is still threatened by many enemies.

A song of degrees.

1. **M**ANY a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: 2. Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me. 3. The ploughers ploughed upon my back: they made long their furrows. 4. The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.

The church of God, in its several ages, is here spoken of, or rather, here speaks, as one single person, now old and grey-headed, but calling to remembrance the former days, and reflecting upon the times of old. And, upon the review, it is found,

1. That the church has been often greatly distressed by its enemies on earth; *Israel may now say*, "I am the people that has been oppressed more than any people, that has been *as a speckled bird*, pecked at by *all the birds round about*," Jer. 12. 9. It is true, they brought their troubles upon themselves by their sins, it was for them that God punished them; but it was for the peculiarity of their covenant, and the singularities of their religion, that their neighbours hated and persecuted them. For these, *many a time have they afflicted me from my youth*. Note, God's people have always had many enemies; and the state of the church, from its infancy, has frequently been an afflicted state. Israel's youth was in Egypt, or in the times of the Judges, then they were afflicted, and from thenceforward more or less. The gospel-church, ever since it had a being, has been at times afflicted; and it bore this yoke most of all in its youth, witness the ten persecutions which the primitive church groaned under, v. 3. *The ploughers ploughed upon my back.* We read (125. 3.) *of the rod of the wicked upon the lot of the righteous*, where we rather expected the plough, to mark it out for themselves; here we read of the *plough of the wicked upon the back of the righteous*, where we rather expected to find the rod. But the metaphors in these places may be said to be *crossed*: the sense, however, of both is the same, and is too plain, that the enemies of God's people have all along used them very barbarously. They tare them as the husbandman tears the ground with his ploughshare, to pull them to pieces, and get all

they could out of them, and so to wear out the saints of the Most High, as the ground is worn out that had been long-tilled, tilled (as we say) quite out of heart. When God permitted them to plough thus, he intended it for his people's good, that, their fallow ground being thus broken up, he might sow the seeds of his grace upon them, and reap a harvest of good fruit from them: howbeit, the enemies meant not so, neither did their hearts think so; (Isa. 10. 7.) *they made long their furrows*, never knew when to have done, aiming at nothing less than the destruction of the church. Many, by the *furrows* they made on the backs of God's people, understand the stripes they gave them. *The cutters cut upon my back*, so they read it. The saints have often had trials of cruel scourgings, (probably the captives had,) and cruel mockings, (for we read of the scourge, or lash of the tongue, Heb. 11. 36.) and so it was fulfilled in Christ, who gave his back to the smiters, Isa. 50. 6. Or it may refer to the desolations they made of the cities of Israel; *Zion shall, for your sake, be ploughed as a field*, Mic. 3. 12.

2. That the church has been always graciously delivered by her Friend in heaven.

(1.) The enemies' projects have been defeated; they have afflicted the church, in hopes to ruin it, but they have not gained their point; many a storm it has weathered, many a shock, and many a brunt, it has borne, and yet is in being; *They have not prevailed against me*. One would wonder how this ship has lived at sea, when it has been tossed with tempests, and all the waves and billows have gone over it. Christ has built his church upon a rock, and the gates of hell have not prevailed against it, nor ever shall.

(2.) The enemies' power has been broken; God has cut asunder the cords of the wicked; has cut their gears, their traces, and so spoiled their ploughing; has cut their scourges, and so spoiled their lashing; has cut the hands of union, by which they were combined together; has cut the bands of captivity, in which they held God's people. God has many ways of disabling wicked men to do the mischief they design against his church, and shaming their counsels.

These words, *The Lord is righteous*, may refer either to the distresses or to the deliverances of the church. [1.] *The Lord is righteous*, in suffering Israel to be afflicted. This the people of God were always ready to own, that, how unjust soever their enemies were, God was just in all that was brought upon them, Neh. 9. 33. [2.] *The Lord is righteous*, in not suffering Israel to be ruined; for he has promised to preserve it a people to himself, and he will be as good as his word. He is righteous in reckoning with their persecutors, and rendering to them a recompence, 2 Thess. 1. 6.

5. Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion. 6. Let them be as the grass upon the house-tops, which withereth afore it groweth up: 7. Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom. 8. Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord.

The psalmist, having triumphed in the defeat of the many designs that had been laid as deep as hell to ruin the church, here concludes his psalm as Deborah did her song, *So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord*, Judg. 5. 31.

1. There are many that hate Zion, that hate Zion's God, his worship, and his worshippers, that have an antipathy to religion and religious people, that seek the ruin of both, and do what they can, that God may not have a church in the world.

2. We ought to pray that all their attempts against the church may be frustrated, that in them they may be confounded, and turned back with shame, as those that have not been able to bring to pass their enterprise and expectation; *Let them all be confounded*, is as much as, *They shall be all confounded*. The confusion imprecated, and predicted, is illustrated by a similitude; while God's

people shall flourish, as the loaded palm-tree, or the green and fruitful olive, their enemies shall wither as the grass upon the house-top. As men, they are not to be feared, for they shall be made as grass, Isa. 51. 12. But, as they are enemies to Zion, they are so certainly marked for ruin, that they may be looked upon with as much contempt as the grass on the house-tops, which is little, and short, and sour, and good for nothing.

(1.) It perishes quickly, it withers before it grows up to any maturity, having no root; and the higher its place is, which perhaps is its pride, the more it is exposed to the scorching heat of the sun, and consequently the sooner does it wither. *It withers before it is plucked up*, so some read it. The enemies of God's church wither of themselves, and stay not till they are rooted out by the judgments of God.

(2.) It is of no use to any body; nor are they any thing but the unprofitable burthens of the earth; nor will their attempts against Zion ever ripen or come to any head; nor, whatever they promise themselves, will they get any more by them than the husbandman does by the grass on his house-top. *Their harvest will be a heap in the day of grief*, Isa. 17. 11.

3. No wise man will pray God to bless the mowers or reapers, v. 8. Observe, (1.) It has been an ancient and laudable custom not only to salute, and wish a good day to, strangers and travellers, but particularly to pray for the prosperity of harvest-labourers. Thus Boaz prayed for his reapers, (Ruth, 2. 4.) *The Lord be with you*. We must thus acknowledge God's providence, testify our good-will to our neighbours, and commend their industry, and it will be accepted of God as a pious ejaculation, if it comes from a devout and upright heart. (2.) Religious expressions, being sacred things, must never be made use of in light and ludicrous actions. Mowing the grass on the house-top would be a jest, and therefore those that have a reverence for the name of God will not prostitute to it the usual forms of salutation, which savoured of devotion; for holy things must not be jested with. (3.) It is a dangerous thing to let the church's enemies have our good wishes in their designs against the church. If we wish them God speed, we are partakers of their evil deeds, 2 John, 11. When it is said, None will bless them, and shew them respect, more is implied, namely, that all wise and good people will cry out shame on them, and beg of God to defeat them; and woe to those that have the prayers of the saints against them. *I cursed his habitation*, Job, 5. 3.

PSALM CXXX.

This psalm relates not to any temporal concern, either personal or public, but it is wholly taken up in the affairs of the soul. It is reckoned one of the seven penitential psalms, which have sometimes been made use of by penitents, upon their admission into the church; in singing it, we are all concerned to apply it to ourselves. The psalmist here expresses, I. His desire toward God, v. 1, 2. II. His repentance before God, v. 3, 4. III. His attendance upon God, v. 5, 6. IV. His expectations from God, v. 7, 8. And as in water face answers to face, so does the heart of one humble penitent to another.

A song of degrees.

1. **O**UT of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. 2. LORD, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. 3. If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O LORD, who shall stand? 4. But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

In these verses, we are taught,

1. Whatever condition we are in, though ever so deplorable, to continue calling upon God, v. 1. The best men may sometimes be in the depths, in great trouble and affliction, and utterly at a loss what to do; in the depths of distress, and almost in the depths of despair; the spirit low and dark, sinking and drooping, cast down and disquieted. But, in the greatest depths, it is our privilege that we may cry unto God, and be heard. A prayer may reach the heights of heaven, though not out of the depths of hell, yet out of the depths of the greatest trouble we can be in, in this world; Jeremiah's, out of the dungeon, Daniel's, out of the den,

and Jonah's, out of the fish's belly. It is our duty and interest to cry unto God, for that is the likeliest way both to prevent our sinking lower, and to recover us out of the horrible pit, and miry clay, 40. 1, 2.

2. While we continue calling upon God, to assure ourselves of an answer of peace from him; for this is that which David in faith prays for, (v. 2.) *Lord, hear my voice*, my complaint and prayer, and *let thine ears be attentive* to the voice both of my afflictions and of my supplications.

3. We are taught to humble ourselves before the justice of God, as guilty in his sight, and unable to answer him for one of a thousand of our offences; (v. 3.) *If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?* His calling God *Lord* twice, in so few words, *Jah* and *Adonai*, is very emphatical, and intimates a very awful sense of God's glorious majesty, and a dread of his wrath. Let us learn here, (1.) To acknowledge our iniquities, that we cannot justify ourselves before God, or plead not guilty. There is that which is remarkable in our iniquities, and is liable to be animadverted upon. (2.) To own the power and justice of God, which is such, that, if he should be extreme to mark what we do amiss, there were no hopes of coming off. His eye can discover enough in the best man to ground a condemnation upon; and if he proceed against us, we have no way to help ourselves, we cannot stand, but shall certainly be cast. If God deal with us in strict justice, we are undone; if he make remarks upon our iniquities, he will find them to be many and great; greatly aggravated, and very provoking; and then, if he should proceed accordingly, he would shut us out from all hope of his favour, and shut us up under his wrath; and what could we do to help ourselves? We could not make our escape, nor resist, or bear up under, his avenging hand. (3.) Let us admire God's patience and forbearance; we were undone if he should mark iniquities, and he knows it, and therefore bears with us. It is of his mercy that we are not consumed by his wrath.

4. We are taught to cast ourselves upon the pardoning mercy of God, and to comfort ourselves with that, when we see ourselves obnoxious to his justice, v. 4. Here is, (1.) God's grace discovered, and pleaded with him, by a penitent sinner; *But there is forgiveness with thee*. It is our unspeakable comfort, in all our approaches to God, that there is *forgiveness with him*, for that is what we need. He has put himself into a capacity to pardon sin, he has declared himself gracious and merciful, and ready to forgive, Exod. 34. 6, 7. He has promised to forgive the sins of those that do repent. Never any that dealt with him found him implacable, but easy to be entreated, and swift to shew mercy. With us there is iniquity, and therefore it is well for us that with him there is forgiveness. *There is a propitiation with thee*, so some read it. Jesus Christ is the great Propitiation, the Ransom which God has found; he is ever with him, as Advocate for us, and through him we hope to obtain forgiveness. (2.) Our duty designed in that discovery, and inferred from it; *There is forgiveness with thee*, not that thou mayest be made bold with, and presumed upon, but that thou mayest be feared; in general, that thou mayest be worshipped and served by the children of men, who, being sinners, could have no dealings with God, if he were not a Master that could pass by a great many faults. But this encourages us to come into his service, that we shall not be turned off for every misdemeanor; no, not for any, if we truly repent. This does in a special manner invite those who have sinned to repent, and return to the fear of God, that he is gracious and merciful, and will receive them upon their repentance; (Joel. 2. 13. Matth. 3. 2.) and particularly, we are to have a holy awe and reverence of God's pardoning mercy; (Hos. 3. 5.) *They shall fear the Lord, and his goodness; and then* we may expect the benefit of the forgiveness that is with God, when we make it the object of our holy fear.

5. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. 6. My soul waiteth for the LORD more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for

the morning. 7. Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. 8. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Here, 1. The psalmist engages himself to trust in God, and to wait for him, v. 5, 6. Observe, (1.) His dependence upon God, expressed in a climax, it being a song of degrees, or ascents: "*I wait for the Lord*; from him I expect relief and comfort, believing it will come, longing till it does come, but patiently bearing the delay of it, and resolving to look for it from no other hand. *My soul doth wait*; I wait for him in sincerity, and not in profession only. I am an expectant, and it is for the Lord that my soul waits, for the gifts of his grace, and the operations of his power." (2.) The ground of that dependence; *In his word do I hope*. We must hope for that only, which he has promised in his word, and not for the creatures of our own fancy and imagination; and we must hope for it, because he has promised it, and not from any opinion of our own merit. (3.) The degree of that dependence; *more than they that watch for the morning*; who are, [1.] Well-assured that the morning will come; and so am I, that God will return in mercy to me, according to his promise; for God's covenant is more firm than the ordinances of day and night, for they shall come to an end, but that is everlasting. [2.] Very desirous that it would come. Centinels that keep guard upon the walls, they that watch with sick people, and travellers that are abroad upon their journey, long before day, wish to see the dawning of the day; but more earnestly does this good man long for the tokens of God's favour, and the visits of his grace; and more readily will he be aware of his first appearances than they are of day. Dr. Hammond reads it thus: "*My soul hastens to the Lord, from the guards in the morning, the guards in the morning*;" and gives this sense of it, "To thee I daily betake myself, early in the morning, addressing my prayers, and my very soul, before thee, at the time that the priests offer their morning-sacrifice."

2. He encourages all the people of God, in like manner, to depend upon him, and trust in him; *Let Israel hope in the Lord, and wait for him*; not only the body of the people, but every good man, who surnames himself by the name of Israel, Isa. 44. 5. Let all that devote themselves to God cheerfully stay themselves upon him, (v. 7, 8.) for two reasons: (1.) Because the light of nature discovers to us that *there is mercy with him*, that the God of Israel is a merciful God, and the Father of mercies. *Mercy is with him*; not only inherent in his nature, but it is his delight, it is his darling attribute; it is with him in all his works, in all his counsels. (2.) Because the light of the gospel discovers to us that *there is redemption with him*, contrived by him, and to be wrought out in the fulness of time; it was in the beginning hid in God. See here, [1.] The nature of this redemption; it is redemption from sin, from all sin; and therefore can be no other than that eternal redemption which Jesus Christ became the Author of; for it is he that saves his people from their sins, (Matth. 1. 21.) that redeems them from all iniquity, (Tit. 2. 14.) and turns away ungodliness from Jacob, Rom. 11. 26. It is he that redeems us both from the condemning, and from the commanding, power of sin. [2.] The riches of this redemption; it is plenteous redemption; there is an all-sufficient fulness of merit and grace in the Redeemer, enough for all, enough for each; enough for me, says the believer. Redemption from sin includes redemption from all other evils, and therefore is a plenteous redemption. [3.] The persons to whom the benefits of this redemption belong; *He shall redeem Israel; Israel according to the spirit*; all those who are in covenant with God, as Israel was, and who are Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile.

PSALM CXXXI.

This psalm is David's profession of humility; humbly made, with thankfulness to God for his grace, and not in vain-glory. It is probable enough that (as most interpreters suggest) David made this protestation in answer to the calumnies of Saul and his courtiers, who represented David as an ambitious aspiring man, who, under pretence of a divine appointment, sought the

kingdom, in the pride of his heart. But he appeals to God, that, on the contrary, 1. He aimed at nothing high or great, v. 1. 11. He was very easy in every condition which God allotted him; (v. 2.) and therefore, 111. He encourages all good people to trust in God as he did, v. 3. Some have made it an objection against singing David's psalms, that there are many who cannot say, My heart is not haughty, &c. It is true there are; but we may sing it for the same purpose that we read it, to teach and admonish ourselves, and one another, what we ought to be; with repentance that we have come short of being so, and humble prayer to God for his grace to make us so.

A song of degrees of David.

1. **L**ORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. 2. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child. 3. Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and for ever.

Here are two things which will be comforts to us:

I. Consciousness of our integrity. This was David's rejoicing, that his heart could witness for him, that he had walked humbly with his God, notwithstanding the censures he was under, and the temptations he was in.

1. He aimed not at a high condition, nor was he desirous of making a figure in the world, but, if God had so ordered, could have been well-content to spend all his days, as he did the beginning of them, in the sheep-folds. His own brother, in a passion, charged him with pride, (1 Sam. 17. 28.) but the charge was groundless and unjust; God, who searches the heart, knew,

(1.) That he had no conceited opinion of himself, or his own merits; *Lord, my heart is not haughty.* Humble saints cannot think so well of themselves as others think of them; are not in love with their own shadow, nor do they magnify their own attainments or achievements. The love of God, reigning in the heart, will subdue all inordinate self-love.

(2.) That he had neither a scornful nor an aspiring look; "*My eyes are not lofty*, either to look with envy upon those that are above me, or to look with disdain upon those that are below me." Where there is a proud heart, there is commonly a proud look; (Prov. 6. 17.) but the humble publican will not so much as lift up his eyes.

(3.) That he did not employ himself in things above his station; *in things too great or too high* for him. He did not employ himself in studies too high; he made God's word his meditation, and did not amuse himself with matters of nice speculation or doubtful disputation, or covet to be wise above what is written. To know God and our duty, is learning sufficiently high for us. He did not employ himself in *affairs* too great; he followed his ewes, and never set up for a politician; no, nor for a soldier; for, when his brethren went to the wars, he stayed at home to keep the sheep. It is our wisdom, and will be our praise, to keep within our sphere, and not to intrude into things which we have not seen, or meddle with that which does not belong to us. Princes and scholars must not exercise themselves in matters too great, too high, for men; and those in a low station, and of ordinary capacities, must not pretend to that which is out of their reach, and which they were not cut out for. Those will fall under due shame, that affect undue honours.

2. He was well-reconciled to every condition that God placed him in; (v. 2.) *I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother.* As he had not proudly aimed at the kingdom, so, since God had appointed him to it, he had not behaved insolently towards any, nor been restless in his attempts to get the crown before the time set; but, (1.) He had been as humble as a little child about the age of a weaning, as manageable and governable, and as far from aiming at high things; as entirely at God's disposal, as the child at the disposal of the mother or nurse; as far from taking state upon him, though anointed to be king, or valuing himself upon the prospect of his future advancement, as a child in the arms. Our Saviour has taught us humility by this comparison; (Matth. 18. 3.) we must *become as*

little children. (2.) He had been as indifferent to the wealth and honour of this world as a child is to the breast, when it is thoroughly weaned from it. *I have levelled and quieted myself,* (so Dr. Hammond reads it,) *as a child that is weaned.* This intimates that our hearts are naturally as desirous of worldly things as the babe is of the breast, and in like manner relish them, cry for them, are fond of them, play with them, and cannot live without them. But, by the grace of God, a soul that is sanctified is weaned from those things. Providence puts wormwood upon the breast, and that helps to wean us. The child is perhaps cross and fretful while it is in the weaning, and thinks itself undone when it has lost the breast; but in a day or two it is forgotten, the fret is over, and it accommodates itself well enough to a new way of feeding; cares no longer for milk, but can bear strong meat. Thus does a gracious soul quiet itself under the loss of that which it loved, and disappointment in that which it hoped for, and is easy whatever happens; lives, and lives comfortably, upon God and the covenant-grace, when creatures prove dry breasts. When our condition is not to our mind, we must bring our mind to our condition; and then we are easy to ourselves, and all about us; then our souls are *as a weaned child.*

II. Confidence in God; and this David recommends to all the Israel of God, no doubt from his own experience of the benefit of it; (v. 3.) *Let Israel hope in the Lord*, and let them continue to do so, *from henceforth and for ever.* Though David could himself wait patiently and quietly for the crown designed him, yet perhaps Israel, the people whose darling he was, would be ready to attempt something in favour of him before the time; he therefore endeavours to quiet them too, and bids them *hope in the Lord*, that they should see a happy change of the face of affairs in due time. *Thus it is good to hope, and quietly to wait, for the salvation of the Lord.*

PSALM CXXXII.

It is probable that this psalm was penned by Solomon, to be sung at the dedication of the temple which he built according to the charge his father gave him, 1 Chron. 28. 2, &c. Having fulfilled his trust, he begs of God to own what he had done. 1. He had built this house for the honour and service of God; and when he brings the ark into it, the token of God's presence, he desires God himself would come and take possession of it, v. 8. 10. With these words Solomon concluded his prayer, 2 Chron. 6. 41, 42. II. He had built it in pursuance of the orders he had received from his father, and therefore his pleas to enforce these petitions refer to David. 1. He pleads David's piety toward God, v. 1. 7. 2. He pleads God's promise to David, v. 11. 18. The former introduces his petition, the latter follows it as an answer to it. In singing this psalm, we must have a concern for the gospel church, as the temple of God, and a dependence upon Christ, as David our King, in whom the mercies of God are sure mercies.

A song of degrees.

1. **L**ORD, remember David, and all his afflictions: 2. How he swore unto the LORD, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; 3. Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; 4. I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, 5. Until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. 6. Lo, we heard of it at Ephrath: we found it in the fields of the wood. 7. We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool. 8. Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength. 9. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy. 10. For thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed.

In these verses, we have Solomon's address to God for his favour to him and to his government, and his acceptance of his building a house to God's name. Observe,

I. What he pleads: two things.

1. That what he had done was in pursuance of the pious vow which his father David had made to build a house for God. Solomon was a wise man, yet pleads not any merit of his own; "I am not worthy, for whom thou shouldest do this; but, *Lord, remember David*, with whom thou madest the covenant;" (as Moses prayed, Exod. 32. 13. *Remember Abraham*, the first trustee of the covenant;) "remember *all his afflictions*, all the troubles of his life, which his being anointed was the occasion of;" or, his care and concern about the ark, and what an uneasiness it was to him that the ark was in curtains, 2 Sam. 7. 2. *Remember all his humility and meekness*; so some read it; all that pious and devout affection with which he had made the following vow. Note, It is not amiss for us to put God in mind of our predecessors in profession, of their afflictions, their services, and their sufferings; of God's covenant with them, the experiences they have had of his goodness, the care they took of, and the many prayers they put up for, those that should come after them. We may apply it to Christ, the Son of David, and to all his afflictions; "Lord, remember the covenant made with him, and the satisfaction made by him; *Remember all his offerings*, (Ps. 20. 3.) all his sufferings."

He especially pleads the solemn vow that David had made as soon as ever he was settled in his government, and before he was well-settled in a house of his own, that he would build a house for God. Observe,

(1.) Whom he bound himself to; *to the Lord, to the mighty God of Jacob*. Vows are to be made to God, who is a Party as well as a Witness. The Lord is the mighty One of Jacob; Jacob's God, and a mighty One, whose power is engaged for Jacob's defence and deliverance. Jacob is weak, but the God of Jacob is a mighty One.

(2.) What he bound himself to do; *to find out a place for the Lord*, for the ark, the token of his presence. He had observed in the law frequent mention of the *place that God would choose to put his name there*, to which all the tribes should resort. When he came to the crown, there was no such place, Shiloh was deserted, and no other place was pitched upon, for want of which the trusts of the Lord were not kept with due solemnity: "Well," says David, "I will find out such a place for the general rendezvous of all the tribes, a place of *habitation for the mighty One of Jacob*, a place for the ark, where there shall be room both for the priests and people to attend upon it."

(3.) How intent he was upon it; he would not settle in his house; nay, he would not sleep in his bed, till he had brought this matter to some head, v. 3, 4. The thing had been long talked of, and nothing done, till at last David, when he went out one morning about public business, made a vow, that before night he would come to a resolution in this matter, and would determine the place either where the tent should be pitched for the reception of the ark, at the beginning of his reign, or rather, where Solomon should build the temple, which was not fixed till the latter end of his reign, just after the pestilence with which he was punished for numbering the people; (1 Chron. 22. 1.) *Then David said, This is the house of the Lord*. And perhaps it was upon occasion of that judgment that he made this vow, being apprehensive that one of God's controversies with him was for his dilatoriness in this matter. Note, When needful work is to be done for God, it is good for us to task ourselves, and tie ourselves to a time, because we are apt to put off. It is good in the morning to cut out work for the day, binding ourselves that we will do it before we sleep, only with submission to Providence; *for we know not what a day may bring forth*. Especially in the great work of conversion to God, we must be thus solicitous, thus zealous; we have good reason to resolve that we will not enjoy the comforts of this life, till we have laid a foundation for hopes of a better.

2. That it was in pursuance of the expectations of the people of Israel, v. 6, 7. (1.) They were inquisitive after the ark; for they lamented its obscurity, 1 Sam. 7. 2. They *heard of it at Ephratah*, at Shiloh, in the tribe of Ephraim, there they were told it had been, but it was gone; they *found it* at last *in the fields*

of the wood, in Kirjath-jearim, which signifies *the city of woods*. Thence all Israel fetched it, with great solemnity, in the beginning of David's reign, (1 Chron. 13. 6.) so that in building this house for the ark, Solomon had gratified all Israel; they needed not to go about to seek the ark any more, they now knew where to find it. (2.) They were resolved to attend it; "Let us but have a convenient place, and *we will go into his tabernacle*, to pay our homage there; *we will worship at his footstool*, as subjects and supplicants; which we neglected to do, for want of such a place, *in the days of Saul*," 1 Chron. 13. 3.

II. What he prays for, v. 8. . 10.

1. That God would vouchsafe, not only to take possession of, but to take up his residence in, this temple which he had built. *Arise, O Lord, into thy rest*, and let this be it, *thou, even the ark of thy strength*, the pledge of thy presence, thy mighty presence.

2. That God would give grace to the ministers of the sanctuary to do their duty; *Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness*; let them appear righteous both in their administrations and in their conversations, and let both be according to the rule. Note, Righteousness is the best ornament of a minister. Holiness towards God, and goodness towards all men, are habits for ministers, of the necessity of which there is no dispute. "They are *thy priests*, and will therefore discredit their relation to thee, if they be not clothed with righteousness."

3. That the people of God might have the comfort of the due administration of holy ordinances among them; *Let thy saints shout for joy*; they did so when the ark was brought into the city of David; (2 Sam. 6. 15.) they will do so when the *priests are clothed with righteousness*. A faithful ministry is the joy of the saints; it is the matter of it; it is a friend and a furtherance to it; we are *helpers of your joy*, 2 Cor. 1. 24.

4. That Solomon's own prayer, upon occasion of the dedicating of the temple, might be accepted of God; "Turn not away the face of thine anointed; deny me not the things I have asked of thee; send me not away ashamed. He pleads, (1.) That he was the anointed of the Lord, and this he pleads as a type of Christ, the great Anointed, who, in his intercession, urges his designation to his office. He is God's Anointed, and therefore the Father hears him always. (2.) That he was the son of David; "For his sake do not deny me;" and this is the Christian's plea; "For the sake of Christ," (our David,) "*in whom thou art well-pleased*, accept me." He is David, whose name signifies *beloved*; and we are made accepted in the Beloved. He is God's Servant, whom he *upholds*, Isa. 42. 1. We have no merit of our own to plead, but, for his sake, in whom there is a fulness of merit, let us find favour. When we pray for the prosperity of the church, we may with great boldness, for Christ's sake, who purchased the church with his own blood; let both ministers and people do their duty.

11. The LORD hath sworn *in truth* unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. 12. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore. 13. For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired *it* for his habitation. 14. This *is* my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. 15. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. 16. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. 17. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. 18. His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.

These are precious promises, confirmed by an oath, that the heirs

of them might have *strong consolation*, Heb. 6. 17, 18. It is all one whether we take them as pleas urged in the prayer, or as answers returned to the prayer; believers know how to make use of the promises both ways; with them to speak to God, and in them to hear what God the Lord will speak to us. These promises relate to the establishment both in church and state, both to the throne of the house of David, and to the testimony of Israel fixed on mount Zion. The promises concerning Zion's hill are as applicable to the gospel-church, as these concerning David's seed are to Christ; and therefore both pleadable by us, and very comfortable to us. Here is,

I. The choice God made of David's house, and Zion hill. Both were of divine appointment.

1. God chose David's family for the royal family, and confirmed his choice by an oath, v. 11, 12. David, being a type of Christ, was made king with an oath, *The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent*, will not turn from it. Did David swear to the Lord, that he would find him a house? (v. 2.) The Lord swore to David that he would build him a house; for God will be behind with none of his people in affections or assurances. The promise made to David refers, (1.) To a long succession of kings that should descend from his loins; *Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne*, which was fulfilled in Solomon; David himself lived to see it with great satisfaction, 1 Kings, 1. 48. The crown was also entailed conditionally upon his heirs for ever; *If thy children, in following ages, will keep my covenant, and my testimony that I shall teach them*; God himself engages to teach them, and he did his part; they had Moses and the prophets, and all he expects, is, that they should keep what he taught them, and keep to it, and then, *their children shall sit upon thy throne for evermore*. Kings are before God upon their good behaviour, and their commission from him runs *quandiu se bene gesserint—during good behaviour*. The issue of this was, that they did not keep God's covenant, and so the entail was at length cut off, and *the sceptre departed from Judah* by degrees. (2.) To an everlasting Successor, a King that should descend from his loins, *of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end*. St. Peter applies this to Christ, nay, he tells us, that David himself so understood it; (Acts, 2. 30.) *He knew that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne*; and in the fulness of time he did so, and gave him *the throne of his father David*, Luke, 1. 32. He did fulfil the condition of the promise, he kept God's covenant and his testimony, did his Father's will, and in all things pleased him, and therefore to him, and his spiritual seed, the promise shall be made good; he, and the children God has given him, all believers, shall sit upon the throne for evermore, Rev. 3. 21.

2. God chose Zion hill for the holy hill, and confirmed his choice by the delight he took in it, v. 13, 14. He chose the mount Zion which he loved; (78. 68.) he chose it for the habitation of his ark, and said of it, *This is my rest for ever*, and not my residence for a time, as Shiloh was. Zion was the city of David, he chose it for the royal city, because God chose it for the holy city. God said, *Here will I dwell*, and therefore David said, *Here will I dwell*, for he adhered to his principle, *It is good for me to be near to God*. Zion must be here looked upon as a type of the gospel-church, which is called *mount Zion*, (Heb. 12. 22.) and in it what is here said of Zion has its full accomplishment. Zion was long since ploughed as a field, but the church of Christ is *the house of the living God*, (1 Tim. 3. 15.) and it is his *rest for ever*, and shall be blessed with his presence always, even to the end of the world. The delight God takes in his church, and the continuance of his presence with his church, are the comfort and joy of all its members.

II. The choice blessings God has in store for David's house, and Zion hill. Whom God chooses he will bless.

1. God, having chosen Zion hill, promises to bless that, (1.) With the blessings of the life that now is; for godliness has the promise of them, v. 15. The earth shall yield her increase; where religion is set up, there shall be provision, and in blessing God will bless it; (87. 6.) he will surely and abundantly bless it. And a little

provision, with an abundant blessing upon it, will be more serviceable, as well as more comfortable, than a great deal without that blessing. God's people have a special blessing upon common enjoyments, and that blessing puts a peculiar sweetness into them. Nay, the promise goes further; *I will satisfy her poor with bread*. Zion has her own poor to keep; and it is promised that God will take care even of them. [1.] By his providence they shall be kept from wanting, they shall have provision enough. If there be scarcity, the poor are the first that feel it, so that it is a sure sign of plenty if they have sufficient. Zion's poor shall not want, for God has obliged all the sons of Zion to be charitable to the poor, according to their ability, and the church must take care that they be not *neglected*, Acts, 6. 1. [2.] By his grace, they shall be kept from complaining; though they have but dry bread, yet they shall be satisfied. Zion's poor have, of all others, reason to be content with a little of this world, because they have better things prepared for them. And this may be understood spiritually of the provision that is made for the soul, in the word and ordinances; God will abundantly bless that for the nourishment of the new man, and satisfy the poor in spirit with the bread of life. What God sanctifies to us, we shall and may be satisfied with.

(2.) With the blessings of the life that is to come, things pertaining to godliness; (v. 16.) which is an answer to the prayer, v. 9. [1.] It was desired that the priests might be *clothed with righteousness*; it is here promised that God will *clothe them with salvation*; not only save them, but make them and their administrations instrumental for the salvation of his people; they shall both *save themselves and those that hear them*, and *add those to the church that shall be saved*. Note, Whom God clothes with righteousness he will clothe with salvation; we must pray for righteousness, and then with it God will give salvation. [2.] It was desired that the saints might *shout for joy*; it is promised that they shall *shout aloud for joy*. God gives more than we ask, and when he gives salvation he will give an abundant joy.

2. God, having chosen David's family, here promises to bless that also with suitable blessings.

(1.) Growing power; *There, in Zion, will I make the horn of David to bud*, v. 17. The royal dignity shall increase more and more, and constant additions be made to the lustre of it. Christ is the *Horn of salvation*, denoting a plentiful and powerful salvation, which God has raised up, and made to bud, *in the house of his servant David*. David had promised to use his power for God's glory, to cut off the horns of the wicked, and to exalt the horns of the righteous; (75. 10.) in recompence for it, God here promises to make his horn to bud, for to them that have power, and use it well, more shall be given.

(2.) Lasting honour; *I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed*. Thou wilt *light my candle*; (18. 28.) that lamp is likely to burn bright which God ordains. A lamp is a successor; for, when a lamp is almost out, another may be lighted by it: it is a succession; for by this means David shall not want a man to stand before God. Christ is the Lamp and the Light of the world.

(3.) Complete victory; *His enemies*, who have formed design against him, *will I clothe with shame*, when they shall see their designs baffled. Let the enemies of all good governors expect to be clothed with shame, and especially the enemies of the Lord Jesus and his government, who shall rise, in the great day, to everlasting shame and contempt.

(4.) Universal prosperity; *Upon himself shall his crown flourish*, his government shall be more and more his honour. This was to have its full accomplishment in Jesus Christ, whose crown of honour and power shall never fade, nor the flowers of it wither. The crowns of earthly princes *endure not to all generations*, (Prov. 27. 24.) but Christ's crown shall endure to all eternity, and the crowns reserved for his faithful subjects are such as *fade not away*.

PSALM CXXXIII.

This psalm is a brief encomium on unity and brotherly love, which, if we did not see the miseries of discord among men, we should think needless; but we cannot say too much, it were well if we could say enough, to persuade people to live

together in peace. Some conjecture that David penned it upon occasion of the union between the tribes, when they all met unanimously to make him king. It is a psalm of general use to all societies, lesser and larger, civil and sacred. Here is, 1. The doctrine bid down of the happiness of brotherly love, v. 1. II. The illustration of that doctrine, in two similitudes, v. 2, 3. III. The proof of it, in a good reason given for it; (v. 3.) and then we are left to make the application, which we ought to do in singing it, provoking ourselves and one another to holy love. The contents of this psalm, in our Bibles, are short, but very proper; it is the benefit of the communion of saints.

A song of degrees of David.

1. **BEHOLD**, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity? 2. *It is* like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, *even* Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments; 3. As the dew of Hermon, *and as the dew* that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, *even* life for evermore.

Here see, 1. What it is that is commended; *brethren's dwelling together in unity*; not only not quarrelling, and devouring one another, but delighting in each other with mutual endearments, and promoting each other's welfare with mutual services. Sometimes it is chosen, as the best expedient for preserving peace, that brethren should live asunder and at a distance from each other; that indeed may prevent enmity and strife, (Gen. 13. 9.) but the goodness and pleasantness are, *for brethren to dwell together*, and *so to dwell in unity*; *to dwell even as one*, so some read it; as having one heart, one soul, one interest. David had many sons by many wives; probably, he penned this psalm for their instruction, to engage them to love one another; which, if they had done, much of the mischief that arose in his family had been happily prevented. The tribes of Israel had long had separate interests, during the government of the Judges, and it was often of bad consequence; but now that they were united under one common head, he would have them sensible how much it was likely to be for their advantage; especially since now the ark was fixed, and with it the place of their rendezvous for public worship, and the centre of their unity. Now let them live in love.

2. How commendable it is; *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is!* It is good in itself, agreeable to the will of God, the conformity of earth to heaven. It is good for us, for our honour and comfort; it is pleasant and pleasing to God and all good men; it brings constant delight to those who do thus live in unity. *Behold, how good!* We cannot conceive or express the goodness and pleasantness of it. *Behold*, it is a rare thing, and therefore admirable. *Behold*, and wonder that there should be so much goodness and pleasantness among men, so much of heaven on this earth! *Behold*, it as an amiable thing, which will attract our hearts. *Behold*, it as an exemplary thing, which, where it is, is to be imitated by us with a holy emulation.

3. How the pleasantness of it is illustrated. (1.) It is fragrant as the holy anointing oil, which was strongly perfumed, and diffused its odours, to the great delight of all the by-standers, when it was poured upon the head of Aaron, or his successor the high priest, so plentifully, that it ran down the face, even to the collar or binding of the garment, v. 2. [1.] This was holy ointment; such must our brotherly love be, with a pure heart, devoted to God. We must love them that are begotten, *for his sake that begat*, 1 John, 5. 1. [2.] This ointment was a composition made up by a divine dispensatory; God appointed the ingredients and the quantities. Thus believers are *taught of God to love one another*; it is a grace of his working in us. [3.] It was very precious, and the like to it was not to be made for any common use. Thus holy love is, in the sight of God, of great price; and that is precious indeed, which is so in God's sight. [4.] It was grateful, both to Aaron himself and to all about him; so is holy love; it is like *ointment and perfume which rejoice the heart*. Christ's love to mankind was part of that *oil of gladness* with which he was

anointed above his fellows. [5.] Aaron and his sons were not admitted to minister unto the Lord till they were anointed with this ointment, nor are our services acceptable to God without this holy love; if we have it not, we are nothing, 1 Cor. 13. 1, 2.

(2.) It is fructifying; it is profitable as well as pleasing; it is *as the dew*; it brings abundance of blessings along with it, as numerous as the drops of dew. It cools the scorching heat of men's passions, as the evening dews cool the air and refresh the earth. It contributes very much to our fruitfulness in every thing that is good, it moistens the heart, and makes it tender and fit to receive the good seed of the word; as, on the contrary, *malice and bitterness* unfit us to receive it, 1 Pet. 2. 1. It is *as the dew of Hermon*, a common hill; for brotherly love is the beauty and benefit of civil societies; *and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion*, a holy hill, for it contributes greatly to the fruitfulness of sacred societies. Both Hermon and Zion will wither without this dew. It is said of the dew, that it *tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men*, Mic. 5. 7. Nor should our love to our brethren stay for their's to us, that is publican's love; but should go before it, that is divine love.

4. The proof of the excellency of brotherly love. Loving people are blessed people. For,

(1.) They are blessed of God, and therefore blessed indeed. *There*, where brethren dwell together in unity, *the Lord commands the blessing*, a complicated blessing, including all blessings. It is God's prerogative to command the blessings, man can but beg a blessing. Blessings, according to the promise, are commanded blessings, for he has commanded *his covenant for ever*. Blessings that take effect, are commanded blessings, *for he speaks and it is done*.

(2.) They are everlastingly blessed. The blessing which God commands on them that dwell in love, is, *life for evermore*; that is the blessing of blessings. They that dwell in love, not only dwell in God, but do already dwell in heaven. As the perfection of love is the blessedness of heaven, so the sincerity of love is the earnest of that blessedness. They that live in love and peace, shall have the God of love and peace with them now, and they shall be with him shortly, with him for ever, in the world of endless love and peace. How good then is it, and how pleasant!

PSALM CXXXIV.

This is the last of the fifteen songs of degrees; and if they were at any time sung all together in the temple-service, it is fitly made the conclusion of them, for the design of it is, to stir up the ministers to go on with their work in the night, when the solemnities of the day were over. Some make this psalm to be a dialogue. I. In the two first verses, the priests or Levites, who sat up all night to keep the watch of the house of the Lord, are called upon to spend their time while they were upon the guard, not in idle talk, but in the acts of devotion. II. In the last verse, they who were thus called upon to praise God, pray for him that gave them the exhortation, either the high priest, or the captain of the guard. Or thus; they who did that service, did mutually exhort one another, and pray for one another. In singing this psalm, we must both stir up ourselves to give glory to God, and encourage ourselves to hope for mercy and grace from him.

A song of degrees.

1. **BEHOLD**, bless ye the LORD, all *ye* servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. 2. Lift up your hands *in* the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. 3. The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.

This psalm instructs us concerning a two-fold blessing:

1. Our blessing God; that is, speaking well of him, which here we are taught to do, v. 1, 2.

(1.) It is a call to the *Levites* to do it; they were the *servants of the Lord* by office, appointed to minister in holy things; they attended the sanctuary, and kept the charge of the house of the Lord, Numb. 3. 6, &c. Some of them did *by night stand in the house of the Lord*, to guard the holy things of the temple, that they might not be profaned, and the rich things of the temple, that they might not be plundered. While the ark was in curtains, there was the more need of guards upon it. They attended likewise to

see that neither the fire on the altar, nor the lamps in the candlestick, went out. Probably, it was usual for some devout and pious Israelites to sit up with them; we read of one that *departed not from the temple night or day*, Luke, 2. 37. Now these are here called upon to *bless the Lord*. Thus they must keep themselves awake by keeping themselves employed; thus they must redeem time for holy exercises: and how can we spend our time better than in praising God? It would be an excellent piece of good husbandry, to fill up the vacancies of time with pious meditations and ejaculations; and surely it is a very modest and reasonable demand to converse with God when we have nothing else to do. They who stood *in the house of the Lord*, must remember where they were, and that holiness and holy work became that house. Let them therefore *bless the Lord*; let them all do it in concert, or each by himself; let them *lift up their hands* in the doing of it, in token of their lifting up of their hearts. *Let them lift up their hands in holiness*, so Dr. Hammond reads it; or in sanctification; as it is fit when they lift them up *in the sanctuary*; and let them remember, that when they were appointed to wash before they went in to minister, they were thereby taught to *lift up holy hands* in prayer and praise.

(2.) It is a call to us to do it, who, as Christians, are made priests to our God, and Levites, Isa. 66. 21. We are the *servants of the Lord*, we have a place and a name in his house, in his sanctuary, we stand before him to minister to him, even by night we are under his eye, and have access to him. Let us therefore *bless the Lord*, and again bless him; think and speak of his glory and goodness; let us *lift up* our hands in prayer, in praise, in vows; let us do our work with diligence and cheerfulness, and an elevation of mind. This exhortation is ushered in with *Behold!* a note commanding attention. Look about you, Sirs, when you are in God's presence, and conduct yourselves accordingly.

2. God's blessing us, and that is doing well for us, which we are here taught to desire, v. 3. Whether it is the watchmen's blessing their captain, or the Levites' blessing the high priest, or whoever was their chief, as many take it, because it is in the singular number, *The Lord bless thee*; or whether the blessing is pronounced by one upon many, *The Lord bless thee*, each of you in particular, *thee and thee*: you that are blessing God, the Lord bless you; is not material. We may learn, (1.) That we need desire no more to make us happy, than to be blessed of the Lord, for those whom he blesses are blessed indeed. (2.) That blessings out of Zion, spiritual blessings, the blessings of the covenant, and of communion with God, are the best blessings, which we should be most earnest for. (3.) It is a great encouragement to us, when we come to God for a blessing, that it is he who *made heaven and earth*, and therefore has all the blessings of both at his disposal, the upper and nether springs. (4.) We ought to beg these blessings, not only for ourselves, but for others also; not only, The Lord bless *me*, but, The Lord bless *thee*; thus testifying our belief of the fulness of divine blessings, that there is enough for others as well as for us, and our good-will also to others. We must pray for them that exhort us. Though *the less is blessed of the greater*, (Heb. 7. 7.) yet the greater must be prayed for by the less.

PSALM CXXXV.

This is one of the Hallelujah-psalms; that is the title of it, and that is the Amen of it, both its alpha and its omega. I. It begins with a call to praise God, particularly a call to the servants of the Lord to praise him, as in the foregoing psalm, v. 1. 3. II. It goes on to furnish us with matter for praise. God is to be praised, 1. As the God of Jacob, v. 4. 2. As the God of gods, v. 5. 3. As the God of the whole world, v. 6, 7. 4. As a terrible God to the enemies of Israel, v. 8. 11. 5. As a gracious God to Israel, both in what he had done for them, and what he would do, v. 12. 14. 6. As the only living God, all other gods being vanity and a lie, v. 15. 18. III. It concludes with another exhortation to all persons concerned to praise God, v. 19. 21. In singing this psalm, our hearts must be filled, as well as our mouths, with the high praises of God.

1. **P**RAISE ye the LORD. Praise ye the name of the LORD; praise *him*, O ye servants of the LORD. 2. Ye that stand in the house of the

LORD, in the courts of the house of our God, 3. Praise the LORD; for the LORD is good: sing praises unto his name: for *it is pleasant*. 4. For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.

Here is,

1. The duty we are called to; to *praise the Lord*, to *praise his name*; *praise him*, and again *praise him*. We must not only thank him for what he has done for us, but praise him for what he is in himself, and has done for others; take all occasions to speak well of God, and to give his truths and ways a good word.

2. The persons that are called upon to do this; the *servants of the Lord*, the priests and Levites that stand in his house, and all the devout and pious Israelites that stand in the courts of his house to worship there, v. 2. They have most reason to praise God, who are admitted to the privileges of his house; and they see most reason, who there behold his beauty, and taste his bounty; from them it is expected, for to that end they enjoy their places. Who should praise him, if they do not?

3. The reasons why we should praise God.

(1.) Because he whom we are to praise is *good*; and goodness is that which every body will speak well of. He is good to all, and we must give him the praise of that; his goodness is his glory, and we must make mention of it to his glory.

(2.) Because the work is its own wages; *Sing praises to his name, for it is pleasant*. It is best done with a cheerful spirit, and we shall have the pleasure of having done our duty. It is a heaven upon earth to be praising God; and the pleasure of that should quite put our mouths out of taste for the pleasures of sin.

(3.) Because of the peculiar privileges of God's people; (v. 4.) *The Lord hath chosen Jacob to himself*, and therefore Jacob is bound to praise him; for *therefore* God chose a people to himself, that they might be unto him *for a name and a praise*; (Jer. 13. 11.) and *therefore* Jacob has abundant matter for praise, being thus dignified and distinguished. *Israel* is God's *peculiar treasure* above all people; (Exod. 19. 5.) they are his *Segullah*, a people appropriated to him, and that he has a delight in, *precious in his sight, and honourable*. For this distinguishing, surprising, favour, if the seed of Jacob do not praise him, they are the most unworthy, ungrateful, people under the sun.

5. For I know that the LORD is great, and that our LORD is above all gods. 6. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. 7. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures. 8. Who smote the first-born of Egypt, both of man and beast. 9. Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants. 10. Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings; 11. Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan: 12. And gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people. 13. Thy name, O LORD, endureth for ever; and thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations. 14. For the LORD will judge his people, and he will repent himself concerning his servants.

The psalmist had suggested to us the goodness of God, as the proper matter of our *cheerful* praises; here he suggests to us the greatness of God, as the proper matter of our *awful* praises; and on this he is most large, because this we are less forward to consider

I. He asserts the doctrine of God's greatness; (v. 5.) *The Lord is great; great indeed, who knows no limits of time or place.* He asserts it with assurance, "I know that he is so; know it not only by observation of the proofs of it, but by belief of the revelation of it. I know it; I am sure of it, I know it by my own experience of the divine greatness working on my soul." He asserts it with a holy defiance of all pretenders, though they should join in confederacy against him; he is not only above any god, but above all gods, infinitely above them, betwixt him and them there is no comparison.

II. He proves him to be a great God, by the greatness of his power, v. 6. 1. He has an absolute power, and may do what he will; *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he, and none could controul him, or say unto him, What doest thou?* He does what he pleases, because he pleases, and gives not account of any of his matters. 2. He has an almighty power, and can do what he will; if he will work, none shall hinder. 3. This absolute almighty power is of universal extent; he doeth what he will, *in heaven, in earth, in the seas, and in all the deep places* that are in the bottom of the sea or the bowels of the earth. The gods of the heathen can do nothing; but our God can do any thing, and does do every thing.

III. He gives instances of his great power.

1. In the kingdom of nature, v. 7. All the powers of nature prove the greatness of the God of nature, from whom they are derived, and on whom they depend. The chain of natural causes was not only framed by him at first, but is still preserved by him. (1.) It is by his power that exhalations are drawn up from the terraqueous globe; the heat of the sun raises them, but it has that power from God, and therefore it is given as an instance of the glory of God, that *nothing is hid from the heat of the sun*, 19. 6. *He causes the vapours to ascend* (not only unhelped, but unseen, by us) from the earth, from the ends of the earth, that is, from the seas, by which the earth is surrounded. (2.) It is he who, out of those vapours so raised, forms the rain, so that the earth is no loser by the vapours it sends up, for they are returned with advantage in fruitful showers. (3.) Out of the same vapours (such is his wonderful power) he *makes lightnings for the rain*, by them he opens the bottles of heaven, and shakes the clouds, that they may water the earth. Here are fire and water thoroughly reconciled by Divine Omnipotence. They come together, and yet the water does not quench the fire, nor the fire lick up the water, as fire from heaven did when God pleased, 1 Kings, 18. 38. (4.) The same exhalations, to serve another purpose, are converted into winds, which blow where they list, from what point of the compass they will, and we are so far from directing them, that we cannot tell whence they come or whither they go, but God *brings them out of his treasures* with as much exactness and design as a prudent prince orders money to issue out of his exchequer.

2. In the kingdoms of men; and here he mentions the great things God had formerly done for his people Israel, which were proofs of God's greatness as well as of his goodness, and confirmations of the truth of the scriptures of the Old Testament, which began to be written by Moses, the person employed in working those miracles. Observe God's sovereign dominion, and irresistible power, (1.) In bringing Israel out of Egypt, humbling Pharaoh by many plagues, and so forcing him to let them go. These plagues are called *tokens and wonders*, because they came not in the common course of providence, but there was something miraculous in each of them. They were *sent upon Pharaoh and all his servants*, his subjects; but the Israelites, whom God claimed for his servants, his sons, his first-born, his free-born, were exempted from them, and no plague came nigh their dwelling. The death of the first-born, both of men and cattle, was the heaviest of all the plagues, and that which gained the point. (2.) In destroying the kingdoms of Canaan before them, v. 10. They that were in possession of the land designed for Israel, had all possible advantages for keeping possession; the people were numerous, and warlike, and confederate against Israel; they were great nations. Yet if a great nation has a meek and mean-spirited prince, it lies exposed; but these great nations had *mighty kings*,

and yet they were all smitten and slain; *Sihon and Og, and all the kingdoms of Canaan*; v. 10, 11. No power of hell or earth can prevent the accomplishment of the promise of God, when the time, the set-time, for it, is come. (3.) In settling them in the land of promise. He that gives kingdoms to whomsoever he pleases, gave Canaan to be a heritage to Israel his people. It came to them by inheritance, for their ancestors had the promise of it, though not the possession; and it descended as an inheritance to their seed. This was done long before, yet God is now praised for it; and with good reason, for the children were now enjoying the benefit of it.

IV. He triumphs in the perpetuity of God's glory and grace. 1. Of his glory; (v. 13.) *Thy name, O God, endures for ever.* God's manifestations of himself to his people have everlasting fruits and consequences. *What God doeth, it shall be for ever*, Eccl. 3. 14. His name endures for ever, in the constant and everlasting praises of his people; his memorial endures, has endured hitherto, and shall still endure throughout all generations of the church. This seems to refer to Exod. 3. 15. where, when God had called himself *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, he adds, *This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.* God is, and will be, always the same to his church, a gracious, faithful, wonder-working God; and his church is and will be, the same to him, a thankful, praising, people; and thus his name *endures for ever*. 2. Of his grace; he will be kind to his people. (1.) He will plead their cause against others that contend with them; he will judge his people, he will judge for them, and will not suffer them to be run down. (2.) He will not himself contend for ever with them, but will repent himself concerning his servants, and not proceed in his controversy with them; he will be entreated for them, or he will be comforted concerning them; he will return in ways of mercy to them, and will delight to do them good. This verse is taken from the song of Moses, Deut. 32. 36.

15. The idols of the heathen *are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.* 16. They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; 17. They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there *any* breath in their mouths. 18. They that make them are like unto them: *so is every one that trusteth in them.* 19. Bless the LORD, O house of Israel: bless the LORD, O house of Aaron: 20. Bless the LORD, O house of Levi: ye that fear the LORD, bless the LORD. 21. Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.

The design of these verses is,

1. To arm the people of God against idolatry and all false worship, by shewing what sort of gods they were that the heathen worshipped, as we had it before, 115. 4, &c. (1.) They were gods of their own making; being so, they could have no power but what their makers gave them; and then, what power could their makers receive from them? The images were the *work of men's hands*, and the deities that were supposed to inform them, were as much the creatures of men's fancy and imagination. (2.) They had the shape of animals, but could not perform the least act, nor not of the *animal* life. They could neither *see*, nor *hear*, nor *speak*, nor so much as *breathe*; and therefore to make them with *eyes*, and *ears*, and *mouths*, and *nostrils*, was such a jest, that one would wonder how reasonable creatures could suffer themselves to be so imposed upon, as to expect any good from such mock-deities. (3.) Their worshippers were therefore as stupid and senseless as they were: both those that made them to be worshipped, and those that trusted in them when they were made, v. 18. The worshipping of such gods as were the objects of sense, and senseless, made the worshippers sensual and senseless.

Let our worshipping of a God that is a Spirit, make us spiritual and wise.

2. To stir up the people of God to true devotion in the worship of the true God, v. 19..21. The more deplorable the condition of the Gentile nations that worship idols is, the more are we bound to thank God that we know better. Therefore, (1.) Let us set ourselves about the acts of devotion, and employ ourselves in them; *Bless the Lord*, and again, and again, *bless the Lord*. In the parallel place, (115. 9..11.) by way of inference, from the impotency of idols, the duty thus pressed upon us, is, to *trust in the Lord*; here, to *bless him*; by putting our trust in God, we give glory to him, and they that depend upon God shall not want matter of thanksgiving to him. All persons that knew God are here called to praise him: the *house of Israel*, the nation in general; the *house of Aaron*, and the *house of Levi*, the Lord's ministers that attended in his sanctuary; and all others that *feared the Lord*, though they were not of the house of Israel. (2.) Let God have the glory of all; *Blessed be the Lord*. The tribute of praise arises out of Zion; all God's works do praise him, but his saints bless him; and they need not go far to pay their tribute, for he *dwells in Jerusalem*, in his church, which they are members of, so that he is always nigh unto them to receive their homage. The condescensions of his grace, in dwelling with men upon the earth, call for our grateful and thankful returns, and our repeated Hallelujahs.

PSALM CXXXVI.

The scope of this psalm is the same with that of the foregoing psalm, but there is something very singular in the composition of it; for the latter half of each verse is the same, repeated throughout the psalm, for his mercy endureth for ever, and yet no vain repetition. It is allowed that such burthens, or keepings, as we call them, add very much to the beauty of a song, and help to make it moving and affecting; nor can any verse contain more weighty matter, or more worthy to be thus repeated, than this, that God's mercy endureth for ever; and the repetition of it here twenty-six times, intimates, 1. That God's mercies to his people are thus repeated and drawn, as it were, with a continuando from the beginning to the end, with a progress and advance in infinitum. 2. That in every particular favour we ought to take notice of the mercy of God, and to take notice of it as enduring still, the same now that it has been, and enduring for ever, the same always that it is. 3. That the everlasting continuance of the mercy of God is very much his honour, and that which he glories in, and very much the saints' comfort, and that which they glory in. It is that which therefore our hearts should be full of, and greatly affected with, so that the most frequent mention of it, instead of cloying us, should raise us the more, because it will be the subject of our praise to all eternity. This most excellent sentence, that God's mercy endureth for ever, is magnified above all the truths concerning God, not only by the repetition of it here, but by the signal tokens of divine acceptance with which God owned the singing of it, both in Solomon's time, (2 Chron. 5. 13. when they sang these words, for his mercy endureth for ever, the house was filled with a cloud,) and in Jehoshaphat's time; (when they sang these words, God gave them victory, 2 Chron. 20. 21, 22.) which should make us love to sing, His mercies sure do still endure, eternally. We must praise God, I. As great and good in himself, v. 1..3. II. As the Creator of the world, v. 5..9. III. As Israel's God and Saviour, v. 10..22. IV. As our Redeemer, v. 23, 24. V. As the great Benefactor of the whole creation, and God over all, blessed for evermore, v. 25, 26.

1. **O** GIVE thanks unto the LORD; for *he is* good: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
2. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy *endureth* for ever. 8. O give thanks to the LORD of lords: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
4. To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy *endureth* for ever. 5. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy *endureth* for ever. 6. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.
7. To him that made great lights: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 8. The sun to rule by day: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 9. The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy *endureth* for ever

The duty we are here again and again called to, is, to *give thanks*, to offer the sacrifice of praise continually, not the fruits of our ground or cattle, but the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name, Heb. 13. 15. We are never so earnestly called upon to pray and repent, as to *give thanks*; for it is the will of God that we should abound most in the most pleasant exercises of religion, in that which is the work of heaven.

Now here observe,

1. Whom we must give thanks to; to him that we receive all good from, to the *Lord*, Jehovah, Israel's God, (v. 1.) *the God of gods*, the God whom angels adore, from whom magistrates derive their power, and by whom all pretended deities are and shall be conquered; (v. 2.) *to the Lord of lords*, the Sovereign of all sovereigns, the Stay and Supporter of all supports, v. 3. In all our adorations, we must have an eye to God's excellency as transcendent, and to his power and dominion as uncontestably and uncontrollably supreme.

2. What we must give thanks for; not as the Pharisee, that made all his thanksgivings terminate in his own praise; *God, I thank thee*, that I am so and so; but directing them all to God's glory.

(1.) We must give thanks to God for his goodness and mercy; (v. 1.) *Give thanks to the Lord*, not only because he doeth good, but because he is good; all the streams must be run up to the fountain; not only because he is merciful to us, but because his mercy endures for ever, and will be drawn out to those that shall come after us. We must give thanks to God, not only for that mercy which is now handed out to us here on earth, but for that which shall endure for ever in the glories and joys of heaven.

(2.) We must give God thanks for the instances of his power and wisdom. In general, (v. 4.) *he alone doeth great wonders*. The contrivance is wonderful, the design being laid by infinite wisdom; the performance wonderful, being put in execution by infinite power. He alone doeth marvellous things; none besides can do such things, and he doeth them without the assistance or advice of any other.

More particularly, [1.] He made the heavens, and stretched them out, and in them we not only see his wisdom and power, but we taste his mercy in their benign influences; as long as the heavens endure, the mercy of God endures in them, v. 5. [2.] He raised the earth out of the waters, when he caused the dry land to appear, that it might be fit to be a habitation for man, and therein also his mercy to man still endures; (v. 6.) *for the earth hath he given to the children of men*, and all its products. [3.] Having made both heaven and earth, he settled a correspondence between them, notwithstanding their distance, by making the sun, moon, and stars, which he placed in the firmament of heaven, to shed their light and influences upon this earth, v. 7..9. These are called the *great lights*, because they appear so to us, for, otherwise, astronomers tell us, that the moon is less than many of the stars, but, being nearer to the earth, it seems much greater. They are said to *rule*, not only because they govern the seasons of the year, but because they are useful to the world, and benefactors are the best rulers, Luke, 22. 25. But the empire is divided; one *rules by day*, the other *by night*, (at least, the stars,) and yet all are subject to God's direction and disposal. Those rulers, therefore, which the Gentiles idolized, are the world's servants, and God's subjects; *Sun, stand thou still, and thou, moon.*

10. To him that smote Egypt in their first-born: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 11. And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 12. With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy *endureth* for ever. 13. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 14. And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 15. But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy *endureth* for

ever. 16. To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy *endureth* for ever. 17. To him which smote great kings: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 18. And slew famous kings: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 19. Sibun king of the Amorites: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 20. And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 21. And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 22. *Even* an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.

The great things God did for Israel, when he first formed them into a people, and set up his kingdom among them, are here mentioned, as often elsewhere in the Psalms, as instances both of the power of God, and of the particular kindness he had for Israel. See 135. 8, &c.

1. He brought them out of Egypt, v. 10. 12. That was a mercy which endured long to them, and our redemption by Christ, which was typified by that, does indeed endure for ever, for it is an eternal redemption. Of all the plagues of Egypt, none is mentioned but the death of the first-born, because that was the conquering plague; by that, God, who, in all the plagues, distinguished the Israelites from the Egyptians, brought them at last from among them; not by a wile, but with a strong hand, and an arm stretched out to reach far, and do great things. These miracles of mercy, as they proved Moses's commission to give law to Israel, so they laid Israel under lasting obligations to obey that law, Exod. 20. 2.

2. He forced them a way through the Red sea, which obstructed them at their first setting out. By the power he has to controul the common course of nature, he *divided the sea into two parts*, between which he opened a path, and made Israel to pass between the parts, now that they were to enter into covenant with him; see Jer. 34. 18. He not only divided the sea, but gave his people courage to go through it when it was divided; which was an instance of God's power over men's hearts, as the former of his power over the waters. And, to make it a miracle of justice as well as mercy, the same Red sea that was a lane to the Israelites, was a grave to their pursuers. There he shook off Pharaoh and his host.

3. He conducted them through a vast howling wilderness; (v. 16.) there he led them and fed them; their camp was victualled and fortified by a constant series of miracles for forty years; though they loitered and wandered there, they were not lost. And in this, the mercy of God, and the constancy of that mercy, were the more observable, because they often provoked him in the wilderness, and grieved him in the desert.

4. He destroyed kings before them, to make room for them; (v. 17, 18.) not deposed and banished them, but smote and slew them; in which appeared his wrath against them, but his mercy, his never-failing mercy, to Israel. And that which magnified it, was, that they were *great kings* and *famous kings*, yet God subdued them as easily as if they had been the least, and weakest, and meanest, of the children of men. They were wicked kings, and then their grandeur and lustre would not secure them from the justice of God. The more great and famous they were, the more did God's mercy to Israel appear in *giving such kings* for them. Sibun and Og are particularly mentioned, because they were the two first that were conquered on the other side Jordan, v. 19, 20. It is good to enter into the detail of God's favours, and not to view them in the gross; and in each instance to observe, and own, that God's *mercy endureth for ever*.

5. He put them in possession of a good land, v. 21, 22. He, whose the earth is, and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein, took land from one people and gave it to another, as pleased him. The *iniquity of the Amorites was now full*, and therefore it was taken from them; Israel was his *servant*, and though they had been provoking in the wilderness, yet he intended to have some service out of them, for *to them pertained the service of God*. As he said to the Egyptians, *Let my people go, so to the*

Canaanites, *Let my people in*, that they may serve me. In this, *God's mercy to them endureth for ever*, because it was a figure of the heavenly Canaan, the *mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*.

23. Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy *endureth* for ever: 24. And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy *endureth* for ever. 25. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy *endureth* for ever. 26. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.

God's everlasting mercy is here celebrated.

1. In the redemption of his church; (v. 23, 24.) in the many redemptions wrought for the Jewish church, out of the hands of their oppressors; when, in the years of their servitude, their estate was very low, God remembered them, and raised them up saviours, the judges, and David, at length, by whom God gave them rest from all their enemies; but especially in the great redemption of the universal church, of which these were types, we have a great deal of reason to say, "*He remembered us, the children of men, in our low estate, in our lost estate, for his mercy endureth for ever*: he sent his Son to redeem us from sin, and death, and hell, and all our spiritual enemies; *for his mercy endureth for ever*; he was sent to redeem us, and not the angels that sinned; for his mercy endureth for ever."

2. In the provision he makes for all the creatures; (v. 25.) *He gives food to all flesh*. It is an instance of the mercy of God's providence, that, wherever he has given life, he gives food agreeable and sufficient; and he is a good Housekeeper, that provides for so large a family.

3. In all his glories, and all his gifts; (v. 26.) *Give thanks to the God of heaven*; this denotes him to be a glorious God, and the glory of his mercy is to be taken notice of in our praises; the *riches of his glory* are displayed in the *vessels of his mercy*, Rom. 9. 23. It also denotes him to be the great Benefactor, *for every good and perfect gift is from above*, from the Father of lights, the *God of heaven*; and we should trace every stream to the fountain; this and that particular mercy may perhaps endure but a while, but the mercy that is in God *endures for ever*; it is an inexhaustible fountain.

PSALM CXXXVII.

There are divers psalms which are thought to have been penned in the latter days of the Jewish church, when prophecy was near expiring, and the canon of the Old Testament ready to be closed up; but none of them appears so plainly to be of a late date as this, which was penned when the people of God were captives in Babylon, and there insulted over by their proud oppressors; probably it was toward the latter end of their captivity; for now they saw the destruction of Babylon hastening on apace, (v. 8.) which would be their discharge. It is a mournful psalm, a lamentation; and the Septuagint makes it one of the lamentations of Jeremiah, naming him for the author of it. Here, I. The melancholy captives cannot enjoy themselves, v. 1, 2. II. They cannot humour their proud oppressors, v. 3, 4. III. They cannot forget Jerusalem, v. 5, 6. IV. They cannot forgive Edom and Babylon, v. 7. 9. In singing this psalm, we must be much affected with the concerns of the church, especially that part of it that is in affliction, laying the sorrows of God's people near our hearts, comforting ourselves in the prospect of the deliverance of the church, and the ruin of its enemies, in due time, but carefully avoiding all personal animosities, and not mixing the leaven of malice with our sacrifices.

1. **B**Y the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. 2. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. 3. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us* mirth, *saying*, sing us *one* of the songs of Zion. 4. How shall we sing the *LORD's* song in a strange land? 5. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *her cunning*. 6. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave

to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

We have here the daughter of Zion covered with a cloud, and dwelling with the daughter of Babylon; the people of God in tears, but sowing in tears. Observe,

1. The mournful posture they were in, as to their affairs, and as to their spirits.

1. They were pestered *by the rivers of Babylon*, in a strange land, a great way from their own country, whence they were brought as prisoners of war; the land of Babylon was now a house of bondage to that people, as Egypt had been in their beginning. Their conquerors quartered them *by the rivers*, with design to employ them there, and keep them to work in their galleys; or perhaps they chose it as the most melancholy place, and therefore most suitable to their sorrowful spirits. If they must build houses there, (Jer. 29. 5.) it shall not be in the cities, the places of concourse, but by the rivers, the places of solitude, where they might mingle their tears with the streams. We find some of them by the river *Chebar*, (Ezek. 1. 3.) others by the river *Ulai*, Dan. 3. 2.

2. There they *sat down* to indulge their grief, by poring on their miseries. Jeremiah had taught them under this yoke to *sit alone*, and *keep silence*, and *put their mouths in the dust*, Lam. 3. 28, 29. We *sat down*, as those that expected to stay, and were content, since it is the will of God that it must be so.

3. Thoughts of Zion drew tears from their eyes; and it was not a sudden passion of weeping, such as we are sometimes put into by a trouble that surprises us, but they were deliberate tears; we *sat down and wept*, tears with consideration. We *wept when we remembered Zion*, the holy hill on which the temple was built. Their affection to God's house swallowed up their concern for their own houses. They remembered Zion's former glory, and the satisfaction they had in Zion's courts, Lam. 1. 7. *Jerusalem remembered, in the days of her misery, all her pleasant things which she had in the days of old*, Ps. 42. 4. They remembered Zion's present desolations, and *favoured the dust thereof*, which was a good sign that the time for God to favour it was not far off, 102, 13, 14.

4. They laid by their instruments of music; (v. 2.) *We hanged our harps upon the willows*. (1.) The harps they used for their own diversion and entertainment; these they laid aside, both because it was their judgment that they ought not to use them now that God called to weeping and mourning, (Isa. 22. 12.) and their spirits were so sad, that they had no hearts to use them; they brought their harps with them, designing perhaps to use them for the alleviating of their grief, but it proved so great, that it would not admit the experiment; music makes some people melancholy; *As vinegar upon nitre, so is he that sings songs to a heavy heart*. (2.) The harps they used in God's worship, the Levites harps; these they did not throw away, hoping they might yet again have occasion to use them, though they had no present use for them; God had cut them out other work, by *turning their feasting into mourning, and their songs into lamentations*, Amos. 8. 10. Every thing is beautiful in its season. They did not hide their harps in the bushes, or the hollows of the rocks; but hung them up in view, that the sight of them might affect them with this deplorable change. Yet perhaps they were faulty in doing this; for praising God is never out of season, it is his will that we should *in every thing give thanks*, Isa. 24. 15, 16.

11. The abuses which their enemies put upon them when they were in this melancholy condition, v. 3. They had *carried them away captive* from their own land, and then *wasted them* in the land of their captivity, took what little they had from them; but this was not enough; to complete their woes, they insulted over them, they *required of us mirth and a song*. Now, 1. This was very barbarous and inhuman; even an enemy, in misery, is to be pitied, and not trampled upon. It argues a base and sordid spirit to upbraid those that are in distress either with their former joys or with their present griefs, or to challenge those to be merry, who, we know, are out of tune for it; this is adding affliction to the afflicted. 2. It was very profane and impious; no songs would serve them but the *songs of Zion*, with which God had been

honoured; so that in this demand they reflected upon God himself; as Belshazzar when he drank wine in temple-bowls. Their enemies *mocked at their sabbaths*, Lam. 1. 7.

III. The patience wherewith they bore their abuses, v. 4. They had laid by their harps, and would not resume them, no not to ingratiate themselves with those at whose mercy they lay; they would not answer those fools according to their folly. Profane scoffers are not to be humoured, nor pearls cast before swine. David prudently *kept silence even from good*, when the *wicked were before him*, who, he knew, would ridicule what he said, and make a jest of it, Ps. 39. 1, 2. The reason they gave is very mild and pious; *How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?* They do not say, "How shall we sing, when we are so much in sorrow?" If that had been all, they might perhaps have put a force upon themselves, so far as to oblige their masters with a song; but, "It is the *Lord's song*, it is a sacred thing, it is peculiar to the temple-service, and therefore we dare not sing it in the land of a stranger, among idolators. We must not serve common mirth, much less profane mirth, with any thing that is appropriated to God, who is sometimes to be honoured by a religious silence as well as by religious speaking.

IV. The constant affection they retained for Jerusalem, the city of their solemnities, even now that they were in Babylon. Though their enemies banter them for talking so much of Jerusalem, and even doting upon it, their love to it is not in the least abated; it is what they may be jeered for, but will never be jeered out of, v. 5, 6. Observe, 1. How these pious captives stood affected to Jerusalem; (1.) Their *heads* were full of it; it was always in their minds, they remembered it, they did not forget it, though they had been long absent from it: many of them had never seen it, nor knew any thing of it but by report, and by what they had read in the scripture, yet it was graven upon the palms of their hands, and even its ruins were continually before them, which was an evidence of their faith in the promise of its restoration in due time. In their daily prayers, they opened their windows toward Jerusalem; and how then could they forget it? (2.) Their *hearts* were full of it; they *preferred it above their chief joy*, and therefore they remembered it, and could not forget it. What we love, we love to think of. They that *rejoice in God*, do, for his sake, make Jerusalem their joy, and *prefer it before that*, whatever it is, which is the head of their joy, which is dearest to them in this world. A godly man will prefer a public good before any private satisfaction or gratification whatsoever.

2. How steadfastly they resolved to keep up this affection, which they express by a solemn imprecation of mischief to themselves if they should let it fall; "Let me be for ever disabled, either to sing or play on the harp, if I so far forget the religion of my country as to make use of my songs and harps for the pleasing of Babylon's sons, or the praising of Babylon's gods. *Let my right hand forget her art*," (which the hand of an expert musician never can, unless it were withered,) "nay, *let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth*, if I have not a good word to say for Jerusalem, wherever I am." Though they dare not sing Zion's songs among the Babylonians, yet they cannot forget them, but as soon as ever the present restraint is taken off, they will sing them as readily as ever, notwithstanding the long disuse.

7. Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, *Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof*. 8. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; *happy shall he be*, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. 9. *Happy shall he be*, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

The pious Jews in Babylon, having afflicted themselves with the thoughts of the ruins of Jerusalem, here please themselves with the prospect of the ruin of her impenitent, implacable, enemies; but this, not from a spirit of revenge, but from a holy zeal for the glory of God and the honour of his kingdom.

1. The Edomites will certainly be reckoned with, and all others

that were accessaries to the destruction of Jerusalem, that were aiding and abetting, that *helped forward the affliction*, (Zech. 1.15.) and triumphed in it; that said, *in the day of Jerusalem*, the day of her judgment, "*Rase it, rase it to the foundations*; down with it, down with it, do not leave one stone upon another." Thus they made the Chaldean army more furious, who were already so enraged that they needed no spur. Thus they put shame upon Israel, who would be looked upon as a people worthy to be cut off, when their next neighbours had such an ill-will to them. And all this was a fruit of the old enmity of Esau against Jacob, because he got the birthright and the blessing, and a branch of that more ancient enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; *Lord, remember them*, says the psalmist; which is an appeal to his justice against them. Far be it from us to avenge ourselves, if ever it should be in our power, but we will leave it to him who has said, *Vengeance is mine*. Note, They that are glad at calamities, especially the calamities of Jerusalem, shall not go unpunished. They that are confederate with the persecutors of good people, and stir them up, and set them on, and are pleased with what they do, shall certainly be called to an account for it another day, and God will remember it against them.

2. Babylon is the principal, and it will come to her turn too to drink of the cup of tremblings, the very dregs of it; (v. 8, 9.) *O daughter of Babylon*, proud and secure as thou art, we know well, by the scriptures of truth, *thou art to be destroyed*; or, as Dr. Hammond reads it, *who art the destroyer*. The destroyers shall be destroyed; (Rev. 13. 10.) and perhaps it is with reference to this, that the man of sin, the head of the New-Testament Babylon, is called a *son of perdition*, 2 Thess. 2. 3. The destruction of Babylon being foreseen as a sure destruction, *thou art to be destroyed*. It is spoken of, (1.) As a just destruction; she shall be paid in her own coin; "*Thou shalt be served as thou hast served us*; as barbarously used by the destroyers as we have been by thee." See Rev. 18. 6. Let not those expect to find mercy, who, when they had power, did not shew mercy. (2.) As an utter destruction; the very little ones of Babylon, when it is taken by storm, and all in it put to the sword, shall be dashed to pieces, by the enraged and merciless conqueror. None escape, if these little ones perish. Those are the seed of another generation; so that, if they be cut off, the ruin will be not only total, as Jerusalem's was, but final. It is sunk like a millstone into the sea, never to rise. (3.) As a destruction which should reflect honour upon the instruments of it. Happy shall they be that do it; for they are fulfilling God's counsels; and therefore he calls Cyrus, who did it, his *servant*, his *shepherd*, his *anointed*, (Isa. 44. 28.—45. 1.) and the soldiers, that were employed in it, his *sanctified ones*, Isa. 13. 3. They are making way for the enlargement of God's Israel, and happy they who are any way serviceable to that. The fall of the New-Testament Babylon will be the triumph of all the saints, Rev. 19. 1.

PSALM CXXXVIII

It does not appear, nor is it material to inquire, upon what occasion David penned this psalm; but in it, I. He looks back with thankfulness upon the experiences he had had of God's goodness to him, v. 1. 3. II. He looks forward with comfort, in hopes, 1. That others would go on to praise God like him, v. 4, 5. 2. That God would go on to do good to him, v. 6. 8. In singing this psalm, we must in like manner devote ourselves to God's praise and glory, and repose ourselves in his power and goodness.

A psalm of David.

1. **I** WILL praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee. 2. I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. 3. In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me *with strength* in my soul. 4 All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O LORD when they hear the words of thy mouth.

5. Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the LORD: for great is the glory of the LORD.

I. How he would praise God; compare 111. 1.

1. He will praise him with sincerity and zeal; *with my heart, with my whole heart*; with that which is within me, and with all that is within me; with uprightness of intention, and fervency of affection; inward impressions agreeing with outward expressions.

2. With freedom and boldness; *Before the gods will I sing praise unto thee*; before the princes, and judges, and great men; either those of other nations, that visited him, or those of his own nation, that attended on him. Even in their presence, he will not only praise God with his heart, which we may do by pious ejaculations in any company, but will sing praise, if there be occasion. Note, Praising God is work which the greatest of men need not be ashamed of; it is the work of angels, the work of heaven. *Before the angels*, so some understand it, in religious assemblies, where there is a special presence of angels, 1 Cor. 11. 10. 3. In the way that God had appointed; *I will worship toward thy holy temple*. The priests only went into the temple, the people, at the nearest, did but worship towards it, and that they might do at a distance. Christ is our Temple, and toward him we must look with an eye of faith, as Mediator between us and God, in all our praises of him. Heaven is God's holy temple, and thitherward we must lift up our eyes, in all our addresses to God; *Our Father in heaven*.

II. What he would praise God for.

1. For the fountain of his comforts; *for thy loving-kindness, and for thy truth*; for thy goodness, and for thy promise; mercy hid in thee, and mercy revealed by thee that God is a gracious God in himself, and has engaged to be so to all those that trust in him. *For thou hast magnified thy word*, thy promise, which is truth, *above all thy name*. God has made himself known to us in many ways, in creation and providence, but most clearly by his word. The judgments of his mouth are magnified even above those of his hand, and greater things are done by them. The wonders of grace exceed the wonders of nature; and what is discovered of God by revelation, is much greater than what is discovered by reason. In what God had done for David, his faithfulness to his word appeared more illustrious, and redounded more to his glory, than any other of his attributes. Some good interpreters understand it of Christ, the essential Word, and of his gospel, which are magnified above all the discoveries God had before made of himself to the fathers. He that magnified the law and made that honourable, magnifies the gospel much more.

2. For the streams flowing from that fountain, in which he himself had tasted that the Lord is gracious, v. 3. He had been in affliction, and he remembers, with thankfulness, (1.) The sweet communion he then had with God. He cried, he prayed, and prayed earnestly, and God answered him, gave him to understand that his prayer was accepted, and should have a gracious return in due time. The intercourse between God and his saints is carried on by his promises and their prayers. (2.) The sweet communications he then had from God; *Thou strengthenedst me with strength in my soul*. This was the answer to his prayer, for God gives more than good words, 20. 6. Observe, [1.] It was a speedy answer; *in the day when I cried*. Note, Those that trade with heaven by prayer, grow rich by quick returns; *while we are yet speaking, God hears*, Isa. 65. 24. [2.] It was a spiritual answer; God gave him strength in his soul, and that is a real and valuable answer to the prayer of faith in the day of affliction. If God give us strength in our souls, to bear the burthens, resist the temptations, and do the duties, of an afflicted state; if he strengthen us to keep hold of himself by faith, to maintain the peace of our own minds, and to wait with patience for the issue, we must own that he has answered us, and we are bound to be thankful.

III. What influence he hoped that his praising God would have upon others, v. 4, 5. David was himself a king, and therefore he hoped that kings would be wrought upon by his experiences, and his examples, to embrace religion; and if kings became religious, their kingdoms would be every way better. Now, 1. This

may have reference to the kings that were neighbours to David, as Hiram and others; They shall all praise thee; when they visited David, and, after his death, when they sought the presence of Solomon, (as *all the kings of the earth* are expressly said to have done, 2 Chron. 9. 23.) they readily joined in the worship of the God of Israel. 2. It may look further to the calling of the Gentiles, and the discipling of all nations, by the gospel of Christ, of whom it is said, that *all kings shall fall down before him*, Ps. 72. 11. Now it is here foretold, (1.) That the *kings of the earth shall hear the words of God*. All that came near David should hear them from him, 119. 46. In the latter days, the preachers of the gospel should be sent into all the world. (2.) That then they shall praise God, as all those have reason to do that hear his word, and receive it in the light and love of it, Acts, 13. 48. (3.) That they shall *sing in the ways of the Lord*; in the ways of his providence and grace toward them; they shall rejoice in God, and give glory to him, however he is pleased to deal with them in the ways of their duty and obedience to him. Note, They that walk in the ways of the Lord have reason to sing in those ways, to go on in them with a great deal of cheerfulness, for they are ways of pleasantness, and it becomes us to be pleasant in them; if we are so, *great is the glory of the Lord*. It is very much for the honour of God that kings should walk in his ways, and that all those who walk in them should sing in them, and so proclaim to all the world that he is a good Master, and his work its own wages.

6. Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off. 7. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me; thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. 8. The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.

David here comforts himself with three things.

1. The favour God bears to his humble people; (v. 6.) *Though the Lord be high*, and neither needs any of his creatures, nor can be benefited by them, yet has he respect unto the lowly; smiles upon them as well pleased with them, overlooks heaven and earth to cast a gracious look upon them, (Isa. 57. 15.—66. 1.) and, sooner or later, he will put honour upon them, while he knows the proud afar off; knows them, but disowns them and rejects them, how proudly soever they pretend to his favour. Dr. Hammond makes this to be the sum of that gospel which the kings of the earth shall hear and welcome—that penitent sinners shall be accepted of God, but the impenitent cast out; witness the instance of the Pharisee and the Publican, Luke, 18.

2. The care God takes of his afflicted, oppressed, people, v. 7. David, though a great and good man, expects to walk in the midst of trouble, but encourages himself with hope, (1.) That God would comfort him; “When my spirit is ready to sink and fail, thou shalt revive me, and make me easy and cheerful under my troubles.” Divine consolations have enough in them to revive us even when we walk in the midst of troubles, and are ready to die away for fear. (2.) That he would protect him, and plead his cause; “Thou shalt stretch forth thine hand, though not against mine enemies, to destroy them, yet against the wrath of mine enemies, to restrain that, and set bounds to it. (3.) That he would in due time work deliverance for him; *Thy right hand shall save me*. As he has one hand to stretch out against his enemies, so he has another to save his own people. Christ is the Right Hand of the Lord, that shall save all those who serve him.

3. The assurance we have, that, whatever good work God has begun in and for his people, he will perform it; (v. 8.) *The Lord will perfect that which concerns me*, (1.) That which is most needful for me; and he knows best what is so. We are careful and cumbered about many things that do not concern us, but he knows what are the things that really are of consequence to us, (Matth.

6. 32.) and he will order them for the best. (2.) That which we are most concerned about. Every good man is most concerned about his duty to God, and his happiness in God: that the former may be faithfully done, and the latter effectually secured; and if indeed these are the things that our hearts are most upon, and concerning which we are most solicitous, there is a good work begun in us, and he that has begun it will perfect it, we may be confident he will, Phil. 1. 6. Observe, [1.] What ground the psalmist builds this confidence upon; *Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever*. This he had made very much the matter of his praise, (13. 6.) and therefore he could here with the more assurance make it the matter of his hope. For, if we give God the glory of his mercy, we may take to ourselves the comfort of it. Our hopes that we shall persevere, must be founded, not upon our own strength, for that will fail us, but upon the mercy of God, for that will not fail. It is well pleaded, “*Lord, thy mercy endureth for ever*; let me be for ever a monument of it.” [2.] What use he makes of this confidence; it does not supersede, but quicken, prayer; he turns his expectation into a petition; *Forsake not*, do not let go, *the work of thine own hands*. Lord, I am the work of thine own hands, my soul is so, do not forsake me; my concerns are so, do not lay by thy care of them.” Whatever good there is in us, it is the work of God’s own hands; *he works in us both to will and to do*; it will fail if he forsake it; but his glory, as Jehovah, a perfecting God, is so much concerned in the progress of it to the end, that we may in faith pray, “*Lord, do not forsake it*.” Whom he loves he loves to the end; and as for God, his work is perfect.

PSALM CXXXIX.

Some of the Jewish doctors are of opinion that this is the most excellent of all the psalms of David; and a very pious devout meditation it is, upon the doctrine of God’s omniscience, which we should therefore have our hearts fixed upon, and filled with, in singing this psalm. I. This doctrine is here asserted, and fully laid down, v. 1. 6. II. It is confirmed by two arguments. 1. God is every where present, therefore he knows all, v. 7. 12. 2. He made us, therefore he knows us, v. 13. 16. III. Some inferences are drawn, from this doctrine. 1. It may fill us with pleasing admiration of God, v. 17, 18. 2. With a holy dread and detestation of sin and sinners, v. 19. 22. 3. With a holy satisfaction in our own integrity, concerning which we may appeal to God, v. 23, 24. This great and self-evident truth, That God knows our hearts, and the hearts of all the children of men, if we did but mix faith with it, and seriously consider it, and apply it, would have a great influence upon our holiness, and upon our comfort.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **O** LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. 2. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising, thou understandest my thought afar off. 3. Thou compassedst my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. 4. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. 5. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. 6. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

David here lays down this great doctrine, That the God with whom we have to do has a perfect knowledge of us, and that all the motions and actions, both of our inward and of our outward man, are naked and open before him.

1. He lays down this doctrine in the way of an address to God; he says it to him, acknowledging it to him, and giving him the glory of it. Divine truths look full as well when they are prayed over, as when they are preached over; and much better than when they are disputed over. When we speak of God to him himself, we shall find ourselves concerned to speak with the utmost degree both of sincerity and reverence, which will be likely to make the impressions the deeper.

2. He lays it down in a way of application to himself; not, “*Thou hast known all*,” but, “*Thou hast known me*; that is it

which I am most concerned to believe, and which it will be most profitable for me to consider." Then we know these things for our good, when we know them *for ourselves*, Job, 5. 27. When we acknowledge, "Lord, all souls are thine," we must add, "My soul is thine; thou that hatest all sin hatest my sin; that art good to all, good to Israel, art good to me." So here, "*Thou hast searched me, and known me*; known me as thoroughly as we know that which we have most diligently and exactly searched into." David was a king, and *the hearts of kings are unsearchable* to their subjects, (Prov. 25. 3.) but they are not so to their Sovereign.

3. He descends to particulars; "Thou knowest me wherever I am, and whatever I am doing; me, and all that belongs to me." (1.) "*Thou knowest me and all my motions, my down-sitting to rest, my up-rising to work*; with what temper of mind I compose myself when I sit down, and stir up myself when I rise up; what my soul reposes itself in, as its stay and support, what it aims at, and reaches toward, as its felicity and end. Thou knowest me when I come home, how I walk before my house, and when I go abroad, on what errands I go." (2.) "Thou knowest all my imaginations; nothing is more close and quick than thought, it is always unknown to others, it is often unobserved by ourselves, and yet *thou understandest my thoughts afar off*. Though my thoughts be ever so foreign and distant from one another, thou understandest the chain of them, and canst make out their connexion, when so many of them slip my notice, that I myself cannot." Or, "*Thou understandest them afar off*, even before I think them, and long after I have thought them, and have myself forgotten them." Or, "*Thou understandest them from afar*, from the height of heaven thou seest into the depths of the heart," 33. 14. (3.) "Thou knowest me and all my designs and undertakings; *thou compassest every particular path*; thou *siftest or winnowest my path*," (so some,) "so as thoroughly to distinguish between the good and evil of what I do;" as by sifting we separate between the corn and the chaff. All our actions are ventilated by the judgment of God, 17. 3. God takes notice of every step we take, every right step, and every by-step. He is *acquainted with all our ways*, intimately acquainted with them, he knows what rule we walk by, what end we walk toward, what company we walk with. (4.) "*Thou knowest me in all my retirements*; thou knowest *my lying down*; when I am withdrawn from all company, and am reflecting upon what has passed all day, and composing myself to rest, thou knowest what I have in my heart, and with what thoughts I go to bed." (5.) "Thou knowest me, and all I say: (v. 4.) *There is not a word in my tongue*, not a vain word, not a good word, but *thou knowest it altogether*; knowest what it meant, from what thought it came, and with what design it was uttered. There is not a word at my tongue's end, ready to be spoken, yet checked and kept in, but thou knowest it." *When there is not a word in my tongue, O Lord, thou knowest all*; so some read it; for thoughts are words to God. (6.) "Thou knowest me in every part of me; *Thou hast beset me behind and before*, so that, go which way I will, I am under thine eye, and cannot escape it. Thou hast *laid thine hand upon me*, and I cannot run away from thee." Wherever we are, we are under the eye and hand of God. Perhaps, it is an allusion to the physician's laying his hand upon his patient, to feel how his pulse beats, or what temper he is in. God knows us, as we know not only what we see, but what we feel, and have our hands upon. *All his saints are in his hand*.

4. He speaks of it with admiration; (v. 6.) *It is too wonderful for me; it is high*; (1.) "Thou hast such a knowledge of me, as I have not of myself, nor can have. I cannot take notice of all my own thoughts, nor make such a judgment of myself as thou makest of me." (2.) "It is such a knowledge as I cannot comprehend, much less describe. That thou knowest all things I am sure, but how I cannot tell." We cannot by searching find out how God searches and finds out us; nor do we know how we are known.

7. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? 8. If I ascend up

into heaven, thou *art* there; if I make my bed in bell, behold, thou *art there*. 9. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; 10. Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. 11. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. 12. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light *are both alike to thee*. 13. For thou hast possessed my reins; thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. 14. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well. 15. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, *and* curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect, and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there was none* of them.

It is of great use to us to know the certainty of the things wherein we have been instructed, that we may not only believe them, but be able to tell why we believe them, and to give a reason of the hope that is in us. David is *therefore* sure that God perfectly knows him and all his ways.

1. Because he is always under his eye. If God is omnipresent, he must needs be omniscient; but he is omnipresent; this supposes the infinity and immensity of his being, from which follows the ubiquity of his presence; heaven and earth include the whole creation, and the Creator fills both; (Jer. 23, 24.) he not only knows both, and governs both, but he fills both. Every part of the creation is under God's intuition and influence. David here acknowledges this also with application, and sees himself thus open before God.

1. No flight can remove us out of God's presence; "*Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, from thy presence*, from thy spiritual presence, from thyself, who art a Spirit?" *God is a Spirit*, and therefore it is folly to think that because we cannot see him, he cannot see us; *Whither shall I flee from thy presence?* Not that he desired to go away from God; no, he desired nothing more than to be near him; but he only puts the case, "Suppose I should be so foolish as to think of getting out of thy sight, that I might shake off the awe of thee; suppose I should think of revolting from my obedience to thee, or of disowning a dependence on thee, and of shifting for myself; alas, whither can I go?" A heathen could say, *Quocunque te flexeris, ibi Deum videbis occurrentem tibi—Whithersoever thou turnest thyself, thou wilt see God meeting thee*. Seneca.

He specifies the most remote and distant places, and counts upon meeting God in them. (1.) *In heaven*; "*If I ascend thither*, as I hope to do shortly, *thou art there*"; and it will be my eternal bliss to be with thee there." Heaven is a vast large place, replenished with an innumerable company, and yet there is no escaping God's eye there in any corner, or any crowd. The inhabitants of that world have as necessary a dependence upon God, and lie as open to his strict scrutiny, as the inhabitants of this. (2.) *In hell*; in *Sheol*; which may be understood of the depth of the earth, the very centre of it. Should we dig as deep as we can under ground, and think to hide ourselves there, we should be mistaken; God knows that path which the vulture's eye never saw, and to him the earth is all surface. Or it may be understood of the state of the dead. When we are removed out of the sight of all living, yet not out of the sight of the living God; from his eye, we cannot hide us in the grave. Or, of the place of the damned; *If I make my bed in hell*, (an uncomfortable place to make a bed in,

where there is no rest day or night, yet thousands will make their bed for ever in those flames,) *behold, thou art there*, in thy power and justice. God's wrath is the fire which will there burn everlastingly, Rev. 14. 10. (3.) In the remotest corners of this world; "*If I take the wings of the morning*, the rays of the morning-light, (called the wings of the sun, Mal. 4. 2.) than which nothing more swift, and flee upon them to the uttermost parts of the sea, or of the earth; (Job, 38. 12, 13.) should I flee to the utmost distant and obscure islands, (the *ultima Thule*, the *Terra incognita*;) I should find thee there; *there shall thy hand lead me*, as far as I go, *and thy right hand shall hold me*, that I can go no further, that I cannot go out of thy reach." God soon arrested Jonah, when *he fled to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord*.

2. No veil can hide us from God's eye, no, not that of the thickest darkness, v. 11, 12. "*If I say*, Yet the darkness shall cover me, when nothing else will, alas! I find myself deceived, the curtains of the evening will stand me in no more stead than the wings of the morning; *even the night shall be light about me*. That which often favours the escape of a pursued criminal, and the retreat of a beaten army, will do me no kindness in fleeing from thee." When God divided between the light and darkness, it was with a reservation of this prerogative, that to himself the darkness and the light should still be both alike. The darkness darkeneth not from thee, for there is no darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. No hypocritical mask or disguise, how specious soever, can save any person or action from appearing in a true light before God. Secret haunts of sin are as open before God as the most open and barefaced villainies.

II. Because he is the work of his hands; he that framed the engine knows all the motions of it; God made us, and therefore, no doubt, he knows us; he saw us when we were in the forming, and can we be hid from him now that we are formed? This argument he insists upon; (v. 13. . 16.) "*Thou hast possessed my reins*; thou art Master of my most secret thoughts and intentions, and the innermost recesses of my soul; thou not only knowest, but governest, them, as we do that which we have possession of; and the possession thou hast of my reins is a rightful possession, *for thou coveredst me in my mother's womb*, thou madest me; (Job, 10. 11.) thou madest me a secret: the soul is concealed from all about us; *Who knows the things of a man, save the spirit of a man?*" 1 Cor. 2. 11. Hence we read of the *hidden man of the heart*. But it was God himself that thus covered us, and therefore he can, when he pleases, discover us; when he hid us from all the world, he did not intend to hide us from himself.

Concerning the formation of man, of each of us;

1. The glory of it is here given to God, entirely to him; *for it is he that has made us, and not we ourselves*. I will praise thee, the Author of my being; my parents were only the instruments of it. It was done, (1.) Under the divine inspection; *My substance*, when hid in the womb, nay, when it was yet but *in fieri*—*in the forming*, an unshapen embryo, *was not hid from thee, thine eyes did see my substance*. (2.) By the divine operation. As the eye of God saw us then, so his hand wrought us; we were his work. (3.) According to the divine model; *In thy book all my members were written*. Eternal wisdom formed the plan, and by that almighty power raised the noble structure.

2. Glorious things are here said concerning it. the generation of man is to be considered with the same pious veneration as his creation at first. Consider it, (1.) As a great marvel, a great miracle we might call it, but that it is done in the ordinary course of nature. We are *fearfully and wonderfully made*; we may justly be astonished at the admirable contrivance of these living temples, the composition of every part, and the harmony of all together. (2.) As a great mystery; a mystery of nature; *My soul knows right well* that it is marvellous, but how to describe it for any one else I know not; *for I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the womb, as in the lowest parts of the earth*; so privately, and so far out of sight. (3.) As a great mercy; that all our members *in continuance were fashioned*, according as they were written in the book of God's wise counsel, *when as yet there*

was none of them; or, as some read it, *and none of them was left out*. If any of our members had been wanting in God's book, they had been wanting in our bodies, but, through his goodness, we have all our limbs and senses, the want of any of which might have made us burthens to ourselves. See what reason we have then to praise God for our creation, and to conclude that he who saw our substance when it was unfashioned, sees it now that it is fashioned.

17. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! 18. *If I should count them*, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. 19. Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. 20. For they speak against thee wickedly, *and thine enemies take thy name in vain*. 21. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? 22. I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. 23. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: 24. And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Here the psalmist makes application of the doctrine of God's omniscience, divers ways.

1. He acknowledges, with wonder and thankfulness, the care God had taken of him all his days, v. 17, 18. God, who knew him, thought of him, and his thoughts toward him were thoughts of love: *thoughts of good, and not of evil*, Jer. 24. 11. God's omniscience, which might justly have watched over us to do us hurt, has been employed for us, and has watched over us to do us good, Jer. 31. 28. God's counsels concerning us and our welfare have been, (1.) Precious, to admiration; *How precious are they!* They are deep in themselves, such as cannot be fathomed and comprehended. Providence has had a vast reach in its dispensations concerning us, and has brought things about for our good, quite beyond our contrivance and foresight. They are dear to us; we must think of them with a great deal of reverence, and yet with pleasure and thankfulness. Our thoughts concerning God must be delightful to us above any other thoughts. (2.) Numerous, to admiration; *How great is the sum of them!* We cannot conceive how many God's kind counsels have been concerning us; how many good turns he has done us; and what variety of mercies we have received from him. *If we would count them*, the heads of them, much more the particulars of them, *they are more in number than the sand*, and yet every one great and very considerable, 40. 5. We cannot conceive the multitude of God's compassions, which are all new every morning. (3.) Constant at all times; "*When I awake every morning, I am still with thee*, under thine eye and care, safe and easy under thy protection." This bespeaks also the continual devout sense David had of the eye of God upon him; *When I awake, I am with thee*, in my thoughts; and it would help to keep us in the fear of the Lord all the day long, if, when we awake in the morning, our first thoughts were of him, and we did then set him before us.

2. He concludes from this doctrine, that ruin will certainly be the end of sinners. God knows all the wickedness of the wicked, and therefore he will reckon for it; "*Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God*; for all their wickedness is open before thee, however it may be artfully disguised and coloured over, to hide it from the eye of the world. However thou suffer them to prosper for a while, *surely thou wilt slay them at last*." Now observe, (1.) The reason why God will punish them; because they daringly affront him, and set him at defiance; (v. 20.) *They speak against thee wickedly; they set their mouth against the heavens*, (73. 9.) and shall be called to account for the hard speeches they have

spoken against him, Jude, 15. They are his *enemies*, and declare their enmity by *taking his name in vain*; as we shew our contempt of a man, if we make a by-word of his name, and never mention him but in a way of jest and banter. Those that profane the sacred forms of swearing or praying, by using them in an impertinent, irreverent, manner, take God's name in vain, and thereby shew themselves enemies to him. Some make it to be a description of hypocrites; "They speak of thee for mischief; they talk of God, pretending to piety, but it is with some ill design, for a cloke of maliciousness; and, being enemies to God, while they pretend friendship, they *take his name in vain*, which they swear falsely." (2.) The use David makes of this prospect which he has of the ruin of the wicked. [1.] He defies them; "*Depart from me, ye bloody men*; ye shall not debauch me, for I will not admit your friendship, nor have fellowship with you; and you cannot destroy me, for, being under God's protection, he shall force you to depart from me." [2.] He detests them; (v. 21, 22.) "Lord, thou knowest the heart, and canst witness for me; *do not I hate them that hate thee*, and for that reason, because they hate thee? Therefore I hate them, because I love thee, and hate to see such affronts and indignities put upon thy blessed name. *Am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee*, grieved to see their rebellion, and to foresee their ruin which it will certainly end in?" Note, Sin is hated, and sinners lamented, by all that fear God. "*I hate them, I hate the work of them that turn aside*," (as he explains himself, 101. 3.) "*with a sincere and perfect hatred*; I count them that are enemies to God as *enemies* to me, and will not have any intimacy with them," 69. 8.

3. He appeals to God concerning his sincerity, v. 23, 24.

(1.) He desires that as far as he was in the wrong, God would discover it to him. They that are upright, can take comfort in God's omniscience as a witness of their uprightness, and can with a humble confidence beg of him to search and try them, to discover them to themselves, (for a good man desires to know the worst of himself,) and to discover them to others. He that means honestly could wish he had a window in his breast, that any man may look into his heart; "Lord, I hope I am not in a wicked way, but *see if there be any wicked way in me*, any corrupt inclination remaining; let me see it; and root it out of me, for I do not allow it."

(2.) He desires that, as far as he was in the right, he might be forwarded in it, which he that knows the heart knows how to do effectually; *Lead me in the way everlasting*. Note, [1.] The way of godliness is an everlasting way, it is everlastingly true and good; pleasing to God, and profitable to us; and will end in everlasting life. *It is the way of antiquity*, so some; the good old way. [2.] All the saints desire to be kept and led in this way, that they may not miss it, turn out of it, or tire in it.

PSALM CXL.

This and the four following psalms are much of a piece, and the scope of them the same with many that we met with in the beginning and middle of the book of Psalms, though with but few of late. They were penned by David (as it should seem) when he was persecuted by Saul; one of them is said to be his prayer when he was in the cave, and it is probable that all the rest were penned about the same time. In this psalm, I. David complains of the malice of his enemies, and prays to God to preserve him from them, v. 1. 5. II. He encourages himself in God, as his God, v. 6, 7. III. He prays for, and prophesies, the destruction of his persecutors, v. 8. 11. IV. He assures all God's afflicted people that their troubles would in due time end well, (v. 12, 13.) with which assurance we must comfort ourselves and one another in singing this psalm.

To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

1. **D**ELIVER me, O LORD, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man; 2. Which imagine mischiefs in *their heart*; continually are they gathered together *for war*. 3. They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah. 4. Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to over-

throw my goings. 5. The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the way-side; they have set gins for me. Selah. 6. I said unto the LORD, Thou *art* my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD. 7. O God the LORD, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.

In *this*, as in other things, David was a type of Christ, that he suffered before he reigned, he was humbled before he was exalted; and that as there were many who loved and valued him, and sought to do him honour, so there were many who hated and envied him, and sought to do him mischief, as appears by these verses, where,

1. He gives a character of his enemies, and paints them out in their own colours as dangerous men, whom he had reason to be afraid of, but wicked men, whom he had no reason to think the righteous God would countenance. There was one that seems to have been the ring-leader of them, whom he calls *the evil man*, and *the man of violence*; (v. 1, 4.) probably he means Saul. The Chaldee paraphrast (v. 9.) names both Doeg and Ahithophel; but between them there was a great distance of time. Violent men are evil men. But there were many beside this one, who were confederate against David, who are here represented as the genuine offspring and seed of the serpent. For, (1.) They are very subtle, crafty to do mischief; they have imagined it, (v. 2.) have laid the scheme with all the art and cunning imaginable. They *have purposed* and plotted to *overthrow* the goings of a good man, (v. 4.) to draw him into sin and trouble, to ruin him, by blasting his reputation, crushing his interest, and taking away his life. For this purpose *they have*, like mighty hunters, *hid a snare*, and *spread a net*, and *set gins*, (v. 5.) that their designs against him, being kept undiscovered, might be the more likely to take effect, and he might fall into their hands ere he was aware. Great persecutors have often been great politicians, which has indeed made them the more formidable; but *the Lord preserves the simple* without all those arts. (2.) They are very spiteful; as full of malice as Satan himself; *They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent*, that infuses his venom with his tongue; and there is so much malignity in all they say, that one would think there was nothing *under their lips* but *adders' poison*, v. 3. With their calumnies, and with their counsels, they aimed to destroy David, but secretly, as a man is stung with a serpent, or a snake in the grass. And they endeavoured likewise to infuse their malice into others, and to make them seven times more the children of hell than themselves. A malignant tongue makes men like the old serpent; and poison in the lips is a certain sign of poison in the heart. (3.) They are confederate; they are many of them; but they are all *gathered together* against me *for war*, v. 2. They who can agree in nothing else, can agree to persecute a good man. Herod and Pilate will unite in this, and in this they resemble Satan, who is not divided against himself, all the devils agreeing in Beelzebub. (4.) They are *proud*, (v. 5.) conceited of themselves, and confident of their success; and herein also they resemble Satan, whose reigning, ruining, sin, was pride. The pride of persecutors, though at present it be the terror, yet may be the encouragement, of the persecuted, for the more haughty they are, the faster are they ripening for ruin. *Pride goes before destruction*.

2. He prays to God to keep him from them, and from being swallowed up by them; "Lord, *deliver me, preserve me, keep me*; (v. 1, 4.) let them not prevail to take away my life, my reputation, my interest, my comfort, and to prevent my coming to the throne. *Keep me* from doing as they do, or as they would have me do, or as they promise themselves I shall do." Note, The more malice appears in our enemies against us, the more earnest we should be in prayer to God to take us under his protection. In him believers may count upon a security, and may enjoy it and themselves with a holy serenity. Those are safe whom God preserves. If he be for us, who can be against us?

3. He triumphs in God, and thereby, in effect, he triumphs; 9

over his persecutors, v. 6, 7. When his enemies sharpened their tongues against him, did he sharpen his against them? No; *adder's poison was under their lips*, but grace was poured into his lips, witness what he here said unto the Lord, for to him he looked, to him he directed himself, when he saw himself in so much danger through the malice of his enemies: and it is well for us that we have a God to go to. He comforted himself, (1.) In his interest in God; "*I said, Thou art my God*"; and if my God, then my Shield and mighty Protector." In troublous dangerous times, it is good to claim relation to God, and by faith to keep hold of him. (2.) In his access to God. This comforted him, that he was not only taken into covenant with God, but into communion with him, that he had leave to speak to him, and might expect an answer of peace from him, and could say, with a humble confidence, *Hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord*. (3.) In the assurance he had of help from God, and happiness in him; "*O God the Lord, Jehovah, Adonai*; as *Jehovah*, thou art self-existent and self-sufficient, an infinitely perfect Being; as *Adonai*, thou art my Stay and Support, my Ruler and Governor; and therefore *the Strength of my salvation*, my strong Saviour; nay, not only my Saviour, but my Salvation itself, from whom, in whom, my salvation is; not only a strong Saviour, but the very Strength of my salvation, on whom the stress of my hope is laid; all in all to make me happy, and to preserve me to my happiness." (4.) In the experience he had had formerly of God's care of him; *Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle*. As he pleaded with Saul, that, for the service of his country, he many a time jeopardied his life in the high places of the field, so he pleads with God, that, in those services, He had wonderfully protected him, and provided him a better helmet for the securing of his head, than Goliath's was; "Lord, thou hast kept me *in the day of battle* with the Philistines, suffer me not to fall by the treacherous intrigues of false-hearted Israelites." God is as able to preserve his people from secret fraud as from open force; and the experience we have had of his power and care, in dangers of one kind, may encourage us to trust in him, and depend upon him, in dangers of another nature; for nothing can shorten the Lord's right hand.

8. Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked: further not his wicked device: *lest* they exalt themselves. Selah. 9. *As for* the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. 10. Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again. 11. Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him. 12. I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, *and* the right of the poor. 13. Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence.

Here is the believing foresight David had,

I. Of the shame and confusion of persecutors.

1. Their disappointment; this he prays for, (v. 8.) that their lusts might not be gratified, their lust of ambition, envy, and revenge; "*Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked*, but frustrate them; let them not see the ruin of my interest, which they so earnestly wish to see; but *hear the voice of my supplications*." He prays that their projects might not take effect, but be blasted; "*O further not his wicked device*; let not Providence favour any of his designs, but cross them; suffer *not his wicked device* to proceed, but chain his wheels, and stop him in the career of his pursuits." Thus we are to pray against the enemies of God's people, that they may not succeed in any of their enterprises. Such was David's prayer against Ahithophel, that God would turn his counsels into foolishness. The plea is, *lest they exalt themselves*; value themselves upon their success, as if it were an evidence that God favoured them. Proud men, when they prosper, are made prouder,

grow more impudent against God, and insolent against his people, and therefore, "Lord, do not prosper them."

2. Their destruction. This he *prays for*, (as we read it,) but some choose to read it rather as a *prophecy*; and the original will bear it. If we take it as a prayer that proceeds from a spirit of prophecy, which comes all to one, he foretells the ruin,

(1.) Of his own enemies; "*As for those that compass me about, and seek my ruin*," [1.] "*The mischief of their own lips shall cover their heads*; (v. 9.) the evil they have wished to me shall come upon themselves; their curses shall be blown back into their own faces; and the very designs which they have laid against me shall turn to their own ruin," 7. 15, 16. Let those that make mischief, by slandering, tale-bearing, misrepresenting their neighbours, and spreading ill-natured characters and stories, dread the consequence of it, and think how sad their condition will be, when all the mischief they have been accessory to shall be made to return upon themselves. [2.] The judgments of God shall *fall upon them*, compared here to *burning coals*, in allusion to the destruction of Sodom: nay, as in the deluge, the waters from above, and those from beneath, met for the drowning of the world, both the windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep were broken up; so here, to complete the ruin of the enemies of Christ and his kingdom, they shall not only have *burning coals* cast upon them from above, (Job, 20. 23.—27. 22.) but they themselves shall *be cast into the fire* beneath; both heaven and hell, the wrath of God the Judge, and the rage of Satan the tormenter, shall concur to make them miserable. And the fire they shall be cast into is not a furnace of fire, out of which perhaps they might escape, but a *deep pit*, out of which they cannot rise. Tophet is said to be *deep and large*, Isa. 30. 33.

(2.) Of all others that are like them, v. 11. [1.] *Evil speakers* must expect to be shaken, for they shall never be *established in the earth*. What is got by fraud and falsehood, by calumny and unjust accusation, will not prosper, will not last. Wealth gotten by vanity will be diminished. Let not such men as Doeg think to reign long, for his doom will be their's, 2. 5. A lying tongue is but for a moment, but the *lip of truth shall be established for ever*. [2.] Evil Doeg must expect to be destroyed. *Evil shall hunt the violent man*, as the blood-hound hunts the murderer to discover him, as the lion hunts his prey to tear it to pieces: mischievous men will be brought to light, and brought to ruin, the destruction appointed shall run them down and overthrow them. *Evil pursues sinners*.

II. Here is his foresight of the deliverance and comfort of the persecuted, v. 12, 13. 1. God will do *them* justice, in delivering them, who, being wronged, commit themselves to him; "*I know that the Lord will maintain the just and injured cause of his afflicted people*, and will not suffer might *always* to prevail against right, though it be but *the right of the poor*, who have but little that they can pretend a right to." God is, and will be, the patron of oppressed innocence, much more of persecuted piety; they that know him cannot but know this. 2. They will do *him* justice, (if I may so speak,) in ascribing the glory of their deliverance to him; "*Surely the righteous* (who make conscience of rendering to God his due, as well as to men their's) *shall give thanks unto thy name*, when they find their cause pleaded with jealousy, and prosecuted with effect." The closing words, *The upright shall dwell in thy presence*, denote God's favour to them; "Thou shalt admit them to dwell in thy presence, in grace here, in glory hereafter, and it shall be their safety and happiness," their duty to God; They shall attend upon thee as servants that keep in the presence of their masters, both to do them honour, and to receive their commands. This is true thanksgiving, even thanksgiving; and this use we should make of all our deliverances, we should serve God the more closely and cheerfully.

PSALM CXLI.

David was in distress when he penned this psalm; pursued, it is most likely, by Saul, that violent man. Is any distressed? Let him pray; David did so, and had the comfort of it. I. He prays for God's favourable acceptance, v. 1, 2. II. For his powerful assistance, v. 3, 4. III. That others might be instrumental of good to his soul, as he hoped to be to the souls of others, v. 5, 6.

IV. That he and his friends being now brought to the last extremity, God would graciously appear for their relief and rescue, v. 7. 10. The mercy and grace of God are as necessary to us as they were to him, and therefore we should be humbly earnest for them in singing this psalm.

A psalm of David.

1. **L**ORD, I cry unto thee; make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee. 2. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. 3. Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. 4. Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.

Mercy to accept what we do well, and grace to keep us from doing ill, are the two things which we are here taught by David's example to pray to God for.

1. David loved prayer, and he begs of God that his prayers might be heard and answered, v. 1, 2. *David cried unto God*; his crying denotes fervency in prayer, he prayed as one in earnest; his crying to God denotes faith and fixedness in prayer. And what did he desire as the success of his prayer? (1.) That God would take cognizance of it; "*Give ear to my voice*; let me have a gracious audience." They that cry in prayer may hope to be heard in prayer, not for their loudness, but their liveliness. (2.) That he would visit him upon it; *Make haste unto me*. Those that know how to value God's gracious presence will be importunate for it, and humbly impatient of delays. He that believes does not make haste, but he that prays may be earnest with God to make haste. (3.) That he would be well-pleased with him in it; well-pleased with his *praying* and the *lifting up of his hands in prayer*; which denotes both the elevation and enlargement of his desire, and the out-goings of his hope and expectation; the lifting up of the hand signifying the lifting up of the heart, and being used instead of lifting up the sacrifices which were heaved and waved before the Lord. Prayer is a spiritual sacrifice, it is the offering up of the soul and its best affections to God; now he prays that this may be set forth and directed before God, as the incense which was daily burnt upon the golden altar, and as the evening sacrifice, which he mentions, rather than the morning sacrifice, perhaps because this was an evening prayer, or with an eye to Christ, who, in the evening of the world, and in the evening of the day, was to offer up himself a sacrifice of atonement, and establish the spiritual sacrifices of acknowledgment, having abolished all the carnal ordinances of the law. They that pray in faith may expect it will please God better than an ox or bullock. David was now banished from God's court, and could not attend the sacrifice and incense, and therefore begs that his prayer might be instead of them. Note, Prayer is of a sweet-smelling savour to God, as incense, which yet had no savour without fire; nor has prayer without the fire of holy love and fervour.

2. David was in fear of sin; and he begs of God that he might be kept from sin, knowing that his prayers would not be accepted, unless he took care to watch against sin; we must be as earnest for God's grace in us, as for his favour towards us.

(1.) He prays that he might not be surprised into any sinful words; (v. 3.) "*Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth*, and nature having made my lips to be a door to my words, let grace keep that door, that no word may be suffered to go out, which may any way tend to the dishonour of God, or the hurt of others." Good men know the evil of tongue-sins, and how prone they are to them; when enemies are provoking, we are in danger of carrying our resentments too far, and of speaking unadvisedly, as Moses did, though the meekest of men; and therefore they are earnest with God to prevent their speaking amiss, as knowing that no watchfulness or resolution of their own is sufficient for the governing of their tongues, much less of their hearts, without the special grace of God. We must *keep our mouth as with a bridle*; but that will

not serve, we must pray to God to keep them. Nehemiah prayed to the Lord then when he set a watch, and so must we, for without him the watchman waketh but in vain.

(2.) That he might not be inclined to any sinful practices; (v. 4.) "*Incline not mine heart to any evil thing*; whatever inclination there is in me to sin, let it be not only restrained, but mortified, by divine grace." The example of those about us, and the provocations of those against us, are apt to stir up, and draw out, corrupt inclinations; we are ready to do as others do, and to think that if we received injuries, we may return them; and therefore we have need to pray that we may never be left to ourselves to practise any wicked work, either in confederacy with, or in opposition to, the *men that work iniquity*. While we live in such an evil world, and carry about with us such evil hearts, we have need to pray that we may neither be drawn in by any allurements, nor driven on by any provocation, to do any sinful thing.

(3.) That he might not be insnared by any sinful pleasures; "*Let me not eat of their dainties*. Let me not join with them in their feasts and sports, lest thereby I be inveigled into their sins." *Better is a dinner of herbs* out of the way of temptation, than a *stalled ox* in it. Sinners pretend to find dainties in sin; *stolen waters are sweet*, forbidden fruit is pleasant to the eye; but they that consider how soon the dainties of sin will turn into wormwood and gall, how certainly it will, at last, *bite like a serpent*, and *sting like an adder*, will dread those dainties, and pray to God by his providence to take them out of their sight, and by his grace to turn them against them. Good men will pray against even the sweets of sin.

5. Let the righteous smite me; *it shall be a kindness*: and let him reprove me; *it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head*: for yet my prayer also *shall be* in their calamities. 6. When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words; for they are sweet. 7. Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth *wood* upon the earth. 8. But mine eyes *are* unto thee, O God the Lord: in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute. 9. Keep me from the snare *which* they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity. 10. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape.

Here, 1. David desires to be told of his faults; his enemies reproached him with that which was false, which he could not but complain of; yet, at the same time, he desires his friends would reprove him for that which was really amiss in him, particularly if there was anything that gave the least colour to those reproaches; (v. 5.) *Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness*. The *righteous God*; so some. "I will welcome the rebukes of his providence, and be so far from quarrelling with them, that I will receive them as tokens of love, and improve them as means of grace, and will pray for those that are the instruments of my trouble." But it is commonly taken for the reproofs given by righteous men; and it best becomes those that are themselves righteous, to reprove the unrighteousness of others, and from them it will be best taken. But if the reproof be just, though the reprover be not so, we must make a good use of it, and learn obedience by it. We are here taught how to receive the reproofs of the righteous and wise. (1.) We must desire to be reproofed for whatever is amiss in us, or is done amiss by us; "Lord, put it into the heart of the righteous to smite me and reprove me. If my own heart does not *smite me*, as it ought, let my friend do it; let me never fall under that dreadful judgment of being let alone in sin." (2.) We must account it a peace of friendship; we must not only bear it patiently, but take it as a kindness; for *reproofs of instruction are the way of life*, (Prov. 6. 23.) are means of *good*

to us, to bring us to repentance for the sins we have committed, and to prevent relapses into sin. Though reproofs cut, it is in order to a cure, and therefore much more desirable than the kisses of an enemy, (Prov. 27. 6.) or the song of fools, Eccl. 7. 5. David blessed God for Abigail's seasonable admonition, 1 Sam. 25. 32. (3.) We must reckon ourselves helped and healed by it; *it shall be as an excellent oil to a wound, to mollify it, and close it up; it shall not break my head*, as some reckon it to do, who could as well bear to have their heads broken, as to be told of their faults; but, says David, "I am not of that mind; it is my sin that has broken my head, that has broken my bones, Ps. 51. 8. The reproof is an excellent oil, to cure the bruises sin has given me. It shall not break my head, if it may but help to break my heart." (4.) We must requite the kindness of those that deal thus faithfully, thus friendly, with us, at least by our prayers for them in their calamities, and hereby we must shew that we take it kindly. Dr. Hammond gives quite another reading of this verse; "*Reproach will bruise me that am righteous, and rebuke me; but that poisonous oil shall not break my head*, shall not destroy me, shall not do me the mischief intended, for yet my prayer shall be in their mischiefs, that God would preserve me from them, and my prayer shall not be in vain."

2. David hopes his persecutors will, some time or other, bear to be told of their faults, as he was willing to be told of his; (v. 6.) "*When their judges*" (Saul and his officers, who judged and condemned David, and would themselves be sole judges) "*are overthrown in stony places, among the rocks in the wilderness, then they shall hear my words, for they are sweet.*" Some think this refers to the relentings that were in Saul's breast, when he said with tears, *Is this thy voice, my son David?* 1 Sam. 24. 16.—26. 21. Or, we may take it more generally; even judges, great as they are, may come to be overthrown; those that make the greatest figure in this world do not always meet with level smooth ways through it. And those that slighted the word of God before, will relish it, and be glad of it, when they are in affliction, for that opens the ear to instruction. When the world is bitter, the word is sweet. Oppressed innocency cannot gain a hearing with those that live in pomp and pleasure, but when they come to be overthrown themselves, they will have more compassionate thoughts of the afflicted.

3. David complains of the great extremity to which he and his friends were reduced; (v. 7.) *Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth*, out of which they are thrown up, so long have we been dead, or into which they are ready to be thrown, so near are we to the pit; and they are as little regarded as chips among the hewers of wood, which are thrown in neglected heaps. *As one that cuts and cleaves the earth*; so some read it, alluding to the ploughman who tears the earth in pieces with his ploughshare, 129. 3. *Can these dry bones live?*

4. David casts himself upon God, and depends upon him for deliverance; "*But mine eyes are unto thee*"; (v. 8.) for, when the case is ever so deplorable, thou canst redress all the grievances, from thee I expect relief, bad as things are, and in thee is my trust." Those that have their eye toward God, may have their hopes in him.

5. He prays that God would succour and relieve him as his necessity required. (1.) That he would comfort him; "*Leave not my soul desolate and destitute*"; still let me see where my help is." (2.) That he would prevent the designs of his enemies against him; (v. 9.) "*Keep me from being taken in the snare they have laid for me*; give me to discover it, and to evade it." Be the gin placed with ever so much subtlety, God can, and will, secure his people from being taken in it. (3.) That God would, in justice, turn the designs of his enemies upon themselves, and, in mercy, deliver him from being ruined by them; (v. 10.) *Let the wicked fall into their own net*, the net which, intentionally, they procured for me; but which, meritoriously, they prepared for themselves. *Nec lex est justior nulla quam necis artifices arte perire sua*—No law can be more just than that the architects of destruction should perish by their own contrivances. All that are bound over to God's justice are held on the cords of their own

iniquity. But let me at the same time obtain a discharge. The entangling and ensnaring of the wicked sometimes prove the escape and enlargement of the righteous.

PSALM CXLII.

This psalm is a prayer, the substance of which David offered up to God, when he was forced by Saul to take shelter in a cave, and which he afterwards penned in this form. Here is, I. The complaints he makes to God, (v. 1, 2.) of the subtlety, strength, and malice, of his enemies, (v. 3, 6.) and the coldness and indifference of his friends, v. 4. II. The comfort he takes in God, that he knew his case, (v. 3.) and was his Refuge, v. 5. III. His expectation from God, that he would hear and deliver him, v. 6, 7. IV. His expectation from the righteous, that they would join with him in praises, v. 7. Those that are troubled in mind, body, or estate, may, in singing this psalm, (if they sing it in some measure with David's spirit,) both warrant his complaints, and fetch in his comforts.

Maschil of David. A prayer when he was in the cave.

1. **I** CRIED unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. 2. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble. 3. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me.

Whether it was in the cave of Adullam, or that of En-gedi, that David prayed this prayer, is not material; it is plain that he was in distress; it was a great disgrace to so great a soldier, so great a courtier, to be put to such shifts for his own safety; and a great terror to be so hotly pursued, and every moment in expectation of death; yet then he had such a presence of mind, as to pray this prayer, and, wherever he was, still he had his religion about him. Prayers and tears were his weapons, and when he durst not stretch forth his hands against his prince, he lifted them up to his God. There is no cave so deep, so dark, but we may out of it send up our prayers, and our souls in prayer, to God. He calls this prayer *Maschil*, a psalm of instruction, because of the good lessons he had himself learnt in the cave, learnt on his knees, which he desired to teach others.

In these verses, observe,

1. How David complained to God, v. 1, 2. When the danger was over, he was not ashamed to own (as great spirits sometimes are) the fright he had been in, and the application he had made to God. Let not men of the first rank think it any diminution or disparagement to them, when they are in affliction, to cry to God, and to cry like children to their parents, when any thing frightens them. *David poured out his complaint*, which denotes a free and full complaint; he was large and particular in it. His heart was as full of his grievances as it could hold, but he made himself easy by pouring them out before the Lord; and this he did with great fervency, *He cried unto the Lord with his voice*, with the voice of his mind, (so some think,) for, being hid in the cave, he durst not speak with an audible voice, lest that should have discovered him: but mental prayer is vocal to God, and he hears the groanings which cannot, or dare not, be uttered, Rom. 8. 26. Two things David laid open to God, in this complaint;

(1.) His distress; he exhibited a remonstrance or memorial of his case; *I shewed before him my trouble*, and all the circumstances of it. He did not prescribe to God, nor shew him his trouble, as if God did not know it without his shewing, but, as one that put a confidence in God, desired to keep up communion with him, and was willing to refer himself entirely to him, he unbosomed himself to him, humbly laid the matter before him, and then cheerfully left it with him. We are apt to shew our trouble too much to ourselves, aggravating it, and poring upon it, which does us no service; whereas, by shewing it to God, we might cast the care upon him who careth for us, and thereby ease ourselves. Nor should we allow of any complaint to ourselves, or others, which we cannot with the due decency and sincerity of devotion make to God, and stand to before him.

(2.) His desire. When he made his complaint, he *made his supplication*; (v.1.) not claiming relief as a debt, but humbly *begging* it as a favour. Complainants must be supplicants, for God will be sought unto.

2. What he complained of; "*In the way wherein I walked, suspecting no danger, have they, privily laid a snare for me, to entrap me.*" Saul gave Michal his daughter to David, on purpose that she might be a snare to him, 1 Sam. 18. 21. This he complains of to God, that every thing was done with a design against him. If he had gone out of his way, and met with snares, he might have thanked himself; but, when he met with them in the way of his duty, he might with humble boldness tell God of them.

3. What comforts him in the midst of these complaints; (v. 3.) "*When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, and ready to sink under the burthen of grief and fear, when I was quite at a loss, and ready to despair, then thou knewest my path, then it was a pleasure to me to think that thou knewest it. Thou knewest my sincerity, the right path which I have walked in, and that I am not such a one as my persecutors represent me; thou knewest also my condition in all the particulars of it; when my spirit was so overwhelmed that I could not distinctly shew it, this comforted me, that thou knewest it, Job, 23. 10. Thou knewest it, thou didst protect, preserve, and secure, it," Ps. 31. 7. Deut. 2. 7.*

4. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. 5. I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. 6. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. 7. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

The psalmist here tells us, for our instruction,

1. How he was disowned and deserted by his friends, v. 4. When he was in favour at court, he seemed to have a great interest, but when he was made an outlaw, and it was dangerous for any body to harbour him, (witness Ahimelech's fate,) then *no man would know him*, but every body was shy of him. He looked on his right hand for an advocate, (109. 31.) some friend or other to speak a good word for him. But, since Jonathan's appearing for him had like to have cost him his life, no body was willing to venture in defence of his innocency, but all were ready to say they knew nothing of the matter. He looked round to see if any would open their doors to him, but *refuge failed him*, none of all his old friends would give him a night's lodging, or direct him to any place of secrecy and safety. How many good men have been deceived by such swallow-friends, who are gone when winter comes! David's life was exceeding precious, and yet, when he was unjustly proscribed, *no man cared for it*, nor would move a hand for the protection of it. Herein he was a type of Christ, who, in his sufferings for us, was forsaken of all men, even of his own disciples, and trod the wine-press alone, for there was none to help, none to uphold, Isa. 63. 5.

2. How he then found satisfaction in God, v. 5. Lovers and friends stood aloof from him, and it was in vain to call to them; "But," said he, "*I cried unto thee, O Lord, who knowest me, and carest for me, when none else will, and wilt not fail me nor forsake me, when men do;*" for God is constant in his love. David tells us what he said to God in the cave, "*Thou art my Refuge and my Portion in the land of the living; I depend upon thee to be so, my Refuge to save me from being miserable, my Portion to make me happy.*" The cave I am in is but a poor refuge; Lord, thy name is the strong tower that I run into. Thou art my Refuge, in whom alone I shall think myself safe. The crown I am in hopes of is but a poor portion; I can never think myself well-provided for, till I know that the Lord is the Portion

of mine inheritance and of my cup." Those who in sincerity take the Lord for their God, shall find him all-sufficient both as a Refuge and as a Portion, so that, as no evil shall hurt them, so no good shall be wanting to them; and they may humbly claim their interest; "Lord, thou art my Refuge and my Portion, every thing else is a refuge of lies, and a portion of no value. Thou art so in the land of the living, while I live, and have my being, whether in this world, or in a better." There is enough in God to answer all the necessities of this present time; we live in a world of dangers and wants; but what danger need we fear, if God is our Refuge, or what wants, if he be our Portion? Heaven, which alone deserves to be called the land of the living, will be to all believers both a refuge and a portion.

3. How, in this satisfaction, he addressed himself to God; (v. 6, 7.) "Lord, give a gracious ear to my cry, the cry of my affliction, the cry of my supplication, for I am brought very low, and if thou help me not, I shall be quite sunk. Lord, deliver me from my persecutors; either tie their hands or turn their hearts, break their power or blast their projects, restrain them or rescue me, for they are stronger than I, and it will be thine honour to take part with the weakest. Deliver me from them, or I shall be ruined by them, for I am not yet myself a match for them. Lord, bring my soul out of prison; not only bring me safe out of this cave, but bring me out of all my perplexities." We may apply it spiritually; the souls of good men are often straitened by doubts and fears, cramped and fettered, through the weakness of faith and the prevalency of corruption. And it is then their duty and interest to apply themselves to God, and beg of him to set them at liberty, and to enlarge their hearts, that they may run the way of his commandments.

4. How much he expected his deliverance would redound to the glory of God. (1.) By his own thanksgivings, into which his present complaints would then be turned; "*Bring my soul out of prison, not that I may enjoy myself and my friends, and live at ease, no, nor that I may secure my country, but, that I may praise thy name.*" This we should have an eye to, in all our prayers to God for deliverance out of trouble, that we may have occasion to praise God, and may live to his praise. This is the greatest comfort of temporal mercies, that they furnish us with matter, and give us opportunity, for the excellent duty of praise. (2.) By the thanksgivings of many on his behalf; (2 Cor. 1. 11.) "When I am enlarged, the righteous shall compass me about, for my cause they shall make thee a crown of praise. So the Chaldee. They shall flock about me to congratulate me on my deliverance, to hear my experiences, and to receive (Maschil) instructions from me; they shall compass me, to join with me in my thanksgivings, because thou shalt have dealt bountifully with me." Note, The mercies of others ought to be the matter of our praises to God; and the praises of others, on our behalf, ought to be both desired and rejoiced in by us.

PSALM CXLIII.

This psalm, as those before, is a prayer, and full of complaints of the great distress and danger he was in, probably when Saul persecuted him. He did not only pray in that affliction, but he prayed very much, and very often, not the same over again, but new thoughts. In this psalm, I. He complains of his troubles, through the oppression of his enemies, (v. 3.) and the weakness of his spirit under it, which was ready to sink, notwithstanding the likely course he took to support himself, v. 4, 5. II. He prays, and prays earnestly, v. 6. 1. That God would hear him, v. 1. 7. 2. That he would not deal with him according to his sins, v. 2. 3. That he would not hide his face from him, (v. 7.) but manifest his favour to him, v. 8. 4. That he would guide and direct him in the way of his duty, (v. 8, 10.) and quicken him in it, v. 11. 5. That he would deliver him out of his troubles, v. 9, 11. 6. That he would in due time reckon with his persecutors, v. 12. We may more easily accommodate this psalm to ourselves, in the singing of it, because most of the petitions in it are for spiritual blessings, (which we all need at all times,) mercy, and grace.

A psalm of David.

I. **H**EAR my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer

me, and in thy righteousness. 2. And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. 3. For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. 4. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate. 5. I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands. 6. I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul *thirsteth* after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.

Here, 1. David humbly begs to be heard; (v. 1.) not as if he questioned it, but he earnestly desired it, and was in care about it, for, having directed his prayer, he looked up to see how it sped, Hab. 2. 1. He is a suppliant to his God, and he begs that his requests might be granted; *Hear my prayer, give ear to my supplications*: he is an appellant against his persecutors, and he begs that his case might be brought to hearing, and that God would give judgment upon it, in his faithfulness and righteousness, as the Judge of right and wrong. Or, "Answer my petitions in thy faithfulness, according to the promises thou hast made, which thou wilt be just to." We have no righteousness of our own to plead, and therefore must plead God's righteousness, the word of promise, which he has freely given us, and caused us to hope in.

2. He humbly begs not to be proceeded against in strict justice, v. 2. He seems here, if not to correct, yet to explain, his plea, (v. 1.) Deliver me in thy righteousness; "I mean," says he, "the righteous promises of the gospel, not the righteous threatenings of the law; if I be answered according to the righteousness of this broken covenant of innocency, I am quite undone;" and therefore, (1.) His petition is, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; do not deal with me in strict justice, as I deserve to be dealt with." In this prayer, we must own ourselves to be God's servants, bound to obey him, accountable to him, and solicitous to obtain his favour, and we must approve ourselves to him; we must acknowledge that in many instances we have offended him, and have come short of our duty to him; that he might justly inquire into our offences, and proceed against us for them according to law; and that, if he should do so, judgment would certainly go against us, we have nothing to move in arrest or mitigation of it, but execution would be taken out and awarded, and then we are ruined for ever. But we must encourage ourselves with a hope that there is mercy and forgiveness with God, and be earnest with him for the benefit of that mercy. *Enter not into judgment with thy servant*, for thou hast already entered into judgment with thy Son, and laid upon him the iniquity of us all. *Enter not into judgment with thy servant*, for thy servant enters into judgment with himself; and if we will judge ourselves, we shall not be judged. (2.) His plea is, *In thy sight shall no man living be justified* upon those terms, for no man can plead innocency nor any righteousness of his own, either that he has not sinned, or that he does not deserve to die for his sins, or that he has any satisfaction of his own to offer; nay, if God contend with us, we are not able to answer him for one of a thousand, Job. 9. 3.—15. 20. David, before he prays for the removal of his trouble, prays for the pardon of his sin, and depends upon mere mercy for it.

3. He complains of the prevalency of his enemies against him; (v. 3.) "Saul, that great enemy, has persecuted my soul, sought my life, with a restless malice, and has carried the persecution so far, that he has already smitten it down to the ground; though I am not yet under ground, I am struck to the ground, and that is next door to it; he has forced me to dwell in darkness, not only in dark caves, but in dark thoughts and apprehensions, in the clouds of melancholy, as helpless and hopeless as those that have been long dead. Lord, let me find mercy with thee, for I find no mercy with men. They condemn me; but, Lord, do not thou

condemn me. Am not I an object of thy compassion, fit to be appeared for; and is not mine enemy an object of thy displeasure, fit to be appeared against?"

4. He bemoans the oppression of his mind, occasioned by his outward troubles; (v. 4.) *Therefore is my spirit overpowered and overwhelmed within me*, and I am almost plunged in despair; when without are fightings, within are fears, and those fears greater tyrants and oppressors than Saul himself, and not so easily out-run. It is sometimes the lot of the best men to have their spirits for a time almost overwhelmed, and their hearts desolate, and doubtless it is their infirmity. David was not only a great saint, but a great soldier, and yet even he was sometimes ready to faint in a day of adversity. *Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be shaken*.

5. He applies himself to the use of proper means for the relief of his troubled spirit. He had no force to muster up against the oppression of the enemy, but if he can keep possession of nothing else, he will do what he can to keep possession of his own soul, and to preserve his inward peace. In order to this, (1.) He looks back, and remembers the days of old, (v. 5.) God's former appearances for his afflicted people, and for him in particular. This has been often a relief to the people of God in their straits, to think of the wonders which their fathers told them of, 77. 5, 11. (2.) He looks round, and takes notice of the works of God in the visible creation, and the providential government of the world; *I meditate on all thy works*. Many see them, but do not see the footsteps of God's wisdom, power, and goodness, in them, and therefore do not receive the benefit they might by them, because they do not meditate upon them; they do not dwell on that copious, curious, subject, but soon quit it, as if they had exhausted it, when they have scarcely touched upon it. *I muse on*, or, as some read it, *I discourse of*, the operation of thy hands; how great, how good, it is! The more we consider the power of God, the less we shall fear the face or force of man, Isa. 51. 12, 13. (3.) He looks up with earnest desires toward God and his favour; (v. 6.) *I stretch forth my hands unto thee*, as one begging an alms, and big with expectation to receive something great, standing ready to lay hold on it, and bid it welcome; "My soul thirsteth after thee, it is to thee, (so the word is,) entire for thee, intent on thee, it is as a thirsty land, which, being parched with excessive heat, gapes for rain; so do I need, so do I crave, the support and refreshment of divine consolations under mine afflictions, and nothing else will relieve me." This is the best course we can take when our spirits are overwhelmed; and justly do they sink under their load, who will not take such a ready way as this to ease themselves.

7. Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. 8. Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. 9. Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. 10. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. 11. Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. 12. And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.

David here tells us what he said when he stretched forth his hands unto God; he begins not only as one in earnest, but as one in haste; "Hear me speedily, and defer no longer, for my spirit faileth. I am just ready to faint; reach the cordial, quickly, quickly, or I am gone." It was not a haste of unbelief, but of vehement desire and holy love; *Make haste, O God, to help me*.

Three things David here prays for;

I. The manifestations of God's favour toward him; that God would be well-pleased with him, and let him know that he was so; this he prefers before any good, 4.6. 1. He dreads God's frowns; "Lord, *hide not thy face from me*; Lord, be not angry with me; do not turn from me, as we do from one we are displeased with; Lord, let me not be left under the apprehensions of thine anger, or in doubt concerning thy favour; if I have thy favour, let it not be hid from me." Those that have the truth of grace, cannot but desire the evidence of it. He pleads the wretchedness of his case, if God withdrew from him; "Lord, let me not lie under thy wrath, for then I am *like them that go down to the pit*, down to the grave; I am a dead man, weak, and pale, and ghastly; thy frowns are worse than death; or down to hell, the bottomless pit." Even those who through grace are delivered from going down to the pit, may sometimes, when the terrors of the Almighty set themselves in array against them, look like those who are going to the pit. Disconsolate saints have sometimes cried out of the wrath of God, as if they had been damned sinners, Job, 6.4. Ps. 88.6. 2. He entreats God's favour; (v.8.) *Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning*. He cannot but think that God has a kindness for him, that he has some kind things to say to him, some good words and comfortable words; but the present hurry of his affairs, and tumult of his spirits, drowned those pleasing whispers; and therefore he begs, "Lord, do not only speak kindly to me, but cause me to hear it, to *hear joy and gladness*," 51.8. God speaks to us by his word, and by his providence, and in both we should desire and endeavour to *hear his loving-kindness*, (107.43.) that we may set that always before us; "Cause me to hear it in the morning, every morning; let my waking thoughts be of God's loving-kindness, that the sweet relish of that may abide upon my spirits all the day long." His plea is, "For in thee do I trust, and in thee only; I look not for comfort in any other." It is a usual thing for God's goodness to be wrought for those who trust in him, (31.8.) who by faith draw it out.

II. The operations of God's grace in him. Those he is as earnest for, as for the tokens of God's favour to him, and so should we be. He prays, 1. That he might be enlightened with the knowledge of God's will; and this is the first work of the Spirit, in order to his other works; for God deals with men as men, as reasonable creatures. Here are three petitions to this effect. (1.) *Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk*. Sometimes, those that are much in care to walk right are in doubt and in the dark which is the right way. Let them come boldly to the throne of grace, and beg of God, by his word, and Spirit, and providence, to shew them the way, and prevent their missing it. A good man does not ask what is the way in which he *must* walk, or in which is the most *pleasant* walking, but what is the *right* way, the way in which he *should* walk. He pleads, "I lift up my soul unto thee, to be moulded and fashioned according to thy will." He did not only importunately, but impartially, desire to know his duty; and those that do so shall be taught. (2.) "Teach me to do thy will; not only shew me what thy will is, but teach me how to do it, how to turn my hand dexterously to my duty." It is the desire and endeavour of all God's faithful servants to know and do his will, and to stand complete in it. He pleads, "Thou art my God, and therefore my Oracle, by whom I may expect to be advised; my God, and therefore my Ruler, whose will I desire to do." If we do in sincerity take God for our God, we may depend upon him to teach us to do his will, as a master does his servant. (3.) *Lead me into the land of uprightness*, into the communion of saints, that pleasant land of the upright; or, into a settled course of holy living, which will lead to heaven, that land of uprightness, where holiness will be in perfection, and he that is holy shall be holy still. We should desire to be led, and kept safe, to heaven, not only because it is a land of blessedness, but because it is a land of uprightness; it is the perfection of grace. We cannot find the way that will bring us to that land, unless God shew us; nor go in that way, unless he take us by the hand and lead us, as we lead these that are weak, or lame, or timorous, or

dim-sighted; so necessary is the grace of God, not only to put us into the good way, but to keep us, and carry us on, in it. The plea is, "Thy Spirit is good, and able to make me good;" good and willing to help those that are at a loss. *Let thy good Spirit lead me*, so some read it. They that have the Lord for their God have his Spirit for their Guide; and it is both their character and their privilege that they are *led by the Spirit*.

2. He prays that he might be enlivened to do his will; (v.11.) "Quicken me, O Lord; quicken my graces, that they may be active, quicken my devotions, that they may be lively, quicken me to my duty, and quicken me in it, and this for thy name's sake." The best saints often find themselves dull, and dead, and slow, and therefore pray to God to quicken them.

III. The appearance of God's providence for him; that God would, in his own way and time, 1. Give him rest from his troubles; (v.9.) "Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies, that they may not have their will against me; for I fly unto thee to hide me; I trust to thee to defend me in my trouble, and therefore to rescue me out of it." Preservations are pledges of salvation, and those shall find God their Hiding-Place, who by faith make him such. He explains himself, (v.11.) "For thy righteousness-sake, bring my soul out of trouble; for thy promise-sake, nay, for thy mercy-sake," (for some by righteousness understand kindness and goodness,) "do not only deliver me from my outward trouble, but from the trouble of my soul, the trouble that threatens to overwhelm my spirit. Whatever trouble I am in, Lord, let not my heart be troubled," John, 14.1. 2. That he would reckon with those that were the instruments of his trouble; (v.12.) "Of thy mercy to me, cut off mine enemies, that I may be no longer in fear of them; and destroy all them, whoever they be, how numerous, how powerful, soever, who afflict my soul, and create vexation to that; for I am thy servant, and am resolved to continue such, and therefore may expect to be owned and protected in thy service." This prayer is a prophecy of the utter destruction of all the impenitent enemies of Jesus Christ and his kingdom, who will not have him to reign over them, who grieve his Spirit and afflict his soul, by afflicting his people, in whose afflictions he is afflicted.

PSALM CXLIV.

The four preceding psalms seem to have been penned by David before his accession to the crown, when he was persecuted by Saul; this seems to have been penned after, when he was still in trouble, (for there is no condition in this world privileged with an exemption from trouble,) the neighbouring nations molesting him and giving him disturbance, especially the Philistines, 2Sam. 5.17. In this psalm, I. He acknowledges, with triumph and thankfulness, the great goodness of God to him in advancing him to the government, v.1. 4. II. He prays to God to help him against the enemies who threatened him, (v.5. 8.) and again, v.11. III. He rejoices in the assurance of victory over them, v.9.10. IV. He prays for the prosperity of his own kingdom, and pleases himself with the hopes of it, v.12. 15. In singing this psalm, we may give God the glory of our spiritual privileges and advancements, and fetch in help from him against our spiritual enemies; we may pray for the prosperity of our souls, of our families, and of our land; and, in the opinion of some of the Jewish writers, we may refer the psalm to the Messiah and his kingdom.

A psalm of David.

1. **B**LESSED be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: 2. My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me. 3. LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him! 4. Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away. 5. Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. 6. Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them. 7. Send thine

hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children; 8. Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

Here,

I. David acknowledges his dependence upon God, and his obligations to him, v.1, 2. A prayer for further mercy is fitly begun with a thanksgiving for former mercy; and when we are waiting upon God to bless us, we should stir up ourselves to bless him.

He gives to God the glory of two things:

1. What he was to him; *Blessed be the Lord my Rock, (v.1.) my Goodness, my Fortress, v.2.* He has in the covenant engaged himself to be so, and encouraged us, accordingly, to depend upon him; all the saints, who by faith have made him their's, have found him not only to answer, but to outdo, their expectations. David speaks it here as the matter of his trust, and that which made him easy; as the matter of his triumph, and that which made him glad, and in which he gloried. See how he multiplies words to express the satisfaction he had in God, and his interest in him. (1.) "He is *my Strength*, on whom I stay, and from whom I have power both for my work and for my warfare; my Rock to build on, to take shelter in." Even when we are weak, we may be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. (2.) "*My Goodness*; not only good to me, but my chief Good, in whose favour I place my felicity, and who is the Author of all the goodness that is in me, and from whom comes every good and perfect gift." (3.) "*My Fortress, and my high Tower*, in whom I think myself as safe as ever any prince thought himself in a castle or strong-hold." David had formerly sheltered himself in strong-holds at En-gedi, (1 Sam. 23. 29.) which perhaps were natural fastnesses. He had lately made himself master of the strong-hold of Zion, which was forfeited by art, and he dwelt in the fort; (2 Sam. 5. 7, 9.) but he depends not on these." "Lord," says he, "thou art *my Fortress, and my high Tower.*" The divine attributes and promises are fortifications to a believer, far exceeding those either of nature or art. (4.) *My Deliverer*, and, as it is in the original, very emphatically, *my Deliverer to me*; "not only a Deliverer I have interest in, but who is always nigh unto me, and makes all my deliverances turn to my real benefit." (5.) "*My Shield*, to guard me against all the malignant darts that mine enemies let fly at me; not only *my Fortress* at home, but *my Shield* abroad in the field of battle." Wherever a believer goes, he carries his protection along with him. *Fear not, Abram, I am thy Shield.*

2. What he had done for him. He was bred a shepherd, and seems not to have been designed by his parents or himself for any thing more. But, (1.) God had made him a soldier; his hands had been used to the crook, and his fingers to the harp, but God taught his hands to war, and his fingers to fight, because he designed him for Israel's champion; and what God calls men to, he either finds them, or makes them, fit for. Let the men of war give God the glory of all their military skill; the same that teaches the meanest husbandman his art, teaches the greatest general his. It is pity that any, whose fingers God has taught to fight, should fight against him or his kingdom among men. Those have special reason to acknowledge God with thankfulness, who prove to be qualified for services which they themselves never thought of. (2.) God had made him a sovereign prince, had taught him to wield the sceptre as well as the sword, to rule as well as fight, the harder and nobler art of the two; He *subdueth my people under me*. The providence of God is to be acknowledged in making people subject to their prince, and so preserving the order and benefit of societies. There was a special hand of God inclining the people of Israel to be subject to David, pursuant to the promise God had made him; and it was typical of that great act of divine grace, the bringing of souls into subjection to the Lord Jesus, and making them willing in the day of his power.

II. He admires God's condescension to man, and to himself in particular; (v.3,4.) "*Lord, what is man, what a poor little*

thing is he, that thou takest knowledge of him! that thou makest account of him! that he falls so much under thy cognizance and care, and that thou hast such a tender regard to any of that mean and worthless race, as thou hast had to me!" Considering the many disgraces which the human nature lies under, we have reason to admire the honours God has put upon mankind in general, (the saints especially, some in a particular manner, as David,) and upon the Messiah, (to whom those words are applied, Heb. 2. 6.) who was *therefore highly exalted, because he humbled himself to be found in fashion as a man, and therefore has authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man.* A question to this purport David asked, (Ps. 8. 4.) and there he illustrated the wonder by the consideration of the great dignity God has placed man in; (v.5.) *Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour.* Here he illustrates it by the consideration of the meanness and mortality of man, notwithstanding the dignity put upon him; (v.4.) *Man is like to vanity*, so frail is he, so weak, so helpless, compassed about with so many infirmities, and his continuance here so very short and uncertain, that he is as like as may be to vanity itself. Nay, he is vanity, he is so at his best estate. *His days have little substance in them*, considering how many of the thoughts and cares of an immortal soul are employed about a poor dying body: *they are as a shadow*, dark and flitting, transitory, and finishing with the sun, and when that sets, resolving itself into all shadow. *They are as a shadow that passeth away*, and there is no loss of it. David puts himself into the number of those that are thus mean and despicable.

III. He begs of God to strengthen him, and give him success against the enemies that invaded him, v.5, 8. He does not specify who they were that he was in fear of, but says, *Scatter them, destroy them.* God knew whom he meant, though he did not name them. But afterward he describes them; (v.7, 8.) "*They are strange children, Philistines, aliens, bad neighbours to Israel, heathens whom we are bound to be strange to, and not to make any leagues with, and who therefore carry it strangely towards us.*" Notwithstanding the advantages with which God had blessed David's arms against them, they were still vexatious and treacherous, and men that one could put no confidence in; one cannot take their word, for *their mouth speaketh vanity*; nay, if they give their hand upon it, or offer their hand to help you, there is no trusting them; for *their right hand is a right hand of falsehood*: against such as these we cannot defend ourselves, but may depend on the God of truth and justice, who hates falsehood, to defend us from them.

1. David prays that God would appear, that he would do something extraordinary, for the conviction of those who preferred their dunghill-deities before the God of Israel; (v.5.) "*Bow thy heavens, O Lord*, and make it evident that they are indeed thine, and that thou art the Lord of them, Isa. 64. 1. Let thy providence threaten mine enemies, and look black upon them, as the clouds do on the earth, when they are thick, and hang very low, big with a storm. Fight against those that fight against us, so that it may visibly appear thou art for us. *Touch the mountains*, our strong and stately enemies, and let them *smoke*. Shew thyself by the ministry of thy angels, as thou didst upon mount Sinai."

2. That he would appear against his enemies; that he would fight from heaven against them, as sometimes he had done, by lightnings, which are his arrows, his fiery darts, against which the hardest steel is no armour of proof; so penetrating is the force of lightning: that he himself would shoot these arrows, who, we are sure, never misses his mark, but hits where he aims.

3. That he would appear for him, v.7. He begs for their destruction, in order to his own deliverance, and the repose of his people; "*Send thy hand, thy power, from above*, for that way we look for help; *rid me, and deliver me out of these great waters* that are ready to overflow me." God's time to help his people is when they are sinking, and all other helps fail.

9. I will sing a new song unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee. 10. *It is he that*

giveth salvation unto kings: who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword. 11. Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood: 12. That our sons *may be* as plants grown up in their youth; *that* our daughters *may be* as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: 13. *That* our garners *may be* full, affording all manner of store: *that* our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets: 14. *That* our oxen *may be* strong to labour; *that there be* no breaking in, nor going out; *that there be* no complaining in our streets. 15. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: *yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.*

The method is the same in this latter part of the psalm, as in the former; he first gives glory to God, and then begs mercy from him.

1. He praises God for the experiences he had had of his goodness to him, and the encouragements he had to expect further mercy from him, v.9, 10. In the midst of his complaints concerning the power and treachery of his enemies, here is a holy exultation in his God; *I will sing a new song to thee, O God; a song of praise for new mercies, for those compassions that are new every morning.* Fresh favours call for fresh returns of thanks; nay, we must praise God for the mercies we hope for by his promise, as well as those we have received by his providence, 2 Chron. 20. 20, 21. He will join music with his songs of praise, to express and excite his holy joy in God; he will praise God upon a *psaltery of ten strings*, in the best manner, thinking all little enough to set forth the praises of God. He tells us what this new song shall be; (v. 10.) *It is he that giveth salvation unto kings.* This intimates, 1. That great kings cannot save themselves without him. Kings have their life-guards, and have armies at command, and all the means of safety that can be devised; but, after all, it is God that gives them their salvation, and secures them by those means, which he could do, if there were occasion, without them, 33. 16. Kings are the protectors of their people, but it is God that is their Protector. How much service do they owe him, then, with their power, who gives them all their salvation! 2. That good kings, who are his ministers for the good of their subjects, shall be protected and saved by him. He has engaged to give salvation to those kings that are his subjects, and rule for him; witness the great things he had done for *David his servant*, whom he had many a time *delivered from the hurtful sword*, to which Saul's malice, and his own zeal for the service of his country, had often exposed him. This may refer to Christ the Son of David, and then it is a new song indeed, a New-Testament song; God delivered him from the hurtful sword, upheld him as his servant, and brought him off a Conqueror over all the powers of darkness, Isa. 42. 1.—49. 8. To him he *gave salvation*, not for himself only, but for us, raising him up to be a *Horn of salvation*.

II. He prays for the continuance of God's favour.

1. That he might be delivered from the public enemies, v. 11. Here he repeats his prayer and plea, v. 7, 8. His persecutors were still of the same character, false and perfidious, and who would certainly over-reach an honest man, and be too hard for him; "Therefore, Lord, do thou *deliver me from them*, for they are a strange sort of people."

2. That he might see the public peace and prosperity; "Lord, let us have victory, that we may have quietness; which we shall never have while our enemies have it in their power to do us mischief." David, as a king, here speaks the earnest desire he had of the welfare of his people; wherein he was a type of Christ, who provides effectually for the good of his chosen. We have here,

(1.) The particular instances of that public prosperity which David desired for his people.

[1.] A hopeful progeny; (v. 12.) "*That our sons and our daughters may be* in all respects such as we could wish." He means not those only of his own family, but those of his subjects, that are the seed of the next generation. It adds much to the comfort and happiness of parents in this world, to see their children promising, and likely to do well. *First*, It is pleasant to see *our sons as plants grown up in their youth*, as olive-plants, (128. 3.) *the planting of the Lord*; (Isa. 61. 3.) to see them as plants, not as weeds, not as thorns; to see them as plants growing great, not withered and blasted; to see them of a healthful constitution, a quick capacity, a towardly disposition, and especially of a pious inclination, likely to bring forth fruit unto God in their day; to see them *in their youth*, their growing time, increasing in every thing that is good, growing wiser and better, till they grow strong in spirit. *Secondly*, It is no less desirable to see *our daughters as corner-stones, or corner-pillars, polished after the similitude of a palace or temple*. By daughters families are united and connected, to their mutual strength, as the parts of a building are by the corner-stones; and when they are graceful and beautiful both in body and mind, they are then polished after the similitude of a nice and curious structure. When we see our daughters well established and stayed with wisdom and discretion, as corner-stones are fastened in the building, when we see them by faith united to Christ, as the chief Corner-stone, adorned with the graces of God's Spirit, which are the polishing of that which is naturally rough, and *become women professing godliness*, when we see them purified and consecrated to God as living temples, we think ourselves happy in them.

[2.] Great plenty. Numerous families increase the care, perhaps more than the comfort, where there is not sufficient for their maintenance; and therefore he prays for a growing estate with a growing family. *First*, That their store-houses might be well-replenished with the fruits and products of the earth; *That our garners may be full*, like those of the good householder, who brings out of them things new and old; those things that are best new, he has in *that state*; those that are best when they are kept, he has in *that state*; that we may have in them *all manner of stores*, for ourselves and our friends; that, living plentifully, we may live not luxuriously, for then we abuse our plenty, but cheerfully and usefully; that, having abundance, we may be thankful to God, generous to our friends, and charitable to the poor; otherwise, what profit is it to have *our garners full*? Jam. 5. 3. *Secondly*, That their flocks might greatly increase; *That our sheep may bring forth thousands, and ten thousands, in our folds*. Much of the wealth of their country consisted in their flocks; (Prov. 27. 26.) and of our's too, else wool would not be, as it is, a staple-commodity. The increase of our cattle is a blessing in which God is to be acknowledged. *Thirdly*, That their beasts designed for service might be fit for it; *That our oxen may be strong to labour* in the plough; *that they may be fat and fleshy*, so some; in good working case. We were none of us made to be idle, and therefore we should pray for bodily health, not that we may be easy and take our pleasures, but that we *may be strong to labour*, that we may do the work of our place and day, else we are worse than the beasts; for when they are strong, it is for labour.

[3.] An uninterrupted peace. *First*, That there be no war; *no breaking in of invaders, no going out of deserters*. Let not our enemies break in upon us; let us not have occasion to march out against them. War brings with it abundance of mischiefs, whether it be offensive or defensive. *Secondly*, That there be no oppression or faction, *no complaining in our streets*; that the people may have no cause to complain, either of their government or of one another; nor may be so peevish as to complain without cause. It is desirable thus to dwell in quiet habitations.

(2.) His reflection upon this description of the prosperity of the nation which he so much desired; (v. 15.) *Happy are the people that are in such a case*; but it is seldom so, and never long so; *yea, happy are the people whose God is the Lord*. The relation of a people to God as their's, is here spoken of, either, [1.] As that which is the fountain whence all those blessings flow. Happy

are the Israelites, if they faithfully adhere to the Lord as their God, for they may expect to be in such a case. National piety commonly brings national prosperity; for nations, as such, in their national capacity, are capable of rewards and punishments only in this life. Or, [2.] As that which is abundantly preferable to all these enjoyments. The psalmist began to say, as most do, *Happy are the people that are in such a case*; they are blessed that prosper in the world; but he immediately corrects himself, *Yea, rather, happy are the people whose God is the Lord*, who have his favour and love and grace, according to the tenor of the covenant, though they have not abundance of this world's goods. As all this, and much more, cannot make us happy unless the Lord be our God, so, if he be, the want of this, the loss of this, nay, the reverse of this, cannot make us miserable.

PSALM CXLV.

The five foregoing psalms were all of a piece, all full of prayers; this, and the five that follow it to the end of the book, are all of a piece too, all full of praises; and though this only is entitled David's psalm, yet we have no reason to think but that they were all his, as well as all the foregoing prayers. And it is observable, 1. That after five psalms of prayer, follow six psalms of praise; for those that are much in prayer, shall not want matter for praise; and those that have sped in prayer, must abound in praise. Our thanksgivings for mercy, when we have received it, should even exceed our supplications for it, when we were in pursuit of it. David, in the last of his begging psalms, had promised to praise God, (144.9.) and here he performs his promise. 2. That the book of Psalms concludes with psalms of praise, all praise, for praise is the conclusion of the whole matter, it is that in which all the psalms centre. And it intimates, that God's people, toward the end of their life, should abound much in praise, and the rather, because, at the end of their life, they hope to remove to the world of everlasting praise; and the nearer they come to heaven, the more they should accustom themselves to the work of heaven. This is one of those psalms which are composed alphabetically, (as Ps. 25. and 34. &c.) that it might be the more easily committed to memory, and kept in mind. The Jewish writers justly extol this psalm as a star of the first magnitude in this bright constellation; and some of them have an extravagant saying concerning it, not much unlike some of the popish superstitions, That whosoever will sing this psalm constantly three times a day, shall certainly be happy in the world to come. In this psalm, 1. David engages himself and others to praise God, v. 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 12. 11. He fastens upon those things that are proper matter for praise; God's greatness, (v. 3.) his goodness, (v. 8, 9.) the proofs of both in the administration of his kingdom, (v. 13.) the kingdom of providence, (v. 14, 16.) the kingdom of grace; (v. 17, 20.) and then he concludes with a resolution to continue praising God, (v. 21.) with which resolution our hearts must be filled, and in which they must be fixed, in singing this psalm.

David's psalm of praise.

1. **I** WILL extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. 2. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. 3. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. 4. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. 5. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. 6. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness. 7. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. 8. The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. 9. The LORD is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works.

The entitling of this, *David's psalm of praise*, may intimate not only that he was the penman of it, but that he took a particular pleasure in it, and sung it often; it was his companion wherever he went. In this former part of the psalm, God's glorious attributes are praised, as, in the latter part of the psalm, his kingdom and the administration of it. Observe,

1. Who shall be employed in giving glory to God.

1. Whatever others do, the psalmist will himself be much in

praising God. To this good work he here excites himself, engages himself, and has his heart much enlarged in it. What he does, that he will do, having more and more satisfaction in it; it was his duty, it was his delight. Observe, (1.) How he expresses the work itself; *I will extol thee, and bless thy name*; (v. 1.) "I will speak well of thee, as thou hast made thyself known, and will therein express my own high thoughts of thee, and endeavour to raise the like in others." When we speak honourably of God, this is graciously interpreted and accepted as an extolling of him. Again, (v. 2.) *I will bless thee, I will praise thy name*; the repetition intimates the fervency of his affection to this work, the fixedness of his purpose to abound in it, and the frequency of his performances therein. Again, (v. 5.) *I will speak of thine honour*; and, (v. 6.) *I will declare thy greatness*. He would give glory to God, not only in his solemn devotions, but in his common conversation. If the heart be full of God, out of the abundance of that the mouth will speak, with reverence, to his praise, upon all occasions. What subject of discourse can we find more noble, more copious, more pleasant, useful, and unexceptionable, than the glory of God? (2.) How he expresses his resolution to persevere in it. [1.] He will be constant to this work; *Every day will I bless thee*. Praising God must be our daily work. No day must pass, though ever so busy a day, though ever so sorrowful a day, without praising God: we ought to reckon it the most needful of our daily employments, and the most delightful of our daily comforts. God is every day blessing us, doing well for us; there is therefore reason that we should be every day blessing him, speaking well of him. [2.] He will continue in it; *I will bless thee for ever and ever*, (v. 1.) and again, v. 2. This intimates, First, That he resolved to continue in this work to the end of his life, throughout his ever in this world. Secondly, That the psalms he penned should be made use of in praising God by the church to the end of time, 2 Chron. 29. 30. Thirdly, That he hoped to be praising God to all eternity in the other world. They that make it their constant work on earth, shall have it their everlasting bliss in heaven.

2. He doubts not but others also would be forward to this work. (1.) "They shall concur in it now; they shall join with me in it; when I declare thy greatness, men shall speak of it, (v. 6.) they shall abundantly utter it," (v. 7.) or pour it out, as the word is; they shall praise God with a gracious fluency, better than the most curious oratory. David's zeal would provoke many, and it has done so. (2.) "They shall keep it up, when I am gone, in an uninterrupted succession; (v. 4.) One generation shall praise thy works to another." The generation that is gone off shall tell them to that which is rising up, shall tell what they have seen in their days, and what they have heard from their fathers; they shall fully and particularly declare thy mighty acts; (78. 3.) and the generation that is rising up shall follow the example of that which is going off; so that the death of God's worshippers shall be no diminution of his worship; for a new generation shall rise up in their room to carry on that good work, more or less, to the end of time, when it shall be left to that world to do it in, in which there is no succession of generations.

II. What we must give to God the glory of.

1. Of his greatness, and his great works. We must declare, *Great is the Lord*, his presence infinite, his power irresistible, his brightness insupportable, his majesty awful, his dominion boundless, and his sovereignty incontestable; and therefore there is no dispute, but *Great is the Lord*, and, if great, then greatly to be praised, with all that is within us, to the utmost of our power, and with all the circumstances of solemnity imaginable. His greatness indeed cannot be comprehended, for it is unsearchable; who can conceive, or express, how great God is? But then it is so much the more to be praised; when we cannot, by searching, find the bottom, we must sit down at the brink, and adore the depth, Rom. 11. 33. God is great, for, (1.) His majesty is glorious in the upper world, above the heavens, where he has set his glory; and when we are declaring his greatness, we must not fail to speak of the glorious honour of his majesty, the splendour of the glory of his majesty, v. 5. How bright he shines in the upper world, so

as to dazzle the eyes of the angels themselves, and oblige them to cover their faces, as unable to bear the lustre of it! (2.) His works are wondrous in this lower world; the preservation, maintenance, and government, of all the creatures, speak the Creator very great. When therefore we declare his greatness, we must observe the unquestionable proofs of it, and must *declare his mighty acts*, (v. 4.) *speak of his wondrous works*, (v. 5.) *the might of his terrible acts*, v. 6. We must see God acting and working in all the affairs of this lower world; various instruments are used, but in all events God is the supreme Director; it is he that performs all things. Much of his power is seen in the operations of his providence; they are mighty acts, such as cannot be paralleled by the strength of any creature; and much of his justice; they are terrible acts, awful to saints, dreadful to sinners. These we should take all occasions to speak of, observing the finger of God, his hand, his arm, in all, that we may marvel.

2. Of his goodness; this is his glory, Exod. 33. 19. It is what he glories in, (Exod. 34. 6, 7.) and it is what we must give him the glory of; *They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness*, v. 7. God's goodness is great goodness, the treasures of it can never be exhausted, nay, they can never be lessened, for he ever will be as rich in mercy as he ever was. It is memorable goodness, it is what we ought always to lay before us, always to have in mind, and preserve the memorials of; for it is *worthy to be had in everlasting remembrance*; and the memory we have of God's goodness we should *utter*, we should *abundantly utter*, as those who are full of it, very full of it, and desire that others may be acquainted and affected with it. But, whenever we utter God's great goodness, we must not forget, at the same time, to *sing of his righteousness*; for as he is gracious in rewarding those that serve him faithfully, so he is righteous in punishing those that rebel against him. Impartial and inflexible justice is as surely in God as inexhaustible goodness; and we must sing of both together, Rom. 11. 22.

(1.) There is a fountain of goodness in God's nature; (v. 8.) *The Lord is gracious* to those that serve him, he is *full of compassion* to those that need him, *slow to anger* to those that have offended him, *and of great mercy* to all that seek him, and sue to him. He is ready to give, and ready to *forgive*, more ready than we are to ask, than we are to repent.

(2.) There are streams of goodness in all the dispensations of his providence, v. 9. As he is good, so he *does good*; he is *good to all*, to all his creatures, from the highest angels to the meanest worm; to all but devils and damned sinners, that have shut themselves out from his goodness. *His tender mercies are over all his works*. [1.] All his works, all his creatures, receive the fruits of his merciful care and bounty; it is extended to them all, he hates nothing that he has made. [2.] The works of his mercy out-shine all his other works, and declare him more than any of them. In nothing will the glory of God be for ever so illustrious, as in the vessels of mercy ordained to glory. To the divine goodness will the everlasting hallelujahs of all the saints be sung.

10. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. 11. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; 12. To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. 13. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion *endureth* throughout all generations. 14. The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all *those that be bowed down*. 15. The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. 16. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. 17. The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. 18. The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him,

to all that call upon him in truth. 19. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them. 20. The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy. 21. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

The greatness and goodness of him who is *optimus et maximus*—the best and greatest of beings, were celebrated in the former part of the psalm; here, in these verses, we are taught to give him *the glory of his kingdom*, in the administration of which his greatness and goodness shine so clear, so very bright. Observe, as before,

I. From whom the tribute of praise is expected; (v. 10.) *All God's works shall praise him*; they all minister to us matter for praise, and so praise him according to their capacity; even those that refuse to give him honour, he will get him honour upon; but his *saints do bless him*, not only as they have peculiar blessings from him, which other creatures have not, but as they praise him actively, while his other works praise him only objectively. They bless him, for they collect the rent and tribute of praise from the inferior creatures, and pay it into the treasury above. *All God's works do praise him*, as the beautiful building praises the builder, or the well-drawn picture praises the painter; but his *saints bless him*, as the children of prudent tender parents rise up and call them blessed. Of all God's works, the saints, the workmanship of his grace, the first-fruits of his creatures, have most reason to bless him.

II. For what this praise is to be given; *They shall speak of thy kingdom*. The kingdom of God among men is a thing to be often thought of, and often spoken of. As, before, he had magnified God's greatness and goodness in general, so, here, he magnifies them with application to his kingdom. Consider then,

1. The greatness of his kingdom; it is great indeed, for all the kings and kingdoms of the earth are under his controul. To shew the greatness of God's kingdom, he observes, (1.) The pomp of it. Would we by faith look within the veil, we should see, and, believing, we should *speak of, the glory of his kingdom*, (v. 11.) *the glorious majesty of it*, (v. 12.) for he has prepared his throne in the heavens, and it is high and lifted up, and surrounded with an innumerable company of angels. The courts of Solomon and Ahasuerus were magnificent; but, compared with the glorious majesty of God's kingdom, they were but as glow-worms to the sun. The consideration of this should strike an awe upon us in all our approaches to God. (2.) The power of it; When *they speak of the glory of God's kingdom*, they must *talk of his power*, the extent of it, the efficacy of it, his power, by which he can do any thing, and does every thing he pleases; (v. 11.) and, as a proof of it, let them *make known his mighty acts*, (v. 12.) that *the sons of men* may be invited to yield themselves his willing subjects, and so put themselves under the protection of such a mighty Potentate. (3.) The perpetuity of it, v. 13. The thrones of earthly princes totter, and the flowers of their crowns wither, monarchies come to an end; but, Lord, *thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom*. God will govern the world to the end of time, when the Mediator, who is now intrusted with the administration of his kingdom, shall deliver it up to God, even the Father, that he may be all in all to eternity. His *dominion endures throughout all generations*, for he himself is eternal, and his counsels unchangeable and uniform; and Satan, who has set up a kingdom in opposition to him, is conquered and in a chain.

2. The goodness of his kingdom. His royal style and title are, *The Lord God, gracious and merciful*; and his government answers to his title. The goodness of God appears in what he does,

(1.) For all the creatures in general; (v. 15, 16.) He *provides food for all flesh*, and therein appears his everlasting mercy, 136. 25. All the creatures live upon God, and as they had their being from him at first, so from him they have all the supports of their being, and on him they depend for the continuance of it. [1.]

The eye of their expectation attends upon him; *The eyes of all wait on thee.* The inferior creatures indeed have not the knowledge of God, nor are capable of it, and yet they are said to *wait upon God*, because they seek their food according to the instinct which the God of nature has put into them, (and *they sow not, neither do they reap*, Matth. 6. 26.) and because they take what the God of nature has provided for them, in the time and way that he has appointed, and are content with it. [2.] The hand of his bounty is stretched out unto them; *Thou givest them their meat in due season*; the meat proper for them, and in the proper time, when they need it; so that none of the creatures, ordinarily, perish for want of food, no not in the winter. *Thou openest thy hand freely and liberally, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing*; except some of the unreasonable children of men, that will be satisfied with nothing, but are still complaining, still crying, *Give, give.*

(2.) For the children of men in particular, whom he governs as reasonable creatures.

[1.] He does none of them any wrong, for, (v. 17.) *The Lord is righteous in all his ways*, and not unrighteous in any of them; he is *holy*, and acts like himself, with a perfect rectitude in all his works. In all the acts of government he is just, injurious to none, but administering justice to all. *The ways of the Lord are equal*, though our's are unequal. In giving laws, in deciding controversies, in recompensing services, and punishing offences, he is incontestably just, and we are bound to own it.

[2.] He does all of them good, his own people in a special manner. First, He supports those that are sinking, and it is his honour to help the weak, v. 14. He *upholds all that fall*, in that, though they fall, they are not utterly cast down. Many of the children of men are brought very low by sickness and other distresses, and seem ready to drop into the grave, and yet Providence wonderfully upholds them, raises them up, and says, *Return*, 90. 3. If all had died, who once seemed dying, the world would have been very thin. Many of the children of God, who have been ready to fall into sin, to fall into despair, have experienced his goodness in preventing their falls, or recovering them speedily by his graces and comforts, so that, *though they fell*, they were not *utterly cast down*, 37. 24. If those who are *bowled down* by oppression and affliction, be *raised up*, it was God that raised them. And with respect to all those that are *heavy-laden* under the burthen of sin, if they come to Christ by faith, he will ease them, he will raise them. Secondly, He is very ready to hear and answer the prayers of his people, v. 18, 19. In this appears the grace of his kingdom, that his subjects have not only liberty of petitioning, but all the encouragement that can be to petition. 1. The grant is very rich, that God will be *nigh to all that call upon him*; he will be always within call of their prayers, and they shall always find themselves within reach of his help. If a neighbour that is *near is better than a brother afar off*, (Prov. 27. 10.) much more a God that is near. Nay, he will not only be *nigh to them*, that they may have the satisfaction of being heard, but *he will fulfil their desires*; they shall have what they ask, and find what they seek. It was said, (v. 16.) that he *satisfies the desire of every living thing*; much more *will he fulfil the desire of them that fear him*; for he that feeds his birds will not starve his babes. *He will hear their call, and will save them*; that is, hearing them to purpose, as he heard David, that is, saved him from the *horn of the unicorn*, 22. 21. 2. The proviso is very reasonable; he will hear and help us, (1.) If we *fear him*, if we worship and serve him with a holy awe of him; for, otherwise, how can we expect that he should accept us? (2.) If we *call upon him in truth*; for he desires that in the inward part. We must be faithful to God, and sincere in our professions of dependence on him, and devotedness to him. In all devotions, inward impressions must be answerable to the outward expressions, else they are not performed in truth. (3.) He takes them under his special protection who have a confidence and complacency in him, v. 20. *The Lord preserves all them that love him*; they lie exposed in this world, but he, by preserving them in their integrity, will effectually secure them, that no real evil shall befall them.

3. If any are destroyed, they may thank themselves; *All the wicked he will destroy*, but they have, by their wickedness, fitted themselves for destruction. This magnifies his goodness in the protection of the righteous, that *with their eyes they shall see the reward of the wicked*, (91. 8.) and God will, by this means, preserve his people, even by destroying the wicked that would do them a mischief.

Lastly, The psalmist concludes, (1.) With a resolution to give glory to God himself; (v. 21.) *My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord.* When we have said what we can, in praising God, still there is more to be said, and therefore we must not only begin our thanksgivings with this purpose, as he did, (v. 1.) but conclude them with it, as he does here, because we shall presently have occasion to begin again. As the end of one mercy is the beginning of another, so should the end of our thanksgiving be. While I have breath to draw, my mouth shall still speak God's praises. (2.) With a call to others to do so too; *Let all flesh, all mankind, bless his holy name for ever and ever.* Some of mankind shall be blessing God for ever; it is pity but that they should be all so engaged.

PSALM CXLVI.

This, and all the rest of the psalms that follow, begin and end with Hallelujah, a word which puts much of God's praise into a little compass; for in it we praise him by his name Jah, the contraction of Jehovah. In this excellent psalm of praise, 1. The psalmist engages himself to praise God, v. 1, 2. 11. He engages others to trust in him, which is one necessary and acceptable way of praising him. 1. He shews why we should not trust in men, v. 3, 4. 2. Why we should trust in God, v. 5. Because of his power in the kingdom of nature, (v. 6.) his dominion in the kingdom of providence, (v. 7.) and his grace in the kingdom of the Messiah, (v. 8, 9.) that everlasting kingdom, (v. 10.) to which many of the Jewish writers refer this psalm, and to which therefore we should have an eye in the singing of it.

1. PRAISE ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. 2. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being. 3. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. 4. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

David is supposed to have penned this psalm; and he was himself a prince, a mighty prince; as such, it might be thought,

1. That he should be exempted from the service of praising God, that it was enough for him to see that his priests and people did it, but that he needed not to do it himself in his own person. Michal thought it a disparagement to him to *dance before the ark*; but he was so far from being of this mind, that he will himself be first and foremost in the work, v. 1, 2. He thinks his dignity is so far from excusing him from it, that it rather obliged him to lead in it; and that it was so far from lessening him, that it really magnified him; therefore he stirs up himself to it, and to make a business of it; *Praise the Lord, O my soul*; and resolves to abide by it; "I will praise him with my heart, I will sing praises to him with my mouth. Herein I will have an eye to him as the Lord, infinitely blessed and glorious in himself, and as my God, in covenant with me." Then praise is most pleasant, when, in praising God, we have an eye to him as our's, whom we have an interest in, and stand in relation to. "This I will do constantly while I live, every day of my life, and to my life's end; nay, I will do it while I have any being, for when I have no being on earth, I hope to have a being in heaven, a better being, to be doing it better." That which is the great end of our being, ought to be our great employment and delight while we have any being; "In thee must our time and powers be spent."

2. It might be thought that he himself, having been so great a blessing to his country, should be adored, according to the usage of the heathen nations, who deified their heroes; that they should all come and *trust in his shadow*, and make him their *stay and strong hold*. "No," says David, "Put not your trust in princes, (v. 3.) not in me, nor in any other; do not repose your confidence

in them, do not raise your expectations from them. Be not too sure of their sincerity, some have thought they knew better how to reign by knowing how to dissemble; be not too sure of their constancy and fidelity, it is possible they may both change their minds, and break their words." But though we suppose them wise and good as David himself, yet we must not be too sure of their ability and continuance, for they are sons of Adam, weak and mortal. There is indeed a Son of man in whom there is help, in whom there is salvation, and who will not fail those that trust in him. But all other sons of men are like the man they are sprung of, who, being in honour, did not abide.

(1.) We cannot be sure of their ability; even the power of kings may be so straitened, cramped, and weakened, that they may not be in a capacity to do that for us which we expect. David himself owned, (2 Sam. 3. 39.) *I am this day weak, though anointed king.* So that *in the son of man there is often no help*, no salvation; he is at a loss, at his wit's end, as a man astonished, and then, though a mighty man, he cannot save, Jer. 14. 9.

(2.) We cannot be sure of their continuance. Suppose he has it in his power to help us while he lives, yet he may be suddenly taken off when we expect most from him; (v. 4.) *His breath goeth forth*, so it does every moment, and comes back again, but that is an intimation that it will shortly go for good and all, and then he returns to his earth. The earth is his, in respect of his original as a man, the earth out of which he was taken, and to which therefore he must return, according to the sentence, Gen. 3. 19. It is his, if he be a worldly man, in respect of choice, his earth which he has chosen for his portion, and on the things of which he has set his affections. He shall go to his own place. Or rather, it is his earth, because of the property he has in it; and, though he has had large possessions on earth, a grave is all that will remain to him. *The earth God has given to the children of men*, and great striving there is about it, and, as a mark of their authority, men call their lands by their own names. But, after a while, no part of the earth will be their own, but that in which the dead body shall make its bed, and that shall be their's *while the earth remains*. But when he returns to his earth, *in that very day his thoughts perish*; all the projects and designs he had of kindness to us, vanish and are gone; and he cannot take one step further in them; all his purposes are cut off and buried with him, Job, 17. 11. And then what comes of our expectations from him? Princes are mortal, as well as other men, and therefore we cannot have that assurance of help from them, which we may have from that Potentate who hath immortality. *Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils*, and will not be there long.

5. *Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help*, whose hope is in the LORD his God: 6. Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever: 7. Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The LORD looseth the prisoners: 8. The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: the LORD loveth the righteous: 9. The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down. 10. The LORD shall reign for ever, *even thy God, O Zion*, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD.

The psalmist, having cautioned us not to trust in princes, (because, if we do, we shall be miserably disappointed,) here encourages us to put our confidence in God, because, if we do so, we shall be happily secured. *Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his Help*, that has an interest in his attributes and promises, and has them engaged for him; and *whose hope is in the Lord his God*. Those shall have God for their Help, 1. Who take

him for their God, and serve and worship him accordingly 2. Who have their hope in him, and live a life of dependence upon him; who have good thoughts of him, and encourage themselves in him, when all other supports fail. Every believer may look upon him as the God of Jacob, of the church in general, and therefore may expect relief from him, in reference to public distresses, and as his God in particular, and therefore may depend upon him in all personal wants and straits. We must hope, (1.) In the providence of God, for all the good things we need, which relate to the life that now is. (2.) In the grace of Christ, for all the good things which relate to the life that is to come. To this especially the learned Dr. Hammond refers this and the following verses, looking upon the latter part of this psalm to have a most visible remarkable aspect toward the eternal Son of God in his incarnation. He quotes one of the rabbins, who says of v. 10. that it belongs to the days of the Messiah. And that it does so, he thinks will appear by comparing v. 7, 8. with the characters Christ gives of the Messiah; (Matth. 11. 5, 6.) *The blind receive their sight, the lame walk*; and the closing words there, *Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me*, he thinks may very well be supposed to refer to v. 5. *Happy is the man that hopes in the Lord his God*, and who is not offended in him.

Let us take a view of the mighty encouragements here given us to hope in the Lord our God.

1. He is the *Maker of the world*, and therefore has all power in himself, and the command of the powers of all the creatures, which, being derived from him, depend upon him; (v. 6.) *He made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is*, and therefore his arm is not shortened, that it cannot save. It is very applicable to Christ, by whom God made the world, and *without whom was not any thing made that was made*. It is a great support to faith, that the Redeemer of the world is the same that was the Creator of it, and therefore has a good-will to it, a perfect knowledge of its case, and power to help it.

2. He is a God of inviolable fidelity. We may venture to take God's word, for *he keepeth truth for ever*, and therefore no word of his shall fall to the ground; it is true *from the beginning*, and therefore true *to the end*. Our Lord Jesus is the Amen, the faithful Witness, as well as the Beginning, the Author and Principle, of the creation of God, Rev. 3. 14. The keeping of God's truth for ever is committed to him, for *all the promises are in him yea and amen*.

3. He is the *Patron of injured innocence*; *He pleads the cause of the oppressed*, and (as we read it) *he executes judgment for them*. He often does it in his providence, righting those that suffer wrong, and clearing up their integrity; he will do it in the judgment of the great day. The Messiah came to rescue the children of men out of the hands of Satan the great oppressor, and, all judgment being committed to him, the executing of judgment upon persecutors is so among the rest, Jude, 15.

4. He is a bountiful Benefactor to the necessitous; *He gives food to the hungry*; so God does in an ordinary way for the answering of the cravings of nature; so he has done sometimes in an extraordinary way, as when ravens fed Elijah; so Christ did more than once, when he fed thousands miraculously with that which was intended but for one meal or two for his own family; this encourages to hope in him as the Nourisher of our souls with the bread of life.

5. He is the Author of liberty to those that were bound; *The Lord looseth the prisoners*. He brought Israel out of the house of bondage in Egypt, and afterward in Babylon. The miracles Christ wrought, in making the dumb to speak, and the deaf to hear, with that one word, *Ephphatha, Be opened*, his cleansing of lepers, and so discharging them from their confinement, and his raising the dead out of their graves, may all be included in this one of *loosing the prisoners*; and we may take encouragement from those, to hope in him for that spiritual liberty which he came to proclaim, Isa. 61. 1, 2.

6. He gives sight to those that have been long deprived of it; *The Lord can open the eyes of the blind*, and has often given to his afflicted people to see that comfort which before they were not

aware of; witness Gen. 21. 19. and the prophet's servant, 2 Kings, 6. 17. But this has special reference to Christ; for since the world began, was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind, till Christ did it, (John, 9. 32.) and thereby encouraged us to hope in him for spiritual illumination.

7. He sets that straight that was crooked, and makes those easy that were pained and ready to sink; he raises them that are bowed down, by comforting and supporting them under their burthens, and, in due time, removing their burthens. This was literally performed by Christ, when he made a poor woman straight, that had been bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself; (Luke, 13. 12.) and he still does it by his grace, giving rest to them that were weary and heavy-laden, and raising up with his comforts those that were humbled and cast down by convictions.

8. He has a constant kindness for all good people; *The Lord loveth the righteous*, and they may, with the more confidence, depend upon his power when they are sure of his good-will. Our Lord Jesus shewed his love to the righteous, by fulfilling all righteousness.

9. He has a tender concern for those that stand in special need of his care; *The Lord preserveth the strangers*. It ought not to pass without remark, that the name *Jehovah* is repeated here five times in five lines, to intimate that it is an almighty power (that of *Jehovah*) that is engaged and exerted for the relief of the oppressed; and that it is as much the glory of God to succour them that are in misery, as it is to ride on the heavens by his name *Jah*, 68. 4. (1.) Strangers are exposed; and are commonly destitute of friends, but *the Lord preserveth them*, that they be not run down and ruined. Many a poor stranger has found the benefit of the divine protection, and been kept alive by it. (2.) Widows and fatherless children, that have lost the head of the family, who took care of the affairs of it, often fall into the hands of those that make a prey of them, that will not do them right, nay, that will do them wrong; but *the Lord relieveth them*, and raiseth up friends for them. See Exod. 22. 22, 23. Our Lord Jesus came into the world to help the helpless, to receive Gentiles, strangers, into his kingdom, and that with him poor sinners, that are as fatherless, may find mercy, Hos. 14. 3.

10. He will appear for the destruction of all those that oppose his kingdom, and oppress the faithful subjects of it; *the way of the wicked he turneth upside down*, and therefore let us hope in him, and not be afraid of the fury of the oppressor, as though he were ready to destroy. It is the glory of the Messiah, that he will subvert all the counsels of hell and earth, that militate against his church, so that, having him for us, we need not fear any thing that can be done against us.

11. His kingdom shall continue through all the revolutions of time, to the utmost ages of eternity, v. 10. Let this encourage us to trust in God at all times, that *the Lord shall reign for ever*, in spite of all the malignity of the powers of darkness, *even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations*. Christ is set King on the holy hill of Zion, and his kingdom shall continue in an endless glory. It cannot be destroyed by an invader, it shall not be left to a successor, either to a succeeding monarch, or a succeeding monarchy, but it shall stand for ever. It is matter of unspeakable comfort, that *the Lord reigns* as Zion's God, as Zion's King, that the Messiah is Head over all things to the church, and will be so while the world stands.

PSALM CXLVII.

This is another psalm of praise: some think it was penned after the return of the Jews from their captivity: but it is so much of a piece with Ps. 145. that I rather think it was penned by David, and what is said, v. 2, 13. may well enough be applied to the first building and fortifying of Jerusalem in his time, and the gathering in of those that had been outcasts in Saul's time. The Septuagint divides it into two; and we may divide it into the first and second part, but both of the same import. I. We are called upon to praise God, v. 1, 7, 12. II. We are furnished with matter for praise, for God is to be glorified, 1. As the God of nature, and so he is very great, v. 4, 5, 8, 9, 15. 18. 2. As the God of grace, comforting his people, v. 3, 6. 11. 3. As the God of Israel, Jerusalem, and Zion, settling their civil state, (v. 2, 13, 14.) and especially settling religion among them, v. 19, 20. It is easy, in singing this psalm, to

apply it to ourselves, both as to personal and national mercies, were it but as easy to do it with suitable affections.

1. PRAISE ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely. 2. The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. 3. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. 4. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. 5. Great is our LORD, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. 6. The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground. 7. Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: 8. Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. 9. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. 10. He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. 11. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

Here,

I. The duty of praise is recommended to us. It is not without reason, that we are thus called to it again and again; *Praise ye the Lord*, (v. 1.) and again, (v. 7.) *Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving, sing praise upon the harp to our God*, let all our praises be directed to him, and centre in him; for it is good to do it; it is our duty, and therefore good in itself; it is our interest, and therefore good for us: it is acceptable to our Creator, and it answers the end of our creation. The law for it is holy, just, and good, the practice of it will turn to a good account. It is good; for, 1. It is pleasant; holy joy and delight are required as the principle of it, and that is pleasant to us as men; giving glory to God is the design and business of it, and that is pleasant to us as saints that are devoted to his honour. Praising God is work that is its own wages, it is heaven upon earth, it is what we should be in, as in our element. 2. It is comely, it is that which becomes us as reasonable creatures, much more as people in covenant with God. In giving honour to God, we really do ourselves a great deal of honour.

II. God is recommended to us as the proper Object of our most exalted and enlarged praises, upon several accounts.

1. The care he takes of his chosen people, v. 2. Is Jerusalem to be raised out of small beginnings? Is it to be recovered out of its ruins? In both cases, *The Lord builds up Jerusalem*. The gospel-church, the Jerusalem that is from above, is of his building; he framed the model of it in his own counsels, he founded it by the preaching of his gospel, he adds to it daily such as shall be saved, and so increases it. He will build it up unto perfection, build it up as high as heaven. Are any of his people outcasts? Have they made themselves so by their own folly? He gathers them by giving them repentance, and bringing them again into the communion of saints. Have they been forced out by war, famine, or persecution? He opens a door for their return; many that were missing, and thought to be lost, are brought back, and they that were scattered in the cloudy and dark day are gathered together again.

2. The comforts he has laid up for true penitents, v. 3. They are broken in heart, and wounded, humbled, and troubled, for sin, inwardly pained at the remembrance of it, as a man is, that is sorely wounded. Their very hearts are not only pricked, but rent, under the sense of the dishonour they have done to God, and the injury they have done to themselves, by sin. To those whom God heals with the consolations of his Spirit he speaks

peace assures them that their sins are pardoned, and that he is reconciled to them, and so makes them easy, pours the balm of Gilead into the bleeding wounds, and then binds them up, and makes them to rejoice. They who have had experience of this need not be called upon to praise the Lord, for, when he brought them out of the horrible pit, and set their feet upon a rock, he put a new song in their mouths, 40. 2, 3. And, for this, let others praise him also.

3. The sovereign dominion he has over the lights of heaven, v. 4, 5. The stars are innumerable, many of them being scarcely discernible with the naked eye, and yet he counts them, and knows the exact number of them, for they are all the work of his hands, and the instruments of his providence; their bulk and power are very great, but he calleth them all by their names, which bespeaks his dominion over them, and the command he has them at, to make what use of them he pleases. They are his servants, his soldiers, he musters them, he marshals them, they come and go at his bidding, and all their motions are under his direction. He mentions this as one instance of many, to shew that great is our Lord, and of great power; he can do what he pleases, and of his understanding there is no computation, so that he can contrive every thing for the best. Man's knowledge is soon drained, and you have his utmost length; hitherto his wisdom can reach, and no farther; but God's knowledge is a depth that can never be fathomed.

4. The pleasure he takes in humbling the proud and exalting them of low degree; (v. 6.) *The Lord lifts up the meek*, who abase themselves before him, and whom men trample on; but *the wicked*, who carry it insolently toward God and scornfully toward all mankind, who lift up themselves in pride and folly, *he casteth down to the ground*, sometimes by very humbling providences in this world, at furthest in the day when their faces shall be filled with everlasting shame. God proves himself to be God, by looking on the proud and abasing them, Job, 40. 12.

5. The provision he makes for the inferior creatures. Though he is so great as to command the stars, he is so good as not to forget even the fowls, v. 8, 9. Observe in what method he feeds man and beast. (1.) *He covereth the heaven with clouds*, which darken the air, and intercept the beams of the sun, and yet in them he *prepareth that rain for the earth* which is necessary to its fruitfulness. Clouds look melancholy, and yet without them we could have no rain, and consequently no fruit. Thus afflictions, for the present, look black, and dark, and unpleasant, and we are in heaviness because of them, as sometimes, when the sky is overcast, it makes us dull; but they are necessary, for from these clouds of affliction come those showers that make the harvest to yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness, (Heb. 12. 11.) which should help to reconcile us to them. Observe the necessary dependence which the earth has upon the heavens, which directs us on earth to depend on God in heaven. All the rain, with which the earth is watered, is of God's preparing. (2.) By the rain which distils on the earth, he *makes grass to grow upon the mountains*, even the high mountains, which man neither takes care of, nor reaps the benefit of. The mountains, which are not watered with the springs and rivers, as the vallies are, are yet watered so that they are not barren. (3.) This grass he *gives to the beast for his food*, the beasts of the mountains, which run wild, which man makes no provision for. And even the *young ravens*, which, being forsaken by their old ones, cry, are heard by him, and ways are found to feed them, so that they are kept from perishing in the nest.

6. The complacency he takes in his people, v. 10, 11. In times when great things are doing, and there are great expectations of the success of them, it concerns us to know (since the issue proceeds from the Lord) whom, and what, God will delight to honour and crown with victory. It is not the strength of armies, but the strength of grace, that God is pleased to own. (1.) Not the strength of armies; not in the cavalry, for he *delighteth not in the strength of the horse*, the war-horse, noted for his courage; (Job, 39. 19, &c.) nor in the infantry, for he *taketh no pleasure in the legs of a man*; he does not mean the swiftness of

them for flight, to quit the field, but the steadiness of them for charging, to stand the ground. If one king, making war with another king, goes to God to pray for success, it will not avail him to plead, "Lord, I have a gallant army, the horse and foot in good order, it is pity that they should suffer any disgrace;" for that is no argument with God, Ps. 20. 7. Jehoshaphat's was much better, *Lord, we have no might*, 2 Chron. 20. 12. But, (2.) God is pleased to own the strength of grace; a serious and suitable regard to God, is that which is, in the sight of God, of great price in such a case. The Lord accepts of, and takes pleasure in, those that *fear him, and that hope in his mercy*. Observe, [1.] A holy fear of God and hope in God, not only may consist, but must concur. In the same heart, at the same time, there must be both a reverence of his majesty, and a complacency in his goodness; both a believing dread of his wrath, and a believing expectation of his favour. Not that we must hang in suspense between hope and fear, but we must act under the gracious influences of hope and fear. Our fear must save our hope from swelling into presumption, and our hope must save our fear from sinking into despair; thus must we take our work before us. [2.] We must *hope in God's mercy*, his general mercy, even then when we cannot find a particular promise to stay ourselves upon. A humble confidence in the goodness of God's nature is very pleasing to him, as that which turns to the glory of that attribute which he most glories in. Every man of honour loves to be trusted.

12. Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. 13. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. 14. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat. 15. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth; his word runneth very swiftly. 16. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. 17. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? 18. He sendeth out his word and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow. 19. He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. 20. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD.

Jerusalem, and Zion, the holy city, the holy hill, are here called upon to praise God, v. 12. For where should praise be offered up to God, but where his altar is? Where may we expect that glory should be given to him, but in the beauty of holiness? Let the inhabitants of Jerusalem praise the Lord in their own houses; let the priests and Levites, who attend in Zion, the city of their solemnities, in a special manner, praise the Lord. They have more cause to do it than others, and they lie under greater obligations to do it than others; for it is their business, it is their profession. "Praise thy God, O Zion: he is thine, and therefore thou art bound to praise him; his being thine includes all happiness, so that thou canst never want matter for praise."

Jerusalem and Zion must praise God,

I. For the prosperity and flourishing estate of their civil interests, v. 13, 14. 1. For the common safety; they had gates, and kept their gates barred in times of danger; but that would not have been an effectual security to them, if God had not *strengthened the bars of their gates*, and fortified their fortifications. The most probable means we can devise for our own preservation will not answer the end, unless God give his blessing with them; we must, therefore, in the careful and diligent use of those means, depend upon him for that blessing, and attribute the undisturbed re-

pose of our land, more to the wall of fire, than to the wall of water, round about us, Zech. 2. 5. 2. For the increase of their people; this strengthens the bars of the gates as much as any thing; *He hath blessed thy children within thee*, with that first and great blessing, *Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the land*. It is a comfort to parents to see their children blessed of the Lord, (Jsa. 61. 9.) and a comfort to the generation that is going off, to see the rising generation numerous and hopeful; for which blessing God must be blessed. 3. For the public tranquillity, that they were delivered from the terrors and desolations of war; *He maketh peace in thy borders*, by putting an end to the wars that were, and preventing the wars that were threatened and feared. He makes peace within thy borders, in all parts of the country, by composing differences among neighbours, that there may be no intestine broils and animosities; and *upon thy borders*, that they may not be attacked by invasions from abroad. If there be trouble any where, it is in the borders, the marches of a country, the frontier-towns lie most exposed, so that if there be peace in the borders, there is a universal peace, a mercy we can never be enough thankful for. 4. For great plenty, the common effect of peace; *He filleth thee with the finest of the wheat*; wheat, the most valuable grain, the fat, the finest of that, and a fulness thereof. What would they more? Canaan abounded with the best wheat, (Deut. 32. 14.) and exported it to the countries abroad, as appears, Ezek. 27. 17. The land of Israel was not enriched with precious stones or spices, but with *the finest of the wheat*, with bread, which strengthens man's heart; that made it the glory of all lands, and for that God was praised in Zion.

II. For the wonderful instances of his power in the weather, particularly the winter-weather; he that protects Zion and Jerusalem is that God of power from whom all the powers of nature are derived, and on whom they depend, and who produces all the changes of the seasons, which, if they were not common, would astonish us.

1. In general, whatever alterations there are in this lower world, (and it is that world that is subject to continual changes,) they are produced by the will, and power, and providence, of God; (v. 15.) *He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth*, as one that has an incontestable authority to give orders, and innumerable attendants ready to carry his orders, and put them in execution. As the world was at first made, so it is still upheld and governed, by a word of almighty power; *God speaks, and it is done*, for all are his servants. That word takes effect, not only surely, but speedily; *his word runneth very swiftly*, for nothing can oppose or retard it. As the lightning, which passes through the air in an instant, such is the word of God's providence, and such the word of his grace, when it is sent forth with commission, Luke, 17. 24. Angels, who carry his word, and fulfil it, *fly swiftly*, Dan. 9. 21.

2. In particular, frosts and thaws are both of them wonderful changes, and in both we must acknowledge the word of his power.

(1.) Frosts are from God; with him are the *treasures of the snow and hail*, (Job, 38. 22, 23.) and out of these treasures he draws as he pleases. [1.] *He giveth snow like wool*; it is compared to wool for its whiteness, (Isa. 1. 18.) and its softness; it falls silently, and makes no more noise than the fall of a lock of wool, it covers the earth, and keeps it warm like a fleece of wool, and so promotes its fruitfulness. See how God can work by contraries, and bring meat out of the eater, can warm the earth with cold snow. [2.] *He scattereth the hoar-frost*, which is dew congealed, as the snow and hail are rain congealed; this looks like ashes scattered upon the grass, and is sometimes prejudicial to the products of the earth, and blasts them as if it were hot ashes, Ps. 78. 47. [3.] *He casteth forth his ice like morsels*, which may be understood either of large hail-stones, which are as ice in the air, or of the ice which covers the face of the waters, and when it is broken, though naturally it was as drops of drink, is now as morsels of meat, or crusts of bread. [4.] When we see the frost, and snow, and ice, we feel it in the air; *Who can stand before his cold?* The beasts cannot, they retire into dens, (Job, 37. 8.) they are easily conquered then, 2 Sam. 23. 20. Men cannot, but are

forced to take the benefit of fires, or furs, or both, and all little enough where and when the cold is in extremity. We see not the causes when we feel the effects; and therefore we must call it *his cold*, it is of his sending, and therefore we must bear it patiently, and be thankful for warm houses, and clothes, and beds, to relieve us against the rigour of the season, and must give him the glory of his wisdom and sovereignty, his power and faithfulness, which appear in the winter-weather, which shall not cease more than summer, Gen. 8. 22. And let us also infer from it, If we cannot stand before the cold of his frosts, how can we stand before the heat of his wrath?

(2.) Thaws are from God; when he pleases, (v. 18.) *he sendeth out his word, and melteth them*; the frost, the snow, the ice, are all dissolved quickly, in order to which he *causes the wind, the south wind, to blow, and the waters*, which were frozen, flow again as they did before. We are soon sensible of the change, but we see not the causes of it, but must resolve it into the will of the First Cause. And in it we must take notice, not only of the power of God, that he can so suddenly, so insensibly, make such a great and universal alteration in the temper of the air, and the face of the earth; (what cannot he do, that doeth this every winter, perhaps often every winter?) but also of the goodness of God; hard weather does not always continue, it would be sad if it should; he does not *contend for ever*, but *renews the face of the earth*. As he remembered Noah, and released him, (Gen. 8. 1.) so he remembers the earth, and his covenant with the earth, Cant. 2. 11, 12. This thawing word may represent the gospel of Christ, and this thawing wind the Spirit of Christ, (for the Spirit is compared to the wind, John, 3. 8.) both are sent for the melting of frozen souls; converting grace, like the thaw, softens the heart that was hard, moistens it, and melts it into tears of repentance; it warms good affections, and makes them to flow, which, before, were chilled and stopped up. The change which the thaw makes is universal, and yet gradual; it is very evident, and yet how it is done is unaccountable: such is the change wrought in the conversion of a soul, when God's word and Spirit are sent to melt it, and restore it to itself.

III. For his distinguishing favour to Israel, in giving them his word and ordinances, a much more valuable blessing than their peace and plenty, (v. 14.) as much as the soul is more excellent than the body. Jacob and Israel had God's statutes and judgments among them; they were under his peculiar government, the municipal laws of their nation were of his framing and enacting, their constitution was a theocracy; they had the benefit of divine revelation, the great things of God's law were written to them; they had a priesthood of divine institution for all things pertaining to God, and prophets for all extraordinary occasions. No people besides went upon sure grounds in their religion. Now this was, 1. A preventing mercy; they did not find out God's statutes and judgments of themselves, but *God shewed his word unto Jacob*, and by that word he made known to them his *statutes and judgments*. It is a great mercy to any people to have the word of God among them; *faith comes by hearing* and reading that word, that faith without which it is impossible to please God. 2. A distinguishing mercy, and upon that account the more obliging; *He hath not dealt so with every nation*, not with any nation; and *as for his judgments, they have not known them*, nor are likely to know them till the Messiah come, and take down the partition-wall between Jew and Gentile, that the gospel may be preached to every creature. Other nations had plenty of outward good things; some nations were very rich, others had pompous powerful princes, and polite literature, but none were blessed with God's statutes and judgments as Israel were; let *Israel therefore praise the Lord* in the observation of these statutes; *Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not to the world?* Even so, Father, because it seemed good in thine eyes.

PSALM CXLVIII.

This psalm is a most solemn and earnest call to all the creatures, according to their capacity, to praise their Creator, and to shew forth his eternal power

and Godhead, the invisible things of which are manifested in the things that are seen. Thereby the psalmist designs to express his great affection to the duty of praise: he is highly satisfied that God is praised, is very desirous that he may be more praised, and therefore does all he can to engage all about him in this pleasant work, yea, and all who shall come after him, whose hearts must be very dead and cold, if they be not raised and enlarged, in praising God, by the lofty flights of divine poetry which we find in this psalm. I. He calls upon the higher house, the creatures that are placed in the upper world, to praise the Lord, both those that are intellectual beings, and are capable of doing it actively, (v. 1, 2.) and those that are not, and are therefore capable of doing it only objectively, v. 3..6. II. He calls upon the lower house, the creatures of this lower world, both those that can only minister matter of praise, (v. 7..10.) and those that, being endued with reason, are capable of offering up this sacrifice, (v. 11..13.) especially his own people, who have more cause to do it, and are more concerned to do it, than any other, v. 14.

1. **PRAISE** ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. 2. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. 3. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. 4. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. 5. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created. 6. He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass.

We, in this dark and depressed world, know but little of the world of light and exaltation, and, conversing within narrow confines, can scarcely admit any tolerable conceptions of the vast regions above. But this we know,

I. That there is above us a world of blessed angels, by whom God is praised, an innumerable company of them; *Thousand thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him*; and it is his glory that he has such attendants, but much more his glory that he neither needs them, nor is, nor can be, any way benefited by them. To that bright and happy world the psalmist has an eye here, v. 1, 2. In general, to the heavens, to the heights; the heavens are the heights, and therefore we must lift up our souls above the world, unto God in the heavens, and on things above we must set our affections. It is his desire that God may be praised from the heavens, that thence a praising frame may be transmitted to this world in which we live, that from the inhabitants of that world we may learn this blessed work. It is his delight to think that God is praised in the heights; that, while we are so cold, and low, and flat, in praising God, there are those above who are doing it in a better manner, and that, while we are so often interrupted in this work, they rest not day nor night from it. In particular, he had an eye to God's angels, to his hosts, and calls upon them to praise God. That God's angels are his hosts, is plain enough; as soon as they were made, they were listed, armed, and disciplined; he employs them in fighting his battles, and they keep ranks, and know their place, and observe the word of command as his hosts. But what is meant by the psalmist's calling upon them, and exciting them to praise God, is not so easy to account for. I will not say, They do not heed it; because we find that to the principalities and powers is known by the church the manifold wisdom of God; (Eph. 3. 10.) but I will say, They do not need it, for they are continually praising God, and there is no deficiency at all in their performances; and therefore, when, in singing this psalm, we call upon the angels to praise God, (as we did, 103. 20.) we mean, that we desire God may be praised by the ablest hands and in the best manner; that we are sure it is fit he should be so; that we are pleased to think he is so; and that we have a spiritual communion with those that dwell in his house above, and are still praising him; and that we are come by faith, and hope, and holy love, to the innumerable company of angels, Heb. 12. 22.

II. That there is above us not only an assembly of blessed spirits, but a system of vast bodies too, and those bright ones, in which God is praised, which may give us occasion (as far as we know any

thing of them) to give to God the glory not only of their being, but of their beneficence to mankind. Observe,

1. What these creatures are that thus shew us the way in praising God, and, whenever we look up and consider the heavens, furnish us with matter for his praises. (1.) There are the sun, moon, and stars, which continually, either day or night, present themselves to our view, as looking-glasses, in which we may see a faint shadow (for so I must call it, not a resemblance) of the glory of him that is the Father of lights, v. 3. The greater lights, the sun and moon, are not too great, too bright, to praise him; and the praises of the lesser lights, the stars, shall not be slighted. Idolaters made the sun, moon, and stars, their gods, and praised them, worshipping and serving the creature, because it is seen, more than the Creator, because he is not seen; but we, who worship the true God, make them only our fellow-worshippers, and call upon them to praise him with us, nay, as Levites to attend us, who, as priests, offer this spiritual sacrifice. (2.) There are the heavens of heavens above the sun and stars, the seat of the blessed; from the vastness and brightness of these unknown orbs abundance of glory redounds to God, for the heavens of heavens are the Lord's, (115. 16.) and yet they cannot contain him, 1 Kings, 8. 27. The learned Mr. Hammond understands here, by the heavens of heavens, the upper regions of the air, or all the regions of it, as Ps. 68. 33. We read of the heaven of heavens, whence God sends forth his voice, and that a mighty voice, meaning the thunder. (3.) There are the waters that be above the heavens, the clouds that hang above in the air, where they are reserved against the day of battle and war, Job, 38. 23. We have reason to praise God, not only that these waters do not drown the earth, but that they water it and make it fruitful. The Chaldee paraphrase reads it, *Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that depend on the word of him which is above the heavens*; for the key of the clouds is one of the keys which God has in his hand, wherewith he opens, and none can shut, he shuts, and none can open.

2. Upon what account we are to give God the glory of them; *Let them praise the name of the Lord*; let us praise the name of the Lord for them, and observe what constant and fresh matter for praise may be fetched from them. (1.) Because he made them, gave them their powers, and assigned them their places; *He commanded them* (great as they are) out of nothing, and they were created at a word's speaking. God created, and therefore may command; for he commanded, and so created; his authority must always be acknowledged and acquiesced in, because he once spake with such authority. (2.) Because he still upholds and preserves them in their beings and posts, their powers and motions; (v. 6.) *He hath established them for ever and ever*, to the end of time; a short ever, but it is their ever; they shall last as long as there is occasion for them. *He hath made a decree, the law of creation, which shall not pass*; it was enacted by the wisdom of God, and therefore needs not be altered; by his sovereignty and inviolable fidelity, and therefore cannot be altered. All the creatures that praised God at first for their creation, must praise him still for their continuance. And we have reason to praise him, that they are kept within the bounds of a decree; for to that it is owing that the waters above the heavens have not a second time drowned the earth.

7. Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps. 8. Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour: stormy wind fulfilling his word: 9. Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: 10. Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl: 11. Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: 12. Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children: 13. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven. 14. He also

exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; *even* of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the LORD.

Considering that this earth, and the atmosphere that surrounds it, are the very sediment of the universe, it concerns us to inquire after those considerations that may be of use to reconcile us to our place in it; and I know none more likely than this, (next to the visit which the Son of God once made to it,) that even in this world, dark and as bad as it is, God is praised; *Praise ye the Lord from the earth, v. 7.* As the rays of the sun, which are darted directly from heaven, reflect back (though more weakly) from the earth, so should the praises of God, with which this cold and infected world should be warmed and perfumed.

1. Even those creatures that are not dignified with the powers of reason are summoned into this concert, because God may be glorified in them, *v. 7. 10.* Let the *dragons* or *whales*, that sport themselves in the mighty waters, (104. 26.) dance before the Lord, to his glory, who largely proves his own omnipotence, by his dominion over the leviathan or whale, Job, 41. 1, &c. *All deeps*, and their inhabitants, praise God; the sea, and the animals there; the bowels of the earth, and the animals there. *Out of the depths* God may be praised as well as prayed unto. If we look up into the atmosphere, we meet with a great variety of meteors, which, being a kind of new productions, (and some of them unaccountable,) do, in a special manner, magnify the power of the great Creator. There are *fiery* meteors, lightning is *fire*, and there are other blazes sometimes kindled, which may be so called; there are *watery* meteors, *hail* and *snow*, and the *vapours* of which they are gendered; there are *airy* meteors, *stormy winds*; we know not whence they come, nor whither they go; whence their mighty force comes, nor how it is spent; but this we know, that, be they ever so strong, so stormy, they *fulfil God's word*, and do that, and no more than he appoints them; and by *this* Christ shewed himself to have a divine power, that he *commanded even the winds and the seas*, and *they obeyed him*. Those that will not fulfil God's word, but rise up in rebellion against it, shew themselves to be more violent and headstrong than even the stormy winds, for they fulfil it. Take a *view* of the surface of the earth, (*v. 9.*) and there are presented to our view the exalted *grounds*, *mountains*, and *all hills*; from the barren tops of some of which, and the fruitful tops of others, we may fetch matter for praise; there are the exalted plants, some that are exalted by their usefulness, as the *fruitful trees* of various kinds, for the fruits of which God is to be praised; others by their stateliness, as *all cedars*, those *trees of the Lord*, 104. 16. Cedars, the high trees, are not the fruitful trees, yet they had their use even in God's temple. Pass we next to the animal-kingdom, and there we find God glorified, even by the *beasts* that run wild, and *all cattle* that are tame and in the service of man, *v. 10.* Nay, even the *creeping things* are not sunk so low, nor do the *flying fowl* soar so high, as not to be called upon to *praise the Lord*. Much of the wisdom, power, and goodness, of the Creator, appears in the several capacities and instincts of the creatures, in the provision made for them, and the use made of them. When we see all so very strange, and all so very good, surely we cannot but acknowledge God with wonder and thankfulness.

2. Much more, those creatures that are dignified with the powers of reason, ought to employ them in praising God. *Kings of the earth and all people, v. 11, 12.* (1.) God is to be glorified in and for these, as in and for the inferior creatures, for their hearts are in the hand of the Lord, and he makes what use he pleases of them. God is to be praised in the order and constitution of kingdoms, the *pars imperans*—the part that commands, and the *pars subdita*—the part that is subject; *kings of the earth, and all people*. It is by him that kings reign, and people are subject to them; the *princes and judges of the earth* have their wisdom and their commission from him, and we, to whom they are blessings, ought to bless God for them. God is to be praised also in the constitution of families, for he is the Founder of them; and for all the comfort

of relations, the comfort that parents and children, brothers and sisters, have in each other, God is to be praised. (2.) God is to be glorified by these. Let all manner of persons praise God. [1.] Those of each rank, high and low; the praises of kings, and princes, and judges, are demanded; those on whom God has put honour, must honour him with it; and the power they are intrusted with, and the figure they make in the world, put them in a capacity of bringing more glory to God, and doing him more service, than others. Yet the praises of the people are expected also, and God will graciously accept of them; Christ despised not the hosannas of the multitude. [2.] Those of each sex, *young men and maidens*, who make merry together, let them turn it into this channel, let the mirth be sacred, that it may be pure. [3.] Those of each age; *old men* must still bring forth this fruit in old age, and not think that either the gravity or the infirmity of their age will excuse them from it; and *children* too must begin betimes to praise God; even *out of the mouth of babes and sucklings* this good work is perfected. A good reason is given (*v. 13.*) why all these should *praise the name of the Lord*, because *his name alone is excellent*, and worthy to be praised; it is a name above every name, no name, no nature, but his, has in it all excellency. *His glory is above both the earth and the heaven*, and let all the inhabitants both of earth and heaven praise him, and yet acknowledge his name to be exalted far above all blessing and praise.

3. Most of all, his own people, that are dignified with peculiar privileges, must in a peculiar manner give glory to him; *v. 14.* Observe, (1.) The dignity God has put upon *his people, even the children of Israel*, typical of the honour reserved for all true believers, who are God's spiritual Israel. *He exalts their horn*, their brightness, their plenty, their power. The people of Israel were, in many respects, honoured above any other nation, for *to them pertained the adoption, the glory, and the covenants*, Rom. 9. 4. It was their own honour that they were *a people near unto God*, his *Servant*, his *peculiar treasure*; they were admitted into his courts, when a stranger that came nigh must be put to death. They had him *nigh to them in all that which they called upon him for*. This blessing is now come upon the Gentiles, through Christ, for they that were *afar off*, by his blood, are made *nigh*, Eph. 2. 13. It is the greatest honour that can be put upon a man, to be brought near to God, the nearer the better; and it will be best of all, when nearest of all in the kingdom of glory. (2.) The duty God expects from them in consideration of this; Let those whom God honours, honour him; *Praise ye the Lord*. Let him be the Praise of all his saints, the Object of their praise: for he is a Praise to them. *He is thy Praise, and he is thy God*, Deut. 10. 21. Some by the horn of his people understand David, as a type of Christ, whom God has exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, who is indeed the Praise of all his saints, and will be so for ever; for it is through him that they are *a people near to God*.

PSALM CXLIX.

The foregoing psalm was a hymn of praise to the Creator; this to the Redeemer. It is a psalm of triumph in the God of Israel, and over the enemies of Israel. Probably, it was penned upon occasion of some victory which Israel was blessed and honoured with. Some conjecture that it was penned when David had taken the strong-hold of Zion, and settled his government there. But it looks further, to the kingdom of the Messiah, who, in the chariot of the everlasting gospel, goes forth conquering and to conquer. To him, and his graces and glories, we must have an eye, in singing this psalm, which speaks, 1. Abundance of joy to all the people of God, *v. 1. 5.* 11. Abundance of terror to the proudest of their enemies, *v. 6. 9.*

1. **PRAISE** ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. 2. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. 3. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp. 4. For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with

salvation. 5. Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds.

We have here,

I. The calls given God's Israel to praise. *All his works were*, in the foregoing psalm, excited to *praise him*; but here his saints in a particular manner are required to bless him. Observe then,

1. Who are called upon to praise God. *Israel* in general, the body of the church, (v. 2.) *the children of Zion* particularly, the inhabitants of that holy hill, who are nearer to God than other Israelites; those that have the word and ordinances of God near them, that are not put to travel far to them, are justly expected to do more in praising God than others. All true Christians may call themselves *the children of Zion*, for in faith and hope *we are come unto mount Zion*, Heb. 12. 22. The saints must praise God, saints in profession, saints in power, for this is the intention of their sanctification; they are *therefore* devoted to the glory of God, and renewed by the grace of God, that *they may be unto him for a name and a praise*.

2. What must be the principle of this praise; and that is, holy joy in God; *Let Israel rejoice*, and *the children of Zion be joyful*, and *the saints be joyful in glory*. Our praises of God should flow from a heart filled with delight and triumph in God's attributes, and our relation to him. Much of the power of godliness in the heart consists in making God our chief Joy, and solacing ourselves in him; and our faith in Christ is described by our rejoicing in him. We then give honour to God, when we take pleasure in him. We must be *joyful in glory*, in him as our Glory, and in the interest we have in him; and let us look upon it as our glory to be of those that rejoice in God.

3. What must be the expressions of the praise. We must, by all proper ways, shew forth the praises of God; *Sing to the Lord*. We must entertain ourselves, and proclaim his name, by *singing praises unto him*, (v. 3.) *singing aloud*, (v. 5.) for we should sing psalms with all our heart, as those that are not only not ashamed of it, but are enlarged in it. We must sing a *new song*, newly composed upon every special occasion; sing with new affections, which make the song new, though the words have been used before, and keep them from growing threadbare. Let God be *praised in the dance with timbrel and harp*; according to the usage of the Old-Testament church very early, (Exod. 15. 20.) where we find God praised with *timbrels and dances*. They who from hence urge the use of music in religious worship, must by the same rule introduce dancing, for they went together, as in David's dancing before the ark, and Judg. 21. 21. But whereas many scriptures in the New Testament keep up singing as a gospel-ordinance, none provide for the keeping up of music and dancing; the gospel-canon for psalmody, is, *to sing with the spirit and with the understanding*.

4. What opportunities must be taken for praising God; none must be let slip; but particularly, (1.) We must praise God in public, in the *solemn assembly*, (v. 1.) *in the congregation of saints*; the more the better, it is the more like heaven. Thus God's name must be owned before the world; thus the service must have a solemnity put upon it, and we must mutually excite one another to it. The principle, end, and design, of our coming together in religious assemblies, is, that we may join together in praising God. Other parts of the service must be in order to this. (2.) We must praise him in private. *Let the saints be so transported with their joy in God, as to sing aloud upon their beds*, when they awake in the night, full of the praises of God, as David, 119. 62. When God's Israel are brought to a quiet settlement, let them enjoy that with thankfulness to God; much more may true believers, that are entered into God's rest, and find repose in Jesus Christ, sing aloud, for joy of that. Upon their sick-beds, their death-beds, let them sing the praises of their God.

II. The cause given God's Israel for praise. Consider,

1. God's doings for them. They have reason to rejoice in God, to devote themselves to his honour, and employ themselves in his service; for it is he that made them. He gave us our being as men, and we have reason to praise him for that, for it is a noble and excellent being. He gave Israel their being as a people, as a

church; made them what they were, so much different from other nations; let that people therefore praise him, for he formed them for himself, on purpose that they might *shew forth his praise*, Isa. 43. 21. Let Israel *rejoice in his Makers*, so it is in the original; for God said, *Let us make man*; and in this, some think, is the mystery of the Trinity.

2. God's dominion over them. This follows upon the former: if he made them, he is their King; he that gave being, no doubt, may give law; and this ought to be the matter of our joy and praise, that we are under the conduct and protection of such a wise and powerful King. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, for behold, thy King comes*, the King Messiah, whom God has *set upon his holy hill of Zion*; let all the children of Zion be *joyful* in him, and go forth to meet him with their hosannas, Zech. 9. 9.

3. God's delight in them. He is a King that rules by love, and therefore to be praised; for *the Lord takes pleasure in his people*, in their services, in their prosperity, in communion with them, and in the communications of his favour to them. He that is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself, and to whose fidelity no accession can be made, yet graciously condescends to *take pleasure in his people*, 147. 11.

4. God's designs concerning them. Beside the present complacency he has in them, he has prepared for their future glory; *He will beautify the meek*, the humble, and lowly, and contrite in heart; that tremble at his word, and submit to it, that are patient under their afflictions, and *shew all meekness towards all men*. These, men vilify and asperse, but God will justify them, and wipe off their reproach, nay, he will beautify them, they shall appear not only clear, but comely, before all the world, with the comeliness that he puts upon them. He will beautify them with salvation; with temporal salvations; when God works remarkable deliverances for his people, they that had been *among the pots, become as the wings of a dove covered with silver*, (68. 13.) but especially with eternal salvation. The righteous shall be beautified in that day, when they *shine forth as the sun*. In the hopes of this, let them now, in the darkest day, *sing a new song*.

6. *Let the high praises of God be in their mouth*, and a two-edged sword in their hand; 7. To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; 8. To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; 9. To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD.

The Israel of God are here represented triumphing over their enemies, which is both the matter of their praise, (let them give to God the glory of those triumphs,) and the recompence of their praise; they that are truly thankful to God for their tranquillity, shall be blessed with victory. Or it may be taken as a further expression of their praise; (v. 6.) *Let the high praises of God be in their mouth*, and then, in a holy zeal for his honour, let them take a *two-edged sword in their hand*, to fight his battles against the enemies of his kingdom.

Now this may be applied,

1. To the many victories which God blessed his people Israel with over the nations of Canaan, and other nations that were devoted to destruction. These began in Moses and Joshua, who, when they taught Israel *the high praises of the Lord*, did withal put a *two-edged sword in their hand*; David did so too, for as he was the sweet singer of Israel, so he was the captain of their hosts, and taught the children of Judah the use of the bow, (2 Sam. 1. 18.) taught their hands to war, as God had taught his. Thus he and they went on victoriously, fighting the Lord's battles, and avenging Israel's quarrels on those that had oppressed them; then they *executed vengeance upon the heathen*, (the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and others, 2 Sam. 8. 1, &c.) and *punishments upon the people*, for all the wrong they had done to God's people, v. 7. Their kings and nobles were taken prisoners, (v. 8.) and on some of them the judgment written was executed, as by Joshua on the kings of Canaan, by Gideon on the princes of Midian, by Samuel

on Agag. The honour of this redounded to all the Israel of God, and to him who put it upon them they return it entirely in their hallelujahs. Jehoshaphat's army had at the same time the high praises of God in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, for they went forth to war, singing the praises of God, and then their sword did execution, 2 Chron. 20. 23. Some apply it to the time of the Maccabees, when the Jews sometimes gained great advantages against their oppressors. And if it seem strange that the meek should, notwithstanding that character, be thus severe, and upon kings and nobles too, here is one word that justifies them in it, it is *the judgment written*.

They do not do it from any personal malice and revenge, or any bloody politics that they govern themselves by, but by commission from God, according to his direction, and in obedience to his command; and Saul lost his kingdom for disobeying a command of this nature. Thus the kings of the earth, that shall be employed in the destruction of the New-Testament Babylon, will but *execute the judgment written*, Rev. 17. 16, 17. But, since now no such special commissions can be produced, this will by no means justify the violence either of subjects against their princes, or of princes against their subjects, or both against their neighbours, under pretence of religion; for Christ never intended that his gospel should be propagated by fire and sword, or his righteousness wrought by the wrath of man. When the high praises of God are in our mouth, with them we should have an olive-branch of peace in our hands.

2. To Christ's victories, by the power of his gospel and grace over spiritual enemies, in which all believers are more than conquerors. The word of God is the *two-edged sword*, (Heb. 4. 12.) the *sword of the Spirit*, (Eph. 6. 17.) which it is not enough to have in our armoury, we must have it in our hand also, as our Master had, when he said, *It is written*. Now, (1.) With this *two-edged sword* the first preachers of the gospel obtained a glorious victory over the power of darkness; vengeance was executed upon the gods of the heathen, by the conviction and conversion of those that had been long their worshippers, and by the consternation and confusion of those that would not repent; (Rev. 6. 15.) the strongholds of Satan were cast down; (2 Cor. 10. 4, 5.) great men were made to tremble at the word, as Felix; Satan, the god of this world, was cast out, according to the judgment given against him. *This is the honour of all Christians*, that their holy religion has been so victorious. (2.) With this *two-edged sword* believers fight against their own corruptions, and, through the grace of God, subdue and mortify them; the sin that had dominion over them is crucified; self, that once sat king, is bound with chains, and brought into subjection to the yoke of Christ; the tempter is foiled and bruised under their feet; *This honour have all the saints*. (3.) The complete accomplishment of this will be in the judgment of the great day, when the Lord shall come with *ten thousand of his saints*, to *execute judgment upon all*, Jude, v. 14, 15. Vengeance shall then be *executed upon the heathen*, (Ps. 9. 17.) and *punishments*, everlasting punishments, *upon the people: kings and nobles*, that cast away the bands and cords of Christ's government, (2.3.) shall not be able to cast away the chains and fetters of his wrath and justice. Then shall be *executed the judgment written*, for *the secrets of men shall be judged according to the gospel*. *This honour shall all the saints have*, that, as assessors with Christ, they shall *judge the world*; (1 Cor. 6. 2.) in the prospect of that, let them *praise the Lord*, and continue Christ's faithful servants and soldiers to the end of their lives.

PSALM CL.

The first and last of the psalms have both the same number of verses, are both short, and very memorable: but the scope of them is very different; the first psalm is an elaborate instruction in our duty, to prepare us for the comforts of our devotion; this is all rapture and transport, and, perhaps, was penned on purpose to be the conclusion of those sacred songs, to shew what is the design of them all, and that is, to assist us in praising God. The psalmist had been himself full of the praises of God, and here he would fain fill all the world with them: again and again he calls, Praise the Lord, praise him, praise him, no less than thirteen times in these six short verses. He shews, I. For what, and upon what account, God is to be praised, v. 1, 2. II. How, and with what expressions of joy, God is to be praised, v. 3, 4. III. Who must praise the Lord; it is every one's business, v. 6. In singing this psalm, we

should endeavour to get our hearts much affected with the perfections of God, and the praises with which he is, and shall be, for ever attended, throughout all ages, world without end.

1. **PRAISE** ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. 2. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. 3. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. 4. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. 5. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. 6. Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

We are here, with the greatest earnestness imaginable, excited to praise God; if, as some suppose, it was primarily intended for the Levites, to stir them up to do their office in the house of the Lord, as singers and players on instruments, yet we must take it as speaking to us, who are made to our God spiritual priests. And the repeated inculcating of the call thus, intimates that it is a great and necessary duty, a duty which we should be much employed, and much enlarged, in; but which we are naturally backward to, and cold in, and therefore need to be brought to, and held to, by precept upon precept, and line upon line. Observe here,

1. Whence this tribute of praise arises, and out of what part of his dominion it especially issues.

It comes, (1.) From *his sanctuary*; praise him there: let his priests, let his people that attend there, attend him with their praises. Where should he be praised, but there where he does, in a special manner, both manifest his glory, and communicate his grace? *Praise God* upon the account of *his sanctuary*, and the privileges which we enjoy by having that among us, Ezek. 37. 26. *Praise God in his holy ones*, so some read it: we must take notice of the image of God, as it appears on those that are sanctified, and love them for the sake of that image; and, when we praise them, we must praise God in them. (2.) From *the firmament of his power*; *Praise him*, because of his power and glory which appear in the firmament; its vastness, its brightness, and its splendid furniture; and because of the powerful influences it has upon this earth. Let them that have their dwelling in *the firmament of his power*, even the holy angels, lead in this good work. Some, by *the sanctuary*, as well as by *the firmament of his power*, understand the highest heavens, the residence of his glory; that is indeed his sanctuary, his holy temple, and there he is praised continually, in a far better manner than we can praise him. And it is a comfort to us, when we find we do it so poorly, that it is so well done there.

2. Upon what account this tribute of praise is due: upon many accounts; particularly, (1.) The works of his power; (v. 2.) *Praise him for his mighty acts*; for *his mightinesses*, so the word is; for all the instances of his might, the power of his providence, the power of his grace; what he has done in the creation, government, and redemption, of the world; for the children of men in general, for his own church and children in particular. (2.) The glory and majesty of his being; *Praise him according to his excellent greatness*, according to the multitude of his magnificence; (so Dr. Hammond reads it;) not that our praises can bear any proportion to God's greatness, for it is infinite; but, because he is greater than we can express or conceive, we must raise our conceptions and expressions to the highest degree we can attain to. Be not afraid of saying too much in the praises of God, as we often do in praising even great and good men; *Deus non patitur hyperbolum* — We cannot speak hyperbolically of God; all the danger is of saying too little; and therefore, when we have done our utmost, we must own, that though we have praised him in consideration of, yet not in proportion to, *his excellent greatness*.

3. In what manner this tribute must be paid; with all the kinds of musical instruments that were then used in the temple-service, v. 3, 4, 5. It is well that we are not concerned to inquire what

sort of instruments each of these was ; it is enough that they were well known then : our concern is, to know, (1.) That hereby is intimated how full the psalmist's heart was of the praises of God, and how desirous he was that this good work might go on. (2.) That in serving God we should spare no cost or pains. (3.) That the best music in God's ears is devout and pious affections ; *non musica chordula, sed cor—not a melodious string, but a melodious heart.* Praise God with a strong faith ; praise him with holy love and delight ; praise him with an entire confidence in Christ ; praise him with a believing triumph over the powers of darkness ; praise him with an earnest desire toward him, and a full satisfaction in him ; praise him by a universal respect to all his commands ; praise him by a cheerful submission to all his disposals ; praise him by rejoicing in his love, and solacing yourselves in his great goodness ; praise him by promoting the interests of the kingdom of his grace ; praise him by a lively hope and expectation of the kingdom of his glory. (4.) That various instruments being used in praising God, it should yet be done with an exact and perfect harmony ; they must not hinder, but help, one another. The New-Testament concert, instead of this, is, *with one mind, and one mouth, to glorify*, Rom. 15. 6.

4. Who must pay this tribute ; (v. 6.) *Let every thing that has breath praise the Lord.* He began with a call to those that had a place in his sanctuary, and were employed in the temple-service ; but he concludes with a call to all the children of men, in prospect of the time when the Gentiles should be taken into the church, and in every place, as acceptably as at Jerusalem, *this incense should be offered*, Mal. 1. 11. Some think that in *every thing that has breath*, here we must include the inferior creatures, (as Gen. 7. 22.) all in whose nostrils was the breath of life. They praise God according to their capacity : the singing of birds is a sort of praising God. The brutes do in effect say to man, "We would praise God if we could, do you do it for us." John in vision heard a song of praise from every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, Rev. 5. 13. Others think that the children of men only are meant ; for into them God has in a more peculiar manner breathed the breath of life, and they are become living souls, Gen. 2. 7. Now that the gospel is ordered to be preached to every creature, to every human creature, it is required that every human creature praise the Lord. What have we our breath,

our spirit, for, but to spend it in praising God ; and how can we spend it better ? Prayers are called *our breathings*, Lam. 3. 56. Let every one that breathes toward God in prayer, finding the benefit of that, breathe forth his praises too. Having breath, let the praises of God perfume our breath ; let us be in this work as in our element ; let it be to us as the air we breathe in, which we could not live without. Having our breath in our nostrils, let us consider that it is still going forth, and will shortly go, and not return. Since therefore we must shortly breathe our last, while we have breath let us praise the Lord ; and then we shall breathe our last with comfort, and, when death runs us out of breath, we shall remove to a better state, to breathe God's praises in a freer better air.

The three first of the five books of psalms (according to the Hebrew division) concluded with *Amen and Amen* ; the fourth with *Amen, Hallelujah* ; but the last, and in it the whole book, concludes only with *Hallelujah*, because the six last psalms are wholly taken up in praising God, and there is not a word of complaint or petition in them. The nearer good Christians come to their end, the fuller they should be of the praises of God. Some think that this last psalm is designed to represent to us the work of glorified saints in heaven, who are there continually praising God. And musical instruments, here said to be used, are no more to be understood literally than the gold, and pearls, and precious stones, which are said to adorn the New Jerusalem, Rev. 21. 18, 19. But as those intimate that the glories of heaven are the most excellent glories, so these intimate that the praises the saints offer there are the most excellent praises. Prayers will there be swallowed up in everlasting praises ; there will be no intermission in praising God, and yet no weariness. Hallelujahs for ever repeated, and yet still new songs. Let us often take a pleasure in thinking what glorified saints are doing in heaven, what those are doing whom we have been acquainted with on earth, but are gone before us thither ; and let it not only make us long to be among them, but quicken us to do this part of the will of God on earth, as they do it that are in heaven. And therefore let us spend as much of our time as may be in this good work, because in it we hope to spend a joyful eternity. *Hallelujah* is the word there ; (Rev. 19. 1, 3.) let us echo to it now, as those that hope to join in it shortly. *Hallelujah, praise ye the Lord.*

AN

E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH

Practical Observations,

OF THE

P R O V E R B S.

We have now before us,

1. A new Author, or Penman rather, or Pen, (if you will,) made use of by the Holy Ghost, for making known the mind of God to us, writing as moved by the *Finger of God*, so the Spirit of God is called ; and that is Solomon, through his hand came this book of Scripture, and the two that follow it, Ecclesiastes and Canticles, a Sermon and a Song. Some think he wrote Canticles when he was very young, Proverbs in the midst of his days, and Ecclesiastes when he was old. In the title of his song, he only writes himself *Solomon*, perhaps, because he wrote it before his accession to the throne, being filled with the Holy Ghost when he was

PROVERBS, I.

young. In the title of his Proverbs he writes himself *the son of David, king of Israel*, for then he ruled over all Israel. In the title of his Ecclesiastes he writes himself *the son of David, king of Jerusalem*, because then, perhaps, his influence was grown less upon the distant tribes, and he confined himself very much in Jerusalem. Concerning this author we may observe, 1. That he was a king, and a king's son. The penmen of scripture, hitherto, were most of them men of the first rank in the world, as Moses and Joshua, Samuel and David, and now Solomon; but, after him, the inspired writers were generally poor prophets, men of no figure in the world, because that dispensation was approaching in which God would choose the *weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty*, and the poor should be employed to evangelize. Solomon was a very rich king, and his dominions very large, a king of the first magnitude, and yet he addicted himself to the study of divine things, and was a prophet, and a prophet's son. It is no disparagement to the greatest princes and potentates in the world to instruct those about them in religion and the laws of it. 2. That he was one whom God endued with extraordinary measures of wisdom and knowledge, in answer to his prayers at his accession to the throne; his prayer was exemplary, *Give me a wise and an understanding heart*; the answer to it was encouraging, he had that, and *all other things were added to him*. Now here we find what good use he made of the wisdom God gave him; he not only governed himself and his kingdom with it, but he gave rules of wisdom to others also, and transmitted them to posterity. Thus must we trade with the talents with which we are trusted, according as they are. 3. That he was one who had his faults, and in his latter end turned aside from those good ways of God which in this book he had directed others in. We have the story of it, 1 Kings, 11. and a sad story it is, that the penman of such a book as this should apostatize as he did; *tell it not in Gath*; but let those who are most eminently useful take warning, by this, not to be proud or secure; and let us all learn not to think the worse of good instructions, though we have them from those who do not themselves altogether live up to them.

II. We have here a new way of writing, in which divine wisdom is taught us by Proverbs, or short sentences, which contain their whole design within themselves, and are not connected with one another. We have had divine *laws, histories, and songs*, and now divine *proverbs*; such various methods has Divine Wisdom used for our instruction, that, no stone being left unturned to do us good, we may be inexorable if we perish in our folly. Teaching by proverbs was, 1. An ancient way of teaching, it was the most ancient way among the Greeks; the seven wise men of Greece had each of them some one saying that they valued themselves upon, and that made them famous: these sentences were inscribed on pillars, and had in great veneration, as that which was said to come down from heaven; *A celo descendit, γνῶθι σεαυτὸν—Know thyself, is a precept which came down from heaven*. 2. It was a plain and easy way of teaching, which cost neither the teachers nor the learners much pains, nor put their understandings or their memories to the stretch. Long periods, and arguments far-fetched, must be laboured both by him that frames them and by him that takes them, while a proverb, which carries both its sense and its evidence in a little compass, is quickly apprehended and subscribed to, and is easily retained. Both David's devotions and Solomon's instructions are sententious, which may recommend that way of expression to those who minister about holy things, both in praying and preaching. 3. It was a very profitable way of teaching, and served admirably well to answer the end. The word *Mashal*, here used for a proverb, comes from a word that signifies *to rule, or have dominion*, because of the commanding power and influence which wise and weighty sayings have upon the children of men; he that teaches by them, *dominatur in concionibus—rules his auditory*. It is easy to observe how the world is governed by proverbs; *As saith the proverb of the ancients*, (1 Sam. 24. 13.) or, as the vulgar expresses it, *As the old saying is*, goes very far with most men in forming their notions and fixing their resolves. Much of the wisdom of the ancients had been handed down to posterity by proverbs; and some think we may judge of the temper and character of a nation by the complexion of its vulgar proverbs. Proverbs in conversation are like axioms in philosophy, maxims in law, and postulata in the mathematics, which no body disputes, but every one endeavours to expound, so as to have them on his side. Yet there are many corrupt proverbs, which tend to debauch men's minds and harden them in sin. The Devil has his proverbs, and the world and the flesh have their proverbs, which reflect reproach on God and religion, (as Ezek. 12. 22.—18. 2.) to guard us against the corrupt influences of which, God has his proverbs, which are all wise and good, and tend to make us so. These proverbs of Solomon were not merely a collection of the wise sayings that had been formerly delivered, as some have imagined, but were the dictates of the Spirit of God in Solomon. The very first of them, (ch. 1. 7.) agrees with what God said to man in the beginning, (Job, 28. 28.) *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom*; so that, though Solomon was great, and his name may serve as much as any man's to recommend his writings, yet behold, *a greater than Solomon is here*. It is God, by Solomon, that here speaks to us; I say, to us; for these proverbs were *written for our learning*, and when Solomon speaks to his son, the exhortation is said *to speak to us as unto children*, Heb. 12. 5. And as we have no book so useful to us in our devotions as David's psalms, so have we none so serviceable to us, for the right ordering of our conversations, as Solomon's proverbs, which, as David says of the commandments, are *exceeding broad*, containing, in a little compass, a complete body of divine ethics, politics, and economics, exposing every vice, recommending every virtue, and suggesting rules for the government of ourselves in every relation and condition, and every turn of conversation. The learned Bishop Hall has drawn up a system of moral philosophy out of Solomon's Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The nine first chapters of this book are reckoned as a preface by way of exhortation to the study and practice of wisdom's rules, and caution against those things that would hinder therein. We have then the first volume of Solomon's proverbs: (ch. 10. . 24.) after that, a second volume; (ch. 25. . 29.) and then Agur's prophecy, (ch. 30.) and Lemuel's, ch. 31. The scope of all is one and the same, to direct us so to order our conversation aright, as that in the end we may see the salvation of the Lord. The best comment on those rules is to be ruled by them.

The Design of the Proverbs.

CHAP. I.

Those who read David's psalms, especially those toward the latter end, would be tempted to think that religion is all rapture, and consists in nothing but the ecstasies and transports of devotion; and doubtless there is a time for them, and, if there be a heaven upon earth, it is in them: but, while we are on earth, we cannot be wholly taken up with them, we have a life to live in the flesh, must have a conversation in the world, and into that we must now be taught to carry our religion, which is a rational thing, and very serviceable to the conduct of human life, and tends as much to make us discreet as to make us devout, to make the face shine before men in a prudent, honest, useful, conversation, as to make the heart burn toward God in holy and pious affections. In this chapter, we have, I. The title of the book, shewing the general scope

and design of it, v. 1. . 6. II. The first principle of it recommended to our serious consideration, v. 7. . 9. III. A necessary caution against bad company, v. 10. . 19. IV. A faithful and lively representation of wisdom's reasonings with the children of men, and the certain ruin of those who turn a deaf ear to those reasonings, v. 20. . 33.

1. **T**HE proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; 2. To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; 3. To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; 4. To give

subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. 5. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: 6. To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

We have here an introduction to this book, which some think was prefixed by the collector and publisher, as Ezra; but it is rather supposed to have been penned by Solomon himself, who, in the beginning of his book, proposes his end in writing it, that he might keep to his business, and closely pursue that end. We are here told,

I. Who wrote these wise sayings; (v. 1.) they are *the proverbs of Solomon*. 1. His name signifies *peaceable*, and the character both of his spirit and of his reign answered to it; both were peaceable. David, whose life was full of troubles, wrote a book of devotion; for, *Is any afflicted? Let him pray*. Solomon, who lived quietly, wrote a book of instruction, for when the churches had rest, they were edified. In times of peace, we should learn ourselves, and teach others, that which, in troublous times, both they and we must practise. 2. He was *the son of David*; it was his honour to stand related to that good man, and he reckoned it so with good reason, for he fared the better for it, 1 Kings, 11. 12. He had been blessed with a good education, and many a good prayer had been put up for him, (Ps. 72. 1.) the effect of both which appeared in his wisdom and usefulness. The generation of the upright are sometimes thus blessed, that they are made blessings, eminent blessings, in their day. Christ is often called the Son of David, and Solomon was a type of him in this, as in other things, that he opened his mouth in parables or proverbs. 3. He was king of Israel; a king, and yet it was no disparagement to him to be an instructor of the ignorant, and a teacher of babes; king of Israel, that people among whom God was known, and his name was great; among them he learned wisdom, and to them he communicated it. All the earth sought to Solomon to hear his wisdom, which excelled all men's; (1 Kings, 4. 30.—10. 24.) it was an honour to Israel, that their king was such a dictator, such an oracle. Solomon was famous for apophthegms; every word he said had weight in it, and something that was surprising and edifying; his servants, who attended him, and heard his wisdom, had, among them, collected 3000 proverbs of his, which they wrote in their day-books, but these were of his own writing, and do not amount to near a thousand; in these, he was divinely inspired. Some think, that, out of those other proverbs of his, which were not so inspired, the apocryphal books of *Ecclesiasticus* and the *Wisdom of Solomon* were compiled, in which are many excellent sayings, and of great use; but, take all together, they are far short of this book. The Roman emperors had each of them their symbol or motto, as many now have with their coat of arms. But Solomon had many weighty sayings, not, as their's, borrowed from others, but all the product of that extraordinary wisdom which God had endued him with.

II. For what end they were written; (v. 2. . 4.) not to gain a reputation to the author, or strengthen his interest among his subjects, but for the use and benefit of all that in every age and place will govern themselves by these dictates, and study them close.

This book will help us,

1. To form right notions of things, and to possess our minds with clear and distinct ideas of them; that we may *know wisdom and instruction*; that wisdom which is got by instruction, by divine revelation; may know both how to speak and act wisely ourselves, and to give instruction to others.

2. To distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil; to perceive the words of understanding; to apprehend them, to judge of them, to guard against mistakes, and to accommodate what we are taught to ourselves, and our own use, that we may discern things that differ, and not be imposed upon, and may approve things that are excellent, and not lose the benefit of them, as the apostle prays, Phil. 1. 10.

3. To order our conversation aright in every thing, v. 3. This book will give, that we may receive, the instruction of wisdom, that knowledge which will guide our practice in justice, judgment, and equity, (v. 3.) which will dispose us to render to all their due, to God the things that are God's, in all the exercises of religion, and to all men what is due to them, according to the obligations which, by relation, office, contract, or upon any other account, we lie under to them. Note, Those are truly wise, and none but those, who are universally conscientious; and the design of the scripture is, to teach us that wisdom. Justice in the duties of the first table, judgment in those of the second table, and equity, that is, sincerity, in both; so some distinguish them.

III. For whose use they were written, v. 4. They are of use to all, but are designed especially, 1. For the simple, to give subtlety to them. The instructions here given are plain and easy, and level to the meanest capacity; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein; and those are likely to receive benefit by them who are sensible of their own ignorance, and their need to be taught, and are therefore desirous to receive instruction; and those who receive those instructions, in their light and power, though they be simple, will hereby be made subtle, graciously crafty to know the sin they should avoid, and the duty they should do, and to escape the tempter's wiles. He that is harmless as the dove, by observing Solomon's rules, may become wise as the serpent; and he that has been sinfully foolish, when he begins to govern himself by the word of God, becomes graciously wise. 2. For young people, to give them knowledge and discretion. Youth is the learning age, catches at instructions, receives impressions, and retains what is then received; it is therefore of great consequence that the mind be then seasoned well, nor can it receive a better tincture than from Solomon's proverbs. Youth is rash, and heady, and inconsiderate: man is born like the wild ass's colt; and therefore needs to be broken by the restraints, and managed by the rules, we find here. And if young people will but take heed to their ways, according to Solomon's proverbs, they will soon gain the knowledge and discretion of the ancients. Solomon had an eye to posterity in writing this book, hoping by it to season the minds of the rising generation with the generous principles of wisdom and virtue.

IV. What good use may be made of them, v. 5, 6. Those who are young and simple may by them be made wise, and are not excluded from Solomon's school, as they were from Plato's. But is it only for such? No; here is not only milk for babes, but strong meat for strong men. This book will not only make the foolish and bad wise and good, but the wise and good wiser and better; and though the simple and the young man may perhaps slight those instructions, and not be the better for them, yet the wise man will hear; wisdom will be justified by her own children, though not by the children sitting in the market-place. Note, Even wise men must hear, and not think themselves too wise to learn. A wise man is sensible of his own defects, (*Plurima ignoro, sed ignorantiam meam non ignoro—I am ignorant of many things, but not of my own ignorance*) and therefore is still pressing forward, that he may increase in learning, may know more, and know it better, more clearly and distinctly, and may know better how to make use of it. As long as we live, we should strive to increase in all useful learning. It was a saying of one of the greatest of the rabbins, *Qui non auget scientiam, amittit de ea—If our stock of knowledge be not increasing, it is wasting*; and they that would increase in learning must study the scriptures; those perfect the man of God.

A wise man, by increasing in learning, is not only profitable to himself, but to others also.

1. As a counsellor. A man of understanding in these precepts of wisdom, by comparing them with one another, and with his own observations, shall by degrees attain unto wise counsels, he stands fair for preferment, and will be consulted as an oracle, and intrusted with the conduct of public affairs; he shall come to sit at the helm, so the word signifies. Note, Industry is the way to honour; and those whom God has blessed with wisdom must study to do good with it, according as their sphere is. It is more dig-

nity, indeed, to be counsellor to the prince, but it is more charity to be counsellor to the poor, as Job was with his wisdom, (Job, 29. 15.) *I was eyes to the blind.*

2. As an interpreter; (v. 6.) *to understand a proverb.* Solomon was himself famous for expounding riddles, and resolving hard questions, which was, of old, the celebrated entertainment of the eastern princes; witness the solutions he gave to the knots with which the queen of Sheba thought to puzzle him. Now, here he undertakes to furnish his readers with that talent, as far as would be serviceable to the best purposes. They shall *understand a proverb*, even the *interpretation*, without which the proverb is a nut uncracked; when they hear a wise saying, though it be figurative, they shall take the sense of it, and know how to make use of it. *The words of the wise are sometimes dark sayings.* In St. Paul's epistles there was that which was *hard to be understood*; but to those who, being well-versed in the scriptures, know how to *compare spiritual things with spiritual*, they will be easy and safe. So that, if you ask them, *Have ye understood all these things?* they may answer, *Yea, Lord.* Note, It is a credit to religion, when men of honesty are men of sense; all good people, therefore, should aim to be intelligent, and run to and fro, take pains in the use of means, that their knowledge may be increased.

7. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction. 8. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: 9. For they *shall be* an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

Solomon, having undertaken to *teach a young man knowledge and discretion*, here lays down two general rules to be observed in order thereunto, and those are, to fear God, and honour his parents; which two fundamental laws of morality Pythagoras begins his golden verses with, but the former of them in a wretchedly corrupted state; *Primum, deos immortales cole—parentesque honora—First, worship the immortal gods—and honour your parents.*

To make young people as they should be,

I. Let them have regard to God as their Supreme; (v. 7.) *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*; it is the *principal part of knowledge*, so the margin; it is the head of knowledge; that is, 1. Of all things that are to be known, this is most evident, that *God is to be feared*, to be revered, served, and worshipped; this is so the beginning of knowledge, that those know nothing who do not know this. 2. In order to the attaining of all useful knowledge, this is most necessary, that we fear God; we are not qualified to profit by the instructions that are given us, unless our minds be possessed with a holy reverence of God, and every thought within us be brought into obedience to him. *If any man do his will, he shall know of his doctrine*, John, 7. 17. 3. As all our knowledge must take rise from the fear of God, so it must tend to it as its perfection and centre. Those know enough who know how to fear God, who are careful in every thing to please him, and fearful of offending him in any thing; this is the alpha and omega of knowledge.

To confirm this truth, that an eye to God must both direct and quicken all our pursuits of knowledge, he observes, *Fools* (atheists, who have no regard to God) *despise wisdom and instruction*; having no dread at all of God's wrath, nor any desire of his favour, they will not give you thanks for telling them what they may do to escape his wrath, and obtain his favour. They who say to the Almighty, *Depart from us*, who are so far from fearing him, that they set him at defiance, can excite no surprise if they desire not the knowledge of his ways, but despise that instruction. Note, Those are fools who do not fear God, and value the scriptures; and, though they may pretend to be admirers of wit, they are really strangers and enemies to wisdom.

II. Let them have regard to their parents, as their superiors; (v. 8, 9.) *My son, hear the instruction of thy father.* He means, *not only* that he would have his own children to be observant of

him, and of what he said to them, nor only that he would have his pupils, and those who came to him to be taught, to look upon him as their father, and attend to his precepts with the disposition of children: but that he would have all children to be dutiful and respectful to their parents, and to conform to the virtuous and religious education which they give them, according to the law of the fifth commandment.

1. He takes it for granted, that parents will, with all the wisdom they have, instruct their children, and, with all the authority they have, give law to them for their good. They are reasonable creatures, and therefore we must not give them law without instruction; we must draw them with the cords of a man, and when we tell them *what* they must do, we must tell them *why*. But they are corrupt and wilful, and therefore with the instruction there is need of a law. Abraham will not only catechize, but command, his household. Both the father and the mother must do all they can for the good education of their children; and all little enough.

2. He charges children both to receive, and to retain, the good lessons and laws their parents give them.

(1.) To receive them with readiness; "Hear the instruction of thy father; hear it, and heed it; hear it, and bid it welcome, and be thankful for it, and subscribe to it."

(2.) To retain them with resolution; "Forsake not their law; think not that, when thou art grown up, and no longer under tutors and governors, thou mayest live at large; no, *the law of thy mother* was according to the law of thy God, and therefore it must never be forsaken; thou wast trained up in the way in which thou shouldest go, and therefore, when thou art old, thou must not depart from it." Some observe, that whereas the Gentile ethics, and the laws of the Persians and Romans, provided only that children should pay respect to their *father*, the divine law secures the honour of the *mother* also.

3. He recommends this as that which is very graceful, and will put an honour upon us; "The instructions and laws of thy parents, carefully observed and lived up to, *shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head*, (v. 9.) such an ornament as is, in the sight of God, of great price, and shall make thee look as great as those that wear gold *chains about their necks*." Let divine truths and commands be to us as a coronet, or a collar of SS, which are badges of first-rate honours; let us value them, and be ambitious of them, and then they shall be so to us. Those are truly valuable, and shall be valued, who value themselves more by their virtue and piety than by their worldly wealth and dignity.

10. My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. 11. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: 12. Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: 13. We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: 14. Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: 15. My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: 16. For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. 17. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. 18. And they lay wait for their *own* blood; they lurk privily for their *own* lives. 19. So *are* the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; *which* taketh away the life of the owners thereof.

Here Solomon gives another general rule to young people, in order to their finding out, and keeping in, the paths of wisdom, and that is, to take heed of the snare of bad company. David's psalms begin with this caution, and so do Solomon's proverbs; for nothing is more destructive both to a lively devotion and to a regular conversation; (v. 10.) *My son*, whom I love, and have a

tender concern for, *if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.* This is good advice for parents to give their children, when they send them abroad into the world; it is the same that St. Peter gave to his new converts, (Acts, 2. 40.) *Save yourselves from this untoward generation.* Observe, 1. How industrious wicked people are to seduce others into the paths of the destroyer; they will entice; sinners love company in sin; the angels that fell were tempters almost as soon as they were sinners. They do not threaten or argue, but entice with flattery and fair speech; with a bait they draw the unwary young man to the hook. But they mistake, if they think, that, by bringing others to partake with them in their guilt, and to be bound, as it were, in the bond with them, they shall have the less to pay themselves; for they will have so much the more to answer for. 2. How cautious young people should be that they be not seduced by them; "*Consent thou not*"; and then, though they entice thee, they cannot force thee. Do not say as they say, nor do as they do, or would have thee to do; have no fellowship with them."

To enforce this caution,

I. He represents the fallacious reasonings which sinners use in their enticements, and the arts of wheedling which they have, for the beguiling of unstable souls. He specifies highwaymen, who do what they can to draw others into their gang, v. 11. 14. See here what they would have the young man to do; "*Come with us*, (v. 11.) let us have thy company;" at first, they pretend to ask no more; but the courtship rises higher, v. 14. "*Cast in thy lot among us*; come in partner with us, join thy force to our's, and let us resolve to live and die together; thou shalt fare as we fare; and let us all have one purse, that what we get together we may spend merrily together;" for that is it they aim at.

Two unreasonable insatiable lusts they propose to themselves the gratification of, and therewith entice their prey into the snare.

1. Their cruelty. They thirst after blood, and hate those that are innocent and never gave them any provocation, because, by their honesty and industry, they shame and condemn them; "*Let us therefore lay wait for their blood, and lurk privily for them*; they are conscious to themselves of no crime, and consequently apprehensive of no danger, but travel unarmed; therefore we shall make the more easy prey of them. And, Oh how sweet it will be to swallow them up alive!" v. 12. These bloody men would do this as greedily as the hungry lion devours the lamb. If it be objected, "The remains of the murdered will betray the murderers;" they answer, "No danger of that, we will swallow them whole as those that are buried." Who could imagine that human nature should degenerate so far, that it should ever be a pleasure to one man to destroy another!

2. Their covetousness. They hope to get a good booty by it; (v. 13.) "*We shall find all precious substance* by following this trade; what though we venture our necks by it, we shall fill our houses with spoil." See here, (1.) The idea they have of worldly wealth. They call it *precious substance*; whereas it is neither substance, nor precious; it is a shadow, it is vanity, especially that which is got by robbery, Ps. 62. 10. It is as that which is rot, which will give a man no solid satisfaction. It is cheap, it is common, yet, in their account, it is precious, and therefore they will hazard their lives, and perhaps their souls, in pursuit of it. It is the ruining mistake of thousands, that they over-value the wealth of this world, and look on it as *precious substance*. (2.) The abundance of it, which they promise themselves; We shall fill our houses with it. Those who trade with sin promise themselves mighty bargains, and that it will turn to a vast account. All this will I give thee, (says the tempter;) but they only dream that they eat; the housefuls dwindle into scarcely a handful, like the grass on the house-tops.

II. He shews the perniciousness of these ways, as a reason why we should dread them; (v. 15.) "*My son, walk not thou in the way with them*; do not associate with them; get, and keep, as far off from them as thou canst, *refrain thy foot from their path*, do not take example by them, nor do as they do." Such is the corruption of our nature, that our foot is very prone to step into the path of sin, so that we must use necessary violence upon

ourselves to refrain our foot from it, and check ourselves, if at any time we take the least step towards it. Consider,

1. How pernicious their way is in its own nature; (v. 16.) *Their feet run to evil*, to that which is displeasing to God and hurtful to mankind, for they make haste to shed blood. Note, The way of sin is down-hill; men not only cannot stop themselves, but, the longer they continue in it, the faster they run, and make haste in it, as if they were afraid they should not do mischief enough, and were resolved to lose no time. They said they would proceed leisurely, (Let us lay wait for blood, v. 11.) but thou wilt find they are all in haste, so much has Satan filled their hearts.

2. How pernicious the consequences of it will be. They are plainly told that this wicked way will certainly end in their own destruction, and yet they persist in it. Herein, (1.) They are like the silly bird, that sees the net spread to take her, and yet it is in vain; she is decoyed into it by the bait, and will not take the warning which her own eyes gave her, v. 17. But we think ourselves of more value than many sparrows, and therefore should have more wit, and act with more caution. God has made us wiser than the fowls of heaven; (Job, 35. 11.) and shall we, then, be as stupid as they? (2.) They are worse than the birds, and have not the sense which we sometimes perceive them to have; for the fowler knows it is in vain to lay his snare in the sight of the bird, and therefore he has arts to conceal it. But the sinner sees ruin at the end of his way; the murderer, the thief, see the jail and the gallows before them, nay, they might see hell before them, their watchmen tell them they shall surely die, but it is to no purpose; they rush into sin, and rush on in it, like the horse into the battle. For really the stone they roll will turn upon themselves; v. 18, 19. They lay wait, and lurk privily, for the blood and lives of others, but it will prove, contrary to their intention, to be for their own blood, their own lives; they will come, at length, to a shameful end; and, if they escape the sword of the magistrate, yet there is a divine Nemesis that pursues them. *Vengeance suffers them not to live.* Their greediness of gain hurries them upon those practices which will not suffer them to live out half their days, but will cut off the number of their months in the midst. They have little reason to be proud of their property in that which takes away the life of the owners, and then passes to other masters; and what is a man profited, though he gain the world, if he lose his life? for then he can enjoy the world no longer; much less if he lose his soul, and that be drowned in destruction and perdition, as multitudes are by the love of money.

Now, though Solomon specifies only the temptation to rob on the highway, yet he intends hereby to warn us against all other evils which sinners entice men to; such are the ways of the drunkards and unclean, they are indulging themselves in those pleasures which tend to their ruin, both here and for ever; and, therefore, consent not to them.

20. Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: 21. She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, 22. How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? 23. Turn you at my reproof: behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. 24. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; 25. But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: 26. I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; 27. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind;

when distress and anguish cometh upon you. 28. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: 29. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: 30. They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. 31. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. 32. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. 33. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

Solomon, having shewed how dangerous it is to hearken to the temptations of Satan, here shews how dangerous it is not to hearken to the calls of God, which we shall for ever rue the neglect of. Observe,

I. By whom God calls to us; by *wisdom*. It is *wisdom* that *crieth without*. The word is plural, *wisdoms*, for, as there is infinite wisdom in God, so there is the *manifold wisdom of God*, Eph. 3. 10. God speaks to the children of men by all the kinds of wisdom, and as in every will, so in every word, of God there is a counsel. 1. *Human understanding is wisdom*, the light and law of nature, the powers and faculties of reason, and the office of conscience, Job, 38. 36. By these God speaks to the children of men, and reasons with them; *The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord*; and, wherever men go, they may hear a voice behind them, saying, *This is the way*; and the voice of conscience is the voice of God, and not always a still small voice, but sometimes it cries. 2. *Civil government is wisdom*; it is God's ordinance, magistrates are his viceregents. God, by David, had said to the *fools*, *Deal not foolishly*, Ps. 75. 4. *In the opening of the gates*, and in the *places of concourse*, where courts were kept, the judges, the wisdom of the nation, call to wicked people, in God's name, to repent and reform. 3. *Divine revelation is wisdom*; all its dictates, all its laws, are wise as wisdom itself. God does, by the written word, by the law of Moses, which sets before us the blessing and the curse, by the priests' lips which keep knowledge, by his servants the prophets, and all the ministers of this word, declare his mind to sinners, and give them warning as plainly as that which is proclaimed in the streets or courts of judicature by the criers. God, in his word, not only opens the case, but argues it with the children of men. *Come now, and let us reason together*, Isa. 1. 18. 4. *Christ himself is Wisdom*, is *Wisdoms*, for in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and he is the centre of all divine revelation, not only the *essential Wisdom*, but the *eternal Word*, by whom God speaks to us, and to whom he has committed all judgment; he it is, therefore, who here both pleads with sinners, and passes sentence on them; he calls himself *Wisdom*, Luke, 7. 35.

II. How he calls to us, and in what manner. 1. Very publicly, that whosoever hath ears to hear may hear, since all are welcome to take the benefit of what is said, and all are concerned to heed it. The rules of wisdom are published *without in the streets*, not in the schools only, or in the palaces of princes, but *in the chief places of concourse*, among the common people, that pass and repass *in the opening of the gates*, and *in the city*. It is comfortable casting the net of the gospel there where there is a multitude of fish, in hopes that then some will be inclosed. This was fulfilled in our Lord Jesus, who taught openly in the temple, and in crowds of people, and *in secret said nothing*, (John, 18. 20.) and charged his ministers to *proclaim his gospel on the house-top*, Matth. 10. 27. God says, (Isa. 45. 19.) *I have not spoken in secret*. There is *no speech or language where wisdom's voice is not heard*. Truth seeks not corners, nor is virtue ashamed of itself. 2. Very pathetically; she cries, and again she cries, as one in earnest; *Jesus stood and cried*. She utters her voice, she

utters her words with all possible clearness and affection. God is desirous to be heard and heeded.

III. What the call of God and Christ is.

1. He reproves sinners for their folly, and their obstinate persisting in it, v. 22. Observe, (1.) Who they are that Wisdom here reproves and expostulates with. In general, they are such as are simple, and therefore might justly be despised; such as love simplicity, and therefore might justly be despaired of; but we must use the means even with those that we have little hopes of, because we know not what divine grace may do. Three sorts of persons are here called to; [1.] *Simple ones that love simplicity*. Sin is simplicity, and sinners are simple ones; they do foolishly, very foolishly; and the condition of those is very bad, who love simplicity, are fond of their simple notions of good and evil, their simple prejudices against the ways of God, and are in their element when they are doing a simple thing, sporting themselves in their own deceivings, and flattering themselves in their wickedness. [2.] *Scorners that delight in scorning*. Proud people that take a pleasure in hectoring all about them; jovial people that banter all mankind, and make a jest of every thing that comes in their way. But scoffers at religion are especially meant, the worst of sinners, that scorn to submit to the truths and laws of Christ, and to the reproofs and admonitions of his word, and take a pride in running down every thing that is sacred and serious. [3.] *Fools that hate knowledge*. None but fools hate knowledge; those only are enemies to religion that do not understand it aright. And they are the worst of fools that hate to be instructed and reformed, and have a rooted antipathy to serious godliness. (2.) How the reproof is expressed. "How long will ye do so?" This implies, that the God of heaven desires the conversion and reformation of sinners, and not their ruin; that he is much displeased with their obstinacy and dilatoriness; that he waits to be gracious, and is willing to reason the case with them.

2. He invites them to repent, and become wise, v. 23. And here, (1.) The precept is plain; *Turn you at my reproof*. We do not make a right use of the reproofs that are given us for that which is evil, if we do not turn from it to that which is good; for this end the reproof was given. Turn, return to your right mind; turn to God, turn to your duty, turn and live. (2.) The promises are very encouraging. They that love simplicity find themselves under a moral impotency to change their own mind and way, they cannot turn by any power of their own; to this God answers, "*Behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you*; set yourselves to do what you can, and the grace of God shall set in with you, and work in you both to will and to do that good which, without that grace, you could not do." Help thyself, and God will help thee; *stretch forth thy withered hand*, and Christ will strengthen and heal it. [1.] The Author of this grace is the Spirit, and that is promised; *I will pour out my Spirit unto you*, as oil, as water; you shall have the Spirit *in abundance*, *rivers of living water*, John, 7. 38. Our heavenly Father *will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*. [2.] The means of this grace is the word, which, if we take it aright, will turn us; it is therefore promised, "*I will make known my words unto you*, not only speak them to you, but make them known, give you to understand them." Note, Special grace is necessary to a sincere conversion. But that grace shall never be denied to any that honestly seek it, and submit to it.

3. He reads the doom of those that continue obstinate against all these means and methods of grace. It is large and very terrible, v. 24. . 32. Wisdom, having called sinners to return, pauses a while, to see what effect the call has, *hearkens and hears*; but *they speak not aright*, (Jer. 8. 6.) and therefore she goes on to tell them what will be in the end hereof.

(1.) The crime is recited, and it is highly provoking.

See what it is for which judgment will be given against impenitent sinners in the great day, and you will say they deserve it, and the Lord is righteous in it. It is, in short, rejecting Christ, and the offers of his grace, and refusing to submit to the terms of his gospel, which would have saved them both from the curse of the law of God, and from the dominion of the law of sin.

[1.] Christ called to them, to warn them of their danger; he *stretched out his hand* to offer them mercy, nay, to have helped them out of their miserable condition, *stretched out his hand* for them to *take hold of*, but they *refused*, and *no man regarded*, some were careless, and never heeded it, nor took notice of what was said to them; others were wilful, and, though they could not avoid hearing the will of Christ, yet they gave him a flat denial, they refused, v. 24. They were in love with their folly, and would not be made wise. They were obstinate to all the methods that were taken to reclaim them. God *stretched out his hand* in mercies bestowed upon them, and, when those would not work upon them, in corrections, but all were in vain, they regarded the operations of his hand no more than the declarations of his mouth.

[2.] Christ reproved and counselled them; not only reproved them for what they did amiss, but counselled them to do better, (those are *reproofs of instruction*, and evidences of love and goodwill,) but they *set at nought* all his counsel, as not worth heeding, and *would none of his reproof*; as if it were below them to be reproved by him, and as if they had never done any thing that deserved reproof, v. 25. This is repeated; (v. 30.) "*They would none of my counsel*, but rejected it with disdain; they called reproofs *reproaches*, and took them amiss; (Jer. 6. 10.) nay, *they despised all my reproof*, as if it were all a jest, and not worth taking notice of." Note, Those are marked for ruin that are deaf to reproof and good counsel.

[3.] They were exhorted to submit to the government of right reason and religion, but they rebelled against both. *First*, Reason should not rule them, for *they hated knowledge*, (v. 29.) hated the light of divine truth, because it discovered to them the evil of their deeds, John, 3. 20. They hated to be told that which they could not bear to know. *Secondly*, Religion should not rule them, for they *did not choose the fear of the Lord*, but chose to walk in the way of *their heart*, and in the *sight of their eyes*. They were pressed to *set God always before them*, but they chose rather to *cast him* and his fear *behind their backs*. Note, Those who do not choose the fear of the Lord, shew that they have no knowledge.

(2.) The sentence is pronounced, and it is certainly ruining. They that will not submit to God's government will certainly perish under his wrath and curse, and the gospel itself will not relieve them. They would not take the benefit of God's mercy when it was offered them, and therefore justly fall as victims to his justice, ch. 29. 1. The threatenings here will have their full accomplishment in the judgment of the great day, and the eternal misery of the impenitent, of which yet there are some earnest in present judgments.

[1.] Now sinners are in prosperity, and secure; they live at ease, and set sorrow at defiance. But, *First*, Their calamity will come, (v. 26.) sickness will come, and those diseases which they shall apprehend to be the very arrests and harbingers of death. Other troubles will come, in mind, in estate, which will convince them of their folly in setting God at a distance. *Secondly*, Their calamity will put them into a great fright. Fear seizes them, and they apprehend that bad will be worse. When public judgments are abroad, the *sinners in Zion are afraid*, *fearfulness surprises the hypocrites*, death is the *king of terrors* to them; (Job, 15. 21, &c.—18. 11, &c.) this fear will be their continual torment. *Thirdly*, According to their fright will it be to them. Their fear shall come; the thing they were afraid of shall befall them, it shall come as *desolation*, as a mighty deluge, bearing down all before it, it shall be their *destruction*, their total and final destruction, and it shall come as a *whirlwind*, which suddenly and forcibly drives away all the chaff. Note, Those that will not admit the fear of God, lay themselves open to all other fears, and their fears will not prove causeless. *Fourthly*, Their fright will then be turned into despair; *Distress and anguish shall come upon them*, for, being fallen into the pit they were afraid of, they shall see no way to escape, v. 27. Saul cries out, (2 Sam. 1. 9.) *Anguish is come upon me*; and in hell there is *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth* for anguish; *tribulation and anguish to the soul* of the sinner, the fruit of the indignation and wrath of the righteous God, Rom. 2. 8, 9.

[2.] Now God pities their folly, but he will then *laugh at their calamity*; (v. 26.) "I also will laugh at your distress, even as you laughed at my counsel." They that ridicule religion will thereby but make themselves ridiculous before all the world. The righteous will *laugh at them*, (Ps. 52. 6.) for God himself will. It intimates that they shall be for ever shut out of God's compassions; they have so long sinned against mercy, that they have now quite sinned it away; *his eye shall not spare, neither will he have pity*. Nay, his justice being glorified in their ruin, he will be pleased with it, though now he would rather they should *turn and live*. Ah, *I will ease me of mine adversaries*.

[3.] Now God is ready to hear their prayers, and to meet them with mercy, if they would but seek to him for it; but then the door will be shut, and they shall cry in vain; (v. 28.) "*Then shall they call upon me* when it is too late, *Lord, Lord, open to us*. They would then gladly be beholden to that mercy which now they reject and make light of; but *I will not answer*, because, when I called, they would not answer;" all the answer then will be, *Depart from me, I know you not*. This has been the case of some even in this life, as of Saul, whom God answered not by *Urim* or *prophets*; but, ordinarily, while there is life, there is room for prayer, and hope of speeding; and therefore this must refer to the inexorable justice of the last judgment. Then those that slighted God will *seek him early*, earnestly, but in vain; *they shall not find him*, because they sought him not when he might be found, Isa. 55. 6. The rich man in hell begged, but was denied.

[4.] Now they are eager upon their own way, and fond of their own devices; but then they will have enough of them, (v. 31.) according to the proverb, *Let men drink as they brew*; they shall *eat the fruit of their own way*, their wages shall be according to their work, and, as was their choice, *so shall their doom be*, Gal. 6. 7, 8. Note, *First*, There is a natural tendency in sin to destruction, Jam. 1. 15. Sinners are certainly miserable, if they do but *eat the fruit of their own way*. *Secondly*, They that perish must thank themselves, and can lay no blame upon any other. It is *their own device*, let them make their boast of it. God chooses *their delusions*, Isa. 66. 4.

[5.] Now they value themselves upon their worldly prosperity; but then that shall help to aggravate their ruin, v. 32. *First*, They are now proud that they can turn away from God, and get clear of the restraints of religion; but, that every thing shall slay them, the remembrance of it shall cut them to the heart. *Secondly*, They are now proud of their own security and sensuality; but the case of the *simple* (so the margin reads it) *shall slay them*; the more secure they are, the more certain and the more dreadful will their destruction be, and the *prosperity of fools shall help to destroy them*, by puffing them up with pride, giving their hearts to the world, furnishing them with fuel for their lusts, and hardening their hearts in their evil ways.

4. He concludes with an assurance of safety and happiness to all those that submit to the instructions of wisdom; (v. 33.) "*Whoso hearkeneth unto me*, and will be ruled by me, he shall," (1.) "*Be safe*; he shall dwell under the special protection of Heaven, so that nothing shall do him any real hurt." (2.) "*He shall be easy*, and have no disquieting apprehensions of danger; he shall not only be safe from evil, but *quiet from the fear of it*." *Though the earth be removed, yet shall not they fear*. Would we be safe from evil, and quiet from the fear of it? let religion always rule us, and the word of God be our counsellor. That is the way to dwell safely in this world, and to be quiet from the fear of evil in the other world.

CHAP. II.

Solomon, having foretold the destruction of those who are obstinate in their impiety, in this chapter applies himself to those who are willing to be taught; and, 1. He shews them, that, if they would diligently use the means of knowledge and grace, they should obtain of God the knowledge and grace which they seek, v. 1. 9. II. He shews them of what unspeakable advantage it would be to them. 1. It would preserve them from the snares of evil men, (v. 10. 15.) and of evil women, v. 16. 19. II. It would direct them into, and keep them in, the way of good men, v. 20. 22. So that, in this chapter, we are taught both how to get wisdom, and how to use it when we have it, that we may neither seek it, nor receive it, in vain.

1. **M**Y son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; 2. So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; 3. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; 4. If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; 5. Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. 6. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. 7. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: *he is* a buckler to them that walk uprightly. 8. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. 9. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity: *yea*, every good path.

Job had asked, long before this, *Where shall wisdom be found? Whence cometh wisdom?* Job, 28. 12, 20. He had given this general answer, (v. 23.) *God knoweth the place of it*; but Solomon here goes further, and tells us both where we may find it, and how we may get it.

We are here told,

I. What means we must use, that we may obtain wisdom.

1. We must closely attend to the word of God, for that is the word of wisdom, *which is able to make us wise unto salvation*, v. 1, 2. (1.) We must be convinced that the words of God are the fountain and standard of wisdom and understanding, and that we need not desire to be wiser than they will make us. We must *incline our ear*, and *apply our hearts* to them, as to *wisdom and understanding* itself: many wise things may be found in human compositions, but divine revelation, and true religion built upon it, are all wisdom. (2.) We must, accordingly, receive the word of God with all readiness of mind, and bid it welcome, even the commandments as well as the promises, without murmuring or disputing. *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears*. (3.) We must hide them with us, as we do our treasures, which we are afraid of being robbed of. We must not only receive, but retain, the word of God, and lodge it in our hearts, that it may be always ready to us. (4.) We must incline our ear to them; we must lay hold on all opportunities of hearing the word of God, and listen to it with attention and seriousness, as those that are afraid of letting it slip. (5.) We must apply our hearts to them, else inclining the ear to them will stand us in no stead.

2. We must be much in prayer, v. 3. We must *cry after knowledge*, as one that is ready to perish for hunger begs hard for bread; faint desires will not prevail, we must be importunate, as those that know the worth of knowledge, and our own want of it. We must cry, as new-born babes, after the sincere milk of the word, 1 Pet. 2. 2. We must *lift our voice for understanding*, lift it up to heaven; from thence these good and perfect gifts must be expected, Jam. 1. 17. Job, 38. 34. We must *give our voice to understanding*, so the word is; speak for it, vote for it; submit the tongue to the command of wisdom; we must consecrate our voice to it; having applied our heart to it, we must employ our voice in seeking for it. Solomon could write *probatum est*, upon this method; he prayed for wisdom, and so obtained it.

3. We must be willing to take pains; (v. 4.) we must *seek it as silver*, preferring it far before all the wealth of this world, and labouring in search of it as those who dig in the mines, who undergo great toil, and run great hazards, with indefatigable industry and invincible constancy and resolution, in pursuit of the ore; or as those who will be rich, rise up early, and sit up late, and turn every stone to get money, and fill their treasures. Thus diligent must we be in the use of the means of knowledge, showing on to know the Lord.

II. What success we may hope for in the use of these means; our labour shall not be in vain; for, 1. We shall know how to maintain our acquaintance and communion with God; "*Thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord*"; (v. 5.) thou shalt know how to worship him aright, shalt be led into the meaning and mystery of every ordinance, and be enabled to answer the end of its institution." *Thou shalt find the knowledge of God*, which is necessary to our fearing him aright. It concerns us to understand how much it is our interest to know God, and to evidence it by agreeable affections toward him, and adorations of him. 2. We shall know how to carry it aright towards all men; (v. 9.) "*Thou shalt understand*, by the word of God, *righteousness, and judgment, and equity*; shalt learn those principles of justice, and charity, and fair dealing, which shall guide and govern thee in the whole course of thy conversation, shall make thee fit for every relation, every business, and faithful to every trust. It shall give thee not only a right notion of justice, but a disposition to practise it, and to render to all their due; for those that do not do justly, do not rightly understand it." This will lead them into *every good path*, for the scripture will *make the man of God perfect*. Note, Those have the best knowledge who know their duty, Ps. 111. 10.

III. What ground we have to hope for this success in our pursuits of wisdom; we must take our encouragement herein from God only, v. 6. . 8.

1. God has wisdom to bestow, v. 6. *The Lord* not only is wise himself, but he *gives wisdom*, and that is more than the wisest men in the world can do, for it is God's prerogative to open the understanding. All the wisdom that is in any creature is his gift, his free gift, and he gives it liberally, (Jam. 1. 5.) has given it to many, and is still giving it; to him, therefore, let us apply ourselves for it.

2. He has blessed the world with a revelation of his will. *Out of his mouth*, by the law and the prophets, by the written word, and by his ministers, both which are his mouth to the childer of men, *come knowledge and understanding*; such a discovery of truth and good, as, if we admit and receive the impressions of it, will make us truly knowing and intelligent. It is both an engagement, and an encouragement, to search after wisdom, that we have the scriptures to search, in which we may find it if we seek it diligently.

3. He has particularly provided that good men, who are sincerely disposed to do his will, shall have that *knowledge and understanding* which are necessary for them, John, 7. 17. Let them seek, and they shall find it, let them ask, and it shall be given them, v. 7, 8. Observe here, (1.) Who they are that are thus favoured. They are *the righteous*, on whom the image of God is renewed, which consists in righteousness; and those who *walk uprightly*, who are honest in their dealings both with God and man, and make conscience of doing their duty as far as they know it. They are *his saints*, devoted to his honour, and set apart for his service. (2.) What it is that is provided for them. [1.] Instruction. The means of wisdom are given to all, but wisdom itself, *sound wisdom*, is laid up for *the righteous*, laid up in Christ their Head, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and who is made of God to us Wisdom. The same that is the Spirit of revelation in the word, is a Spirit of wisdom in the souls of them that are sanctified; that wisdom of the prudent, which is to understand his way; and it is sound wisdom, its foundations firm, its principles solid, and its products of lasting advantage. [2.] Satisfaction. Some read it, *He lays up substance for the righteous*, not only substantial knowledge, but substantial happiness and comfort Prov. 8. 21. Riches are things that are not, and they that have them only fancy themselves happy; but what is laid up, in the promises and in heaven, for the righteous, will make them truly, thoroughly, and eternally, happy. [3.] Protection. Even they who *walk uprightly* may be brought into danger, for the trial of their faith, but God is, and will be, a *Buckler to them*, so that nothing that happens to them, shall do them any real hurt, or possess them with any terrific apprehensions; they are safe, and they shall think themselves so. *Fear not, Abraham, I am thy Shield*. It is their way, the paths of judgment in which they walk, that the Lord

knows, and owns, and takes care of. [4.] Grace to persevere to the end. If we depend upon God, and seek to him for wisdom, he will uphold us in our integrity, will enable us to *keep the paths of judgment*, however we may be tempted to turn aside out of them; for he *preserves the way of his saints*, that it be not perverted, and so preserves them in it safe and blameless to his heavenly kingdom. The assurances God has given us of his grace, if duly improved, will excite and quicken our endeavours in doing our duty. *Work out your salvation, for God works in you.*

10. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; 11. Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: 12. To deliver thee from the way of the *evil man*, from the man that speaketh froward things; 13. Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; 14. Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; 15. Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths: 16. To deliver thee from the strange woman, *even* from the stranger which flattereth with her words; 17. Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. 18. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. 19. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life. 20. That thou mayest walk in the way of good *men*, and keep the paths of the righteous. 21. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. 22. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.

The scope of these verses is to shew, 1. What great advantage true wisdom will be of to us; it will keep us from the paths of sin, which lead to ruin, and will therein do us a greater kindness than if it enriched us with all the wealth of the world. 2. What good use we should make of the wisdom God gives us; we must use it for our own guidance in the paths of virtue, and for the arming of us against temptations of every kind. 3. By what rules we may try ourselves, whether we have this wisdom or no; this tree will be known by its fruits; if we be truly wise, it will appear by our care to avoid all evil company and evil practices.

This wisdom will be of use to us,

I. For our preservation from evil, from the evil of sin, and consequently from the evil of trouble that attends it. In general, (v. 10, 11.) "When wisdom has entire possession of thee, it will *keep thee*." And when has it an entire possession of us? 1. When it has dominion over us; when it not only fills the head with notions, but *enters into the heart*, and has a commanding power and influence upon that; when it is upon the throne there, and gives law to the affections and passions; when it *enters into the heart*, as the leaven into the dough, to diffuse its relish there, and to change it into its own image; then it is likely to do us good. 2. When we have delight in it: when knowledge becomes *pleasant to the soul*; "When thou beginnest to relish it as the most agreeable entertainment, and art subject to its rules, of choice, and with satisfaction; when thou callest the practice of virtue, not a *slavery* and a *task*, but *liberty* and *pleasure*, and a life of serious godliness the most comfortable life a man can live in this world, then thou wilt find the benefit of it." Though its restraints should be in some respects unpleasant to the *body*, yet even those must be pleasant to the *soul*. When it is come to this, with us, *discretion shall preserve* us, and keep us. God keeps *the way of his saints*, (v. 8.) by giving them discretion to keep out of harm's way, to keep themselves, that the wicked one touch them not. Note, A principle of grace reigning in the heart, will be a powerful preservative both

against corruptions within and temptations without, Eccl. 9. 16, 18. More particularly, wisdom will preserve us,

(1.) From men of corrupt principles; atheistical, profane, men, who make it their business to debauch young men's judgments, and instil into their minds prejudices against religion, and arguments for vice. "It will *deliver thee from the way of the evil man*; (v. 12.) and a blessed deliverance it will be, as from the very jaws of death, *from the way* in which he walks, and in which he would persuade thee to walk." The enemy is spoken of as one, (v. 12.) an *evil man*, but afterward as many; (v. 13.) there is a club, a gang, of them, that are in confederacy against religion, and join hand in hand for the support of the Devil's kingdom and the interests of it.

[1.] They have a spirit of contradiction to that which is good; they *speak froward things*; they say all they can against religion, both to shew their own enmity to it, and to dissuade others from it. They are advocates for Satan, they plead for Baal, and *pervert the right ways of the Lord*. How peevishly will profane wits argue for sin; and with what frowardness will they carp at the word of God! Wisdom will keep us either from conversing with such men, or at least from being insuared by them.

[2.] They are themselves apostates from that which is good, and such are commonly the most malicious and dangerous enemies religion has; witness Julian; (v. 13.) *They leave the paths of uprightness*, which they were trained up in, and had set out in; shake off the influences of their education, and break off the thread of their hopeful beginnings, *to walk in the ways of darkness*, in those wicked ways which hate the light, in which men are led blindfold by ignorance and error, and which lead men into utter darkness. The ways of sin are ways of darkness, uncomfortable and unsafe; what fools are they that leave the plain, pleasant, lightsome, paths of uprightness, to walk in those ways! Ps. 82. 5. 1 John, 2. 11.

[3.] They take a pleasure in sin; both in committing it themselves, and in seeing others commit it; (v. 14.) *They rejoice* in an opportunity to *do evil*, and in the accomplishment and success of any wicked project. It is sport to a fool to do mischief; nor is any sight more grateful to them, than to see *the frowardness of the wicked*; to see those that are hopeful drawn into the ways of sin, and then to see them hardened and confirmed in those ways. They are pleased if they can discern that the Devil's kingdom gets ground; (see Rom. 1. 32.) such a height of impiety are they arrived at.

[4.] They are resolute in sin; (v. 15.) *Their ways are crooked*, a great many windings and turnings to escape the pursuit of their convictions, and break the force of them; some sly excuse, some subtle evasion or other, their deceitful hearts furnish them with, for the strengthening of their hands in their wickedness; and, in the crooked mazes of that labyrinth, they secure themselves from the arrests of God's word and their own consciences; for they are *froward in their paths*, they are resolved to go on in them, whatever is said against it. Every wise man will shun the company of such as these.

(2.) From women of corrupt practices. The former lead to spiritual wickednesses, the lusts of the unsanctified mind; these lead to *fleshly lusts*, which defile the body, that living temple, but withal *war against the soul*. The adulteress is here called *the strange woman*, because no man that has any wisdom or goodness in him, will have any acquaintance with her; she is to be shunned by every Israelite, as if she were a heathen, and a stranger to that sacred commonwealth. A *strange woman* indeed! utterly estranged from all principles of reason, virtue, and honour.

It is a great mercy to be delivered from the allurements of the adulteress, considering,

[1.] How false she is. Who will have any dealings with those that are made up of treachery? She is a *strange woman*; for, *First*, She is false to him whom she entices; she speaks fair, tells him how much she admires him above any man, and what a kindness she has for him; but she *flatters with her words*, she has no true affection for him, nor any desire of his welfare, any more than Delilah had of Samson's; all she designs, is, to pick his pocket, and gratify a base lust of her own. *Secondly*, She is false to her husband,

and violates the sacred obligation she lies under to him; he was *the guide of her youth*, by marrying him she chose him to be so, and submitted herself to his conduct, with a promise to attend him only, and forsake all other; but she has *forsaken* him, and therefore it cannot be thought that she should be faithful to any one else; and whoever entertains her is partaker with her in her falsehood. *Thirdly*, She is false to God himself; she *forgets the covenant of her God*, the marriage-covenant, (v. 17.) to which God is not only a Witness, but a Party, for he having instituted the ordinance, both sides vow to him to be true to each other. It is not her husband only that she sins against, but her God, who *therefore will judge whoremongers and adulterers*, because they despise the oath, and break the covenant, Ezek. 17. 18. Mal. 2. 14.

[2.] How fatal it will prove to those that fall in league with her, v. 18, 19. Let the sufferings of others be our warnings; take heed of the sin of whoredom; for, *First*, The ruin of those who are guilty of it is certain and unavoidable, if they do not repent. It is a sin that has a direct tendency to the killing of the soul, the extinguishing of all good affections and dispositions in it, and the exposing of it to the wrath and curse of God, and the sword of his justice. They that live in forbidden pleasures are dead while they live. Let discretion preserve every man, not only from the evil woman, but from the evil house, for the *house inclines to death*, it is in the road that leads directly to eternal death; and *her paths unto Rephaim*, to the giants, so some read it, the sinners of the old world, who, living in luxury and excess of riot, were cut down out of time, and their foundation overthrown with a flood. Our Lord Jesus deters us from sinful pleasures, with the consideration of everlasting torments which follow them, *where the worm dies not, nor is the fire quenched*. See Matth. 5. 28, 29. *Secondly*, Their repentance and recovery are extremely hazardous; none, or next to none, *that go unto her, return again*. It is very rare that any who are caught in this snare of the Devil recover themselves, so much is the heart hardened, and the mind blinded, by the deceitfulness of this sin. Having once lost their *hold of the paths of life*, they know not how to take hold of them again, but are perfectly besotted and bewitched with those base lusts.

Many learned interpreters think that this caution against the *strange woman*, beside the literal sense, is to be understood figuratively, as a caution, 1. Against idolatry, which is spiritual whoredom. Wisdom will keep thee from all familiarity with the worshippers of images, and all inclination to join with them, which had for many ages been of such pernicious consequence to Israel, and proved so to Solomon himself. 2. Against the debauching of the intellectual powers and faculties of the soul, by the lusts and appetites of the body. Wisdom will keep thee from being captivated by the carnal mind, and from subjecting the spirit to the dominion of the flesh, that notorious adulteress which *forsakes its guide*, violates the *covenant of our God*, which *inclines to death*, and which, when it has got an undisturbed dominion, makes the case of the soul desperate.

II. This wisdom will be of use to guide and direct us in that which is good; (v. 20.) *That thou mayest walk in the way of good men*. We must therefore avoid the way of the *evil man*, and the *strange woman*, that we may walk in good ways; we must *therefore cease to do evil*, that we may *learn to do well*. Note, 1. There is a way which is peculiarly the way of good men, the way in which good men, as such, and as far as they have really been such, have always walked. 2. It will be our wisdom to walk in that way, to ask for the good old way, and walk therein, Jer. 6. 13. Heb. 6. 12.—12. 1. And we must not only walk in that way while, but we must keep it, keep in it, and never turn aside out of it: *The paths of the righteous* are the paths of life, which all that are wise, having taken hold of, will keep their hold of; "That thou mayest imitate those excellent persons, the patriarchs and prophets, (so Bishop Patrick paraphrases it,) and be preserved *in the paths of those righteous men* who followed after them."

We must not only choose our way in general, by the good examples of the saints, but must also take directions from them in the choice of our particular paths; observe the track, and go forth by the footsteps of the flock.

Two reasons are here given why we should thus choose.

(1.) Because men's integrity will be their establishment, v. 21. It will be the establishment, [1.] Of their persons; *The upright shall dwell in the land*, peaceably and quietly, as long as they live; and their uprightness will contribute to it, as it settles their minds, guides their counsels, gains them the good-will of their neighbours, and entitles them to God's special favour. [2.] Of their families; *The perfect, in their posterity, shall remain in it*. They shall dwell and remain for ever in the heavenly Canaan, of which the earthly one was but a type.

(2.) Because men's iniquity will be their destruction, v. 22. See what comes of the *wicked*, who choose the way of the *evil man*; they *shall be cut off*, not only from heaven hereafter, and all hopes of that, but *from the earth* now, on which they set their affections, and in which they lay up their treasure. They think to take root in it, but they and their families *shall be rooted out of it*, in judgment to them, but in mercy to the earth. There is a day coming, which *shall leave them neither root nor branch*, Mal. 4. 1. Let that wisdom then *enter into our hearts*, and be *pleasant to our souls*, which will keep us out of a way that will end thus.

CHAP. III.

This chapter is one of the most excellent in all this book; both for argument to persuade us to be religious, and for direction therein. I. We must be constant to our duty, because that is the way to be happy, v. 1..4. II. We must live a life of dependence upon God, because that is the way to be safe, v. 5. III. We must keep up the fear of God, because that is the way to be healthful, v. 7, 8. IV. We must serve God with our estates, because that is the way to be rich, v. 9, 10. V. We must bear afflictions well, because that is the way to get good by them, v. 11, 12. VI. We must take pains to obtain wisdom, because that is the way to gain her, and to gain by her, v. 13..20. VII. We must always govern ourselves by the rules of wisdom, of right reason and religion, because that is the way to be always easy, v. 21..26. VIII. We must do all the good we can, and no hurt, to our neighbours, because, according as men are just or unjust, charitable or uncharitable, humble or haughty, accordingly they shall receive of God, v. 27..35. From all which it appears what a tendency religion has to make men both blessed and blessings.

1. **M**Y son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: 2. For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. 3. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: 4. So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. 5. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

We are here taught to live a life of communion with God; and without controversy great is this mystery of godliness, and of great consequence to us, and, as is here shewed, will be of unspeakable advantage.

I. We must have a continual regard to God's precepts, v. 1, 2.

We must, 1. Fix God's law, and his commandments, as our rule, by which we will in every thing be ruled, and to which we will yield obedience. 2. We must acquaint ourselves with them; for we cannot be said to forget that which we never knew. 3. We must remember them so that they may be ready to us whenever we have occasion to use them. 4. Our wills and affections must be subject to them, and must in every thing conform to them. Not only our heads, but our hearts, must *keep God's commandments*; in them, as in the ark of the testimony, both the tables of the law must be deposited.

To encourage us to submit ourselves to all the restraints and injunctions of the divine law, we are assured, v. 2. that it is the certain way to long life and prosperity. (1.) It is the way to be long-lived. God's commandments *shall add to us length of days*; to a good useful life on earth, they shall add an eternal life in heaven, *length of days for ever and ever*, Ps. 21. 4. God shall

be our Life and the Length of our days, and that will be indeed long life, with an addition. But, because length of days may possibly become a burthen and a trouble, it is promised, (2.) That it shall prove the way to be easy too, so that even the days of old age shall not be evil days, but days in which thou shalt have pleasure; *Peace shall they be continually adding to thee.* As grace increases, peace shall; and of the increase of Christ's government and peace, in the heart as well as in the world, *there shall be no end.* Great and growing peace have they that love the law.

II. We must have a continual regard to God's promises, which go along with his precepts, and are to be received, and retained, with them; (v. 3.) "*Let not mercy and truth forsake thee* : God's mercy in promising, and his truth in performing; do not forfeit those, but live up to them, and preserve thine interest in them; do not forget these, but live upon them, and take the comfort of them: bind them about thy neck, as the most graceful ornament." It is the greatest honour we are capable of in this world, to have an interest in the mercy and truth of God. "*Write them upon the table of thine heart*, as dear to thee, thy portion, and most delightful entertainment; take a pleasure in applying them, and thinking them over." Or it may be meant of the mercy and truth which are our duty; piety and sincerity; charity toward men, fidelity toward God. Let these be fixed and commanding principles in thee.

To encourage us to do this, we are assured (v. 4.) that this is the way to recommend ourselves both to our Creator and fellow-creatures; *So shalt thou find favour, and good understanding.* 1. A good man seeks the favour of God, in the first place, is ambitious of the honour of being accepted of the Lord, and he shall find that favour, and with it a good understanding; God will make the best of him, and put a favourable construction upon what he says and does. He shall be owned as one of Wisdom's children, and shall have praise with God, as one having that *good understanding* which is ascribed to all them that do his commandments. 2. He wishes to have favour with men also, (as Christ had, Luke, 2. 52.) to be accepted of the multitude of his brethren; (Esth. 10. 3.) and that he shall have, they shall understand him aright, and in his dealings with them he shall appear to be prudent, shall act intelligently and with discretion. *He shall have good success*, so some translate it; the common effect of good understanding.

III. We must have a continual regard to God's providence, must own and depend upon it in all our affairs, both by faith and prayer.

1. By faith. We must repose an entire confidence in the wisdom, power, and goodness, of God, assuring ourselves of the extent of his providence to all the creatures and all their actions. We must therefore *trust in the Lord with all our hearts*; (v. 5.) we must believe that he is able to do what he will, wise to do what is best, and good, according to his promise, to do what is best for us, if we love him and serve him. We must, with an entire submission and satisfaction, depend upon him to perform all things for us, and not *lean to our own understanding*; as if we could, by any forecast of our own, without God, help ourselves, and bring our affairs to a good issue. Those who know themselves, cannot but find their own understanding to be a broken reed, which, if they lean to, it will certainly fail them. In all our conduct, we must be diffident of our own judgment, and confident of God's wisdom, power, and goodness, and therefore must follow Providence, and not force it. That often proves best which was least our own doing.

2. By prayer; (v. 6.) *In all thy ways acknowledge God.* We must not only in our judgment believe that there is an over-ruling hand of God, ordering and disposing of us and all our affairs, but we must solemnly own it, and address ourselves to him accordingly. We must ask his leave, and not design any thing but what we are sure is lawful. We must ask his advice, and beg direction from him, not only when the case is difficult, (when we know not what to do, no thanks to us that we have our eyes up to him,) but in every case, be it ever so plain. We must ask success of him, as those who know the race is not to the swift; we must refer ourselves to him, as one from whom our judgment proceeds, and patiently, and with a holy indifference, wait his award. *In all our ways* that prove direct, and fair, and pleasant, in which we gain our point to our satisfaction, we must acknowledge God with

thankfulness. *In all our ways* that prove cross and uncomfortable; and that are hedged up with horns, we must acknowledge God with submission. Our eye must be ever toward God, to him we must, in every thing, make our requests known, as Jephthah uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh, Judg. 11. 11.

For our encouragement to do this, it is promised, "*He shall direct thy paths* ; so that thy way shall be safe and good, and the issue happy at last." Note, They that put themselves under a divine guidance, shall always have the benefit of it. God will give them that wisdom which is profitable to direct, so that they shall not turn aside into the by-paths of sin, and then will himself so wisely order the event, that it shall be to their mind, or (which is equivalent) for their good. They that faithfully follow the pillar of cloud and fire, shall find, that, though it may lead them about, it leads them the right way, and will bring them to Canaan at last.

7. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. 8. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. 9. Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: 10. So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine. 11. My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: 12. For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

We have here before us three exhortations, each of them enforced with a good reason.

I. We must live in a humble and dutiful subjection to God and his government; (v. 7.) "*Fear the Lord*, as your sovereign Lord and Master; be ruled in every thing by your religion, and subject to the divine will. This must be, 1. A humble subjection; *Be not wise in thine own eyes.* Note, There is not a greater enemy to the power of religion, and the fear of God in the heart, than conceitedness of our own wisdom. They that have an opinion of their own sufficiency, think it below them, and a disparagement to them, to take their measures from, much more to hamper themselves with, religion's rules. 2. A dutiful subjection; *Fear the Lord, and depart from evil*; take heed of doing any thing to offend him, and to forfeit his care. To *fear the Lord*, so as to depart from evil, is true wisdom and understanding; (Job, 28. 28.) those that have it are truly wise, but self-denyingly so, and not wise in their own eyes.

For our encouragement thus to live in the fear of God, it is here promised (v. 8.) that it shall be as serviceable even to the outward man as our necessary food; it will be nourishing, *it shall be health to thy navel*; it will be strengthening, *it shall be marrow to thy bones*. The prudence, temperance, and sobriety, the calmness and composure of mind, and the good government of the appetites and passions, which religion teaches, tend very much not only to the health of the soul, but to a good habit of body, which is very desirable, and without which our other enjoyments in this world are insipid. Envy is the rottenness of the bones, the sorrow of the world dries them, but hope and joy in God are marrow to them.

II. We must make a good use of our estates, and that is the way to increase them, v. 9, 10. Here is,

1. A precept which makes it our duty to serve God with our estates; *Honour the Lord with thy substance.* It is the end of our creation and redemption to honour God, to be to him for a name and a praise; we are no other way capable of serving him than in his honour. His honour we must shew forth, and the honour we have for him. We must honour him, not only with our bodies and spirits, which are his, but with our estates too, for they also are his; we and all our appertinances must be devoted to his glory. Worldly wealth is but poor substance, yet, such as it is, we must honour God with it, and then, if ever, it becomes substantial.

We must honour God, (1.) *With our increase.* Where riches increase, we are tempted to honour ourselves, (Deut. 8. 17.) and to set our hearts upon the world; (Ps. 62. 10.) but the more God gives us, the more we should study to honour him. It is meant of the increase of the earth, for we live upon annual products, to keep us in constant dependence on God. (2.) *With all our increase;* as God has prospered us in every thing, we must honour him. Our law will allow a prescription for a *modus decimandi*—a *modus of tithing*, but none *de non decimando*—for being excused from paying tithes. (3.) *With the first-fruits of all*, as Abel, Gen. 4. 4. This was the law, (Exod. 23. 19.) and the prophets, Mal. 3. 10. God, who is the first and best, must have the first and best of every thing; his right is prior to all other, and therefore he must be served first. Note, It is our duty to make our worldly estates serviceable to our religion; to use them, and the interest we have by them, for the promoting of religion; to do good to the poor with what we have, and abound in all works of piety and charity, *devising liberal things.*

2. A promise, which makes it our interest to serve God with our estates; it is the way to make a little much, and much more; it is the surest and safest method of thriving; *So shall thy barns be filled with plenty.* He does not say, thy *bags*, but, thy *barns*; not, thy *wardrobe* replenished, but, thy *presses*; God shall bless thee with an increase of that which is for use, not for shew or ornament; for spending and laying out, not for hoarding and laying up. They that do good with what they have, shall have more to do more good with. Note, If we make our worldly estates serviceable to our religion, we shall find our religion very serviceable to the prosperity of our worldly affairs. *Godliness has the promise of the life that now is*, and most of the comfort of it. We mistake, if we think that giving will undo us, and make us poor; no, giving for God's honour will make us rich, Hag. 2. 19. What we gave we have.

III. We must conduct ourselves aright under our afflictions, r. 11, 12. This the apostle quotes, (Heb. 12. 5.) and calls it *an exhortation*, which *speaks unto us as unto children*, with the authority and affection of a father. We are here in a world of troubles. Now observe,

1. What must be our care when we are in affliction; we must neither despise it, nor be weary of it. His exhortation before, was to those that are rich and in prosperity, here, to those that are poor and in adversity. (1.) We must not despise an affliction, be it ever so light and short, as if it were not worth taking notice of; or as if it were not sent on an errand, and therefore required no answer. We must not be stocks and stones, and Stoics, under our afflictions; insensible of them, hardening ourselves under them, and concluding we can easily get through them without God. (2.) We must not be weary of an affliction, be it ever so heavy and long, not *faint* under it, so the apostle renders it; not be dispirited, dispossessed of our own souls, or driven to despair, or to use any indirect means for our relief, and the redress of our grievances. We must not think that the affliction either presses harder, or continues longer, than is meet; nor conclude that deliverance will never come, because it does not come so soon as we expect it.

2. What will be our comfort when we are in affliction. (1.) That it is a divine correction; it is *the chastening of the Lord*; which, as it is a reason why we should submit to it, (for it is folly to contend with a God of incontestable sovereignty, and irresistible power,) so it is a reason why we should be satisfied in it; for we may be sure that a God of unspotted purity does us no wrong, and that a God of infinite goodness means us no hurt. It is from God, and therefore must not be despised; for a slight put upon the messenger, is an affront to him that sends him. It is from God, and therefore we must not be weary of it, for he knows our frame, both what we need, and what we can bear. (2.) That it is a fatherly correction; it comes not from his vindictive justice as a Judge, but his wise affection as a Father. The father corrects *the son whom he loves*, nay, and *because he loves him*, and desires he may be wise and good. He delights in that in his son, which is amiable and agreeable, and therefore corrects him for the prevention and cure of that which would be a deformity to him,

and an allay to his delight in him. Thus God hath said, *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten*, Rev. 3. 19. This is a great comfort to God's children under their afflictions, [1.] That they not only consist with, but flow from, covenant-love. [2.] That they are so far from doing them any real hurt, that, by the grace of God working with them, they do a great deal of good, and are happy means of their sanctification.

13. Happy is the man *that findeth wisdom*, and the man *that getteth understanding*. 14. For the merchandise of it *is better than the merchandise of silver*, and the gain thereof *than fine gold*. 15. She *is more precious than rubies*; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. 16. Length of days *is in her right hand*; and in her left hand *riches and honour*. 17. Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and all her paths *are* peace. 18. She *is* a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy *is every one* that retaineth her. 19. The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. 20. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

Solomon had pressed us earnestly to seek diligently for wisdom; (ch. 2. 1, &c.) and had assured us that we should succeed in our sincere and constant pursuits. But the question is, What shall we get by it when we have found it? Prospect of advantage is the spring and spur of industry; he therefore shews us how much it will be to our profit, laying this down for an unquestionable truth, *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom*, that true wisdom which consists in the knowledge and love of God, and an entire conformity to all the intentions of his truths, providences, and laws. Now observe,

1. What it is to *find wisdom*, so as to be made happy by it.

1. We must get it; he is the happy man, who, having found it, makes it his own, gets both an interest in it, and the possession of it; who *draws out understanding*; so the word is; (1.) Who derives it from God; having it not in himself, he draws it with the bucket of prayer from the Fountain of all wisdom, *who gives liberally*. (2.) Who takes pains for it, as he does who draws ore out of the mine; if it does not come easily, we must put the more strength to draw it. (3.) Who improves in it; who having some understanding, draws it out by growing in knowledge, and making five talents ten. (4.) Who does good with it; who draws out from the stock he has, as wine from the vessel, and communicates to others, for their instruction, *things new and old*. That is well got, and to good purpose, that is thus used to good purpose.

2. We must trade for it. We read here of the merchandise of wisdom; which intimates, (1.) That we must make it our business, and not a by-business; as the merchant bestows the main of his thoughts and time upon his merchandise. (2.) That we must venture all in it, as a stock in trade, and be willing to part with all for it. This is that pearl of great price, which, when we have found it, we must willingly sell all for the purchase of, Matth. 13. 45, 46. *Buy the truth*; (Prov. 23. 23.) he does not say at what rate, because we must buy it at any rate, rather than miss it.

3. We must lay hold on it, as we lay hold on a good bargain when it is offered us, which we do the more carefully, if there be danger of having it taken out of our hands. We must apprehend with all our might, and put forth our utmost vigour in the pursuit of it; lay hold on all occasions to improve in it, and catch at the least of its dictates.

4. We must retain it; it is not enough to lay hold on wisdom, but we must keep our hold, hold it fast, with a resolution never to let it go, but to persevere in the ways of wisdom to the end. We must *sustain it*, so some read it; must embrace it with all our might, as we do that which we would sustain. We must do all

we can to support the declining interests of religion in the places where we live.

11. What the happiness of those is who do find it.

1. It is a transcendent happiness, more than can be found in the wealth of this world, if we had ever so much of it, v. 14, 15. It is not only a surer, but a more gainful, merchandise to trade for wisdom, for Christ, and grace, and spiritual blessings, than for silver and gold, and rubies; suppose a man to have got these in abundance, nay, to have all the things he can desire of this world; and who is it that ever had that? (1.) All this would not purchase heavenly wisdom; no, it would *utterly be contemned*; it *cannot be gotten for gold*, Job, 28. 15, &c. (2.) All this would not counter-vail the want of heavenly wisdom, nor be the ransom of a soul lost by its own folly. (3.) All this would not make a man half so happy, no not in this world, as they are who have true wisdom, though they have none of all these things. (4.) Heavenly wisdom will procure that for us, and secure that to us, which silver, and gold, and rubies, will not be the purchase of.

2. It is a true happiness; for it is inclusive of, and equivalent to, all those things which are supposed to make men happy, v. 16, 17. Wisdom is here represented as a bright and bountiful queen, reaching forth gifts to her faithful and loving subjects, and offering them to all that will submit to her government.

(1.) Is length of days a blessing? Yes, the most valuable; life includes all good, and therefore she offers that in her right hand. Religion puts us into the best methods of prolonging life, entitles us to the promises of it, and though our days on earth should be no more than our neighbour's, yet it will secure to us everlasting life in a better world.

(2.) Are riches and honour accounted blessings? They are so, and them she reaches out with *her left hand*. For as she is ready to embrace those that submit to her with both arms, so she is ready to give out to them with both hands. They shall have the wealth of this world, as far as Infinite Wisdom sees good for them; the true riches, however, by which men are rich toward God, are secured to them; nor is there any honour, by birth or preferment, comparable to that which attends religion; it makes the *righteous more excellent than his neighbour*, recommends men to God, commands respect and veneration with all the sober part of mankind, and will in the other world make those that are now buried in obscurity to *shine forth as the sun*.

(3.) Is pleasure courted as much as any thing? It is so, and it is certain that true piety has in it the greatest true pleasure. *Her ways are ways of pleasantness*; the ways in which she has directed us to talk, are such as we shall find abundance of delight and satisfaction in. All the enjoyments and entertainments of sense are not comparable to the pleasure which gracious souls have in communion with God and doing good. That which is the only right way to bring us to our journey's end, we must walk in, fair or foul, pleasant or unpleasant; but the way of religion, as it is the right way, so it is a pleasant way, it is smooth and clean, and strewed with roses. *All her paths are peace*. There is not only peace in the end, but peace in the way; not only in the way of religion in general, but in the particular paths of that way, in all her paths, all the several acts, instances, and duties, of it. One does not imbitter what the other sweetens, as it is with the allays of this world; but they are all peace, not only sweet, but safe; the saints enter into peace on this side heaven, and enjoy a present sabbatism.

3. It is the happiness of paradise; (v. 18.) *She is a tree of life*. True grace is that to the soul which the *tree of life* would have been, from which our first parents were shut out for eating of the forbidden tree; it is a seed of immortality, a *well of living waters springing up to life eternal*. It is an earnest of the New Jerusalem, in the midst of which is the *tree of life*, Rev. 22. 2.—2. 7. They that feed and feast on this heavenly wisdom, shall not only be cured by it of every fatal malady, but shall find an antidote against age and death; they shall *eat and live for ever*.

4. It is a participation of the happiness of God himself, for wisdom is his everlasting glory and blessedness, v. 19, 20. *This should make us in love with the wisdom and understanding which*

God gives, that the Lord by wisdom founded the earth, so that it cannot be removed, nor can ever fail of answering all the ends of its creation, to which it is admirably and unexceptionably fitted; *by understanding he has likewise established the heavens*, and directed all the motions of them in the best manner. The heavenly bodies are vast, yet there is no flaw in them; numerous, yet no disorder in them; the motion rapid, yet no wear or tear; the depths of the sea are broken up, and thence come the waters beneath the firmament, and the clouds drop down the dews, the waters from above the firmament; and all this by the divine wisdom and knowledge; therefore *happy is the man that finds wisdom*; for he will thereby be *thoroughly furnished for every good word and work*. Christ is that Wisdom by whom the worlds were made, and still consist; happy therefore are they to whom he is *made of God Wisdom*, for he has wherewithal to make good all the foregoing promises of long life, riches, and honour; for all the wealth of heaven, earth, and seas, is his.

21. My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: 22. So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. 23. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. 24. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. 25. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. 26. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.

Solomon, having pronounced them happy, who not only lay hold on wisdom, but retain her, here exhorts us therefore to retain her, assuring us that we ourselves shall have the comfort of doing so.

I. The exhortation is, to have religion's rules always in view, and always at heart, v. 21. 1. To have them always in view; "*My son, let them not depart from thine eyes*; let not thine eyes ever depart from them to wander after vanity. Have them always in mind, and do not forget them; be ever and anon thinking of them, and conversing with them, and never imagine that thou hast looked upon them long enough, and that it is time now to lay them by; but, as long as thou livest, keep up, and cultivate, thine acquaintance with them. He who learns to write, must always have his eye upon his copy, and not let that be out of his sight; and to the words of wisdom must *they*, in like manner, have a constant respect, who will walk circumspectly. 2. To have them always at heart; for it is in that treasury, the hidden man of the heart, that we must *keep sound wisdom and discretion*, keep to the principles of it, and keep in the ways of it. It is wealth that is worth keeping.

II. The argument to enforce this exhortation, is taken from the unspeakable advantage which wisdom, thus kept, will be of to us.

1. In respect of strength and satisfaction; "*It will be life to thy soul*"; (v. 22.) it will quicken thee to thy duty, when thou beginnest to be slothful and remiss, it will revive thee under thy troubles, when thou beginnest to droop and despond. It will be thy spiritual life, an earnest of life eternal." Life to the soul is life indeed.

2. In respect of honour and reputation; It shall be *grace to thy neck*, as a chain of gold, or a jewel. *Grace to thy jaws*, so the word is; grateful to thy taste and relish, so some; it shall infuse *grace unto all thou sayest*, so others; shall furnish thee with acceptable words, which shall gain thee credit.

3. In respect of safety and security; this he insists upon in four verses, the scope of which is to shew that the *effect of righteousness*, (which is the same with wisdom here) is *quietness and assurance for ever*, Isa. 32. 17. Good people are taken under God's

special protection, and therein they may have an entire satisfaction. They are safe, and may be easy,

(1.) In their motions by day, v. 23. If our religion be our companion, it will be our convoy; *Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely*; the natural life, and all that belongs to it, shall be under the protection of God's providence; the spiritual life, and all its interests, under the protection of his grace, so that thou shalt be kept from falling into sin or trouble." Wisdom will direct us into, and keep us in, the safe way, as far as may be from temptation, and will enable us to walk in it with a holy security; the way of duty is the way of safety. "We are in danger of falling, but wisdom will keep thee, that *thy foot shall not stumble* at those things which are an offence and overthrow to many, but which thou shalt know how to get over."

(2.) In their rest by night, v. 24. In our retirements, we lie exposed, and are most subject to frights; "But keep up communion with God, and keep a good conscience, and then, *when thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid* of fire, or thieves, or spectres, or any of the terrors of darkness, knowing that when we and all our friends are asleep, yet He that keeps Israel and every true-born Israelite, neither slumbers nor sleeps; and to him thou hast committed thyself, and taken shelter under the shadow of his wings. *Thou shalt lie down*, and not need to sit up to keep guard; having lain down, thou shalt sleep, and not have thine eyes held waking by care and fear; and *thy sleep shall be sweet* and refreshing to thee, being not disturbed by any alarms from without or from within," Ps. 4. 8.—116. 7. The way to have a good night, is, to keep a good conscience; and the sleep, as of the labouring man, so of the wise and godly man, is sweet.

(3.) In their greatest straits and dangers. Integrity and uprightness will preserve us, so that we need *not be afraid of sudden fear*, v. 25. The harms that surprise us unthought of, giving us no time to arm ourselves by consideration, are most likely to put us into confusion. But let not the wise and good man forget himself, and then he will not give way to any fear that has torment, be the alarm ever so sudden. Let him not fear the *desolation of the wicked, when it comes*; [1.] The desolation which the wicked ones make of religion and the religious; though it comes, and seems to be just at the door, yet be not afraid of it; for though God may make use of the wicked as instruments of his people's correction, yet he will never suffer them to be the authors of their desolation. Or rather, [2.] The desolation which wicked men will be brought into in a moment. It will come, and timorous saints may be apprehensive that they shall be involved in it; but let this be their comfort, that though judgments lay waste generally, at least promiscuously, yet God knows who are his, and how to separate between the precious and the vile. Therefore be not afraid of that which appears most formidable, for (v. 26.) "*The Lord shall be not only thy Protector to keep thee safe, but thy Confidence to keep thee secure, so that thy foot shall not be taken* by thine enemies, nor insured by thine own fears." God has engaged to keep the feet of his saints.

27. Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. 28. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. 29. Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. 30. Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm. 31. Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways. 32. For the froward is abomination to the Lord: but his secret is with the righteous. 33. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. 34. Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto

the lowly. 35. The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools.

True wisdom consists in the due discharge of our duty toward man, as well as toward God, in honesty as well as piety, and therefore we have here divers excellent precepts of wisdom, which relate to our neighbour.

I. We must render to all their due, both in justice and charity; and not delay to do it; (v. 27, 28.) "*Withhold not good from them to whom it is due*, (either for want of love to them, or through too much love to thy money,) *when it is in the power of thine hand to do it*, for if it be not, it cannot be expected; but it was thy great fault, if thou didst, by thy extravagancies, disable thyself to do justly, and shew mercy, and it ought to be the greatest of thy griefs, if God had disabled thee; not so much that thou art straitened in thy own comforts and conveniencies, as that thou hast not wherewithal to give to those to whom it is due." *Withhold it not*; this implies that it is called for and expected, but that the hand is drawn in, and the *bowels of compassion are shut up*. We must not hinder others from doing it, nor be ourselves backward to it. "If thou hast it by thee to-day, hast it in the power of thine hand, say not to thy neighbour, *Go thy way for this time*, and come at a more convenient season, and I will then see what will be done; *to-morrow I will give*; whereas thou art not sure that thou shalt live till to-morrow, or that to-morrow thou shalt have it by thee; be not thus loath to part with thy money upon a good account; make not excuses to shift off a duty that must be done; nor delight to keep thy neighbour in pain and in suspense, or to shew the authority which the giver has over the beggar; but readily and cheerfully, and from a principle of conscience toward God, give good to those to whom it is due;" to the lords and owners of it, so the word is, to those who, upon any account, are entitled to it. This requires us, 1. To pay our just debts, without fraud, covin, or delay. 2. To give wages to those that have earned it. 3. To provide for our relations, and those that have dependence on us, for to them it is due. 4. To render dues both to church and state, magistrates and ministers. 5. To be ready to all acts of friendship and humanity, and in every thing to be neighbourly; for these are things that are due by the law of doing as we would be done by. 6. To be charitable to the poor and necessitous; if others want the necessary supports of life, and we have wherewithal to supply them, we must look upon it as due to them, and not withhold it; alms are called *righteousness*, because they are a debt to the poor; and a debt which we must not defer to pay; *Bis dat, qui cito dat—He gives twice, who gives speedily*.

II. We must never design any hurt or harm to any body; (v. 29.) "*Devise not evil against thy neighbour*; do not contrive how to do him an ill turn undiscovered, to prejudice him in his body, goods, or good name; and the rather, because *he dwells securely by thee*, and, having given thee no provocation, entertains no jealousy or suspicion of thee, and therefore is off his guard." It is against the laws both of honour and friendship to do a man an ill turn, and give him no warning; *Cursed be he that smites his neighbour secretly*. It is a most base ungrateful thing, if our neighbours have a good opinion of us, that we will do them no harm, and we thence take advantage to cheat and injure them.

III. We must not be quarrelsome and litigious; (v. 30.) "*Do not strive with a man without cause*; contend not for that which thou hast no title to; resent not that as a provocation, which peradventure was but an oversight. Never trouble thy neighbour with frivolous complaints and accusations, or vexatious law-suits, when either there is no harm done thee, or none worth speaking of, or thou mightest right thyself in a friendly way;" law must be the last refuge; for it is not only our duty, but our interest, as much as in us lies, *to live peaceably with all men*. When accounts are balanced, it will be found there is little got by striving.

IV. We must not envy the prosperity of evil-doers, v. 31. This caution is the same with that which is so much insisted on, Ps. 37. "*Envy not the oppressor*; though he be rich and great, though he live in ease and pleasure, and make all about him to stand in awe of him, yet do not think him a happy man, nor wish thyself in

his condition. *Choose none of his ways*, do not imitate him, nor take the courses he takes to enrich himself. Never think of doing as he does, though thou wert sure to get by it all that he has, for it would be dearly bought.

Now, to shew what little reason saints have to envy sinners, Solomon here, in the four last verses of the chapter, compares the condition of sinners and saints together, (as his father David had done, Ps. 37.) sets the one over-against the other, that we may see how happy the saints are, though they be *oppressed*, and how miserable the wicked are, though they be *oppressors*. Men are to be judged of as they stand with God, and as he judges of them, not as they stand in the world's books; those are in the right who are of God's mind; and, if we be of his mind, we shall see, whatever pretence one sinner may have to envy another, saints are so happy themselves, that they have no reason at all to envy any sinner, though his condition be ever so prosperous. For,

1. Sinners are hated of God, but saints are loved, v. 32. The forward sinners, who are continually going from-ward him, whose lives are a perverse contradiction to his will, they are *abomination to the Lord*; He, that hates nothing that he has made, abhors those who have thus marred themselves; they are not only abominable in his sight, but an abomination; the righteous therefore have no reason to envy them, for they have his secret with them; they are his favourites, he has that communion with them which is a secret to the world, and in which they have a joy that a stranger does not intermeddle with; he communicates to them the secret tokens of his love; his covenant is with them; they know his mind, and the meanings and intentions of his providence, better than others can. *Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?*

2. Sinners are under the curse of God, they and their houses; saints are under his blessing, they and their habitation, v. 33. The wicked has a house, a strong and stately dwelling perhaps, but *the curse of the Lord is upon it, it is in it*, and though the affairs of the family may prosper, yet the very blessings are cursed, Mal. 2. 2. There is *leanness in the soul*, when the body is fed to the full, Ps. 106. 15. The curse may work silently and slowly; but it is as a fretting leprosy, it will consume the *timber thereof*, and the *stones thereof*, Zech. 5. 4. Hab. 2. 11. The just have a habitation, a poor cottage, (the word is used for sheep-cots,) a very mean dwelling; but God blesses it, he is continually blessing it, from the beginning of the year to the end of it. The curse or blessing of God is upon the house, according as the inhabitants are wicked or godly; and it is certain that a blessed family, though poor, has no reason to envy a cursed family, though rich.

3. God puts contempt upon sinners, but shews respect unto saints, v. 34. (1.) Those who *exalt themselves shall certainly be abased*; surely he scorns the scorners. Those who scorn to submit to the discipline of religion, scorn to take God's yoke upon them, scorn to be beholden to his grace, who scoff at godliness and godly people, and take a pleasure in bantering and exposing them, God will scorn them, and lay them open to scorn before all the world: he despises their impotent malice, *sits in heaven and laughs at them*, Ps. 2. 4. He retaliates upon them; (Ps. 18. 26.) he *resists the proud*. (2.) Those who *humble themselves shall be exalted*, for he gives grace to the lowly; he works that in them which puts honour upon them, and for which they are *accepted of God, and approved of men*. Those who patiently bear contempt from scornful men shall have respect from God and all good men, and then they have no reason to envy the scorners, or to choose their ways.

4. The end of sinners will be everlasting shame, the end of saints endless honour, v. 35. (1.) Saints are wise men, and act wisely for themselves; for though their religion now wraps them up in obscurity, and lays them open to reproach, yet they are sure to inherit glory at last, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; they shall have it, and have it by inheritance, the *sweetest and surest tenure*; God gives them grace, (v. 34.) and therefore they shall inherit glory, for grace is glory, 2 Cor. 3. 18. It is glory begun, the earnest of it, Ps. 84. 11. (2.) Sinners are fools, for they are not only preparing disgrace for themselves, but at the same time flattering themselves with a prospect of honour,

as if they only took the way to be great. Their end will manifest their folly; *shame shall be their promotion*. And it will be so much the more their punishment, as it will come instead of their promotion; it will be all the promotion they must ever expect, that God will be glorified in their everlasting confusion.

CHAP. IV.

When the things of God are to be taught, precept must be upon precept, and line upon line; not only because the things themselves are of great worth and weight, but because men's minds, at the best, are unfit to admit them, and commonly prejudiced against them; and therefore Solomon, in this chapter, with a great variety of expression, and a pleasant powerful flood of divine eloquence, inculcates the same things that he had pressed upon us in the foregoing chapters. Here is, I. An earnest exhortation to the study of wisdom, that is, of true religion and godliness, borrowed from the good instructions which his father gave him, and enforced with many considerable arguments, v. 1. 13. II. A necessary caution against bad company, and all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, v. 14. 19. III. Particular directions for the attaining and preserving of wisdom, and bringing forth the fruits of it, v. 20. 27. So plainly, so pressingly, is the case laid before us, that we shall be for ever inexcusable if we perish in our folly.

1. **H**EAR, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.

2. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. 3. For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. 4. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. 5. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. 6. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. 7. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. 8. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. 9. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. 10. Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. 11. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. 12. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. 13. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.

Here we have,

I. The invitation which Solomon gives to his children to come, and receive instruction from him; (v. 1, 2.) *Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father*. That is, 1. "Let my own children, in the first place, receive and give good heed to those instructions which I set down for the use of others also." Note, Magistrates and ministers, who are intrusted with the conduct of larger societies, are concerned to take a more than ordinary care for the good instruction of their own families; from this duty their public work will by no means excuse them. This charity must begin at home, though it must not end there; for he that has not his children in subjection with all gravity, and does not take pains in their good education, how shall he do his duty as he ought to the church of God? 1 Tim. 3. 4, 5. The children of those that are eminent for wisdom and public usefulness ought to improve in knowledge and grace, in proportion to the advantages they derive from their relation to such parents. Yet it may be observed, to save both the credit and the comfort of those parents whose children do not answer the hopes that arose from their education, that Rehobah

the son of Solomon, was far from being either one of the wisest, or one of the best; we have reason to think that thousands have got more good by Solomon's proverbs than his own son did, to whom they seem to have been dedicated. 2. Let all young people, in the days of their childhood and youth, take pains to get knowledge and grace, for that is their learning age, and then their minds are formed and seasoned. He does not say, *My children*, but, *Ye children*; we read but of one son that Solomon had of his own. He is willing to set up for a schoolmaster, and to teach other people's children; for, at that age, there is most hope of success; the branch is easily bended when it is young and tender. 3. Let all that would receive instruction come with the disposition of children, though they be grown persons; let all prejudices be laid aside, and the mind be as white paper; let them be dutiful, tractable, and self-diffident, and take the word as the word of a father, which comes both with authority and with affection. We must see it coming from God as *our Father in heaven*, to whom we pray, from whom we expect blessings, the Father of our spirits, to whom we ought to be in subjection, that we may live. We must look upon our teachers as our fathers, who love us, and seek our welfare; and therefore, though the instruction carry in it reproof and correction, for so the word signifies, yet we must bid it welcome.

Now, (1.) To recommend it to us, we are told, not only that it is the *instruction of a father*, but that it is *understanding*, and therefore should be welcome to intelligent creatures. Religion has reason on its side, and we are taught it by fair reasoning. It is a law indeed, (v. 2.) but that law is founded upon doctrine, upon unquestionable principles of truth, upon *good doctrine*, which is not only faithful, but worthy of all acceptance. If we admit the doctrine, we cannot but submit to the law.

(2.) To rivet it in us, we are directed to receive it as a gift, to attend to it with all diligence, to attend so as to know it, for otherwise we cannot do it, and not to forsake it, by disowning the doctrine, or disobeying the law.

II. The instructions he gives them. Observe,

1. How he came by these instructions; he had them from his parents, and teaches his children the same that they taught him, v. 3, 4. Observe, (1.) His parents loved him, and therefore taught him; *I was my father's son*. David had many sons, but Solomon was his son *indeed*, as Isaac is called, (Gen. 17. 19.) and for the same reason, because on him the covenant was entailed. He was his father's darling above any of his children. God had a special kindness for Solomon, (the prophet called him *Jedidiah*, because the Lord loved him, 2 Sam. 12. 25.) and, for that reason, David had a special kindness for him, for he was a man after God's own heart. If parents may ever love one child better than another, it must not be till it plainly appears that God does so. He was *tender, and only beloved, in the sight of his mother*: surely there was a manifest reason for making such a distinction, when both the parents made it. Now we see how they shewed their love; they catechised him, kept him to his book, and held him to a strict discipline. Though he was a prince, and heir-apparent to the crown, yet they did not let him live at large; nay, *therefore* they tutored him thus. And perhaps David was the more strict with Solomon in his education, because he had seen the ill effects of an undue indulgence in Adonijah, whom he had not *crossed in any thing*, (1 Kings, 1. 6.) as also in Absalom. (2.) What his parents taught him he teaches others. Observe, [1.] When Solomon was grown up, he not only remembered, but took a pleasure in repeating, the good lessons his parents taught him when he was a child. He did not forget them, so deep were the impressions they made upon him. He was not ashamed of them, such a high value had he for them, nor did he look upon them as the childish things, the mean things, which, when he became a man, a king, he should put away, as a disparagement to him; much less did he repeat them, as some wicked children have done, to ridicule them, and make his companions merry with them, priding himself that he was got clear from grave lessons and restraints. [2.] Though Solomon was a wise man himself, and divinely inspired, yet, when he was to teach wisdom, he did not think it below him to quote his

father, and to make use of his words. They that would learn well, and teach well, in religion, must not affect new-found notions and new-coined phrases, so as to look with contempt upon the knowledge and language of their predecessors, if we must keep to the good old way, why should we scorn the good old words? Jer. 6. 16. [3.] Solomon, having been well-educated by his parents, thought himself thereby obliged to give his children a good education, the same that his parents had given him; and this is one way in which we must requite our parents for the pains they took with us, even by shewing piety at home, 1 Tim. 5. 4. They taught us, not only that we may learn ourselves, but that we might teach our children, the good knowledge of God, Ps. 78. 6. And we are false to a trust if we do not; for the sacred deposit of religious doctrine and law was lodged in our hands, with a charge to transmit it pure and entire to those that shall come after us, 2 Tim. 2. 2. [4.] Solomon enforces his exhortations with the authority of his father David, a man famous in his generation upon all accounts. Be it taken notice of, to the honour of religion, that the wisest and best men in every age have been most zealous, not only for the practice of it themselves, but for the propagating of it to others; and we should therefore *continue in the things which we have learned, knowing of whom we have learned them*, 2 Tim. 3. 14.

2. What those instructions were, v. 4. 13.

[1.] By way of precept and exhortation. David, in teaching his son, though he was a child of great capacity and quick apprehension, to shew that he was in good earnest, and to affect his child the more with what he said, expressed himself with great warmth and importunity, and inculcated the same thing again and again. So children must be taught; (Deut. 6. 7.) *Thou shalt wet them diligently upon thy children*. David, though he was a man of public business, and had tutors for his son, took all this pains with him himself.

First, He recommends to him his Bible and his catechism, as the means, his father's words, (v. 4.) *the words of his mouth*, (v. 5.) his sayings, (v. 10.) all the good lessons he had taught him; and, perhaps, he means particularly the book of Psalms, many of which were *Maschils*, psalms of instruction, and two of them are expressly said to be for Solomon. These, and all his other words, Solomon must have an eye to. 1. He must *hear and receive them*, (v. 10.) diligently attend to them, and imbibe them, *as the earth drinks in the rain that comes often upon it*, Heb. 6. 7. God thus bespeaks our attention to his word, *Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings*. 2. He must hold fast the form of sound words which his father gave him; (v. 4.) *Let thine heart retain my words*; and except the word be hid in the heart, lodged in the will and affections, it will not be retained. 3. He must govern himself by them; *Keep my commandments*, obey them, and that is the way to increase in the knowledge of them, John, 7. 17. 4. He must stick to them, and abide by them; *Decline not from the words of my mouth*, (v. 5.) as fearing they will be too great a check upon thee, but *take fast hold of instruction*, (v. 13.) as being resolved to keep thy hold and never let it go. Those that have a good education, though they strive to shake it off, will find it hang about them a great while, and if it do not, their case is very sad.

Secondly, He recommends to him wisdom and understanding as the end to be aimed at in the use of these means; that *wisdom*, which is the *principal wisdom*, get that: *Quod caput est sapientie, eam acquirere sapientiam*—Be sure to mind that branch of wisdom which is the top branch of it, and that is the fear of God, ch. 1. 7. Junius and Tremellius. A principle of religion in the heart, this is the one thing needful: therefore,

1. Get this *wisdom*, get this *understanding*, v. 5. And again, *Get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding*, v. 7. Pray for it, take pains for it, give diligence in the use of all appointed means to attain it, *wait at wisdom's gate*, Prov. 8. 34. Get dominion over thy corruptions, which are thy follies, get possession of wise principles, and the habits of wisdom: get it by experience, get it *above all thy getting*, be more in care, and take more pains, to get this, than to get the wealth of this world whatever thou forgettest, get this; reckon it a great achievement, and pursue it accordingly. True wisdom is God's gift, and yet

we are here commanded to get it, because God gives it to those that labour for it: yet, after all, we must not say, *Our might, and the power of our hand, have gotten us this wealth.*

Forget her not, (v.5.) forsake her not, (v.6.) let her not go, (v.13.) but keep her. Those that have got this wisdom must take heed of losing it again by returning to folly: it is indeed a good part that shall not be *taken from us*; but then we must take heed lest we throw it from us, as those do that forget it first, and let it slip out of their minds, and then forsake it, and turn out of its good ways. That good thing which is committed to us we must keep, and not let it drop, through carelessness, nor suffer it to be forced from us, or suffer ourselves to be wheedled out of it; never let go such a jewel.

3. *Love her, (v.6.) and embrace her, (v.8.)* as worldly men love their wealth, and set their hearts upon it. Religion should be very dear to us, dearer than any thing in this world: and if we cannot reach to be great masters of wisdom, yet let us be true lovers of it; and what grace we have, let us embrace it with a sincere affection, as those that admire its beauty.

4. *“Exalt her; (v.8.)* always keep up high thoughts of religion, speak of it with value and veneration, and do all thou canst to bring it into reputation, and maintain the credit of it among men; concur with God in his purpose, which is, to magnify the law and make it honourable, and do what thou canst to serve that purpose.” Let *wisdom’s* children not only justify her, but magnify her, and prefer her before that which is dearest to them in this world. In honouring those that fear the Lord, though they are low in the world, and in regarding a *poor wise man*, we *exalt wisdom*.

[2.] By way of motive and inducement, thus to labour for wisdom, and submit to the conduct of it, consider,

First, It is the main matter, and that which ought to be the chief and continual care of every man in this life; (v.7.) *Wisdom is the principal thing*; other things which we are solicitous to get, and keep, are nothing to it; it is the *whole of man*, Eccl. 12. 13. It is that which recommends us to God, which beautifies the soul, which enables us to answer the end of our creation, to live to some good purpose in the world, and to get to heaven at last; and therefore it is the principal thing.

Secondly, It has reason and equity on its side; (v.11.) *“I have taught thee in the way of wisdom, true wisdom, and so it will be found to be at last; I have led thee, not in the crooked way of carnal policy, which does wrong, under colour of wisdom, but in right paths, agreeable to the eternal rules and reasons of good and evil.”* The rectitude of the divine nature appears in the rectitude of all the divine laws. Observe, David not only taught his son by good instructions, but led him both by a good example, and by applying general instructions to particular cases; so that nothing was wanting on his part to make him wise.

Thirdly, It would be much for his own advantage; “If thou be wise and good, thou shalt be so for thyself.”

1. “It will be thy life, thy comfort, thy happiness; it is what thou canst not live without;” *Keep my commandments, and live, v.4.* That of our Saviour agrees with this, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*, Matth. 19. 17. It is upon pain of death, eternal death, and in prospect of life, eternal life, that we are required to be religious; “Receive wisdom’s sayings, and the years of thy life shall be many, (v.10.) as many in this world as Infinite Wisdom sees fit, and in the other world thou shalt live that life, the years of which shall never be numbered. *Keep her* therefore, whatever it cost thee, *for she is thy life, v.13.* All thy satisfaction will be found in this;” and a soul without true wisdom and grace is really a dead soul.

2. “It will be thy guard and guide, thy convoy and conduct, through all the dangers and difficulties of thy journey through this wilderness. Love wisdom, and cleave to her, and she shall *preserve thee, she shall keep thee* (v.6.) from sin, the worst of evils, the worst of enemies; she shall keep thee from hurting thyself, and then none else can hurt thee.” As we say, “Keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee;” so “Keep thy wisdom, and thy wisdom will keep thee.” It will keep us from straits and stumbling-blocks in the management of ourselves and our affairs, v.12.

(1.) That our steps be not straitened when we go, that we bring not ourselves into such straits as David was in, 2 Sam. 24. 14. They that make God’s word their rule shall walk at liberty, and be at ease in themselves. (2.) That our feet do not stumble when we run. If wise and good men be put upon sudden resolves, the certain rule of God’s word, which they go by, will keep them even then from stumbling upon any thing that may be pernicious. Integrity and uprightness will preserve us.

3. “It will be thy honour and reputation; (v.8.) *Exalt wisdom*, do thou but shew thy good-will to her advancement, and, though she needs not thy service, she will abundantly recompense it, *she shall promote thee, she shall bring thee to honour.*” Solomon was to be a king, but his wisdom and virtue would be more his honour than his crown or purple; that was it for which all his neighbours had him so much in veneration; and, no doubt, in his reign, and David’s, wise and good men stood fairest for preferment. However, religion will, first or last, bring all those *to honour* that cordially *embrace her*; they shall be accepted of God, respected by all wise men, owned in the great day, and shall inherit everlasting glory. This he insists on, (v.9.) *“She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace* in this world, shall recommend thee both to God and man, and in the other world *a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee*; a crown that shall never totter, a crown of glory that shall never wither.” That is the true honour which attends religion; *Nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus—Virtue is the only nobility!* David having thus recommended wisdom to his son, no marvel that, when God bid him ask what he would, he prayed, Lord, *give me a wise and an understanding heart.* We should make it appear by our prayers how well we were taught.

14. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. 15. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. 16. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. 17. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. 18. But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. 19. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.

Some make David’s instructions to Solomon, which began v.4. to continue to the end of the chapter; nay, some continue them to the end of the ninth chapter; but it is more probable that Solomon begins here again, if not sooner. In these verses, having exhorted us to walk in the paths of wisdom, he cautions us against the path of the wicked. 1. We must take heed of the ways of sin, and avoid them; every thing that looks like sin, and leads to it. 2. In order to this, we must keep out of the ways of sinners, and have no fellowship with them. For fear of falling into wicked courses, we must shun wicked company. Here is,

I. The caution itself, v.14, 15.

1. We must take heed of falling in with sin and sinners; *Enter not into the paths of the wicked.* Our teacher, having, like a faithful guide, shewed us the *right paths*, (v.11.) here warns us of the by-paths into which we are in danger of being drawn aside. Those that have been well educated, and trained up in the way they should go, let them never turn aside into the way they should not go; let them not so much as enter into it, no not to make trial of it, lest it prove a dangerous experiment, and difficult to retreat with safety. “Venture not into the company of those that are infected with the plague, no not though thou think thyself guarded with an antidote.”

2. If at any time we are inveigled into an evil way, we must hasten out of it. “If, ere thou wast aware, thou didst enter in at the gate, because it was wide, yet *go not on in the way of evil men.* As soon as thou art made sensible of thy mistake, retire

immediately, take not a step more, stay not a minute longer, in the way that certainly leads to destruction."

3. We must dread and detest the ways of sin and sinners, and decline them with the utmost care imaginable. "*The way of evil men* may seem a pleasant way and sociable, and the nearest way to the compassing of some secular end we may have in view; but it is an evil way, and will end ill, and therefore, if thou love thy God and thy soul, *avoid it, pass not by it*, that thou mayest not be tempted to enter into it; and, if thou find thyself near it, *turn from it, and pass away*, and get as far off it as thou canst." The manner of expression intimates the imminent danger we are in, the need we have of this caution, and the great importance of it; and that our watchmen are, or should be, in good earnest in giving us warning. It intimates likewise at what a distance we should keep from sin and sinners; he does not say, Keep at a *due* distance, but at a *great* distance, the further the better, never think you can get far enough from it; *escape for thy life, look not behind thee*.

II. The reasons to enforce this caution.

1. "Consider the character of the men whose way thou art warned to shun;" they are mischievous men, (v.16, 17.) they not only care not what hurt they do to those that stand in their way, but it is their business to do mischief, and their delight, purely for mischief-sake. They are continually designing and endeavouring to *cause some to fall*, to ruin them body and soul. Wickedness and malice are in their nature, and violence in all their actions. They are spiteful in the highest degree; for, (1.) Mischief is rest and sleep to them. As much satisfaction as a covetous man has when he has got money, an ambitious man when he has got preferment, and a good man when he has done good, so much have they when they have said or done that which is injurious and ill-natured; and extremely uneasy if they cannot get their envy and revenge gratified; as Haman, to whom every thing was unpleasant, as long as Mordecai was unhanged. It intimates, likewise, how restless and unwearied they are in their mischievous pursuits; they will rather want sleep than want the pleasure of being vexatious. (2.) Mischief is meat and drink to them, they feed and feast upon it; *they eat the bread of wickedness, (they eat up my people as they eat bread, Ps. 14. 4.) and drink the wine of violence, drink iniquity like water, Job, 15. 16.* All they eat and drink is got by rapine and oppression. Do wicked men think the time lost in which they are not doing hurt? Let good men make it as much their business and delight to do good; *Amici, diem perdidit—Friends, I have lost a day.* And let all that are wise, and wish well to themselves, avoid the society of the wicked; for, [1.] It is very scandalous; for there is no disposition of mind that is a greater reproach to the human nature, a greater enemy to human society, a bolder defiance to God and conscience, that has more of the Devil's image in it, or is more serviceable to his interests, than a delight to do mischief, and to vex, and hurt, and ruin every body. [2.] It is very dangerous. "Shun those that delight to do mischief, as thou tenderest thine own safety; for, whatever friendship they may pretend, one time or other they will do thee mischief; thou wilt ruin thyself if thou dost concur with them, (ch. 1. 18.) and they will ruin thee if thou dost not."

2. "Consider the character of the way itself which thou art warned to shun, compared with the right way which thou art invited to walk in."

(1.) The way of righteousness is light; (v.18.) *The path of the just, which they have chosen, and in which they walk, is us light; the light shines on their ways, (Job, 22. 29.)* and makes them both safe and pleasant. Christ is *their Way*, and he is *the Light*. They are guided by the word of God, and that is *a light to their feet*; they themselves are *light in the Lord*, and they *walk in the light as he is in the light*. [1.] It is a *shining light*. Their way shines to themselves, in the joy and comfort of it; it shines before others in the lustre and honour of it; *it shines before men, who see their good works, Matth. 5. 16.* They go on in their way with a holy security and serenity of mind, as those that *walk in the light*. It is as the morning-light, which *shines out of obscurity, (Isa. 58. 8, 10.)* and puts an end to the *works of darkness*. [2.] It

is a growing light; it *shines more and more*; not like the light of a meteor, which soon disappears, or that of a candle, which burns dim, and burns down; but like that of the rising sun, which goes forward shining, mounts upward shining. Grace, the guide of this way, is growing; he that has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger; the joy which is the pleasure of this way, that honour which is the brightness of it, and all that happiness which is indeed its light, shall be still increasing. [3.] It will arrive, in the end, at *the perfect day*. The light of the day-spring will at length be noon-day light, and that is it which the enlightened soul is pressing toward. The saints will not be perfect till they come to heaven, but there they shall themselves *shine as the sun when he goes forth in his strength*, Matth. 13. 43. Their graces and joys shall be all consummate. Therefore it is our wisdom to keep close to *the path of the just*.

(2.) The way of sin is *darkness*, v. 19. The works he had cautioned us not to have fellowship with, are, *works of darkness*. What true pleasure and satisfaction can they have who know no pleasure and satisfaction but what they have in doing mischief? What sure guide have they that cast God's word behind them? *The way of the wicked is dark*, and therefore dangerous; for they stumble, and yet *know not at what they stumble*; they fall into sin, but are not aware which way the temptation came, by which they were overthrown, and therefore know not how to avoid it the next time. They fall into trouble, but never inquire wherefore God contends with them; *they consider not that they do evil*, nor what will be in the end of it, Ps. 82. 5. Job, 18. 5, 6. This is the way we are bid to shun.

20. My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. 21. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. 22. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. 23. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. 24. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. 25. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee. 26. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. 27. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.

Solomon, having warned us not to do evil, here teaches us how to do well. It is not enough for us to shun the occasions of sin, but we must study the methods of duty.

1. We must have a continual regard to the word of God, and endeavour that it may be always ready to us. The sayings of wisdom must be our principles by which we must govern ourselves, our monitors to warn us of duty and danger; and therefore, (1.) We must receive them readily; "*Incline thine ear to them, (v. 20.)* humbly bow to them, diligently listen to them." The attentive hearing of the word of God is a good sign of a work of grace begun in the heart, and a good means of carrying it on. It is to be hoped that those are resolved to do their duty who are inclined to know it. (2.) We must retain them carefully; (v. 21.) we must lay them before us as a rule; "*Let them not depart from thine eyes*; view them, review them, and in every thing aim to conform to them." We must lodge them within us, as a commanding principle, the influences of which are diffused throughout the whole man; "*Keep them in the midst of thine heart*, as things dear to thee, and which thou art afraid of losing." Let the word of God be written in the heart, and that which is written there will remain.

The reason why we must thus make much of the words of wisdom, is, because they will be both food and physic to us, like *the tree of life*, Rev. 22. 2. Ezek. 47. 12. They that seek and find them, find and keep them, shall find in them, [1.] Food; *For they are life unto those that find them, v. 22.* As the spiritual life

was begun by the word as the instrument of it, so by the same word it is still nourished and maintained; we could not live without it, we may by faith live upon it. [2.] *Physic.* They are *health to all their flesh*, to the whole man, both body and soul; they help to keep both in good plight. They are *health to all flesh*, so the Seventy. There is enough to cure all the diseases of this distempered world. They are *a medicine to all their flesh*, so the word is; to all their corruptions; for they are called *flesh*; to all their grievances, which are as thorns in the flesh. There is in the word of God a proper remedy for all our spiritual maladies.

2. We must keep a watchful eye, and a strict hand, upon all the motions of our inward man, v. 23. Here is, (1.) A great duty required by the laws of wisdom, and in order to our getting and preserving wisdom; *Keep thy heart with all diligence.* God, who gave us these souls, gave us a strict charge with them; Man, woman, *keep thy heart; take heed to thy spirit*, Dent. 4. 9. We must maintain a holy jealousy of ourselves, and set a strict guard, accordingly, upon all the avenues of the soul; keep our hearts from doing hurt, and getting hurt; from being defiled by sin, and disturbed by trouble; keep them as our jewel, as our vineyard; keep a conscience void of offence; keep out bad thoughts; keep up good thoughts; keep the affections upon right objects, and in due bounds. *Keep with all keepings*, so the word is; there are many ways of keeping things—by care, by strength, by calling in help, and we must use them all in keeping our hearts; and all little enough, so deceitful are they, Jer. 17. 9. Or, *above all keepings*; we must keep our hearts with more care and diligence than we keep any thing else. We must keep our eyes, (Job. 31. 1.) keep our tongues, (Ps. 34. 13.) keep our feet, (Eccl. 5. 1.) but, above all, keep our hearts. (2.) A good reason given for this care; because *out of it are the issues of life*; out of a heart well kept will flow living issues, good products, to the glory of God, and the edification of others. Or, in general, all the actions of the life flow from the heart, and, therefore, keeping that is making the tree good and healing the springs. Our lives will be regular or irregular, comfortable or uncomfortable, according as our hearts are kept or neglected.

3. We must set a watch before the door of our lips, that we offend not with our tongue; (v. 21.) *Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips.* Our hearts being naturally corrupt, out of them a great deal of corrupt communication is apt to come, and therefore we must conceive a great dread and detestation of all manner of evil words, cursing, swearing, lying, slandering, brawling, filthiness, and foolish talking, all which come from a *froward mouth, and perverse lips*, that will not be governed either by reason or religion, but contradict both; and which are as unsightly and ill-favoured before God, as a crooked distorted mouth drawn awry is before men. All manner of tongue-sins we must, by constant watchfulness and steadfast resolution, *put from us, put far from us*; abstaining from all words that have an appearance of evil, and fearing to learn any such words.

4. We must make a covenant with our eyes; “Let them *look right on, and straight before thee*, v. 25. Let the eye be fixed and not wandering, let it not rove after every thing that presents itself, for then it will be diverted from good, and ensnared in evil. Turn it from beholding vanity; let thine eye be single, and not divided; let thine intentions be sincere and uniform, and look not askint at any by-end.” We must keep our eye upon our Master, and be careful to approve ourselves to him; keep our eye upon our rule, and conform to that; keep our eye upon our mark, the *prize of the high calling*, and direct all toward that. *Oculum in metam—The eye upon the goal.*

5. We must act considerably in all we do; (v. 26.) *Ponder the paths of thy feet; weigh it*, so the word is; “Put the word of God in one scale, and what thou hast done, or art about to do, in the other, and see how they agree; be nice and critical in examining whether thy way be good before the Lord, and whether it will end well.” We must consider our past ways, and examine what we have done, and our present ways, What are we doing? Whither are we going? *See that ye walk circumspectly.* It concerns us to consider, what are the duties, and what the difficulties, what are

the advantages, and what the dangers, of our way, that we may act accordingly. “Do nothing rashly.”

6. We must act with steadiness, caution, and consistency; “*Let all thy ways be established*, (v. 26.) and be not unstable in them, as the double-minded man is; halt not between two, but go on in an even uniform course of obedience; *turn not to the right hand, nor to the left*, for there are errors on both hands, and Satan gains his point, if he prevail to draw us aside either way. Be very careful to *remove thy foot from evil*; take heed of extremes, for in them there is evil, and *let thine eyes look right on*, that thou mayest keep the golden mean.” Those that would approve themselves wise must always be watchful.

CHAP. V.

The scope of this chapter is much the same with that of ch. 2. To write the same things, in other words, ought not to be grievous, for it is safe, Phil. 3. 1. Here is, I. An exhortation to get acquaintance with, and submit to, the laws of wisdom in general, v. 2. II. A particular caution against the sin of whoredom, v. 3. .14. III. Remedies prescribed against that sin. 1. Conjugal love, v. 15. .20. 2. A regard to God's omniscience, v. 21. 3. A dread of the miserable end of wicked people, v. 22, 23. And all little enough to arm young people against those fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

1. **M**Y son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding: 2. That thou mayest regard discretion, and *that thy lips may keep knowledge.* 3. For the lips of a strange woman drop *as an honeycomb*, and her mouth is smoother than oil: 4. But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. 5. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. 6. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, *that thou canst not know them.* 7. Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. 8. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: 9. Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: 10. Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours *be* in the house of a stranger; 11. And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, 12. And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; 13. And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! 14. I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.

Here we have,

I. A solemn preface to introduce the caution which follows, v. 1, 2. Solomon here addresses himself to his son, that is, to all young men, as unto his children, whom he has an affection for; and some influence upon. In God's name he demands attention; for he writes by divine inspiration, and is a prophet, though he begins not with, *Thus saith the Lord.* “Attend, and bow thine ear; not only hear what is said, and read what is written, but apply thy mind to it, and consider it diligently.” To gain attention, he urges, 1. The excellency of his discourse; “It is *my wisdom*, it is *my understanding*; if I undertake to teach thee wisdom, I cannot prescribe any thing to be more properly called so; moral philosophy is my philosophy, and that which is to be learned in my school.” 2. The usefulness of it; “Attend to what I say,” (1.) “That thou mayest act wisely; *that thou mayest regard discretion.*” Solomon's lectures are not designed to fill our heads with notions, with matters of nice speculation, or doubtful disputation, but to guide us in the government of ourselves, that we may act prudently, so as becomes us, and so as will be for our true interest. (2.) “That thou mayest speak wisely; *that thy lips may keep knowledge*, and thou

mayest have it ready at thy tongue's end," (as we say,) "for the benefit of those with whom thou dost converse." The priest's lips are said to *keep knowledge*; (Mal. 2. 7.) but they that are ready and mighty in the scriptures, may, not only in their devotions, but in their discourses, be spiritual priests.

II. The caution itself, and that is, to abstain from fleshly lusts, from adultery, fornication, and all uncleanness. Some apply this figuratively, and by the adulterous woman here understand idolatry, false doctrine, which tend to debauch men's minds and manners; or, the sensual appetite, to which it may as fitly as any thing be applied; but the primary scope of it is plainly to warn us against seventh-commandment-sins, which youth is so prone to, the temptations to which are so violent, the examples of which are so many, and which, where admitted, are so destructive to all the seeds of virtue in the soul, that it is not strange that Solomon's cautions against it are so very pressing, and so often repeated.

Solomon here, as a faithful watchman, gives fair warning to all, as they tender their lives and comforts, to dread this sin, for it will certainly be their ruin. Two things we are here warned to take heed of;

1. That we do not listen to the charms of this sin. It is true, *the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb*; (v. 3.) the pleasures of fleshly lust are very tempting, (like the wine that *gives its colour in the cup*, and *moves itself aright*;) its mouth, the kisses of its mouth, the words of its mouth, are *smoother than oil*, that the poisonous pill may go down glibly, and there may be no suspicion of harm in it.

But consider, (1.) How fatal the consequences will be; how bitter the fruit which the sinner will have of his honey and oil, when the end will be, [1.] The terrors of conscience; it is *bitter as wormwood*; (v. 4.) what was luscious in the mouth, rises in the stomach, and turns sour there; it cuts, in the reflection, like a *two-edged sword*; take it which way you will, it wounds. Solomon could speak by experience, Eccl. 7. 26. [2.] The torments of hell. If some, that have been guilty of this sin, have repented and been saved, yet the direct tendency of the sin is to destruction of body and soul; the *feet of it go down to death*, nay, they *take hold on hell*, to pull it to the sinner, as if the damnation slumbered too long, v. 5. Those that are entangled in this sin should be reminded, that there is but a step between them and hell, and that they are ready to drop into it.

(2.) Consider how false the charms are. The adulteress flatters and speaks fair, her words are honey and oil, but she will deceive those that hearken to her; *her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them*; she often changes her disguise, and puts on a great variety of false colours, because, if she be rightly known, she is certainly hated. Proteus-like, she puts on many shapes, that she may keep in with those whom she has a design upon. And what does she aim at with all this art and management? Nothing but to keep them from *pondering the path of life*, for she knows, that, if they once come to do that, she will certainly lose them. Those are *ignorant of Satan's devices* who do not understand that the great thing he drives at, in all his temptations, is, [1.] To keep them from choosing *the path of life*, to prevent them from being religious, and from going to heaven, that, being himself shut out from happiness, he may keep them out from it. [2.] In order herunto, to keep them from *pondering the path of life*, from considering how reasonable it is that they should walk in that path, and how much it will be for their advantage. Be it observed, to the honour of religion, that it certainly gains its point with all those that will but allow themselves the liberty of a serious thought, and will weigh things impartially in an even balance; and that the Devil has no way of securing men in his interests, but by diverting them, with continual amusements of one kind or other, from the calm and sober consideration of the *things that belong to their peace*. And uncleanness is a sin that does, as much as any thing, blind the understanding, sear the conscience, and keep people from *pondering the path of life*. Whoredom *takes away the heart*, Hos. 4. 11.

2. That we do not approach the borders of this sin, v. 7, 8. This caution is introduced with a solemn preface; "*Hear me now*

therefore, O ye children, whoever you are that read or hear these lines, take notice of what I say, and mix faith with it, treasure it up, and *depart not from the words of my mouth*, as those will do that hearken to the words of the *strange woman*. Do not only receive what I say, for the present merely, but cleave to it, and let it be ready to thee, and of force with thee, when thou art most violently assaulted by the temptation." The caution itself is very pressing; "*Remove thy way far from her*; if thy way should happen to lie near her, and thou shouldst have a fair pretence of being led by business within the reach of her charms, yet change thy way, and alter the course of it, rather than expose thyself to danger; *come not nigh the door of her house*; go on the other side of the street, nay, go through some other street, though it be about." This intimates, (1.) That we ought to have a very great dread and detestation of the sin; we must fear it as we would a place infected with the plague, we must loath it as carrion, that we will not come near. Then we are likely to preserve our purity, when we conceive a rooted antipathy to all fleshly lusts. (2.) That we ought industriously to avoid every thing that may be an occasion of this sin, or a step towards it. They that would be kept from harm must keep out of harm's way. Such tinder there is in the corrupt nature, that it is madness, upon any pretence whatsoever, to come near the sparks. If we thrust ourselves into temptation, we mocked God when we prayed, *Lead us not into temptation*. (3.) That we ought to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, and not to be so confident of the strength of our own resolutions, as to venture upon the brink of sin, with a promise to ourselves, that *hitherto we will come, and no further*. (4.) That whatever is become a snare, to us, and an occasion of sin, though it be as a *right eye* and a *right hand*, we must *pluck it out, cut it off, and cast it from us*, must part with that which is dearest to us, rather than hazard our own souls; this is our Saviour's command, Matth. 5. 28. . 30.

The arguments which Solomon here uses to enforce this caution are taken from the same topic with those before, the many mischiefs which attend this sin.

[1.] "It blasts the reputation; thou wilt *give thine honour unto others*; (v. 9.) thou wilt lose it thyself, thou wilt put into the hand of each of thy neighbours a stone to throw at thee, for they will all, with good reason, cry shame on thee, will despise thee, and trample on thee, as a foolish man." Whoredom is a sin that makes men contemptible and base, and no man of sense or virtue will care to keep company with one that keeps company with harlots.

[2.] "It wastes the time, gives the years, the years of youth, the flower of men's time, unto the cruel, that base lust of thine, which, with the utmost cruelty, wars against the soul; that base harlot which pretends an affection for thee, but really hunts for the precious life." Those years that should be given to the honour of a gracious God are spent in the service of a cruel sin.

[3.] "It ruins the estate; (v. 10.) *strangers* will be *filled with thy wealth*, which thou art but intrusted with as a steward for thy family; and the fruit of *thy labours*, which should be provision for thine own house, will be in the house of a stranger, that neither has right to it, nor will ever thank thee for it."

[4.] "It is destructive to the health, and shortens men's days; *thy flesh and thy body* will be *consumed* by it," v. 11. The lusts of uncleanness not only *war against the soul*, which the sinner neglects, and is in no care about, but they war against the body too, which he is so indulgent of, and is in such care to please and pamper; such deceitful, such foolish, such hurtful, lusts are they. Those that give themselves to work uncleanness with greediness, waste their strength, throw themselves into weakness, and often have their bodies filled with loathsome distempers, by which the number of their months is cut off in the midst, and they fall unpitied sacrifices to a cruel lust.

[5.] "It will fill the mind with horror, if ever conscience be awakened. Though thou art merry now, *sporting thyself in thine own deceivings*, yet thou wilt certainly *mourn at the last*, v. 11. Thou art all this while making work for repentance, and laying up matter for vexation and torment in the reflection, when the sin is set before thee in its own colours." Sooner or later it will bring sorrow; either when the soul is humbled, and brought to repent-

ance, or when the *flesh and body are consumed*; either by sickness, when conscience flies in the sinner's face, or by the grave: when the body is rotting there, the soul is racking in the torments of hell, where the worm dies not, and, *Son, remember*, is the constant peal.

Solomon here brings in the convinced sinner, reproaching himself, and aggravating his own folly. He will then most bitterly lament it.

First, That, because he hated to be reformed, he therefore hated to be informed, and could not endure either to be taught his duty; (*How have I hated* not only the discipline of being instructed, but the instruction itself, though all true and good!) or to be told of his faults, *My heart despised reproof*, v. 12. He cannot but own that those who had the charge of him, parents, ministers, had done their part, they had been his teachers, they had instructed him, had given him good counsel and fair warning; (v. 13.) but, to his own shame and confusion does he speak it, and therein justifies God in all the miseries that were brought upon him, he had not taken their counsel, had not *obeyed their voice*, for indeed he *never inclined his ear to those that instructed him*; never minded what they said, nor admitted the impressions of it. Note, Those who have had a good education, and do not live up to it, will have a great deal to answer for another day. And those who will not now remember what they were taught, to conform themselves to it, will be made to remember it as an aggravation of their sin, and, consequently, of their ruin.

Secondly, That, by the frequent acts of sin, the habits of it were so rooted and confirmed, that his heart was fully set in him to commit it; (v. 14.) *I was almost in all evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly*. When he came into the synagogue, or into the courts of the temple, to worship God with other Israelites, his unclean heart was full of wanton thoughts and desires, and his eyes of adultery. Reverence of the place and company, and of the work that was doing, could not restrain him, but he was almost as wicked and vile there as any where. No sin will appear more frightful to an awakened conscience, than the profanation of holy things; nor will any aggravation of sin render it more exceeding sinful than the place we are honoured with in the congregation and assembly, and the advantages we enjoy thereby. Zimri and Cozbi avowed their villany *in the sight of Moses, and all the congregation*; (Numb. 25. 6.) and heart-adultery is as open to God, and must needs be most offensive to him, when we draw nigh to him in religious exercises. *I was in all evil*, in defiance of the magistrates and judges, and their assemblies; so some understand it. Others refer it to the evil of punishment, not to the evil of sin; "I was made an example, a spectacle, to the world; I was under almost all God's sore judgments *in the midst of the congregation of Israel*, set up for a mark. *I stood up, and cried in the congregation*," Job, 30. 28. Let that be avoided which will be thus rued at last.

15. Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. 16. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. 17. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers with thee. 18. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. 19. *Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe*; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love. 20. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? 21. For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings. 22. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. 23. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

Solomon, having shewed the great evil that there is in adultery

and fornication, and all such lewd and filthy courses, here prescribes remedies against them.

1. Enjoy with satisfaction the comforts of lawful marriage, which was ordained for the prevention of uncleanness, and therefore ought to be made use of in time, lest it should not prove effectual for the cure of that which it might have prevented. Let none complain that God has dealt unkindly with them, in forbidding them those pleasures which they have a natural desire of, for he has graciously provided for the regular gratification of them. Thou mayest not indeed eat of every tree of the garden, but choose thee out one, which thou pleasest, and of that thou mayest freely eat; nature will be content with that, but lust with nothing. God, in thus confining men to one, has been so far from putting any hardship upon them, that he has really consulted their true interest; for, as Mr. Herbert observes,

If God had laid all common, certainly
Man would have been the encloser.—Church-porch.

Solomon here enlarges much upon this; not only prescribing it as an antidote, but urging it as argument, against fornication, that the allowed pleasures of marriage (however wicked wits may ridicule them, who are factors for the unclean spirit) far transcend all the false forbidden pleasures of whoredom.

1. Let young men marry, marry and not burn. Have a cistern, a well of thine own, (v. 15.) even the wife of thy youth; (v. 18.) *Wholly abstain, or wed*—Herb. "The world is wide, and there are varieties of accomplishments, among which thou mayest please thyself."

2. Let him that is married take delight in his wife, and let him be very fond of her, not only because she is the wife that he himself has chosen, and he ought to be pleased with his own choice, but because she is the wife that God in his providence appointed for him, and he ought much more to be pleased with the divine appointment; pleased with her because she is his own; *Let thy fountain be blessed*; (v. 18.) think thyself very happy in her, look upon her as a blessed wife, let her have thy blessing, pray daily for her, and then *rejoice with her*. Those comforts we are likely to have joy of, that are sanctified to us by prayer, and the blessing of God. It is not only allowed us, but commanded us, to be pleasant with our relations; and it particularly becomes yoke-fellows to rejoice together and in each other. Mutual delight is the bond of mutual fidelity. It is not only taken for granted, that the bridegroom *rejoices over his bride*, (Isa. 62. 5.) but given for law, (Eccl. 9. 9.) *Live joyfully with thy wife whom thou lovest, all the days of thy life*. Those take not their comforts there where God has appointed, who are jovial and merry with their companions abroad, but sour and morose with their families at home.

3. Let him be fond of his wife, and love her dearly; (v. 19.) *Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe*, such as great men sometimes kept tame in their houses, and played with. Desire no better diversion from severe study and business, than the innocent and pleasant conversation of thine own wife; let her lie in thy bosom, as the poor man's ewe-lamb did in his, (2 Sam. 12. 3.) and do thou repose thy head in her's, and let that *satisfy thee at all times*; and seek not for pleasure in any other. *Err thou always in her love*. If thou wilt suffer thy love to run into an excess, and wilt be doting-fond of any body, let it be only of thine own wife, where there is least danger of exceeding. This is *drinking waters*, to quench the thirst of thine appetite, *out of thine own cistern*, and *running waters*, which are clear, and sweet, and wholesome, *out of thine own well*, v. 15. 1 Cor. 7. 2, 3.

4. Let him take delight in his children, and look upon them with pleasure; (v. 16, 17.) "Look upon them as streams from thine own pure fountains," (the Jews are said to *come forth out of the waters of Judah*, Isa. 48. 1.) "so that they are pieces of thyself, as the streams are of the fountain. Keep to thine own wife, and thou shalt have," (1.) "A numerous offspring, like rivers of water, which run in abundance, and they shall be dispersed abroad, matched into other families, whereas they that *commit whoredom*, shall not increase," Hos. 4. 10. (2.) "A peculiar offspring, which shall be *only thine own*, whereas the children of whoredom, that are fathered upon thee, are, probably, not so, but, for aught thou

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knowest, are the offspring of strangers, and yet thou must keep them." (3.) "A creditable offspring, which are an honour to thee, and which thou mayest send abroad, and appear with in the streets, whereas a spurious brood is thy disgrace, and that which thou art ashamed to own." In this matter, virtue has all the pleasure and honour in it; justly therefore is it called *wisdom*.

6. Let him then scorn the offer of forbidden pleasures, when he is *always ravished with the love of a faithful virtuous wife*, let him consider what an absurdity it will be for him to be *ravished with a strange woman*, (v. 20.) to be in love with a filthy harlot, and embrace the bosom of a stranger, which, if he had any sense of honour or virtue, he would loathe the thoughts of. "Why wilt thou be so sottish, such an enemy to thyself, as to prefer puddle-water, and that poisoned too and stolen, before pure living waters out of thine own well?" Note, If the dictates of reason may be heard, the laws of virtue will be obeyed.

II. "See the eye of God always upon thee, and let his fear rule in thine heart, v. 21. They that live in this sin, promise themselves secrecy; *the eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight*, Job, 24. 15. But to what purpose, when it cannot be hid from God? For, 1. He sees it; *the ways of man*, all his notions, all his actions, are before the eyes of the Lord, all the workings of the heart, and all the out-goings of the life, that which is done ever so secretly, and disguised ever so artfully. God sees it in a true light, and knows it with all its causes, circumstances, and consequences. He does not cast an eye upon men's ways now and then, but they are always actually in his view, and under his inspection; and darest thou sin against God in his sight, and do that wickedness under his eye, which thou durst not do in the presence of a man like thyself?" 2. He will call the sinner to an account for it; for he not only sees, but *ponders, all his goings*, judges concerning them, as one that will shortly judge the sinner for them. Every action is *weighed*, and shall be *brought into judgment*, (Eccl. 12. 14.) which is a good reason why we should *ponder the path of our feet*, (ch. 4. 26.) and so *judge ourselves*, that we may not be judged.

III. "Foresee the certain ruin of those that go on still in their trespasses." They that live in this sin promise themselves impunity, but they deceive themselves, their sin will find them out, v. 22, 23. The apostle gives the sense of these verses in a few words; (Heb. 13. 4.) *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*.

1. It is a sin which men hardly shake off the power of; when the sinner is old and weak, his lusts are strong and active, in *calling to remembrance the days of his youth*, Ezek. 23. 19. Thus *his own iniquities* having seized the wicked himself by his own consent, and he having voluntarily surrendered himself a captive to them, he is *held in the cords of his own sins*, and such full possession they have gained of him, that he cannot extricate himself, but, in the *greatness of his folly*, (and what greater folly could there be, than to yield himself a servant to such cruel task-masters?) he shall *go astray*, and wander endlessly. Uncleanliness is a sin, from which, when once men have plunged themselves into it, they very hardly and very rarely recover themselves.

2. It is a sin which, if it be not forsaken, men cannot possibly scape the punishment of; it will unavoidably be their ruin. As their own iniquities do arrest them in the reproaches of conscience, and present rebukes, (Jer. 7. 19.) so their own iniquities shall arrest them, and bind them over to the judgments of God; there needs no prison, no chains, they shall be *holden in the cords of their own sins*, as the fallen angels, being incurably wicked, are thereby reserved in chains of darkness. The sinner, who, having been often reprov'd, hardens his neck, shall die at length without instruction; having had general warnings sufficient given him already, he shall have no particular warnings, but he shall die without seeing his danger before-hand, shall die because he would not receive instruction, but in the *greatness of his folly* would go astray; and so shall his doom be, he shall never find the way home again. They that are so foolish as to choose the way of sin, are justly left of God to themselves, to go in it till they come to that destruction which it leads to; which is a good reason why we should guard with watchfulness and resolution against the allurements of the sensual appetite.

In this chapter, we have, I. A caution against rash suretiship, v. 1. 5. II. A rebuke to slothfulness, v. 6. 11. III. The character and fate of a malicious mischievous man, v. 12. 15. IV. An account of seven things which God hates, v. 16. 19. V. An exhortation to make the word of God familiar to us, v. 20. 23. VI. A repeated warning of the pernicious consequences of the sin of whoredom, v. 24. 35. We are here dissuaded from sin very much by arguments borrowed from our secular interests, for it is not only represented as damning in the other world, but as impoverishing in this.

1. **M**Y son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, 2. Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. 3. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend. 4. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eye-lids. 5. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.

It is the excellency of the word of God, that it teaches us not only divine wisdom for another world, but human prudence for this world, that we may order our affairs with discretion; and this is one good rule, To avoid suretiship, because by it poverty and ruin are often brought into families, which take away that comfort in relations which he had recommended in the foregoing chapter.

1. We must look upon suretiship as a snare, and decline it accordingly, v. 1, 2. "It is dangerous enough for a man to be bound for his friend, though it is one whose circumstances he is well-acquainted with, and well-assured of his sufficiency; but much more to *strike the hands with a stranger*, to become surety for one whom thou dost not know to be either able or honest." Or the stranger here, with whom the hand is stricken, is the creditor, "the usurer to whom thou art become bound, and yet as to thee he is a stranger, thou owest him nothing, nor hast had any dealings with him. If thou hast rashly entered into such engagements, either wheedled into them, or in hopes to have the same kindness done for thee another time; know that *thou art snared with the words of thy mouth*, it was easily done, with a word's speaking, it was but setting thy hand to a paper, a bond is soon sealed and delivered, and a recognizance entered into; but it will not be so easily got clear of, thou art *in a snare*, more than thou art aware of." See how little reason we have to make light of tongue-sins; if by a word of our mouth we may become indebted to men, and lie open to their actions, by the words of our mouth we may become obnoxious to God's justice, and even so may be snared. It is false that words are but wind, they are often snares. 2. If we have been drawn into this snare, it will be our wisdom, by all means, with all speed, to get out of it, v. 3. 5. "It sleeps for the present, we hear nothing of it, the debt is not demanded, the principal says, Never fear, we will take care of it." But still the bond is in force, interest is running on, the creditor may come upon thee when he will, and perhaps may be hasty and severe, the principal may prove either knavish or insolvent, and then thou must rob thy wife and children, and ruin thy family, to pay that which thou didst neither eat nor drink for. And therefore *deliver thyself*, rest not till either the creditor give up the bond, or the principal give thee counter-security; when *thou art come into the hand of thy friend*, and he has advantage against thee, it is no time to threaten or give ill language, (that will provoke, and make ill worse,) but *humble thyself*, beg and pray to be discharged, go down on thy knees to them, and give them all the fair words thou canst, engage thy friends to speak for thee, leave no stone unturned till thou hast agreed with thine adversary, and compromised the matter, so that thy bond may not come against thee or thine. This is a care which may well break thy sleep, and let it do so till thou hast got through it. *Give not sleep to thine eyes*, till thou hast delivered thyself. Strive and struggle to the utmost,

and hasten with all speed, as a roe or a bird delivers herself out of the snare of the fowler or hunter. Delays are dangerous, and feeble efforts will not serve." See what care God, in his word, has taken to make men good husbands of their estates, and to teach them prudence in the management of them. *Godliness* has precepts, as well as promises, relating to *the life that now is*.

But how are we to understand this? We are not to think it is unlawful in any case to become surety, or bail, for another; it may be a piece of justice or charity; he that has friends may see cause in this instance to shew himself friendly, and it may be no piece of imprudence. Paul became bound for Onesimus, Philemon, 19. We may help a young man into business, that we know to be honest and diligent, and gain him credit by passing our words for him, and so do him a great kindness without any detriment to ourselves. But, (1.) It is every man's wisdom to keep out of debt as much as may be, for it is an incumbrance upon him, entangles him in the world, puts him in danger of doing wrong, or suffering wrong; the borrower is servant to the lender, and makes himself very much a slave to the world. Christians therefore, who are *bought with a price*, should not thus, without need, make themselves *the servants of men*, 1 Cor. 7. 23. (2.) It is great folly to entangle ourselves with necessitous people, and to become bound for their debts, that are ever and anon taking up money, and lading, as we say, out of one hole into another, for it is ten to one but, some time or other, it will come upon us. A man ought never to be bound as surety for more than he is both able and willing to pay, and can afford to pay without wronging his family, in case the principal fail, for he ought to look upon it as his own debt; (Ecclesiasticus, 8. 13.) *Be not surety above thy power, for if thou be surety, thou must take care to pay it*. (3.) It is a necessary piece of after-wit, if we have foolishly entangled ourselves, to get out of the snare as fast as we can, to lose no time, spare no pains, and stick at no submission, to make ourselves safe and easy, and get our affairs into a good posture. It is better to humble ourselves for an accommodation, than to ruin ourselves by our stiffness and haughtiness. *Make sure thy friend*, by getting clear from thine engagements from him; for rash suretiship is as much the bane of friendship, as that which is prudent is sometimes the bond of it. (4.) Let us take heed lest we any way make ourselves guilty of other men's sins against God, (1 Tim. 5. 22.) for that is worse, and much more dangerous, than being bound for other men's debts; and if we must be in all this care to get our debts to men forgiven, much more to get our peace made with God; "*Humble thyself to him, make sure of Christ thy Friend*, to intercede for thee; pray earnestly that thy sins may be pardoned, and thou mayest be delivered from going down to the pit; and it shall not be in vain. *Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eye-lids*, till this be done."

6. Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: 7. Which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, 8. Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. 9. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? 10. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 11. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

Solomon, in these verses, applies himself to the sluggard, who loves his ease, lives in idleness, minds no business, sticks to nothing, brings nothing to pass, and in a particular manner is careless in the business of religion. Slothfulness is as sure a way to poverty, though not so short a way, as rash suretiship.

He speaks here to the sluggard,

I. By way of instruction, v. 6. . 8. He sends him to school, for sluggards must be schooled. He is to take him to school himself, for if the scholar will take no pains, the master must take the more; the sluggard is not willing to come to school to him, (dreaming scholars will never love wakeful teachers,) and

therefore he has found him out another school, as low as he can desire. Observe,

1. The master he is sent to school to; *Go to the ant; to the bee*, so the Seventy. Man is taught more than the beasts of the earth, and made wiser than the fowls of heaven, and yet is so degenerated, that he may learn wisdom from the meanest insects, and be shamed by them. When we observe the wonderful sagacities of the inferior creatures, we must not only give glory to the God of nature, who has made them thus strangely, but receive instruction to ourselves; by spiritualizing common things, we may make the things of God both easy and ready to us, and converse with them daily.

2. The application of the mind, that is required in order to the learning of this master; *Consider her ways*. The sluggard is so, because he does not consider; nor shall we ever learn to any purpose, either by the word or the works of God, unless we set ourselves to consider. Particularly, if we would imitate others in that which is good, we must consider their ways, diligently observe what they do, that we may do likewise, Phil. 3. 17.

3. The lesson that is to be learned. In general, learn wisdom, *consider, and be wise*; that is the thing we are to aim at in all our learning, not only to be knowing, but to be wise; in particular, learn to *provide meat in summer*; that is, (1.) We must prepare for hereafter, and not mind the present time only; not eat up all, and lay up nothing; but in gathering time treasure up for a spending time. Thus provident we must be in our worldly affairs, not with an anxious care, but with a prudent foresight; lay in for winter, for straits and wants that may happen, and for old age; much more in the affairs of our souls. We must provide meat and food, that which is substantial, and will stand us in stead, and which we shall most need. In the enjoyment of the means of grace, provide for the want of them; in life, for death; in time, for eternity; in the state of probation and preparation, we must provide for the state of retribution. (2.) We must take pains, and labour, in our business, yea, though we labour under inconveniencies; even in *summer*, when the weather is hot, the ant is busy in *gathering food*, and laying it up, and does not indulge her ease, nor take her pleasure, as the grasshopper, that sings and sports in the summer, and then perishes in the winter. The ants help one another; if one have a grain of corn too big for her to carry home, her neighbours will come in to her assistance. (3.) We must improve opportunities, we must gather when it is to be had, as the ant does in *summer and harvest*, in the proper time. It is our wisdom to improve the season while that favours us, because that may be done then, which cannot be done at all, or not so well done, at another time. *Walk while ye have the light*.

4. The advantages which we have of learning this lesson above what the ant has, which will aggravate our slothfulness and neglect, if we idle away our time; she has *no guides, overseers, and rulers*, but does it of herself, following the instinct of nature; the more shame for us who do not in like manner follow the dictates of our own reason and conscience, though beside them we have parents, masters, ministers, magistrates, to put us in mind of our duty, to check us for the neglect of it, to quicken us to it, to direct us in it, and to call us to an account about it. The greater helps we have for working out our salvation, the more inexcusable shall we be if we neglect it.

II. By way of reproof, v. 9. . 11. In these verses,

1. He expostulates with the sluggard, rebaking him, and reasoning with him; calling him to his work, as a master does his servant that has over-slept himself; "*How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?*" How long wouldst thou sleep, if one would let thee alone? *When wilt thou think it time to arise?*" Sluggards should be roused with a *How long?* This is applicable, (1.) To those that are slothful in the way of work and duty; in the duties of their particular calling as men, or their general calling as Christians. "*How long wilt thou waste thy time, and when wilt thou be a better husband of it? How long wilt thou love thine ease, and when wilt thou learn to deny thyself, and to take pains? How long wilt thou bury thy talents, and when wilt thou begin to trade with them? How long wilt thou delay, and put off, and trifle away, thine*

opportunities, as one regardless of herafter: and *when wilt thou stir up thyself to do what thou hast to do, which, if it be not done, thou art for ever undone?* (2.) To those that are secure in the way of sin and danger; "Hast thou not slept enough? Is it not far in the day? Does not thy Master call? Are not the Philistines upon thee? *When, then, wilt thou arise?*"

2. He exposes the frivolous excuses he makes for himself, and shews how ridiculous he makes himself; when he is roused, he stretches himself, and begs, as for alms, for more *sleep*, more *slumber*; he is well in his warm bed, and cannot endure to think of rising, especially of rising to work: but observe, he promises himself and his master that he will desire but *a little more sleep*, *a little more slumber*, and then he will get up and go to his business. But herein he deceives himself; the more a slothful temper is indulged, the more it prevails; let him sleep awhile, and slumber a while, and still he is in the same tune; for *a little more sleep*, *yet a little more*; he never thinks he has enough, and yet, when he is called, pretends he will come presently. Thus men's great work is left undone by being put off yet a little longer, *de die in diem—from day to day*; and they are cheated of all their time by being cheated of the present moments; a little more sleep proves an everlasting sleep. *Sleep on now, and take your rest.*

3. He gives him fair warning of the fatal consequences of his slothfulness, v. 11. (1.) *Poverty and want* will certainly come upon those that are slothful in their business; if men neglect their affairs, they not only will not go forward, but they will go backward; he that leaves his concerns at sixes and sevens, will soon see them go to wreck and ruin, and bring his noble to ninetence. Spiritual poverty comes upon those that are slothful in the service of God; those will want oil, when they should use it, that provide it not in their vessels. (2.) "It will come silently and insensibly, will grow upon thee, and come step by step, *as one that travels*; but will without fail come at last." *It will leave thee as naked as if thou wast stript by a highwayman*; so Bishop Patrick. (3.) "It will come irresistibly, *like an armed man*, whom thou canst not oppose, or make thy part good against."

12. A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. 13. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; 14. Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord. 15. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy. 16. These six *things* doth the Lord hate; yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: 17. A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. 18. An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief. 19. A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Solomon here gives us,

I. The characters of one that is mischievous to man, and dangerous to be dealt with. If the slothful are to be condemned, that do nothing, much more those that do ill, and contrive to do all the ill they can. It is a *naughty person* that is here spoken of, Heb. *A man of Belial*; I think it should been so translated, because it is a term often used in scripture, and this is the explanation of it. Observe,

1. How a man of Belial is here described; he is *a wicked man*, that makes a trade of doing evil, especially with his tongue, for he *walks*, and works his designs, *with a froward mouth*, (v. 12.) by lying and perverseness, and a direct opposition to God and man. He says and does every thing, (1.) Very artfully, and with design; he has the subtlety of the serpent, and carries on his projects with a great deal of craft and management, (v. 13.) *with his eyes, with his feet, with his fingers*; he expresses his malice, *when he dares not speak out*, so some; or rather, thus he carries

on his plot; those about him, whom he makes use of as the tools of his wickedness, understand the ill meaning of a wink of his eye, a stamp of his feet, the least motion of his fingers. He gives orders for evil-doing, and yet would not be thought to do so, but has ways of concealing what he does, so that he may not be suspected. He is a close man, and upon the reserve; those only shall be let into the secret that will do any thing he would have them to do; he is a cunning man, and upon the trick, he has a language by himself, which an honest man is not acquainted with, nor desires to be. (2.) Very spitefully, and with ill design; it is not so much ambition and covetousness that are in his heart, as downright *frowardness*, malice, and ill-nature. He aims not so much to enrich and advance himself, as to do an ill turn to those about him. He is *continually devising one mischief* or other, purely for mischief-sake; a man of Belial indeed, of the Devil, resembling him not only in subtlety, but in malice.

2. What his doom is; (v. 15.) *His calamity shall come, and he shall be broken*; he that devised mischief shall fall into mischief. His ruin shall come, (1.) Without warning; it shall *come suddenly, suddenly shall he be broken*, to punish him for all the wicked arts he had to surprise people into his snares. (2.) Without relief; he shall be irreparably broken, and never able to piece again; *he shall be broken without remedy*. What relief can he expect that has disobliged all mankind? *He shall come to his end, and none shall help him*, Dan. 11. 45.

II. A catalogue of those things which are in a special manner odious to God, all which are generally to be found in those men of Belial, whom he had described in the foregoing verses; and the last of them (which, being the seventh, seems especially to be intended, because he says they are six, yea seven) is part of his character, that he *sows discord*. God hates sin, he hates every sin, he can never be reconciled to it, he hates nothing but sin. But there are some sins which he does in a special manner hate; and all those here mentioned are such as are injurious to our neighbour. It is an evidence of the good-will God bears to mankind, that those sins are in a special manner provoking to him which are prejudicial to the comfort of human life and society. Therefore the men of Belial must expect their ruin to *come suddenly, and without remedy*, because their practices are such as the Lord hates, and *are an abomination to him*, v. 16. These things which God hates it is no thanks to us to hate in others, but we must hate them in ourselves.

1. Haughtiness, conceitedness of ourselves, and contempt of others; *a proud look*. There are seven things that God hates, and pride is the first, because it is at the bottom of much sin, and gives rise to it. God sees the pride in the heart, and hates it there; but when it prevails to that degree, that the shew of men's countenance witnesses against them, that they overvalue themselves, and undervalue all about them, this is in a special manner hateful to him; for then pride is proud of itself, and sets shame at defiance.

2. Falschood, and fraud, and dissimulation. Next to a *proud look*, nothing is more an abomination to God than a *lying tongue*; nothing more sacred than truth, nor more necessary to conversation than speaking truth; God and all good men hate and abhor lying.

3. Cruelty and blood-thirstiness. The Devil was, from the beginning, a liar and a murderer, (John, 8. 44.) and therefore as a *lying tongue*, so *hands that shed innocent blood*, are hateful to God; because they have in them the Devil's image, and do him service.

4. Subtlety in the contrivance of sin, wisdom to do evil, *a heart that designs*, and a head that *devises, wicked imaginations*, that is acquainted with the depths of Satan, and knows how to carry on a covetous, envious, revengeful, plot, most effectually. The more there is of craft and management in sin, the more it is an abomination to God.

5. Vigour and diligence in the prosecution of sin; *feet that are swift in running to mischief*, as if they were afraid of losing time, or were impatient of delay, in a thing they are so greedy of. The policy and vigilance, the eagerness and industry, of sinners, in their sinful pursuits, may shame us who go about that which is good so awkwardly and so coldly.

6. *False-witness bearing*, which is one of the greatest mischiefs that the wicked imagination can devise, and against which there is least fence. There cannot be a greater affront to God, (to whom in an oath appeal is made,) nor a greater injury to our neighbour, (all whose interests in this world, even the dearest, lie open to an attack of this kind,) than knowingly to give in a false testimony. There are seven things which God hates, and lying involves two of them; he hates it, and doubly hates it.

7. Making mischief between relations and neighbours, and using all wicked means possible, not only to alienate their affections one from another, but to irritate their passions one against another. The God of love and peace hates *him that sows discord among brethren*, for he delights in concord. Those that, by tale-bearing and slandering, by carrying ill-natured stories, aggravating every thing that is said and done, and suggesting jealousies and evil surmises, blow the coals of contention, are but preparing for themselves a fire of the same nature.

20. My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: 21. Bind them continually upon thine heart, *and* tie them about thy neck. 22. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and *when* thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. 23. For the commandment *is* a lamp; and the law *is* light; and reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life: 24. To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. 25. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eye-lids. 26. For by means of a whorish woman *a man is brought* to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. 27. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? 28. Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? 29. So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. 30. *Men* do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; 31. But *if* he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. 32. *But* whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he *that* doeth it destroyeth his own soul. 33. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. 34. For jealousy *is* the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. 35. He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts.

Here is,

I. A general exhortation faithfully to adhere to the word of God, and to take it for our guide in all our actions.

1. We must look upon the word of God, both as a *light*, (v.23.) and as a *law*, v.20,23. (1.) By its arguments it is a *light*, which our understandings must subscribe to; it is a *lamp* to our eyes for discovery, and so to our feet for direction. The word of God reveals to us truths of eternal certainty, and is built upon the highest reason. Scripture-light is the sure light. (2.) By its authority it is a *law*, which our wills must submit to. As never such a light shone out of the schools of the philosophers, so never such a law issued from the throne of any prince; so well framed,

and so binding. It is such a law as is a lamp and a light, for it carries with it the evidence of its own goodness.

2. We must receive it as *our father's commandment*, and *the law of our mother*, v.20. It is God's commandment, and his law. But, (1.) Our parents directed us to it, put it into our hands, trained us up in the knowledge and observance of it, its original and obligation being most sacred. We believe, indeed, not for their saying, for we have tried it ourselves, and find it to be of God; but we were beholden to them for recommending it to us, and see all the reason in the world to *continue in the things we have learned, knowing of whom we have learned them*. (2.) The cautions, counsels, and commands, which our parents gave us, agree with the word of God, and therefore we must hold them fast. Children, when they are grown up, must remember *the law of a good mother*, as well as the *commandment of a good father*, Ecclesiasticus, 3.2. *The Lord has given the father honour over the children, and has confirmed the authority of the mother over the sons*.

3. We must retain the word of God, and the good instructions which our parents gave us out of it. (1.) We must never cast them off, never think it a mighty achievement (as some do) to get clear of the restraints of a good education; "*Keep thy father's commandment*, keep it still, and never forsake it." (2.) We must never lay them by, no not for a time; (v.21.) *Bind them continually*, not only upon *thine hand*, (as Moses had directed, Deut.6.8.) but upon *thine heart*. Phylacteries upon the hand were of no value at all, any further than they occasioned pious thoughts and affections in the heart. There the word must be written, there it must be hid, and laid close to the conscience. *Tie them about thy neck*, as an ornament, a bracelet, or gold chain, *about thy throat*, so the word is; let them be a guard upon that pass; tie them about thy throat, that no forbidden fruit may be suffered to go in, nor any evil word suffered to go out, through the throat; and thus a great deal of sin would be prevented. Let the word of God be always ready to us, and let us feel the impressions of it, as of that which is bound upon our hearts, and about our necks.

4. We must make use of the word of God, and of the benefit that is designed us by it. If we bind it continually upon our hearts, (1.) It will be our guide, and we must follow its direction. "*When thou goest, it shall lead thee*; (v.22.) "it shall lead thee into, and lead thee in, the good and right way; shall lead thee from, and lead thee out of, every sinful, dangerous, path. It will say unto thee, when thou art ready to turn aside, *This is the way, walk in it*. It will be that to thee that the pillar of cloud and fire was to Israel in the wilderness. Be led by that, let it be thy rule, and then thou shalt be led by the Spirit; he will be thy Monitor and Support." (2.) It will be our guard, and we must put ourselves under the protection of it; "*When thou sleepest*, and liest exposed to the malignant powers of darkness, *it shall keep thee*; thou shalt be safe, and shalt think thyself so." If we govern ourselves by the precepts of the word all day, and make conscience of the duty God has commanded to us, we may shelter ourselves under the promises of the word at night, and take the comfort of the deliverances God does, and will, command for us. (3.) It will be our companion, and we must converse with it; "*When thou awakest* in the night, and knowest not how to pass away thy waking minutes, if thou pleasest, *it shall talk with thee*, and entertain thee with pleasant meditations in the night-watches; *when thou awakest* in the morning, and art contriving the work of the day, *it shall talk with thee* about it, and help thee to contrive for the best," Ps.1.2. The word of God has something to say to us upon all occasions, if we would but enter into discourse with it, would ask it what it has to say, and give it the hearing. And it would contribute to our close and comfortable walking with God all day, if we would begin with him in the morning, and let his word be the subject of our first thoughts. *When I awake, I am still with thee*; we are so, if the word be still with us. (4.) It will be our life; for, as the law is a lamp, and a light, for the present, so the *reproofs of instruction are the way of life*. Those reproofs of the word, which not only

show us our faults, but instruct us how to do better, are the way that leads to life, eternal life. Let not faithful reproofs, therefore, which have such a direct tendency to make us happy, ever make us uneasy.

II. Here is a particular caution against the sin of uncleanness. When we consider how much this iniquity abounds, how heinous it is in its own nature, of what pernicious consequence it is, and how certainly destructive to all the seeds of the spiritual life in the soul, we shall not wonder that the cautions against it are so often repeated, and so largely inculcated.

1. One great kindness God designed men, in giving them his law, was, to preserve them from this sin; (v. 24.) "The reproofs of instruction are therefore the way of life to thee, because they are designed to keep thee from the evil woman, who will be certain death to thee, from being enticed by the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman, who pretends to love thee, but intends to ruin thee." Those that will be wrought upon by flattery, make themselves a very easy prey to the tempter; and those who would avoid that snare, must take well-instructed reproofs as great kindnesses, and be thankful to those that will deal faithfully with them, Prov. 27. 5, 6.

2. The greatest kindness we can do ourselves, is, to keep at a distance from this sin, and to look upon it with the utmost dread and detestation; (v. 25.) "*Lust not after her beauty, no not in thy heart, for if thou dost, thou hast there already committed adultery with her.* Talk not of the charms in her face, neither be thou smitten with her amorous glances; they are all snares and nets; *let her not take thee with her eye-lids.* Her looks are arrows and fiery darts; they wound, they kill, in another sense than what lovers mean; they call it a pleasing captivity, but it is a destroying one, it is worse than Egyptian slavery."

Divers arguments Solomon here urges to enforce this caution against the sin of whoredom.

(1.) It is a sin that impoverishes men, wastes their estates, and reduces them to beggary; (v. 26.) *By means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread;* many a man has been so, who has purchased the ruin of his body and soul at the expense of his wealth. The prodigal son spent his living on harlots, so that he brought himself to be fellow-commoner with the swine. And that poverty must needs be lie heavy which men bring themselves into by their own folly, Job, 31. 12.

(2.) It threatens death, it kills men; *The adulteress will hunt for the precious life,* perhaps designedly, as Delilah for Samson's, at least eventually, the sin strikes at the life. Adultery was punished, by the law of Moses, as a capital crime; *the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death;* every one knew this; those therefore who, for the gratifying of a base lust, would lay themselves open to the law, could be reckoned no better than self-murderers.

(3.) It brings guilt upon the conscience, and debauches that. He that touches his neighbour's wife, with an immodest touch, cannot be innocent, v. 29. [1.] He is in imminent danger of adultery, as he that takes fire in his bosom, or goes upon hot coals, is in danger of being burnt. The way of this sin is down-hill, and those that venture upon the temptations to it hardly escape the sin itself. The fly fools away her life by playing the wanton with the flames. It is a deep pit, which it is madness to venture upon the brink of. He that keeps company with those of ill fame, that goes in with them, and touches them, cannot long preserve his innocency; he thrusts himself into temptation, and so throws himself out of God's protection. [2.] He that commits adultery is in the high road to destruction. The bold presumptuous sinner says, "I may venture upon the sin, and yet escape the punishment; I shall have peace though I go on." He might as well say, I will take fire into my bosom, and not burn my clothes; or, I will go upon hot coals, and not burn my feet. He that goes in to his neighbour's wife, however he holds himself, God will not hold him guiltless. The fire of lust kindles the fire of hell.

(4.) It ruins the reputation, and entails perpetual infamy upon that. It is a much more scandalous sin than stealing is; (v. 30. . 33.) perhaps it is not so in the account of men, at least not in our day.

A thief is sent to the stocks, to the gaol, to Bridewell, to the gallows, while the vile adulterer goes unpunished, nay, with many, unblemished; he dares boast of his villainies, and they are made but a jest of; but, in the account of God and his law, adultery was much the more enormous crime; and if God is the Fountain of honour, his word must be the standard of it. [1.] As for the sin of stealing, if a man were brought to it by extreme necessity, if he stole meat for the satisfying of his soul when he was hungry, though that will not excuse him from guilt, yet it is such an extenuation of his crime, that men do not despise him, do not expose him to ignominy, but pity him; hunger will break through stone walls, and blame will be laid upon those that brought him to poverty, or that did not relieve him; nay, though he have not that to say in his excuse, if he be found stealing, and the evidence be ever so plain upon him, yet he shall only make restitution seven-fold; the law of Moses appointed that he who stole a sheep should restore four-fold, and an ox five-fold; (Exod. 22. 1.) accordingly David adjudged, 2 Sam. 12. 6. But we may suppose in these cases, concerning which the law had not made provision, the judges afterward settled the penalties in proportion to the crimes, according to the equity of the law. Now, if he that stole an ox out of a man's field must restore five-fold, it was reasonable that he that stole a man's goods out of his house should restore seven-fold; for there was no law to put him to death, as is with us, for burglary, and robbery on the highway. And of this worst kind of theft Solomon here speaks; the greatest punishment was, that a man might be forced to give all the substance of his house to satisfy the law, and his blood was not attained. But,

[2.] Committing adultery is a more heinous crime; Job calls it so, and an iniquity to be punished by the judge, Job, 31. 11. When Nathan would convict David of the evil of his adultery, he did it by a parable concerning the most aggravated theft, which, in David's judgment, deserved to be punished with death, (2 Sam. 12. 5.) and then shewed him that his sin was more exceeding sinful than that. First, It is a greater reproach to a man's reason, for he cannot excuse it, as a thief may, by saying that it was to satisfy his hunger, but must own that it was to gratify a brutish lust, which would break the hedge of God's law, not for want, but for wantonness. Therefore whoso commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding, and deserves to be stigmatized as an arrant fool. Secondly, It is more severely punished by the law of God; a thief suffered only a pecuniary mulct, but the adulterer suffered death. The thief steals to satisfy his soul, but the adulterer destroys his own soul, and falls an unpitied sacrifice to the justice both of God and man. Sinner, thou hast destroyed thyself. This may be applied to the spiritual and eternal death, which is the consequence of sin; he that does it wounds his conscience, corrupts his rational power, extinguishes all the sparks of the spiritual life, and exposes himself to the wrath of God for ever, and thus destroys his own soul. Thirdly, The infamy of it is indelible, v. 33. It will be a wound to his good name, a dishonour to his family, and, though the guilt of it may be done away by repentance, the reproach of it never will, but will stick to his memory when he is gone. David's sin, in the matter of Uriah, was not only a perpetual blemish upon his own character, but gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme his name too.

(5.) It exposes the adulterer to the rage of the jealous husband, whose honour he puts such an affront upon, v. 34, 35. He that touches his neighbour's wife, and is familiar with her, gives him occasion for jealousy, much more he that debauches her; which, if kept ever so secret, might then be discovered by the waters of jealousy; (Numb. 5. 12.) "When discovered, thou hadst better meet a bear robbed of her whelps, than the injured husband, who, in the case of adultery, will be as severe an avenger of his own honour, as, in the case of manslaughter, of his brother's blood. If thou art not afraid of the wrath of God, yet be afraid of the rage of a man; such jealousy is, it is strong as death, and cruel as the grave. In the day of vengeance, when the adulterer comes to be tried for his life, the prosecutor will not spare any pains or cost in the prosecution, will not relent toward thee, as he would, perhaps, towards one that had robbed him; he will not accept of

any commutation, any composition, he will not regard any ransom; though thou offer to bribe him, and give him many gifts to pacify him, he will not rest content with any thing less than the execution of the law, thou must be stoned to death; if a man would give all the substance of his house, it would atone for a theft, (v. 31.) but not for adultery, in that case it would utterly be condemned. Stand in awe therefore, and sin not, expose not thyself to all this misery for a moment's sordid pleasure, which will be bitterness in the end."

CHAP. VII.

The scope of this chapter, is, as of several before, to warn young men against the lusts of the flesh. Solomon remembered of what ill consequence it was to his father, perhaps found himself, and perceived his son, addicted to it, or at least had observed how many hopeful young men among his subjects had been ruined by those lusts; and therefore he thought he could never say enough to dissuade men from them, that every one may possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, and not in the lusts of uncleanness. In this chapter, we have, I. A general exhortation to get our minds principled and governed by the word of God, as a sovereign antidote against this sin, v. 1. 5. II. A particular representation of the great danger which un wary young men are in of being inebriated into this snare, v. 6. 23. III. A serious caution inferred thence, in the close, to take heed of all approaches toward this sin, v. 24. 27. We should all pray, Lord, lead us not into this temptation.

1. **M**Y son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. 2. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. 3. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart. 4. Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman: 5. That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words.

These verses are an introduction to his warning against fleshly lusts, much the same with that, ch. 6. 20, &c. and ends, (v. 5.) as that did, (v. 24.) To keep thee from the strange woman, that is it he aims at; only there he had said, *Keep thy father's commandment*, here, (which comes all to one,) *Keep my commandments*, for he speaks to us as unto sons. He speaks in God's name; for they are God's commandments that we are to keep, his words, his law.

The word of God must be to us,

1. As that which we are most careful of; we must keep it as our treasure, we must lay up God's commandments with us, lay them up safe, that we may not be robbed of them by the wicked one; (v. 1.) We must keep it as our life; *Keep my commandments, and live*; (v. 2.) "Not only keep them, and you shall live; but, keep them as you would your life, as those that cannot live without them." It would be death to a good man to be deprived of the word of God, for by it he lives, and not by bread alone.

2. As that which we are most tender of; *Keep my law as the apple of thine eye*; a little thing offends the eye, and therefore nature has so well guarded it: we pray, with David, that God would keep us as the apple of his eye; (Ps. 17. 8.) that our lives and comforts may be precious in his sight; and they shall be so, (Zech. 2. 8.) if we be in like manner tender of his law, and afraid of the least violation of it. Those who reproach strict and circumspect walking, as needless preciseness, consider not that the law is to be kept as the apple of the eye, for indeed it is the apple of our eye, the law is light, the law in the heart is the eye of the soul.

3. As that which we are proud of, and would be ever mindful of; (v. 3.) "*Bind them upon thy fingers*, let them be precious to thee, look upon them as an ornament, as a diamond-ring, as the signet on thy right hand; wear them continually as thy wedding-ring, the badge of thine espousals to God; look upon the word of God as putting an honour upon thee, as an ensign of thy dignity. Bind them on thy fingers, that they may be constant memorandums to thee of thy duty, that thou mayest have them always in view, as that which is graven upon the palms of thine hands."

4. As that which we are fond of, and are ever thinking of; *Write*

them upon the tables of thine heart, as the names of the friends we dearly love, we say, are written in our hearts. Let the word of God dwell richly in us, and be written there where it will be always at hand to be read. Where sin was written, (Jer. 17. 1.) let the word of God be written. It is the matter of a promise; (Heb. 8. 10.) *I will write my law in their hearts*, which makes the precept practicable and easy.

5. As that which we are intimately acquainted and conversant with; (v. 4.) "*Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister*, whom I dearly love and take delight in; and call understanding thy kinswoman, to whom I am nearly allied, and for whom I have a pure affection; call her thy friend, whom thou courtest." We must make the word of God familiar to us, consult it, and consult its honour, and take a pleasure in conversing with it.

6. As that which we make use of for our defence and armour, to keep us from the strange woman, from sin, that flattering, but destroying, thing, that adulteress; particularly from the sin of uncleanness, v. 5. Let the word of God confirm our dread of that sin, and our resolutions against it; let it discover to us its fallacies, and suggest to us answers to all its flatteries.

6. For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, 7. And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, 8. Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, 9. In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: 10. And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtle of heart. 11. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: 12. Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.) 13. So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, 14. I have peace-offerings with me: this day have I payed my vows. 15. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. 16. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. 17. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. 18. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning; let us solace ourselves with loves. 19. For the good man is not at home, he is gone a long journey: 20. He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed. 21. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. 22. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; 23. Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.

Solomon here, to enforce the caution he had given against the sin of whoredom, tells a story of a young man that was ruined, to all intents and purposes, by the enticements of an adulterous woman. Such a story as this would serve the lewd profane poets of our age to make a play of, and the harlot, with them, would be a heroine; nothing would be so entertaining to the audience, nor give them so much diversion, as her arts of beguiling the young gentleman, and drawing in the country-squire; her conquests would be celebrated as the triumphs of wit and love, and the comedy would conclude very pleasantly; and every young man that saw it acted,

would covet to be so picked up. Thus *fools make a mock at sin*. But Solomon here relates it, and all wise and good men read it, as a very melancholy story; the impudence of the adulterous woman is very justly looked upon, by all that have any sparks of virtue in them, with the highest indignation, and the easiness of the young man, with the tenderest compassion; and the story concludes with sad reflections, enough to make all that read and hear it afraid of the snares of fleshly lusts, and careful to keep at the utmost distance from them. It is supposed to be a parable, or imagined case, but I doubt it was too true, and, which is worse, that, notwithstanding the warning it gives of the fatal consequences of such wicked courses, it is still too often true, and the agents for hell are still playing the same game, and with like success.

Solomon was a magistrate, and, as such, inspected the manners of his subjects, looked often through his casement, that he might see with his own eyes, and made remarks upon those who little thought his eye was upon them, that he might know the better how to make the sword he bore a terror to evil-doers. But here he writes as a minister, a prophet, who is by office a watchman, to give warning of the approach of the enemies, and especially where they lie in ambush, that we may not be ignorant of Satan's devices, but may know where to double our guard. This Solomon does here, where we may observe the account he gives,

I. Of the person tempted, and how he laid himself open to the temptation, and therefore must thank himself if it end in his destruction. 1. He was a *young man*, v. 7. Fleshly lusts are called *youthful lusts*, (2 Tim. 2. 22.) not to extenuate them as tricks of youth, and therefore excusable, but rather to aggravate them, as robbing God of the first and best of our time, and, by debauching the mind when it is tender, laying a foundation for a bad life ever after; and to intimate that young people ought, in a special manner, to fortify their resolutions against this sin. 2. He was a young man, *void of understanding*, that went abroad into the world, not principled, as he ought to have been, with wisdom and the fear of God, and so ventured to sea without ballast, without pilot, cord, or compass; he knew not how to depart from evil, which is the best understanding, Joh. 28. 28. Those become an easy prey to Satan, who, when they are arrived to the stature of men, have scarcely the understanding of children. 3. He kept bad company; he was a *young man among the youths*, a silly young man *among the simple* ones; if, being conscious of his own weakness, he had associated with those that were elder and wiser than himself, there had been hopes of him; Christ, at twelve years old, conversed with the doctors, to set young people an example of this; but if those that are simple choose such for their companions as are like themselves, simple they will still be, and hardened in their simplicity. 4. He was sauntering, and had nothing to do, but *passed through the street*, as one that knew not how to dispose of himself. One of the sins of filthy Sodom, was, *abundance of idleness*, Ezek. 16. 49. He went in a starched stately manner, so (they say) the word signifies; he appeared to be a nice formal fop, the top of whose accomplishments was to dress well, and walk with a good air; fit game for that bird of prey to fly at. 5. He was a night-walker, that hated and scorned the business that is to be done by day-light, from which the evening calls men in to their repose; and, having fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, he begins to move in the *twilight in the evening*, v. 9. And he chooses the *black and dark night* as fittest for his purpose, not the moon-light nights, when he might be discovered. 6. He steered his course toward the house of one that he thought would entertain him, and that he might be merry with; he went *near her corner, the way to her house*, (v. 8.) contrary to Solomon's advice, (ch. 5. 8.) *Come not nigh the door of her house*. Perhaps he did not know it was the way to an infamous house, but, however, it was a way that he had no business in; and, when we have nothing to do, the Devil will quickly find us something to do. We must take heed, not only of idle days, but of idle evenings, lest they prove inlets into temptation.

II. Of the person tempting; not a common prostitute, for she was a married wife, (v. 19.) and, for aught appears, lived in reputation among her neighbours, not suspected of any such wickedness,

and yet, in the *twilight of the evening*, when her husband was abroad, abominably impudent. She is here described, 1. By her dress; she had the *attire of a harlot*, (v. 10.) gaudy and flaunting, to set her off as a beauty, perhaps she was painted as Jezebel, and went with her neck and breasts bare, loose, and *en deshabbille*. The purity of the heart will shew itself in the modesty of the dress, which *becomes women professing godliness*. 2. By her craft and management; she is *subtle of heart*, mistress of all the arts of wheedling, and knowing how by all her caresses to serve her own base purposes. 3. By her temper and carriage; *she is loud and stubborn*, talkative and self-willed, noisy and troublesome, wilful and head-strong, all tongue, and that will have her saying, right or wrong, impatient of check and controul, and cannot bear to be counselled, much less reprov'd, by husband or parents, ministers or friends; she is a *daughter of Belial*, that will endure no yoke. 4. By her place; not her own house, she hates the confinement and employment of that, her *feet abide not there* any longer than needs must. She is all for gadding abroad, changing place and company; *now is she without* in the country, under pretence of taking the air, now *in the streets* of the city, under pretence of seeing how the market goes; she is here, and there, and every where but where she should be; she *lies in wait at every corner*, to pick up such as she can make a prey of. Virtue is a penance to those to whom home is a prison.

III. Of the temptation itself, and the management of it. She met the young spark, perhaps she knew him, however, she knew by his fashions that he was such a one as she wished for; so she *caught him about the neck and kissed him*, contrary to all the rules of modesty, (v. 13.) and waited not for his compliments or courtship, but, *with an impudent face*, invited him not only to *her house*, but to *her bed*.

1. She courted him to *sup* with her; (v. 14, 15.) *I have peace-offerings with me*. Hereby she gives him to understand, (1.) Her prosperity, that she was compassed about with so many blessings, that she had occasion to offer peace-offerings, in token of joy and thankfulness; she was before-hand in the world, so that he needed not fear having his pocket picked. (2.) Her profession of piety; she had been to-day at the temple, and was as well respected there as any that worshipped in the courts of the Lord; she had paid her vows, and, as she thought, made all even with God Almighty, and therefore might venture upon a new score of sins. Note, The external performances of religion, if they do not harden men against sin, harden them in it, and embolden carnal hearts to venture upon it, in hopes that, when they come to count and discount with God, he will be found as much in debt to them for their peace-offerings and their vows, as they to him for their sins. But it is sad that a shew of piety should become the shelter of iniquity, (which really doubles the shame of it, and makes it more exceeding sinful,) and that men should baffle their consciences with those very things that should startle them. The Pharisees made long prayers, that they might the more plausibly carry on their covetous and mischievous designs. (3.) Her present plenty of good provisions. The greatest part of the flesh of the peace-offerings, was, by the law, returned back to the offerers, to feast upon with their friends, which (if they were peace-offerings of thanksgiving) was to be all eaten *the same day, and none of it left until the morning*, Lev. 7. 15. This law of charity and generosity is abused to be a colour for gluttony and excess; "Come," says she, "come home with me, for I have good cheer enough, and only want good company to help me off with it." It was pity that the peace-offerings should thus become, in a bad sense, sin-offerings, and that what was designed for the honour of God should become the food and fuel of a base lust.

But this is not all; to strengthen the temptation, [1.] She pretends to have a very great affection for him above any man; "Therefore, because I have a good supper upon the table, *I came forth to meet thee*, for no friend in the world shall be so welcome to it as thou shalt, v. 15. Thou art he whom I came on purpose to seek, to seek diligently; came myself, and would not send a servant." Surely he cannot deny her his company, when she put such a value upon it, and would take all these pains to obtain the

favour of it. Sinners take pains to do mischief, and are as the roaring lion himself; they go about seeking to devour, and yet pretend they are seeking to oblige. [2.] She would have it thought that Providence itself countenanced her choice of him for her companion; for how quickly had she found him whom she sought!

2. She courted him to *lie with her*; they will sit down to eat and drink, and then rise up to play, to play the wanton, and there is a bed ready for them, where he shall find that which will be, in all respects, agreeable to him; to please his eye, it is *decked with coverings of tapestry*, and *carved works*, exquisitely fine, he never saw the like; to please his touch, the sheets are not of home-spun cloth, they are far-fetched and dear-bought, they are of *fine linen of Egypt*; (v. 16.) to gratify his smell, it is *perfumed* with the sweetest scents, v. 17. Come, therefore, and *let us take our fill of love*, v. 18. Of *love*, does she say? Of *lust* she means, brutish lust; but it is pity that the name of love should be thus abused; true love is from heaven, this is from hell; how can they pretend to solace themselves, and love one another, who are really ruining themselves, and one another?

3. She anticipates the objection which he might make of the danger of it. Is she not another man's wife, and what if her husband should catch them in adultery, in the very act, he will make them pay dear for their sport, and where will the solace of their love be then? Never fear, says she, the *good man is not at home*; (v. 19.) she does not call him her husband, for she *forsakes the guide of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God*; but the *good man* of the house, whom I am weary of. Thus Potiphar's wife, when she spake of her husband, would not call him so, but *he*, Gen. 39. 14. It is therefore, with good reason, taken notice of, to Sarah's praise, that she spake respectfully of her husband, calling him *Lord*. She pleases herself with this, that he is not at home, and therefore she is melancholy, if she have not some company, and therefore, whatever company she has, she may be free with them, for she is from under his eye, and he shall never know. But will he not return quickly? No, he is *gone a long journey*, and cannot return on a sudden; he *appointed the day* of his return, and he never comes home sooner than he says he will. *He has taken a bag of money with him*; either, (1.) To trade with, to buy goods with, and he will not return till he has laid it all out; it was pity that an honest industrious man should be thus abused, and advantage taken of his absence, when it is upon business, for the good of his family. Or, (2.) To spend and revel with; whether justly or not, she insinuates that he was a bad husband; so she would represent him, because she was resolved to be a bad wife, and must have that for an excuse; it is often groundlessly suggested, but is never a sufficient excuse. "He follows his pleasures, and wastes his estate abroad;" (says she;) "and why should not I do the same at home?"

4. Of the success of the temptation. Promising the young man every thing that was pleasant, and impunity in the enjoyment, she gained her point, v. 21. It should seem, the youth, though very simple, had no ill design, else a word, a beck, a wink, would have served, and there had not needed all this harangue; but though he did not intend any such thing, nay, had something in his conscience that opposed it, yet, *with her much fair speech, she caused him to yield*, his corruptions at length triumphed over his convictions, and his resolutions were not strong enough to hold out against such artful attacks as these, but, *with the flattery of her lips, she forced him*, he could not stop his ear against such a charmer, but surrendered himself her captive. Wisdom's maidens, who plead her cause, and have reason on their side, and true and divine pleasures to invite men to, have a deaf ear turned to them, and with all their rhetoric cannot compel men to come in, but such is the dominion of sin in the hearts of men, that its allurements soon prevail by falsehood and flattery.

With what pity does Solomon here look upon this foolish young man, when he sees him follow the adulterous woman! (1.) He gives him up for gone; alas! he is undone. He goes to the slaughter; (for houses of uncleanness are slaughter-houses to precious souls;) a dart will presently strike through his liver; going without his breast-plate, he will receive his death's wound, v. 23.

It is his life, his precious life, that is thus irrecoverably thrown away; he is perfectly lost to all good, his conscience is debauched, a door is opened to all other vices, and this will certainly end in his endless damnation. (2.) That which makes his case the more piteous, is, that he is not himself aware of his misery and danger; he goes blindfold, nay, he goes laughing, to his ruin. The ox thinks he is led to the pasture when he is led to the slaughter; the fool (that is, the drunkard, for, of all sinners, drunkards are the greatest fools, they willfully turn themselves into fools) is led to the correction of the stocks, and is not sensible of the shame of it, but goes to it as if he were going to a play. The *bird* that *hastes to the snare*, looks only at the bait, and promises herself a good bit from that, and considers not that *it is for her life*. Thus this unthinking unwary young man dreams of nothing but the pleasures he shall have in the embraces of the harlot, while really he is running headlong upon his ruin. Though Solomon does not here tell us that he put the law in execution against this base harlot, yet we have no reason to think but that he did, he was himself so affected with the mischief she did, and had such an indignation at it.

24. Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth.

25. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. 25. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. 26. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.

We have here the application of the foregoing story; "Hearken to me therefore, and not to such seducers; (v. 24.) give ear to a father, and not to an enemy."

1. "Take good counsel when it is given you. *Let not thine heart decline to her ways*; (v. 25.) never leave the paths of virtue, though strait and narrow, solitary and up-hill, for the way of the adulteress, though green and broad, and crowded with company. Do not only keep thy feet from those ways, but let not so much as thy heart incline to them; never harbour a disposition this way, nor think otherwise than with abhorrence of such wicked practices as these. Let reason, and conscience, and the fear of God, ruling in the heart, check the inclinations of the sensual appetite. If thou goest in her paths, in any of the paths that lead to this sin, thou goest astray, thou art out of the right way, the safe way; therefore take heed, *go not astray*, lest thou wander endlessly."

2. "Take fair warning when it is given you."

(1.) "Look back and see what mischief this sin has done; the adulteress has been the ruin not of here and there one, but she has *cast down many wounded*." Thousands have been undone, now and for ever, by this sin; and those not only the weak and simple youths, such as he was of whom we had now spoken, but *many strong men have been slain by her*, v. 26. Herein, perhaps, he has an eye especially to Samson, who was slain by this sin, and perhaps to David too, who, by his sin, entailed a sword upon his house, though so far the Lord took it away, that he himself should not die. These were men not only of great bodily strength, but of eminent wisdom and courage, and yet their fleshly lusts prevailed over them. Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be shaken. *Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall*.

(2.) "Look forward with an eye of faith, and see what will be in the end of it," v. 27. Her house, though richly decked and furnished, and called a *house of pleasure*, is the *way to hell*; and her chambers are the stair-case that goes down to the *chambers of death*, and everlasting darkness. The cup of fornication must shortly be exchanged for the cup of trembling; and the flames of lust, if not quenched by repentance and mortification, will burn to the lowest hell. Therefore *stand in awe, and sin not*.

CHAP. VIII.

The word of God is two-fold, and, in each sense, is wisdom; for a word without wisdom, or wisdom without a word, is of little use. Now, I. Divine

revelation is the word and wisdom of God, and so is that pure religion and undefiled, which is built upon it; and of that Solomon here speaks, recommending it to us as faithful, and well worthy of all acceptance, v. 1. 21. God, by it, instructs, and governs, and blesses, the children of men. II. The Redeemer is the eternal Word and Wisdom, the Logos; he is the Wisdom that speaks to the children of men, in the former part of the chapter; all divine revelation passes through his hand, and centres in him; but of him as the personal Wisdom, the second Person in the Godhead, in the judgment of many of the ancients, Solomon here speaks, v. 22. 31. He concludes with a repeated charge to the children of men, diligently to attend to the voice of God in his word, v. 32. 36.

WISDOM not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice? 2. She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. 3. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. 4. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. 5. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. 6. Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. 7. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. 8. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. 9. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge. 10. Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. 11. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.

The will of God, revealed to us for our salvation, is here largely represented to us, as easy to be known and understood, that none may have an excuse for their ignorance or error; and as worthy to be embraced, that none may have an excuse for their carelessness and unbelief.

I. The things revealed are easy to be known, for they belong to us and to our children; (Deut. 29. 29.) and we need not soar up to heaven, or dive into the depths, to get the knowledge of them, (Deut. 30. 11.) for they are published and proclaimed in some measure by the works of the creation, (Ps. 19. 1.) more fully by the consciences of men, and the eternal reasons and rules of good and evil, but most clearly by Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

The precepts of wisdom may easily be known; for,

1. They are proclaimed aloud; (v. 1.) *Does not wisdom cry?* Yes, she cries aloud, and does not spare; (Isa. 58. 1.) she puts forth her voice; as one in earnest, and desirous to be heard. *Jesus stood and cried*, John, 7. 37. The curses and blessings were read with a loud voice by the Levites, Deut. 27. 14. And men's own hearts sometimes speak aloud to them; there are clamours of conscience, as well as whispers.

2. They are proclaimed from on high; (v. 2.) *She stands in the top of high places*; it was from the top of mount Sinai that the law was given, and Christ expounded it in a sermon upon the mount. Nay, if we slight divine revelation, we turn away from him that speaks from heaven, a high place indeed, Heb. 12. 25. The adulterous woman spake in secret, the oracles of the heathen muttered, but wisdom speaks openly; truth seeks no corners, but gladly appeals to the light.

3. They are proclaimed in the places of concourse, where multitudes are gathered together, the more the better. *Jesus spake in the synagogues and in the temple, whither the Jews always resorted*, John, 18. 20. Every man that passes by on the road, of what rank or condition soever, may know what is good, and what the Lord requires of him, if it be not his own fault. There is no speech nor language where wisdom's voice is not

heard; her discoveries and directions are given to all promiscuously. *He that has ears to hear, let him hear.*

4. They are proclaimed there where they are most needed. They are intended for the guide of our way, and therefore are published in the places of the path, where many ways meet, that travellers may be shewed, if they will but ask, which is the right way, just then when they are at a loss; thou shalt then hear the word behind thee, saying, *This is the way*, Isa. 30. 21. The foolish man knows not how to go to the city, (Eccl. 10. 15.) and therefore wisdom stands ready to direct him; stands at the gates, at the entry of the city, ready to tell him where the seer's house is, 1 Sam. 9. 18. Nay, she follows men to their own houses, and cries to them at the coming in at the doors, saying, *Peace be to this house*; and, if the son of peace be there, it shall certainly abide upon it. God's ministers are appointed to testify to people, both publicly, and from house to house. Their own consciences follow them with admonitions, wherever they go, which they cannot be out of the hearing of, while they carry their own heads and hearts about with them, which are a law unto themselves.

5. They are directed to the children of men. We attend to that discourse in which we hear ourselves named, though otherwise we should have neglected it; therefore wisdom speaks to us; *Unto you, O men, I call*, (v. 4.) not to angels, they need not these instructions; not to devils, they are past them; not to the brute-creatures, they are not capable of them; but to you, O men, who are taught more than the beasts of the earth, and made wiser than the fowls of heaven. To you is this law given, to you is the word of this invitation, this exhortation, sent. *My voice is to the sons of men*, who are concerned to receive instruction, and to whom, one would think, it should be very welcome. It is not to you, O Jews, only, that wisdom cries, or to you, O gentlemen, or to you, O scholars; but to you, O men, O sons of men, even the meanest.

6. They are designed to make them wise; (v. 5.) they are calculated not only for men that are capable of wisdom, but for sinful men, fallen men, foolish men, that need it, and are undone without it; *O ye simple ones, understand wisdom*. Though you are ever so simple, wisdom will take you for her scholars, and not only so, but, if you will be ruled by her, will undertake to give you an understanding heart. When sinners leave their sins, and become truly religious, then the simple understand wisdom.

II. The things revealed are worthy to be known, well-worthy of all acceptance. We are concerned to hear; for,

1. They are of inestimable value; they are excellent things, (v. 6.) princely things, so the word is. Though they are level to the capacity of the meanest, yet there is that in them which will be entertainment for the greatest. They are divine and heavenly things, so excellent, that, in comparison with them, all other learning is but children's play. Things which relate to an eternal God, an immortal soul, and an everlasting state, must needs be excellent things.

2. They are of incontestable equity, and carry along with them the evidence of their own goodness; they are right things, (v. 6.) all in righteousness, (v. 8.) and nothing froward or perverse in them. All the dictates and directions of revealed religion are consonant to, and perfective of, the light and law of nature, and there is nothing in it that puts any hardship upon us, that lays us under any undue restraints, unbecoming the dignity and liberty of the human nature; nothing that we have reason to complain of: all God's precepts concerning all things are right.

3. They are of unquestionable truth; wisdom's doctrines, upon which her laws are founded, are such as we may venture our immortal souls upon; *My mouth shall speak truth*, (v. 7.) the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, for it is a testimony to the world. Every word of God is true, there are not so much as pious frauds in it, nor are we imposed upon in that which is told us for our good. Christ is a faithful Witness, is the Truth itself; wickedness, lying, is an abomination to his lips. Note, Lying is wickedness, and we should not only refrain from it, but it should be an abomination to us, and as far from what we say, as from

what God says to us. His word to us is *yea, and amen*, never then let our's be *yea, and nay*.

4. They are wonderfully acceptable and agreeable to those who take them aright, who understand themselves aright, have not their judgments blinded and biassed by the world and the flesh, are not under the power of prejudice, are taught of God, and whose understanding he has opened; who impartially seek knowledge, take pains for it, and have found it in the inquiries they have hitherto made: to them, (1.) They are all plain, and not hard to be understood. If the book is sealed, it is to those who are willingly ignorant. *If our gospel is hid, it is hid to them who are lost*; but to those who depart from evil, which is understanding, who have that good understanding, which they have who do the commandments, to them they are all plain, and there is nothing difficult in them. The way of religion is a high-way, and the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein, Isa. 35. 8. They therefore do a great wrong to the common people, who deny them the use of the scripture, under pretence that they cannot understand it, whereas it is plain for plain people. (2.) They are all right, and not hard to be submitted to. Those who discern things that differ, who know good and evil, readily subscribe to the rectitude of all wisdom's dictates, and, therefore, without murmuring or disputing, govern themselves by them.

III. From all this he infers, that the right knowledge of those things, such as transforms us into the image of them, is to be preferred before all the wealth of this world; (v. 10. 11.) *Receive my instruction, and not silver*. Instruction must not only be heard, but received. We must bid it welcome, receive the impressions of it, and submit to the command of it; and this, rather than choice gold; that is, 1. We must prefer religion before riches, and look upon it, that, if we have the knowledge and fear of God in our hearts, we are really more happy, and better provided for every condition of life, than if we had ever so much silver and gold. *Wisdom is, in itself, and therefore must be, in our account, better than rubies*. It will bring us in a better price, be to us a better portion; shew it forth, and it will be a better ornament than jewels and precious stones of the greatest value. Whatever we can sit down and wish for of the wealth of this world, if we had it, it were not worthy to be compared with the advantages that attend serious godliness. 2. We must be dead to the wealth of this world, that we may the more closely and earnestly apply ourselves to the business of religion. We must receive instruction as the main matter, and then be indifferent whether we receive silver or no; nay, we must not receive it as our portion and reward, as the rich man in his life-time received his good things.

12. I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions. 13. The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. 14. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. 15. By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. 16. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. 17. I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. 18. Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. 19. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. 20. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: 21. That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.

Wisdom here is Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; it is Christ in the word, and Christ in the heart; not only Christ revealed to us, but Christ revealed in us.

It is the word of God, the whole compass of divine revelation; it is God the Word, in whom all divine revelation centres; it is the soul formed by the word, it is Christ formed in the soul; it is religion in the purity and power of it. Glorious things are here spoken of this excellent Person, this excellent thing.

I. Divine wisdom gives men good heads; (v. 12.) *I wisdom dwell with prudence*, not with carnal policy, (the wisdom that is from above is contrary to that, 2 Cor. 1. 12.) but with true discretion, which serves for the right ordering of the conversation; that wisdom of the prudent, which is to understand his way, and is in all cases profitable to direct; the wisdom of the serpent, not only to guard from harm, but to guide in doing good. *Wisdom dwells with prudence*; for prudence is the product of religion, and an ornament to religion; and here are more witty inventions found out with the help of the scripture, both for the right understanding of God's providences, and for the effectual countermining of Satan's devices, and the doing of good in our generation, than were ever discovered by the learning of the philosophers or the politics of statesmen. We may apply it to Christ himself; he dwells with prudence, for his whole undertaking is the wisdom of God in a mystery, and in it God abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence. Christ found out the knowledge of that great invention, and a costly one it was to him, man's salvation, by his satisfaction, an admirable expedient: we had found out many inventions for our ruin, he found out one for our recovery. The covenant of grace is so well ordered in all things, that we must conclude that he, who ordered it, dwelt with prudence.

II. It gives men good hearts, v. 13. True religion consisting in the fear of the Lord, which is the wisdom before recommended, teaches men, 1. To hate all sin, as displeasing to God, and destructive to the soul; *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, the evil way*; to hate sin as sin, and therefore to hate every false way. Wherever there is an awe of God, there is a dread of sin, as an evil, as only evil. 2. Particularly to hate pride and passion, those two common and dangerous sins. Conceitedness of ourselves, pride and arrogancy, are sins which Christ hates, and so do all those who have the Spirit of Christ; every one hates them in others, but we must hate them in ourselves. *The froward mouth*, peevishness towards others, God hates, because it is such an enemy to the peace of mankind, and therefore we should hate it. Be it spoken to the honour of religion, that, however it is unjustly accused, it is so far from making men conceited and sour, that there is nothing more directly contrary to it than pride and passion, nor which it teaches us more to detest.

III. It has a great influence upon public affairs, and the well governing of all societies, v. 14. Christ, as God, has strength and wisdom; wisdom and might are his; as Redeemer, he is the Wisdom of God, and the Power of God. To all that are his, he is made of God both Strength and Wisdom; in him they are laid up for us, that we may both know and do our duty. He is the Wonderful Counsellor, and gives that grace which alone is sound wisdom. He is Understanding itself, and has strength for all those that strengthen themselves in him. True religion gives men the best counsel in all difficult cases, and helps to make their way plain; wherever it is, it is understanding, it has strength, it will be all that to us that we need, both for services and sufferings. Where the word of God dwells richly, it makes a man perfect, and furnishes him thoroughly for every good word and work.

Kings, princes, and judges, have, of all men, most need of wisdom and strength, of counsel and courage, for the faithful discharge of the trusts reposed in them, and that they may be blessings to the people over whom they are set. And therefore Wisdom says, *By me kings reign*; (v. 15, 16.) that is, 1. Civil government is a divine institution, and those that are intrusted with the administration of it have their commission from Christ: it is a branch of his kingly office, that by him kings reign; from him, to whom all judgment is committed, their power is derived. They reign by him, and therefore ought to reign for him. 2. Whatever qualifications for government any kings or princes have, they are indebted to the grace of Christ for them; he gives them the spirit of government, and they have nothing, no skill, no

principles of justice, but what he endues them with. *A divine sentence is in the lips of the king*; and they are to their subjects what he makes them. 3. Religion is very much the strength and support of the civil government; it teaches subjects their duty, and so *by it kings reign* over them the more easily; it teaches kings their duty, and so *by it kings reign* as they ought; they *decree justice*, while they *rule in the fear of God*. Those rule well whom religion rules.

IV. It will make all those happy, truly happy, that receive and embrace it.

1. They shall be happy in the love of Christ; for he it is that says, *I love them that love me*, v. 17. They that *love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity* shall be loved of him with a peculiar distinguishing love; he will *love them*, and *manifest himself to them*.

2. They shall be happy in the success of their inquiries after him; "*They that seek me early*, seek an acquaintance with me, and an interest in me, seek it *early*, seek it earnestly, seek it first before any thing else, that begin betimes in the days of their youth to seek me, they shall find what they seek;" Christ shall be their's, and they shall be his; he never said, *Seek, in vain*.

3. They shall be happy in the wealth of the world, or in that which is infinitely better. (1.) They shall have as much riches and honour as Infinite Wisdom sees good for them; (v. 18.) they are *with Christ*, he has them to give, and whether he will see fit to give them to us must be referred to him. Religion sometimes helps to make people rich and great in this world, gains them a reputation, and so increases their estates; and the riches which Wisdom gives to her favourites have these two advantages; [1.] That they are riches and righteousness, riches honestly got, not by fraud and oppression, but in regular ways; and riches charitably used, for alms are called *righteousness*. Those that have their wealth from God's blessing on their industry, and that have a heart to do good with it, have *riches and righteousness*. [2.] That therefore they are *durable riches*; wealth gotten by vanity will soon be diminished, but that which is well-got will wear well, and will be left to the children's children; and that which is well-spent, in works of piety and charity, is set out to the best interest, and so will be durable; for the friends made by the *mammon of unrighteousness, when we fail, will receive us into everlasting habitations*, Luke, 16. 9. It will be found after many days, for the days of eternity. (2.) They shall have that which is infinitely better, if they have not riches and honour in this world; (v. 19.) "*My fruit is better than gold*, and will turn to a better account, will be of more value in less compass, and *my revenue better than the choicest silver*, will serve a better trade." We may assure ourselves, that not only Wisdom's products at last, but her incomes in the mean time, not only her fruit, but her revenue, are more valuable than the best, either of the possessions or of the reversions of this world.

4. They shall be happy in the grace of God now; that shall be their guide in the good way, v. 20. This is that fruit of wisdom which is *better than gold, than fine gold, it leads us in the way of righteousness*, shews us that way, and goes before us in it; the way that God would have us walk in, and which will certainly bring us to our desired end. It leads *in the midst of the paths of judgment*, and saves us from deviating on either hand. *In medio virtus—Virtue lies in the midst*. Christ by his Spirit guides believers into all truth, and so *leads them in the way of righteousness*, and they *walk after the Spirit*.

5. They shall be happy in the glory of God hereafter, v. 21. Therefore Wisdom *leads in the paths of righteousness*, not only that she may keep her friends in the way of duty and obedience, but that she may *cause them to inherit substance*, and may *fill their treasures*; which cannot be done with the things of this world, nor with any thing less than God and heaven. The happiness of those that love God, and devote themselves to his service, is substantial and satisfactory. (1.) It is substantial, it is substance itself; it is a happiness which will subsist of itself, and stand alone, without the accidental supports of outward conveniences; spiritual and eternal things are the only real and substantial things. Joy in God is substantial joy, solid and well-grounded; the promises are their

bonds, Christ is their Surety, and both substantial. They *inherit substance*; their inheritance hereafter is substantial, it is a weight of glory, it is substance; (Heb. 10. 34.) all their happiness they have as heirs, it is grounded upon their sonship. (2.) It is satisfying; it will fill not only their hands, but *their treasures*; not only maintain them, but make them rich. The things of this world may fill men's bellies, (Ps. 17. 14.) but not their treasures; for they cannot in them secure to themselves *goods for many years*, perhaps they may be deprived of them *this night*; but, let the treasures of the soul be ever so capacious, there is enough in God, and Christ, and heaven, to fill them. In Wisdom's promises believers have goods laid up, not for days and years, but for eternity; her fruit therefore *is better than gold*.

22. The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. 23. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. 24. When *there were* no depths, I was brought forth; when *there were* no fountains abounding with water. 25. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, was I brought forth: 26. While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. 27. When he prepared the heavens, I *was* there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: 28. When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: 29. When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: 30. Then I was by him, as one brought up *with him*: and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him; 31. Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights *were* with the sons of men.

That it is an intelligent and divine Person that here speaks, seems very plain, and that it is not meant of a mere essential property of the divine nature; for wisdom here has personal properties and actions; and that intelligent, divine, Person, can be no other than the Son of God himself, to whom the principal things here spoken of wisdom are attributed in other scriptures, and we must explain scripture by itself. If Solomon himself designed only the praise of wisdom, as it is an attribute of God, by which he made the world and governs it, so to recommend to men the study of that wisdom which belongs to them, yet the Spirit of God, who indited what he wrote, carried him, as David often, to such expressions as could agree to no other than the Son of God, and would lead us into the knowledge of great things concerning him. All divine revelation is *the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him*, and here we are told who and what he is, as God, designed in the eternal councils to be the Mediator between God and man. The best exposition of these verses we have in the four first verses of St. John's gospel; *In the beginning was the Word, &c.*

Concerning the Son of God, observe here,

1. His personality, and distinct subsistence; one with the Father, and of the same essence, and yet a person of himself, whom *the Lord possessed*, (v. 22.) *was set up*, (v. 23.) *was brought forth*, (v. 24, 25.) *was by him*, (v. 30.) for he was *the express Image of his person*, Heb. 1. 3.

2. His eternity; he was begotten of the Father, for *the Lord possessed him*, as his own Son, his beloved Son, laid him in his bosom; he was *brought forth as the only-begotten of the Father*, and this, *before all worlds*; which is most largely insisted upon here. The Word was eternal, and had a being before the world, before the beginning of time; and therefore it must follow, that

it was from eternity. *The Lord possessed him in the beginning of his way*, of his eternal councils, for those were *before his works*; this way, indeed, had no beginning, for God's purposes in himself are eternal like himself, but God speaks to us in our own language. Wisdom explains herself; (v.23.) *I was set up from everlasting*. The Son of God was, in the eternal councils of God, designed and advanced to be the Wisdom and Power of the Father, Light and Life, and all in all, both in the creation and in the redemption of the world.

That he *was brought forth* as to his being, and *set up* as to the divine councils concerning his office, before the world was made, is here set forth in a great variety of expressions, much the same with those by which the eternity of God himself is expressed, Ps. 90. 2. *Before the mountains were brought forth*. (1.) *Before the earth was*, and that was made *in the beginning*, before man was made; therefore the second Adam had a being before the first, for the first Adam was *made of the earth*, the second had a being *before the earth*, and therefore is *not of the earth*, John, 3. 31. (2.) *Before the sea was*; (v.24.) *when there were no depths* in which the waters were gathered together, *no fountains* from which those waters might arise, *none of that deep* on which the Spirit of God moved for the production of the visible creation, Gen. 1. 2. (3.) *Before the mountains were*, the everlasting mountains, v. 25. Eliphaz, to convince Job of his inability to judge of the divine counsels, asks him, (Job, 15. 7.) *Wast thou made before the hills?* No, thou wast not: but *before the hills was* the eternal Word *brought forth*. (4.) *Before the habitable parts of the world*, which men cultivate, and reap the profits of, (v.26.) *the fields in the vallies and plains*, to which the mountains are as a wall, which are *the highest part of the dust of the world*; *the first part of the dust*, so some; the atoms which compose the several parts of the world; *the chief or principal part of the dust*, so it may be read, and understood of man, who was made of the dust of the ground, and is dust, but is the principal part of the dust, dust enlivened, dust refined. The eternal Word had a being before man was made, for *in him was the life of men*.

3. His agency in making the world. He not only had a being before the world, but he was present, not as a spectator, but as the Architect, when the world was made. God puzzled and humbled Job, by asking him, *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who hath laid the measures thereof?* (Job, 38. 4, &c.) *Wast thou that eternal Word and Wisdom*, which was the prime Manager of that great affair? No; thou art of yesterday." But here the Son of God, referring, as it should seem, to the discourse God had with Job, declares himself to have been engaged in that which Job could not pretend to be a witness of, and a worker in, the creation of the world. *By him God made the worlds*, Eph. 3. 9. Heb. 1. 2. Col. 1. 16. (1.) When, on the first day of the creation, in the very beginning of time, God bespoke the light, and with a word produced it, this eternal Wisdom was that almighty Word; Then *I was there, when he prepared the heavens*, the fountain of that light, which, whatever it is here, is there substantial. (2.) He was no less active, when, on the second day, he stretched out the firmament, the vast expanse, and set that as *a compass upon the face of the depth*, (v. 27.) surrounded it on all sides with that canopy, that curtain. Or, it may refer to the exact order and method with which God framed all the parts of the universe, as the workman marks out his work with his line and compasses. The work in nothing varied from the plan of it formed in the eternal mind. (3.) He was also employed in the third day's work, when the *waters above the heavens* were gathered together by *establishing the clouds above*, and those under the heavens by *strengthening the fountains of the deep*, which send forth those waters, (v. 28.) and by preserving the bounds of the sea, which is the receptacle of those waters, v. 29. This speaks much the honour of this eternal Wisdom, for by this instance God proves himself a God greatly to be feared, (Jer. 5. 22.) that *he has placed the sand for the bound of the sea*, that the dry land might continue to appear above water, fit to be a habitation for man; and thus he has *appointed the foundation of the earth*.

How able, how fit, is the Son of God to be the Saviour of the world, who was the Creator of it!

4. The infinite complacency which the Father had in him, and he in the Father; (v. 30.) *I was by him, as one brought up with him*. As by an eternal generation he was brought forth of the Father, so by an eternal council he was brought up with him; which intimates, not only the infinite love of the Father to the Son, who is therefore called *the Son of his love*, (Col. 1. 13.) but the mutual consciousness and good understanding that were between them, concerning the work of man's redemption, which the Son was to undertake, and about which the *council of peace was between them both*, Zech. 6. 13. He was *alumnus Patris—the Father's pupil*, as I may say, trained up from eternity for that service which, in time, in the fulness of time, he was to go through with, and is therein taken under the special tuition and protection of the Father; he is *my Servant whom I uphold*, Isa. 42. 1. He did what he saw the Father do, (John, 5. 19.) pleased his Father, sought his glory, did according to the commandment he received from his Father, and all this *as one brought up with him*. He was *daily his Father's Delight*, (*mine Elect, in whom my soul delighteth*, says God; Isa. 42. 1.) and he also *rejoiced always before him*. This may be understood, either, (1.) Of the infinite delight which the persons of the blessed Trinity have in each other, wherein consists much of the happiness of the divine nature. Or, (2.) Of the pleasure which the Father took in the operations of the Son, when he *made the world*; God saw every thing that the Son made, and, *behold, it was very good*, it pleased him, and therefore his Son was *daily*, day by day, during the six days of the creation, upon that account, *his Delight*; Exod. 39. 43. And the Son also did himself *rejoice before him* in the beauty and harmony of the whole creation, Ps. 104. 31. Or, (3.) Of the satisfaction they had in each other, with reference to the great work of man's redemption. The Father delighted in the Son, as Mediator between him and man, was well-pleased with what he proposed, (Matth. 3. 17.) and *therefore* loved him, because he undertook to *lay down his life for the sheep*; he put a confidence in him, that he would go through his work, and not fail or fly off. The Son also *rejoiced always before him*, delighted to do his will, (Ps. 40. 8.) stuck close to his undertaking, as one that was well-satisfied in it, and, when it came to the setting to, expressed as much satisfaction in it as ever, saying, *Lo, I come, to do as in the volume of the book it is written of me*.

5. The gracious concern he had for mankind, v. 31. Wisdom *rejoiced*, not so much in the rich products of the earth, or the treasures hid in the bowels of it, as *in the habitable parts of it*, for *her delights were with the sons of men*; not only in the creation of man is it spoken with a peculiar air of pleasure, (Gen. 1. 26.) *Let us make man*; but in the redemption and salvation of man. The Son of God was *ordained, before the world*, to that great work, 1 Pet. 1. 20. A remnant of the sons of men were given him to be brought, through his grace, to his glory, and those were they in whom his delights were: his church was the habitable part of his earth, made habitable for him, that *the Lord God might dwell even among them* that had been rebellious; and this he rejoiced in, in the prospect of seeing his seed. Though he foresaw all the difficulties he was to meet with in his work, the services and sufferings he was to go through, yet, because it would issue in the glory of his Father, and the salvation of those sons of men that were given him, he looked forward upon it with the greatest satisfaction imaginable, in which we have all the encouragement we can desire to come to him, and rely upon him for all the benefits designed us by his glorious undertaking.

32. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for *blessed are they that keep my ways*. 33. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. 34. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. 35. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD. 36

But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul : all they that hate me love death.

We have here the application of Wisdom's discourse ; the design and tendency of it, is, to bring us all into an entire subjection to the laws of religion, to make us wise and good ; not to fill our heads with speculations, or our tongues with disputes, but to rectify what is amiss in our hearts and lives. In order to this, here is,

I. An exhortation to hear and obey the voice of Wisdom, to attend and comply with the good instructions that the word of God gives us, and in them to discern the voice of Christ, as the sheep know the shepherd's voice.

1. We must be diligent *hearers of the word* ; for how can we believe in him of whom we have not heard ? "*Hearken unto me, O ye children,*" (v. 32.) "read the word written, sit under the word preached, bless God for both, and hear him in both speaking to you." Let children in *age* hearken, for it is their learning age ; and what they hearken to then, it is likely, they will be so seasoned by, as to be governed by all their days. Let children in *relation* hearken to God as their Father, to Wisdom as their mother, to whom they ought to be in subjection and live ; let Wisdom's children justify Wisdom by hearkening to her, and shew themselves to be indeed her children.

We must hear Wisdom's words, (1.) Submissively, and with a willing heart ; (v. 33.) "*Hear instruction, and refuse it not*, either as that which you need not, or as that which you like not ; it is offered you as a kindness, and it is at your peril if you refuse it." They that reject the counsel of God, reject it against themselves, Luke, 7. 30. "Refuse it not now, lest you have not another offer." (2.) Constantly, and with an attentive ear. We must hear Wisdom so as to *watch daily at her gates*, as beggars to receive an alms, as clients and patients to receive advice, and to wait as servants, with humility, and patience, and ready observance, at the posts of her doors. See here what a good house Wisdom keeps, for every day is dole-day ; what a good school, for every day is lecture-day. While we have God's works before our eyes, and his word in our hand, we may be every day hearing Wisdom, and learning instruction from her. See here what a dutiful and diligent attendance is required of all Christ's disciples ; they must *watch at his gates*. [1.] We must lay hold on all opportunities of getting knowledge and grace, and must get into, and keep in, a constant settled course of communion with God. [2.] We must be very humble in our attendance on divine instructions, and be glad of any place, even the meanest, so we may but be within hearing of them ; as David, who would gladly be a door-keeper in the house of God. [3.] We must raise our expectations of these instructions, and hearken to them with care, and patience, and perseverance ; must watch and wait, as Christ's hearers, that *hanged on him* to hear him, as the word in the original is, (Luke, 19. 48.) and (ch. 21. 38.) *came early in the morning to hear him*.

2. We must be conscientious *doers of the work*, for we are *blessed only in our deed*. It is not enough to hearken unto Wisdom's words, but we must *keep her ways*, (v. 32.) do every thing that she prescribes, keep within the hedges of her ways, and not transgress them, keep in the tracts of her ways, proceed and persevere in them. *Hear instruction, and be wise*, let it be a means to make you wise in ordering your conversation. What we know, is known in vain, if it do not make us wise, v. 33.

II. An assurance of happiness to all those that do hearken to Wisdom. They are blessed, (v. 32.) and again, v. 34. They are blessed, that watch and wait at Wisdom's gates, even their attendance there is their happiness ; it is the best place they can be in ; they are blessed that wait there, for they shall not be put to wait long, let them continue to knock a while, and it shall be opened to them. They are seeking wisdom, and they shall find what they seek ; but will it make amends if they do find it ? Yes, (v. 35.) *Whoso findeth me, finds life*, all happiness, all that good which he needs, or can desire. He finds life in that grace which is the principle of spiritual life, and the pledge of eternal life. He *finds life*, for he shall *obtain favour of the Lord*, and in his favour is

life. If the king's favour is towards a wise son, much more the favour of the King of kings. Christ is Wisdom, and he that finds Christ, that obtains an interest in him, he *finds life* ; for Christ is Life to all believers, *he that has the Son of God has life*, eternal life, and he *shall obtain favour of the Lord*, who is well-pleased with all those that are in Christ ; nor can we obtain God's favour, unless we find Christ, and be found in him.

III. The doom past upon all those that reject Wisdom and her proposals, v. 36. They are left to ruin themselves, and Wisdom will not hinder them, because they have set at nought all her counsel. 1. Their crime is very great ; they *sin against Wisdom*, rebel against its light and laws, thwart its designs, and by their folly offend it ; they *sin against Christ*, they act in contempt of his authority, and in contradiction to all the purposes of his life and death. This is construed into hating Wisdom, hating Christ ; they are his enemies, who will not have him to reign over them. What can appear worse than hating him who is the Centre of all beauty, and Fountain of all goodness, Love itself ? 2. Their punishment will be very just, for they wilfully bring it upon themselves. (1.) They that offend Christ do the greatest wrong to themselves ; they *wrong their own souls*, they wound their own consciences, bring a blot and stain upon their souls, which renders them odious in the eyes of God, and unfit for communion with him ; they deceive themselves, disturb themselves, destroy themselves ; sin is a wrong to the soul. (2.) They that are at variance with Christ, are in love with their own ruin ; *They that hate me, love death* ; they love that which will be their death, and put that from them which would be their life. Sinners die because they will die, which leaves them inexcusable, makes their condemnation the more intolerable, and will for ever justify God when he judges. *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself*.

CHAP. IX.

Christ and sin are rivals for the soul of man, and here we are told how they both make their court to it, to have the innermost and uppermost place in it. The design of this representation is, to set before us life and death, good and evil ; and there needs no more than a fair stating of the case, to determine us which of those to choose, and surrender our hearts to. They are both brought in, making entertainment for the soul, and inviting it to accept of the entertainment ; concerning both we are told what the issue will be ; and the matter being thus laid before us, let us consider, take advice, and speak our minds. And we are therefore concerned to put a value upon our own souls, because we see there is such striving for them. I. Christ, under the name of Wisdom, invites us to accept of his entertainment, and so to enter into acquaintance and communion with him, v. 1. 6. And having foretold the different success of his invitation, (v. 7. 9.) he shews, in short, what he requires from us, (v. 10.) and what he designs for us, (v. 11.) and then leaves it to our choice what we will do, v. 12. II. Sin, under the character of a foolish woman, courts us to accept of her entertainment, and (v. 13. 16.) pretends it is very charming, v. 17. But Solomon tells what the reckoning will be, v. 18. And now choose you, this day, whom you will close with.

1. **W**ISDOM hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars : 2. She hath killed her beasts ; she hath mingled her wine ; she hath also furnished her table. 3. She hath sent forth her maidens : she crieth upon the highest places of the city, 4. Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither : *as for him that wanteth understanding*, she saith to him, 5. Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine *which I have mingled*. 6. For-sake the foolish, and live ; and go in the way of understanding. 7. He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame : and he that rebuketh a wicked man *getteth himself a blot*. 8. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee : rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. 9. Give *instruction to a wise man*, and he will be yet wiser : teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. 10. The

fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. 11. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. 12. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but *if* thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.

Wisdom is here introduced as a magnificent Queen, very great and very generous; that Word of God is this Wisdom, in which God makes known his good-will toward men; God the Word is this Wisdom, to whom the Father has committed all judgment. He who, in the chapter before, shewed his grandeur and glory, as the Redeemer of the world, here shews his grace and goodness, as the Redeemer of it. The word is plural, to *Wisdoms*; for in Christ are hid treasures of wisdom, and in his undertaking appears the manifold Wisdom of God in a mystery. Now, observe here,

I. The rich provision which Wisdom has made for the reception of all those that will be her disciples. This is represented under the similitude of a sumptuous feast, whence, it is probable, our Saviour borrowed those parables, in which he compared the *kingdom of heaven* to a great supper, Matth. 22. 2. Luke, 14. 16. And so it was prophesied of, Isa. 25. 6. It is such a feast as Ahasuerus made to *shew the riches of his glorious kingdom*. The grace of the gospel is thus set before us in the ordinance of the Lord's supper. To bid her guests welcome,

1. Here is a stately palace provided, v. 1. Wisdom, not finding a house capacious enough for all her guests, has built one on purpose, and, both to strengthen it, and to beautify it, she has *hewn out her seven pillars*, which make it to be very firm, and look very great. Heaven is the house which Wisdom has built to entertain all her guests that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb; that is her Father's house, where there are many mansions, and whither she is gone to prepare places for us. She has hanged the earth upon nothing, therefore in it we have no continuing city; but heaven is a city that has foundations, has pillars. The church is Wisdom's house, to which she invites her guests, supported by the power and promise of God, as by *seven pillars*. Probably, Solomon refers to the temple which he himself had lately built for the service of religion, and to which he would persuade people to resort, both to worship God, and to receive the instructions of Wisdom. Some reckon the schools of the prophets to be here intended.

2. Here is a splendid feast got ready; (v. 2.) *She has killed her beasts, she has mingled her wine*; plenty of meat and drink is provided, and all of the best. *She has killed her sacrifice*, so the word is; it is a sumptuous, but a sacred, feast, a feast upon a sacrifice. Christ has offered up himself a Sacrifice for us, and it is *his flesh* that is *meat indeed*, and *his blood* that is *drink indeed*. The Lord's supper is a feast of reconciliation and joy upon the sacrifice of atonement. The wine is *mingled* with something richer than itself, to give it a more than ordinary spirit and flavour. *She has completely furnished her table* with all the satisfactions that a soul can desire; righteousness and grace, peace and joy, the assurances of God's love, the consolations of the Spirit, and all the pledges and earnest of eternal life. Observe, It is all Wisdom's own doings; *she has killed the beasts, she has mingled the wine*; which denotes both the love of Christ, who makes the provision, (he does not leave it to others, but takes the doing of it into his own hands,) and the excellency of the preparation. That must needs be exactly fitted to answer the end, which Wisdom herself has the fitting up of.

II. The gracious invitation she has given, not to some particular friends, but to all in general, to come and take part of these provisions. 1. She employs her servants to invite round about in the country; *she has sent forth her maidens*, v. 3. The ministers of the gospel are commissioned and commanded to give notice of the preparations which God has made, in the everlasting covenant, for all those that are willing to come up to the terms of it; and they, with maiden purity, not corrupting themselves or the word of God, and with an exact observance of orders, are to call upon

all they meet with, even in *the high-ways and hedges*, to come and feast with Wisdom, for *all things are now ready*, Luke, 14. 23. 2. She herself *cries upon the highest places of the city*, as one earnestly desirous of the welfare of the children of men, and grieved to see them rejecting their own mercies for lying vanities. Our Lord Jesus was himself the Publisher of his own gospel; when he had sent forth his disciples, he followed them to confirm what they said; nay, it *began to be spoken by the Lord*, Heb. 2. 3. He stood, and cried, *Come unto me*.

We see who invites; now let us observe,

(1.) To whom the invitation is given; *Whoso is simple*, and *wants understanding*, v. 4. If we were to make an entertainment, of all people we should not care for, much less court, the company of such, but rather of philosophers and learned men, that we might hear their wisdom, and whose table-talk would be improving. "Have I need of mad-men?" But Wisdom invites such, because what she has to give is what they most need, and it is their welfare that she consults, and aims at, in the preparation and invitation. He that is simple is invited, that he may be made wise; and he that wants a heart, so the word is, let him come hither, and he shall have one. Her preparations are rather physic than food, designed for the most valuable and desirable cure, that of the mind. Whosoever he be, the invitation is general, and excludes none that do not exclude themselves; though they be ever so foolish, yet, [1.] They shall be welcome. [2.] They may be helped, they shall neither be despised, nor despaired of. Our Saviour came, *not to call the righteous, but sinners*; not the wise in their own eyes, who say they see, (John, 9. 41.) but the simple, those who are sensible of their simplicity, and ashamed of it, and him that is willing to *become a fool, that he may be wise*, 1 Cor. 3. 18.

(2.) What the invitation is. [1.] We are invited to Wisdom's house; *Turn in hither*. I say *we* are, for which of us is there that must not own the character of the invited, that are *simple, and want understanding*? Wisdom's doors stand open to such, and she is desirous to have some conversation with them, one word for their own good, nor has she any other design upon them. [2.] We are invited to her table; (v. 5.) *Come, eat of my bread*, taste of the true pleasures that are to be found in the knowledge and fear of God. By faith acted on the promises of the gospel, applying them to ourselves, and taking the comfort of them, we feed, we feast, upon the provisions Christ has made for poor souls. What we eat and drink we make our own, and are nourished and refreshed by it, and so are our souls by the word of God; it has that in it that is *meat and drink* to those that understand themselves.

(3.) What is required of those that may have the benefit of this invitation, v. 6. [1.] They must break off from all bad company; "*Forsake the foolish*, converse not with them, conform not to their ways, have no fellowship with the works of darkness, or with those that deal in such works." The first step toward virtue, is, to shun vice, and therefore to shun the vicious; *Depart from me, ye evil doers*. [2.] They must awake and arise from the dead; they must live, not in pleasure, (for those that do so are dead while they live,) but in the service of God; for those only that do so live indeed, live to some purpose. "Live not a mere animal-life, as brutes, but now, at length, live the life of men *Live*, and you *shall live*; live spiritually, and you shall live eternally," Eph. 5. 14. [3.] They must choose the paths of Wisdom, and keep to them; "*Go in the way of understanding*; govern thyself henceforward by the rules of religion and right reason." It is not enough to *forsake the foolish*, but we must join ourselves with those that walk in wisdom, and walk in the same spirit and steps.

III. The instructions which Wisdom gives to the maidens she sends to invite, to the ministers and others, who in their places are endeavouring to serve her interests and designs. She tells them, 1. What their work must be; not only to tell in general what preparation is made for souls, and to give a general offer of it, but they must apply themselves to particular persons; must tell them of their faults, *reprove, rebuke*, v. 7, 8. They must instruct

them how to amend, *teach*, v. 9. The word of God is intended, and therefore so is the ministry of that word, *for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness*. 2. What different sorts of persons they would meet with, and what course they must take with them, and what success they might expect.

(1.) They would meet with some *scorners* and *wicked men*, who would mock the messengers of the Lord, and misuse them, would *laugh them to scorn*, that invite them to the feast of the Lord, as they did, 2Chron. 30. 10. would *treat them spitefully*, Matth. 22. 6. And though they are not forbidden to invite those simple ones to Wisdom's house, yet they are advised not to pursue the invitation, by reproving and rebuking them; *Reprove not a scorner, cast not these pearls before swine*, Matth. 7. 6. Thus Christ said of the Pharisees, *Let them alone*, Matth. 15. 14. "Do not reprove them." [1.] "In justice to them, for *they* have forfeited the favour of further means, who scorn the means they have had." They that are thus *filthy*, *let them be filthy still*; that are *joined to idols*, *let them alone*; *lo, we turn to the Gentiles*. [2.] "In prudence to yourselves; because, if you reprove them," *First*, "You lose your labour, and so *get to yourselves shame* for the disappointment." *Secondly*, "You exasperate them; do it ever so wisely and tenderly, if you do it faithfully, they will hate you, they will load you with reproaches, and say all the ill they can of you, and so you will get a blot; therefore you had better not meddle with them, for your reproofs will be likely to do more hurt than good."

(2.) They would meet with others who are wise, and good, and just; thanks be to God, all are not scorners. We meet with some who are so wise for themselves, so just to themselves, as to be willing and glad to be taught; and, when we meet with such, [1.] If there be occasion, we must reprove them; for wise men are not so perfectly wise, but there is that in them which needs a reproof; and we must not connive at any man's faults, because we have a veneration for his wisdom; nor must a *wise man* think that his wisdom exempts him from reproof, when he says or does any thing foolishly; but, the more wisdom a man has, the more desirous he should be to have his weaknesses shewed him, because a *little folly* is a great blemish to him *that is in reputation for wisdom and honour*. [2.] With our reproofs we must *give them instruction*, and must *teach* them, v. 9. [3.] We may expect that it will be taken as a kindness, Ps. 141. 5. A wise man will reckon those his friends who deal faithfully with him; "Rebuke such a one, and *he will love thee* for thy plain dealing, will thank thee, and desire thee to do him the same good turn another time, if there be occasion." It is as great an instance of wisdom to *take* a reproof well, as to *give* it well. [4.] Being taken well, it will do good, and answer the intention. A *wise man* will be made wiser by the reproofs and instructions that are given him; he will *increase in learning*, will grow in knowledge, and so grow in grace. None must think themselves too wise to learn, or so good that they need not be better, and therefore need not be taught. We must still press forward, and follow on to know, till we come to the perfect man. *Give to a wise man*, so it is in the original, give him advice, give him reproof, give him comfort, and *he will be yet wiser*; *give him occasion*, so the Seventy, occasion to shew his wisdom, and he will shew it, and the acts of wisdom will strengthen the habits.

IV. The instructions she gives to those that are invited, which her maidens must inculcate upon them.

1. Let them know wherein true wisdom consists, and what will be their entertainment at Wisdom's table, v. 10. (1.) The heart must be principled with *the fear of God*, that is *the beginning of wisdom*. A reverence of God's majesty, and a dread of his wrath, is that fear of him which is the beginning, the first step toward true religion, whence all other instances of it take rise. This fear may, at first, have torment, but love will, by degrees, cast out the torment of it. (2.) The head must be filled with the knowledge of the things of God. *The knowledge of holy things* (the word is plural) is *understanding*; the things pertaining to the service of God, (those are called *holy things*;) that pertain to our own sanctification; reproof is called *that which is holy*, Matth. 7. 6. Or the knowledge which holy men have, which was taught by the

holy prophets, of those things which *holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*; this is *understanding*, it is the best and most useful understanding, will stand us in most stead, and turn to the best account.

2. Let them know what will be the advantages of this wisdom; (v. 11.) "*By me thy days shall be multiplied*." It will contribute to the health of thy body, and so *the years of thy life on earth shall be increased*, while men's folly and intemperance shorten their days. It will bring thee to heaven, and there thy days shall be multiplied in *infinitum—to infinity*, and *the years of thy life shall be increased without end*." There is no true wisdom but in the way of religion, and no true life but in the end of that way.

3. Let them know what will be the consequence of their choosing, or refusing, this fair offer, v. 12. Here is, (1.) The happiness of those that embrace it; "*If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself*; thou wilt be the gainer by it, not Wisdom." A man cannot be profitable to God; it is to our own good that we are thus courted: "Thou wilt not leave the gain to others," (as we do our worldly wealth when we die, which is therefore called *another man's*, Luke, 16. 12.) "but thou shalt carry it with thee into another world." Those that are wise for their souls, are wise for themselves, for the soul is the man; nor do any consult their own true interest, but those that are truly religious. This recommends us to God, and recovers us from that which is our folly and degeneracy; it employs us in that which is most beneficial in this world, and entitles us to that which is much more so in the world to come. (2.) The shame and ruin of those that slight it; "*If thou scornest Wisdom's proffer, thou alone shalt bear it*." [1.] "Thou shalt bear the blame of it;" those that are good must thank God, but those that are wicked may thank themselves. It is not owing to God, he is not the Author of sin; Satan can only tempt, he cannot force; and wicked companions are but his instruments; so that all the fault must lie on the sinner himself. [2.] "Thou shalt bear the loss of that which thou scornest: it will be to thine own destruction, thy blood will be upon thine own head, and the consideration of this will aggravate thy condemnation. *Son, remember* that thou hadst this fair offer made thee, and thou wouldest not accept of it; thou stoodest fair for life, but didst choose death rather."

13. A foolish woman is clamorous: *she is simple*, and knoweth nothing. 14. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, 15. To call passengers who go right on their ways: 16. Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and *as for him that wanteth understanding*, she saith to him, 17. Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. 18. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; *and that her guests are in the depths of hell*.

We have heard what Christ has to say, to engage our affections to God and godliness, and one would think the whole world should go after him; but here we are told how industrious the tempter is to seduce unwary souls into the paths of sin, and with the most he gains his point, and Wisdom's courtship is not effectual. Now observe,

1. Who is the tempter, a *foolish woman*; Folly herself, in opposition to Wisdom. Carnal, sensual, pleasure, I take to be especially meant by this *foolish woman*; (v. 13.) for that is the great enemy to virtue, and inlet to vice; that defiles and debauches the mind, stupifies conscience, and puts out the sparks of conviction, more than any thing else. This tempter is here described to be, (1.) Very ignorant; *she is simple, and knows nothing*, she has no sufficient, solid, reason to offer; where she gets dominion in a soul, she works out all the knowledge of holy things, they are lost and forgotten. *Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart*, they besot men, and *make fools of them*. (2.) Very

inopportune. The less she has to offer, that is rational, the more violent and pressing she is, and carries the day often by dint of impudence. She is *clamorous* and noisy, (v.13.) continually haunting young people with her enticements. *She sits at the door of her house*, (v.14.) watching for a prey; not as Abraham at his tent-door, seeking an opportunity to do good. *She sits on a seat, (on a throne, so the word signifies) in the high places of the city*, as if she had authority to give law; and we were all debtors to the *flesh, to live after the flesh*; and as if she had reputation, and were in honour, and thought worthy of *the high places of the city*; and, perhaps, she gains upon many, more by pretending to be fashionable, than by pretending to be agreeable. Do not all persons of rank and figure in the world," (says she) "give themselves a greater liberty than the strict laws of virtue allow; and why shouldst thou humble thyself so far as to be cramped by them?" Thus the tempter affects to seem both kind and great.

2. Who are the tempted; young people who have been well-educated; these she will triumph most in being the ruin of. Observe, (1.) What their real character is; they are *passengers that go right on their ways*, (v.15.) that have been trained up in the paths of religion and virtue, and set out very hopefully and well; that seem determined and designed for good, and are not (as that young man, *ch.7.8.*) *going the way to her house*. Such as these she has a design upon, and lays snares for, and uses all her arts, all her charms, to pervert them; if they *go right on*, and will not look toward her, she will call after them; so urgent are these temptations. (2.) How she represents them; she calls them *simple*, and *wanting understanding*, and therefore courts them to her school, that they may be cured of the restraints and formalities of their religion. This is the method of the stage, (which is too close an exposition of this paragraph,) where the sober young man, that has been virtuously educated, is the fool in the play, and the plot is to make him *seven times more a child of hell* than his profane companions, under colour of polishing and refining him, and setting him up for a wit and a beau. What is justly charged upon sin and impiety, (v.4.) that it is folly, is here very unjustly retorted upon the ways of virtue; but the day will declare who are the fools.

3. What the temptation is; (v.17.) *Stolen waters are sweet*. It is water and bread; whereas Wisdom invites to the beasts she has killed, and the wine she has mingled; however, bread and water are acceptable enough to those that are hungry and thirsty; and this is pretended to be more *sweet* and *pleasant* than common; for it is *stolen water*, and *bread eaten in secret*, with a fear of being discovered. The pleasures of prohibited lusts are boasted of as more relishing than those of prescribed love; and dishonest gain is preferred to that which is justly gotten. Now this argues, not only a bold contempt, but an impudent defiance, (1.) Of God's law, in that the waters are the sweeter for being stolen, and come at by breaking through the hedge of the divine command. *Nitimur in vetitum—We are prone to what is forbidden*. This spirit of contradiction we have from our first parents, who thought the forbidden tree of all others *a tree to be desired*. (2.) Of God's curse. *The bread is eaten in secret*, for fear of discovery and punishment, and the sinner takes a pride in having so far baffled his convictions, and triumphed over them, that, notwithstanding that fear, he dares commit the sin, and can make himself believe, that, being eaten in secret, it shall never be discovered or reckoned, for sweetness and pleasantness is the bait; but, by the tempter's own shewing, even that is so absurd, and has such allays, that it is a wonder how it can have any influence upon men that pretend to reason.

4. An effectual antidote against the temptation, in a few words, v.18. He that so far wants understanding, as to be drawn aside by these enticements, is led on, ignorantly, to his own inevitable ruin; *he knows not*, will not believe, does not consider; the tempter will not let him know *that the dead are there*, that those who live in pleasure are *dead while they live, dead in trespasses and sins*. Terrors attend these pleasures, like the terrors of death itself. The giants are there, *Rephaim*; this was it that ruined the sinners of the old world; the giants that were *in the earth in those days*. *Her guests*, that are treated with these *stolen waters*, are

not only in the highway to hell, and at the brink of it, but they are already *in the depths of hell*, under the power of sin, led captive by Satan at his will, sometimes lashed by the terrors of their own consciences, which are a hell upon earth. The depths of Satan are *the depths of hell*; remorseless sin is remediless ruin, it is the bottomless pit already. Thus does Solomon shew the hook; those that believe him will not meddle with the bait.

CHAP. X.

Hitherto we have been in the porch or preface to the Proverbs, here they begin; they are short, but weighty, sentences; most of them are distichs, two sentences in one verse, illustrating each other; but it is seldom that there is any coherence between the verses, much less any thread of discourse; and therefore in these chapters we need not attempt to reduce the contents to their proper heads, the several sentences will appear best in their own places. The scope of them all, is, to set before us good and evil, the blessing and the curse. Many of the proverbs in this chapter relate to the good government of the tongue, without which men's religion is vain.

1. **T**HE proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.

Solomon, speaking to us as unto children, observes here how much the comfort of parents, natural, political, and ecclesiastical, depends upon the good behaviour of those under their charge, as a reason, 1. Why parents should be careful to give their children a good education, and to train them up in the ways of religion, which, if it obtain the desired effect, they themselves will have the comfort of it, or, if not, they will have for their support under their heaviness, that they have done their duty, have done their endeavour. 2. Why children should conduct themselves wisely and well, and live up to their good education, that they may rejoice the hearts of their parents, and not sadden them. Observe, (1.) It adds to the comfort of young people that are pious and discreet, that thereby they do something toward recompensing their parents for all the care and pains they have taken with them, and occasion pleasure to them in the evil days of old age, when they most need it. It is the duty of parents to rejoice in their children's wisdom and well-doing, yea, though it arrive at such an eminency as to eclipse them. (2.) It adds to the guilt of those that conduct themselves ill, that thereby they grieve those whom they ought to be a joy to, and are a heaviness particularly to their poor mothers who bore them with sorrow, but with greater sorrow see them wicked and vile.

2. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death. 3. The LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.

These two verses speak to the same purport, and the latter may be the reason of the former.

1. That wealth which men get unjustly will do them no good, because God will blast it; *Treasures of wickedness profit nothing*, (v.2.) the treasures of wicked people; much less the treasure which they have made themselves masters of by any wicked arts, by oppression or fraud; though it be ever so much, as a treasure, and laid up ever so safe, though it be hid treasure, yet it *profits nothing*; when profit and loss come to be balanced, the profit gained by the treasures will by no means countervail the loss sustained by the wickedness, *Matth. 16.26*. They do not profit the soul, they will not purchase any true comfort or happiness; they will stand a man in no stead at death, or in the judgment of the great day; and the reason is, because God *casts away the substance of the wicked*; (v.3.) he takes that from them which they have unjustly gotten; he rejects the consideration of it, not regarding the rich more than the poor. We often see that scattered by the justice of God, which has been gathered together by the injustice of men. How can the treasures of wickedness profit, when, though it be counted substance, God casts it away, and it vanishes as a shadow?

2. That which is honestly got will turn to a good account, for God will bless it. *Righteousness delivers from death*, that is, wealth

gained, and kept, and used in a right manner; (righteousness signifies both honesty and charity;) it answers the end of wealth, which is to keep us alive, and be a defence to us; it will deliver from those judgments which men bring upon themselves by their wickedness; it will profit to that degree, as to deliver, though not from the stroke of death, yet from the sting of it, and consequently from the terror of it. For the Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish, (v.3.) and so their righteousness delivers from death, purely by the favour of God to them, which is their life and livelihood, and which will keep them alive in famine. The soul of the righteous shall be kept alive by the word of God, and faith in his promise, when young lions shall lack, and suffer hunger.

4. He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

We are here told, 1. Who they are, who, though rich, are in a fair way to become poor; those who deal with a slack hand, who are careless and remiss in their business, and never mind which end goes foremost, nor ever set their hands vigorously to their work, or stick to it; who deal with a deceitful hand, so it may be read; those who think to enrich themselves by fraud and tricking, will, in the end, impoverish themselves, not only by bringing the curse of God on what they have, but by forfeiting their reputation with men; none will care to deal with those who deal with slight of hand, and are honest only with good looking to. 2. Who they are, who, though poor, are in a fair way to become rich; those who are diligent, and honest, who are careful about their affairs, and what their hands find to do, do it with all their might, in a fair and honourable way, those are likely to increase what they have. The hand of the acute, so some; of those who are sharp, but not sharpeners; the hand of the active, so others; the stirring hand gets a penny. This is true in the affairs of our souls, as well as in our worldly affairs; slothfulness and hypocrisy lead to spiritual poverty, but those who are fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, are likely to be rich in faith, and rich in good works.

5. He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.

Here is, 1. The just praise of those who improve their opportunities, who take pains to gather and increase what they have, both for soul and body, who provide for hereafter, while provision is to be made, who gather in summer, which is gathering time; he who does so is a wise son, and it is his honour; he acts wisely for his parents, whom, if there be occasion, he ought to maintain, and he gives reputation to himself, his family, and his education.

2. The just reproach and blame of those who trifle away these opportunities; He who sleeps, loves his ease, idles away his time, and neglects his work, especially who sleeps in harvest, when he should be laying in for winter, who lets slip the season of furnishing himself with that which he will have occasion for, he is a son that causes shame; for he is a foolish son, he prepares shame for himself when winter comes, and reflects shame upon all his friends. He who gets knowledge and wisdom in the days of his youth, gathers in summer, and he will have the comfort and credit of it; but he who idles away the days of his youth, will bear the shame of it when he is old.

6. Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

Here is, 1. The head of the just crowned with blessings; with the blessings both of God and man; variety of blessings, abundance of blessings, shall descend from above, and visibly abide on the head of good men; real blessings; they shall not only be spoken well of, but done well to. Blessings shall be on their head as a coronet to adorn and dignify them, and as a helmet to protect and secure them.

2. The mouth of the wicked covered with violence; their mouths shall be stopt with shame for the violence which they have done;

they shall not have a word to say in excuse for themselves; (Joh. 5. 16.) their breath shall be stopt with the violence that shall be done to them, when their violent dealings shall return on their heads, shall be returned to their teeth.

7. The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.

Both the just and the wicked, when their days are fulfilled, must die; between their bodies, in the grave, there is no visible difference; between the souls of the one and the other, in the world of spirits, there is a vast difference; and so there is, or ought to be, between their memories that survive them.

1. Good men are, and ought to be, well-spoken of when they are gone; it is one of the blessings that comes upon the head of the just, even when their head is laid. Blessed men leave behind them blessed memories. (1.) It is part of the dignity of the saints, especially those who excel in virtue, and are eminently useful, that they are remembered with respect when they are dead; their good name, their name with good men, for good things, is then in a special manner as precious ointment, Eccl. 7. 1. Those that honour God, he will thus honour, Ps. 112. 3, 6, 9. The elders by faith obtained a good report, (Heb. 11. 2.) and, being dead, are yet spoken of. (2.) It is part of the duty of the survivors; Let the memory of the just be blessed, so the Jews read it; and observe it as a precept, not naming an eminently just man that is dead, without adding, Let his memory be blessed. We must delight in making an honourable mention of good men that are gone; bless God for them, and for his gifts and graces that appeared in them; and especially be followers of them in that which is good.

2. Bad men are, and shall be, forgotten, or spoken of with contempt. When their bodies are putrifying in the grave, their names also shall rot. Either they shall not be preserved at all, but buried in oblivion; no good can be said of them, and therefore the greatest kindness that can be done them, will be to say nothing of them; or they shall be loathsome, and mentioned with detestation, and that rule of honour, De mortuis nil nisi bonum—Say nothing to the disadvantage of the dead, will not protect them. Where the wickedness has been notorious, and cannot but be mentioned, it ought to be mentioned with abhorrence.

8. The wise in heart will receive commandments; but a prating fool shall fall.

Here is, 1. The honour and happiness of the obedient; they will receive commandments; they will take it as a privilege, and really an ease to them, to be under government, which saves them the labour of deliberating, and choosing for themselves; and they will take it as a favour to be told their duty, and admonished concerning it. And it is their wisdom; they are wise in heart, who are tractable; and those who thus bend, thus stoop, shall stand and be established, shall prosper, being well-advised.

2. The shame and ruin of the disobedient, that will not be governed, nor endure any yoke; that will not be taught, nor take any advice. They are fools, for they act against themselves and their own interest; they are commonly prating fools, fools of lips, full of talk, but full of nonsense; boasting of themselves, prating spitefully against those that admonish them, (3 John, 10.) and pretending to give counsel and law to others. Of all fools, none more troublesome than the prating fools, nor that more expose themselves; but they shall fall into sin, into hell, because they received not commandments. They that are full of tongue, seldom look well to their feet, and therefore stumble and fall.

9. He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.

We are here told, and we may depend upon it,

1. That men's integrity will be their security; He that walks uprightly toward God and man, is faithful to both; he that designs as he ought, and means as he says, he walks surely, he is safe under a divine protection, and easy in a holy security. He goes on his way with a humble boldness, being well-armed against the

temptations of Satan, the troubles of the world, and the reproaches of men. He knows what ground he stands on, what guide he follows, what guard he is surrounded with and what glory he is going to, and therefore proceeds with assurance and *great peace*, Isa. 32. 17.--33. 15, 16. Some understand it as part of the character of an upright man, that he *walks surely*, in opposition to walking at all adventures; he will not dare to do that which he is not fully satisfied in his own conscience concerning the lawfulness of, but will see his way clear in every thing.

2. That men's dishonesty will be their shame; *He that perverts his way*, that turns aside into crooked paths, that dissembles with God and man, looks one way and rows another, though he may for a time disguise himself, and pass current, he *shall be known* to be what he is; it is a thousand to one but some time or other he betrays himself; however, God will discover him in the great day. *He that perverts his ways*, documentum erit—shall be made an example of, for warning to others; so some.

10. He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall.

Mischief is here said to attend,

1. Politic, designing, self-disguising, sinners; *He that winks with the eye*, as if he took no notice of you, when, at the same time, he is watching an opportunity to do you an ill turn; that makes signs to his accomplices when to come in to assist him in executing his wicked projects, which are all carried on by trick and artifice; he *causes sorrow*, both to others and to himself. Ingenuity will be no excuse for iniquity, but the sinner must either repent, or do worse; either rue it, or be ruined by it.

2. Public, silly, self-exposing, sinners; *A prating fool*, whose sins go before unto judgment, *shall fall*, as he had said before, v. 8. But his case is less dangerous of the two, and, though he destroy himself, does not create so much sorrow to others as *he that winks with his eyes*. The dog that bites is not always the dog that barks.

11. The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

See here, 1. How industrious a good man is, by communicating his goodness, to do good with it; *His mouth*, the outlet of his mind, *is a well of life*, it is a constant spring, whence issues good discourse for the edification of others, like streams that water the ground and make it fruitful, and for their consolation, like streams that quench the thirst of the weary traveller. It is like *a well of life*, that is pure and clean, not only not poisoned, but not muddled, with any corrupt communication.

2. How industrious a bad man is, by concealing his badness, to do hurt with it; *The mouth of the wicked covers violence*; disguises the designed mischief with professions of friendship, that it may be carried on the more securely and effectually; as Joab kissed and killed, Judas kissed and betrayed; this is his sin to which the punishment answers; (v. 6.) *Violence covers the mouth of the wicked*; what he got by violence, shall by violence be taken from him, Job, 5. 4, 5.

12. Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

Here is, 1. The great mischief-maker, and that is malice; Even where there is no manifest occasion of strife, yet *hatred* seeks occasion, and so *stirs it up*, and does the Devil's work. Those are the most spiteful, ill-natured, people that can be, who take a pleasure in setting their neighbours together by the ears, by tale-bearing, evil surmises, and misrepresentations; blowing up the sparks of contention, which had lain buried, into a flame, at which, with an unaccountable pleasure, they warm their hands.

2. The great peace-maker, and that is *love*, which *covers all sins*, the offences among relations, which occasion discord; Love, instead of proclaiming and aggravating the offence, conceals and extenuates it as far as it is capable of being concealed and extenuated.

Love will excuse the offence which we give through mistake, and unadvisedly, when we are able to say that there was no ill intended; but it was an oversight, and we love our friend notwithstanding; this covers it. It will also overlook the offence that is given us, and so cover it, and make the best of it; by this means strife is prevented, or, if begun, peace is recovered and restored quickly. The apostle quotes this, (1 Pet. 4. 8.) *Love will cover a multitude of sins*.

13. In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.

Observe, 1. Wisdom and grace are the honour of good men; *He that has understanding*, that good understanding which they have that do the commandments, *wisdom is found in his lips*, it is discovered to be there, and, consequently, that he has within a good treasure of it, and it is derived thence for the benefit of others. It is a man's honour to have wisdom, but much more to be instrumental to make others wise. 2. Folly and sin are the shame of bad men; *A rod is for the back of him that wants a heart*; he exposes himself to the lashes of his own conscience, to the scourges of the tongue, to the censures of the magistrate, and to the righteous judgments of God. They that foolishly and wilfully go on in wicked ways are preparing rods for themselves, the marks of which will be their perpetual disgrace.

14. Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.

Observe, 1. It is the wisdom of the wise that they treasure up a stock of useful knowledge, which will be their preservation; *Wisdom is therefore found in their lips*, (v. 13.) because it is laid up in their hearts; out of which store, like the good householder, they bring things new and old. Whatever knowledge may be at any time useful to us, we must *lay it up*, because we know not but some time or other we may have occasion for it. We must continue laying up as long as we live; and be sure to lay it up safe, that it may not be to seek when we want it.

2. It is the folly of fools that they lay up mischief in their hearts, which is ready to them in all they say, and works terror and destruction both to others and to themselves. They *love devouring words*, (Ps. 52. 4.) and these come uppermost; their *mouth is near destruction*, having the *sharp arrows of bitter words* always at hand, to throw about.

15. The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty.

This may be taken two ways:

1. As a reason why we should be diligent in our business, that we may avoid that sinking, dispiriting, uneasiness which attends poverty, and may enjoy the benefit and comfort which they have that are beforehand in the world. Taking pains is really the way to make ourselves and our families easy. Or, rather,

2. As a representation of the common mistakes both of rich and poor, concerning their outward condition.

(1.) Rich people think themselves happy because they are rich; but it is their mistake; *The rich man's wealth is*, in his own conceit, *his strong city*, whereas the worst of evils it is too weak and utterly insufficient to protect them from. It will prove that they are not so safe as they imagine; nay, their wealth may perhaps expose them.

(2.) Poor people think themselves undone because they are poor; but it is their mistake; *The destruction of the poor is their poverty*; it sinks their spirits, and ruins all their comforts; whereas a man may live very comfortably, though he has but a little to live on, if he be but content, and keep a good conscience, and live by faith.

16. The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.

Solomon here confirms what his father had said, (Ps. 37. 16.)

A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked.

1. Perhaps a righteous man has no more than what he works and for, he eats only *the labour of his hands*, but that labour ends to life; he aims at nothing but to get an honest livelihood, cares not to be rich and great, but is willing to live and maintain his family. Nor does it tend only to his own life, but he could enable himself to do good to others; he *therefore* labours, *that he may have to give*; (Eph. 4. 28.) all his business turns to some good account or other. Or, it may be meant of his labour religion; he takes most pains in that which has a tendency to eternal life; he *sows to the Spirit*, that he may *reap life everlasting*.

2. Perhaps a wicked man's wealth is fruit which he did not labour for, but came easily by, but it tends to sin; he makes it the food and fuel of his lusts, his pride, and luxury; he does hurt with it, and not good; he gets hurt by it, and is hardened by it in his wicked ways. The things of this world are good or evil, life or death, as they are used, and as *they* are that have them.

17. He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.

See here, 1. That those are in the right that do not only receive instruction, but retain it; that do not let it slip through carelessness, as most do, nor let it go to those that would rob them of it; that keep instruction safe, keep it pure and entire, keep it for their own use, that they may govern themselves by it, keep it for the benefit of others, that they may instruct them; they that do so are *in the way of life*; the way that has true comfort in it, and eternal life at the end of it.

2. That those are in the wrong, that do not only not receive instruction, but wilfully and obstinately refuse it when it is offered them; they will not be taught their duty, because it discovers their faults to them; that instruction which carries reproof in it they have a particular aversion to, and certainly they err; it is a sign that they err in judgment, and have false notions of good and evil; it is a cause of their erring in conversation. The traveller that has missed his way, and cannot bear to be told of it, and shewed the right way, must needs err still, err endlessly: he certainly misses *the way of life*.

18. He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.

Observe here, malice is folly and wickedness.

1. It is so when it is concealed by flattery and dissimulation; He is a fool, though he may think himself a politician, *that hides hatred with lying lips*, lest, if it break out, he should be ashamed before men, and he should lose the opportunity of gratifying his malice. *Lying lips* are bad enough, of themselves, but have a peculiar malignity in them, when they are made a *cloak of maliciousness*. But he is a fool who thinks to hide any thing from God.

2. It is no better when it is vented in spiteful and mischievous language; *He that utters slander is a fool too*, for God will, sooner or later, bring forth that righteousness as the light, which he endeavours to cloud, and will find an expedient to roll the reproach away.

19. In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.

We are here admonished concerning the government of the tongue, that necessary duty of a Christian.

1. It is good to say little, because *in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin*, or *sin doth not cease*. Usually, they that speak much, speak much amiss; and among many words there cannot but be many idle words, which they must shortly give an account of. They that love to hear themselves talk, do not consider what work they are making for repentance; for that will be wanted, and, first or last, will be had, where *there wanteth not sin*.

2. It is therefore good to *keep our mouth as with a bridle*; *He that refrains his lips*, that often checks himself, suppresses what he has thought, and holds in that which would transpire, he is a

wise man; it is an evidence of his wisdom, and he therein consults his own peace. Little said, soon amended, Amos, 5. 13. Jam. 1. 19.

20. The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. 21. The lips of the righteous feed many; but fools die for want of wisdom.

We are here taught how to value men, not by their wealth and preferment in the world, but by their virtue.

1. Good men are good for something; though they may be poor and low in the world, and may not have power and riches to do good with, yet, as long as they have a mouth to speak, that will make them valuable and useful, and upon that account we must honour them that fear the Lord, because *out of the good treasure of their heart they bring forth good things*. (1.) This makes them valuable; *The tongue of the just is as choice silver*; they are sincere, freed from the dross of guile and evil design. God's words are compared to *silver purified*, (Ps. 12. 6.) for they may be relied on; and such are the words of just men. They are of weight and worth, and will enrich those that hear them with wisdom, which is better than *choice silver*. (2.) It makes them useful; *The lips of the righteous feed many*; for they are full of the word of God, which is the bread of life, and that sound doctrine wherewith souls are nourished up. Pious discourse is spiritual food to the needy, to the hungry.

2. Bad men are good for nothing. (1.) One can get no good by them; *The heart of the wicked is little worth*; and therefore that which comes out of the abundance of his heart cannot be worth much. His principles, his notions, his thoughts, his purposes, and all the things that fill him, and affect him, are worldly and carnal, and therefore of no value. *He that is of the earth speaks of the earth*, and neither understands nor relishes the things of God, John, 3. 31. 1 Cor. 2. 14. The wicked man pretends, that though he does not talk of religion as the just do, yet he has it within him, and thanks God that his heart is good; but he that searches the heart here says the contrary, *It is nothing worth*. (2.) One can do no good to them. While many are fed by *the lips of the righteous*, fools die for want of wisdom; and fools indeed they are to die for want of that which they might so easily come by. *Fools die for want of a heart*, so the word is; they perish for want of consideration and resolution; they have no heart to do any thing for their own good. While the righteous feed others, fools starve themselves.

22. The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.

Worldly wealth is that which most men have their hearts very much upon, but they generally mistake both in the nature of the thing they desire, and in the way by which they hope to compass it; we are therefore told here,

1. What that wealth is which is indeed desirable; not having abundance only, but having it, and *no sorrow with it*; no disquieting care to get and keep it; no vexation of spirit in the enjoyment of it; no tormenting grief for the loss of it; no guilt contracted by the abuse of it. To have it, and to have a heart to take the comfort of it; to do good with it, and to serve God with joyfulness and gladness of heart in the use of it.

2. Whence this desirable wealth is to be expected; not by making ourselves drudges to the world, (Ps. 127. 2.) but by *the blessing of God*, that is it that *makes rich, and adds no sorrow*; what comes from the love of God has the grace of God for its companion, to preserve the soul from those turbulent lusts and passions of which, otherwise, the increase of riches is commonly the incentive. He had said, (v. 4.) *The hand of the diligent makes rich*, as a means; but here he ascribes it to *the blessing of the Lord*; but that blessing is upon *the hand of the diligent*. It is thus in spiritual riches. Diligence in getting them is our duty, but God's blessing and grace must have all the glory of that which is acquired, Deut. 8. 17, 18.

23. It is a sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.

Here is, 1. Sin exceeding sinful; *It is as a laughter to a fool to do mischief*; it is as natural to him, and as pleasant, as it is to a man to laugh. *Wickedness is his Isaac*, that is the word here; it is his delight, his darling, and that in which he pleases himself. He makes a laughing matter of sin. When he is warned not to sin, from the consideration of the law of God, and the revelation of his wrath against sin, he makes a jest of the admonition, and laughs at the shaking of the spear; when he has sinned, instead of sorrowing for it, he boasts of it, ridicules reproofs, and laughs away the convictions of his own conscience, *ch. 14. 9.*

2. Wisdom exceeding wise; for it carries along with it the evidence of its own excellency; it may be predicated of itself, and it is encomium enough; you need say no more in praise of a *man of understanding* than this, "He is an *understanding man*, he has *wisdom*; he is so wise as not to do mischief, or if he has, through oversight, offended, he is so wise as not to make a jest of it." Or, to bespeak wisdom wise indeed, read it thus; *As it is a sport to a fool to do mischief, so it is to a man of understanding to have wisdom, and to shew it.* Beside the future recompence, a good man has as much present pleasure in the restraints and exercises of religion, as sinners can pretend to in the liberties and enjoyments of sin; and much more and much better.

24. The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted. 25. As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.

It is here said, and said again, to the righteous, that *it shall be well with them*, and to the wicked, *Woe to them*; and these are set the one over-against the other, for their mutual illustration.

1. It shall be as ill with the wicked as they can fear, and as well with the righteous as they can desire. (1.) The wicked, it is true, buoy themselves up sometimes in their wickedness with vain hopes which will deceive them, but at other times they cannot but be haunted with just fears, and those *fears shall come upon them*; the God they provoke will be every whit as terrible as they, when they are under their greatest damps, apprehend him to be. *As is thy fear, so is thy wrath*, Ps. 90. 11. Wicked men fear the punishment of sin, but they have not wisdom to improve their fears by making their escape, and so the thing they feared comes upon them, and their present terrors are earnest of their future torments. (2.) The righteous, it is true, sometimes have their fears, but their desire is toward the favour of God and a happiness in him, and that *desire shall be granted*. According to their faith, not according to their fear, it shall be *unto them*, Ps. 37. 4.

2. The prosperity of the wicked shall quickly end, but the happiness of the righteous shall never end, v. 25. The wicked make a great noise, hurry themselves and others, like a *whirlwind* which threatens to bear down all before it; but, like a *whirlwind*, they are presently gone, and they pass irrecoverably, they are *no more*; all about them are quiet and glad when the storm is over, Ps. 37. 10, 36. Job. 20. 5. *The righteous*, on the contrary, make no shew; they lie hid, like a *foundation* which is low and out of sight, but they are fixed in their resolution to cleave to God, established in virtue, and they shall be an *everlasting foundation*, immeasurably good; he that is holy shall be holy still, and immovably happy; his hope is built on a rock, and therefore not shocked by the storm, Matth. 7. 24. *The righteous is the pillar of the world*, so some read it, the world stands for their sakes; the holy seed is the substance thereof.

26. As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.

Observe, 1. Those that are of a slothful disposition, that love their ease, and cannot apply their minds to any business, are not

fit to be employed, no not so much as to be sent on an errand, for they will neither deliver a message with any care, nor make any haste back. Such therefore are very unmeet to be ministers, Christ's messengers; he will not own the sending forth of sluggards into his harvest. 2. They that are guilty of so great an oversight as to intrust such with any affair, and put confidence in them, will certainly have vexation with them. A slothful servant is to his master as uneasy and troublesome as *vinegar to the teeth*, and *smoke to the eyes*; he provokes his passion, as vinegar sets the teeth on edge, and occasions him grief to see his business neglected and undone, as smoke sets the eyes a weeping.

27. The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. 28. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.

Observe, 1. Religion lengthens men's lives, and crowns their hopes. *What man is he that loves life?* Let him *fear God*, and that will secure him from many things that would prejudice his life, and secure to him life enough in this world, and eternal life in the other; *the fear of the Lord* will add days more than was expected, will add them endlessly, will prolong them to the days of eternity. *What man is he that would see good days?* Let him be religious, and then his days shall not only be many, but happy, very happy as well as very many, for *the hope of the righteous shall be gladness*, they shall have what they hope for, to their unspeakable satisfaction. It is something future and unseen that they place their happiness in; (Rom. 8. 24, 25.) not what they have in hand, but what they have in hope, and their hope will shortly be swallowed up in fruition, and it will be their everlasting gladness. *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

2. Wickedness shortens men's lives, and frustrates their hopes; The years of the wicked, that are spent in the pleasures of sin and the drudgery of the world, *shall be shortened*; Cut down the trees that cumber the ground. And whatever comfort or happiness a wicked man promises himself in this world or the other, he will be frustrated; for *the expectation of the wicked shall perish*: his hope shall be turned into endless despair.

29. The way of the LORD is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. 30. The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.

These two verses are to the same purport with those next before, intimating the happiness of the godly and the misery of the wicked; it is necessary that this be inculcated upon us, so loath are we to believe and consider it.

1. Strength and stability are entailed upon integrity; *The way of the Lord*, the providence of God, the way in which he walks towards us, *is strength to the upright*, confirms him in his uprightness. All God's dealings with him, merciful and afflictive, serve to quicken him to his duty, and animate him against his discouragements. Or, *The way of the Lord*, the way of godliness, in which he appoints us to walk, *is strength to the upright*; the closer we keep to that way, and the more our hearts are enlarged to proceed in it, the better fitted we are both for services and sufferings. A good conscience, kept pure from sin, gives a man boldness in a dangerous time; and constant diligence in duty makes a man's work easy in a busy time; the more we do for God, the more we may do, Job. 17. 9. That *joy of the Lord*, which is to be found only in the *way of the Lord*, will be our strength, (Neh. 8. 10.) and therefore *the righteous shall never be removed*. They that have an established virtue, have an established peace and happiness which nothing can rob them of, they *have an everlasting foundation*, v. 25.

2. Ruin and destruction are the certain consequence of wickedness. The wicked shall not only not *inherit* the earth, though they lay up their treasure in it, but they shall not so much as *inhabit* the earth; God's judgments will root them out; *Destruction*,

swift and sure destruction, *shall be to the workers of iniquity*; destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. Nay, that way of the Lord, which is the strength of the upright, is consumption and terror *to the workers of iniquity*: the same gospel which to the one is a *savour of life unto life*, to the other is a *savour of death unto death*; the same providence, like the same sun, softens the one and hardens the other, Hos. 14. 9.

31. The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out. 32. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable; but the mouth of the wicked *speaketh* frowardness.

Here, as before, men are judged of, and, accordingly, are justified, or condemned, by their words, Matth. 12. 37.

1. It is both the proof and the praise of a man's wisdom and goodness, that he speaks wisely and well. A good man, in his discourse, *brings forth wisdom* for the benefit of others. God gives him wisdom as a reward of his righteousness; (Eccl. 2. 26.) and he, in gratitude for that gift, and justice to the Giver, does good with it, and with his wise and pious discourses edifies many. He *knows what is acceptable*, what discourse will be pleasing to God, (for that is it that he studies more than to oblige the company,) and what will be agreeable both to the speaker and to the hearers, what will become him, and benefit them, and that he will speak.

2. It is the sin, and will be the ruin, of a wicked man, that he speaks wickedly like himself. *The mouth of the wicked speaks frowardness*, that which is displeasing to God, and provoking to those he converses with; and what becomes of it? Why, *the froward tongue shall be cut off*, as surely as the *flattering one*, Ps. 12. 3.

CHAP. XI.

1. **A FALSE** balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.

As religion toward God is a branch of universal righteousness, (he is not an honest man that is not devout,) so righteousness toward men is a branch of true religion, he is not a godly man that is not honest, nor can he expect that his devotion should be accepted; for,

1. Nothing is more offensive to God than deceit in commerce, *A false balance* is here put for all manner of unjust and fraudulent practises in dealing with any person, which are all *an abomination to the Lord*, and render those abominable to him that allow themselves in the use of such cursed arts of thriving. It is an affront to justice, which God is the Patron of, as well as a wrong to our neighbour, whom God is the Protector of. Men make light of such frauds, and think there is no sin in that which there is money to be got by, and, while it passes undiscovered, they cannot blame themselves for it; a blot is no blot till it is hit, Hos. 12. 7, 8. But they are not the less an abomination to God, who will be the Avenger of those that defraud their brethren.

2. Nothing is more pleasing to God than fair and honest dealing, nor more necessary to make us and our devotions acceptable to him; *A just weight is his delight*. He himself goes by a *just weight*, and holds the scale of judgment with an even hand, and therefore is pleased with those that are herein followers of him. A balance cheats, under pretence of doing right most exactly, and therefore is the greater abomination to God.

2. *When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.*

Observe, 1. How he that exalts himself is here abased, and contempt put upon him; *When pride comes, then comes shame*. Pride is a sin which men have reason to be themselves ashamed of; it is a shame to a man who springs out of the earth, who lives upon alms, depends upon God, and has forfeited all he has, to be proud. It is a sin which others cry out shame on, and look upon with disdain; he that is haughty makes himself contempt-

tible; it is a sin for which God often brings men down, as he did Nebuchadnezzar and Herod, whose ignominy immediately attended their vainglory; for God *resists the proud*, contradicts them, and counterworks them, in the thing they are proud of, Isa. 2. 11, &c.

2. How he that humbles himself is here exalted, and a high character is given him; as with the proud there is folly, and will be shame, so *with the lowly there is wisdom*, and will be honour, for a man's wisdom gains him respect, and makes his face to shine, before men; or if any be so base as to trample upon the humble, God will give them grace, which will be their glory. Considering how safe, and quiet, and easy, they are, that are of a humble spirit, what communion they have with God, and comfort in themselves, we will say, *With the lowly is wisdom*.

3. The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.

It is not only promised that God will guide the upright, and threatened that he will destroy the transgressors, but, that we may be the more fully assured of both, it is here represented as if the nature of the thing were such on both sides, that it would do it itself.

1. The integrity of an honest man will itself be his guide, in the way of duty and the way of safety. His principles are fixed, his rule is certain, and therefore his way is plain; his sincerity keeps him steady, and he needs not tack about every time the wind turns, having no other end to drive at than to keep a good conscience. *Integrity and uprightness will preserve men*, Ps. 25. 21.

2. The iniquity of a bad man will itself be his ruin. As the plainness of a good man will be his protection, though he is ever so much exposed, so the perverseness of sinners will be their destruction, though they think themselves ever so well fortified. They shall fall into pits of their own digging, ch. 5. 22.

4. Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.

Note, 1. *The day of death* will be a *day of wrath*; it is a messenger of God's *wrath*; therefore, when Moses had meditated on man's mortality, he takes occasion thence to admire *the power of God's anger*, Ps. 90. 11. It is a debt owing, not to nature, but to God's justice. After death, *the judgment*, and that is a *day of wrath*, Rev. 6. 17.

2. Riches will stand men in no stead in that day; they will neither put by the stroke, nor ease the pain, much less take out the sting; what profit will this world's birth-rights be of then? In the day of public judgments, riches often expose men rather than protect them, Ezek. 7. 19.

3. It is righteousness only that will *deliver from the evil of death*; a good conscience will make death easy, and take off the terror of it; it is the privilege of the righteous only not to be hurt of the second death, and so not much hurt by the first.

5. The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness. 6. The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in *their own* naughtiness.

These two verses are, in effect, the same, and both to the same purport, with v. 3. For the truths are here of such certainty and weight, that they cannot be too often inculcated. Let us govern ourselves by these principles.

1. That the ways of religion are plain and safe, and in them we may enjoy a holy security. A living principle of honesty and grace will be, (1.) Our best direction in the right way, in every doubtful case, to say to us, *This is the way, walk in it*. He that acts without a guide looks right on, and sees his way before him. (2.) Our best deliverance from every false way; *The righteousness of the upright shall be armour of proof to them, to deliver them*

23. It is a sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.

Here is, 1. Sin exceeding sinful; *It is as a laughter to a fool to do mischief*; it is as natural to him, and as pleasant, as it is to a man to laugh. *Wickedness is his Isaac*, that is the word here; it is his delight, his darling, and that in which he pleases himself. He makes a laughing matter of sin. When he is warned not to sin, from the consideration of the law of God, and the revelation of his wrath against sin, he makes a jest of the admonition, and laughs at the shaking of the spear; when he has sinned, instead of sorrowing for it, he boasts of it, ridicules reproofs, and laughs away the convictions of his own conscience, *ch. 14. 9.*

2. Wisdom exceeding wise; for it carries along with it the evidence of its own excellency; it may be predicated of itself, and it is encomium enough; you need say no more in praise of a man of understanding than this, "He is an understanding man, he has wisdom; he is so wise as not to do mischief, or if he has, through oversight, offended, he is so wise as not to make a jest of it." Or, to bespeak wisdom wise indeed, read it thus; *As it is a sport to a fool to do mischief, so it is to a man of understanding to have wisdom, and to shew it.* Beside the future recompence, a good man has as much present pleasure in the restraints and exercises of religion, as sinners can pretend to in the liberties and enjoyments of sin; and much more and much better.

24. The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted. 25. As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.

It is here said, and said again, to the righteous, that *it shall be well with them*, and to the wicked, *Woe to them*; and these are set the one over-against the other, for their mutual illustration.

1. It shall be as ill with the wicked as they can fear, and as well with the righteous as they can desire. (1.) The wicked, it is true, buoy themselves up sometimes in their wickedness with vain hopes which will deceive them, but at other times they cannot but be haunted with just fears, and those *fears shall come upon them*; the God they provoke will be every whit as terrible as they, when they are under their greatest damps, apprehend him to be. *As is thy fear, so is thy wrath*, Ps. 90. 11. Wicked men fear the punishment of sin, but they have not wisdom to improve their fears by making their escape, and so the thing they feared comes upon them, and their present terrors are earnest of their future torments. (2.) The righteous, it is true, sometimes have their fears, but their desire is toward the favour of God and a happiness in him, and that *desire shall be granted*. According to their faith, not according to their fear, it shall be *unto them*, Ps. 37. 4.

2. The prosperity of the wicked shall quickly end, but the happiness of the righteous shall never end, v. 25. The wicked make a great noise, hurry themselves and others, like a *whirlwind* which threatens to bear down all before it; but, like a *whirlwind*, they are presently gone, and they pass irrecoverably, they are *no more*; all about them are quiet and glad when the storm is over, Ps. 37. 10, 36. Job, 20. 5. The *righteous*, on the contrary, make no shew; they lie hid, like a *foundation* which is low and out of sight, but they are fixed in their resolution to cleave to God, established in virtue, and they shall be an *everlasting foundation*, immeasurably good; he that is holy shall be holy still, and immovably happy; his hope is built on a rock, and therefore not shocked by the storm, Math. 7. 24. The *righteous is the pillar of the world*, so some read it, the world stands for their sakes: the holy seed is the substance thereof.

26. As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.

Observe, 1. Those that are of a slothful disposition, that love their ease, and cannot apply their minds to any business, are not

fit to be employed, no not so much as to be sent on an errand, for they will neither deliver a message with any care, nor make any haste back. Such therefore are very unmeet to be ministers, Christ's messengers; he will not own the sending forth of sluggards into his harvest. 2. They that are guilty of so great an oversight as to intrust such with any affair, and put confidence in them, will certainly have vexation with them. A slothful servant is to his master as uneasy and troublesome as *vinegar to the teeth*, and *smoke to the eyes*; he provokes his passion, as vinegar sets the teeth on edge, and occasions him grief to see his business neglected and undone, as smoke sets the eyes a weeping.

27. The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. 28. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.

Observe, 1. Religion lengthens men's lives, and crowns their hopes. *What man is he that loves life?* Let him *fear God*, and that will secure him from many things that would prejudice his life, and secure to him life enough in this world, and eternal life in the other; *the fear of the Lord* will add days more than was expected, will add them endlessly, will prolong them to the days of eternity. *What man is he that would see good days?* Let him be religious, and then his days shall not only be many, but happy, very happy as well as very many, for *the hope of the righteous shall be gladness*, they shall have what they hope for, to their unspeakable satisfaction. It is something future and unseen that they place their happiness in; (Rom. 8. 24, 25.) not what they have in hand, but what they have in hope, and their hope will shortly be swallowed up in fruition, and it will be their everlasting gladness. *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

2. Wickedness shortens men's lives, and frustrates their hopes; The years of the wicked, that are spent in the pleasures of sin and the drudgery of the world, *shall be shortened*; Cut down the trees that cumber the ground. And whatever comfort or happiness a wicked man promises himself in this world or the other, he will be frustrated; for *the expectation of the wicked shall perish*; his hope shall be turned into endless despair.

29. The way of the LORD is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. 30. The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.

These two verses are to the same purport with those next before, intimating the happiness of the godly and the misery of the wicked; it is necessary that this be inculcated upon us, so loath are we to believe and consider it.

1. Strength and stability are entailed upon integrity; *The way of the Lord*, the providence of God, the way in which he walks towards us, *is strength to the upright*, confirms him in his uprightness. All God's dealings with him, merciful and afflictive, serve to quicken him to his duty, and animate him against his discouragements. Or, *The way of the Lord*, the way of godliness, in which he appoints us to walk, *is strength to the upright*; the closer we keep to that way, and the more our hearts are enlarged to proceed in it, the better fitted we are both for services and sufferings. A good conscience, kept pure from sin, gives a man boldness in a dangerous time; and constant diligence in duty makes a man's work easy in a busy time; the more we do for God, the more we may do, Job, 17. 9. That *joy of the Lord*, which is to be found only in the *way of the Lord*, will be our strength, (Neh. 8. 10.) and therefore *the righteous shall never be removed*. They that have an established virtue, have an established peace and happiness which nothing can rob them of, they *have an everlasting foundation*, v. 25.

2. Ruin and destruction are the certain consequence of wickedness. The wicked shall not only not *inherit* the earth, though they lay up their treasure in it, but they shall not so much as *inhabit* the earth; God's judgments will root them out; *Destruction*,

swift and sure destruction, *shall be to the workers of iniquity*; destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. Nay, that way of the Lord, which is the strength of the upright, is consumption and terror to the workers of iniquity: the same gospel which to the one is a *savour of life unto life*, to the other is a *savour of death unto death*; the same providence, like the same sun, softens the one and hardens the other, Hos. 14. 9.

31. The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out. 32. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable; but the mouth of the wicked *speaketh* frowardness.

Here, as before, men are judged of, and, accordingly, are justified, or condemned, by their words, Matth. 12. 37.

1. It is both the proof and the praise of a man's wisdom and goodness, that he speaks wisely and well. A good man, in his discourse, *brings forth wisdom* for the benefit of others. God gives him wisdom as a reward of his righteousness; (Eccl. 2. 26.) and he, in gratitude for that gift, and justice to the Giver, does good with it, and with his wise and pious discourses edifies many. He *knows what is acceptable*, what discourse will be pleasing to God, (for that is it that he studies more than to oblige the company,) and what will be agreeable both to the speaker and to the hearers, what will become him, and benefit them, and that he will speak.

2. It is the sin, and will be the ruin, of a wicked man, that he speaks wickedly like himself. *The mouth of the wicked speaks frowardness*, that which is displeasing to God, and provoking to those he converses with; and what becomes of it? Why, *the froward tongue shall be cut off*, as surely as the *flattering one*, Ps. 12. 3.

CHAP. XI.

1. **A FALSE balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.**

As religion toward God is a branch of universal righteousness, (he is not an honest man that is not devout,) so righteousness toward men is a branch of true religion, he is not a godly man that is not honest, nor can he expect that his devotion should be accepted; for,

1. Nothing is more offensive to God than deceit in commerce. A false balance is here put for all manner of unjust and fraudulent practises in dealing with any person, which are all an *abomination to the Lord*, and render those abominable to him that allow themselves in the use of such cursed arts of thriving. It is an affront to justice, which God is the Patron of, as well as a wrong to our neighbour, whom God is the Protector of. Men make light of such frauds, and think there is no sin in that which there is money to be got by, and, while it passes undiscovered, they cannot blame themselves for it; a blot is no blot till it is hit, Hos. 12. 7, 8. But they are not the less an abomination to God, who will be the Avenger of those that defraud their brethren.

2. Nothing is more pleasing to God than fair and honest dealing, nor more necessary to make us and our devotions acceptable to him; *A just weight is his delight*. He himself goes by a *just weight*, and holds the scale of judgment with an even hand, and therefore is pleased with those that are herein followers of him. A balance cheats, under pretence of doing right most exactly, and therefore is the greater abomination to God.

2. *When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.*

Observe, 1. How he that exalts himself is here abased, and contempt put upon him; *When pride comes, then comes shame*. Pride is a sin which men have reason to be themselves ashamed of; it is a shame to a man who springs out of the earth, who lives upon alms, depends upon God, and has forfeited all he has, to be proud. It is a sin which others cry out shame on, and look upon with disdain; he that is laughtly makes himself contemp-

tible; it is a sin for which God often brings men down, as he did Nebuchadnezzar and Herod, whose ignominy immediately attended their vainglory; for God *resists the proud*, contradicts them, and counterworks them, in the thing they are proud of, Isa. 2. 11, &c.

2. How he that humbles himself is here exalted, and a high character is given him; as with the proud there is folly, and will be shame, so *with the lowly there is wisdom*, and will be honour, for a man's wisdom gains him respect, and makes his face to shine, before men; or if any be so base as to trample upon the humble, God will give them grace, which will be their glory. Considering how safe, and quiet, and easy, they are, that are of a humble spirit, what communion they have with God, and comfort in themselves, we will say, *With the lowly is wisdom*.

3. The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.

It is not only promised that God will guide the upright, and threatened that he will destroy the transgressors, but, that we may be the more fully assured of both, it is here represented as if the nature of the thing were such on both sides, that it would do it itself.

1. The integrity of an honest man will itself be his guide, in the way of duty and the way of safety. His principles are fixed, his rule is certain, and therefore his way is plain; his sincerity keeps him steady, and he needs not tack about every time the wind turns, having no other end to drive at than to keep a good conscience. *Integrity and uprightness will preserve men*, Ps. 25. 21.

2. The iniquity of a bad man will itself be his ruin. As the plainness of a good man will be his protection, though he is ever so much exposed, so the perverseness of sinners will be their destruction, though they think themselves ever so well fortified. They shall fall into pits of their own digging, ch. 5. 22.

4. Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.

Note, 1. The *day of death* will be a *day of wrath*; it is a messenger of God's wrath; therefore, when Moses had meditated on man's mortality, he takes occasion thence to admire the *power of God's anger*, Ps. 90. 11. It is a debt owing, not to nature, but to God's justice. After death, *the judgment*, and that is a *day of wrath*, Rev. 6. 17.

2. Riches will stand men in no stead in that day; they will neither put by the stroke, nor ease the pain, much less take out the sting; what profit will this world's birth-rights be of then? In the day of public judgments, riches often expose men rather than protect them, Ezek. 7. 19.

3. It is righteousness only that will *deliver from the evil of death*; a good conscience will make death easy, and take off the terror of it; it is the privilege of the righteous only not to be hurt of the second death, and so not much hurt by the first.

5. The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness. 6. The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in *their own* naughtiness.

These two verses are, in effect, the same, and both to the same purport, with v. 3. For the truths are here of such certainty and weight, that they cannot be too often inculcated. Let us govern ourselves by these principles.

1. That the ways of religion are plain and safe, and in them we may enjoy a holy security. A living principle of honesty and grace will be, (1.) Our best direction in the right way, in every doubtful case, to say to us, *This is the way, walk in it*. He that acts without a guide looks right on, and sees his way before him. (2.) Our best deliverance from every false way; *The righteousness of the upright shall be armour of proof to them, to deliver them*

from the assurances of the Devil and the world, and from their menaces.

2. The ways of wickedness are dangerous and destructive; *The wicked shall fall into misery and ruin by their own wickedness, and be taken in their own naughtiness as in a snare; O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself.* Their sin will be their punishment; that very thing by which they contrived to shelter themselves will make against them.

7. When a wicked man dieth, *his expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust men perisheth.*

Note, 1. Even wicked men, while they live, may keep up a confident expectation of a happiness when they die, or at least a happiness in this world. The hypocrite has his hope, in which he wraps himself as the spider in her web; the worldling expects great matters from his wealth, he calls it *goods laid up for many years*, and hopes to take his ease in it, and to be merry; but in death their expectation will be frustrated, the worldling must leave this world which he expected to continue in, and the hypocrite will come short of that world which he expected to remove to, Job, 27. 8.

2. It will be the great aggravation of the misery of wicked people, that their hopes will sink into despair then when they expect them to be crowned with fruition. When a godly man dies, his expectations are out-done, and all his fears vanish; but when a wicked man dies, his expectations are dashed, dashed to pieces, in that very day his thoughts perish, with which he had pleased himself, his hopes vanish.

8. The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.

As always in death, so sometimes in life, the righteous are remarkably favoured, and the wicked crossed.

1. Good people are helped out of the distresses which they thought themselves lost in, and their feet are set in a large room, Ps. 66. 12.—34. 19. God has found out a way to deliver his people, when they have despaired, and their enemies have triumphed, as if the wilderness had shut them in.

2. The wicked have fallen into the distresses which they thought themselves far from, nay, which they had been instrumental to bring the righteous into, so that they seem to come in their stead, as a ransom for the just. Mordecai is saved from the gallows, Daniel from the lion's den, and Peter from the prison; and their persecutors come in their stead. The Israelites are delivered out of the Red sea, and the Egyptians drowned in it. So precious are the saints in God's eye, that he gives men for them, Isa. 43. 3, 4.

9. An hypocrite with *his mouth* destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.

Here is, 1. Hypocrisy designing ill. It is not only the murderer with his sword, but the hypocrite with his mouth, that destroys his neighbour, decoying him into sin, or into mischief, by the specious pretences of kindness and good-will. *Death and life are in the power of the tongue*, but no tongue more fatal than the flattering tongue.

2. Honesty defeating the design, and escaping the snare; *Through knowledge of the devices of Satan shall the just be delivered* from the snares which the hypocrite has laid for him; seducers shall not deceive the elect. By the knowledge of God and the scriptures, and their own hearts, shall the just be delivered from those that lie in wait to deceive, and so to destroy, Rom. 16. 18, 19.

10. When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, *there is shouting.* 11. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

It is here observed,

1. That good men are generally well-beloved by their neigh-

bours, but no body cares for wicked people. (1.) It is true, there are some few that are enemies to the righteous, that are prejudiced against God and godliness, and are therefore vexed to see good men in power and prosperity; but all indifferent persons, even those that have no great stock of religion themselves, have a good word for a good man; and therefore *when it goes well with the righteous*, when they are advanced, and put into a capacity of doing good according to their desire, it is so much the better for all about them, and *the city rejoices*. For the honour and encouragement of virtue, and as it is the accomplishment of the promise of God, we should be glad to see virtuous men prosper in the world, and brought into reputation. (2.) Wicked people may, perhaps, have here and there a well-wisher among those who are altogether such as themselves, but among the generality of their neighbours they get ill-will, they may be feared, but they are not loved, and therefore *when they perish, there is shouting*; every body takes a pleasure in seeing them disgraced, and disarmed, removed out of places of trust and power, chased out of the world, and wishes no greater loss may come to the town, the rather because they hope *the righteous may come in their stead*, as they into trouble instead of the righteous, v. 8. Let a sense of honour therefore keep us in the paths of virtue, that we may live desired and die lamented, and not be hissed off the stage, Job, 27. 23. Ps. 52. 6.

2. That there is good reason for this, because those that are good do good, but (as saith the proverb of the ancients) *wickedness proceeds from the wicked*. (1.) *Good men are public blessings*—*Vir bonus est commune bonum*. By the blessing of the upright, the blessings with which they are blessed, which enlarge their sphere of usefulness; by the blessings with which they bless their neighbours, their advice, their example, their prayers, and all the instances of their serviceableness to the public interest; by the blessings with which God blesses others for their sake; by these *the city is exalted*, and made more comfortable to the inhabitants, and more considerable among its neighbours. (2.) Wicked men are public nuisances; not only the burthens, but the plagues, of their generation; the city is *overthrown by the mouth of the wicked*, whose evil communications corrupt good manners, are enough to debauch a town, to ruin virtue in it, and bring down the judgments of God upon it.

12. He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace. 13. A tale-bearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

Silence is here recommended as an instance of true friendship, and a preservative of it, and therefore an evidence, 1. Of wisdom, *A man of understanding*, that has rule over his own spirit, if he be provoked, *holds his peace*, that he neither give vent to his passion, nor kindle the passion of others, by any opprobrious language or peevish reflections. 2. Of sincerity; *He that is of a faithful spirit*, that is true, not only to his own promise, but to the interest of his friend, he *conceals every matter*, which, if divulged, may turn to the prejudice of his neighbour.

This prudent friendly concealment is here opposed to two very bad vices of the tongue: (1.) Speaking scornfully of a man to his face; *He that is void of wisdom* discovers his folly by this; he *despises his neighbour*, calls him *Raca*, and *Thou fool*, upon the least provocation, and tramples upon him as not worthy to be set with the dogs of his flock. He undervalues himself, who thus undervalues one that is made of the same mould. (2.) Speaking spitefully of a man behind his back; *A tale-bearer*, that carries all the stories he can pick up, true or false, from house to house, to make mischief and sow discord, he *reveals secrets* which he has been intrusted with, and so breaks the laws, and forfeits all the privileges, of friendship and conversation.

14. Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors *there is safety.*

Here is, 1. The bad omen of a kingdom's ruin; *Where no*

counsel is, no consultation at all, but every thing done rashly, or no prudent consultation for the common good, but only caballing for parties and divided interests, *the people fall*, crumble into factions, fall to pieces, fall together by the ears, and fall an easy prey to their common enemies. Councils of war are necessary to the operations of war; two eyes see more than one; and mutual advice is in order to mutual assistance.

2. The good presage of a kingdom's prosperity; *In the multitude of counsellors* that see their need one of another, and act in concert, and with concern for the public welfare, *there is safety*; for what prudent methods one discerns not, another may. In our private affairs we shall often find it to our advantage to advise with many; if they agree in their advice, our way will be the more clear; if they differ, we shall hear what is to be said on all sides, and be the better able to determine.

15. He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure.

Here we are taught,

1. In general, that we may not use our estates as we will; he that gave them to us has reserved himself a power to direct us how we shall use them; for they are not our own, we are but stewards; and further, that God in his law consults our interests, and teaches us that charity which begins at home, as well as that which must not end there. There is a good husbandry, which is good divinity, and a discretion in ordering our affairs, which is part of the character of a good man, Ps. 112. 5. Every man must be just to his family, else he is not true to his stewardship.

2. In particular, that we must not enter rashly into suretiship; (1.) Because there is danger of bringing ourselves into trouble by it, and our families too, when we are gone; *He that is surety for a stranger*, for any one that asks him, and promises him to be bound for him another time, for one whose person perhaps he knows, and thinks he knows his circumstances, but is mistaken, *he shall smart for it*, *Contritione conteretur—He shall be certainly and sadly crushed and broken by it*, and perhaps become a bankrupt. Our Lord Jesus was Surety for us when we were strangers, nay, enemies, and he smarted for it; it pleased the Lord to bruise him. (2.) Because he that resolves against all such suretiship keeps upon sure grounds, which a man may do, if he take care not to launch out any further into business than his own credit will carry him, so that he needs not ask others to be bound for him.

16. A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches.

Here, 1. It is allowed that *strong men retain riches*; that those who bustle in the world, who are men of spirit and interest, and are able to make their part good against all who stand in their way, are likely to keep what they have, and to get more; while those who are weak are preyed upon by all about them.

2. It is taken for granted, that a *gracious woman* is as solicitous to preserve her reputation, for wisdom and modesty, humility and courtesy, and all those other graces that are the true ornaments of her sex, as strong men are to secure their estates; and those women who are truly gracious, will, in like manner, effectually secure their honour by their prudence and good conduct. *A gracious woman* is as honourable as a valiant man, and her honour is as sure.

17. The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.

It is a common principle, Every one for himself; *Proximus egomet mihi—None so near to me as myself*. Now, if this be rightly understood, it will be a reason for the cherishing of gracious dispositions in ourselves, and the crucifying of corrupt ones. We are friends or enemies to ourselves, even in respect of present comfort, according as we are, or are not, governed by religious principles.

1. A *merciful*, tender, good-humoured, man, *doeth good to his own soul*, makes and keeps himself easy; he has the pleasure of doing his duty, and contributing to the comfort of those that are to him as his own soul: for we are members one of another. He that

waters others with his temporal good things, God will water him with his spiritual blessings, which he will find to do the best good to his own soul. See Isa. 58. 7, &c. *If thou hide not thine eyes from thine own flesh*, but do good to others as to thyself; if thou do good with thine own soul, and draw that out to the hungry, thou doest good to thy own soul; for the Lord shall satisfy thy soul, and make fat thy bones. Some make it part of the character of a *merciful man*, that he will make much of himself; that disposition which inclines him to be charitable to others, will oblige him to allow himself also that which is convenient, and to enjoy the good of all his labour. We may by the *soul* understand the inward man, as the apostle calls it, and then it teaches us, that the first and great act of mercy, is, to provide well for our own souls the necessary supports of the spiritual life.

2. A *cruel*, froward, ill-natured, man, *troubles his own flesh*, and so his sin becomes his punishment; he starves, and dies, for want of what he has, because he has not a heart to use it, either for the good of others, or for his own. He is vexatious to his nearest relations, that are, and should be, to him as his own flesh, Eph. 5. 29. Envy, and malice, and greediness of the world, are the rottenness of the bones, and the consumption of the flesh.

18. The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.

Note, 1. Sinners put a most fatal cheat upon themselves; *The wicked works a deceitful work*, builds himself a house upon the sand, which will deceive him when the storm comes; promises himself that by his sin which he will never gain; nay, it is cutting his throat when it smiles upon him. *Sin deceived me, and by it slew me*.

2. Saints lay up the best securities for themselves; *He that sows righteousness*, that is good, and makes it his business to do good, with an eye to a future recompence, he shall have a *sure reward*; it is made as sure to him as eternal truth can make it. If the seedness fail not, the harvest shall not, Gal. 6. 8.

19. As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.

It is here shewed that righteousness, not only by the divine judgment, will end in life, and wickedness in death, but that righteousness, in its own nature, has a direct tendency to life, and wickedness to death.

1. True holiness is true happiness; it is a preparative for it, a pledge and earnest of it. *Righteousness* inclines, disposes, and leads, the soul to life.

2. In like manner, they that indulge themselves in sin are fitting themselves for destruction. The more violent a man is in sinful pursuits, the more eagerly bent he is upon his own destruction; he awakens it when it seemed to slumber, and hastens it when it seemed to linger.

20. They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the LORD: but such as are upright in their way are his delight.

It concerns us to know what God hates, and what he loves, that we may govern ourselves accordingly; may avoid his displeasure, and recommend ourselves to his favour. Now here we are told,

1. That nothing is more offensive to God than hypocrisy and double-dealing, for that is signified by the word which we translate *frowardness*, pretending justice, but intending wrong; walking in crooked ways, to avoid discovery. Those are of a *froward heart* who act in contradiction to that which is good, under a profession of that which is good; and such are, more than any sinners, an *abomination to the Lord*, Isa. 65. 5.

2. That nothing is more pleasing to God than sincerity and plain-dealing; *Such as are upright in their way*, such as aim and act with integrity, such as have their conversation in the world in *simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom*, these God

delights in, these he even boasts of, (*Hast thou considered my servant Job?*) and will have us to admire; *Behold an Israelite indeed!*

21. *Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.*

1. That confederacies in sin shall certainly be broken, and shall not avail to protect the sinners; *Though hand join in hand*, though there are many that concur by their practice to keep wickedness in countenance, and engage to stand by one another in defending it against all the attacks of virtue and justice, though they are in league for the support and propagation of it, though wicked children tread in the steps of their wicked parents, and resolve to keep up the trade, in defiance of religion, yet all this will not protect them from the justice of God, they shall not be held guiltless; it will not excuse them to say that they did as the most did, and as their company did, they *shall not be unpunished*; witness the flood that was brought upon a whole world of ungodly men. Their number, and strength, and unanimity in sin, will stand them in no stead when the day of vengeance comes.

2. That entails of religion shall certainly be blessed; *The seed of the righteous*, that follow the steps of their righteousness, though they may fall into trouble, shall, in due time, *be delivered*. Though justice may come slowly to punish the wicked, and mercy may come slowly to save the righteous, yet both will come surely. Sometimes *the seed of the righteous*, though they are not themselves righteous, are delivered for the sake of their godly ancestors, as Israel often, and the seed of David.

22. *As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.*

By *discretion* here we must understand *religion* and *grace*, a true taste and relish (so the word signifies) of the honours and pleasures that attend an unspotted virtue; so that a *woman without discretion* is a woman of a loose and dissolute conversation; and then observe,

1. It is taken for granted here, that beauty and comeliness of body are *as a jewel of gold*, a thing very valuable, and, where there is wisdom and grace to guard against the temptations of it, it is a great ornament. *Gratior est pulchro veniens de corpore virtus*—*Virtue appears peculiarly graceful when associated with beauty*. A foolish wanton woman, of a light carriage, is fitly compared to a swine, though she be ever so handsome, wallowing in the mire of filthy lusts, with which the mind and conscience are defiled, and, though washed, returning to them.

2. It is lamented that beauty should be so abused as it is by those that have not modesty with it; it seems ill-bestowed upon them; it is quite misplaced, *as a jewel in a swine's snout*, with which he routs in the dunghill; if beauty be not guarded by virtue, the virtue is exposed by the beauty. It may be applied to all other bodily endowments and accomplishments; it is pity that those should have them who have not discretion to use them well.

23. *The desire of the righteous is only good: but the expectation of the wicked is wrath.*

This tells us what *the desire* and *expectation of the righteous*, and of *the wicked*, are, and how they will prove; what they would have, and what they *shall* have.

1. *The righteous* would have *good, only good*; all they desire, is, that it may go well with all about them; they wish no hurt to any, but happiness to all; as to themselves, their desire is not to gratify any evil lust, but to obtain the favour of a good God, and to preserve the peace of a good conscience; and good they shall have, that good which they desire, Ps. 37. 4.

2. *The wicked* would have *wrath*, they desire the woeful day, that God's judgments may gratify their passion and revenge, may remove those that stand in their way, and that they may make an advantage to themselves by fishing in troubled waters; and wrath they shall have, so shall their doom be; they expect and desire mischief to others, but it shall return upon themselves; as they loved cursing they shall have enough of it.

24. *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.*

Note, 1. A man may grow rich by prudently spending what he has; may scatter in works of piety, charity, and generosity, and yet may increase; nay, by that means may increase, as the corn is increased by being sown. By cheerfully using what we have, our spirits are exhilarated, and so fitted for the business we have to do; by minding which closely, what we have is increased; it gains a reputation which contributes to the increase. But it is especially to be ascribed to God; he blesses the giving hand, and so makes it a getting hand, 2 Cor. 9. 10. *Give, and it shall be given you.*

2. A man may grow poor by meanly sparing what he has, *withholding more than is meet*, not paying just debts, not relieving the poor, not providing what is convenient for the family, not allowing necessary expences for the preservation of the goods; this *tends to poverty*; it cramps men's ingenuity and industry, weakens their interest, destroys their credit, and forfeits the blessing of God: and let men be ever so saving of what they have, if God blast it, and blow upon it, it comes to nothing; *a fire not blown shall consume it*, Hag. 1. 6, 9.

25. *The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*

So backward we are to works of charity, and so ready to think that giving undoes us, that we need to have it very much pressed upon us, how much it is for our own advantage to do good to others, as before, v. 17.

1. We shall have the comfort of it in our own bosoms; *The liberal soul*, the soul of blessing, that prays for the afflicted, and provides for them, that scatters blessings with gracious lips and generous hands, that *soul shall be made fat* with true pleasure, and enriched with more grace.

2. We shall have the recompence of it both from God and man; *He that waters* others with the streams of his bounty, *shall be also watered himself*; God will certainly return it in the dews, in the plentiful showers, of his blessing, which he will *pour out, till there be not room enough to receive it*, Mal. 3. 10. Men that have any sense of gratitude will return it if there be occasion; the *merciful shall find mercy*, and the kind be kindly dealt with.

3. We shall be enabled still to do yet more good; *He that waters, even he shall be as rain*, so some read it; he shall be recruited as the clouds are, which return after the rain, and shall be further useful and acceptable, as the rain to the new-mown grass. *He that teaches shall learn*, so the Chaldee reads it; he that uses his knowledge in teaching others, shall himself be taught of God; to him that has, and uses what he has, more shall be given.

26. *He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.*

See here, 1. What use we are to make of the gifts of God's bounty; we must not hoard them up merely for our own advantage, that we may be enriched by them, but we must bring them forth for the benefit of others, that they may be supported and maintained by them. It is a sin, when corn is dear and scarce, to withhold it, in hopes that it will still grow dearer, so to keep up and advance the market, when it is already so high, that the poor suffer by it; and at such a time it is the duty of those that have stocks of corn by them to consider the poor, and to be willing to sell at the market-price, to be content with moderate profit, and not aim to make a gain of God's judgments. It is a noble and extensive piece of charity, for those that have stores wherewithal to do it, to help to keep the markets low when the price of our commodities grows excessive.

2. What regard we are to have to the voice of the people; we are not to think it an indifferent thing, and not worth heeding, whether we have the ill will and word, or the good will and word, of our neighbours, their prayers or their curses; for here we are

taught to dread their curses, and forego our own profit rather than incur them; and to court their blessings, and be at some expence to purchase them. Sometimes, *Vox populi vox Dei*—*The voice of the people is the voice of God.*

27. He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.

Observe, 1. Those that are industrious to do good in the world get themselves beloved both with God and man; *He that rises early to that which is good*, so the word is; that seeks opportunities of serving his friends, and relieving the poor, and lays out himself therein, *he procures favour*; all about him love him, and speak well of him, and will be ready to do him a kindness; and, which is better than that, better than life, he has God's loving-kindness.

2. Those that are industrious to do mischief are preparing ruin for themselves; *it shall come unto them*; some time or other they will be paid in their own coin. And, observe, *seeking mischief* is here set in opposition to *seeking good*; for those that are not doing good are doing hurt.

28. He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.

Observe, 1. Our riches will fail us when we are in the greatest need; *He that trusts in them*, as if they would secure him the favour of God, and be his protection and portion, *he shall fall*, as a man who lays his weight on a broken reed, which will not only disappoint him, but run into his hand, and pierce him.

2. Our righteousness will stand us in stead when our riches fail us; *The righteous shall then flourish as a branch*, the branch of righteousness; like a tree whose leaf shall not wither, Ps. 1. 3. Even in death, when riches fail men, the *bones* of the righteous *shall flourish as an herb*, Isa. 66. 14. When those that take root in the world wither, those that are grafted into Christ, and partake of his root and fatness, shall be fruitful and flourishing.

29. He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart.

Two extremes, in the management of family affairs, are here condemned, and the ill consequences of them foretold.

1. Carefulness and carnal policy, on the one hand. There are those that by their extreme earnestness in pursuit of the world, their anxiety about their business, and fretfulness about their losses, their strictness with their servants, and their niggardliness toward their families, *trouble their own houses*, and give continual vexation to all about them; while others think, by supporting factions and feuds in their families, which are really a trouble to their houses, to serve some turn for themselves, and either to get, or to save, by it; but they will both be disappointed; they will *inherit the wind*. All they will get by these arts will not only be empty and worthless as the wind, but noisy and troublesome, vanity and vexation.

2. Carelessness and want of common prudence, on the other hand. He that is a fool in his business, that either minds it not, or goes awkwardly about it, that has no contrivance and consideration, he not only loses his reputation and interest, but becomes a *servant to the wise in heart*; he is impoverished, and forced to work for his living; while those that manage wisely raise themselves, and come to have dominion over him, and others like him. It is rational, and very fit, that *the fool should be servant to the wise in heart*, and, upon that account, among others, we are bound to submit our wills to the will of God, and to be subject to him, because we are fools, and he is infinitely wise.

30. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

This shews what great blessings good men are, especially those that are eminently wise, to the places where they live, and therefore how much to be valued.

1. The righteous are as *trees of life*; the fruits of their piety

and charity, their instructions, reproofs, examples, and prayers, their interest in heaven, and their influence upon earth, are like the fruits of that tree, precious and useful, contributing to the support and nourishment of the spiritual life in many; they are the ornaments of paradise, God's church on earth, for whose sake it stands.

2. The wise are something more, they are as trees of knowledge, not forbidden, but commanded, knowledge. *He that is wise*, by communicating his wisdom, *wins souls*; wins upon them to bring them in love with God and holiness, and so wins them over into the interests of God's kingdom among men. The wise are said to *turn many to righteousness*, and that is the same with winning souls here, Dan. 12. 3. Abraham's proselytes are called *the souls that he had gotten*, Gen. 12. 5. They that would win souls have need of wisdom to know how to deal with them; and they that do win souls shew that they are wise.

31. Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.

This, I think, is the only one of Solomon's proverbs that has that note of attention prefixed to it, *Behold!* which intimates, that it contains not only an evident truth, which may be beheld, but an eminent truth, which must be considered.

1. Some understand both parts of a recompence in displeasure; *The righteous*, if they do amiss, shall be punished for their offences in this world; much more shall wicked people be punished for their's, which are committed, not through infirmity, but with a high hand. If judgment begin at the house of God, what will become of the ungodly? 1 Pet. 4. 17, 18. Luke, 23. 31.

2. I rather understand it of a recompence of reward to the righteous, and punishment to sinners. Let us behold providential retributions. There are some recompences *in the earth*, in this world, and in the things of this world, which prove that *verily there is a God that judges in the earth*, (Ps. 58. 11.) but they are not universal; many sins go unpunished in the earth, and services unrewarded, which indicates that there is a judgment to come, and that there will be more exact and full retributions in the future state. Many times *the righteous are recompensed* for their righteousness here *in the earth*, though that is not the principal, much less the only, reward either intended for them or intended by them; but whatever the word of God has promised them, or the wisdom of God sees good for them, they shall have *in the earth*. *The wicked* also, and *the sinner*, are sometimes remarkably punished in this life; nations, families, particular persons. And if the righteous, who do not deserve the least reward, yet have part of their recompence here on earth, much more shall the wicked, who deserve the greatest punishment, have part of their punishment on earth, as an earnest of worse to come. Therefore *stand in awe, and sin not*. If those have two heavens that merit none, much more shall they have two hells that merit both.

CHAP. XII.

1. **W**HOSO loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish.

We are here taught to try whether we have grace or no, by inquiring how we stand affected to the means of grace.

1. Those that have grace, and love it, will delight in all the instructions that are given them by way of counsel, admonition, or reproof, by the word or providence of God; they will value a good education, and think it not a hardship, but a happiness, to be under a strict and prudent discipline. They that love a faithful ministry, that value it, and sit under it with pleasure, make it to appear that they *love knowledge*.

2. Those shew themselves not only void of grace, but void of common sense, that take it as an affront to be told of their faults, and an imposition upon their liberty to be put in mind of their duty; *He that hates reproof* is not only foolish but *brutish*; like

the horse, and the mule, that have no understanding, or the ox that kicks against the goad. Those that desire to live in loose families and societies, where they may be under no check; that stifle the convictions of their own consciences, and count those their enemies that tell them the truth, are the *brutish* here meant.

2. A good *man* obtaineth favour of the LORD: but a man of wicked devices will be condemn.

Note, 1. We are really as we are with God. Those are happy, truly happy, for ever happy, that *obtain favour of the Lord*, though the world frown upon them, and they find little favour with men; for in God's favour is life, and that is the fountain of all good. On the other hand, those are miserable whom *he condemns*, however men may applaud them, and cry them up; whom he condemns he condemns to the second death.

2. We are with God as we are with men; as we have our conversation in this world. Our Father judges of his children very much by their conduct one to another; and therefore a *good man*, that is merciful and charitable, and does good, *draws out favour from the Lord*, by his prayers; but a malicious man, that devises wickedness against his neighbours, *he will condemn*, as unworthy of a place in his kingdom.

3. A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.

Note, 1. Though men may advance themselves by sinful arts, they cannot by such arts settle and secure themselves; though they may get large estates, they cannot get such as will abide; *A man shall not be established by wickedness*; it may set them in high places, but they are slippery places, Ps. 73. 18. That prosperity which is raised by sin is built on the sand, and so it will soon appear.

2. Though good men may have but little of the world, yet that little will last, and what is honestly got will wear well; *The root of the righteous shall not be moved*, though their branches may be shaken. Those that by faith are rooted in Christ, are firmly fixed; in him their comfort and happiness are so rooted, as never to be rooted up.

4. A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.

Note, 1. He that is blessed with a good wife is as happy as if he were upon the throne, for she is no less than a *crown* to him. A *virtuous woman*, that is pious and prudent, ingenious and industrious, that is active for the good of her family, and looks well to the ways of her household, that makes conscience of her duty in every relation, a woman of spirit, that can bear crosses without disturbance, such a one owns her husband for her head, and therefore she is a *crown* to him; not only a credit and honour to him, as a *crown* is an ornament, but supports and keeps up his authority in his family, as a *crown* is an ensign of power. She is submissive and faithful to him, and therefore teaches his children and servants to be so too.

2. He that is plagued with a bad wife is as miserable as if he were upon the dunghill; for she is no better than *rottenness in his bones*, an incurable disease; moreover, *she makes him ashamed*. She that is silly and slothful, wasteful and wanton, passionate and ill-tongued, ruins both the credit and comfort of her husband; if he go abroad, his head is hung down, for his wife's faults turn to his reproach; if he retire into himself, his heart is sunk; he is continually uneasy; it is an affliction that preys much upon the spirits.

5. The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.

Note, 1. The word of God is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and judges them. We mistake if we imagine that thoughts are free; no, they are under the divine cognizance,

and therefore under the divine command. 2. We ought to be observers of the thoughts and intents of our own hearts, and to judge of ourselves by them; for they are the first-born of the soul that have most of its image undisguised. Right thoughts are a righteous man's best evidences, as nothing more certainly proves a man wicked than wicked contrivances and designs. A good man may have in his mind bad suggestions, but he does not indulge them and harbour them till they are ripened into bad projects and resolutions. 3. It is a man's honour to mean honestly, and to have his thoughts right, though a word or action may be misplaced, or mistimed, or, at least, misinterpreted. But it is a man's shame to lie always at catch, to act with deceit, with trick and design; not only with a long reach, but with an over-reach.

6. The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.

In the foregoing verse, the *thoughts* of the wicked and righteous were compared, here their *words*, and those are as the abundance of the heart is.

1. Wicked people speak mischief to their neighbours; and wicked indeed are those whose *words* are to *lie in wait for blood*, their tongues are swords to those that stand in their way, to good men whom they hate and persecute. See an instance, Luke, 20. 20, 21.

2. Good men speak help to their neighbours; The *mouth of the upright* is ready to be opened in the cause of those that are oppressed, (ch. 31. 8.) to plead for them, to witness for them, and so to deliver them, particularly them whom the wicked *lie in wait* for. A man may sometimes do a very good work with one good word.

7. The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand.

We are here taught, as before, (v. 3.) and ch. 10. 25, 30.

1. That the *triumphing of the wicked is short*; they may be exalted for a while, but in a little time they are *overthrown*, and are *not*; their trouble proves their overthrow, and they who made a great shew disappear, and their place knows them no more. *Turn the wicked, and they are not*; they stand in such a slippery place, that the least touch of trouble brings them down; like the apples of Sodom, which look fair, but touch them, and they go to dust.

2. That the prosperity of the righteous has a good bottom, and will endure. Death will remove them, but their *house shall stand*, their families shall be kept up, and the generation of the upright shall be blessed.

8. A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.

We are here told whence to expect a good name. Reputation is what most have a fervent regard to, and stand much upon. Now it is certain,

1. The best reputation is that which attends virtue and serious piety, and the prudent conduct of life; *A man shall be commended* by all that are wise and good, in conformity to the judgment of God himself, which, we are sure, is *according to truth*, not according to his riches or preferments, his craft and subtlety, but *according to his wisdom*, the honesty of his designs, and the prudent choice of means to compass them.

2. The worst reproach is that which follows wickedness, and an opposition to that which is good; *He that is of a perverse heart*, that turns aside to crooked ways, and goes on frowardly in them, shall be despised. Providence will bring him to poverty and contempt, and all that have a true sense of honour will despise him, as unworthy to be dealt with, and unfit to be trusted, as a blemish and scandal to mankind.

9. *He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.*

Note, 1. It is the folly of some, that they covet to make a great figure abroad, take place, and take state, as persons of quality, and yet want necessaries at home, and, if their debts were paid, would not be worth a morsel of bread, nay, perhaps, pinch their bellies to put it on their backs, that they may appear very gay, because fine feathers make fine birds.

2. The condition and character of those is every way better, who content themselves in a lower sphere, where they are despised for the plainness of their dress, and the meanness of their post, that they may be able to afford themselves, not only necessaries, but conveniences, in their own houses, not only bread, but a servant to attend them, and take some of their work off their hands. They that contrive to live plentifully and comfortably at home, are to be preferred before those that affect nothing so much as to appear splendid abroad, though they have not wherewithal to maintain it, whose hearts are unhumiliated when their condition is low.

10. *A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.*

See here, 1. To how great a degree a good man will be merciful; he has not only a compassion for the human nature under its greatest abasements, but he regards even *the life of his beast*, not only because it is his servant, but because it is God's creature, and in conformity to Providence, which *preserves man and beast*. The beasts that are under our care must be provided for, must have convenient food and rest, must in no case be abused or tyrannised over. Balaam was checked for beating his ass. The law took care for oxen. Those therefore are unrighteous men that are not just to the brute-creatures; those that are furious and barbarous to them, evidence, and confirm in themselves, a habit of barbarity, and help to make the creation groan, Rom. 8. 22.

2. To how great a degree a wicked man will be unmerciful; even his *tender mercies are cruel*, that natural compassion which is in him, as a man, is lost, and by the power of corruption is turned into hard-heartedness; even that which they will have to pass for compassion, is really cruel, as Pilate's resolution concerning Christ the Innocent, *I will chastise him, and let him go*. Their pretended kindnesses are only a cover for purposed cruelties.

11. *He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding.*

Note, 1. It is men's wisdom to mind their business, and follow an honest calling, for that is the way, by the blessing of God, to get a livelihood; *He that tills his land*, of which he is either the owner or the occupant, that keeps to his work, and is willing to take pains, if he do not raise an estate by it, (what need is there of that?) yet he shall be *satisfied with bread*, shall have food convenient for himself and his family, enough to bear his charges comfortably through the world. Even the sentence of wrath has this mercy in it, Thou shalt *eat bread*, though it be *in the sweat of thy face*. Cain was denied this, Gen. 4. 12. Be busy, and that is the true way to keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee. *Thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands*.

2. It is men's folly to neglect their business; they are *void of understanding* that do so, for then they fall in with idle companions, and follow them in their evil courses, and so come to want bread, at least bread of their own, and make themselves burthensome to others, eating the bread *out of other people's mouths*.

12. *The wicked desireth the net of evil men: but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit.*

See here, 1. What is the care and aim of a wicked man; he

would do mischief; *He desires the net of evil men*; "Oh that I were but as cunning as such a man, to make a hand of those I deal with; that I had but his art of over-reaching, that I could but take my revenge on one I have spite to, as effectually as he can!" He desires the *strong-hold, or fortress*, of evil men, so some read it, to act securely in doing mischief, that it may not turn upon him.

2. What is the care and aim of a good man; his *root yields fruit*, and is his strength and stability, and that is it that he desires, to do good, and to be fixed and confirmed in doing good. The wicked desires only a net wherewith to fish for himself, the righteous *desires to yield fruit* for the benefit of others, and God's glory, Rom. 14. 6.

13. *The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.*

See here, 1. The wicked entangling themselves in trouble by their folly, when God in justice leaves them to themselves; They are often *snared by the transgression of their lips*, and their throats are cut with their own tongues; by *speaking evil of dignities* they expose themselves to public justice, by giving ill language they become obnoxious to private resentments, are sued for defamation, and actions on the case for words are brought against them. Many a man has paid dear in this world for the transgression of his lips, and has felt the lash on his back for want of a bridle upon his tongue, Ps. 51. 8.

2. The righteous extricating themselves out of trouble by their own wisdom, when God in mercy comes in for their succour; *The just shall come out of such troubles* as the wicked throw themselves headlong into. It is intimated, that the just may, perhaps, come into trouble; but *though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down*, Ps. 34. 19.

14. *A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompence of a man's hand shall be rendered unto him.*

We are here assured, for our quickening to every good word and work,

1. That even good words will turn to a good account; (v. 14.) *A man shall be satisfied with good*, he shall gain present comfort, that inward pleasure which is truly satisfied, *by the fruit of his mouth*, by the good he does with his pious discourse and prudent advice. While we are teaching others, we may ourselves learn and feed on the bread of life we break to others.

2. That good works, much more, will be abundantly rewarded. *The recompence of a man's hands* for all his work and labour of love, all he has done for the glory of God, and the good of his generation, *shall be rendered unto him*, and he shall *reap* as he has sown. Or it may be understood of the general rule of justice, God will *render to every man according to his work*, Rom. 2. 6.

15. *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*

See here, 1. What it is that keeps a fool from being wise; *His way is right in his own eyes*, he thinks he is in the right in every thing he does, and *therefore* asks no advice, because he does not apprehend he needs it; he is confident he knows the way, and cannot miss it, and therefore never inquires the way. The rule he goes by, is, to do that which is *right in his own eyes*, to walk in the way of his heart, *Quicquid libet, licet*—*He makes his will his law*. He is a fool that is governed by his eye, and not by his conscience.

2. What it is that keeps a wise man from being a fool: he is willing to be advised, desires to have counsel given him, and *hearkeneth to counsel*, being diffident of his own judgment, and having a value for the directions of those that are wise and good. He is wise; it is a sign he is so, and he is likely to continue so whose ear is always open to good advice.

16. *A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.*

Note, 1. Passion is folly; *A fool is known by his anger*, so some read it; not but that a wise man may be angry when there is just cause for it, but then he has his anger under check and direction, is *lord of his anger*, whereas a fool's anger lords it over him. He that, when he is provoked, breaks out into indecent expressions, in words or behaviour, whose passion alters his countenance, makes him outrageous, and forget himself, *Nabal* certainly is his name, and *folly is with him*. *A fool's indignation is known in the day*, he proclaims it openly, whatever company he is in; or, it is known in the day he is provoked, he cannot defer shewing his resentments. Those that are soon angry, that are quickly put into a flame by the least spark, have not that rule which they ought to have of their own spirits.

2. Meekness is wisdom; *A prudent man covers shame*; (1.) He covers the passion that is in his own breast; when his *spirit is stirred*, and his *heart hot within him*, he keeps his mouth as with a bridle, and suppresses his resentments, by smothering and stifling them. Anger is shame, and though a wise man be not perfectly free from it, yet he is ashamed of it, rebukes it, and suffers not the evil spirit to speak. (2.) He covers the provocation that is given him, the indignity that is done him, winks at it, covers it as much as may be from himself, that he may not carry his resentments of it too far. It is a kindness to ourselves, and contributes to the repose of our own minds, to extenuate and excuse the injuries and affronts that we receive, instead of aggravating them, and making the worst of them, as we are apt to do.

17. *He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.*

Here is, 1. A *faithful witness* commended for an honest man. *He that makes conscience of speaking truth*, and representing every thing fairly, to the best of his knowledge, whether in judgment or in common conversation, whether he be upon his oath or no, he *shews forth righteousness*, he makes it to appear that he is governed and actuated by the principles and laws of righteousness, and he promotes justice by doing honour to it, and serving the administration of it. (2.) A *false witness* condemned for a cheat; he *shews forth deceit*, not only how little conscience he makes of deceiving those he deals with, but how much pleasure he takes in it, and that he is possessed by a lying spirit, Jer. 9. 3. . 5. We are all concerned to possess ourselves with a dread and detestation of the sin of lying, (Ps. 119. 163.) and with a reigning principle of honesty.

18. *There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword; but the tongue of the wise is health.*

The tongue is death or life, poison or medicine, as it is used.

1. There are words that are cutting and killing, that are *like the piercings of a sword*. Opprobrious words grieve the spirits of those to whom they are spoken, and cut them to the heart; slanders, like a sword, wound the reputation of those of whom they are uttered, and perhaps incurably; whisperings and evil surmises, like a sword, divide and cut asunder the bonds of love and friendship, and separate those that have been dearest to each other.

2. There are words that are curing and healing; *The tongue of the wise is health*, closing up those wounds which the backbiting tongue had given, making all whole again, restoring peace, and accommodating matters in variance, and persuading to reconciliation. Wisdom will find out proper remedies against the mischiefs that are made by detraction and evil-speaking.

19. *The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*

Be it observed, to the honour of truth, that sacred thing,

1. That, if truth be spoken, it will hold good, and, whoever may be disobliged by it, and angry at it, yet it will keep its ground; great is the truth, and will prevail; what is true will be always true, we may abide by it, and need not fear being disproved and put to shame.

2. That, if truth be denied, yet in time it will transpire; a *lying tongue*, that puts false colours upon things, is but for a moment,

the lie will be disproved; the liar, when he comes to be examined, will be found in several stories, and not consistent with himself, as he is that speaks truth; and when he is found in a lie, he cannot gain his point, nor will be afterward be credited. Truth may be eclipsed, but it will come to light. Those, therefore, that make a lie their refuge, will find it a refuge of lies.

20. *Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.*

Note, 1. Those that devise mischief, contrive, for the accomplishing of it, how to impose upon others; but it will prove, in the end, that they deceive themselves. They that *imagine evil*, under colour of friendship, have their hearts full of this and the other advantage and satisfaction which they shall gain by it, but it is all a cheat. Let them imagine it ever so artfully, deceivers will be deceived.

2. Those that consult the good of their neighbours, that study the things which make for peace, and give peaceable advice, promote healing attempts, and contrive healing methods, and, according as their sphere is, further the public welfare, will have not only the credit, but the comfort of it, joy and success, perhaps beyond their expectation. Blessed are the peace-makers.

21. *There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.*

Note, 1. Piety is a sure protection. If men be sincerely righteous, the righteous God has engaged that no evil shall happen to them; he will, by the power of his grace in them, that principle of justice, keep them from the evil of sin; so that though they be tempted, yet they shall not be overcome by the temptation. And though they may come into trouble, into many troubles, yet to them those troubles shall have no evil in them, whatever they have to others, (Ps. 91. 10.) for they shall be over-ruled to work for their good.

2. Wickedness is as sure a destruction. They that live in contempt of God and man, that are set on mischief, with mischief they *shall be filled*. They shall be more and more mischievous, shall be *filled with all unrighteousness*, Rom. 1. 29. Or, they shall be made miserable with the mischiefs that shall come upon them. They that delight in mischief shall have enough of it. Some read the whole verse thus, *There shall no evil happen to the just, though the wicked be filled with mischief* and spite against them. They shall be safe under the protection of Heaven, though hell itself break loose upon them.

22. *Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight.*

We are here taught,

1. To hate lying, and to keep at the utmost distance from it, because it is an abomination to the Lord, and renders those abominable, in his sight, that allow themselves in it; not only because it is a breach of his law, but because it is destructive to human society.

2. To make conscience of truth, not only in our words, but in all our actions; because those that *deal truly* and sincerely, in all their dealings, are *his delight*, and he is well-pleased with them. We delight to converse with, and make use of, those that are honest, and that we may put a confidence in; such therefore let us be, that we may recommend ourselves to the favour both of God and man.

23. *A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.*

Note, 1. He that is wise does not affect to proclaim his wisdom, and it is his honour that he does not; he communicates his knowledge when it may turn to the edification of others, but he conceals it when the shewing of it would only tend to his own commendation. Knowing men, if they be prudent men, will carefully avoid every thing that savours of ostentation, and not take all occasions to shew their learning and reading, but only to use it

for good purposes, and then let *their own works praise them*. *Ars est celare artem*—*The perfection of art is to conceal it*.

2. He that is foolish cannot avoid proclaiming his folly, and it is his shame that he cannot; *The heart of fools*, by their foolish words and actions, *proclaims foolishness*; either they do not desire to hide it, so little sense have they of good and evil, honour and dishonour, or they know not how to hide it, so little discretion have they in the management of themselves, Eccl. 10. 3.

24. The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.

Note, 1. Industry is the way to preferment. Solomon advanced Jeroboam, because he saw that he was an industrious young man, and minded his business, 1 Kings, 11. 28. Men that take pains in study and serviceableness, will thereby gain such an interest and reputation as will give them a dominion over all about them, by which means many have risen strangely. He that has been *faithful in a few things* shall be made *ruler over many things*. The elders, that *labour in the word and doctrine*, are *worthy of double honour*; and those that are diligent when they are young will get that which will enable them to rule, and so to rest, when they are old.

2. Knavery is the way to slavery; *The slothful and careless*, or rather the *deceitful*, (for so the word signifies,) *shall be under tribute*. Those that, because they will not take pains in an honest calling, live by their shifts, and arts of dishonesty, are paltry and beggarly, and will be kept under. Those that are diligent and honest, when they are apprentices, will come to be masters; but those that are otherwise are the fools which, all their days, must be *servants to the wise in heart*.

25. Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.

Here is, 1. The cause and consequence of melancholy. It is *heaviness in the heart*, it is a load of care, and fear, and sorrow, upon the spirits, depressing them, and disabling to exert themselves with any vigour in what is to be done, or courage in what is to be borne; it makes them stoop, prostrates and sinks them. Those that are thus oppressed can neither do the duty, nor take the comfort, of any relation, condition, or conversation. Those therefore that are inclined to it should watch and pray against it.

2. The cure of it; *A good word from God*, applied by faith, *makes it glad*; such a word as that, (says one of the rabbins,) *Cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee*; the good word of God, particularly the gospel, is designed to make the hearts glad that are weary and heavy-laden, Matth. 11. 28. Ministers are to be helpers of this joy.

26. The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them.

See here, 1. That good men do well for themselves; for they have in themselves an excellent character, and they secure to themselves an excellent portion, and in both they excel other people; *The righteous is more abundant than his neighbour*, so the margin; he is richer, though not in this world's goods, yet in the graces and comforts of the Spirit, which are the true riches. There is a true excellency in religion, it ennobles men, inspires them with generous principles, makes them substantial; it is an excellency which is, in the sight of God, of great price, who is the true Judge of excellency. His neighbour may make a greater figure in the world, may be more applauded, but the righteous man has the intrinsic worth.

2. That wicked men do ill for themselves; they walk in a way which seduces them. It seems to them to be not only a pleasant way, but the right way; it is so agreeable to flesh and blood, that they therefore flatter themselves with an opinion that it cannot be amiss, but they will not gain the point they aim at, nor enjoy the good they hope for. It is all a cheat; and therefore the righteous

is wiser and happier than his neighbours, that yet despise him, and trample upon him.

27. The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.

Here is, 1. That which may make us hate slothfulness and deceit, for the word here, as before, signifies both; The slothful deceitful man has roast meat, but that which he roasts is not what he himself *took in hunting*, no, it is what others took pains for, and he lives upon the fruit of their labours, like the drones in the hive. Or, if slothful deceitful men have taken anything by hunting, (as sportsmen are seldom men of business,) yet they do not roast it, when they have taken it; they have no comfort in the enjoyment of it; perhaps God, in his providence, cuts them short of it.

2. That which may make us in love with industry and honesty; that the *substance of a diligent man*, though it be not great, perhaps is yet *precious*. It comes from the blessing of God; he has comfort in it; it does him good, and his family. It is his own daily bread, not bread out of other people's mouths, and therefore he sees God gives it him in answer to his prayer.

28. In the way of righteousness is life: and in the path-way thereof there is no death.

The way of religion is here recommended to us,

1. As a straight, plain, easy, way; it is *the way of righteousness*; God's commands (the rule we are to walk by) are all holy, just, and good; religion has right reason and equity on its side; it is a *path-way*, a way which God has cast up for us, (Isa. 35. 8.) it is a highway, the king's highway, the King of kings' highway; a way which is tracked before us by all the saints; the good old way, full of the footsteps of the flock.

2. As a safe, pleasant, comfortable way. (1.) There is not only life at the end, but there is life in the way; all true comfort and satisfaction. The favour of God, which is better than life; the Spirit, who is life. (2.) There is not only life in it, but so as that in it *there is no death*; none of that sorrow of the world which works death, and is an alloy to our present joy and life. There is no end of that life that is in the way of righteousness. Here there is life, but there is death too. *In the way of righteousness there is life, and no death*, life and immortality.

CHAP. XIII.

1. A WISE son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke.

Among the children of the same parents, it is no new thing for some to be hopeful, and others the contrary; now here we are taught to distinguish.

1. There is great hope of those that have a reverence for their parents, and are willing to be advised and admonished by them. He is a *wise son*, and is in a fair way to be wiser, that *hears his father's instruction*, desires to hear it, regards it, and complies with it, and does not only give it the hearing.

2. There is little hope of those that will not so much as *hear rebuke* with any patience, but scorn to submit to government, and scoff at those that deal faithfully with them. How can those mend a fault who will not be told of it, but count those their enemies who do them that kindness.

2. A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence.

Note, 1. If that which comes from within, out of the heart, be good, and from a good treasure, it will return with advantage. Inward comfort and satisfaction will be daily bread; nay, it will be a continual feast to those who delight in that communication which is *to the use of edifying*.

2. Violence done will recoil in the face of him that does it; *The soul of the transgressors*, that harbours and plots mischief, and

vents it by word and deed, *shall eat violence*. they shall have their belly full of it. *Reward her as she has rewarded thee*, Rev. 18. 6. Every man shall drink as he brews, eat as he speaks; for by our words we must be justified or condemned; (Matth. 12. 37.) as our fruit is, so will our food be, Rom. 6. 21, 22.

3. He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.

Note, 1. A guard upon the lips is a guard to the soul; he that is cautious, that thinks twice before he speaks once, that, if he have *thought evil*, lays his hand upon his mouth to suppress it, that keeps a strong bridle on his tongue, and a strict hand on that bridle, he keeps his soul from a great deal both of guilt and grief, and saves himself the trouble of many bitter reflections on himself, and others upon him.

2. There is many a one ruined by an ungoverned tongue; He that opens wide his lips, to let out *quod in buccam venerit*—*what ever comes uppermost*, that loves to bawl, and bluster, and make a noise, and affects such a liberty of speech as bids defiance both to God and man, he shall have destruction. It will be the destruction of his reputation, his interest, his comfort, and his soul for ever, Jam. 3. 6.

4. The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

Here is, 1. The misery and shame of the slothful; see how foolish and absurd they are; they desire the gains which the diligent get, but they hate the pains which the diligent take; they covet every thing that is to be coveted, but will do nothing that is to be done; and therefore it follows, they have nothing; for he that will not labour, let him hunger, and let him not eat, 2 Thess. 3. 10. The desire of the slothful, which should be his excitement, is his torment, which should make him busy, makes him always uneasy, and is really a greater toil to him than labour would be.

2. The happiness and honour of the diligent; Their soul shall be made fat; they shall have abundance, and shall have the comfortable enjoyment of it; and the more, for its being the fruit of their diligence. This is especially true in spiritual affairs. They that rest in idle wishes, know not what the advantages of religion are; whereas they that take pains in the service of God find both the pleasure and profit of it.

5. A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame.

Note, 1. Where grace reigns, sin is loathsome. It is the undoubted character of every righteous man, that he hates lying, all sin, for every sin is a lie, and particularly all fraud and falsehood in commerce and conversation; not only that he will not tell a lie, but he abhors it, from a rooted reigning principle of love to truth and justice, and conformity to God.

2. Where sin reigns, the man is loathsome. If his eyes were opened, and his conscience awakened, he would be so to himself, he would abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes: however, he is so to God and all good men; particularly, he makes himself so by lying, than which nothing is more detestable. And though he may think to face it out a while, yet he will come to shame and contempt at last, and will blush to show his face, Dan. 12. 2.

6. Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.

See here, 1. Saints secured from ruin. Those that are upright in their way, that mean honestly in all their actions, adhere conscientiously to the sacred and eternal rules of equity, and deal sincerely both with God and man, their integrity will keep them from the temptations of Satan, which shall not prevail over them, the reproaches and injuries of evil men, which shall not fasten upon them, to do them any real mischief, Ps. 25. 21.

Hic murus aheneus esto, nil conscire sibi—

Be this thy brazen bulwark of defence,
Still to preserve thy conscious innocence.

2. Sinners secured for ruin. Those that are wicked, even their wickedness will be their overthrow at last, and they are held in the cords of it in the mean time. Are they corrected, destroyed? It is their own wickedness that corrects them, that destroys them; they alone shall bear it.

7. There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.

This observation is applicable.

1. To men's worldly estate. The world is a great cheat; not only the things of the world, but the men of the world; all men are liars. Here is an instance in two sore evils under the sun: (1.) Some that are really poor would be thought to be rich, and are thought to be so; they trade and spend as if they were rich, make a great bustle and a great shew as if they had hid treasures, when perhaps, if all their debts were paid, they are not worth a groat. This is sin, and will be shame; many a one hereby ruins his family, and brings reproach upon his profession of religion. They that thus live above what they have, choose to be subject to their own pride rather than to God's providence, and it will end accordingly. (2.) Some that are really rich would be thought to be poor, and are thought to be so, because they sordidly and meanly live below what God has given them, and choose rather to bury it than to use it, Eccl. 6. 1. 2. In this there is ingratitude to God, injustice to the family and neighbourhood, and uncharitableness to the poor.

2. To their spiritual state. Grace is the riches of the soul, it is true riches, but men commonly misrepresent themselves, either designedly, or through mistake, and ignorance of themselves. (1.) There are many presuming hypocrites that are really poor, and empty of grace; and yet either think themselves rich, and will not be convinced of their poverty, or pretend themselves rich, and will not own their poverty. (2.) There are many timorous, trembling, Christians, that are spiritually rich, and full of grace, and yet think themselves poor, and will not be persuaded that they are rich, or at least will not own it; by their doubts and fears, their complaints and griefs, they make themselves poor. The former mistake is destroying at last, this is disquieting in the mean time.

8. The ransom of a man's life are his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke.

We are apt to judge of men's blessedness, at least, in this world, by their wealth, and that they are more or less happy according as they have more or less of this world's goods; but Solomon here shews what a gross mistake it is; that we may be reconciled to a poor condition, and may neither covet riches ourselves, nor envy those that have abundance.

1. Those that are rich, if by some they are respected for their riches, yet, to balance that, by others they are envied and struck at, and brought in danger of their lives, which therefore they are forced to ransom with their riches. *Slay us not, for we have treasures in the field*, Jer. 41. 8. Under some tyrants, it has been crime enough to be rich; and how little is a man beholden to his wealth, when it only serves to redeem that life which otherwise had not been exposed!

2. Those that are poor, if by some, that should be their friends, they are despised and overlooked, yet, to balance that, they are also despised and overlooked by others, that would be their enemies if they had any thing to lose; *The poor hear not rebuke*; are not censured, reproached, accused, nor brought into trouble, as the rich are; for no body thinks it worth while to take notice of them. When the rich Jews were carried captives to Babylon, the poor of the land were left, 2 Kings, 25. 12. Welcome nothing, once in seven years. *Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator*—When

a traveller is met by a robber, he will rejoice in not having much property about him.

9. The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.

Here is, 1. The comfort of good men flourishing and lasting; *The light of the righteous rejoices*, it increases, and makes them glad. Even their outward prosperity is their joy, and much more those gifts, graces, and comforts, with which their souls are illuminated; these *shine more and more*, ch. 4. 18. The Spirit is their Light, and he gives them a fulness of joy, and *rejoices to do them good*.

2. The comfort of bad men withering and dying; *The lamp of the wicked burns dim and faint*, it looks melancholy, like a taper in an urn, and it will shortly be *put out* in utter darkness, Isa. 50. 11. The light of the righteous is as that of the sun, which may be eclipsed and clouded, but will continue; that of the wicked is as a lamp of their own kindling, which will presently go out, and is easily put out.

10. Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well-advised is wisdom.

Note, 1. Foolish pride is the great make-bait. Would you know *whence come wars and fightings*? They come from this root of bitterness. Whatever hand other lusts may have in contention, (passion, envy, covetousness,) pride has the great hand, it is its pride that it will itself sow discord, and needs no help. Pride makes men impatient of contradiction in either their opinions or their desires, impatient of competition and rivalry, impatient of concession and receding, from a conceit of certain right and truth on their side; and hence arise quarrels among relations and neighbours, quarrels in states and kingdoms, in churches and Christian societies. Men will be revenged, will not forgive, because they are proud.

2. Those that are humble and peaceable are wise and *well-advised*. Those that will ask and take advice, that will consult their own consciences, their Bibles, their ministers, their friends, and will do nothing rashly, they are wise, as in other things, so in this, that they will humble themselves, will stoop and yield, to preserve quietness, and prevent quarrels.

11. Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.

This shews that riches wear as they are won and woven.

1. That which is won ill will never wear well, for a curse attends it, which will waste it; and the same corrupt dispositions which incline men to the sinful ways of getting, will incline them to the like sinful ways of spending; *Wealth gotten by vanity* will be bestowed upon vanity, and then it will be *diminished*. That which is got by such employments as are not lawful, or not becoming Christians, such as only serve to feed pride and luxury, that which is got by gaming, or by the stage, may as truly be said to be *gotten by vanity*, as that which is got by fraud and lying, and will be *diminished*. *De male quæsitis vix gaudet tertius hæres—Ill-gotten wealth will scarcely be enjoyed by the third generation*.

2. That which is got by industry and honesty will grow more, instead of growing less; it will be a maintenance, it will be an inheritance, it will be an abundance. *He that labours, working with his hands, shall so increase*, as that he shall have to give to him that needs; (Eph. 4. 28.) and, when it comes to that, it will increase yet more and more.

12. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.

Note, 1. Nothing is more grievous than the disappointment of a raised expectation, though not in the thing itself by a denial, yet in the time of it by a delay; *Hope deferred makes the heart sick* and languishing, fretful and peevish; but hope quite dashed kills the heart, and the higher the expectation was raised, the more cutting is the frustration of it. It is therefore our wisdom not to

promise ourselves any great matters from the creature, nor to feed ourselves with any vain hopes from this world, lest we lay up matter for our own vexation: and what we do hope for let us prepare to be disappointed in, that, if it should prove so, it may prove the easier; let us not be hasty.

2. Nothing is more grateful than to enjoy that, at last, which we have long wished and waited for; *When the desire does come*, it puts men into a sort of paradise, a garden of pleasure, for it is *a tree of life*. It will aggravate the eternal misery of the wicked, that their hopes will be frustrated; and it will make the happiness of heaven the more welcome to the saints, that it is what they have earnestly longed for as the crown of their hopes.

13. Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.

Here is, 1. The character of one that is marked for ruin; He that *despises the word* of God, and has no regard to it, no veneration for it, nor will be ruled by it, certainly he *shall be destroyed*; for he slights that which is the only means of curing a destructive disease, and makes himself obnoxious to that divine wrath which will certainly be his destruction. Those that prefer the rules of carnal policy before divine precepts, and the allurements of the world and the flesh before God's promises and comforts, despise his word, giving the preference to those things that stand in competition with it; and it is to their own just destruction; they would not take warning.

2. The character of one that is sure to be happy; *He that fears the commandment*, that stands in awe of God, pays a deference to his authority, has a reverence for his word, is afraid of displeasing God, and incurring the penalties annexed to the commandment, he shall not only escape destruction, but *shall be rewarded* for his godly fear. *In keeping the commandment there is great reward*.

14. The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

By the law of the wise and righteous, here, we may understand, either the principles and rules by which they govern themselves, or (which comes all to one) the instructions which they give to others, which ought to be as a law to all about them; and if they be so,

1. They will be constant springs of comfort and satisfaction; as a *fountain of life*, sending forth streams of living water; the closer we keep to those rules, the more effectually we secure our own peace.

2. They will be constant preservatives from the temptations of Satan. They that follow the dictates of this law will keep at a distance from the snares of sin, and so escape *the snares of death*, which they run themselves into that forsake *the law of the wise*.

15. Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard.

If we compare not only the end, but the way, we shall find that religion has the advantage; for,

1. The way of saints is pleasant and agreeable; *Good understanding gains favour* with God and man; our Saviour grew in that favour, when he *increased in wisdom*. Those that conduct themselves prudently, and order their conversation aright in every thing, that *serve Christ in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, are accepted of God, and approved of men*, Rom. 14. 17, 18. And how comfortably will that man pass through the world, who is well-understood, and is therefore well-accepted!

2. The way of sinners is rough and uneasy, and, for that reason, unpleasant to themselves, because unacceptable to others. It is *hard*, hard upon others, who complain of it, hard to the sinner himself, who can have little enjoyment of himself, while he is doing that which is disobliging to all mankind. The service of sin is perfect slavery, and the road to hell is strewed with the thorns and thistles that are the products of the curse. Sinners labour in the very fire.

16. Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly.

Note, 1. It is wisdom to be cautious; *Every prudent discreet man* does all *with knowledge*, (considering with himself, and consulting with others,) acts with deliberation, and is upon the reserve; is careful not to meddle with that which he has not some knowledge of, nor to lanch out into business which he has not acquainted himself with; will not *deal with* those that he has not some *knowledge* of, whether they may be confided in. He is still dealing in knowledge, that he may increase the stock he has.

2. It is folly to be rash, as the *fool* is, who is forward to talk of things he knows nothing of, and undertake that which he is no way fit for, and so *lays open his folly*, and makes himself ridiculous. He *began to build, and was not able to finish*.

17. A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.

Here is, 1. The ill consequences of betraying a trust; *A wicked messenger*, who, being sent to negotiate any business, is false to him that employed him, divulges his counsels, and so defeats his designs, he cannot expect to prosper, but will certainly *fall into some mischief* or other, will be discovered and punished; since nothing is more hateful to God and man than the treachery of those that have a confidence reposed in them.

2. The happy effects of fidelity; *An ambassador*, who *faithfully* discharges his trust, and serves the interests of those who employ him, he *is health*, he is health to those by whom, and for whom, he is employed, heals differences that are between them, and preserves a good understanding; he is health to himself, for he secures his own interest. This is applicable to ministers, Christ's messengers and ambassadors; those that are wicked and false to Christ, and the souls of men, do mischief, and *fall into mischief*; but those that are faithful will find sound words to be healing words to others and themselves.

18. Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.

Note, 1. He that is so proud that he scorns to be taught, will certainly be abased; He that *refuses* the good *instruction* offered him, as if it were a reflection upon his honour, and an abridgment of his liberty, *poverty and shame shall be to him*; he will become a beggar, and live and die in disgrace; every one will despise him as foolish, and stubborn, and ungovernable.

2. He that is so humble that he takes it well to be told of his faults, shall certainly be exalted; *He that regards a reproof*, whoever gives it him, and will mend what is amiss when it is shewed him; he gains respect as wise and candid; he avoids that which would be a disgrace to him, and is in a fair way to make himself considerable.

19. The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil.

This shews the folly of those that refuse instruction, for they might be happy, and will not.

1. They *might* be happy. There are in man strong desires of happiness; God has provided for the accomplishment of those desires, and that would be *sweet to the soul*, whereas the pleasures of sense are grateful only to the carnal appetite. *The desire* of good men toward the favour of God and spiritual blessings, brings that which is *sweet to their souls*; we know those that can say so by experience, Ps. 4. 6, 7.

2. Yet they *will not* be happy; for *it is an abomination to them to depart from evil*, which is necessary to their being happy. Never let those expect any thing truly sweet to their souls that will not be persuaded to leave their sins, but that roll them under their tongues as a sweet morsel.

20. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

Note, 1. Those that would be good must keep good company, which is an evidence for them that they would be good, (man's character is known by the company they choose,) and will be a means of making them good, of shewing them the way, and of quickening and encouraging them in it. He that would be himself wise, must walk with those that are so, must choose such for his intimate acquaintance, and converse with them accordingly; must ask and receive instruction from them, and keep up pious and profitable talk with them; (Ecclesiasticus, 8. 9.) *Miss not the discourse of the elders, for they also learned of their fathers.* And (ch. 6. 35.) *Be willing to hear every godly discourse, and let not the parables of understanding escape thee.*

2. Multitudes are brought to ruin by bad company; *A companion of fools shall be broken*, so some; *shall be known*, so the Seventy; known to be a fool; *noscitur ex socio—he is known by his company*. He *will be like them*, so some; *will be made wicked*, so others; it comes all to one; for all those, and those only, that make themselves wicked, will be *destroyed*; and those that associate with evil doers are debauched, and so undone, and, at last, ascribe their death to it.

21. Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.

Here see, 1. How unavoidable the destruction of sinners is; the wrath of God pursues them, and all the terrors of that wrath; *Evil pursues* them close wherever they go, as the avenger of blood pursued the manslayer, and they have no city of refuge to flee to; they attempt an escape, but in vain. Whom God pursues he is sure to overtake. They may prosper for a while, and grow very secure, but their damnation slumbers not, though they do.

2. How indefeasible the happiness of the saints is; the God that cannot lie has engaged that *to the righteous good shall be repayed*; they shall be abundantly recompensed for all the good they have done, and all the ill they have suffered, in this world; so that, though many have been losers for their righteousness, they shall not be losers by it. Though the recompence do not come quickly, it will come in the day of payment, in the world of retribution; and it will be an abundant recompence.

22. A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.

See here, 1. How *a good man's* estate lasts; he *leaves an inheritance to his children's children*. It is part of his praise that he is thoughtful for posterity; that he does not lay all out upon himself, but is in care to do well for those that come after him; not by withholding more than is meet, but by a prudent and decent frugality. He trains up his children to this, that they may leave it to their children; and especially he is careful, both by justice and charity, to obtain the blessing of God upon what he has, and to entail that upon his children, without which the greatest industry and frugality will be in vain; *A good man*, by being good, and doing good, by honouring the Lord with his substance, and spending it in his service, secures it to his posterity; or, if he should not leave them much of this world's goods, his prayers, his instructions, his good example, will be the best entail; and the promises of the covenant will be an inheritance to his *children's children*, Ps. 103. 17.

2. How it increases by the accession of *the wealth of the sinner* to it, for that *is laid up for the just*. If it be asked, "How should good men grow so rich, who are not so eager upon the world as others are, and who commonly suffer for their well-doing?" it is here answered, "God, in his providence, often brings into their hands that which wicked people had laid up for themselves." *The innocent shall divide the silver*, Job, 27. 16, 17. The Israelites shall spoil the Egyptians, (Exod. 12. 36.) and *eat the riches of the Gentiles*, Isa. 61. 6.

23. Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.

See here, 1. How a small estate may be improved by industry, so that a man, by making the best of every thing, may live comfortably upon it; *Much food is in the tillage of the poor*, the poor farmers, that have but a little, but take pains with that little, and husband it well. Many make it an excuse for their idleness, that they have but a little to work on, a very little to be doing with; but the less compass the field is of, the more let the skill and labour of the owner be employed about it, and it will turn to a very good account. Let him dig, and he needs not beg.

2. How a great estate may be ruined by indiscretion; *There is that has a great deal, but it is destroyed* and brought to nothing, for want of judgment, prudence in the management of it. Men over-build themselves, or over-buy themselves; keep greater company, or a better table, or more servants, than they can afford; suffer what they have to go to decay, and do not make the most of it; by taking up money themselves, or being bound for others, their estates are sunk, their families reduced, and all for want of judgment.

24. He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.

Note, 1. To the education of children in that which is good, there is necessary a due correction of them for what is amiss; every child of our's is a child of Adam, and therefore has that foolishness bound up in its heart which calls for rebuke, more or less; the rod and reproof which give wisdom. Observe, It is his rod that must be used, the rod of a parent, directed by wisdom and love, and designed for good; not the rod of a servant.

2. It is good to begin *betimes* with the necessary restraints of children from that which is evil, before vicious habits are confirmed. The branch is easily bent when it is tender.

3. Those really hate their children, though they pretend to be fond of them, that do not keep them under a strict discipline, and by all proper methods, severe ones when gentle ones will not serve, make them sensible of their faults, and afraid of offending. They abandon them to their worst enemy, to the most dangerous disease, and therefore hate them. Let this reconcile children to the correction their good parents give them; it is from love, and for their good, Heb. 12. 7..9.

25. The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want.

Note, 1. It is the happiness of the righteous that they shall have enough, and that they know when they have enough. They desire not to be surfeited, but, being moderate in their desires, they are soon satisfied. Nature is content with a little, and grace with less; enough is as good as a feast. They that feed on the bread of life, that feast on the promises, meet with abundant satisfaction of soul there, eat, and are filled.

2. It is the misery of the wicked, that, through the insatiableness of their own desires, they are always needy: not only their souls shall not be satisfied with the world and the flesh, but even their *belly shall want*; their sensual appetite is always craving. In hell they shall be denied a drop of water.

CHAP. XIV.

1. EVERY wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.

Note, 1. A good wife is a great blessing to a family; by a fruitful wife a family is multiplied and replenished with children, and so built up; but by a prudent wife, one that is pious, industrious, and considerate, the affairs of the family are made to prosper, debts are paid, portions raised, provision made, the children well educated and maintained, and the family has comfort within doors and credit without; thus is the house built. She looks upon it as her own to take care of, though she knows it is her husband's to bear rule in, Esth. 1. 22.

2. Many a family is brought to ruin by ill housewifery, as well as by ill husbandry. A *foolish* woman, that has no fear of God, nor regard to her business, that is wilful, and wasteful, and

humoursome; that indulges her ease and appetite, and is all for jaunting and feasting, cards and the play-house; though she come to a plentiful estate, and to a family beforehand, she will impoverish and waste it, and will as certainly be the ruin of her house as if she *plucked it down with her hands*; and the husband himself, with all his care, can scarcely prevent it.

2. He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD: but *he that is* perverse in his ways despiseth him.

Here are, 1. Grace and sin in their true colours. Grace reigning is a reverence of God, and gives honour to him who is infinitely great and high, and to whom all honour is due, than which what is more becoming, or should be more pleasing, to the rational creature? Sin reigning is no less than a contempt of God; in *this*, more than in any thing, sin appears exceeding sinful, that it despises God, whom angels adore. They that despise God's precepts, and will not be ruled by them, his promises, and will not accept of them, despise God himself, and all his attributes.

2. Grace and sin in their true light. By this we may know a man that has grace, and the fear of God, reigning in him, *he walks in his uprightness*, he makes conscience of his actions, is faithful both to God and man, and every step he makes, as well as every step he takes, is by rule; here is one that honours God. But, on the contrary, *he that is perverse in his ways*, that wilfully follows his own appetites and passions, that is unjust and dishonest, and contradicts his profession in his conversation; however he may pretend to devotion, he is a wicked man, and will be reckoned with as a despiser of God himself.

3. In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.

See here, 1. A proud fool exposing himself. Where there is pride in the heart, and no wisdom in the head to suppress it, it commonly shews itself in the words; *In the mouth there is pride*, proud boasting, proud censuring, proud scorning, proud commanding, and giving law; this is the rod, or branch, of pride; the word is used only here and Isa. 11. 1. It grows from that root of bitterness which is in the heart; it is a rod from that stem. The root must be plucked up, or we cannot conquer this branch: or it is meant of a smiting, beating, rod; a *rod of pride*, which strikes others. The proud man with his tongue lays about him, and deals blows at pleasure, but it will in the end be a rod to himself; the proud man shall come under an ignominious correction by the words of his own mouth; not cut as a soldier, but caned as a servant; and herein he will be beaten with his own rod, Ps. 64. 8.

2. A humble wise man saving himself, and consulting his own good; *The lips of the wise shall preserve them* from doing that mischief to others which proud men do with their tongues, and from bringing that mischief on themselves which haughty scorers are often involved in.

4. Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.

Note, 1. The neglect of husbandry is the way to poverty; *Where no oxen are*, to till the ground and tread out the corn, *the crib is empty, is clean*, there is no straw for the cattle, and consequently no bread for the service of man. Scarcity is represented by *clean-ness of teeth*, Amos, 4. 6. *Where no oxen are*, there is nothing to be done at the ground, and then nothing to be had out of it; *the crib indeed is clean* from dung, which pleases the neat and nice, that cannot endure husbandry, because there is so much dirty work in it, and therefore will sell their oxen to keep the crib clean; but then not only the labour, but even the dung, of the ox is wanted. This shews the folly of those who addict themselves to the pleasures of the country, but do not mind the business of it; who (as we say) keep more horses than kine, more dogs than swine; their families must needs suffer by it.

2. Those who take pains about their ground are likely to reap the profit of it; those who keep that about them which is for use

and service, not for state and shew, more husbandmen than footmen, they are likely to thrive. *Much increase is by the strength of the ox, that is made for our service, and is profitable alive and dead.*

5. A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.

In the administration of justice, much depends upon the witnesses, and therefore it is necessary to the common good that witnesses be principled as they ought to be; for,

1. A witness that is conscientious, will not dare to give in a testimony that is in the least untrue; nor, for good-will or ill-will, represent a thing otherwise than according to the best of his knowledge, whoever is pleased or displeased; and then judgment runs down like a river.

2. But a witness that will be bribed, and biassed, and brow-beaten, *will utter lies*, (and not stick or startle at it,) with as much readiness and assurance as if it were all true.

6. A scorner seeketh wisdom, and *findeth it not*: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.

Note, 1. The reason why some people seek wisdom, and do not find it, is, because they do not seek it from a right principle, and in a right manner. They are scornors, and it is in scorn that they ask instruction, that they may ridicule what is told them, and may cavil at it. Many put questions to Christ, tempting him, and that they might have whereof to accuse him, but they were never the wiser. No marvel, if they who seek wisdom, as Simon Magus sought the gifts of the Holy Ghost, to serve their pride and covetousness, do not find it, for they seek amiss. Herod desired to see a miracle, but he was a scorner, and therefore it was denied him, Luke, 23. 8. Scornors speed not in prayer.

2. To those who understand themselves aright, who *depart from evil, for that is understanding, the knowledge of God and of his will is easy*. The parables which harden scornors in their scornmg, and make divine things more difficult to them, enlighten those who are willing to learn, and make the same things more plain and intelligible and familiar to them, Matth. 13. 11, 15, 16. The same word which to the scornful is *a savour of death unto death*, to the humble and serious is *a saviour of life unto life*. He that *understands*, so as to *depart from evil*, (for that is *understanding*;) to quit his prejudices, to lay aside all corrupt dispositions and affections, will easily apprehend instruction, and receive the impressions of it.

7. Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not *in him* the lips of knowledge.

See here, 1. How we may discern a fool, and discover him; a wicked man, for he is a *foolish man*; if we *perceive not in him the lips of knowledge*, if we find there is no relish or savour of piety in his discourse, that his communication is all corrupt and corrupting, and nothing in it *good and to the use of edifying*, we may conclude the treasure is bad.

2. How we must decline such a one, and depart from him; *Go from his presence*, for thou *perceivest* there is no good to be gotten by his company, but danger of getting hurt by it. Sometimes the only way we have of reproving wicked discourse and witnessing against it, is, by leaving the company and going out of the hearing of it.

8. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.

See here, 1. The good conduct of a wise and good man; he manages himself well. It is not the wisdom of the learned, which consists only in speculation, that is here commended, but the *wisdom of the prudent*, which is practical, and is of use to direct our counsels and actions. Christian prudence consists in a right *understanding of our way*; for we are travellers, whose concern it

is, not to spy wonders, but to get forward toward their journey's end. It is to *understand our own way*, not to be critics and busy-bodies in other men's matters, but to look well to ourselves, and *ponder the path of our feet*; to understand the directions of our way, that we may observe them; the dangers of our way, that we may avoid them; the difficulties of our way, that we may break through them; and the advantages of our way, that we may improve them: to understand the rules we are to walk by, and the ends we are to walk toward, and walk accordingly.

2. The bad conduct of a bad man; he puts a cheat upon himself, he does not rightly understand his way, he thinks he does, and so misses his way, and goes on in his mistake; *The folly of fools is deceit*, it cheats them into their own ruin. The folly of him that built on the sand was deceit.

9. Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous *there is favour*.

See here, 1. How wicked people are hardened in their wickedness; they *make a mock at sin*: they make a laughing matter of the sins of others, making themselves and their companions merry with that for which they should mourn; and they make a light matter of their own sins, both when they are tempted to sin, and when they have committed it; they *call evil good, and good evil*, (Isa. 5. 20.) turn it off with a jest, rush into sin, (Jer. 8. 6.) and say they shall have peace, though they go on: they care not what mischief they do by their sins, and laugh at those that tell them of it. They are advocates for sin, and are ingenious at framing excuses for it. *Fools make a mock at the sin-offering*, so some; they that make light of sin make light of Christ. They are fools that make light of sin, for they make light of that which God complains of, (Amos, 2. 13.) which lay heavy upon Christ, and which they themselves will have other thoughts of shortly.

2. How good people are encouraged in their goodness; *Among the righteous there is favour*; if they in any thing offend, they presently repent, and obtain the favour of God. They have a good-will one to another; and among them, in their societies, there is mutual charity and compassion in cases of offences, and no mocking.

10. The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

This agrees with 1 Cor. 2. 11. *What man knows the things of a man, and the changes of his temper, save the spirit of a man?*

1. Every man feels most from his own burthen, especially that which is a burthen upon the spirits, for that is commonly concealed, and the sufferer keeps it to himself. We must not censure the griefs of others, for we know not what they feel, their stroke perhaps is heavier than their groaning.

2. Many enjoy a secret pleasure, especially in divine consolations, which others are not aware of, much less are sharers in. As the sorrows of a penitent, so the joys of a believer, are such *as a stranger does not intermeddle with*, and therefore is no competent judge of.

11. The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.

Note, 1. Sin is the ruin of great families; *The house of the wicked*, though built ever so strong and high, *shall be overthrown*, shall be brought to poverty and disgrace, and at length be extinct. His hope for heaven, the house on which he leans, shall not stand, but fail in the storm; the deluge that comes will sweep it away.

2. Righteousness is the rise and stability even of mean families; *Even the tabernacle of the upright*, though moveable and despicable as a tent, *shall flourish* in outward prosperity, if Infinite Wisdom see good; at all events, in graces and comfort, which are true riches and honours.

12. There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

We have here an account of the way and end of a great many self-deluded souls.

1. Their way is seemingly fair; it *seems right* to themselves; they please themselves with a fancy that they are as they should be, that their opinions and practices are good, and such as will bear them out. The way of ignorance and carelessness, the way of worldliness and earthly mindedness, the way of sensuality and flesh-pleasing, seem right to those that walk in them; much more, they imagine, the way of hypocrisy in religion, external performances, partial reformatations, and blind zeal, will bring them to heaven; they flatter themselves in their own eyes, that all will be well at last.

2. Their end is really fearful, and the more so for their mistake; it is *the ways of death*, eternal death; their iniquity will certainly be their ruin, and they will perish with a lie in their right hand. Self-deceivers will prove, in the end, self-destroyers.

13. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.

This shews the vanity of carnal mirth, and proves what Solomon said of laughter, that *it is mad*; for,

1. There is sadness under it. Sometimes, when sinners are under convictions, or some great trouble, they dissemble their grief by a forced mirth, and put a good face on it, because they will not seem to yield; they cry not when he binds them. Nay, when men really are merry, yet, at the same time, there is some alloy or other to it; something that casts a damp upon their mirth, which all their gaiety cannot keep from their heart. Their consciences tell them they have no reason to be merry; (Hos. 9. 1.) they cannot but see the vanity of it. Spiritual joy is seated in the soul; the joy of the hypocrite is but from the teeth outward. See John, 16. 22. 2 Cor. 6. 10.

2. There is worse after this; *The end of that mirth is heaviness*; it is soon over, like the crackling of thorns under a pot: and, if the conscience be awake, all sinful and profane mirth will be reflected upon with bitterness; if not, the heaviness will be so much the greater, when *for all these things God shall bring the sinner into judgment*. The sorrows of the saints will end in everlasting joys, (Ps. 126. 5.) but the laughter of fools will end in endless weeping and wailing.

14. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

Note, 1. The misery of sinners will be an eternal surfeit upon their sins: *The backslider in heart*, who for fear of suffering, or in hope of profit or pleasure, forsakes God and his duty, *shall be filled with his own ways*, God will give him enough of them; they would not leave their brutish lusts and passions, and therefore they shall stick by them, to their everlasting terror and torment: *he that is filthy shall be filthy still*. *Sam, remember*, shall fill them with their own ways, and set their sins in order before them. Backsliding begins in the heart, it is the evil heart of unbelief that departs from God; and, of all sinners, backsliders will have most terror when they reflect on *their own ways*, Luke, 11. 26.

2. The happiness of the saints will be an eternal satisfaction in their graces, as tokens of, and qualifications for, God's peculiar favour; *A good man shall be abundantly satisfied from himself*, from what God has wrought in him. He has *rejoicing in himself alone*, Gal. 6. 4. As sinners never think they have sin enough till it brings them to hell, so saints never think they have grace enough till it brings them to heaven.

15. The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.

Note, 1. It is folly to be credulous, to heed every flying report, to give ear to every man's story, though ever so improbable, to take things upon trust from common fame, to depend upon every man's profession of friendship, and give credit to every one that will

promise payment; those are *simple* who thus *believe every word*, forgetting that all men, in some sense, are liars, in comparison with God, all whose words we are to believe with an implicit faith, for he cannot lie.

2. It is wisdom to be cautious; The *prudent man* will try before he trusts, will weigh both the credibility of the witness, and the probability of the testimony, and then give judgment as the thing appears, or suspend his judgment till it appears. *Prove all things, and believe not every spirit*.

16. A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.

Note, 1. Holy fear is an excellent guard upon every holy thing, and against every thing that is unholy. It is wisdom to depart from evil, from the evil of sin, and thereby from all other evil; and therefore it is wisdom to fear, to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, to keep up a dread of God's wrath, to be afraid of coming near the borders of sin, or dallying with the beginnings of it. A wise man, for fear of harm, keeps out of harm's way, and starts back in a fright when he finds himself entering into temptation.

2. Presumption is folly. He who, when he is warned of his danger, *rages, and is confident*, furiously pushes on, cannot bear to be checked, bids defiance to the wrath and curse of God, and, fearless of danger, persists in his rebellion, makes bold with the occasions of sin, and plays upon the precipice, he is a fool, for he acts against his reason and his interest, and his ruin will quickly be the proof of his folly.

17. He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.

Note, 1. Passionate men are justly laughed at; Men who are peevish and touchy, and are *soon angry* upon every the least provocation, *deal foolishly*, they say and do that which is ridiculous, and so expose themselves to contempt, they themselves cannot but be ashamed of it when the heat is over. The consideration of this should engage those especially who are in reputation for wisdom and honour, with the utmost care to bridle their passion.

2. Malicious men are justly dreaded and detested, for they are much more dangerous and mischievous to all societies; *A man of wicked devices*, who stifles his resentments till he has an opportunity of being avenged, and is secretly plotting how to wrong his neighbour, and to do him an ill turn, as Cain to kill Abel, such a man as this is hated by all mankind. The character of an angry man is pitiable; through the surprise of a temptation he disturbs and disgraces himself, but it is soon over, and he is sorry for it; but that of a spiteful revengeful man is odious, there is no fence against him, nor cure for him.

18. The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

Note, 1. Sin is the shame of sinners; The simple, who love simplicity, get nothing by it, they *inherit folly*, they have it by inheritance, so some. This corruption of nature is derived from our first parents, and all the calamities that attend it we have by kind; it was the inheritance they transmitted to their degenerate race, an hereditary disease. They are as fond of it as a man of his inheritance, hold it as fast, and are as loath to part with it. What they value themselves upon is really foolish; and what will be the issue of their simplicity but folly? They will for ever rue their own foolish choices.

2. Wisdom is the honour of the wise; The prudent *crown themselves with knowledge*, they look upon it as their brightest ornament, and there is nothing they are so ambitious of; they bind it to their heads as a crown, which they will by no means part with; they press toward the top and perfection of knowledge, which will crown their beginnings and progress. They shall have the praise of it; wise heads shall be respected as if they were crowned heads. They *crown knowledge*, (so some read it,) they are a credit to their profession; wisdom is not only justified, but glorified, of all her children.

19. The evil bow before the good: and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

That is, 1. The wicked are oftentimes impoverished and brought low, so that they are forced to beg, their wickedness having reduced them to straits, while good men, by the blessing of God, are enriched, and enabled to give, and do give, even to the evil, for where God grants life, we must not deny a livelihood.

2. Sometimes God extorts, even from bad men, an acknowledgment of the excellency of God's people. The evil ought always to bow before the good, and sometimes they are made to do it, and to know that God has loved them, Rev. 3. 9. They desire their favour, (Esth. 7. 7.) their prayers, 2 Kings, 3. 12.

3. There is a day coming when the upright shall have the dominion; (Ps. 49. 14.) when the foolish virgins shall come begging to the wise for oil, and shall knock in vain at that gate of the Lord at which the righteous entered.

20. The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends

This shews not what should be, but what is, the common way of the world—to be shy of the poor, and fond of the rich.

1. Few will give countenance to those whom the world frowns upon, though otherwise worthy of respect; *The poor*, who should be pitied, and encouraged, and relieved, is hated, looked strange upon, and kept at a distance, even by his own neighbour, who, before he fell into disgrace, was intimate with him, and pretended to have a kindness for him. Most are swallow-friends that are gone in winter. It is good having God our Friend, for he will not desert us when we are poor.

2. Every one will make court to those whom the world smiles upon, though otherwise unworthy; *The rich have many friends*, friends to their riches, in hope to get something out of them. There is little friendship in the world but what is governed by self-interest, which is no true friendship at all, nor what a wise man will either value himself on, or put any confidence in. Those that make the world their God, idolize them that have most of its good things, and seek their favour, as if indeed they were Heaven's favourites.

21. He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.

See here how men's character and condition are measured and judged of, by their conduct toward their poor neighbours.

1. Those that look upon them with contempt, have here assigned them a bad character, and their condition will be accordingly. He that despises his neighbour because he is low in the world, because he is of a mean extraction, rustic education, and makes but a mean figure, that thinks it below him to take notice of him, converse with him, or concern himself about him, and sets him with the dogs of his flock, he is a sinner, is guilty of a sin, is in the way to worse, shall be dealt with as a sinner, unhappy is he.

2. Those that look upon them with compassion are here said to be in a good condition, according to their character. *He that has mercy on the poor*, is ready to do all the good offices he can to him, and thereby puts an honour upon him, *happy is he*; he does that which is pleasing to God, which he himself will afterward reflect upon with great satisfaction, for which the loins of the poor will bless him, and which will be abundantly recompensed in the resurrection of the just.

22. Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good.

See here, 1. How miserably mistaken they are, that not only do evil, but devise it; *Do they do not err?* Yes, certainly they do, every one knows it. They think that by sinning with craft and contrivance, and carrying on their intrigues with more plot and artifice than others, they shall make a better hand of their sins than others do, and come off better; but they are mistaken. God's justice cannot be out-witted. They that devise evil against

their neighbours greatly err, for it will certainly turn upon themselves, and end in their own ruin; a fatal error!

2. How wisely they consult their own interest, that not only do good, but devise it; *Mercy and truth* shall be to them; not a reward of debt, (they will own that they merit nothing,) but a reward of mercy, mere mercy, mercy according to the promise, mercy and truth, to which God is pleased to make himself a Debtor. Those that are so liberal as to devise liberal things, that seek opportunities of doing good, and contrive how to make their charity most extensive, and most acceptable to those that need it, *by liberal things they shall stand*, Isa. 32. 8.

23. In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.

Note, 1. Working without talking, will make men rich; *In all labour of the head, or of the hand, there is profit*, it will turn to some good account or other. Industrious people are generally thriving people, and where there is something done, there is something to be had. *The stirring hand gets a penny*. It is good therefore to keep in business, and to keep in action, and what our hand finds to do, to do it with all our might.

2. Talking, without working, will make men poor. Those that love to boast of their business, and make a noise about it, and that waste their time in tittle-tattle, in telling and hearing new things, like the Athenians, and, under pretence of improving themselves by conversation, neglect the work of their place and day, they waste what they have, and the course they take tends to penury, and will end in it. It is true in the affairs of our souls; those that take pains in the service of God, that strive earnestly in prayer, will find profit in it. But if men's religion runs all out in talk and noise, and their praying is only the labour of the lips, they will be spiritually poor, and come to nothing.

24. The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools is folly.

Observe, 1. If men be wise and good, riches make them so much the more honourable and useful; *The crown of the wise is their riches*; their riches make them to be so much the more respected, and give them the more authority and influence upon others. They that have wealth, and wisdom to use it, will have a great opportunity of honouring God and doing good in the world. *Wisdom is good without an inheritance*, but better with it.

2. If men be wicked and corrupt, their wealth will but the more expose them; *The foolishness of fools*, put them in what condition you will, is folly, and will shew itself, and shame them; if they have riches, they do mischief with them, and are the more hardened in their foolish practices.

25. A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.

See here, 1. How much praise is due to a faithful witness; *He delivers the souls* of the innocent who are falsely accused, and their good names, which are as dear to them as their lives. A man of integrity will venture the displeasure of the greatest, to bring truth to light, and rescue those who are injured by falsehood. A faithful minister, who truly witnesses for God against sin, is thereby instrumental to deliver souls from eternal death.

2. How little regard is to be had to a false witness; he forges lies, and yet pours them out with the greatest assurance imaginable for the destruction of the innocent. It is therefore the interest of a nation by all means possible to detect and punish false witness-bearing, yea, and lying in common conversation; for truth is the cement of society.

26. In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.

27. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

In these two verses, we are invited and encouraged to live in the fear of God, by the advantages which attend a religious life;

the *fear of the Lord* is here put for all gracious principles, producing gracious practices.

1. Where this reigns it produces a holy security and serenity of mind; there is in it a *strong confidence*, it enables a man still to hold fast both his purity and his peace, whatever happens, and gives him boldness before God and the world. *I know that I shall be justified; None of these things move me*; such is the language of this confidence.

2. It entails a blessing upon posterity. The children of them that by faith make God their Confidence, shall be encouraged, by the promise that God will be a God to believers, and to their seed, to fly to him as their Refuge, and they shall find shelter in him. The children of religious parents often do the better for their parents' instructions and example, and fare the better for their faith and prayers. *Our fathers trusted in thee, therefore we will.*

3. It is an over-flowing, ever-flowing, spring of comfort and joy; it is a *fountain of life*, yielding constant pleasure and satisfaction to the soul; joys that are pure and fresh are life to the soul, and quench its thirst, and can never be drawn dry; it is a *well of living water* that is springing up to, and is the earnest of, eternal life.

4. It is a sovereign antidote against sin and temptation. Those that have a true relish of the pleasures of serious godliness, will not be allured by the baits of sin to swallow its hook; they have better things than any it can pretend to offer, and therefore it is easy to them *to depart from the snares of death*, and to keep their foot from being taken in them.

28. In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince.

Here are two maxims in politics, which carry their own evidence with them.

1. That it is much for the honour of a king to have a populous kingdom; it is a sign that he rules well, since strangers are hereby invited to come and settle under his protection, and his own subjects live comfortably; it is a sign that he and his kingdom are under the blessing of God, the effect of which is, being fruitful and multiplying. It is his strength, and makes him considerable and formidable; happy is the king, the father of his country, who has his *quiver full of arrows*, he *shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with his enemy in the gate*, Ps. 127. 4, 5. It is therefore the wisdom of princes, by a mild and gentle government, by encouraging trade and husbandry, and by making all easy under them, to promote the increase of their people. And let all that wish well to the kingdom of Christ, and to his honour, do what they can in their places, that many be added to his church.

2. That when the people are lessened, the prince is weakened; *In the want of people is the leanness of the prince*, so some read it; trade lies dead, the ground lies untilld, the army wants to be recruited, the navy to be manned, and all because there are not hands sufficient. See how much the honour and safety of kings depend upon their people, which is a reason why they should rule by love, and not with rigour. Princes are corrected by those judgments which abate the number of the people, as we find, 2 Sam. 24. 13.

29. *He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.*

Note, 1. Meekness is wisdom. *He* rightly understands himself, and his duty and interest, the infirmities of human nature, and the constitution of human society, who is slow to anger, and knows how to excuse the faults of others as well as his own, how to adjourn his resentments, and moderate them, so as by no provocation to be out of the possession of his own soul. A mild patient man is really to be accounted an intelligent man, one that learns of Christ, who is Wisdom itself.

2. Unbridled passion is folly proclaimed; *He that is hasty of spirit*, whose heart is tinder to every spark of provocation, *that is*

all fire and tow, as we say, he thinks hereby to magnify himself, and make those about stand in awe of him, whereas really he *exalts his own folly*, he makes it known, as that which is lifted up is visible to all, and he subverts himself to it, as to the government of one that is exalted.

30. A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.

The foregoing verse shewed how much our reputation, this, how much our health, depends on the good government of our passions, and the preserving of the temper of the mind.

1. A *healing spirit*, made up of love and meekness, a hearty, friendly, cheerful, disposition, *is the life of the flesh*; it contributes to a good constitution of body, people grow fat with good humour.

2. A fretful, envious, discontented, spirit, is its own punishment; it consumes the flesh, preys upon the animal spirits, makes the countenance pale, and is the *rottenness of the bones*; they that see the prosperity of others and are grieved, let them *gnash with their teeth, and melt away*, Ps. 112. 10.

Rumpatur, quisquis rumpitur invidia—

Whoever bursts for envy, let him burst.

31. He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

God is here pleased to interest himself more than one would imagine in the treatment of the poor.

1. He reckons himself affronted in the injuries that are done them. Whosoever he be that wrongs a poor man, taking advantage against him, because he is poor and cannot help himself, let him know that he puts an affront upon his Maker. God made him, and gave him his being, the same that is the Author of our being, we have all one Father, one Maker; see how Job considered this, Job. 31. 15. God made him poor, and appointed him his lot, so that if we deal hardly with any because they are poor, we reflect upon God as dealing hardly with them, in laying them low, that they might be trampled upon.

2. He reckons himself honoured in the kindnesses that are done them; he takes them as done to himself, and will shew himself accordingly pleased with them; *I was hungry, and ye gave me meat*. Those therefore that have any true honour for God, will shew it by compassion to the poor, whom he has undertaken in a special manner to protect and patronise.

32. The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.

Here is, 1. The desperate condition of a wicked man when he goes out of the world; he is *driven away in his wickedness*; he cleaves so close to the world, that he cannot find in his heart to leave it, but is *driven away* out of it; his soul is required, is forced from him, and sin cleaves so close to him, that it is inseparable, it goes with him into another world; he is *driven away in his wickedness*, dies in his sins, under the guilt and power of them, unjustified, unsanctified; his wickedness is the storm in which he is hurried away, as chaff before the wind, chased out of the world.

2. The comfortable condition of a godly man when he finishes his course; He *has hope in his death*, of a happiness on the other side death, of better things in another world than ever he had in this. They have the grace of hope in them, though they have pain, and some dread of death; they have before them the good hoped for, even the blessed hope, which God, who cannot lie, has promised.

33. Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but *that which is* in the midst of fools is made known.

Observe, 1. Modesty is the badge of wisdom. He that is truly wise *hides his treasure*, so as not to boast of it, (Matth. 13. 44.)

though he does not hide his talent, so as not to trade with it. His wisdom rests in his heart, he digests what he knows, and has it ready to him, but does not unseasonably talk of it, and make a noise with it. The heart is the seat of the affections, and there wisdom must rest in the practical love of it, and not swim in the head.

2. Openness and ostentation are a mark of folly. If fools have a little smattering of knowledge, they take all occasions, though very foreign, to produce it, and bring it in by head and shoulders. Or, the folly that is in the midst of fools is made known by their forwardness to talk. Many a foolish man takes more pains to shew his folly than a wise man thinks it worth his while to take to shew his wisdom.

34. Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.

Note, 1. Justice, reigning in a nation, puts an honour upon it; A righteous administration of the government, impartial equity between man and man, public countenance given to religion, the general practice and profession of virtue, the protecting and preserving of virtuous men, charity and compassion to strangers, (alms are sometimes called righteousness,) these exalt a nation, they uphold the throne, elevate the people's minds, and qualify a nation for the favour of God, which will make them high, as a holy nation, Deut. 26. 19.

2. Vice, reigning in a nation, puts disgrace upon it; Sin is a reproach to any city or kingdom, and renders them despicable among their neighbours. The people of Israel were often instances of both parts of this observation; they were great when they were good, but when they forsook God, all about them insulted them, and trampled on them. It is therefore the interest and duty of princes to use their power for the suppression of vice and support of virtue.

35. The king's favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame.

This shews, that, in a well-ordered court and government, smiles and favours are dispensed among those that are employed in public trusts, according to their merits; Solomon lets them know he will go by that rule;

1. That those who behave themselves wisely shall be respected and preferred, whatever enemies they may have, that seek to undermine them. No man's services shall be neglected to please a party or a favourite.

2. That those who are selfish and false, who betray their country, oppress the poor, and sow discord, and thus cause shame, they shall be displaced, and banished the court, whatever friends they may make to speak for them.

CHAP. XV.

1. A SOFT answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Solomon, as conservator of the public peace, here tell us, 1. How the peace may be kept, that we may know how in our places to keep it; it is by soft words. If wrath be risen like a threatening cloud, pregnant with storms and thunder, a soft answer will disperse it and turn it away. When men are provoked, speak gently to them, and give them good words, and they will be pacified; as the Ephraimites were by Gideon's mildness, (Judg. 8. 1. .3) whereas, upon a like occasion, by Jephthah's roughness, they were exasperated, and the consequences were bad, Judg. 12. 1. .3. Reason will be better spoken, and a righteous cause better pleaded, with meekness than with passion; hard arguments do best with soft words.

2. How the peace will be broken, that we, for our parts, may do nothing toward the breaking of it. Nothing stirs up anger and sows discord, like grievous words, calling foul names, as Raca, and Thou fool, upbraiding men with their infirmities and infelicities, their extraction or education, or any thing that lessens them, and makes them mean; scornful, spiteful, reflections, by which men affect to shew their wit and malice, and stir up the anger of others,

which does but increase and inflame their own anger. Rather than lose a jest some will lose a friend, and make an enemy.

2. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.

Note, 1. A good heart, by the tongue, becomes very useful. He that has knowledge is not only to enjoy it for his own entertainment, but to use it, to use it aright, for the edification of others; and it is the tongue that must make use of it in pious, profitable, discourse, in giving suitable and seasonable instructions, counsels, and comforts, with all possible expressions of humility and love, and then knowledge is used aright; and to him that has, and thus uses what he has, more shall be given.

2. A wicked heart, by the tongue, becomes very hurtful; for the mouth of fools pours out foolishness, which is very offensive; and the corrupt communication which proceeds from an evil treasure within, (the filthiness, and foolish talking, and jesting,) corrupts the good manners of some, and debauches them, and grieves the good hearts of others, and disturbs them.

3. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

The great truths of divinity are of great use to enforce the precepts of morality, and none more than this—That the eye of God is always upon the children of men.

1. An eye to discern all; not only from which nothing can be concealed, but by which every thing is actually inspected, and nothing over-looked, or looked slightly upon; The eyes of the Lord are in every place; for he not only sees all from on high, (Ps. 33. 13.) but he is every where present. Angels are full of eyes, (Rev. 4. 8.) but God is all eye. It denotes not only his omniscience, that he sees all, but his universal providence, that he upholds and governs all. Secret sins, services, and sorrows, are under his eye.

2. An eye to distinguish both persons and actions; he beholds the evil and the good; is displeased with the evil, and approves of the good, and will judge men according to the sight of his eyes, Ps. 1. 6.—11. 4. The wicked shall not go unpunished, nor the righteous unrewarded, for God has his eye upon both, and knows their true character; this speaks as much comfort to saints, as terror to sinners.

4. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.

Note, 1. A good tongue is healing; healing to wounded consciences, by comforting them; to sin-sick souls, by convincing them; to peace and love when it is broken, by accommodating differences, compromising matters in variance, and reconciling parties at variance; this is the healing of the tongue, which is a tree of life, the leaves of which have a sanative virtue, Rev. 22. 2. He that knows how to discourse, will make the place he lives in a paradise.

2. An evil tongue is wounding; (perverseness, passion, falsehood, and filthiness there, are a breach in the spirit;) it wounds the conscience of the evil speaker, and occasions either guilt or grief to the hearers, and both are to be reckoned breaches in the spirit. Hard words indeed break no bones, but many a heart has been broken by them.

5. A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.

Hence, 1. Let superiors be admonished to give instruction and reproof to those that are under their charge, as they will answer it in the day of account. They must not only instruct with the light of knowledge, but reprove with the heat of zeal; and both these must be done with the authority and affection of a father, and must be continued, though the desired effect be not immediately perceived. If the instruction be despised, give reproof, and rebuke sharply. It is indeed against the grain with good-humoured men to find fault, and make those about them uneasy; but better so, than to suffer them to go on undisturbed in the way to ruin.

2. Let inferiors be admonished, not only to submit to instruction and reproof, (even hardships must be submitted to,) but to value them as favours, and not despise them; to make use of them for their conduct, and always to have a regard to them; this will be an evidence that they are wise, and a means of making them so; whereas he that slight his good education is a fool, and is likely to live and die one.

6. In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.

Note, 1. Where righteousness is, riches are, and the comforts of them; *In the house of the righteous is much treasure.* Religion teaches men to be diligent, temperate, and just, and by these means, ordinarily, the estate is increased; but that is not all, God blesses the habitation of the just, and that blessing makes rich without trouble. Or, if there be not much of this world's goods, yet, where there is grace, there is true treasure; and those who have but little, if they have a heart to be therewith content, and to enjoy the comfort of that little, it is enough; it is all riches. The righteous, perhaps, are not themselves enriched, but there is treasure in their house, a blessing in store, which their children after them may reap the benefit of. A wicked worldly man is only for having his belly filled with those treasures, his own sensual appetite gratified; (Ps. 17. 14.) but a righteous man's first care is for his soul, and then for his seed; to have treasure in his heart, and then in his house, which his relations and those about him may have the benefit of.

2. Where wickedness is, though there may be riches, yet there is vexation of spirit with them; *In the revenues of the wicked,* the great incomes they have, *there is trouble:* for there is guilt and a curse; there is pride and passion, and envy and contention; and those are troublesome lusts, which rob them of the joy of their revenues, and make them troublesome to their neighbours.

7. The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so.

This is to the same purport with v. 2. and shews what a blessing a wise man is, and what a burthen a fool is, to those about him. Only here observe further,

1. That we then use knowledge aright when we disperse it; not confine it to a few of our intimates, and grudge it to others who would make as good use of it, but give a portion of this spiritual alms to seven, and also to eight; not only be communicative, but diffusive, of this good, with humility and prudence. We must take pains to spread and propagate useful knowledge; must teach some, that they may teach others; and so it is dispersed.

2. That it is not only a fault to pour out foolishness, but it is a shame not to disperse knowledge, not to drop some wise word or other; *The heart of the foolish doeth not so;* it has nothing to disperse that is good, or, if it had, has neither skill nor will to do good with it, and therefore is little worth.

8. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Note, 1. God so hates wicked people, whose hearts are malicious, and their lives mischievous, that even their sacrifices are an abomination to him. God has sacrifices brought him even by wicked men, to stop the mouth of conscience, and to keep up their reputation in the world; as malefactors come to a sanctuary, not because it is a holy place, but because it shelters them from justice: but their sacrifices, though ever so costly, are not accepted of God, because not offered in sincerity, nor from a good principle; they dissemble with God, and in their conversations give the lie to their devotions, and, for that reason, they are an abomination to him, because they are made a cloke for sin, ch. 7. 14. See Isa. 1. 11.

2. God has such a love for upright good people, that, though they are not at the expence of a sacrifice, (he himself has provided that,) their prayer is a delight to him. Praying graces are his own gift, and the work of his own Spirit in them, with which he

is well-pleased. He not only answers their prayers, but delights in their addresses to him, and in doing them good.

9. The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.

This is a reason of what was said in the foregoing verse. 1. *The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to God;* not for want of some nice points of ceremony, but because their way, the whole course and tenor of their conversations, is wicked, and consequently an abomination to him. Sacrifices for sin were not accepted of those that resolved to go on in sin; and were to the highest degree abominable, if intended to obtain a connivance at sin, and a permission to go on in it.

2. Therefore *the prayer of the upright is his delight,* because he is a friend of God, and *he loves him who,* though he have not yet attained, is following after, righteousness, aiming at it, and pressing towards it, as St. Paul, Phil. 3. 13.

10. Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die.

This shews, that those who cannot bear to be corrected, must expect to be destroyed.

1. It is common for those who have known the way of righteousness, but have forsaken it, to reckon it a great affront to be reprov'd and admonished; they are very uneasy at it, they cannot, they will not, bear it; nay, because they hate to be reformed, they hate to be reprov'd, and hate those who deal faithfully and kindly with them. Of all sinners, reproofs are worst resented by apostates.

2. It is certain that those who will not be reprov'd will be ruined; *He that hates reproof,* and hardens his heart against it, is joined to his idols, let him alone; he shall die, and perish for ever, in his sins, since he would not be parted from his sins; (2 Chron. 25. 16.) *I know that God has determined to destroy thee,* because thou couldest not bear to be reprov'd; see also ch. 29. 1.

11. Hell and destruction are before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men!

This confirms what was said (v. 3.) concerning God's omniscience, in order to his judging of evil and good.

1. God knows all things, even those things that are hid from the eyes of all living; *Hell and destruction are before the Lord;* not only the centre of the earth, and its subterraneous caverns, but the grave, and all the dead bodies which are there buried out of our sight, they are all before the Lord, all under his eye, so that none of them can be lost, or be to seek when they are to be raised again. He knows where every man lies buried, even Moses, even those that are buried in the greatest obscurity; nor needs he any monument with a *Hic jacet—Here he lies,* to direct him. The place of the damned in particular, and all their torments, which are inexpressible, the state of separate souls in general, and all their circumstances, are under God's eye. The word here used for destruction is *Abaddon*, which is one of the Devil's names, Rev. 9. 11. That destroyer, though he deceives us, cannot evade or elude the divine cognizance. God examines him whence he comes, (Job, 1. 7.) and sees through all his disguises, though he is sly, and subtle, and swift, Job, 26. 6.

2. He knows particularly *the hearts of the children of men.* If he sees through the depths and wiles of Satan himself, much more can he search men's hearts, though they be deceitful, since they learned all their fraudulent arts of Satan. *God is greater than our hearts,* and knows them better than we know them ourselves, and therefore is an infallible Judge of every man's character, Heb. 4. 13.

12. A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.

A *scorner* is one that not only makes a jest of God and religion, but bids defiance to the methods of his conviction and reformation; and, as an evidence of that,

1. He cannot endure the checks of his own conscience, nor will he suffer it to deal plainly with him; *He loves not to reprove him*; so some read it. He cannot endure to retire into his own heart, and commune seriously with that; will not admit of any free thought or fair reasoning with himself, nor let his own heart smite him, if he can help it. That man's case is sad who is afraid of being acquainted, and of arguing, with himself.

2. He cannot endure the advice and admonitions of his friends; *He will not go unto the wise*, lest they should give him wise counsel. We ought not only to bid the wise welcome when they come to us, but to go to them, as beggars to the rich man's door for an alms; but this the scorner will not do, for fear of being told of his faults, and prevailed with to reform.

13. A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

Here, 1. Harmless mirth is recommended to us, as that which contributes to the health of the body, making men lively, and fit for business, and to the acceptableness of the conversation, making the face to shine, and rendering us pleasant one to another. A cheerful spirit, under the government of wisdom and grace, is a great ornament to religion, puts a further lustre upon the beauty of holiness, and makes men the more capable of doing good.

2. Hurtful melancholy is what we are cautioned against, as a great enemy to us, both in our devotion and in our conversation; *By sorrow of the heart*, when it has got dominion, and plays the tyrant, as it will be apt to do, if it be indulged a while, *the spirit is broken and sunk*, and becomes unfit for the service of God. *The sorrow of the world works death*. Let us therefore weep as *though we wept not*, in justice to ourselves, as well as in conformity to God and his providence.

14. The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness.

Here are two things to be wondered at,

1. A wise man not satisfied with his wisdom, but still seeking the increase of it; the more he has, the more he would have; *The heart of him that has understanding rejoices so in the knowledge it has attained to*, that it is still coveting more; and in the use of the means of knowledge is still labouring for more; *growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ*. *Si dixisti, Sufficit, peristi—If you say, I have enough, you are undone*.

2. A fool well-satisfied with his folly, and not seeking the cure of it. While a good man hungers after the solid satisfactions of grace, a carnal mind feasts on the gratifications of appetite and fancy. Vain mirth and sensual pleasures are its delight, and with these it can rest contented, flattering itself in these foolish ways.

15. All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.

See here what a great difference there is between the condition and temper of some and others of the children of men.

1. Some are much in affliction, and of a sorrowful spirit, and all their days are evil days, like those of old age, and days of which they say they have no pleasure in them. They eat in darkness, (Eccl. 5. 17.) and never eat with pleasure, Job, 21. 25. How many are the afflictions of the afflicted in this world! Such are not to be censured or despised, but pitied and prayed for, succoured and comforted. It might have been our own lot, or may be yet, merry as we are at present.

2. Others enjoy great prosperity, and are of a cheerful spirit; and they have not only good days, but have a continual feast; and if, in the abundance of all things, they serve God with gladness

of heart, and it is oil to the wheels of their obedience, (all this, and heaven too,) then they serve a good Master. But let not such feast without fear, a sudden change may come; therefore rejoice with trembling.

16. Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. 17. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

Solomon had said in the foregoing verse, that he who has not a large estate, or a great income, but a cheerful spirit, has a continual feast; Christian contentment, and joy in God, make the life easy and pleasant; now here he tells us what that is which is necessary to that cheerfulness of spirit, which will furnish a man with a continual feast, though he has but little in the world; holiness and love.

1. Holiness; A little, if we manage it, and enjoy it, in the fear of the Lord, if we keep a good conscience, and go on in the way of duty, and serve God faithfully with the little we have, will be more comfortable, and turn to a better account, than great treasure, and trouble therewith. Observe here, (1.) It is often the lot of those that fear God to have but a little of this world; *the poor receive the gospel*, and poor they still are, Jam. 2. 5. (2.) Those that have great treasure have often trouble therewith: it is so far from making them easy, that it increases their care and hurry. *The abundance of the rich will not suffer them to sleep*. (3.) If great treasure bring trouble with it, it is for want of the fear of God. If those that have great estates would do their duty with them, and then trust God with them, their treasure would not have so much trouble attending it. (4.) It is therefore far better, and more desirable, to have but a little of the world, and to have it with a good conscience; to keep up communion with God, and enjoy him in it, and live by faith, than to have the greatest plenty, and live without God in the world.

2. Love; next to the fear of God, peace with all men is necessary to the comfort of this life. (1.) If brethren dwell together in unity, if they are friendly, and hearty, and pleasant, both in their daily meals and in more solemn entertainments, that will make a dinner of herbs a feast sufficient; though the fare be coarse, and the estate so small, that they can afford no better, yet love will sweeten it, and they may be as merry over it as if they had all dainties. (2.) If there be mutual enmity and strife, though there be a whole ox for dinner, a fat ox, there can be no comfort in it; the leaven of malice, of hating and being hated, is enough to sour it all. Some refer it to him that makes the entertainment; better have a slender dinner, and be heartily welcome, than a table richly spread with a grudging evil eye.

Cum torvo vultu mihi cœnula nulla placebit.

Cum placido vultu cœnula ulla placet.

The most sumptuous entertainment, presented with a sullen brow, would offend me; while the plainest repast, presented kindly, would delight me.

18. A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.

Here is, 1. Passion the great make-bate; thence come wars and fightings; anger strikes the fire which sets cities and churches into a flame; A wrathful man, with his peevish passionate reflections, stirs up strife, and sets people together by the ears; he gives occasion to others to quarrel, and takes the occasion that others give, though ever so trifling. When men carry their resentments too far, one quarrel still produces another.

2. Meekness the great peace-maker; He that is slow to anger, not only prevents strife, that it be not kindled, but appeases it, if it be already kindled, brings water to the flame, unites those again that were fallen out, and by gentle methods brings them to mutual concessions, for peace-sake.

19. The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.

See here, 1. Whence those difficulties arise, which men pretend to meet with in the way of their duty, and to be insuperable; they arise, not from any thing in the nature of the duty, but from the slothfulness of those that have really no mind to it. Those that have no heart to their work, pretend that their way is hedged up with thorns, and they cannot do their work at all; as if God were a hard Master, reaping where he had not sown; at least, that their way is strewed with thorns, that they cannot do their work without a great deal of hardship and danger; and therefore they go about it with as much reluctance as if they were to go barefoot through a thorny hedge.

2. How these imaginary difficulties may be conquered; an honest desire and endeavour to do our duty, will, by the grace of God, make it easy, and we shall find it strewed with roses; *The way of the righteous is made plain*; it is easy to be trodden, and not rough; easy to be hit, and not intricate.

20. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother.

Observe here, 1. To the praise of good children, that they are the joy of their parents, who ought to have joy of them, having taken so much care and pains about them. And it adds much to the satisfaction of those that are good, if they have reason to think that they have been a comfort to their parents in their declining years, when evil days come.

2. To the shame of wicked children, that, by their wickedness, they put contempt upon their parents, slight their authority, and make an ill requital for their kindness; *A foolish son despises his mother*, that had most sorrow with him, and perhaps had too much indulged him, which makes his sin, in despising her, the more sinful, and her sorrow the more sorrowful.

21. Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly.

Note, 1. It is the character of a wicked man, that he takes pleasure in sin; he has an appetite to the bait, and swallows it greedily, and has no dread of the hook, nor feels from it when he has swallowed it; *Folly is joy to him*, the folly of others is so, and his own much more; he sins, not only without regret, but with delight; not only repents not of it, but makes his boast of it: this is a certain sign of one that is graceless.

2. It is the character of a wise and good man, that he makes conscience of his duty. A fool lives at large, walks at all adventures, by no rule, acts with no sincerity or steadiness; but a man of understanding, the eyes of whose understanding are enlightened by the Spirit, (and those that have not a good understanding, have no understanding,) he walks uprightly, lives a sober, orderly, regular, life, and studies in every thing to conform himself to the will of God; and this is a constant pleasure and joy to him. But what foolishness remains in him, or proceeds from him, at any time, it is a grief to him, and he is ashamed of it. By these characters we may try ourselves.

22. Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

See here, 1. Of what ill consequence it is to be precipitate and rash, and to act without advice; Men's purposes are disappointed, their measures broken, and they come short of their point, gain not their end, because they would not ask counsel about the way. If men will not take time and pains to deliberate with themselves, or are so confident of their own judgment, that they scorn to consult with others, they are not likely to bring any thing considerable to pass; circumstances defeat them, which, with a little consultation, might have been foreseen and obviated. It is a good rule, both in public and domestic affairs, to do nothing rashly, and of one's own head. *Plus vident oculi quam oculus—Many eyes see more than one.* This often proves best which was least our own doing.

2. How much it will be for our advantage to ask the advice of our friends; *In the multitude of counsellors*, (provided they be discreet and honest, and will not give counsel with a spirit of contradiction,) purposes are established. Solomon's son made no good use of this proverb, when he acquiesced not in the counsel of the old men, but, because he would have a multitude of counsellors, regarding number more than weight, advised with the young men.

23. A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!

Note, 1. Then we speak wisely, when we speak seasonably; *The answer of the mouth* will then be our credit and joy, when it is pertinent, and to the purpose, and is spoken in due season, when it is needed, and will be regarded, and, as we say, hits the joint. Many a good word comes short of doing the good it might have done, for want of being well-timed. Nor is any thing more the beauty of discourse than to have a proper answer ready off-hand, just when there is occasion for it, and it comes in well.

2. If we speak wisely and well, it will redound to our own comfort, and to the advantage of others; *A man has joy by the answer of his mouth*; he may take a pleasure, but may by no means take a pride, in having spoken so acceptably and well, that the hearers admire him, and say, "*How good is it, and how much good does it do!*"

24. The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.

The way of wisdom and holiness is here recommended to us, 1. As very safe and comfortable; It is *the way of life*, the way that leads to eternal life, in which we shall find the joy and satisfaction which will be the life of the soul, and at the end of which we shall find the perfection of blessedness; be wise and live. It is the way to escape that misery which we cannot but see ourselves exposed to, and in danger of. It is to depart from hell beneath, from the snares of hell, the temptations of Satan, and all his wiles; from the pains of hell, that everlasting destruction which our sins have deserved.

2. As very sublime and honourable; it is *above*. A good man sets his affections on things above, and deals in those things; his conversation is in heaven, his way leads directly thither; there his treasure is, above, out of the reach of enemies, above the changes of this lower world. A good man is truly noble and great, his desires and designs are high, and he lives above the common rate of other men. It is above the capacity, and out of the sight, of foolish men.

25. The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.

Note, 1. Those that are elevated, God delights to abase, and commonly does it in the course of his providence; *The proud*, that magnify themselves, bid defiance to the God above them, and trample on all about them, they are such as God resists, and will destroy; not them only, but *their houses*, which they are proud of, and are confident of the continuance and perpetuity of. Pride is the ruin of multitudes.

2. Those that are dejected, God delights to support, and often does it remarkably; *He will establish the border of the poor widow*, which proud injurious men break in upon, and which the poor widow is not herself able to defend and make good. It is the honour of God to protect the weak, and appear for those that are oppressed.

26. The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.

The former part of this verse speaks of thoughts, the latter of words, but they come all to one; for thoughts are words to God, and words are judged of by the thoughts from which they proceed; so that,

PROVERBS, XV. The Righteous and the Wicked contrasted.

1. *The thoughts* and words of the wicked, which are, like themselves, wicked, which aim at mischief, and have some ill tendency or other, they are an *abomination to the Lord*, he is displeased at them, and will reckon for them. The thoughts of wicked men, for the most part, are such as God hates, and are an offence to him, who not only knows the heart, and all that passes and repasses there, but requires the innermost and uppermost place in it.

2. The thoughts and words of the pure, being pure like themselves, clean, honest, and sincere, are pleasant words, and pleasant thoughts, well-pleasing to the holy God, who delights in purity. It may be understood, both of their devotions to God, (*the words of their mouth, and the meditations of their heart*, in prayer and praise, are acceptable to God, Ps. 19. 14.—69. 13.) and of their discourses with men, tending to edification. Both are then pleasant, when they come from a pure, a purified, heart.

27. He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.

Note, 1. Those that are covetous entail trouble upon their families; *He that is greedy of gain*, and therefore makes himself a slave to the world, rises up early, sits up late, and eats the bread of carefulness, in pursuit of it; he that hurries, and puts himself and all about him upon the stretch, in business, frets and vexes at every loss and disappointment, and quarrels with every body that stands in the way of his profit, he *troubles his own house*, is a burthen and vexation to his children and servants. He that, in his greediness of gain, takes bribes, and uses unlawful ways of getting money, leaves a curse, with what he gets, to those that come after him, which, sooner or later, will bring trouble into the house, Hab. 2. 9, 10.

2. Those that are generous as well as righteous entail a blessing upon their families; *He that hates gifts*, that shakes his hands from holding the bribes that are thrust into his hand to pervert justice, and abhors all sinful indirect ways of getting money, that *hates to be paltry and mercenary*, and is willing, if there be occasion, to do good gratis, he shall live, he shall have the comfort of it, shall live in prosperity and reputation, his name and family shall live and continue.

28. The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.

Here is, 1. A good man proved to be a wise man, by this, that he governs his tongue well; he that does so, *the same is a perfect man*, Jam. 3. 2. It is part of the character of a righteous man, that, being convinced of the account he must give of his words, and of the good and bad influence of them upon others, he makes conscience of speaking truly, (it is his heart that answers, he speaks as he thinks, and dares not do otherwise, he *speaks the truth in his heart*, Ps. 15. 2.) and of speaking pertinently and profitably, and therefore he *studies to answer*, that his speech may be with grace, Neh. 2. 4.—5. 7.

2. A wicked man is proved to be a fool, by this, that he never needs what he says, but his mouth *pours out evil things*, to the dishonour of God and religion, his own reproach, and the hurt of others. Doubtless that is an evil heart which thus overflows with evil.

29. The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.

Note, 1. God sets himself at a distance from those that set him at defiance; *The wicked say to the Almighty, Depart from us*, and he is, accordingly, *far from them*; he does not manifest himself to them, has no communion with them, will not hear them, will not help them, no not in time of their need. They shall be for ever banished from his presence, and he will behold them afar off. *Depart from me, ye cursed*.

2. He will draw nigh to those in a way of mercy who draw nigh to him in a way of duty; *He hears the prayer of the righteous*,

accepts it, is well-pleased with it, and will grant an answer of peace to it. It is the prayer of a righteous man that avails much, Jam. 5. 16. *He is nigh to them*, a present help in all that they call upon him for.

30. The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat.

Two things are here pronounced pleasant.

1. It is pleasant to have a good prospect, to see the light of the sun, (Eccl. 11. 7.) and by it to see the wonderful works of God, with which this lower world is beautified and enriched; those that want the mercy, know how to value it; how would the light of the eyes rejoice their hearts! The consideration of this should make us thankful for our eye-sight.

2. It is more pleasant to have a good name, a name for good things with God and good people; this is as precious ointment, (Eccl. 7. 1.) it makes the bones fat, it gives a secret pleasure, and that which is strengthening. It is also very comfortable to hear (as some understand it) a good report concerning others; a good man has no greater joy than to hear that his friends walk in the truth.

31. The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.

Note, 1. It is the character of a wise man, that he is very willing to be reproofed, and therefore chooses to converse with those that, both by their words and examples, will shew him what is amiss in him; *The ear that can take the reproof*, will love the reproof. Faithful friendly reproofs are here called *the reproofs of life*, not only because they are to be given in a lively manner, and with a prudent zeal, (and we must reprove by our lives as well as by our doctrine,) but because, where they are well-taken, they are means of spiritual life, and lead to eternal life; and (as some think) to distinguish them from rebukes and reproaches for well-doing, which are rather reproofs of death, which we must not regard, or be influenced by.

2. Those that are so wise as to bear reproof well, will hereby be made wiser, (ch. 9. 9.) and come at length to be numbered among the wise men of the age, and will have both ability and authority to reprove and instruct others. They that learn well, and obey well, are likely in time to teach well, and rule well.

32. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.

See here, 1. The folly of those that will not be taught, that *refuse instruction*, that will not heed it, but turn their backs upon it, or will not hear it, but turn their hearts against it. They *refuse correction*; margin, they will not take it, no not from God himself, but kick against the pricks. They that do so *despise their own souls*, they shew that they have a low and mean opinion of them, and are in little care and concern about them, considered as rational and immortal, instruction being designed to cultivate reason, and prepare for the immortal state. The fundamental error of sinners, is, undervaluing their own souls, therefore they neglect to provide for them, abuse them, expose them, prefer the body before the soul, and wrong the soul to please the body.

2. The wisdom of those that are willing, not only to be taught, but to be reproofed; *He that hears reproof*, and amends the faults he is reproofed for, *gets understanding*, by which his soul is secured from bad ways, and directed in good ways, and thereby he both evidences the value he has for his own soul, and puts true honour upon it.

33. The fear of the LORD is the instruction or wisdom; and before honour is humility.

See here, how much it is our interest, as well as duty,

1. To submit to our God, and keep up a reverence for him. *The fear of the Lord*, as it is the beginning of wisdom, so it is the instruction and correction of wisdom; the principles of religion,

closely adhered to, will improve our knowledge, rectify our mistakes, and be the best and surest guide of our way. An awe of God upon our spirits will put us upon the wisest counsels, and chastise us when we say or do unwisely.

2. To stoop to our brethren, and keep up a respect for them. Where there is humility, there is a happy presage of honour, and preparative for it. Those that humble themselves shall be exalted here and hereafter.

CHAP. XVI.

1. THE preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.

As we read this, it teaches us a great truth, that we are not sufficient of ourselves to *think or speak any thing, of ourselves*, that is wise and good, but that all *our sufficiency is of God*, who is with the heart and with the mouth, and *works in us both to will and to do*, Phil. 2. 13. Ps. 10. 17. But most read it otherwise; *The preparation of the heart is in man*, he may contrive and design this and the other; but *the answer of the tongue*, not only the delivering of what he designed to speak, but the issue and success of what he designed to do, *is of the Lord*. That is, in short,

1. *Man purposes*; he has a freedom of thought, and a freedom of will, permitted him; let him form his projects, and lay his schemes, as he thinks best: but, after all,

2. *God disposes*; man cannot go on with his business without the assistance and blessing of God, who *made man's mouth*, and teaches us what we shall say. Nay, God easily can, and often does, cross men's purposes, and break their measures. It was a curse that was prepared in Balaam's heart, but the answer of the tongue was a blessing.

2. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits.

Note, 1. We are all apt to be partial in judging of ourselves; *All the ways of a man*, all his designs, all his doings, *are clean in his own eyes*, and he sees nothing amiss in them, nothing for which to condemn himself, or which should make his projects prove otherwise than well; and therefore he is confident of success, and that the answer of the tongue shall be according to the expectations of the heart; but there is a great deal of pollution cleaving to our ways, which we are not aware of, or do not think so ill of as we ought.

2. The judgment of God concerning us, we are sure, is according to truth; He *weighs the spirits* in a just and unerring balance, knows what is in us, and passes a judgment upon us accordingly, writing *Tekel* upon that which passed our scale with approbation, *weighed in the balance, and found wanting*; and by his judgment we must stand or fall. He not only sees men's ways, but tries their spirits, and we are as our spirits are.

3. Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.

Note, 1. It is a very desirable thing to have *our thoughts established*, and not tossed, and put into a hurry, by disquieting cares and fears; to go on in an even steady course of honesty and piety, not disturbed, or put out of frame, by any event or change; to be satisfied that all shall work for good, and issue well at last, and therefore to be always easy and sedate.

2. The only way to have *our thoughts established*, is, to *commit our works to the Lord*. The great concerns of our souls must be committed to the grace of God, with a dependence upon, and submission to, the conduct of that grace; (2 Tim. 1. 12.) all our outward concerns must be committed to the providence of God, and to the sovereign, wise, and gracious, disposal of that providence; *Roll thy works upon the Lord*, so the word is, roll the burthen of thy care from thyself upon God; lay the matter before him by prayer, *make known thy works unto the Lord*, so some read it; not only the works of thy hand, but the workings of thy heart; and then leave it with him, by faith and dependence upon

him, submission and resignation to him; *the will of the Lord be done*. We may then be easy, when we resolve, that whatever pleases God shall please us.

4. The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

Note, 1. That God is the first Cause, he is the Former of all things and all persons, the Fountain of being; he gave every creature the being it has, and appointed it its place. Even the wicked are his creatures, though they are rebels; he gave them those powers with which they fight against him, which aggravates their wickedness, that they will not let him that made them rule them, and therefore, though he made them, he will not save them.

2. That God is the last End. All is of him and from him, and therefore all is to him and for him. He made all according to his will, and for his praise; he designed to serve his own purposes by all his creatures, and he will not fail of his design: all are his servants. The wicked he is not glorified by, but he will be glorified upon. He makes no man wicked, but he made those who he foresaw would be wicked, yet he made them, (Gen. 6. 6.) because he knew how to *get him honour upon them*. See Rom. 9. 22. Or, as some understand it, he made the wicked to be employed by him as the instruments of his wrath in the day of evil, when he brings judgments on the world. He makes some use even of wicked men, as of other things, to be his sword, his hand, (Ps. 17. 13, 14.) *flagellum Dei—the scourge of God*. The king of Babylon is called his *servant*.

5. Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.

Note, 1. The pride of sinners sets God against them. He that, being high in estate, is proud in heart, whose spirit is elevated with his condition, so that he becomes insolent in his conduct toward God and man, let him know, that though he admires himself, and others caress him, yet he is *an abomination to the Lord*; the great God despises him, the holy God detests him.

2. The power of sinners cannot secure them against God, though they strengthen themselves with both hands; though they may strengthen one another with their confederacies and combinations, joining forces against God, they shall not escape his righteous judgment; *voc unto him that strives with his Maker*, ch. 11. 21. Isa. 45. 9.

6. By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

See here, 1. How the guilt of sin is taken away from us; by the *mercy and truth* of God, mercy in promising, truth in performing; the mercy and truth which kiss each other in Jesus Christ the Mediator; by the covenant of grace, in which mercy and truth shine so bright; by our mercy and truth, as the condition of the pardon, and a necessary qualification for it: by these, and not by the legal sacrifices, Mic. 6. 7, 8.

2. How the power of sin is broken in us; by the principles of *mercy and truth* commanding in us, the corrupt inclinations are purged out; so we may take the former part: however, *by the fear of the Lord*, and the influence of that fear, *men depart from evil*; they will not dare to sin against God, who keep up in their minds a holy dread and reverence of him.

7. When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Note, 1. God can turn foes into friends, when he pleases; he that has all hearts in his hand has access to men's spirits, and power over them, working insensibly, but irresistibly, upon them, can make *a man's enemies to be at peace with him*, change their minds, or force them into a feigned submission. He can slay all enmities, and bring those together that were at the greatest distance from each other.

2. He will do it for us, when we please him; if we only

care to be reconciled to God, and to keep ourselves in his love, he will incline those that had been envious towards us, and vexatious to us, to entertain a good opinion of us, and to become our friends. God made Esau to be at peace with Jacob, Abimelech with Isaac, and David's enemies to court his favour, and desire a league with Israel. The image of God appearing upon the righteous, and his particular loving-kindness to them, are enough to recommend them to the respects of all, even of those that had been most prejudiced against them.

8. Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.

Here, 1. It is supposed that an honest good man may have but a little of the wealth of this world, all the righteous are not rich; that a man may have but little, and yet may be honest; though poverty is a temptation to dishonesty, (*ch. 30. 9.*) yet not an invincible one. A man may grow rich, for a while, by fraud and oppression, may have *great revenues*, and those got, and kept, *without right*, may have no good title to them, nor make any good use of them.

2. It is maintained that a small estate, honestly come by, which a man is content with, enjoys comfortably, serves God with cheerfully, and puts to a right use, is much better, and more valuable, than a great estate ill-got, and then ill-kept, or ill-spent. It carries with it more inward satisfaction, a better reputation with all that are wise and good, it will last longer, and will turn to a better account in the great day, when men will be judged, not according to what they had, but what they did.

9. A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

Man is here represented to us,

1. As a reasonable creature, that has the faculty of contriving for himself; *His heart devises his way*, designs an end, and projects ways and means leading to that end, which the inferior creatures, who are governed by sense and natural instinct, cannot do. The more shame for him, if he do not devise the way how to please God, and provide for his everlasting state.

2. But as a depending creature, that is subject to the direction and dominion of his Maker; if men *devise their way*, so as to make God's glory their end, and his will their rule, they may expect that he will *direct their steps* by his Spirit and grace, so that they shall not miss their way, nor come short of their end. But, let men devise their worldly affairs ever so politicly, and with ever so great a probability of success, yet God has the ordering of the event, and sometimes *directs their steps* to that which they least intended. The design of this is to teach us to say, *If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that*, (*Jam. 4. 14, 15.*) and to have our eye to God, not only in the great turns of our lives, but in every step we take; *Lord, direct my way*, 1 Thess. 3. 11.

10. A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment.

We wish this were always true as a proposition, and we ought to make it our prayer for kings, and all in authority, that a *divine sentence* may be in their lips, both in giving orders, that they may do that in wisdom, and in giving sentence, that they may do that in equity, both which are included in *judgment*, and that in neither *their mouth may transgress*, 1 Tim. 2. 1. But it is often otherwise; and therefore,

1. It may be read as a precept to the kings and judges of the earth, to be wise and instructed; let them be just, and rule in the fear of God; let them act with such wisdom and conscience, that there may appear a holy divination in all they say or do, and that they are guided by principles supernatural; let not their mouths transgress in judgment, for the judgment is God's.

2. It may be taken as a promise to all good kings, that, if they sincerely aim at God's glory, and seek direction from him, he will qualify them with wisdom and grace above others, in proportion to the eminency of their station, and the trusts lodged in their

hands. When Saul himself was made king, God gave him another spirit.

3. It was true concerning Solomon, who wrote this, he had extraordinary wisdom, pursuant to the promise God made him. See 1 Kings, 3. 28.

11. A just weight and balance are the LORD's: all the weights of the bag are his work.

Note, 1. The administration of public justice by the magistrate is an ordinance of God; in it the scales are held, and ought to be held, by a steady and impartial hand; and we ought to submit to it, for the Lord's sake, and to see his authority in that of the magistrate, Rom. 13. 1. 1 Pet. 2. 13.

2. The observation of justice in commerce between man and man is likewise a divine appointment. He taught men discretion to make scales and weights for the adjusting of right exactly between buyer and seller, that neither may be wronged; and all other useful inventions for the preserving of right are from him; He has also appointed by his law that they be just; it is therefore a great affront to him, and to his government, to falsify, and so to do wrong, under colour and pretence of doing right, which is *wickedness in the place of judgment*.

12. It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness.

Here is, 1. The character of a good king, which Solomon intended not for his own praise, but for instruction to his successors, his neighbours, and the vice-roys under him. A good king not only does justice, but it is an abomination to him to do otherwise; he hates the thought of doing wrong, and perverting justice; he not only abhors the wickedness done by others, but abhors to do any himself, though, having power, he might easily and safely do it.

2. The comfort of a good king; his *throne is established by righteousness*. He that makes conscience of using his power aright, shall find that to be the best security of his government; both as it will oblige people, make them easy, and keep them in the interests of it; and as it will obtain the blessing of God, which will be a firm basis to the throne, and a strong guard about it.

13. Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.

Here is a further character of good kings, that they *love and delight* in those that *speak right*.

1. They hate parasites and those that flatter them, and are very willing that all about them should deal faithfully with them, and tell them that which is true, whether it be pleasing or displeasing, both concerning persons and things, that every thing should be set in a true light, and nothing disguised, *ch. 29. 12.*

2. They not only do righteousness themselves, but take care to employ those under them that do righteousness too; which is of great consequence to the people, who must be subject not only to the king as supreme, but to the governors sent by him, 1 Pet. 2. 14. A good king will therefore put those in power who are conscientious, and will say that which is righteous and discreet, and know how to speak right, and to the purpose.

14. The wrath of a king is as messengers of death; but a wise man will pacify it. 15. In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.

These two verses shew the power of kings, which is every where great, but was especially so in those eastern countries, where they were absolute and arbitrary; whom they would they slew, and whom they would they kept alive; their will was a law. We have reason to bless God for the happy constitution of the government we live under, which maintains the prerogative of the prince without any injury to the liberty of the subject. But here it is *intimated*,

1. How formidable *the wrath of a king is*; it is as *messengers of death*, the wrath of Ahasuerus was so to Haman. An angry word from an incensed prince has been to many a *messenger of death*, and has struck as great a terror upon some, as if a sentence of death had been pronounced upon them. He must be a very wise man, that knows how to pacify the wrath of a king with a word fitly spoken; as Jonathan once pacified his father's rage against David, 1 Sam. 19. 6. A prudent subject may sometimes suggest that to an angry prince, which will cool his resentments.

2. How valuable and desirable the king's favour is to those that have incurred his displeasure; it is life from the dead, if the king be reconciled to them. To others it is a *cloud of the latter rain*, very refreshing to the ground. Solomon put his subjects in mind of this, that they might not do any thing to incur his wrath, but be careful to recommend themselves to his favour. We ought by it to be put in mind how much we are concerned to escape the wrath, and obtain the favour, of the King of kings. His frowns are worse than death, and his favour better than life; and therefore they are fools, who, to escape the wrath, and obtain the favour, of an earthly prince, will throw themselves out of God's favour, and make themselves obnoxious to his wrath.

16. How much better *is it* to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!

Solomon here not only asserts that it is better to get wisdom than gold, (ch. 3. 14.—8. 19.) but he speaks it, with assurance, that it is much better, beyond expression; with admiration, *How much better!* amazed at the disproportion; with an appeal to men's consciences, "Judge in yourselves how much better it is;" and with an addition to the same purport, that understanding is *rather to be chosen than silver*, and all the treasures of kings and their favourites.

Note, 1. Heavenly wisdom is better than worldly wealth, and to be preferred before it. Grace is more valuable than gold. Grace is the gift of God's peculiar favour; gold only of common providence. Grace is for ourselves; gold for others. Grace is for the soul and eternity; gold only for the body and time. Grace will stand us in stead in a dying hour, when gold will do us no good.

2. The getting of this heavenly wisdom is better than the getting of worldly wealth. Many take care and pains to get wealth, and yet come short of it; but grace was never denied to any that sincerely sought it. There is vanity and vexation of spirit in getting wealth, but joy and satisfaction of spirit in getting wisdom; *great peace have they that love it*.

17. The highway of the upright *is* to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.

Note, 1. It is *the way of the upright* to avoid sin, and every thing that looks like it, and leads towards it; and this is a highway marked out by authority, tracked by many that have gone before us, and in which we meet with many that keep company with us; it is easy to hit, and safe to be travelled in, like a highway, Isa. 35. 8. *To depart from evil is understanding*.

2. It is the care of the upright to preserve their own souls, that they be not polluted with sin, and that by the troubles of the world they may not be put out of the possession of them; especially that they may not perish for ever, Matth. 16. 26. And it is therefore their care to keep their way, and not to turn aside out of it, on either hand, but to press toward perfection. They that adhere to their duty, secure their felicity. Keep thy way, and God will keep thee.

18. Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

Note, 1. Pride will have a fall. Those that are of a *haughty spirit*, that think of themselves above what is meet, and look with contempt upon others, that with their pride affront God and disquiet others, they will be brought down, either by repentance or

by ruin. It is the honour of God to humble the proud, Job, 40. 11. t2. It is the act of justice, that those who have lifted up themselves should be laid low. Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, were instances of this. Men cannot punish pride, but either admire it or fear it, and therefore God will take the punishing of it into his own hands. Let him alone to deal with proud men.

2. Proud men are often most proud, and insolent, and haughty, just before their destruction, so that it is a certain presage that they are upon the brink of it. When proud men set God's judgments at defiance, and think themselves at the greatest distance from them, it is a sign that they are at the door; witness the case of Benhadad and Herod. *While the word was in the king's mouth*, Dan. 4. 31. Therefore let us not fear the pride of others, but greatly fear it in ourselves.

19. Better *it is to be* of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

This is a paradox which the children of this world cannot understand, and will not subscribe to; that it is better to be poor and humble, than to be rich and proud.

1. They that *divide the spoil* are commonly proud; they value themselves and despise others, and their mind rises with their condition; those, therefore, that are *rich in this world*, have need to be charged that they *be not high-minded*, 1 Tim. 6. 17. Those that are proud, and will put forth themselves, that thrust, and shove, and scramble, for preferment, are the men that commonly *divide the spoil*, and share it among them; they have the world at will, and the ball at their foot.

2. It is upon all accounts better to take our lot with those whose condition is low, and their minds brought to it, than to covet and aim to make a figure and a bustle in the world. Humility, though it should expose us to contempt in the world, yet, while it recommends us to the favour of God, qualifies us for his gracious visits, prepares us for his glory, secures us from many temptations, and preserves the quiet and repose of our own souls, is much better than that high-spiritedness, which, though it carry away the honour and wealth of the world, makes God a man's Enemy, and the Devil his master.

20. He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he.

Note, 1. Prudence gains men respect and success; *He that handles a matter wisely*, that is master of his trade, and makes it to appear he understands what he undertakes, that is considerate in his affairs, and, when he speaks or writes of any subject, does it pertinently, he shall *find good*, shall come into good repute, and perhaps may make a good hand of it.

2. But it is piety only that will secure men's true happiness; They that *handle a matter wisely*, if they are proud, and lean to their own understanding, though they may find some good, yet they will have no great satisfaction in it; but he that *trusts in the Lord*, and not in his own wisdom, *happy is he*, and shall speed better at last. Some read the former part of the verse, so as to expound it of piety, which is indeed true wisdom; *he that attends to the word*, the word of God, (ch. 13. 13.) *he shall find good* in it, and good by it. And whoso *trusts in the Lord*, in his word which he attends to, is happy.

21. The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.

Note, 1. Those that have solid wisdom will have the credit of it; it will gain them reputation, and they shall be called *prudent*, grave, men, and a deference will be paid to their judgment. *Do that which is wise and good, and thou shalt have praise of the same*.

2. Those that with their wisdom have a happy elocution, that deliver themselves easily and with a good grace, are communicative of their wisdom, and have words at will, and good language as well as good sense, they *increase learning*, they diffuse and propagate knowledge to others, and do good with it, and by that

means increase their own stock. They add doctrine, improve sciences, and do service to the commonwealth of learning. *To him that has, and uses what he has, more shall be given.*

22. Understanding is a well-spring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly.

Note, 1. There is always some good to be gotten by a wise and good man; his *understanding is a well-spring of life to him*, which always flows, and can never be drawn dry; he has something to say upon all occasions, that is instructive, and of use to those that will make use of it, things new and old, to bring out of his treasure; at least, it is a *spring of life* to himself, yielding him abundant satisfaction; within his own thoughts he entertains and edifies himself, if not others.

2. There is nothing that is good to be gotten by a fool; even his instruction, his set and solemn discourses, are but folly, like himself, and tending to make others like him. When he does his best, it is but folly, in comparison even with the common talk of a wise man, who speaks better at table than a fool in Moses's seat.

23. The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.

Solomon had commended eloquence, and *the sweetness of the lips*, (v. 21.) and seemed to prefer it before wisdom; but here he corrects himself, as it were, and shews that unless there be a good treasure within to support the eloquence, it is worth little. Wisdom in the heart is the main matter.

1. That is it that directs us in speaking; that *teaches the mouth* what to speak, and when, and how, so that what is spoken may be proper, and pertinent, and seasonable; otherwise, though the language be ever so fine, it had better be unsaid.

2. That is it that gives weight to what we speak, and *adds learning* to it; strength of reason and force of argument; without which, let a thing be ever so well worded, it will be rejected, when it comes to be considered, as trifling; quaint expressions please the ear, and humour the fancy, but it is learning in the lips that must convince the judgment, and sway that; to which wisdom in the heart is necessary.

24. Pleasant words are as an honey-comb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.

The *pleasant words* here commended must be those which *the heart of the wise teaches, and adds learning to*; (v. 23.) words of seasonable advice, instruction, and comfort; words taken from God's word, for that is it which Solomon had learned from his father to account *sweeter than honey and the honey-comb*, Ps. 19. 10. These words, to those that know how to relish them,

1. Are pleasant; they are like the *honey-comb, sweet to the soul*, which tastes in them that *the Lord is gracious*; nothing more grateful and agreeable to the new man than the word of God, and those words which are borrowed from it, Ps. 119. 103.

2. They are wholesome; many things are pleasant that are not profitable; but these *pleasant words are health to the bones*, to the inward man, as well as *sweet to the soul*; they make the bones, which sin has broken and put out of joint, *to rejoice*. The bones are the strength of the body; and the good word of God is a means of spiritual strength, curing the diseases that weaken us.

25. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

This we had before, (ch. 14. 12.) but here it is repeated, as that which is very necessary to be thought of;

1. By way of caution to us all to take heed of deceiving ourselves in the great concerns of our souls, by resting in that which *seems right*, and is not really so; and, for the preventing of a self-delusion, to be impartial in self-examination, and keep up a jealousy over ourselves.

2. By way of terror to those whose way is not right, is not as it should be, however it may seem to themselves or others, the end

of it will certainly be death; to that it has a direct and certain tendency.

26. He that laboureth laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.

This is designed to engage us to diligence, and quicken us; *what our hand finds to do, to do it with all our might*, both in our worldly business, and in the work of religion; for in the original it is, *The soul that labours, labours for itself*. It is heart-work which is here intended, the labour of the soul, which is here recommended to us,

1. As that which will be absolutely needful; our mouth is continually craving it of us; the necessities both of soul and body are pressing, and require constant relief, so that we must either work or starve. Both call for daily bread, and therefore there must be daily labour; for in the sweat of our face we must eat, 2 Thess. 3. 10.

2. As that which will be unspeakably gainful; we know on whose errand we go; *He that labours* shall reap the fruit of his labour, it shall be *for himself*, he shall rejoice in his own work, and *eat the labour of his hands*. If we make religion our business, God will make it our blessedness.

27. An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire. 28. A froward man soweth strife, and a whisperer separateth chief friends.

There are those that are not only vicious themselves, but spiteful and mischievous to others, and they are the worst of men; two sorts of such are here described.

1. Such as envy a man the honour of his good name, and do all they can to blast that by calumnies and misrepresentations; They *dig up evil*, they take a great deal of pains to find out something or other on which to ground a slander, or which may give some colour to it. If none appear above ground, rather than want it, they will dig for it, by diving into what is secret, or looking a great way back, or by evil suspicions and surmises, and forced innuendos. In the lips of a slanderer and backbiter *there is as a fire*, not only to brand his neighbour's reputation, to smoke and sully it, but as a *burning fire* to consume it. And how great a matter does a little of this fire kindle, and how hardly is it extinguished! James, 3. 5, 6.

2. Such as envy a man the comfort of his friendship, and do all they can to break that, by suggesting that, on both sides, which will set those at variance, that are most nearly related, and have been long intimate, or, at least, cool and alienate their affections one from another; A *froward man*, that cannot find in his heart to love any body but himself, is vexed to see others live in love, and therefore makes it his business to *sow strife*, by giving men base characters one of another, telling lies, and carrying ill-natured stories between *chief friends*, so as to *separate* them one from another, and make them angry at, or at least suspicious of, one another. Those are bad men, and bad women too, that do such ill offices; they are doing the Devil's work, and his will their wages be.

29. A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good. 30. He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass.

Here is another sort of evil men described to us, that we may neither do like them, nor have any thing to do with them.

1. Such as (like Satan) do all the mischief they can by force and violence, as roaring lions, and not only by fraud and insinuation, as subtle serpents; They are *violent men*, that do all by rapine and oppression, that *shut their eyes*, meditating with the closest intention and application of mind *to devise froward things*, to contrive how they may do the greatest mischief to their neighbour, to do it effectually, and yet securely to themselves; and

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then, *moving their lips*, giving the word of command to their agents, they *bring the evil to pass*, and accomplish the wicked device; *biting his lips*, so some read it, for vexation. When the wicked plots against the just, he *gnasheth upon him with his teeth*.

2. Such as (like Satan still) do all they can to *entice* and draw in others to join with them in doing mischief, *leading them in a way that is not good*, neither honest, nor honourable, nor safe, but offensive to God, and which will be in the end pernicious to the sinner. Thus he aims to ruin some in this world by bringing them into trouble, and others in the other world by bringing them into sin.

31. The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

Note, 1. It ought to be the great care of old people to be found in the way of righteousness, the way of religion and serious godliness. Both God and man will look for them in that way; it will be expected that those that are old should be good, that the multitude of their years should teach them the best wisdom; let them therefore be found in that way. Death will come, the Judge is coming, *the Lord is at hand*; that they may be found of him in peace, let them be found in the way of righteousness, (2 Pet. 3. 14.) found so doing, Matth. 24. 46. Let old people be old disciples, let them persevere to the end in the way of righteousness, which they long since set out in, that they may then be found in it.

2. If old people be found in the way of righteousness, their age will be their honour. Old age, as such, is honourable, and commands respect; *Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head*, (Lev. 19. 32.) but if it be found in the way of wickedness, its honour is forfeited, its crown profaned, and laid in the dust, Isa. 65. 20. Old people, therefore, if they would preserve their honour, must still hold fast their integrity, and then their gray hairs are indeed a crown to them; they are worthy of double honour. Grace is the glory of old age.

32. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

This recommends the grace of meekness to us, which will well become us all, particularly the hoary head, v. 31. Observe,

1. The nature of it; it is to be slow to anger, not easily put into a passion, nor apt to resent provocation; taking time to consider, before we suffer our passion to break out, that it may not transgress due bounds; so slow in our motions towards anger, that we may be quickly stopped and pacified. It is to have the rule of our own spirits, our appetites and affections, and all our inclinations, but particularly our passions, our anger, keeping that under direction and check, and the strict government of religion and right reason. We must be lords of our anger, as God is, Nah. 1. 3. *Æolus sis, affectuum tuorum—Rule your passions, as Æolus rules the winds*.

2. The honour of it; He that gets, and keeps, the mastery of his passions, he is better than the mighty, better than he that by a long siege takes a city, or by a long war subdues a country. Behold, a greater than Alexander or Caesar is here! The conquest of ourselves, and our own unruly passions, requires more true conduct, and a more steady, constant, and regular, management, than the obtaining of a victory over the forces of an enemy. A rational conquest is more honourable to a rational creature, than a brutal one. It is a victory that does no body any harm; no lives or treasures are sacrificed to it, but only some base lusts. It is harder, and therefore more glorious, to quash an insurrection at home, than to resist an invasion from abroad; nay, such are the gains of meekness, that by it we are more than conquerors.

33. The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.

Note, 1. The Divine Providence orders and directs those things which to us are perfectly casual and fortuitous. Nothing comes to pass by chance, nor is any event determined by a blind fortune,

but every thing by the will and counsel of God. What man has neither eye nor hand in, God is intimately concerned in.

2. When solemn appeals are made to Providence by the casting of lots, for the deciding of that matter of moment, which could not otherwise be at all, or not so well, decided, God must be eyed in it, by prayer, that it may be disposed aright, (*Give a perfect lot*, 1 Sam. 14. 41. Acts, 1. 24.) and by acquiescing in it when it is disposed; being satisfied that the hand of God is in it, and that hand directed by infinite wisdom. All the disposals of Providence concerning our affairs, we must look upon to be the directing of our lot, the determining of what we referred to God, and must be reconciled to them accordingly.

CHAP. XVII.

1. BETTER is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.

These words recommend family-love and peace, as conducing very much to the comfort of human life.

1. Those that live in unity and quietness, not only free from jealousies and animosities, but vying in mutual endearments, and that study to make themselves easy and obliging to one another, live very comfortably, though they are low in the world, work hard, and fare hard; though they have but each of them a morsel, and that a dry morsel. There may be peace and quietness where there are not three meals a day, provided there be a joint satisfaction in God's providence, and a mutual satisfaction in each other's prudence. Holy love may be found in a cottage.

2. Those that live in contention, that are always jarring and brawling, and reflecting upon one another, though they have plenty of dainties, a house full of sacrifices, live uncomfortably; they cannot expect the blessing of God upon them and what they have, nor can they have any true relish of their enjoyments, much less any peace in their own consciences. Love will sweeten a dry morsel, but strife will sour and embitter a house full of sacrifices. A little of the leaven of malice will leaven all the enjoyments.

2. A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren.

Note, 1. True merit does not go by dignity. All agree, that the son in the family is more worthy than the servant; (John, 8. 35.) and yet sometimes it so happens that the servant is wise, and a blessing and credit to the family, when the son is a fool, and a burthen and shame to the family. Eliezer of Damascus, though Abram could not bear to think that he should be his heir, was a stay to the family, when he was sent to get a wife for Isaac; whereas Ishmael, a son, was a shame to it, when he mocked Isaac.

2. True dignity will go by merit. If a servant be wise, and manage things well, he shall be further trusted, and not only have rule with, but rule over, a son that causes shame; for God and nature have designed that the fool shall be servant to the wise in heart. Nay, a prudent servant may perhaps come to have such an interest in his master, as to be taken in for a child's share of the estate, and to have part of the inheritance among the brethren.

3. The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the LORD trieth the hearts.

Note, 1. The hearts of the children of men are subject, not only to God's view, but to his judgment; As the fining-pot is for silver, both to prove it, and to improve it, so the Lord tries the hearts; he searches whether they are standard or no, and those that are he refines and makes purer, Jer. 17. 10. God tries the heart by affliction, (Ps. 66. 10, 11.) and often chooses his people in that furnace, (Isa. 48. 10.) and makes them choice.

2. It is God only that tries the hearts; men may try their silver and gold with the fining-pot and the furnace, but they have no such way of trying one another's hearts; God only does that, who is both the Searcher, and the Sovereign, of the heart.

4. A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.

Note, 1. Those that design to do ill, support themselves by falsehood and lying; *A wicked doer gives ear*, with a great deal of pleasure, to *false lips*, that will justify him in the ill he does, to those that aim to make public disturbances, catch greedily at libels, and false stories, that defame the government and the administration.

2. Those that take the liberty to tell lies, take a pleasure in hearing them told; *A liar gives heed* to a malicious, backbiting, tongue, that he may have something to graft his lies upon, and with which to give them some colour of truth, and so to support them. Sinners will strengthen one another's hands; and those shew they are bad themselves who court the acquaintance, and need the assistance, of those that are bad.

5. Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker; and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.

See here, 1. What a great sin *they* are guilty of who trample upon the poor, who ridicule their wants, and the meanness of their appearance, upbraid them with it, and take advantage from their weakness to be abusive and injurious to them; they *reproach their Maker*, put a great contempt and affront upon him, who allotted the poor to the condition they are in, owns them, and takes care of them, and can, when he pleases, reduce us to that condition. Let those, that thus reproach their Maker, know they shall be called to an account for it, Matth. 25. 40, 41. Prov. 14. 31.

2. What great danger *they* are in of falling into trouble themselves, who are pleased to see and hear of the troubles of others; *He that is glad at calamities*, that he may be built up upon the ruins of others, and regales himself with the judgments of God when they are abroad, let him know that he *shall not go unpunished*; the cup shall be put into his hand, Ezek. 25. 6, 7.

6. Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.

They are so, that is, they should be so; if they conduct themselves worthily, they are so.

1. It is an honour to parents, when they are old, to leave children, and *children's children*, growing up, that tread in the steps of their virtues, and are likely to maintain and advance the reputation of their families. It is an honour to a man to live so long as to see his children's children; (Ps. 128. 6. Gen. 50. 23.) to see his house built up in them, and to see them likely to serve their generation according to the will of God; this crowns and completes their comfort in this world.

1. It is an honour to children to have wise and godly parents, and to have them continued to them, even after they are themselves grown up and settled in the world. Those are unnatural children who reckon their aged parents a burthen to them, and think they live too long; whereas, if the children be wise and good, it is as much their honour as can be, that thereby they are comforts to their parents in the unpleasant days of their old age.

7. Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince.

Two things are here represented as very absurd;

1. That men of no repute should be dictators. What can be more unbecoming than for fools, who are known to have little sense and discretion, to pretend to that which is above them, and which they were never cut out for. A fool, in Solomon's proverbs, signifies a wicked man, whom excellent speech does not become, because his conversation gives the lie to his excellent speech. What have they to do to declare God's statutes, who *hate instruction*, Ps. 50. 16. Christ would not suffer the unclean spirits to say that they knew him to be the Son of God. See Acts, 16. 17, 18.

2. That men of great repute should be deceivers. If it is unbecoming a despicable man to presume to speak as a philosopher

or politician, and nobody heeds him, being prejudiced against his character, much more unbecoming it is for a prince, for a man of honour, to take advantage, from his character and the confidence that is put in him, to lie, and dissemble, and make no conscience of breaking his word. Lying ill becomes any man, but worst a prince; so corrupt is the modern policy, which insinuates that princes ought not to make themselves slaves to their words further than is for their interest, and *Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare*—*He who does not know how to dissemble, knows not how to reign*.

8. A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it; whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.

The design of this observation is to shew,

1. That those who have money in their hand think they can do any thing with it. Rich men value a little money as if it were a *precious stone*, and value themselves on it, as if it gave them not only ornament, but power, and every one were bound to be at their beck, even justice itself. Whithersoever they turn this sparkling diamond, they expect it should dazzle the eyes of all, and make them do just what they would have them do, in hopes of it. The deepest bag will carry the cause; fee high, and you may have what you will.

2. That those who have money in their eye, and set their hearts upon it, will do any thing for it; *A bribe is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that takes it*; it has a great influence upon him, and he will be sure to go the way that it leads him, hither and thither, though contrary to justice, and not consistent with himself.

9. He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.

Note, 1. The way to preserve peace among relations and neighbours, is, to make the best of every thing; not to tell others what has been said or done against them, when it is not at all necessary to their safety: nor to take notice of what has been said or done against ourselves, but to excuse both, and put the best constructions upon them. It was an oversight, therefore overlook it; it was done through forgetfulness, therefore forget it; it perhaps made nothing of you, do you make nothing of it.

2. The ripping up of faults is the ripping out of love, and nothing tends more to the separating of friends, and setting them at variance, than the *repeating of matters* that have been in variance; for they commonly lose nothing in the repetition, but the things themselves are aggravated, and the passions about them revived and exasperated. The best method of peace is by an amnesty or act of oblivion.

10. A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.

Note, 1. A word is enough to the wise. A gentle reproof will enter not only into the head, but into the heart, of a wise man, so as to have a strong influence upon him; for if but a hint be given to conscience, let it alone to carry it on and prosecute it.

2. Stripes are not enough for a fool, to make them sensible of his errors, that he may repent of them, and be more cautious for the future. He that is sottish and wilful is very rarely benefited by severity. David is softened with, *Thou art the man*; but Pharaoh remains hard under all the plagues of Egypt.

11. An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.

Here is the sin and punishment of an evil man.

1. His sin; he is an evil man indeed that seeks all occasions to rebel against God, and the government God has set over him, and to contradict and quarrel with those about him. *Quarrit jurgia*—*He picks quarrels*; so some. There are some that are actuated by a spirit of opposition, that will contradict for contradiction-sake, that will go on forwardly in their wicked ways, in spite of all re-

straint and check. *A rebellious man seeks mischief*, so some read it, watches all opportunities to disturb the public peace.

2. His punishment; Because he will not be reclaimed by mild and gentle methods, *a cruel messenger shall be sent against him*; some dreadful judgment or other, as a messenger from God; Angels, God's messengers, shall be employed as ministers of his justice against him, Ps. 78. 49. Satan, the angel of death, shall be let loose upon him, and the *messengers* of Satan. His prince shall send a serjeant to arrest him, an executioner to cut him off. He that *kicks against the pricks*, is waited for *of the sword*.

12. Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.

Note, 1. A passionate man is a brutish man. However at other times he may have some wisdom, take him in his passion ungoverned, and he is a *fool in his folly*. They are fools in whose bosom anger rests, and in whose countenance anger rages. He has put off man, and is become like a bear, a raging bear, *a bear robbed of her whelps*; he is as fond of the gratifications of his lusts and passions as a bear of her whelps, (which, though ugly, are her own,) as eager in the pursuit of them, as she is in quest of her whelps when they are missing, and as full of indignation if crossed in the pursuit.

2. He is a dangerous man, falls foul on every one that stands in his way, though innocent, though his friend, as a bear robbed of her whelps sets upon the first man she meets as a robber. *Ira furor brevis est—Anger is madness while it lasts*. One may more easily stop, escape, or guard against, an enraged bear, than an outrageous angry man. Let us therefore watch over our own passions, (lest they get head and do mischief,) and so consult our own honour; and let us avoid the company of furious men, and get out of their way when they are in their fury, and so consult our own safety. *Currenti cede furori—Give place unto wrath*.

13. Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.

A malicious, mischievous, man is here represented,

1. As ungrateful to his friends; he oftentimes is so absurd and insensible of kindnesses done him, that he renders *evil for good*. David met with those that were his adversaries for his love, Ps. 109. 4. To render *evil for evil* is brutish, but to render *evil for good* is devilish. He is an ill-natured man, who, because he is resolved not to return a kindness, will revenge it.

2. As therein unkind to his family, for he entails a curse upon it; this is a crime so heinous, that it shall be punished, not only in his person, but in his posterity, for whom he thus treasures up wrath. *The sword shall not depart from David's house*, because he rewarded Uriah with evil for his good services. The Jews stoned Christ for his good works, therefore is his blood upon them and upon their children.

14. The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with.

Here is, 1. The danger that there is in *the beginning of strife*; one hot word, one peevish reflection, one angry demand, one spiteful contradiction, begets another, and that a third, and so on, till it proves like the cutting of a dam; when the water has got a little passage, it does itself widen the breach, bears down all before it, and there is then no stopping it, no reducing it.

2. A good caution inferred thence, to take heed of the first spark of contention, and to put it out as soon as ever it appears. Dread the breaking of the ice, for, if once broken, it will break further; therefore leave it off, not only when you see the worst of it, for then it may be too late, but when you see the first of it; *Obsta principiis—Resist its earliest display*; leave it off even before it be meddled with; leave it off, if it were possible, before you begin.

15. He that justifieth the wicked, and he that

condemneth the just, even they both *are* abomination to the LORD.

This shews what an offence it is to God,

1. When those that are intrusted with the administration of public justice, judges, juries, witnesses, prosecutors, counsel, do either acquit the guilty, or condemn those that are not guilty, or in the least contribute to either; this defeats the end of government, which is to protect the good and punish the bad, Rom. 13. 3, 4. It is equally provoking to God to *justify the wicked*, though it be in pity, and in *favorem vitæ—to save life*, as to *condemn the just*.

2. When any private persons plead for sin and sinners, palliate and excuse wickedness, or argue against virtue and piety, and so *pervert the right ways of the Lord*, and confound the eternal distinctions between good and evil.

16. Wherefore *is there* a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing *he hath* no heart to it?

Two things are here spoken of with admiration:

1. Go's great goodness to foolish man, in putting a *price into his hand to get wisdom*, to get knowledge and grace to fit him for both worlds. We have rational souls, the means of grace, the strivings of the Spirit, access to God by prayer, we have time and opportunity; he that has a good estate, (so some understand it,) has advantages thereby of getting wisdom by purchasing instruction. Good parents, relations, ministers, friends, are helps to get wisdom. It is a *price* therefore of value, a talent: it is a *price in the hand*, in possession, *the word is nigh thee*; it is a *price* for getting; it is for own advantage, it is for getting wisdom, the very thing which, being fools, we have most need of. We have reason to wonder that God should so consider our necessity, and should intrust us with such advantages, though he foresaw we should not make a right improvement of them.

2. Man's great wickedness, his neglect of God's favour, and his own interest, which is very absurd and unaccountable: *he has no heart to it*, not to the wisdom that is to be got, nor to the *price* in the use of which it may be got. *He has no heart*, no skill, nor will, nor courage, to improve his advantages. He has set his heart upon other things, so that he has no heart to his duty, or the great concerns of his soul. Wherefore should a price be thrown away and lost upon one so undeserving of it.

17. A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

This bespeaks the strength of those bonds by which we are bound to each other, and which we ought to be sensible of.

1. Friends must be constant to each other *at all times*; that is not true friendship which is not constant, it will be so, if it be sincere, and actuated by a good principle. They that are fanciful or selfish in their friendship, will love no longer than their humour is pleased, and their interest served, and therefore their affections turn with the wind, and change with the weather; swallow-friends, that fly to you in summer, but are gone in winter; such friends there is no loss of. But if the friendship be prudent, generous, and cordial, if I love my friend because he is wise, and virtuous, and good, as long as he continues so, though he fall into poverty and disgrace, still I shall love him. Christ is a Friend that loves at all times; (John, 13. 1.) and we must so love him, Rom. 8. 35.

2. Relations must in a special manner be careful and tender of one another in affliction; *A brother is born* to succour a brother or sister in distress, to whom he is joined so closely by nature, that he may the more sensibly feel from their burthens, and be the more strongly inclined and engaged, as it were by instinct, to help them. We must often consider what we were *born for*, not only as men, but as in such a station and relation. *Who knows but we came into such a family, for such a time as this?* We do not answer the end of our relations, if we do not do the duty of them. Some take it thus; *A friend that loves at all times, is born*, becomes *a brother in adversity*, and is so to be valued.

18. A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend.

Though he had commended friendship in adversity, (v. 17.) yet let not any, under pretence of being generous to their friends, be unjust to their families, and wrong them; one part of our duty must be made to consist with another.

Note, 1. It is a piece of wisdom to keep out of debt as much as may be, especially to dread suretiship. There may be a just occasion for a man to pass his word for his friend in his absence, till he come to engage himself; but to be *surety in the presence of his friend*, when he is upon the spot, supposes that his own word will not be taken, he being deemed insolvent, or dishonest: and then who can with safety pass his word for him?

2. Those that are *void of understanding* are commonly taken in this snare, to the prejudice of their families, and therefore ought not to be trusted too far with their own affairs, but to be under direction.

19. He loveth transgression that loveth strife: and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.

Note, 1. Those that are quarrelsome, involve themselves in a great deal of guilt; *He that loves strife*, that in his worldly business loves to go to law, in religion loves controversies, and in common conversation loves to thwart and fall out, that is never well but when he is in the fire, *he loves transgression*; for a great deal of sin attends that sin, and the way of it is down hill. He pretends to stand up for truth, and for his honour and right, but really he loves sin, which God hates.

2. Those that are ambitious and aspiring, expose themselves to a great deal of trouble, such as often ends in their ruin. *He that exalts his gate*, builds a stately house, at least a fine frontispiece, that he may overtop and outshine his neighbours, seeks his own destruction, and takes a deal of pains to ruin himself; he makes his gate so large, that his house and estate go out at it.

20. He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.

Note, 1. Framing ill designs will be of no advantage to us, there is nothing got by them; *He that has a froward heart*, that sows discord, and is full of resentment, cannot promise himself to get by it, sufficient to balance the loss of his repose and reputation, nor can he take any rational satisfaction in it; *he finds no good*.

2. Giving ill language will be a great disadvantage to us; *He that has a perverse tongue*, spiteful and abusive, scurrilous or backbiting, *falls into one mischief* or other, loses his friends, provokes his enemies, and pulls trouble upon his own head; many a one has paid dear for an unbridled tongue.

21. He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy.

This speaks that very emphatically, which many wise and good men feel very sensibly, what a grievous vexations thing it is to have a foolish wicked child. See here,

1. How uncertain all our creature-comforts are, so that we are often not only disappointed in them, but *that* proves the greatest cross, in which we promised ourselves most satisfaction. There was *joy when a man-child was born into the world*, and yet, if he prove vicious, his own father wishes he had never been born. The name of Absalom signifies his *father's peace*, but he was his greatest trouble. It should moderate the desire of having children, and the delight of their parents in them, that they may prove a grief to them; yet it should silence the murmurings of the afflicted father in that case, that, if his son be a fool, he is a fool of his own begetting, and therefore he must make the best of him, and take it up as his cross, the rather, because Adam begets a son in his own likeness.

2. How unwise we are in suffering one affliction (and that of an untoward child as likely as any other) to drown the sense of a

thousand mercies; *The father of a fool* lays that so much to heart, that he *has no joy* of any thing else; for this he may thank himself; there are joys sufficient to balance even that sorrow.

22. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

Note, 1. It is healthful to be cheerful. The Lord is for the body, and has provided for it, not only meat, but medicine, and has here told us that the best medicine is a *merry heart*; not a heart addicted to vain, carnal, sensual, mirth; Solomon himself said of that mirth, It is not medicine, but madness; it is not food, but poison; *What doth it?* But he means a heart rejoicing in God, and serving him with gladness, and then taking the comfort of outward enjoyments, and particularly that of pleasant conversation. It is a great mercy, that God gives us *leave* to be cheerful, and *cause* to be cheerful; especially if by his grace he gives us *hearts* to be cheerful. This *does good to a medicine*, (so some read it,) it will make physic more efficient. Or, *it does good as a medicine* to the body, making it easy, and fit for business. But, if mirth be a medicine, (understand it of diversion and recreation,) it must be used sparingly, only when there is occasion, not turned into food, and it must be used medicinally, *sub regimine*—as a *prescribed regimen*, and by rule.

2. The sorrows of the mind often contribute very much to the sickness of the body; *A broken spirit*, sunk by the burthen of afflictions, and especially a conscience wounded with the sense of guilt and fear of wrath, *arises the bones*, wastes the radical moisture, exhausts the very marrow, and makes the body a mere skeleton. We should therefore watch and pray against all melancholy indispositions, for they lead us into trouble as well as into temptation.

23. A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment.

See here, 1. What an *evil* thing bribery is; He is a *wicked man* that will *take a gift* to engage him to give a false testimony, verdict, or judgment; when he does it, he is ashamed of it, for he takes it, with all the secrecy imaginable, *out of the bosom* where he knows it is laid ready for him; it is industriously concealed, and so slyly, that if he could, he would, hide it from his own conscience. *A gift is taken out of the bosom of a wicked man*, so some read it; for he is a bad man that gives bribes, as well as he that takes them.

2. What a *powerful* thing it is. It is of such force, that it *perverts the ways of judgment*. The course of justice is not only obstructed, but turned into injustice; and the greatest wrongs are done, under colour of doing right.

24. Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.

Note, 1. He is to be reckoned an intelligent man, that not only has wisdom, but has it ready when he has occasion for it. He lays his *wisdom before him*, as his card and compass which he steers by, has his eye always upon it, as he that writes has on his copy; and then he has it *before him*, it is not to seek, but still at hand.

2. He that has a giddy head, a roving rambling fancy, will never be fit for any solid business. He is a fool, and good for nothing, whose *eyes are in the ends of the earth*, here, and there, and every where; any where but where they should be; who cannot fix his thoughts to one subject, nor pursue any one purpose with any thing of steadiness. When his mind should be applied to his study and business, it is filled with a thousand things, foreign and impertinent.

25. A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.

Observe, 1. Wicked children are an affliction to both their parents. They are an occasion of anger to the father, (so the word

signifies,) because they condemn his authority; but of sorrow and bitterness to the mother, because they abuse her tenderness. The parents, being joint-sufferers, should therefore bring mutual comfort to bear them up under it, and strive to make it as easy as they can, the mother to mollify the father's anger, the father to alleviate the mother's grief.

2. That Solomon often repeats this remark, probably, because it was his own case; however, it is a common case.

26. Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity.

In differences that happen between magistrates and subjects, (and such differences often arise,)

1. Let magistrates see to it that they never *punish the just*, that they be in no case a *terror to good works*, for that is to abuse their power, and betray that great trust which is reposed in them. It is *not good*, it is a very evil thing, and will end ill, whatever end they may aim at in it. When princes become tyrants and persecutors, their thrones will be neither easy nor firm.

2. Let subjects see to it that they do not find fault with the government for doing its duty, for it is wrong to *strike princes for equity*; by defaming their administration, or secretly attempting to strike at them; as the ten tribes that revolted reflected upon Solomon for imposing necessary taxes. Some read it, *nor to strike the ingenuous for equity*; magistrates must take heed that none suffer under them for well-doing; nor must parents *provoke their children to wrath* by unjust rebukes.

27. He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. 28. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.

Two ways a man may shew himself to be a wise man.

1. By the good temper, the sweetness, and the sedateness, of his mind; *A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit, a precious spirit*, so the word is; he is one that looks well to his spirit, that it be as it should be, and so keeps it in an even frame, easy to himself, and pleasant to others. A gracious spirit is a precious spirit, and renders a man amiable, and *more excellent than his neighbour*. He is of a *cool spirit*, so some read it, not heated with passion, nor put into any tumult or disorder by the *impetus* of any corrupt affection, but even and stayed. A cool head with a warm heart is an admirable composition.

2. By the good government of his tongue.

(1.) A wise man will be of *few words*, as being afraid of speaking amiss; *He that has knowledge*, and aims to do good with it, is careful, when he does speak, to speak to the purpose, and therefore says little, that he may take time to deliberate upon it. He spares his words, because they are better spared than ill-spent.

(2.) This is generally taken for such a sure indication of wisdom, that a fool may gain the reputation of being a wise man, if he have but wit enough to hold his tongue, to hear, and see, and say little. If a fool hold his peace, men of candour will think him wise, because nothing appears to the contrary, and because it will be thought that he is making observations on what others say, and gaining experience, and is consulting with himself what he shall say, that he may speak pertinently. See how easy it is to gain men's good opinion, and to impose upon them. But when a *fool holds his peace*, God knows his heart, and the folly that is bound there; thoughts are words to him, and therefore he cannot be deceived in his judgment of men.

CHAP. XVIII.

1. **T**HROUGH desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom.

The original here is difficult, and differently understood.

1. Some take it as a rebuke to an affected singularity; When

men take a pride in *separating themselves* from the sentiments and society of others, in contradicting all that has been said before them, and advancing new notions of their own, which, though ever so absurd, they are wedded to, it is to gratify a desire or lust of vain-glory, and they are seekers and meddlers with that which does not belong to them; he *seeks according to his desire, and intermeddles with every business*, pretends to pass a judgment upon every man's matter; he is morose and supercilious; those generally are so that are opinionative and conceited, and they thus make themselves ridiculous, and are vexations to others.

2. Our translation seems to take it as an excitement to diligence in the pursuit of wisdom. If we would get knowledge and grace, we must *desire* it, as that which we need, and which will be of great advantage to us, 1 Cor. 12. 31. We must *separate ourselves* from all those things which would divert us from, or retard us in, the pursuit, retire out of the noise of this world's vanities, and then *seek and intermeddle with all the means and instructions of wisdom*; be willing to take pains, and try all the methods of improving ourselves; be acquainted with a variety of opinions, that we may prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.

2. A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.

A fool may pretend to understanding, and to seek and intermeddle with the means of it; but,

1. He has no true delight in it; it is only to please his friends, or save his credit, he does not love his book, or his business, or his Bible, or his prayers, he would rather be playing the fool with his sports; those that take no pleasure in learning or religion, will make nothing to purpose of either. No progress is made in them, if they are a task and a drudgery.

2. He has no good design in it, only *that his heart may discover itself*, that he may have something to make a shew with, something wherewith to varnish his folly, that that may pass off the better, because he loves to hear himself talk.

3. When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.

This may include a double sense;

1. That wicked people are scornful people, and put *contempt* upon others; When the wicked comes into any company, comes into the schools of wisdom, or into the assemblies for religious worship, *then comes contempt of God*, of his people and ministers, and of every thing that is said and done. You can expect no other from those that are profane than that they will be scoffers; they will be an *ignominy and reproach*, they will flout and jeer every thing that is serious and grave; but let not wise and good men regard it, for the proverb of the ancients says, *Such wickedness proceeds from the wicked*.

2. That wicked people are shameful people, and bring *contempt* upon themselves, for God has said, that those *who despise him, shall be lightly esteemed*. As soon as ever sin entered, shame followed it, and sinners make themselves despicable. Nor do they only draw contempt upon themselves, but they bring *ignominy and reproach* upon their families, their friends, their ministers, and all that are any way related to them. Those therefore who would secure their honour must retain their virtue.

4. The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the well-spring of wisdom as a flowing brook.

The similitudes here seem to be elegantly transposed.

1. The *well-spring of wisdom* is as *deep waters*; an intelligent knowing man has in him a good treasure of useful things, which furnishes him with something to say upon all occasions, that is pertinent and profitable. This is as *deep waters* which make no noise, but never run dry.

2. The words of such a *man's mouth* are as a *flowing brook*; what he sees cause to speak, flows naturally from him, and with a great deal of *ease*, and freedom, and natural fluency; it is clean and

fresh, it is cleansing and refreshing; from his *deep waters* there flows what there is occasion for, to water those about him, as the brooks do the low grounds.

5. *It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment.*

This justly condemns those who, being employed in the administration of justice, *pervert judgment*,

1. By conniving at men's crimes, and protecting and countenancing them in oppression and violence, because of their dignity and wealth, or some personal kindness they have for them; What-ever excuses men may make for it, certainly *it is not good* thus to *accept the person of the wicked*, it is an offence to God, an affront to justice, a wrong to mankind, and a real service done to the kingdom of sin and Satan. The merits of the cause must be regarded, not the person.

2. By giving a cause against justice and equity, because the person is poor, and low in the world, or not of the same party or persuasion, or a stranger of another country; this is *overthrowing the righteous in judgment*, who ought to be supported, and whom God will make to stand.

6. A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. 7. A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.

Solomon has often shewed what mischief bad men do to others with their ungoverned tongues; here he shews what mischief they do to themselves.

1. They embroil themselves in quarrels; *A fool's lips*, without any cause or call, *enter into contention*, by advancing foolish notions, which others find themselves obliged to oppose, and so a quarrel is begun; or by giving provoking language, which will be resented, and satisfaction demanded; or by setting men at defiance, and bidding them *do if they dare*. Proud and passionate men, and drunkards, are fools, whose lips *enter into contention*. A wise man may, against his will, be drawn into a quarrel, but he is a fool that of choice enters into it when he might avoid it, and he will repent it when it is too late.

2. They expose themselves to correction; The fool's *mouth* does, in effect, *call for strokes*; he has said that which deserves to be punished with strokes, and is still saying that which needs to be checked, and restrained with strokes, as Ananias unjustly commanded that Paul should be *smitten on the mouth*.

3. They involve themselves in ruin; *A fool's mouth*, which has been, or would have been, the destruction of others, proves at length *his own destruction*, perhaps from men; Shimei's mouth was his own destruction, and Adonijah's, who spake against his own head; and when a fool, by his foolish speaking, has run himself into a premunire, and thinks to bring himself off by justifying or excusing what he has said, his *defence* proves his *offence*, and his lips are still the snare of his soul, entangling him yet more and more. However, when men by their evil words shall be condemned at God's bar, their mouths will be their destruction, and it will be such an aggravation of their ruin, as will not admit one drop of water, one drop of comfort, to *cool their tongue*, which is their snare, and will be their tormentor.

8. The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Tale-bearers are those who secretly carry stories from house to house, which perhaps have some truth in them, but are secrets not fit to be told, or are basely misrepresented, and false colours put upon them, and are all told with design to blast men's reputation, to break their friendship, to make mischief between relations and neighbours, and set them at variance: now the words of such are here said to be,

1. *Like as when men are wounded*, so the margin reads it; they take on them to be very much affected with the miscarriages of such and such, and to be in pain for them, and pretend that it is with the greatest grief and reluctance imaginable *that they speak*

of them, they look as if they themselves were wounded by it; whereas really they *rejoice in iniquity*, are fond of the story, and tell it with pride and pleasure. Thus their words seem; but they *go down as poison into the innermost parts of the belly*, the pill being thus gilded, thus sugared.

2. *As wounds*, so the text reads it; as deep wounds, deadly wounds, *wounds in the innermost parts of the belly*; the *venter medius vel infimus*—The middle or lower belly, the thorax, or the abdomen, in either of which wounds are mortal. The words of the tale-bearer wound him of whom they are spoken, his credit and interest, and him to whom they are spoken, his love and charity; they occasion sin to him, which is a wound to the conscience; perhaps he seems to slight them, but they wound insensibly, by alienating his affections from one he ought to love.

9. He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.

Note, 1. Prodigality is very bad husbandry. Those are not only justly branded as fools among men, but will give an uncomfortable account to God of the talents they are intrusted with, who are wasters of their estates, who live above what they have, spend and give more than they can afford, and so, in effect, throw away what they have, and suffer it to run to waste.

2. Idleness is no better. He that is remiss in his work, whose hands *hang down*, (so the word signifies,) that stands, as we say, with his thumbs in his mouth, that neglects his business, does it not at all, or as if he did it not, he is own brother to him that is a prodigal; he is as much a fool, and in as sure and ready a way to poverty; one scatters what he has, the other lets it run through his fingers. The observation is too true, in the affairs of religion; he that is trifling and careless in praying and hearing, is brother to him that does not pray or hear at all; and omissions of duty and in duty, are as fatal to the soul as commissions of sin.

10. The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

Here is, 1. God's sufficiency for the saints; His *name is a strong tower* for them, in which they may take rest where they are weary, and take sanctuary when they are pursued, where they may be lifted up above their enemies, and fortified against them. There is enough in God, and in the discoveries which he has made of himself to us, to make us easy at all times; the wealth laid up in this tower is enough to enrich them, to be a continual feast, and a continuing treasure, to them; the strength of this tower is enough to protect them; the name of the Lord is all that whereby he has made himself known as God, and our God, not only his titles and attributes, but his covenant and all the promises of it, these make up a tower, a strong tower, impenetrable, impregnable, for all God's people.

2. The saints' security in God. It is a strong tower to those who know how to make use of it as such; the righteous, by faith and prayer, devotion toward God, and dependence on him, run into it as their city of refuge; having made sure their interest in God's name, they take the comfort and benefit of it; they go out of themselves, retire from the world, live above, dwell in God, and God in them, and so they are safe, they think themselves so, and they shall find themselves so.

11. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.

Having described the firm and faithful defence of the righteous man, (v. 10.) he here shews what is the false and deceitful defence of the rich man, that has his portion and treasure in the things of this world, and sets his heart upon them; his wealth is as much his confidence, and he expects as much from it, as a godly man from his God.

See, 1. How he supports himself; he makes his wealth his city, where he dwells, where he rules, with a great deal of self-complacency, as if he had a whole city under his command. It is his *strong city*, in which he intrenches himself, and then sets danger at defiance, as if nothing could hurt him. *His scales are his pride*;

his wealth is his wall in which he incloses himself, and he thinks it a *high wall* which cannot be scaled or got over, Job, 31. 24. Rev. 18. 7.

2. How herein he cheats himself; it is a *strong city*, and a *high wall*, but it is so only *in his own conceit*, it will not prove to be really so, but, like the house built on the sand, it will fail the builder when he most needs it.

12. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.

Note, 1. Pride is the presage of ruin, and ruin will at last be the punishment of pride; for *before destruction* men are commonly so infatuated by the just judgment of God, that they are more haughty than ever; that their ruin may be the sorer, and the more surprising. Or, if that do not always hold, yet, after the heart has been lifted up with pride, a fall comes, *ch. 16. 18.*

2. Humility is the presage of honour, and prepares men for it, and honour shall at length be the reward of humility, as he had said before, *ch. 15. 33.* That has need to be often said which men are so loath to believe.

13. He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.

See here how men often expose themselves by that very thing by which they hope to gain applause.

1. Some take a pride in being quick; they answer a matter before they hear it, hear it out, nay, as soon as they but hear of it. They think it is their honour to take up a cause suddenly; and, when they have heard one side, they think the matter so plain, that they need not trouble themselves to hear the other, they are already apprized of it, and masters of all the merits of the cause. Whereas, though a ready wit is an agreeable thing to play with, it is solid judgment and sound wisdom that do business.

2. Those that take a pride in being quick, commonly fall under the just reproach of being impertinent. It is folly for a man to go about to speak to a thing which he does not understand, or to pass sentence upon a matter which he is not truly and fully informed of, and has not patience to make a strict inquiry into; and if it be folly, it is, and will be, shame.

14. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

Note, 1. Outward grievances are tolerable as long as the mind enjoys itself, and is at ease. Many infirmities, many calamities, we are liable to in this world, in body, name, and estate, which a man may bear, and bear up under, if he have but good conduct and courage, and be able to act with reason and resolution, especially if he have a good conscience, and the testimony of that be for him; and if the *spirit of a man will sustain the infirmity*, much more will the spirit of a Christian, or rather the Spirit of God, witnessing and working with our spirits in a day of trouble.

2. The grievances of the spirit are of all others most heavy and hardly to be borne; these make sore the shoulders which should sustain the other infirmities. If the spirit be wounded by the disturbance of the reason, dejection under the trouble, whatever it is, and despair of relief; if the spirit be wounded by the amazing apprehensions of God's wrath for sin, and the fearful expectations of judgment and fiery indignation, *who can bear this?* Wounded spirits cannot help themselves, nor do others know how to help them. It is therefore wisdom to keep conscience void of offence.

15. The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.

Note, 1. Those that are prudent will seek knowledge, and apply their ear and heart to the pursuit of it; their ear to attend to the means of knowledge, and their heart to mix faith with what they hear, and make a good improvement of it. Those that are prudent do not think they have prudence enough, but still see they have need of more; and the more prudent a man is, the more

inquisitive will he be after knowledge, the knowledge of God and his duty, and the way to heaven, for that is the best knowledge.

2. Those that prudently seek knowledge shall certainly get knowledge, for God never said to such, *Seek, in vain. Seek, and ye shall find.* If the ear seeks it, the heart gets it, and keeps it, and is enriched by it. We must get knowledge, not only into our heads, but into our hearts, get the savour and relish of it, apply what we know to ourselves, and experience the power and influence of it.

16. A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

Of what great force gifts, bribes, are, he had intimated before, *ch. 17. 8, 23.* Here he shews the power of gifts, presents, made even by inferiors to those that are above them, and have much more than they have. A good present will go far,

1. Towards a man's liberty; a man's gift, if he be in prison, may procure his enlargement; there are courtiers, who, if they use their interest even for oppressed innocency, expect to be gratified for it. Or, if a mean man know not how to get access to a great man, he may do it by a fee to his servants, or a present to himself; those will make room for him.

2. Toward his preferment. It will bring him to sit among great men in honour and power. See how corrupt this world is, when men's gifts will do that for them which their merits will not do, though ever so great; nay, will gain that for them which they are unworthy of, and unfit for; and no wonder that those take bribes in their offices, who gave bribes for them. *Vendere jura potest, emerat ille prius—He that bought law, can sell it.*

17. He that is first in his own cause seemeth just: but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

This shews that one tale is good till another is told.

1. He that speaks first will be sure to tell a straight story, and relate that only which makes for him, and put the best colour he can upon it, so that his cause shall appear good, whether it really be so or no.

2. The plaintiff having done his evidence, it is fit that the defendant should be heard, should have leave to confront the witnesses, and cross-examine them, and shew the falsehood and fallacy of what has been alleged, which, perhaps, may make the matter appear quite otherwise than it did. We must therefore remember that we have two ears, to hear each side before we give judgment.

18. The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.

Note, 1. Contentions commonly happen among the mighty, that are jealous for their honour and right, and stand upon the punctilios of both, and are confident of their being able to make their part good, and therefore will hardly condescend to the necessary terms of an accommodation; whereas those that are poor are forced to be peaceable, and sit down losers.

2. Even the contentions of the mighty may be ended by lot, if they cannot otherwise be compromised, and sometimes better so than by arguments which are endless, or concessions which they are loath to stoop to, whereas it is no disparagement to a man to acquiesce in the determination of the lot, when once it is referred to that. To prevent quarrels, Canaan was divided by lot; and, if lusty lots had not profaned this way of appeal to Providence, perhaps it might be very well used now for the deciding of many controversies, both to the honour of God, and the satisfaction of the parties, provided it be done with prayer and due solemnity; this, and some other scriptures, seeming to direct to it, especially Acts, 1. 26. If the law is a lottery, (as some have called it,) it were as well that a lottery were the law.

19. A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

Note, 1. Great care must be taken to prevent quarrels among relations, and those that are under special obligation to each other, not only because they are most unnatural and unbecoming, but because between such, things are commonly taken most unkindly, and resentments are apt to be carried too far. Wisdom and grace would indeed make it most easy to us to forgive our relations and friends, if they offend us, but corruption makes it most difficult to forgive them; let us therefore take heed of disobliging a brother, or one that has been as a brother; ingratitude is very provoking.

2. Great pains must be taken to compromise matters in variance between relations, with all speed, because it is a work of so much difficulty, and, consequently, the more honourable if it be done. Esau was a *brother offended*, and seemed harder to be won than a *strong city*, yet, by a work of God upon his heart, in answer to Jacob's prayer, he was won.

20. A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.

Note, 1. Our comfort depends very much upon the testimony of our own consciences, for us, or against us. The belly is here put for the conscience, as *ch. 20. 27*. Now it is of great consequence to us whether that be satisfied, and what that is filled with, for, accordingly, will our satisfaction be, and our inward peace.

2. The testimony of our consciences will be for us, or against us, according as we have, or have not, governed our tongues well. According as *the fruit of the mouth* is, good or bad, unto iniquity or unto righteousness, accordingly the character of the man is, and, consequently, the testimony of his conscience concerning him. "We ought to take as great care about the words we speak, as we do about the fruit of our trees, or the increase of the earth, which we are to eat; for, according as they are wholesome or unwholesome, so will the pleasure or the pain be, wherewith we shall be filled." See Bishop Patrick.

21. Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

Note, 1. A man may do a great deal of good, or a great deal of hurt, both to others and to himself, according to the use he makes of his tongue. Many a one has been his own death by a foul tongue, or the death of others by a false tongue; and, on the contrary, many a one has saved his own life, or procured the comfort of it, by a prudent gentle tongue, and saved the lives of others by a seasonable testimony or intercession for them. And if by our words we must be justified or condemned, *death and life are*, no doubt, *in the power of the tongue*. Tongues were *Æsop's* best meat, and his worst.

2. Men's words will be judged of by the affections with which they speak; he that not only speaks aright, (which a bad man may do to save his credit, or please his company,) but loves to speak so, speaks well of choice, and with delight, to him it will be life; and he that not only speaks amiss, (which a good man may do through inadvertency,) but loves to speak so, (*Ps. 52. 4.*) to him it will be death. As men *love it*, they shall eat the fruit of it.

22. Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

Note, 1. A good wife is a great blessing to a man. He that finds a wife, that is, a wife indeed, (a bad wife does not deserve to be called by a name of so much honour,) that finds a help meet for him, that is a wife in the original acceptation of the word, that sought such a one with care and prayer, and has found what he sought, he has found a *good thing*, a jewel of great value, a rare jewel, he has found that which will not only contribute more than any thing to his comfort in this life, but will forward him in the way to heaven.

2. God is to be acknowledged in it with thankfulness; it is a

token of his favour, and a happy pledge of further favours; it is a sign that God delights in a man to do him good, and has mercy in store for him; for this, therefore, God must be sought unto.

23. The poor useth entreaties; but the rich answereth roughly.

Note, 1. Poverty, though many inconveniencies to the body attend it, has often a good effect upon the spirit, for it makes men humble and submissive, and mortifies their pride; it teaches them to use entreaties; when necessity forces men to beg, it tells them they must not prescribe or demand, but take what is given them, and be thankful. At the throne of God's grace we are all poor, and must use entreaties; not answer, but make application, must sue *sub forma pauperis*—as a pauper.

2. A prosperous condition, though it has many advantages, has often this mischief attending it, that it makes men proud, haughty, and imperious; *The rich answers the entreaties of the poor roughly*, as Nabal answered David's messengers with railing. It is a very foolish humour of some rich men, especially those who have risen from little, that they think their riches will warrant them to give hard words, and, even where they do not design any rough dealing, that it becomes them to answer roughly, whereas gentlemen ought to be gentle, *Jam. 3. 17*.

24. A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

Solomon here recommends friendship to us, and shews,

1. What we must do, that we may contract and cultivate friendship; we must *shew ourselves friendly*. Would we have friends and keep them, we must not only not affront them, or quarrel with them, but we must love them, and make it appear that we do so, by all expressions that are endearing; by being free with them, pleasing to them, visiting them, and bidding them welcome, and especially by doing all the good offices we can, and serving them in every thing that lies in our power; that is *shewing ourselves friendly*.

Si vis amari, ama—

If you wish to gain affection, bestow it. SEN.

Ut ameris, amabilis esto—

The way to be beloved, is to be lovely. OVID.

2. That it is worth while to do so, for we may promise ourselves a great deal of comfort in a true friend; A brother indeed is *born for adversity*, as he had said, *ch. 17. 17*. In our troubles, we expect comfort and relief from our relations, but sometimes *there is a friend* that is nothing akin to us, the bonds of whose esteem and love prove stronger than those of nature, and therefore he *sticks closer than a brother*, and, when it comes to the trial, will do more for us than a brother will. Christ is a Friend to all believers, that *sticks closer than a brother*; to him therefore let them shew themselves friendly.

CHAP. XIX.

1. BETTER is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.

Here see, 1. What will be the credit and comfort of a poor man, and make him more excellent than his neighbour, though his poverty may expose him to contempt, and may dispirit him. Let him be honest, and *walk in integrity*, let him keep a good conscience, and make it appear that he does so, let him always speak and act with sincerity, when he is under the greatest temptations to dissemble, and break his word, and then let him value himself upon that, for all wise and good men will value him. He is better, has a better character, is in a better condition, is better beloved, and lives to better purpose, than many a one that looks great, and makes a figure.

2. What will be the shame of a rich man, notwithstanding all

his pomp. If he have a shallow head, and an evil tongue, if he is *perverse in his lips, and is a fool*, if he is a wicked man, and gets what he has by fraud and oppression, he is a fool, and an honest poor man is to be preferred far before him.

2. Also, *that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth.*

Two things are here shewed to be of bad consequence,

1. Ignorance; *To be without the knowledge of the soul is not good, so some read it.* Know we not our own selves, our own hearts? *A soul without knowledge is not good; it is a great privilege that we have souls, but if these souls have not knowledge, what the better are we?* If man *have not understanding, he is as the beasts*, Ps. 49. 20. An ignorant soul cannot be a good soul. That the soul be without knowledge, is not safe, nor pleasant; what good can the soul do, or what is it good for, if it be without knowledge?

2. Rashness; *He that hasteth with his feet*, that does things inconsiderately, and with precipitation, and will not take time to ponder the path of his feet, sins; he cannot but miss it often, and take many a false step, which those prevent that consider their ways. As good not know, as not consider.

3. The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.

We have here two instances of men's folly.

1. That they bring themselves into straits and troubles, and run themselves a-ground, and embarrass themselves; *The foolishness of man perverts his way.* Men meet with crosses and disappointments in their affairs, and things do not succeed as they expected and wished, and it is their own fault, and their own folly; it is their own iniquity that corrects them.

2. That, when they have done so, they lay the blame upon God, and their hearts fret against him, as if he had done them wrong, whereas really they wrong themselves. In fretting, we are enemies to our own peace, and become self-tormentors; in fretting *against the Lord*, we affront him, his justice, goodness, and sovereignty; but it is very absurd to take occasion, from the trouble which we pull upon our own heads by our wilfulness, or neglect, to quarrel with him, when we ought to blame ourselves, for it is our own doing. See Isa. 50. 1.

4. Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.

Here, 1. We may see how strong is men's love of money, that they will love any man, how undeserving soever he be otherwise, if he has but a deal of money, and is free with it, so that they may hope to be the better for it. Wealth enables a man to send many presents, make many entertainments, and do many good offices, and so gains him many friends, who pretend to love him, for they flatter him, and make their court to him, but really love what he has; or rather love themselves, hoping to get by him.

2. We may see how weak is men's love of one another; He who, while he prospered, was loved and respected, if he fall into poverty, is *separated from his neighbour*, is not owned or looked upon, not visited or regarded, is bid to keep his distance, and told he is troublesome; even one that has been his neighbour and acquaintance, shall turn his face from him, and pass by on the other side; because men's consciences tell them they ought to relieve and succour such, they are willing to have this excuse, that they did not see them.

5. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.

Here we have, 1. The sins threatened; bearing false witness in judgment, and speaking lies in common conversation. Men could not arrive at such a pitch of impiety as to bear false witness, (where to the guilt of a lie is added that of perjury and injury,) if

they had not advanced to it by allowing themselves to speak untruths in jest and banter, or under pretence of doing good. Thus men *teach their tongues to speak lies*, Jer. 9. 5. Those that will take a liberty to tell lies in discourse are in a fair way to be guilty of the greater wickedness of false-witness-bearing, whenever they are tempted to it, though they had seemed to detest it. They that can swallow a false word debase their consciences, so that a false oath will not choke them.

2. The threatening itself; they *shall not go unpunished, they shall not escape.* This intimates, that that which imboldens them in the sin, is, hope of impunity, and that is a sin which commonly escapes punishment from men, though the law was strict, Deut. 19. 13, 19. But it shall not escape the righteous judgment of God, who is jealous, and will not suffer his name to be profaned; we know where all liars will have their everlasting portion.

6. Many will entreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.

7. All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him! he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.

These two verses are a comment upon v. 4. and shew,

1. How those that are rich and great are courted and caressed, and have suitors, and servants, in abundance. The prince that has power in his hand, and preferments at his disposal, has his gate and his anti-chamber thronged with petitioners, that are ready to adore him for what they can get; *Many will entreat his favour*, and think themselves happy in it. Even great men are humble supplicants to the prince. How earnest then should we be for the favour of God, which is far beyond that of any earthly prince! But, it should seem, liberality will go further than majesty itself to gain respect, for they are many that court the prince, but *every man is a friend to him that gives gifts*; not only those that have received, or do expect, gifts from him, will, as friends, be ready to serve him, but others also will, as friends, give him their good word. Prodigals, who are foolishly free of what they have, will have many hangers-on, who will cry them up as long as it lasts, but will leave them when it is done. Those that are prudently generous make an interest by it, which may stand them in good stead; they are accounted benefactors, exercise an authority which may give them an opportunity of doing good, Luke, 22. 25.

2. How those that are poor and low are slighted and despised. It should not be so, we must honour all men, even under their greatest abasements; men may, if they please, court the prince, and the princely, but they may not trample upon the poor, and look at them with disdain; yet so it often is, *All the brethren of the poor do hate him*, even his own relations are shy of him, because he is needy and craving, and expects something from them, and because they look upon him as a blemish to their family; and then, no marvel if others of his friends, that were nothing akin to him, *go far from him*, to get out of his way; *he pursues them with words*, hoping to prevail with them, by his importunity, to be kind to him, but all in vain, they have nothing for him. *They pursue him with words*, so some understand it, to excuse themselves from giving him any thing; they tell him that he is idle and impertinent, that he has brought himself into poverty, and therefore ought not to be relieved; as Nabal said to David's messengers, "*There are many servants now-a-days, that run away from their masters; and how do I know but that David may be one of them?*" Let poor people therefore make God their Friend, pursue him with their prayers, and he will not be wanting to them.

8. He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.

They are here encouraged,

1. That take pains to *get wisdom*, to get knowledge and grace, and acquaintance with God; they that do so, shew that they *love their own souls*, and will be found to have done themselves the

greatest kindness imaginable. No man ever *hated his own flesh*, but loves that, yet many are wanting in love to their own souls, for those only love their souls, and, consequently, love themselves aright, that *get wisdom*, true wisdom.

2. That take care to keep it when they have got it; it is health, and wealth, and honour, and all, to the soul, and therefore he that *keeps understanding*, as he shews that he *loves his own soul*, so he shall certainly *find good*, all good. He that retains the good lessons he has learnt, and orders his conversation according to them, shall find the benefit and comfort of it in his own soul, and shall be happy here and for ever.

9. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish.

Here is, 1. A repetition of what was said before; (v. 5.) for we have need to be again and again warned of the danger of the sin of lying and false-witness-bearing, since nothing is of more fatal consequence.

2. An addition to it in one word; there it was said, *He that speaks lies shall not escape*, and intimated that he shall be punished. Here it is said, His punishment shall be such as will be his destruction, he *shall perish*; the lies he forged against others will be his own ruin. It is a damning, destroying, sin.

10. Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.

Note, 1. Pleasure and liberty ill become a fool; *Delight is not seemly* for such a one. A man that has not wisdom and grace has no right or title to true joy, and therefore it is unseemly. It ill becomes those, that do not delight in God, to delight in any thing else. They know not how to use any thing, nor how to manage themselves, and therefore they do but expose themselves. It becomes ungracious fools to be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, not to laugh and be merry; rebukes are more proper for them than delights. Delight is seemly for a man of business, to refresh him when he is fatigued, but not for a fool that lives an idle life, and abuses his recreations. *The prosperity of fools* discovers their folly, and *destroys them*.

2. Power and honour ill become a man of a servile spirit; nothing is more unseemly than for a *servant to have rule over princes*; it is absurd in itself, and very preposterous; for none are so insolent and intolerable as a beggar on horse-back, a *servant when he reigns*, ch. 30. 22. It is very unseemly for one, that is a servant to sin and his lusts, to rule over and oppress those that are God's freemen, and made kings and priests to him.

11. The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.

A wise man will observe these two rules about his anger;

1. Not to be over-hasty in his resentments; *Discretion* teaches us to *defer our anger*; to defer the admission of it, till we have thoroughly considered all the merits of the provocation, seen them in a true light, and weighed them in a just balance; and then to defer the prosecution of it, till there be no danger of running into any indecencies. Plato said to his servant, "I would beat thee, but that I am angry." Give it time, and it will cool.

2. Not to be over-critical in his resentments. Whereas it is commonly looked upon as a piece of ingenuity to apprehend an affront quickly, it is here made a man's *glory to pass over a transgression*, to appear as if he did not see it; (Ps. 38. 13.) or, if he sees fit to take notice of it, yet to forgive it, and meditate no revenge.

12. The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion; but his favour is as dew upon the grass.

This is to the same purport with what we had, ch. 16. 14, 15. and the design of it is,

1. To make kings wise and considerate in dispensing their frowns and smiles; they are not like those of common persons, their frowns

are very terrible, and their smiles very comfortable, and therefore it concerns them to be very careful that they never frighten a good man from doing well, with their frowns, nor ever give countenance to a wicked man in doing ill, with their smiles, for then they abuse their influence, Rom. 13. 3.

2. To make subjects faithful and dutiful to their princes. Let them be restrained from all disloyalty, by the consideration of the dreadful consequence of having the government against them; and let them be encouraged in all good services to the public, by the hopes of the favour of the prince. Christ is a King, whose wrath against his enemies will be as the *roaring of a lion*, (Rev. 10. 3.) and his favour to his own people as the refreshing dew, Ps. 72. 6.

13. A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.

It is an instance of the vanity of the world, that we are liable to the greatest griefs in those things wherein we promise ourselves the greatest comfort. It is as it proves. What greater temporal comfort can a man have than a good wife, and good children? Yet,

1. A *foolish son* is a great affliction, and may make a man wish a thousand times he had been written childless. A son that will apply himself to no study or business, that will take no advice, that lives a lewd, loose, rakish, life, and spends what he has extravagantly, games it away, and wastes it in the excess of riot, or that is proud, foppish, and conceited, such a one is the grief of his father, because he is the disgrace, and is likely to be the ruin, of his family. He hates all his labour, when he sees to whom he must leave the fruit of it.

2. A cross, peevish, wife is as great an affliction; *Her contentions are continual*; every day, and every hour in the day, she finds some occasion to make herself, and those about her, uneasy. Those that are accustomed to chide, never want something or other to chide at; but it is a *continual dropping*, that is, a continual vexation, as it is to have a house so much out of repair that it rains in, and a man cannot lie dry in it. That man has an uncomfortable life, and has need of a great deal of wisdom and grace to enable him to bear his affliction, and do his duty, that has a sot to his son, and a scold to his wife.

14. House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; and a prudent wife is from the Lord.

Note, 1. A discreet and virtuous wife is a choice gift of God's providence to a man; a wife that is *prudent*, in opposition to one that is contentious, v. 13. For though a wife, that is continually finding fault, may think it is her wit and wisdom to be so, it is really her folly; a *prudent wife* is meek and quiet, and makes the best of every thing. If a man has such a wife, let him not ascribe it to the wisdom of his own choice, or his own management, (for the wisest have been deceived both in and by a woman,) but let him ascribe it to the goodness of God, who made him a help meet for him, and, perhaps, by some hits and turns of providence, that seemed casual, brought her to him. Every creature is what he makes it. Happy marriages, we are sure, are made in heaven; Abraham's servant prayed in the belief of this, Gen. 24. 12.

2. It is a more valuable gift than *house and riches*, contributes more to the comfort and credit of a man's life, and the welfare of his family, is a greater token of God's favour, and about which the Divine Providence is in a more especial manner conversant. A good estate may be *the inheritance of fathers*, which, by the common direction of Providence, comes in course to a man; but no man has a good wife by descent or entail. Parents that are worldly, in disposing of their children, look no further than to match them to *house and riches*, but if withal it was to a *prudent wife*, let God have the glory.

15. Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.

See here the evil of a sluggish, slothful, disposition:

1. It stupifies men, and makes them senseless, and mindless of

their own affairs, as if they were *cast into a deep sleep*, dreaming much, but doing nothing. Slothful people doze away their time, bury their talents, live a useless life, and are the unprofitable burthens of the earth; for any service they do when they are awake they had as good be always asleep. Even their souls are idle, and lulled asleep, their rational powers chilled and frozen.

2. It impoverishes men, and brings them to want; they that will not labour cannot expect to eat, but must *suffer hunger*; *An idle soul*, one that is idle in the affairs of his soul, that takes no care or pains to work out his salvation, shall perish for want of that which is necessary to the life and happiness of the soul.

16. He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; *but* he that despiseth his ways shall die.

Here is, 1. The happiness of those that walk circumspectly; They that make conscience of *keeping the commandment* in every thing, that live by rule, as becomes servants and patients, they *keep their own souls*, they secure their present peace and future bliss, and provide every way well for themselves. If we keep God's word, God's word will keep us from every thing really hurtful.

2. The misery of those that live at large, and never mind what they do; *They that despise their ways shall die*, shall perish eternally, they are in the high road to ruin. With respect to those that are careless about the *end* of their ways, and never consider whither they are going, and about the *rule* of their ways, that will walk in the way of their hearts, and after the course of the world, (Ecc. 11. 9.) that never consider what they have done, or what they are concerned to do, but *walk at all adventures*, (Lev. 26. 21.) right or wrong, it is all one to them; what can come of this but the greatest mischief?

17. He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

Here is, 1. The duty of charity described. It includes two things: (1.) Compassion; which is the inward principle of charity in the heart; it is to *have pity on the poor*; those that have not a penny for the poor, yet may have pity for them, a charitable concern and sympathy; and if a man *give all his goods to feed the poor*, and have not this charity in his heart, *it is nothing*, 1 Cor. 13. 3. We must *draw out our souls to the hungry*, Isa. 58. 10. (2.) Bounty and liberality. We must not only pity the poor, but give, according to their necessity and our ability, Jam. 2. 15. 16. *That which he has given*. Margin, *His deed*. It is charity to do for the poor, as well as to give; and thus, if they have their limbs and senses, they may be charitable to one another.

2. The encouragement of charity. (1.) A very kind construction shall be put upon it; What is given to the poor, or done for them, God will place it to account as lent to him, *lent upon interest*, so the word signifies; he takes it kindly, as if it were done to himself, and he would have us to take the comfort of it, and to be as well pleased as ever any usurer was when he had let out a sum of money into good hands. (2.) A very rich recompence shall be made for it; *he will pay him again*, in temporal, spiritual, and eternal, blessings. Almsgiving is the surest and safest way of thriving.

18. Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.

Parents are here cautioned against a foolish indulgence of their children, that are untoward and viciously inclined, and that discover such an ill temper of mind as is not likely to be cured but by severity.

1. Do not say, that it is all in good time to correct them; no, as soon as ever there appears a corrupt disposition in them, check it immediately, before it gets head, and takes root, and is hardened into a habit; *Chasten thy son while there is hope*, for, perhaps, if he be let alone a while, he will be past hope, and a much greater chastening will not do that which now a less would effect. It is

easiest plucking up weeds as soon as they spring up, and the bullock that is designed for the yoke should be betimes accustomed to it.

2. Do not say, that it is a pity to correct them, and that because they cry, and beg to be forgiven, you cannot find in your heart to do it; if the point will be gained without correction, well and good; but if you find, as it often proves, that your forgiving them once, upon a dissembled repentance, and promise of amendment, does but embolden them to offend again, especially, if it be a thing that is in itself sinful, as lying, swearing, ribaldry, stealing, or the like; in such a case, put on resolution, *and let not thy soul spare for his crying*. It is better that he should cry under thy rod, than under the sword of the magistrate, or, which is more fearful, that of divine vengeance.

19. A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment; for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again.

1. As we read this, it intimates, in short, that angry men never want woe; those that are of strong, or rather headstrong, passions, commonly bring themselves, and their families, into trouble by vexatious suits and quarrels, and the provocations they give; they are still smarting, in one instance or other, for their ungoverned heats; and if their friends deliver them out of one trouble, they will quickly involve themselves in another, and they *must do it again*; all which trouble to themselves and others would be prevented if they would mortify their passions, and get the rule of their own spirits.

2. It may as well be read, *He that is of great wrath*, meaning the child that is to be corrected, and is impatient of rebuke, cries, and makes a noise, even that wrath of his against the rod of correction *deserves to be punished*; *for if thou deliver him* for the sake of that, thou wilt be forced to punish him so much the more the next time. A stomachful, high-spirited, child, must be subdued betimes, or it will be the worse for it.

20. Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.

Note, 1. It is well with those that are *wise in their latter end*, wise for their latter end, for their future state, for another world, that are found wise when their latter end comes; wise virgins, wise builders, wise stewards; that are wise at length, and *understand the things that belong to their peace, before they be hid from their eyes*. A carnal worldling, *at his end, shall be a fool*, (Jer. 17. 11.) but godliness will prove wisdom at last.

2. Those that would be *wise in their latter end* must *hear counsel*, and *receive instruction*, in their beginnings must be willing to be taught and ruled, willing to be advised and reprov'd, when they are young. Those that would be stored in winter must gather in summer.

21. *There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.*

Here is, 1. Men projecting. They keep their designs to themselves, but they cannot hide them from God, he knows the *many devices that are in men's hearts*, devices *against* his counsel, as those, Ps. 2. 1. . 3. Micah, 4. 11. devices *without* his counsel, no regard had to his providence, as those, James, 4. 13. This and the other they will do, and not take God along with them; devices unlike God's counsels; men are wavering in their devices, and often absurd and unjust, but God's counsels are wise and holy, steady and uniform.

2. God over-ruling. Various men have various designs, according as their inclination and interest leads them, but *the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand*, whatever comes of the devices of men. His counsel often breaks men's measures, and baffles their devices; but their devices cannot in the least alter his counsel, or disturb the proceedings of it, or put him upon new counsels, Isa. 14. 24.—46. 11. What a check does this give to politic, designing, men, who think they can outwit all mankind, that there is a God in

heaven, that laughs at them! Ps. 2. 4. What comfort does this speak to all God's people, that all God's purposes, which, we are sure, are right and good, shall be accomplished in due time!

22. The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar.

Note, 1. The honour of doing good is what we may laudably be ambitious of. It cannot but be *the desire of a man*, if he have any spark of virtue in him, to be kind; one would not covet an estate for any thing so much as thereby to be put into a capacity of relieving the poor, and obliging our friends.

2. It is far better to have a heart to do good, and want ability for it, than have ability for it, and want a heart to it; *The desire of a man* to be kind, and charitable, and generous, *is his kindness*, and shall be so construed; both God and man will accept his good-will, according to what he has, and will not expect more. A poor man, who wishes you well, but can promise you nothing, because he has nothing to be kind with, *is better than a liar*, than a rich man, who makes you believe he will do mighty things, but, when it comes to the setting to, will do nothing. The character of the men of low degree, that they are vanity, from whom nothing is expected, is better than that of men of high degree, that they are a lie, they deceive those whose expectations they raised.

23. The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

See what they get by it, that live in the fear of God, and always make conscience of their duty to him.

1. Safety: They shall not be visited with evil; they may be visited with sickness, or other afflictions, but there shall be no evil in them, nothing to hurt them, because nothing to separate them from the love of God, or to hurt the soul.

2. Satisfaction; They shall abide satisfied; they shall have those comforts which are satisfying, and shall have a constant contentment and complacency in them. It is a satisfaction which will abide, whereas all the satisfactions of sense are transient, and soon gone. *Satur pernoctabit, non cubabit incarnatus—He shall not go supperless to bed*; he shall have that which will make him easy, and be an entertainment to him in his silent and solitary hours, Ps. 16. 6, 7.

3. True and complete happiness; Serious godliness has a direct tendency to life, to all good, to eternal life; it is the sure and ready way to it; there is something in the nature of it, fitting men for heaven, and so leading them to it.

24. A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.

A sluggard is here exposed as a fool, for,

1. All his care is to save himself from labour and cold. See his posture; He hides his hand in his bosom, pretends he is lame, and cannot work; his hands are cold, and he must warm them in his bosom; and, when they are warm there, he must keep them so. He hugs himself in his own ease, and is resolved against labour and hardship. Let those work that love it; for his part, he thinks there is no such fine life as sitting still and doing nothing.

2. He will not be at the pains to feed himself; an elegant hyperbole; as we say, A man is so lazy, that he would not shake fire off him; so here, He cannot find in his heart to take his hand out of his bosom, no, not to put meat into his own mouth. If the law be so, that those that will not labour must not eat, he will rather starve than stir: thus his sin is his punishment, and therefore is egregious folly.

25. Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge.

Note, 1. The punishment of scorners will be a means of good to others. When men are so hardened in wickedness, that they

will not themselves be wrought upon by the severe methods that are used to reclaim and reform them, yet such methods must be used for the sake of others, that they may hear and fear, Deut. 19. 20. If the scorner will not be recovered from his sin, the disease being inveterate, yet the simple will beware of venturing upon the sin which exposes men thus. If it cure not the infected, it may prevent the spreading of the infection.

2. The reproof of wise men will be a means of good to themselves; they need not be smitten; a word to the wise is enough. Do but reprove one that has understanding, and he will so far understand himself and his own interest, that he will understand knowledge by it, and not miss it again, through ignorance and inadvertence, when once he has been told of it; so kindly does he take reproof, and so wisely improve it.

26. He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach.

Here is, 1. The sin of a prodigal son. Beside the wrong he does to himself, he is injurious to his good parents, and basely ungrateful to them that were the instruments of his being, and have taken so much care and pains about him, which is a great aggravation of his sin, and renders it exceeding sinful in the eyes of God and man; He wastes his father, wastes his estate which he should have to support him in his old age, wastes his spirits, and breaks his heart, and brings his gray head with sorrow to the grave. He chases away his mother, alienates her affections from him, which cannot be done without a great deal of regret and uneasiness to her; he makes her weary of the house, with his rudeness and insolence, and glad to retire for a little quietness; and, when he has spent all, he turns her out of doors.

2. The shame of a prodigal son. It is a shame to himself that he should be so brutish and unnatural; he makes himself odious to all mankind. It is a shame to his parents and family, who are reflected upon, though perhaps without just cause, for teaching him no better, or being some way wanting to him.

27. Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.

This is a good caution to those who have had a good education, to take heed of hearkening to those who, under pretence of instructing them, draw them off from those good principles under the influence of which they were trained up. Observe,

1. There is that which seems designed for the instruction, but really tends to the destruction, of young men. The factors for vice will undertake to teach them free thoughts and a fashionable conversation; how to palliate the sins they have a mind to, and stop the mouth of their own consciences; how to get clear of the restraints of their education, and to set up for wits and beaux. This is the instruction which causes to err from the forms of sound words, which should be held fast in faith and love.

2. It is the wisdom of young men to turn a deaf ear to such instructions, as the adder does to the charms that are designed to insnare her. "Dread hearing such talk as tends to instil loose principles into the mind; and if thou art linked in with such, break off from them; thou hast heard enough, or too much, and therefore hear no more, of the evil communication which corrupts good manners."

28. An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity.

Here is a description of the worst of sinners, whose hearts are fully set in them to do evil.

1. They set that at defiance which would deter and detain them from sin; An ungodly witness is one that bears false witness against his neighbour, and will forswear himself to do another a mischief, in which there is not only great injustice, but great impiety; this is one of the worst of men. Or, An ungodly witness is one that profanely and atheistically witnesses against religion and godliness.

whose instructions seduce from the words of knowledge; (v. 27.) such a one scorns judgment, laughs at the terrors of the Lord, mocks at that fear, Job, 15. 26. Tell him of law and equity, that the scriptures and an oath are sacred things, and not to be jested with, that there will come a reckoning day; he laughs at it all, and scorns to heed it.

2. They are greedy, and glad of that which gives them an opportunity to sin; *The mouth of the wicked eagerly devours iniquity, drinks it in like water*, Job, 15. 16.

29. Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the back of fools.

Note, 1. Scorers are fools; those that ridicule things sacred and serious, do but make themselves ridiculous; *their folly shall be manifest unto all men*.

2. Those that scorn judgments cannot escape them, v. 28. The unbelief of man shall not make God's threatenings of no effect; they that devour iniquity swallow the hook with the bait. The civil magistrate has judgments prepared for scorers, for, otherwise, he would bear the sword in vain; but if he be remiss, and connive at sin, yet God's judgments slumber not, they are prepared, Matth. 25. 41.

CHAP. XX.

1. **W**INE is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

Here is, 1. The mischief of drunkenness; *Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging*; it is so to the sinner himself, it mocks him, makes a fool of him, promises him that satisfaction which it can never give him; it smiles upon him at first, but *at the last it bites*; in reflection upon it, it rages in his conscience; it is raging in the body, puts the humours into a ferment. *When the wine is in, the wit is out*, and then the man, according as his natural temper is, either mocks like a fool, or rages like a mad man. Drunkenness, which pretends to be a sociable thing, renders men unfit for society, for it makes them abusive with their tongues, and outrageous in their passions, ch. 23. 29.

2. The folly of drunkards is easily inferred thence. He that is deceived thereby, that suffers himself to be drawn into this sin, when he is so plainly warned of the consequences of it, *is not wise*, he shews that he has no right sense or consideration of things; and not only so, but he renders himself incapable of getting wisdom; for it is a sin that infatuates and besots men, and takes away their heart. A drunkard is a fool, and a fool he is like to be.

2. The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whose provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul.

See here, 1. How formidable kings are, and what a terror they strike upon those they are angry with: Their fear, with which (especially when they are absolute, and their will is a law) they keep their subjects in awe, *is as the roaring of a lion*, which is very dreadful to the creatures he preys upon, and makes them tremble, so that they cannot escape from him. Those princes that rule by wisdom and love, rule like God himself, and bear his image; but those that rule merely by terror, and with a high hand, do but rule like a lion in the forest, with a brutal power. *Oderint, dum metuant—Let them hate, provided they fear*.

2. How unwise therefore they are that quarrel with them, that are angry at them, and so provoke them to anger; they sin against their own lives; much more do they do so that provoke the King of kings to anger. *Nemo me impune lacesset—No one shall provoke me with impunity*.

3. It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.

This is designed to rectify men's mistakes concerning strife.

1. Men think it is their wisdom to engage in quarrels; whereas it is the greatest folly that can be. He thinks himself a wise man

that is quick in resenting affronts, that stands upon every nicety of honour and right, and will not abate an ace of either, that prescribes, and imposes, and gives, law, to every body; but he that thus meddles is a fool, and creates a great deal of needless vexation to himself.

2. Men think, when they are engaged in quarrels, that it would be a shame to them to go back, and let fall the weapon; whereas really it is an honour for a man to cease from strife, an honour to withdraw an action, to drop a controversy, to forgive an injury, and to be friends with those that we have fallen out with. It is the honour of a man, a wise man, a man of spirit, to shew the command he has of himself, by ceasing from strife, yielding, and stooping, and receding from his just demands, for peace-sake, as Abraham, the better man, Gen. 13. 8.

4. The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.

See here the evil of slothfulness, and the love of ease.

1. It keeps men from the most necessary business, from ploughing and sowing when the season is; *The sluggard* has ground to occupy, and has ability for it, he can plough, but he will not, some excuse or other he has to shift it off, but the true reason is, it is cold weather; though ploughing time is not in the depth of winter, it is in the borders of winter, when he thinks it too cold for him to be abroad. Those are scandalously sluggish, who, in the way of their business, cannot find in their hearts to undergo so little toil as that of ploughing, and so little hardship as that of a cold blast. Thus careless are many in the affairs of their souls; a trifling difficulty will frighten them from the most important duty; but good soldiers must endure hardness.

2. Thereby it deprives them of the most necessary supports. They that will not plough in seed-time, cannot expect to reap in harvest; and therefore they must beg their bread with astonishment, when the diligent are bringing home their sheaves with joy. He that will not submit to the labour of ploughing, must submit to the shame of begging; *they shall beg in harvest, and yet have nothing*; no, not then when there is most plenty. Though it may be charity to relieve sluggards, yet a man may, in justice, not relieve them, they deserve to be left to starve. They that would not provide oil in their vessels, begged when the bridegroom came, and were denied.

5. Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.

A man's wisdom is here said to be of use to him, for the pumping of other people, and diving into them;

1. To get the knowledge of them. Though men's counsels and designs are ever so carefully concealed by them, so that they are as deep water which one cannot fathom; yet there are those who, by sly insinuations, and questions that seem foreign, will get out of them both what they have done, and what they intend to do. Those therefore who would keep counsel, must not only put on resolution, but stand upon their guard.

2. To get knowledge by them. Some are very able and fit to give counsel, have an excellent faculty of cleaving a hair, hitting the joint of a difficulty, and advising pertinently; but they are modest, and reserved, and not communicative; they have a great deal in them, but it is loath to come out; in such a case, *a man of understanding will draw it out*, as wine out of a vessel. We lose the benefit we might have by the conversation of wise men, for want of the art of being inquisitive.

6. Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?

Note, 1. It is easy to find those that will pretend to be good and liberal. Many a man will call himself a man of mercy, will boast what good he has done, and what good he designs to do, or, at least, what an affection he has to we -doing. Most men will talk a great deal of their charity.

will sound a trumpet to themselves, as the Pharisees, and, what little goodness they have, will proclaim it, and make a mighty matter of it.

2. But it is hard to find those that really are kind and liberal; that have done, and will do, more than either they speak of, or care to hear spoken of; that will be a true friend in a strait; such a one as one may trust to is like a black swan.

7. The just *man* walketh in his integrity: his children *are* blessed after him.

It is here observed, to the honour of a good man,

1. That he does well for himself; he has a certain rule, which, with an even steady hand, he governs himself by; He *walks in his integrity*, he keeps a good conscience, and he has the comfort of it, for *it is his rejoicing*. He is not liable to those uneasinesses, either in contriving what he shall do, or reflecting on what he has done, which they are liable to that walk in deceit.

2. That he does well for his family; *His children are blessed after him*, and fare the better for his sake; God has mercy in store for the seed of the faithful.

8. A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.

Here is, 1. The character of a good governor; He is a *king* that deserves to be called so, who *sits in the throne*, not as a throne of honour, to take his ease, and take state upon him, and oblige men to keep their distance, but as a *throne of judgment*, that he may do justice, right the injured, and punish the injurious; that makes his business his delight, and loves no pleasure comparably to it; that does not devolve the whole care and trouble upon others, but takes cognizance of affairs himself, and sees with his own eyes as much as may be, 1 Kings, 10. 9.

2. The happy effect of a good government. The presence of the prince goes far toward the putting of wickedness out of countenance; if he inspect his affairs himself, those that are employed under him will be kept in awe, and restrained from doing wrong. If great men be good men, and will use their power as they may and ought, what good may they do, and what evil may they prevent!

9. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?

This question is not only a challenge to any man in the world to prove himself sinless, whatever he pretends, but a lamentation of the corruption of mankind, even that which remains in the best. Alas! *Who can say*, "I am sinless?" Observe,

1. Who the persons are that are excluded from these pretensions; all, one as well as another. Here, in this imperfect state, no person whatsoever can pretend to be without sin. Adam could say so in innocency, and saints can say so in heaven, but none in this life. Those that think themselves as good as they should be, cannot; nay, and those that are really good, will not, dare not, say this.

2. What the pretension is that is excluded. We cannot say, *We have made our hearts clean*; though we can say, through grace, "We are cleaner than we have been," yet we cannot say, "We are clean and pure from all remainders of sin;" or, though we are clean from the gross acts of sin, yet we cannot say, "Our hearts are clean;" or, though we are washed and cleansed, yet we cannot say, "We ourselves made our own hearts clean," it was the work of the Spirit; or, though we are pure from the sins of many others, yet we cannot say, "We are *pure from our sin*, the sin that *casily* besets us, the *body of death* which Paul complained of, Rom. 7. 24.

10. Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them *are* alike abomination to the LORD.

See here, 1. The various arts of deceiving that men have; all which evils the *love of money* is the root of. In paying and receiving money, which was then commonly done by the scale, they

had *divers weights*, an under-weight for what they paid, and an over-weight for what they received; in delivering out, and taking in, goods, they had *divers measures*, a scanty measure to sell by, and a large measure to buy by. This was doing wrong with plot and contrivance, and under colour of doing right. Under these is included all manner of fraud and deceit in commerce and trade.

2. The displeasure of God against them; whether they be about the money or the goods in the buyer, or in the seller, they are all *alike an abomination to the Lord*; he will not prosper the trade that is thus driven, nor bless what is thus got; he hates those that thus break the common faith by which justice is maintained, and will be *the Avenger of all such*.

11. Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work *be* pure, and whether *it be* right.

The tree is known by its fruits, a man *by his doings*; even a young tree by its first-fruits, a *child by his childish things*, whether his work *be* clean only, appearing good, (the word is used ch. 16. 2.) or whether *it be* right, really good. This intimates,

1. That children will discover themselves; one may soon see what their temper is, and which way their inclination leads them, according as their constitution is. Children have not learned the art of dissembling and concealing their bent, as grown people have.

2. That parents should observe their children, that they may discover their disposition and genius, and both manage them, and dispose of them, accordingly. Drive the nail that will go, and draw out that which goes amiss. *Wisdom is herein profitable to direct*.

12. The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them.

Note, 1. God is the God of nature, and all the powers and faculties of nature are derived from him, and depend upon him, and therefore are to be employed for him. It was he that *formed the eye*, and *planted the ear*, (Ps. 94. 9.) and the structure of both is admirable; and it is he that preserves to us the use of both; to his providence we owe it that our eyes are seeing eyes, and our ears hearing ears. Hearing and seeing are the learning senses, and we must particularly own God's goodness in them.

2. God is the God of grace; it is he that gives the ear that hears God's voice, the eye that sees his beauty, for it is he that opens the understanding.

13. Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.

Note, 1. Those that indulge themselves in their ease may expect to want necessities, which should have been gotten by honest labour; "Therefore, though thou must sleep, (nature requires it,) yet *love not sleep*, as those do that hate business, Love not sleep for its own sake, but only as it fits for farther work. Love not much sleep, but rather grudge the time that is spent in it, and wish thou couldest live without it, that thou mightest always be employed in some good exercise." We must allow it to our bodies as men allow it to their servants, because they cannot help it, and otherwise they shall have no good of them. They that love sleep are likely to come to poverty, not only because they lose the time they spend in excess of sleep, but because they contract a listless, careless, disposition, and are still half asleep, never well awake.

2. Those that stir up themselves to their business may expect to have conveniences; "Open thine eyes, awake, and shake off sleep, see how far in the day it is, how thy work wants thee, and how busy others are about thee! And when thou art awake, look up, look to thine advantages, and do not let slip thine opportunities; apply thy mind closely to thy business, and be in care about it. It is the easy condition of a great advantage; *open thine eyes*, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread; if thou dost not grow rich yet thou shalt have enough; and that is as good as a feast."

14. *It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.*

See here, 1. What arts men use to get a good bargain, and to buy cheap. They not only cheapen carelessly, as if they had no need, no mind, for the commodity, when, perhaps, they cannot go without it, (there may be prudence in that,) but they vilify and run down that which yet they know to be of value; they cry, "*It is naught, it is naught*; it has this and the other fault, or perhaps may have; it is not good of the sort; and it is too dear; we can have better and cheaper elsewhere; or have bought better and cheaper." This is the common way of dealing; and after all, it may be, they know the contrary of what they affirm; but the buyer may think he has no other way of being even with the seller, who does as extravagantly commend his goods, and justify the price he sets on them; and so there is a fault on both sides; whereas the bargain would be made every jot as well, if both buyer and seller would be modest, and speak as they think.

2. What pride and pleasure men take in a good bargain, when they have got it, though therein they contradict themselves, and own they dissembled when they were driving the bargain; when he has beaten down the seller, who was content to lower his price rather than lose a customer, (as many poor tradesmen are forced to do, small profit is better than none,) then he goes his way, and boasts what excellent goods he has got at his own price, and takes it as an affront and a reflection upon his judgment if any body disparages his bargain. Perhaps he knew the worth of the goods better than the seller himself did, and knows how to get a great deal by them. See how apt men are to be pleased with their gettings, and proud of their tricks; whereas a fraud and a lie are what a man ought to be ashamed of, though he have gained ever so much by them.

15. *There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.*

The *lips of knowledge* (a good understanding to guide the lips, and a good elocution to diffuse the knowledge) are to be preferred far before gold, and pearl, and rubies; for,

1. They are more rare in themselves, more scarce, and hard to be got. *There is gold* in many a man's pocket, that has no grace in his heart. In Solomon's time there was plenty of gold, (1 Kings, 10. 21.) and *abundance of rubies*, every body wore them, they were to be bought in every town; but wisdom is a rare thing, a precious jewel, few have it so as to do good with it, nor is it to be purchased of the merchants.

2. They are more enriching to us, and more adorning. They make us rich toward God, rich in good works, 1 Tim. 2. 9, 10. Most people are fond of gold, and a ruby or two will not serve, they must have a multitude of them, a cabinet of jewels, but he that has the lips of knowledge despises these, because he knows and possesses better things.

16. *Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.*

Two sorts of persons are here spoken of, that are ruining their own estates, and will be beggars shortly, and therefore are not to be trusted without good security.

1. Those that will be bound for any body that will ask them, that entangle themselves in rash suretiship, to oblige their idle companions; they will break at last, nay, they cannot hold out long; these waste by wholesale.

2. Those that are in league with abandoned women, that treat them, and court them, and keep company with them; they will be beggars in a little time, never give them credit without a good pawn. Strange women have strange ways of impoverishing men, to enrich themselves.

17. *Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.*

Note, 1. Sin may be pleasant in the commission; *Bread of deceit*, wealth gotten by fraud, by lying and oppression, may be *sweet to a man*, and the more sweet for its being ill-gotten; such pleasure does the carnal mind take in the success of its wicked projects. All the pleasures and profits of sin are *bread of deceit*, they are stolen, for they are forbidden fruit, and they will deceive men, for they are not what they promise. For a time, however, they are *rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel*, and the sinner blesses himself in them.

But, 2. It will be bitter in the reflection. Afterward, the sinner's *mouth shall be filled with gravel*; when his conscience is awakened, when he sees himself cheated, and becomes apprehensive of the wrath of God against him for this sin, how painful and uneasy then is the thought of it! The pleasures of sin are but for a season, and are succeeded with sorrows. Some nations have punished malefactors by mingling gravel with their bread.

18. *Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.*

Note, 1. It is good in every thing to act with deliberation, and to consult with ourselves at least, and, in matters of moment, with our friends too, before we determine, but especially to ask counsel of God, and beg direction from him, and observe the guidance of his eye. This is the way to have both our minds and our purposes established, and to succeed well in our affairs; whereas what is done hastily and with precipitation, is repented of at leisure. Take time, and you will have done the sooner. *Deliberandum est diu, quod statuendum est semel*—A final decision should be preceded by mature deliberation.

2. It is especially our wisdom to be cautious in making war; consider, and take advice, whether the war should be begun or no, whether it be just, whether it be prudent, whether we be a match for the enemy, and able to carry it on when it is too late to retreat; (Luke, 14. 31.) and, when it is begun, how, and by what arts, it may be prosecuted, for skill is as necessary as courage. Going to law is a kind of going to war, and, therefore, must be done with good advice, Prov. 25. 8. The rule among the Romans was, *nee sequi bellum, nec fugere*—neither to urge war, nor yet to shun it.

19. *He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.*

Two sorts of people are dangerous to be conversed with.

1. Tale-bearers; though they are commonly flatterers, and by speaking fair insinuate themselves into men's acquaintance. Those are unprincipled people, that go about carrying stories, that make mischief among neighbours and relations, that sow in the minds of people jealousies of their governors, of their ministers, and of one another, that reveal secrets which they are intrusted with, or which, by unfair means, they come to the knowledge of; or, under pretence of guessing at men's thoughts and intentions, tell that of them which is really false. "Be not familiar with such, do not give them the hearing when they tell their tales and reveal secrets, for you may be sure that they will betray your secrets too, and tell tales of you."

2. Flatterers, for they are commonly tale-bearers. If a man fawn upon you, compliment and commend you, suspect him to have some design upon you, and stand upon your guard; he would pick that out of you, which will serve him to make a story of to somebody else, to your prejudice; therefore *meddle not with him that flatters with his lips*. Those too dearly love, and too dearly buy, their own praise, that will put confidence in a man, and trust him with a secret or business, because he speaks fairly to them.

20. *Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.*

Here is, 1. An undutiful child become very wicked by degrees; he began with despising his father and mother, slighting their

instructions, disobeying their commands, and raging at their rebukes, but at length he arrives at such a pitch of impudence and impiety as to curse them, to give them scurrilous and opprobrious language, and to wish mischief to them who were the instruments of his being, and have taken so much care and pains about him; and this, in defiance of God and his law, which has made this a capital crime, (Exod. 21. 17. Matth. 15. 4.) and in violation of all the bonds of duty, natural affection, and gratitude.

2. An undutiful child become very miserable at last; *His lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness*; all his honour shall be laid in the dust, and he shall for ever lose his reputation; let him never expect any peace or comfort in his own mind, no, nor to prosper in this world. His days shall be shortened, and the lamp of his life extinguished, according to the reverse of the promise in the fifth commandment. His family shall be cut off, and his posterity be a curse to him; and it will be his eternal ruin, the lamp of his happiness shall be *put out in the blackness of darkness*, so the word is, even that which is *for ever*, Jude, 13. Matth. 22. 13.

21. An inheritance *may be gotten hastily at the beginning*; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.

Note, 1. It is possible that an estate may be suddenly raised. There are those who will be rich, by right or wrong, who make no conscience of what they say or do, if they can but get money by it, who, when it is in their power, will cheat their own father, and who sordidly spare and hoard up what they get, grudging themselves and their families food convenient, and thinking all lost but what they buy land with, or put out to interest. By such ways as these a man may grow rich, may grow very rich, in a little time, at his first setting out.

2. An estate that is suddenly raised is often as suddenly ruined; it was raised hastily, but, not being raised honestly, it proves *soon ripe and soon rotten*, the end thereof shall not be blessed of God, and, if he do not bless it, it can neither be comfortable, nor of any continuance; so that he who got it, at the end, will be a fool. He had better have taken time, and built firmly.

22. Say not thou, I will recompense evil; *but wait on the LORD*, and he shall save thee.

They that live in this world must expect to have injuries done them, affronts given them, and trouble wrongfully created them, for we dwell among briars. Now here we are told what to do when we have wrong done us;

1. We must not avenge ourselves, no, nor so much as think of it, or design it; "*Say not thou*, no not in thy heart, *I will recompense evil* for evil; do not please thyself with the thought that some time or other thou shalt have an opportunity of being quits with him. Do not wish revenge, or hope for it, much less resolve upon it, no, not when the injury is fresh, and the resentments of it most deep. Never say that thou wilt do a thing which thou canst not in faith pray to God to assist thee in; and that thou canst not do in meditating revenge."

2. We must refer ourselves to God, and leave it to him to plead our cause, to maintain our right, and reckon with those that do us wrong, in such a way and manner as he thinks fit, and in his own due time; "*Wait on the Lord*, attend his pleasure, acquiesce in his will, and he does not say that he shall punish him that has injured thee; instead of desiring that, thou must forgive him and pray for him, but *he shall save thee*, and that is enough. He will protect thee, so that thy passing by one injury shall not (as is commonly feared) expose thee to another; nay, he will recompense good to thee, to balance thy trouble, and encourage thy patience," as David hoped, when Shimei cursed him, 2 Sam. 16. 12.

23. Divers weights *are* an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good.

This is to the same purport with what was said v. 10.

1. It is here repeated, because it is a sin that God doubly hates; as lying (which is of the same nature with this sin) is mentioned twice among the seven things that God hates, ch. 6. 17, 19.

and because, probably, it was a sin very much practised at that time in Israel, and therefore made light of, as if there were no harm in it, under pretence that, being commonly used, there was no trading without it.

2. It is here added, *A false balance is not good*; to intimate that it is not only abominable to God, but unprofitable to the sinner himself; there is really no good to be got by it, no, not a good bargain, for a bargain made by fraud will prove a losing bargain in the end.

24. Man's goings *are* of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?

We are here taught, that, in all our affairs,

1. We have a necessary and constant dependence upon God; all our natural actions depend upon his providence, all our spiritual actions upon his grace. The best man is no better than God makes him; and every creature is that to us which it is the will of God that it should be. Our enterprises succeed, not as we desire and design, but as God directs and disposes. The goings even of a strong man, so the word signifies, *are of the Lord*, for his strength is weakness without God, nor is the battle always to the strong.

2. We have no foresight of future events, and therefore know not how to forecast for them; *How can a man understand his own way?* How can he tell what will befall him, since God's counsels concerning him are secret? and therefore how can he of himself contrive what to do, without divine direction? We so little understand our own way, that we know not what is good for ourselves, and therefore we must make a virtue of necessity, and commit our way unto the Lord, in whose hand it is, follow the guidance, and submit to the disposal, of Providence.

25. *It is* a snare to the man *who devoureth that which is holy*, and after vows to make inquiry.

Two things, by which God is greatly affronted, men are here said to be ensnared by, and entangled not only in guilt, but in trouble and ruin at length.

1. Sacrilege; men's alienating holy things, and converting them to their own use, which is here called *devouring* them. What is devoted any way to the service and honour of God, for the support of religion and divine worship, or the relief of the poor, ought to be conscientiously preserved to the purposes designed; and those that directly or indirectly embezzle them, or defeat the purpose for which they were given, will have a great deal to answer for; *Will a man rob God in tithes and offerings?* Mal. 3. 8. Those that hurry over religious offices, (their praying and preaching,) and huddle them up in haste, as being impatient to get done, may be said to *devour that which is holy*.

2. Covenant-breaking. It is a snare to a man, after he has made vows to God, to inquire how he may evade them, or get them dispensed with, and to contrive excuses for the violating of them. If the matter of them was doubtful, and the expressions ambiguous, that was his fault, he should have made them with more caution and consideration, for it will involve his conscience (if it be tender) in great perplexities, if he be to inquire concerning them afterward; (Ecc. 5. 6.) for when we have opened our mouth to the Lord, it is too late to think of going back, Acts, 5. 4.

26. A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.

See here, 1. What is the business of magistrates; they are to be a terror to evil-doers. They must *scatter the wicked*, who are linked in confederacies to assist and imbolden one another in doing mischief; and there is no doing this but by *bringing the wheel over them*, putting the laws in execution against them, crushing their power, and quashing their projects. Severity must sometimes be used, to rid the country of those that are openly vicious and mischievous, debauched and debauching.

2. What is the qualification of magistrates, which is necessary in order to this; they have need to be both pious and prudent, for it is the wise king, that is both religious and discreet, that is likely to effect the suppression of vice and reformation of manners.

27. The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.

We have here the dignity of the soul, the great soul of man, that light which lighteth every man.

1. It is a divine light; it is the *candle of the Lord*, a candle of his lighting, for it is the *inspiration of the Almighty*, that gives us understanding. He forms the spirit of man within him. It is after the image of God that man is created in knowledge. Conscience, that noble faculty, is God's deputy in the soul; it is a candle not only lighted by him, but lighted for him. The Father of spirits is therefore called the *Father of lights*.

2. It is a discovering light. By the help of reason we come to know men, to judge of their characters, and dive into their designs; by the help of conscience we come to know ourselves. The spirit of a man has a self-consciousness; (1 Cor. 2.11.) it searches into the dispositions and affections of the soul, praises what is good, condemns what is otherwise, and judges of the thoughts and intents of the heart. This is the office, this the power, of conscience, which we are therefore concerned to get rightly informed, and keep void of offence.

28. Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy.

Here is, 1. The virtues of a good king; those are *mercy and truth*, especially mercy, for that is mentioned twice here. He must be strictly faithful to his word, must be sincere, and abhor all dissimulation, must religiously discharge all the trusts reposed in him, must support and countenance truth. He must likewise rule with clemency, and by all acts of compassion gain the affections of his people. *Mercy and truth* are the glories of God's throne, and kings are called *gods*.

2. The advantages he gains thereby. These virtues will preserve his person, and support his government, will make him easy and safe, beloved by his own people, and feared by his enemies, if it be possible that he should have any.

29. The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head.

This shews that both young and old have their advantages, and therefore must each of them be, according to their capacities, serviceable to the public, and neither of them despise or envy the other.

1. Let not old people despise the young, for they are strong and fit for action, able to go through business, and break through difficulties, which the aged and weak cannot grapple with. The *glory of young men is their strength*, provided they use it well, (in the service of God and their country, not of their lusts,) and that they be not proud of it, nor trust to it.

2. Let not young people despise the old, for they are grave, and fit for counsel, and though they have not the strength that young men have, yet they have more wisdom and experience. *Juniors ad labores, seniores ad honores—Labour is for the young, honour for the aged*. God has put honour upon the old man; for his *gray head* is his beauty. See Dan. 7. 9.

30. The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.

Note, 1. Many need severe rebukes. Some children are so obstinate, that their parents can do no good with them without sharp correction; some criminals must feel the rigour of the law and public justice; gentle methods will not work upon them; they must be beaten black and blue. And the wise God sees that his own children sometimes need very sharp afflictions.

2. Severe rebukes sometimes do a great deal of good, as corrosives contribute to the cure of a wound, eating out the proud

flesh. The rod drives out even that foolishness which was bound up in the heart, and cleanses away the evil there.

3. Frequently those that most need severe rebukes can worst bear them. Such is the corruption of nature, that men are as loath to be rebuked sharply for their sins as to be beaten till their bones ache. *Correction is grievous to him that forsakes the way*, and yet it is good for him, Heb. 12. 11.

CHAP. XXI.

1. **T**he king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

Note, 1. Even the *hearts* of men are in God's hand, and not only their *goings*, as he had said, *ch. 20. 24*. God can change men's minds, can, by a powerful insensible operation upon their spirits, turn them from that which they seemed most intent upon, and incline them to that which they seemed most averse to, as the husbandman, by canals and gutters, turns the water through his grounds as he pleases, which does not alter the nature of the water, or put any force upon it, any more than God's providence does upon the native freedom of man's will, but directs the course of it to serve his own purpose.

2. Even kings' hearts are so, notwithstanding their powers and prerogatives, as much as the hearts of common persons. The *hearts of kings are unsearchable* to us, much more unmanageable by us; as they have their *Arcana imperii—State secrets*, so they have the prerogatives of their crown, but the great God has them not only under his eye, but in his hand. Kings are what he makes them. Those that are most absolute are under God's government; he *puts things into their hearts*, Rev. 17. 17. Ezra, 7. 27.

2. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

Note, 1. We are all apt to be partial in judging of ourselves and our own actions, and to think too favourably of our own character, as if there were nothing amiss in it; *Every way of a man*, even his by-way, is *right in his own eyes*; the proud heart is very ingenious in putting a fair face upon a foul matter, and in making that appear *right* to itself, which is far from being so, to stop the mouth of conscience.

2. We are sure that the judgment of God concerning us is according to truth. Whatever our judgment is concerning ourselves, *the Lord ponders the heart*. God looks at the heart, and judges of men according to that, of their actions according to their principles and intentions; and his judgment of that is as exact as our's is of that which we ponder most, and more so; he weighs it in an unerring balance, *ch. 16. 2*.

3. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Here, 1. It is implied that many deceive themselves with a conceit, that, if they offer sacrifice, that will excuse them from doing justice, and procure them a dispensation for their unrighteousness; and this makes their way seem *right*, *v. 2*. *We have fasted*, Isa. 58. 3. *I have peace-offerings with me*, Prov. 7. 14.

2. It is plainly declared, that living a good life, doing justly, and loving mercy, are more pleasing to God than the most pompous and expensive instances of devotion; sacrifices were of divine institution, and were then acceptable to God, if they were offered in faith, and with repentance, otherwise not, Isa. 1. 11, &c. But moral duties were preferred before them, (1 Sam. 15. 22.) which intimates that their excellency was not innate, nor the obligation to them perpetual, Micah, 6. 6. 8. Much of religion lies in doing judgment and justice, from a principle of duty to God, contempt of the world, and love to our neighbour; and this is more pleasing to God than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices, Mark, 12. 33.

4. An high look, and a proud heart, and the ploughing of the wicked, is sin.

This may be taken as shewing us,

1. The marks of a wicked man. He that has a *high look* and a *proud heart*, that carries himself insolently and scornfully toward both God and man, and that is always ploughing and plotting, designing and devising some mischief or other, he is indeed a wicked man. *The light of the wicked is sin.* Sin is *the pride, the ambition, the glory and joy, and the business, of wicked men.*

2. The miseries of a wicked man. His raised expectations, and high designs, and most elaborate contrivances and projects, are sin to him; he contracts guilt in them, and so prepares trouble for himself. The very business of all wicked men, as well as their pleasure, is nothing but sin. So Bishop Patrick. They do all to serve their lusts, and have no regard to the glory of God in it, and therefore *their ploughing is sin*, and, no marvel, when their sacrificing is so, *ch. 15. 3.*

5. The thoughts of the diligent *tend* only to plenteousness; but of every one *that is* hasty only to want.

Here is, 1. The way to be rich. If we would live plentifully and comfortably in the world, we must be diligent in our business, and not shrink from the toil and trouble of it, but prosecute it closely, improving all advantages and opportunities for it, and doing what we do with all our might; yet we must not be hasty in it, nor hurry ourselves and others with it, but keep doing fair and softly, which, we say, goes far in a day. With diligence there must be contrivance; the *thoughts* of the diligent are as necessary as the *hand* of the diligent. Forecast is as good as work. Seest thou a man thus prudent and diligent? He will have enough to live on.

2. The way to be poor. Those that are hasty, that are rash and inconsiderate in their affairs, and will not take time to think, that are greedy of gain, by right or wrong, and make haste to be rich by unjust practices, or unwise projects, they are in the ready road to poverty. Their thoughts and contrivances, by which they hope to raise themselves, will ruin them.

6. The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.

This shews the folly of those that hope to enrich themselves by dishonest practices, by oppressing and over-reaching those with whom they deal, by false witness-bearing, or by fraudulent contracts; of those that make no conscience of their assertions when there is any thing to be got by a falsehood. They may perhaps heap up treasures by these means, that which they make their treasure; but,

1. They will not meet with the satisfaction they expect; it is a *vanity tossed to and fro*; it will be disappointment and vexation of spirit to them; they will not have the comfort of it, nor can they put any confidence in it, but will be perpetually uneasy. It will be *tossed to and fro* by their own consciences, and by the censures of men; let them expect to be in a constant hurry.

2. They will meet with the destruction they do not expect. While they are seeking wealth by such unlawful practices, they are really seeking death, they lay themselves open to the envy and ill will of men by the treasures they get, and to the wrath and curse of God by the lying tongue wherewith they get them, which he will make to fall upon themselves, and sink them to hell.

7. The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.

See here, 1. The nature of injustice. Getting money by lying (*v. 6.*) is no better than downright robbery. Cheating is stealing; you had as good pick a man's pocket, as impose upon him by a lie, in making a bargain which he had no fence against but by not believing you; and it will be no excuse from the guilt of robbery to say that he might choose whether he would believe you, for that is a debt we should owe to all men.

2. The cause of injustice. Men *refuse to do judgment*, they will

not render to all their due, but withhold it, and omissions make way for commissions; they come at length to robbery itself. They that refuse to do justice will choose to do wrong.

3. The effect of injustice; it will return upon the sinner's own head. The robbery of the wicked will *terrify them*, so some; their consciences will be filled with horror and amazement, will cut them, will *saw them asunder*, so others; it will *destroy them*, here and for ever, therefore he had said, (*v. 6.*) *They seek death.*

8. The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right.

This shews, that as men are, so is their way.

1. Evil men have evil ways. If the man be froward, his way also is strange; and this is the way of most men, such is the general corruption of mankind. *They are all gone aside*; (*Ps. 14. 2, 3.*) all flesh have perverted their way. But the froward man, the man of deceit, that acts by craft and trick in all he does, his way is strange, contrary to all the rules of honour and honesty; it is strange, for you know not where to find him, or when you have him; it is strange, for it is alienated from all good, and estranges men from God and his favour. It is what he beholds afar off, and so do all honest men.

2. Men that are pure are proved to be such by their work, for it is right, it is just and regular; and they are accepted of God, and approved of men. The way of mankind in their apostacy is froward and strange, but as for the pure, those that by the grace of God are recovered out of that state, of which there is here and there one, *their work is right*, as Noah's was in the old world, *Gen. 7. 1.*

9. It is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.

See here, 1. What a great affliction it is to a man to have a brawling, scolding, woman to his wife; who, upon every occasion, and often upon no occasion, breaks out into passion, and chides either him or those about her, is fretful to herself, and furious to her children and servants, and, in both, vexatious to her husband. If a man has a wide house, spacious and pompous, this will imber the comfort of it to him; a *house of society*, so the word is, in which a man may be sociable, and entertain his friends, this will make both him and his house unsociable, and unfit for the enjoyments of true friendship. It makes a man ashamed of his choice and his management, and disturbs company.

2. What many a man is forced to do under such an affliction. He cannot keep up his authority; he finds it to no purpose to contradict the most unreasonable passion, for it is unruly, and rages so much the more; and his wisdom and grace will not suffer him to render railing for railing, nor his conjugal affection to use any severity, and therefore he finds it his best way to retire *into a corner of the house-top*, and sit alone there, out of the hearing of her clamour; and, if he employ himself well there, as he may do, it is the wisest course he can take. Better do so, than quit the house, and go into bad company; for diversion, as many, who, like Adam, make their wife's sin the excuse of their own.

10. The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.

See here the character of a very wicked man.

1. The strong inclination he has to do mischief; His very *soul desires evil*, desires that evil may be done, and that he may have the pleasure, not only of seeing it, but of having a hand in it; the root of wickedness lies in the soul; the desire that men have to do evil, that is the lust which conceives and brings forth sin.

2. The strong aversion he has to do good; His *neighbour, his friend, his nearest relation, finds no favour in his eyes*, cannot gain from him the least kindness, though he be in the greatest need of it. And, when he is in the pursuit of the evil his heart is so much upon, he will spare no man that stands in his way; his next neighbour shall be used no better than a stranger, than an enemy.

11. When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.

This we had before, (*ch.* 19. 25.) and it shews, that there are two ways by which the simple may be made wise.

1. By the punishments that are inflicted on those that are incorrigibly wicked. Let the law be executed upon a scorner, and even he that is simple will be awakened and alarmed by it, and will discern, more than he did, the evil of sin, and will take warning by it, and take heed.

2. By the instructions that are given to those that are wise and willing to be taught; *When the wise is instructed* by the preaching of the word, *he*, not only the wise himself, but the simple, that stands by, *receives knowledge*. It is no injustice at all to take a good lesson to ourselves which was designed for another.

12. The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.

1. As we read this verse, it shews the reason why good men, when they come to understand things right, will not envy the prosperity of evil-doers. When they see *the house of the wicked*, how full it is, perhaps, of all the good things of this life, they are tempted to envy; but when they *wisely consider* it, when they look upon it with an eye of faith, when they see *God overthrowing the wicked for their wickedness*, that there is a curse upon their habitation, which will certainly be the ruin of it ere long, they see more reason to despise them, or pity them, than to fear or envy them.

2. Some give another sense of it; *The righteous man*, the judge or magistrate, that is intrusted with the execution of justice, and the preservation of the public peace, *examines the house of the wicked*, searches it for arms, or for stolen goods, makes a diligent inquiry concerning his family, and the characters of those about him, that he may by his power *overthrow the wicked for their wickedness*, and prevent their doing any further mischief, that he may fire the nests where the birds of prey are harboured, or the unclean birds.

13. Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.

Here is the description and doom of an uncharitable man.

1. His description; He *stops his ears at the cry of the poor*, at the cry of their wants and miseries, he resolves to take no cognizance of them; at the cry of their requests and supplications, he resolves he will not so much as give them the hearing, turns them away from his door, and forbids them to come near him; or if he cannot avoid hearing them, he will not heed them, nor be moved by their complaints, nor be prevailed with by their importunities; he *shuts up the bowels of his compassion*, and that is equivalent to the stopping of his ears, Acts. 7. 57.

2. His doom; He shall himself be reduced to straits, which will make him cry, and then *he shall not be heard*. Men will not hear him, but reward him as he has rewarded others. God will not hear him; for he that *shewed no mercy shall have judgment without mercy*; (Jam. 2. 13.) and he that on earth denied a crumb of bread, in hell was denied a drop of water. God will be deaf to their prayers who are deaf to the cries of the poor, which, if they be not heard *by us*, will be heard *against us*, Exod. 22. 23.

14. A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.

Here is, 1. The power that is commonly found to be in gifts. Nothing is more violent than *anger*; Oh the force of *strong wrath*! And yet a handsome present, prudently managed, will turn away some men's wrath, when it seemed implacable, and discharge the keenest and most passionate resentments. Covetousness is commonly a master-sin, and has the command of other lusts. *Pecuniæ obediunt omnia*—*Money commands all things*. Thus Jacob pacified Esau, and Abigail David.

2. The policy that is commonly used in giving and receiving bribes; it must be *a gift in secret, and a reward in the bosom*; for he that takes it would not be thought to covet it, nor known to receive it, nor would he willingly be beholden to him whom he has been offended with; but if it be done privately all is well. No man should be too open in giving any gift, nor boast of the presents he sends; but if it be a bribe to pervert justice, that is so scandalous, that those who are fond of it are ashamed of it.

15. It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.

Note, 1. It is a pleasure and satisfaction to good men, both to see justice administered by the government they live under, right taking place, and iniquity suppressed, and also to practise it themselves, according as their sphere is. They not only do justice, but do it with pleasure; not only for fear of shame, but for love of virtue.

2. It is a terror to wicked men to see the laws put in execution against vice and profaneness; it is destruction to them; as it is also a vexation to them to be forced, either for the support of their credit, or for fear of punishment, to do judgment themselves. Or, if we take it as we read it, the meaning is; There is true pleasure in the practice of religion, but certain destruction at the end of all vicious courses.

16. The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.

Here is, 1. The sinner upon his ramble; He *wanders out of the way of understanding*, and when once he has left that good way, he wanders endlessly. The way of religion is *the way of understanding*; those that are not truly pious are not truly intelligent; those that *wander out of this way* break the hedge which God has set, and follow the conduct of the world and the flesh; and they go astray like lost sheep.

2. The sinner at his rest, or rather his ruin; He *shall remain* (*quiescet—he shall rest*, but not in peace—in peace) *in the congregation of the giants*, the sinners of the old world that were swept away by the deluge; to that destruction the damnation of sinners is compared, as sometimes to the destruction of Sodom, when they are said to have their portion in fire and brimstone. Or *in the congregation of the damned* that are under the power of the second death. There is a vast congregation of damned sinners, bound in bundles for the fire, and in that *they shall remain*, remain for ever, who are shut out from the congregation of the righteous. He that forsakes the way to heaven, if he return not to it, will certainly sink into the depths of hell.

17. He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

Here is an argument against a voluptuous, luxurious, life, taken from the ruin it brings upon men's temporal interests. Here is,

1. The description of an epicure; He *loves pleasure*. God allows us to use the delights of sense soberly and temperately, *wine to make glad the heart*, and put vigour into the spirits, and *oil to make the face to shine*, and beautify the countenance; but he that loves these, that sets his heart upon them, covets them earnestly, is solicitous to have all the delights of sense wound up to the height of pleasurable, is impatient of every thing that crosses him in his pleasures, relishes these as the best pleasures, and has his mouth by them put out of taste for spiritual delights, he is an epicure, 2 Tim. 3. 4.

2. The punishment of an epicure in this world; He *shall be a poor man*; for the lusts of sensuality are not maintained but at a great expence; and there are instances of those who want necessities, and live upon alms, who once could not live without dainties and varieties. Many a beau becomes a beggar.

18. The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright.

This intimates,

1. What should be done by the justice of men; *The wicked*, that are the troublers of a land, ought to be punished, for the preventing and turning away of those national judgments which otherwise will be inflicted, and in which even the righteous are many times involved. Thus, when Achan was stoned, he was a *ransom for the camp of righteous Israel*; and the seven sons of Saul, when they were hanged, were a *ransom for the kingdom of righteous David*.

2. What is often done by the providence of God; *The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked comes in his stead*, and so seems as if he were a *ransom for him*, ch. 11. 8. God will rather leave many wicked people to be cut off than abandon his own people. *I will give men for thee*, Isa. 43. 3, 4.

19. *It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.*

Note, 1. Unbridled passions imber and spoil the comfort of all relations. A peevish angry wife makes her husband's life uneasy, to whom she should be a comfort and a meet help. Those cannot dwell in peace and happiness that cannot dwell in peace and love. Even those that are one flesh, if they be not withal one spirit, have no joy of their union.

2. It is better to have no company than bad company. The wife of thy covenant is thy companion, and yet if she be peevish and provoking, *it is better to dwell in a solitary wilderness*, exposed to wind and weather, than in company with her. A man may better enjoy God and himself in a wilderness than among quarrelsome relations and neighbours. See v. 9.

20. *There is a treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.*

Note, 1. Those that are wise will increase what they have, and live plentifully; their wisdom will teach them to proportion their expences to their income, and to lay up for hereafter; so that *there is a treasure of things to be desired*, and as much as needs be desired, a good stock of all things convenient, laid up in season, and particularly of *oil*, one of the staple commodities of Canaan, Dent. 8. 8. This is *in the habitation, or cottage, of the wise*; and it is better to have an old-fashioned house, and have it well-furnished, than a fine modern one, ill-kept. God blesses the endeavours of the wise, and then their houses are replenished.

2. Those that are foolish will mispend what they have, upon their lusts, and so bring the stock they had, to nothing. Those manage themselves ill, that are in haste to spend what they have, but not in care which way to get more. Foolish children spend what their wise parents had laid up; one sinner destroys much good, as the prodigal son.

21. *He that followeth after righteousness and mercy, findeth life, righteousness, and honour.*

See here, 1. What it is to make religion our business; it is to *follow after righteousness and mercy*; not to content ourselves with easy performances, but to do our duty with the utmost care and pains, as those that are pressing forward, and in fear of coming short; we must both do justly, and love mercy, and proceed and persevere therein; and though we cannot attain to perfection, yet it will be a comfort to us if we aim at it, and follow after it.

2. What will be the advantage of doing so; Those that do *follow after righteousness*, shall *find righteousness*; God will give them grace to do good, and they shall have the pleasure and comfort of it; they that make conscience of being just to others, shall be justly dealt with by others, and others shall be kind to them. The Jews *followed after righteousness*, and did not find it, because they sought amiss, Rom. 9. 31. Otherwise, *Seek and you shall find*, and with it shall find both *life and honour*, everlasting life and honour, the crown of *righteousness*.

22. *A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty,*

and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof.

Note, 1. Those that have power are apt to promise themselves great things from their power. *The city of the mighty* thinks itself impregnable, and therefore its strength is *the confidence thereof*, what it boasts of, and trusts in, bidding defiance to danger.

2. Those that have wisdom, though they are so modest as not to promise much, often perform great things, even against those that are so confident of their strength, by their wisdom. Good conduct will go far even against force; and a stratagem, well-managed, may effectually *scale the city of the mighty, and cast down the strength* it had such a confidence in. *A wise man* will gain upon the affections of people, and conquer them by strength of reason, which is a more noble conquest than that by strength of arms. They that understand their interest will willingly submit themselves to a wise and good man, and the strongest walls shall not hold out against him.

23. *Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.*

Note, 1. It is our great concern to keep our soul from straits, from being entangled in snares and perplexities, and disquieted with troubles, that we may preserve the possession and enjoyment of ourselves, and our souls may be in frame for the service of God.

2. Those that would keep their souls, must keep a watch before the door of their lips, must *keep the mouth* by temperance, that no forbidden fruit go into it, no stolen waters, that nothing be eaten or drunk to excess; they must *keep the tongue* also, that no forbidden word go out of the door of the lips, no corrupt communication. By a constant watchfulness over our words, we shall prevent abundance of mischiefs which an ungoverned tongue runs men into. Keep thy heart, and that will keep thy tongue from sin; keep thy tongue, and that will keep thy heart from trouble.

24. *Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.*

See here the mischief of pride and haughtiness.

1. It exposes men to sin, it makes them passionate, and kindles in them the fire of *proud wrath*; they are continually dealing in it, as if it were their trade to be angry, and they had nothing so much to do as to barter passions, and exchange bitter words. Most of the wrath that inflames the spirits and societies of men, is *proud wrath*. Men cannot bear the least slight, nor in any thing to be crossed or contradicted, but they are out of humour, and in a heat, immediately. It likewise makes them scornful when they are angry, very abusive with their tongues, insolent toward those above them, and imperious toward all about them; *only by pride* comes all this.

2. It exposes men to shame; they get a bad name by it, and every one calls them *proud and haughty scorners*, and therefore no body cares for having any thing to do with them. If men would but consult their reputation a little, and the credit of their profession, which suffers with it, they would not indulge their pride and passion as they do.

25. *The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.* 26. *He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.*

Here is, 1. The miseries of the slothful, whose *hands refuse to labour* in an honest calling, by which they might get an honest livelihood; they are as fit for labour as other men, and business offers itself, to which they might lay their hands, and apply their minds, but they will not; herein they fondly think they do well for themselves; (see ch. 26. 16.) *Soul, take thine ease*; but really they are enemies to themselves; for, beside that their slothfulness starves them, depriving them of their necessary supports, their de-

sires at the same time stab them; though their hands refuse to labour, their hearts cease not to covet riches, and pleasures, and honours, which yet cannot be obtained without labour; their desires are impetuous and insatiable, they *covet greedily all the day long*, and cry, *Give, give*; they expect every body should do for them, though they will do nothing for themselves, much less for any body else; now these *desires kill them*, they are a perpetual vexation to them, fret them to death, and, perhaps, put them upon such dangerous courses, for the satisfying of their craving lusts, as hasten them to an untimely end. Many that must have money, with which to make provision for the flesh, and would not be at the pains to get it honestly, have turned highwaymen, and that has killed them. Those that are slothful in the affairs of their souls, and yet have desires toward that which would be the happiness of their souls, those *desires kill them*, will aggravate their condemnation, and be witnesses against them, that they were convinced of the worth of spiritual blessings, but refused to be at the pains that are necessary to the obtaining of them.

2. The honours of the honest and diligent. The righteous and industrious have their desires satisfied, and enjoy not only that satisfaction, but the further satisfaction of doing good to others. The slothful are always craving, and gaping to receive, *but the righteous are always full, and contriving to give; and it is more blessed to give than to receive.* They *give, and spare not*; give liberally, and upbraid not; they *give a portion to seven, and also to eight*, and do not spare for fear of wanting.

27. The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, *when* he bringeth it with a wicked mind!

Sacrifices were of divine institution, and, when they were offered in faith, and with repentance and reformation, God was greatly honoured by them, and well-pleased in them; but they were often not only unacceptable, but an *abomination, to God, and he declared so*; which was an indication, both that they were not required for their own sakes, and that there were better things, and more effectual, in reserve, when sacrifice and offering should be done away. They were an *abomination*,

1. When they were brought by wicked men, who did not, according to the true intent and meaning of sacrificing, repent of their sins, mortify their lusts, and amend their lives. Cain brought his offering. Even wicked men may be found in the external performances of religious worship; they can freely give God their beasts, their lips, their knees, who would not give him their hearts; the Pharisees gave alms. But when the person is an *abomination*, as every wicked man is to God, the performance cannot but be so; even *when he brings it diligently*; so some read the latter part of the verse. Though their offerings are continually before God, (Ps. 50. 8.) they are an abomination to him.

2. *Much more when* they were brought with *wicked minds*, when their sacrifices were made, not only consistent with, but serviceable to, their wickedness; as Absalom's vow, Jezebel's fast, and the Pharisees' long prayers. When men make a shew of devotion, that they may the more easily and effectually compass some covetous or malicious design; when holiness is pretended, but some wickedness intended; then, especially, the performance is an abomination, Isa. 66. 5.

28. A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.

Here is, 1. The doom of a *false witness*; He who, for favour to one side, or malice to the other, gives in a false evidence, or makes an affidavit of that which he knows to be false, or, at least, does not know to be true, if it be discovered, his reputation will be ruined; a man may tell a lie perhaps in his haste, but he that gives in a false testimony does it with deliberation and solemnity, and it cannot but be a presumptuous sin, and a forfeiture of man's credit; but, though it should not be discovered, he himself shall be ruined; the vengeance he imprecated upon himself, when he took the false oath, will come upon him.

2. The praise of him that is conscientious; He *who hears*, obeys the command of God, which is to *speak every man truth with his neighbour*; he who testifies nothing but what he has heard and knows to be true, *speaks constantly*, consistently with himself; he is always in the same story; he *speaks in finem—to the end*; people will give credit to him, and hear him out; he speaks unto victory, he carries the cause, which the *false witness* shall lose; he shall speak to eternity; what is true, is true eternally. *The lip of truth is established for ever.*

29. A wicked man hardeneth his face: but *as for* the upright, he directeth his way.

Here is, 1. The presumption and impudence of a wicked man; He *hardens his face*, brazens it, that he may not blush, steels it, that he may not tremble, when he commits the greatest crimes; he bids defiance to the terrors of the law, and the checks of his own conscience, the reproofs of the word and the rebukes of Providence; he will have his way, and nothing shall hinder him, Isa. 57. 17.

2. The caution and circumspection of a good man; *as for the upright*, he does not say, What *would* I do? What have I a mind to? That I will have; but, What *should* I do? What does God require of me? What is duty? What is prudence? What is for edification? And so he does not force his way, but *direct his way* by a safe and certain rule.

30. *There is* no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD. 31. The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety *is* of the LORD.

The designing, busy, part of mankind are here directed, in all their counsels and undertakings, to have their eye to God, and to believe,

1. That there can be no success *against* God, and therefore they must never act in opposition to him, in contempt of his commands, or in contradiction to his counsels. Though they think they have *wisdom, and understanding, and counsel*, the best politics and politicians, on their side, yet, if it be *against the Lord*, it cannot prosper long, it shall not prevail at last. He that sits in heaven laughs at men's projects against him and his Anointed, and will carry his point in despite of them, Ps. 2. 1. 6. They that fight against God are preparing shame and ruin for themselves; whoever *make war with the Lamb*, he will certainly *overcome them*, Rev. 17. 14.

2. That there can be no success *without* God, and therefore they must never act but in dependence on him. Be the cause ever so good, and the patrons of it ever so strong, and wise, and faithful, and the means of carrying it on, and gaining the point, ever so probable, still they must acknowledge God, and take him along with them. Means, indeed, are to be used; *the horse* must be *prepared against the day of battle*, and the foot too, they must be armed and disciplined; in Solomon's time, even Israel's kings used horses in war, though they were forbidden to multiply them; but, after all, *safety and salvation is of the Lord*; he can save without armies, but armies cannot without him; and therefore he must be sought to, and trusted in, for success, and, when success is obtained, he must have all the glory. When we are preparing for *the day of battle*, our great concern must be to make God our Friend, and secure his favour.

CHAP. XXII.

1. **A** *GOOD* name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.

Here are two things which are more valuable, and which we should covet more, than great riches.

1. To be well-spoken of; *A name*, that is, a *good man*, a name for good things with God and good people, this is *rather to be chosen than great riches*; that is, we should be more careful to do that by which we may get and keep a good name, than that

by which we may raise and increase a great estate. Great riches bring great cares with them, expose men to danger, and add no real value to a man. A fool and a knave may have *great riches*, but a *good name* makes a man easy and safe, supposes a man wise and honest, redounds to the glory of God, and gives a man a greater opportunity of doing good. By *great riches* we may relieve the bodily wants of others, but by a *good name* we may recommend religion to them.

2. To be well-beloved; to have an interest in the esteem and affections of all about us; this is better *than silver and gold*. Christ had neither silver nor gold, but he *grew in favour with God and man*, Luke, 2. 52. This should teach us to look with a holy contempt upon the wealth of this world, not to set our hearts upon that, but with all possible care to *think on those things that are lovely, and of good report*, Phil. 4. 8.

2. The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all.

Note, 1. Among the children of men, Divine Providence has so ordered it, that some are *rich* and others *poor*, and these are intermixed in societies; *the Lord is the Maker of both*; both the Author of their beings, and the Disposer of their lot. The greatest man in the world must acknowledge God to be his Maker, and is under the same obligations to be subject to him that the meanest are; and the poorest have the honour to be the work of God's hands as much as the greatest. *Have they not all one Father?* Mal. 2. 10. Job, 31. 15. God makes some rich, that they may be charitable to the poor, and others poor, that they may be serviceable to the rich; and they have need one of another, 1 Cor. 12. 21. He makes some poor, to exercise their patience, and contentment, and dependence upon God; and others rich, to exercise their thankfulness and beneficence. Even the *poor* we *have always with us*, they shall never cease out of the land, nor the rich neither.

2. Notwithstanding the distance that is in many respects between *rich and poor*, yet in most things they *meet together*, especially before the Lord, who is the *Maker of them all*, and regards not the *rich more than the poor*, Job, 34. 19. *Rich and poor meet together* at the bar of God's justice; all guilty before God, concluded under sin, and shapen in iniquity, the rich as much as the poor; and they meet at the throne of God's grace; the poor are as welcome there as the rich. There is the same Christ, the same scripture, the same Spirit, the same covenant of promises, for them both. There is the same heaven for poor saints that there is for rich; Lazarus is in the bosom of Abraham: and there is the same hell for rich sinners that there is for poor. All stand upon the same level before God, as they do also in the grave. *The small and great are there*.

3. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

See here, 1. The benefit of wisdom and consideration; *A prudent man*, by the help of his prudence, will *foresee an evil* before it comes, and *hide himself*; he will be aware when he is entering into a temptation, and will put on his armour, and stand on his guard; when the clouds are gathering for a storm, he takes the warning, and flies to the name of the Lord as his strong tower. Noah foresaw the deluge, Joseph the years of famine, and provided accordingly.

2. The mischief of rashness and inconsideration; the simple, who believe every word that flatters them, will believe none that warns them, and so they *pass on, and are punished*; they venture upon sin, though they are told what will be in the end thereof; they throw themselves into trouble, notwithstanding the fair warning given them, and they repent their presumption when it is too late. See an instance of both these, Exod. 9. 20, 21. Nothing is so fatal to precious souls as this, they will not take warning.

4. By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, honour, and life.

See here, 1. Wherein religion does very much consist; in *humility, and the fear of the Lord*; that is, walking humbly with

God; we must so reverence God's majesty and authority, as to submit with all humility to the commands of his word, and the disposals of his providence. We must have such low thoughts of ourselves, as to behave humbly toward God and man. Where the fear of God is, there will be humility.

2. What is to be gotten by it; *riches, and honour*, and comfort, and *long life*, in this world, as far as God sees good; at least, *spiritual riches and honour* in the favour of God, and the promises and privileges of the covenant of grace, and *eternal life* at last.

5. Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.

Note, 1. The way of sin is vexatious and dangerous; *In the way of the froward*, that crooked way, which is contrary to the will and word of God, *thorns and snares are found*; *thorns* of grief for past sins, and *snares* entangling them in further sin. He that makes no conscience of what he says, and does, will find himself hampered by that imaginary liberty, and tormented by his pleasures. *Froward* people, who are soon angry, expose themselves to trouble at every step. Every thing will fret and vex him that will fret and vex at every thing.

2. The way of duty is safe and easy; *He that keeps his soul*, that watches carefully over his own heart and ways, is *far from those thorns and snares*, for his way is both plain and pleasant.

6. Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Here is, 1. A great duty enjoined, particularly to those that are the parents and instructors of children, in order to the propagating of wisdom, that it may not die with them; *Train up children* in that age of vanity, to keep them from the sins and snares of it; in that learning age, to prepare them for what they are designed for. *Catechise* them, initiate them, keep them under discipline; *train* them as soldiers, who are taught to handle their arms, keep rank, and observe the word of command. *Train* them up, not in the way they *would* go, (the bias of their corrupt hearts would draw them aside,) but in the way they *should* go, the way in which, if you love them, you would have them go. *Train up a child according as he is capable*, so some take it; with a gentle hand, as nurses feed children, little and often, Deut. 6. 7.

2. A good reason for it, taken from the great advantage of this care and pains with children; when they *grow up*, when they *grow old*, it is to be hoped, they *will not depart from it*. Good impressions made upon them then, will abide upon them all their days. Ordinarily, the vessel retains the savour with which it was first seasoned. Many, indeed, have departed from the good way in which they were trained up; Solomon himself did; but it may be a means of their recovering themselves, as it is supposed Solomon did. At least, the parents will have the comfort of having done their duty, and used the means.

7. The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

He had said, (v. 2.) *Rich and poor meet together*; but here he finds, here he shews, that, as to the things of this life, there is a *great difference*; for,

1. Those that have little will be in subjection to those that have much, because they have dependence upon them, they have received, and expect to receive, support from them; *The rich rule over the poor*, and too often more than becomes them, with pride and rigour, unlike to God, who, though he be great, yet despises not any. It is part of the affliction of the poor, that they must expect to be trampled upon; and part of their duty, to be serviceable, as far as they can, to those that are kind to them, and study to be grateful.

2. Those that are going behind-hand, find themselves to lie much at the mercy of those that are before-hand; *The borrower is servant to the lender*, is obliged to him, and must sometimes beg,

Have patience with me. Therefore it is part of Israel's promised happiness, that they should lend and not borrow, Deut. 28. 12. And it should be our endeavour to keep as much as may be out of debt. Some sell their liberty to gratify their luxury.

8. He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.

Note, 1. Ill-gotten gains will not prosper; *He that sows iniquity*, that does an unjust thing, in hopes to get by it, *shall reap vanity*; what he gets will never do him any good, nor give him any satisfaction. He will meet with nothing but disappointment. They that create trouble to others, do but prepare trouble for themselves. Men shall reap as they sow.

2. Abused power will not last. If the rod of authority turn into a *rod of anger*, if men rule by passion instead of prudence, and, instead of the public welfare, aim at nothing so much as the gratifying of their own resentments, it *shall fail*, and be broken, and their power shall not bear them out in their exorbitances, Isa. 10. 24, 25.

9. He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.

Here is, 1. The description of a charitable man; he has a *bountiful eye*, opposed to the evil eye, (ch. 23. 6.) and the same with the *single eye*, (Matth. 6. 22.) an eye that seeks out objects of charity, beside those that offer themselves; an eye, that, upon the sight of one in want and misery, affects the heart with compassion; an eye, that, with the alms, gives a pleasant look, which makes the alms doubly acceptable. He has also a liberal hand, *he gives of his bread* to those that need; *his bread*, the bread appointed for his own eating. He will rather abridge himself than see the poor perish for want; yet he does not give all *his bread*, but of *his bread*; the poor shall have their share with his own family.

2. The blessedness of such a man; the joins of the poor will bless him, all about him will speak well of him, and God himself shall bless him, in answer to many a good prayer put up for him, and he *shall be blessed*.

10. Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.

See here, 1. What *the scorner* does; it is implied that he sows discord, and makes mischief, wherever he comes; much of the *strife and contention* which disturb the peace of all societies is owing to *the evil interpreter*, as some read it, that construes every thing into the worst; to those that despise and deride every one that comes in their way, and take a pride in bantering and abusing all mankind.

2. What is to be done with *the scorner*, that will not be reclaimed; *Cast him out of your society*, as Ishmael, when he mocked Isaac, was thrust out of Abraham's family. They that would secure the peace must seclude *the scorner*.

11. He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.

Here is, 1. The qualifications of an accomplished, a complete, gentleman, that is fit to be employed in public business; he must be an honest man, a man *that loves pureness of heart*, and hates all impurity; not only pure from all fleshly lusts, but from all deceit and dissimulation, from all selfishness and sinister designs; that takes care to approve himself a man of sincerity, is just and fair from principle, and delights in nothing more than in keeping his own conscience clear, and void of offence. He must also be able to speak with a good grace; not to daub and flatter, but to deliver himself decently and ingenuously, in language as clean and smooth as his spirit.

2. The preferment such a man stands fair for; *The king*, if he be wise and good, and understand his own and his people's interest, *shall be his friend*, shall make him of his cabinet-council, as there was one in David's court, and another in Solomon's, that was

called the *king's friend*; or, in any business that he has, the king will befriend him. Some understand it of the King of kings; a man *in whose spirit there is no guile*, and whose speech is always with grace, God will be his Friend, Messiah, the Prince, will be his Friend; *this honour have all the saints*.

12. The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor.

Here is, 1. The special care God takes to *preserve knowledge*, to keep up religion in the world, by keeping up among men the knowledge of himself and of good and evil, notwithstanding the corruption of mankind, and the artifices of Satan to blind men's minds and keep them in ignorance; it is a wonderful instance of the power and goodness of *the eyes of the Lord*, his watchful providence. He preserves *men of knowledge*, wise and good men, (2 Chron. 16. 9.) particularly faithful witnesses, who speak what they know; God protects such, and prospers their counsels. He does, by his grace, *preserve knowledge* in such, secures his own work and interest in them: see Prov. 2. 7, 8.

2. The just vengeance God takes on those that speak and act against knowledge, against their own knowledge, and against the interests of knowledge and religion in the world; *He overthroweth the words of the transgressor*, and *preserves knowledge* in spite of them. He defeats all the counsels and designs of false and treacherous men, and turns them to their own confusion.

13. The slothful man saith, *There is a lion with* out, *I shall be slain in the streets*.

Note, 1. Those that have no love for their business will never want excuses to shift it off. Multitudes are ruined, both for soul and body, by their slothfulness, and yet still they have something or other to say for themselves; so ingenious are men in putting a cheat upon their own souls! And who, I pray, will be the gainer at last, when the pretences will be all rejected as vain and frivolous?

2. Many frighten themselves from real duties by imaginary difficulties; *The slothful man* has work to do *without* in the fields, but he fancies *there is a lion* there; nay, he pretends he dares not go along the streets, for fear some body or other should meet him and kill him. He does not himself think so, he only says so to those that call him up; he talks of a *lion without*, but considers not his real danger from the Devil, that *roaring lion*, which is in bed with him, and from his own slothfulness, which kills him.

14. The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein.

This is designed to warn all young men against the lusts of uncleanness; as they tender the welfare of their souls, let them take heed of *strange women*, lewd women, whom they ought to be strange to; of *the mouth of strange women*, of the kisses of their lips, (ch. 7. 13.) of the words of their lips, their charms and enticements; dread them, have nothing to do with them; for,

1. Those who abandon themselves to that sin prove that they are abandoned of God; it is a *deep pit*, which those *fall* into that are *abhorred of the Lord*, who leaves them to themselves to enter into that temptation, and takes off the bridle of his restraining grace, to punish them for other sins. Value not thyself upon thy being in favour with such women, when it bespeaks thee under the wrath of God.

2. It is seldom that they recover themselves, for it is a *deep pit*, it will be hard getting out of it, it so besots the mind, and debauches the conscience, by pleasing the flesh.

15. Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

We have here two very sad considerations:

1. That corruption is woven into our nature; Sin is *foolishness*, it is contrary both to our right reason and to our true interest; it is *in the heart*, there is an inward inclination to sin, to speak and

act foolishly; it is in the heart of children, they bring it into the world with them, it is what they were shapen and conceived in; it is not only found there, but it is bound there, it is annexed to the heart; so some vicious dispositions cleave close to the soul, are bound to it, as the scion to the stock into which it is grafted, which quite alters the property; there is a knot tied between the soul and sin, a true lover's knot; they two become one flesh. It is true of ourselves, it is true of our children, whom we have begot in our own likeness. *O God, thou knowest this foolishness.*

2. That correction is necessary to the cure of it; it will not be got out by fair means and gentle methods, there must be strictness and severity, and that which will cause grief. Children need to be corrected, and kept under discipline, by their parents; and we all need to be corrected by our heavenly Father; (Heb. 12. 6, 7.) and under the correction we must stroke down folly, and kiss the rod.

16. He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.

This shews what evil courses rich men sometimes take, by which, in the end, they will impoverish themselves, and provoke God, notwithstanding their abundance, to bring them to want; they oppress the poor, and give to the rich; that is,

1. They will not in charity relieve the poor, but withhold from them, that, by saving that which is really the best, but which they think the most needless part, of their expences, they may increase their riches; but they will make presents to the rich, and give them great entertainments, either in pride and vain glory, that they may look great, or in policy, that they may receive it again with advantage; such shall surely come to want. Many have been beggared by a foolish generosity, but never any by a prudent charity. Christ bids us invite the poor, Luke, 14. 12, 13.

2. They not only will not relieve the poor, but they oppress them, rob the spital,* extort from their poor tenants and neighbours, invade their rights, who have not wherewithal to defend themselves, and then give bribes to the rich, to protect and countenance them in it; but it is all in vain, they shall come to want. They that rob God, and so make him their Enemy, cannot secure themselves by giving to the rich, to make them their friends.

17. Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. 18. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall wilhal be fitted in thy lips. 19. That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. 20. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge; 21. That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?

Solomon here changes his style and manner of speaking; hitherto, for the most part, since the beginning of ch. 10. he had laid down doctrinal truths, and but now and then dropt a word of exhortation, leaving us to make the application as we went along; but here, to the end of ch. 24. he directs his speech to his son, his pupil, to his reader, his hearer, speaking as to a particular person: hitherto, for the most part, his sense was comprised in one verse, but here usually it is drawn out further. See how Wisdom tries variety of methods with us, lest we should be cloyed with any one. We are addressed, in order that our attention may be awakened, and our application assisted. Ministers must not think it enough to preach before their hearers, but must preach to them; nor enough to preach to them all in general, but should apply themselves to particular persons, as here; *Do thou do so and so.* Here is,

I. An earnest exhortation to get wisdom and grace, by attending to the words of the wise men, both written and preached; the words of the prophets and priests; and particularly to that knowledge which Solomon, in this book, gives men of good and evil, sin and duty, rewards and punishments. To these words, to this knowledge, the ear must be bowed down, in humility and serious attention; and the heart applied by faith, and love, and close consideration. The ear will not serve without the heart.

II. Arguments to enforce this exhortation. Consider,

1. The worth and weight of the things themselves, which Solomon in this book gives us the knowledge of; they are not trivial things, for amusement and diversion, not jocular proverbs, to be repeated in sport, and in order to pass away time; no, they are excellent things, which concern the glory of God, the holiness and happiness of our souls, the welfare of mankind, and all communities; they are princely things, so the word is, fit for kings to speak, and senates to hear; they are things that concern counsels and knowledge, wise counsels, relating to the most important concerns; things which will not only make us knowing ourselves, but enable us to advise others.

2. The clearness of the discovery of these things, and the directing of them to us in particular. They are made known, publicly known, that all may read; plainly known, that he that runs may read; made known this day, more fully than ever before, in this day of light and knowledge; made known in this thy day; but it is only a little while that this light is with thee; perhaps the things that are this day made known to thee, if thou improve not the day of thy visitation, may, before to-morrow, be hid from thine eyes. They are written, for the greater certainty, and that they may be received, and transmitted, pure and entire, to posterity; but that which the emphasis is here most laid upon, is, that they are made known to thee, even to thee, and written to thee, as if it were a letter directed to thee by name; it is suited to thee and to thy case, thou mayest in this glass see thine own face; it is intended for thee, to be a rule to thee, and by it thou must be judged. We cannot say of these things, They are good things, but they are nothing to us; no, they are of the greatest concern imaginable to us.

3. The agreeableness of these things to us, in respect both of comfort and credit. (1.) If we hide them in our hearts, they will be very pleasing, and yield us an abundant satisfaction; (v. 18.) *"It is a pleasant thing, and will be thy constant entertainment, if thou keep them within thee; if thou digest them, and be actuated and governed by them, and delivered into them as into a mould."* The form of godliness, when that is rested in, is but a force put upon a man, and he does but do penance in that white clothing; those only that submit to the power of godliness, and make heart-work of it, find the pleasure of it, ch. 2. 10. (2.) If we make use of them in our discourse, they will be very becoming, and gain us a good reputation; they shall be fitted in thy lips; *"Speak of these things, and thou speakest like thyself, and as is fit for thee to speak, considering thy character; thou wilt also have pleasure in speaking of these things, as well as in thinking of them."*

4. The advantage designed us by them. The excellent things which God hath written to us are not like the commands which the master gives his servant, which are all intended for the benefit of the master, but like those which the master gives his scholar, which are all intended for the benefit of the scholar. These things must be kept by us, for they are written to us,

(1.) That we may have a confidence in God, and so may have comfort in him, and communion with him; that thy trust may be in the Lord, v. 19. We cannot trust in God, except in the way of duty; we are, therefore, taught our duty, that we may have reason to trust in God. Nay, this is itself one great duty we are to learn, and a duty that is the foundation of all practical religion, to live a life of delight in God, and dependence on him.

(2.) That we may have a satisfaction in our own judgment; *"That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth."*

* A corruption of the word *hospital*, denoting here any charitable foundation.—ED.

That thou mayest know what is truth, mayest plainly distinguish between it and falsehood, and mayest know upon what grounds thou receivest and believest the truths of God." Note, [1.] It is a desirable thing to know, not only *the words of truth*, but the *certainly of them*; that our faith may be intelligent and rational, and may grow up to a full assurance. [2.] The way to *know the certainty of the words of truth*, is, to make conscience of our duty; for if any man do his will, he shall know for certain that the doctrine is of God, John, 7. 17.

(3.) That we may be useful and serviceable to others for their instruction; "*That thou mayest give a good account of the words of truth to them that send to thee to consult thee as an oracle*;" or, as the margin reads it, "*to those that send thee, that employ thee as an agent or ambassador in any business*." Knowledge is given us to do good with, that others may light their candle at our lamp, and that we may in our place serve our generation according to the will of God. And those who make conscience of keeping God's commandments will be best able to give a reason of the hope that is in them.

22. Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: 23. For the LORD will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.

After this solemn preface, one would have expected something new and surprising; no: here is a plain and common, but very needful, caution against the barbarous and inhuman practice of oppressing poor people. Observe,

1. The sin itself, and that is, *robbing the poor*, and making them poorer; taking from those that have but little to lose, and so leaving them nothing. It is bad to rob any man, but most absurd to rob the poor, whom we should relieve; to squeeze those with our power, whom we should water with our bounty; to oppress the afflicted, and so to add affliction to them; to give judgment against them, and so to patronise those that do rob them; which is as bad as if we robbed them ourselves. Rich men will not suffer themselves to be wronged, poor men cannot help it, and therefore we ought to be the more careful not to wrong them.

2. The aggravations of the sin. (1.) If their inability, by reason of their poverty, to right themselves, imbolden us to rob them, it is so much the worse; that is *robbing the poor because he is poor*; this is not only a base and cowardly thing, to take advantage against a man because he is helpless, but it is unnatural, and bespeaks men worse than beasts. (2.) Or if it be done under colour of law and justice, that is *oppressing the afflicted in the gate*, where they ought to be protected from wrong, and to have justice done them against those that oppress them.

3. The danger that attends this sin. He that robs and oppresses the poor, it is at his peril; for, (1.) The oppressed will find God their powerful Patron; he will plead their cause, and not suffer them to be run down and trampled upon. If men will not appear for them, God will. (2.) The oppressors will find him a just Avenger; he will make reprisals upon them, will spoil the souls of those that spoil them; he will repay them in spiritual judgments, in curses to their souls. He that robs the poor will be found in the end a murderer of himself.

24. Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: 25. Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.

Here is, 1. A good caution against being intimate with a passionate man. It is the law of friendship that we accommodate ourselves to our friends, and be ready to serve them, and therefore we ought to be wise and wary in the choice of a friend, that we come not under that sacred tie to any one whom it would be our folly to accommodate ourselves to; though we must be civil to all, yet we must be careful whom we lay in our bosoms, and contract a familiarity with. And, among others, a man who is easily provoked, touchy, and apt to resent affronts, who, when he is in a passion, cares not what he says or does, but grows

outrageous, such a one is not fit to be made a friend or companion, for he will be ever and anon angry with us, and that will be our trouble, and will expect that we should, like him, be angry with others, and that will be our sin.

2. Good cause given for this caution; *lest thou learn his way*. Those we go with we are apt to grow like. Our corrupt hearts have so much tinder in them, that it is dangerous conversing with those that throw about the sparks of their passion; we shall thereby get a snare to our souls, for a disposition to anger is a great snare to any man, and an occasion of much sin. He does not say, "Lest thou have ill language given thee, or get a broken head," but, which is much worse, "Lest thou imitate him, to humour him, and so contract an ill habit."

26. Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. 27. If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?

We have here, as often before, a caution against suretiship, as a thing both imprudent and unjust.

1. We must not associate ourselves, nor contract an intimacy, with men of broken fortunes and reputations, who need, and will urge their friends to be bound for them, that they may cheat their neighbours, to feed their lusts, and, by keeping up a little longer, may do the more damage at last to those that give them credit. Have nothing to do with such; be not thou among them.

2. We must not cheat people of their money, by striking hands ourselves, or becoming surety for others, when we have not to pay. If a man by the Divine Providence is disabled to pay his debts, he ought to be pitied and helped, but he that takes up money or goods himself, or is bound for another, when he knows that he has not wherewithal to pay, or that which he has is so settled, that the creditors cannot come at it, he does in effect pick his neighbour's pocket, and though, in all cases, compassion is to be used, yet he may thank himself if the law have its course, and his bed be taken from under him, which might not be taken for a pawn to secure a debt, Exod. 22. 26, 27. For if a man appeared to be so poor that he had nothing else to give for security, he ought to be relieved, and it was honestly done to own it; but for the recovery of a debt, it seems it might be taken by the *summum jus—the strict operation of law*.

3. We must not ruin our own estates and families: every man ought to be just to himself, and to his wife and children; those are not so who live above what they have, who, by the mismanagement of their own affairs, or by incumbering themselves with the debts of others, waste what they have, and bring themselves to poverty. We may take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, if it be for the testimony of a good conscience; but if it be for our own rashness and folly, we cannot but take it heavily.

28. Remove not the ancient land-mark which thy fathers have set.

1. We are here taught not to invade another man's right, though we can find ways of doing it ever so secretly and plausibly, clandestinely and by fraud, without any open force. Let not property in general be entrenched upon, by robbing men of their liberties and privileges, or of any just ways of maintaining them. Let not the property of particular persons be encroached upon; the land-marks, or meer-stones, are standing witnesses to every man's right, let not those be removed quite away, for thence come wars, and fightings, and endless disputes; let them not be removed so as to take from thy neighbour's lot to thine own; for that is downright robbing him, and entailing of the fraud upon posterity.

2. We may infer hence, that a deference is to be paid, in all civil matters, to usages that have prevailed time out of mind, and the settled constitutions of government, in which it becomes us to acquiesce; lest an attempt to change it, under pretence of changing it for the better, prove of dangerous consequence.

29. Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.

Here is, 1. A plain intimation, what a hard thing it is to find a truly ingenious, industrious man; "*Seest thou a man diligent in his business?* Thou wilt not see many such, so epidemical are dulness and slothfulness." He is here commended, who lays out himself to get business, though it be but in a very low and narrow sphere, and is not easy when he is out of business, who loves business, is quick and active in it, and goes through it, not only with constancy and resolution, but with dexterity and expedition, a man of dispatch, who knows how to bring a deal of business into a little compass.

2. A moral prognostication of the preferment of such a man; though now he *stands before mean men*, is employed by them, and attends upon them, yet he will rise, and is likely enough to *stand before kings*, as an ambassador to foreign kings, or prime minister of state to his own. *Seest thou a man diligent* in the business of religion? He is likely to excel in virtue, and shall stand before the King of kings.

CHAP. XXIII.

1. **W**HEN thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee:
2. And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. 3. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat.

The sin we are here warned against, is, luxury and sensuality, and the indulgence of the appetite in eating and drinking, a sin that most easily besets us.

1. We are here told when we enter into temptation, and are in most danger of falling into this sin; "*When thou sittest to eat with a ruler*, thou hast great plenty before thee, varieties and dainties, such a table as thou hast seldom seen; thou art ready to think, as Haman did, of nothing but the honour hereby done thee; (Esth. 5. 12.) and the opportunity thou hast of pleasing thy palate, and forgettest that there is a snare laid for thee." Perhaps the temptation may be stronger and more dangerous to one that is not used to such entertainments, than to one that always sits down to a good table.

2. We are here bid to double our guard at such a time. We must, (1.) Apprehend ourselves to be in danger; "*Consider diligently what is before thee*, what meat and drink are before thee, that thou mayest choose that which is safest for thee, and which thou art least likely to eat and drink of to excess. Consider what company is before thee, the ruler himself, who, if he be wise and good, will take it as an affront for any of his guests to disorder themselves at his table." And if when we sit to eat with a ruler, much more when we sit to eat with the Ruler of rulers at the Lord's table, must we *consider diligently what is before us*, that we may not in any respect *eat and drink unworthily*, unbecomingly, lest that table become a snare. (2.) We must alarm ourselves into temperance and moderation; "*Put a knife to thy throat*, restrain thyself, as it were with a sword hanging over thy head, from all excess. Let these words, *Take heed lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and so that day come upon you at unawares*; or those, *For all these things God shall bring thee into judgment*; or those, *Drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God*; be a knife to the throat." The Latins call luxury, *gula*—the throat; "Take up arms against that sin. Rather be so abstemious, that thy craving appetite will begin to think thy throat cut, than indulge thyself in voluptuousness." We must never *feed ourselves without fear*, (Jude, 12.) but we must in a special manner fear when temptation is before us. (3.) We must reason ourselves into a holy contempt of the gratifications of sense; "*If thou be a man given to appetite*, thou must, by a present resolution, and an application of the terrors of the Lord, restrain thyself. When thou art in danger of falling into any excess, *put a knife to thy throat*; that may serve for once.

But that is not enough, lay the axe to the root, mortify that appetite which has such a power over thee, *be not desirous of dainties*." Note, We ought to observe what is our own iniquity, and, if we find ourselves addicted to flesh-pleasing, we must not only stand upon our guard against temptations from without, but subdue the corruption within. Nature is desirous of food, and we are taught to pray for it, but it is lust that is desirous of dainties, and we cannot in faith pray for them, for frequently they are not food convenient either for mind, body, or estate. They are deceitful meat, and therefore David, instead of praying for them, prays against them, Ps. 141. 4. They are pleasant to the palate, but perhaps rise in the stomach, turn sour there, upbraid a man, and make him sick. They do not yield men the satisfaction they promised themselves from them; for those that are given to appetite, when they have that which is very dainty, are not pleased, they are soon weary of it, they must have something else more dainty; the more a luxurious appetite is humoured and indulged, the more humoursome and troublesome it grows, and the more hard to please; dainties will surfeit, but never satisfy. But especially they are, upon *this* account, deceitful meat, that, while they please the body, they prejudice the soul, they over-charge the heart, and unfit it for the service of God, nay, they take away the heart, and alienate the mind, from spiritual delights, and spoil its relish of them. Why then should we covet that which will certainly cheat us?

4. Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. 5. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they flee away as an eagle towards heaven.

As some are given *to* appetite, (v. 2.) so others to covetousness, and those Solomon here takes to task. Men cheat themselves as much by setting their hearts on money (though it seems most substantial) as by setting them on dainties. Observe,

1. How he dissuades the covetous man from toiling and tormenting himself; (v. 4.) "*Do not aim to be rich*; to raise an estate, and to make what thou hast in abundance, more than it is." We must endeavour to live comfortably, and provide for our children and families, according as our rank and condition are, but we must not seek great things. Be not of those that will be rich, that desire it as their chief good, and design it as their highest end, 1 Tim. 6. 9. Covetous men think it is their wisdom, imagining that if they be rich to such a degree, they shall be completely happy; *cease from that wisdom*, for it is a mistake, *a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses*, Luke, 12. 15. Those that aim at great things,

1. "They fill their hands with business more than they can grasp, so that their life is both a perfect drudgery and a perpetual hurry; but be not thou such a fool, *labour not to be rich*. What thou hast and doest, be master of it, and not a slave to it, as those that *rise up early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness*, and all to be rich." Moderate labour, *that we may have to give*, is our wisdom and duty, Eph. 4. 28. Immoderate labour, that we may have to hoard, is our sin and folly.

2. "They fill their heads with projects more than they understand, so that their life is a constant toss of care and fear; but do not thou vex thyself, *cease from thine own wisdom*, go on quietly in the way of thy business, not contriving new ways, and setting thy wits on work to find out new inventions. Acquiesce in God's wisdom, and cease from thine own, ch. 3. 5, 6.

II. How he dissuades the covetous man from cheating and deceiving himself by an inordinate love and pursuit of that which is vanity and vexation of spirit; for,

1. It is not substantial and satisfying; "*Wilt thou be such a fool as to set thine eyes*, to cause thine eyes to fly with eagerness and violence, *upon that which is not?*" Note, (1.) The things of this world are things that are not. They have a real existence in nature, and are the real gifts of Providence, but in the kingdom of grace they are things that are not; they are not a happiness

and portion for a soul; are not what they promise to be, nor what we expect them to be; they are a shew, a shadow, a sham upon the soul that trusts to them; they are not, for in a little while they will not be, they will not be our's, they perish in the using; the fashion of them passes away. (2.) It is therefore folly for us to set our eyes upon them; to admire them as the best things, and appropriate them to ourselves as our good things, and to aim at them as our mark at which all our actions are levelled; to fly upon them as the eagle upon her prey. "Wilt thou do a thing so absurd in itself? What, thou a reasonable creature, wilt thou dote upon shadows? The eyes are put for rational and intellectual powers; wilt thou throw those away upon such undeserving objects? To set the *hands* and *feet* upon the world is well enough, but not the *eyes* the eyes of the mind, those were made to contemplate better things. Wilt thou, my son, that professest religion, put such an affront upon God, (toward whom thine eyes should ever be,) and such an abuse upon thy own soul?"

2. It is not durable and abiding; Riches are very uncertain things, certainly they are so, *they make themselves wings, and flee away*. The more we cause our eyes to fly upon them, the more likely they are to flee away from us. (1.) Riches will leave us; those that hold them ever so fast, cannot hold them always, cannot hold them long; either they must be taken from us, or we must be taken from them. The goods are said to flow away as a stream, (Job, 20. 28.) here to flee away as a bird. (2.) Perhaps they may leave us suddenly; when we have taken a great deal of pains for them, and begin to take a great deal of pride and pleasure in them. The covetous man sits hatching upon his wealth, and brooding over it till it is fledged, as the young ones under the hen, and then it is gone. Or, as if a man should be fond of a flight of wild-fowl that light in his field, and call them his own, because they are upon his ground, whereas if he offer to come near them, they take wing immediately, and are gone to another man's field. (3.) The wings they flee away upon are of their own making; they have in themselves the principles of their own corruption, their own moth and rust. They are wasting in their own nature, and like a handful of dust, which if it be grasped, slips through the fingers. Snow will last a while, and look pretty, if it be left to lie on the ground where it fell, but if gathered up and laid in the bosom, it is dissolved and gone immediately. (4.) They go irresistibly and irrecoverably, *as an eagle toward heaven*, that flies strongly, there is no stopping her, and flies out of sight and out of call, there is no bringing her back; thus do riches leave men, and leave them in grief and vexation, if they set their hearts upon them.

6. Eat thou not the bread of *him that hath* an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: 7. For as he thinketh in his heart, so *is* he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart *is* not with thee. 8. The morsel *which* thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.

Those that are voluptuous, and given to appetite, (v. 2.) are glad to be where there is good cheer stirring, and those that are covetous and saving, that they may spare at home, will be glad to get a dinner at another man's table; and therefore both are here advised not to be forward to accept of every man's invitation, but especially not to thrust themselves in, uninvited. Observe,

1. There are those that pretend to bid their friends welcome, that are not hearty and sincere in it. They have a fair tongue, and know what they should say; *Eat and drink, saith he*, because it is expected that the master of the feast should so compliment his guests; but they have *an evil eye*, and grudge their guests every bit they eat, especially if they eat freely. They would seem to be liberal in making the entertainment, and would have the credit of it, but they have so great a love to their money, and so little to their friends, that they cannot have the comfort of it, nor any enjoyment of themselves or their friends. The miser's feast is his penance. If a man be so very selfish, and sordid, that he cannot find in his heart to bid his friends welcome to what he has, he

ought not to add to that the guilt of dissimulation by inviting them, but let him own himself to be what he is, that *the vile person may not be called liberal, or the churl bountiful*, Isa. 32. 5.

2. One can have no comfort in accepting the entertainments that are given grudgingly; "*Eat not thou the bread* of such a man, let him keep it to himself. Do not sponge upon those that are bountiful, nor make thyself burthensome to any; but especially scorn to be beholden to those that are paltry, and not sincere. Better have a dinner of herbs and true welcome, than dainty meats without it. Therefore," (1.) "Judge of the man as his mind is; thou thinkest to pay thy respect to him as a friend, so thou takest him to be, because he speaks fair, but, *as he thinks in his heart, so is he*, not as he speaks with his tongue." We are that really, both to God and man, which we are inwardly; and neither religion nor friendship is worth any thing further than as it is sincere. (2.) "Judge of the meat, as the digestion is, and as it agrees with thee. He bids thee eat freely, but, first or last, he will discover his sordid covetous humour, and *as he thinks in his heart*, so he will look and give thee to understand that thou art not welcome, and then *the morsel thou hast eaten thou shalt vomit up*, the very thought of that will make thee even to vomit the meat thou hast eaten, and eat the words thou hast spoken in returning his compliments, and giving him thanks for his civilities. Thou shalt *lose thy sweet words* which he has given thee, and thou hast given him."

9. Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.

We are here directed not to *cast pearls before swine*, (Matth. 7. 6.) and not to expose things sacred to the contempt and ridicule of profane scoffers. It is our duty to take all fit occasions to speak of divine things; but,

1. There are some that will make a jest of every thing, though it be ever so prudently and pertinently spoken; that will not only despise a wise man's words, but despise even the wisdom of them, that in them which is most improvable for their own edification; they will particularly reproach that, as if it had an ill design upon them, which they must guard against.

2. Those that do so forfeit the benefit of good advice and instruction, and a wise man is not only allowed, but advised, not to *speak in the ears* of such fools; let them be foolish still, and let not precious breath be thrown away upon them. If what a wise man says in his wisdom will not be heard, let him hold his peace, and try whether the wisdom of that will be regarded.

10. Remove not the old land-mark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: 11. For their redeemer *is* mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.

Note, 1. The fatherless are taken under God's special protection; with him they not only find mercy shewed to them, (Hos. 14. 3.) but justice done for them. He is their Redeemer, their *Goel*, their near Kinsman, that will take their part, and stand up for them with jealousy, as taking himself affronted in the injuries done to them. As their *Redeemer*, he will *plead their cause* against those that do them any injury, and, one way or other, will not only defend their right, and recover it for them, but avenge the wrongs done to them. And he is mighty, almighty; his omnipotence is engaged and employed for their protection, which their proudest and most powerful oppressors will find themselves an unequal match for; and that it is at their peril to contend with it.

2. Every man therefore must be careful not to injure them in any thing, or to invade their rights; either by a clandestine removal of the old land-marks, or by a forcible entry into their fields. Being fatherless, they have none to right them, and, being in their childhood, they do not so much as apprehend the wrong that is done them. Sense of honour, and much more the fear of God, should restrain men from offering any injury to children, especially fatherless children.

12. Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine

ears to the words of knowledge. 13. Withhold not correction from the child: for *if* thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. 14. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. 15. My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. 16. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things.

Here is, 1. A parent *instructing* his child. He is here brought in, persuading him to give his mind to his book, and especially to the scriptures and his catechism; to attend to the words of knowledge, by which he might come to know his duty, and danger, and interest, and not to think it enough to give them the hearing, but to apply his heart to them, to delight in them, and bow his will to the authority of them. The heart is *then* applied to the instruction, when the instruction is applied to the heart.

2. A parent *correcting* his child. A tender parent can scarcely find in his heart to do it, it goes much against the grain, but he finds it is necessary, it is his duty, and therefore he dares not withhold correction when there is occasion for it; (*spare the rod, and spoil the child;*) he *beats him with the rod*, gives him a gentle correction, the stripes of the sons of men, not such as we give to beasts. *Beat him with the rod, and he shall not die;* the rod will not kill him; nay, it will prevent his killing himself by those vicious courses which the rod will be necessary to restrain him from. For the present, it is *not joyous but grievous*, both to the parent and to the child; but, when it is given with wisdom, designed for good, accompanied with prayer, and blessed of God, it may prove a happy means of preventing his utter destruction, and *delivering his soul from hell*. Our great care must be about our children's souls, we must not see them in danger of hell, without using all possible means, with the utmost care and concern, to snatch them as brands out of everlasting burnings. Let the body smart, so that the spirit be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

3. A parent *encouraging* his child, telling him, (1.) What was all he expected; nothing but what would be for his own good, that *his heart be wise*, and that *his lips speak right things*; that he be under the government of good principles, and that by those principles he particularly maintain a good government of his tongue. It is to be hoped, that those will do *right things*, when they grow up, who learn to *speak right things* when they are young, and dare not speak any bad words. (2.) What a comfort it would be to him, if herein he answered his expectation; "*If thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice*, shall rejoice in thee; even mine, who have taken so much care and pains about thee, my heart, that has many a time ached for thee, for which thou shouldest study thus to make a grateful requital." Note, The wisdom of children will be the joy of their parents and teachers, who have no greater joy than to see them *walk in the truth*, 3 John, 4. "Children, if you be wise and good, devout and conscientious, God will be pleased with you, and that will be our joy: we shall think our labour, in instructing you, well bestowed; it will be a comfortable answer for the many prayers we have put up for you; we shall be eased of a great deal of care, shall not need to be so strict and severe in watching over you, and shall, consequently, be the easier, both to you and to ourselves. We shall rejoice in hope that you will be a credit and comfort to us, if we should live to be old, that you will bear up the name of Christ in your generation, that you will live comfortably in this world, and happily in another."

17. Let not thine heart envy sinners: but *be thou* in the fear of the LORD all the day long: 18. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.

Here is, 1. A necessary caution against entertaining any favourable thoughts of prospering profaneness; "*Let not thine heart envy sinners*; do not grudge them either the liberty they take to sin, or the success they have in sin, it will cost them dear, and

they are to be pitied rather than envied. Their prosperity is their portion, (Ps. 17. 14.) nay, it is *their poison*," Prov. 1. 32. We must not harbour in our hearts any secret discontent at the providence of God, though it seem to smile upon them, nor wish ourselves in their condition. "*Let not thine heart imitate sinners*," (so some read it,) do not as they do, walk not in the way with them, use not the methods they take to enrich themselves, though they thrive by them.

2. An excellent direction to maintain high thoughts of God in our minds at all times, *Be thou in the fear of the Lord* every day, and *all the day long*. We must be in the fear of the Lord, as in our employment, exercising ourselves in holy adorings of God, in subjection to his precepts, submission to his providences, and a constant care to please him; we must be in it as in our element, taking a pleasure in contemplating God's glory, and complying with his will. It is to be *devoted to his fear*, (Ps. 119. 38.) and governed by it as our commanding principle in all we say and do. All the days of our life we must constantly keep up an awe of God upon our spirits, must pay a deference to his authority, and have a dread of his wrath. We must be always so in his fear as never to be out of it.

3. A good reason for both of these; (v. 18.) *Surely there is an end*, an end and expectation, as Jer. 29. 11. *There will be an end of the prosperity of the wicked*, therefore *do not envy them*; (Ps. 73. 17.) there will be an end of thy afflictions, therefore be not weary of them; an end of thy services, thy work and warfare will be accomplished, *perfect love will cast out fear*, and *thine expectation of the reward* not only will be *not cut off*, or disappointed, but it will be infinitely out-done. The consideration of the end will help to reconcile us to all the difficulties and discouragements of the way.

19. Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. 20. Be not amongst winebibbers; amongst riotous eaters of flesh: 21. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. 22. Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old. 23. Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. 24. The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. 25. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice. 26. My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways. 27. For an whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit. 28. She also lieth in wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men.

Here is good advice for parents to give to their children; words are put into their mouths, that they may *train them up in the way they should go*. Here we have,

1. An earnest call to young people to attend to the advice of their godly parents, not only to this that is here given, but to all other profitable instructions; "*Hear, my son, and be wise*, v. 19. This will be an evidence that thou art wise, and a means to make thee wiser." Wisdom, as *Faith*, comes by *hearing*. And again, (v. 22.) "*Hearken unto thy father who begat thee*, and who therefore has an authority over thee, and an affection for thee, and, thou mayest be sure, can have no other design than thine own good." We ought to *give reverence to the fathers of our flesh*, who begat us, and were the instruments of our being; much more ought we to obey, and be in subjection to, the *Father of our spirits*, who made us, and is the Author of our being. And since *the mother* also, from a sense of duty to God, and in love to her child, g^o

him good instructions, let him not *despise her*, or her advice, *when she is old*. When the mother is grown old, we may suppose the children to be grown up; but let them not think themselves past being taught, even by her, but rather respect her the more for the multitude of her years, and the wisdom which they teach. Scornful and insolent young men will make a jest, it may be, of the good advice of an aged mother, and think themselves not concerned to heed what an old woman says; but such will have a great deal to answer for another day, not only as having set at nought good counsel, but as having slighted and grieved a good mother, *ch. 30. 17.*

II. An argument to enforce this call, taken from the great comfort which this will be to their parents, *v. 24, 25.* Note, 1. It is the duty of children to study how they may rejoice the hearts of their good parents, and do it yet more and more, so that they may *greatly rejoice* in them, even when the *evil days come*, and the *years of which they say they have no pleasure in them*, but this, to see their children do well; as *Barzillai* to see *Chimham* preferred. 2. Children will be a joy to their parents, if they be *righteous and wise*. Righteousness is true wisdom; they who do good, do well for themselves. Those are completely such as they should be, who are not only wise, knowing and learned, but *righteous*, honest and good; and not only *righteous*, conscientious and well-meaning, but *wise*, prudent and discreet in the management of themselves. If such the children be, especially all the children, the father and mother will be glad, and think nothing too much that they have done, or do, for them; they will please themselves in them, and give God thanks for them; particularly she that bare them with pain, and nursed them with pains, will rejoice in them, and reckon herself well-requited, and the sorrow more than forgotten, because a wise and good man is the product of it, who is a blessing to the world he was born into.

III. Some general precepts of wisdom and virtue.

1. *Guide thine heart in the way, v. 19.* It is the heart that must be taken care of, and directed aright; the motions and affections of the soul must be toward right objects, and under a steady guidance. If the heart be guided in the way, the steps will be guided, and the conversation well-ordered.

2. *Buy the truth, and sell it not, v. 23.* Truth is that by which the heart must be guided and governed, for without truth there is no goodness; no regular practices without right principles. It is by the power of truth, known and believed, that we must be kept back from sin, and constrained to duty; the understanding must be well-informed with wisdom and instruction. And therefore, (1.) We must buy it, be willing to part with any thing for it. He does not say at what rate we must buy it, because we cannot buy it too dear, but must have it at any rate; whatever it costs us, we shall not repent the bargain. When we are at expence for the means of knowledge, and resolved not to starve so good a cause, then we *buy the truth*. Riches should be employed for the getting of knowledge, rather than knowledge for the getting of riches. When we are at pains in searching after truth, that we may come to the knowledge of it, and may distinguish between it and error, then we buy it. *Dii laboribus annia vendunt—Heaven concedes every thing to the laborious.* When we choose rather to suffer loss in our temporal interest, than to deny or neglect the *truth*, then we buy it; and it is a pearl of such great price, that we must be willing to part with all to purchase it, must make shipwreck of estate, trade, preferment, rather than of faith and a good conscience. (2.) We must not *sell it*; do not part with it for pleasures, honours, riches, any thing in this world; do not neglect the study of it, nor throw off the profession of it, nor revolt from under the dominion of it, for the getting or saving of any secular interest whatsoever. *Hold fast the form of sound words*, and never let it go upon any terms.

3. *Give me thine heart, v. 26.* God, in this exhortation, speaks to us as unto children; Son, Daughter, *Give me thy heart*. The heart is that which the great God requires and calls for from every one of us; whatever we give, if we do not give him our hearts, it will not be accepted. We must set our love upon him. Our thoughts must converse much with him, and on him, as our

highest End; *the intents of our hearts* must be fastened. We must make it our own act and deed to devote ourselves to the Lord, and we must be free and cheerful in it. We must not think to divide the heart between God and the world; he will have all or none; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart*. To this call we must readily answer, "*My Father, take my heart*, such as it is, and make it such as it should be; take possession of it, and set up thy throne in it."

4. *Let thine eyes observe my ways*; have an eye to the rule of God's word, the conduct of his providence, and the good examples of his people. Our eyes must observe these, as he that writes observes his copy, that we may keep in the right paths, and may proceed and persevere in them.

IV. Some particular cautions against those sins which are, of all others, the most destructive to the seeds of wisdom and grace in the soul, which impoverish and ruin it.

1. Gluttony and drunkenness, *v. 20, 21.* The world is full of examples of this sin, and temptations to it, which all young people are concerned to stand upon their guard against, and keep at a distance from. *Be not a wine-bibber*; we are allowed to drink a little wine, (1 Tim. 5. 23.) but not much; not to make a trade of it, never to drink to excess. *Be not a riotous eater of flesh*, as the Israelites were, who lusted exceedingly after it, saying, *Who will give us flesh to eat?* Whereas Paul, though he is free to eat flesh, yet resolves that *he will eat no flesh while the world stands, rather than make his brother to offend*; so indifferent is he to it, 1 Cor. 8. 13. *Be not an excessive eater of flesh*; intemperance must be avoided in meat as well as drink. *Be not a luxurious eater of flesh*; not pleased with any thing but what is very nice and delicate, savoury dishes, and forced meat. Some take not only a pleasure, but a pride, in being curious about their diet, and, as they call it, eating well; as if that were the ornament of a gentleman which is really the shame of a Christian; making a God of the belly. "*Be not a wine-bibber, and be not a riotous eater*; and therefore, *be not among wine-bibbers, nor among riotous eaters*; do not give them countenance, lest thou learn their ways, and insensibly fall into those sins, or at least lose the dread and detestation of them. They covet to have thee among them; for those that are debauched themselves are very desirous to debauch others; therefore do not gratify them, lest thou endanger thyself." He fetches an argument against this sin from the expensiveness of it, and its tendency to impoverish men: and if men will not be deterred from it by the ruin it brings on their secular interests, which lie nearest their hearts, no marvel that they are not frightened from it by what they are told out of the word of God of the mischief it does them in their spiritual and eternal concerns. *The drunken and the glutton* hate to be reformed, though they are told they *shall come to poverty*; nay, though they are told they shall come to hell. Drunkenness is the cause of *drowsiness*; it stupifies men, and makes them inattentive to business, and then all goes to wreck and ruin: thus men that have lived creditably come to be *clothed with rags*.

2. Whoredom: that is another sin which *takes away the heart* that should be given to God, Hos. 4. 11. He shews the danger which attends that sin, *v. 27, 28*

(1.) It is a sin from which few recover themselves, when once they are entangled in it. It is like a *deep ditch*, and a *narrow pit*, which it is almost impossible to get out of; and therefore it is wisdom to keep far enough from the brink of it. Take heed of making any approaches toward this sin, because it is so hard to make a retreat from it; conscience, which should head the retreat, being debauched by it, and divine grace forfeited.

(2.) It is a sin which bewitches men to their ruin; *The adulteress lies in wait as a robber*, pretending friendship, but designing the greatest mischief, to rob them of all they have that is valuable, to strip them both of their armour, and of their ornaments. Even those who, being virtuously educated, endeavour to shun the adulteress, she will *lie in wait* for, that she may assault them when they are off their guard, and she has them at an advantage. Let none, therefore, be at any time secure.

(3.) It is a sin that contributes more than any other to the

spreading of vice and immorality in a kingdom; It *increases the transgressors among men*. One adulteress may be the ruin of many a precious soul, and may help to debauch a whole town. It increases the treacherous or perfidious ones; it not only occasions husbands to be false to their wives, and servants to their masters, but many that have professed religion, to throw off their profession, and break their covenants with God. Houses of uncleanness are therefore such pest-houses as ought to be suppressed by those whose office it is to take care of the public welfare.

29. Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? 30. They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. 31. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when it moveth itself aright*. 32. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. 33. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. 34. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. 35. They have stricken me, *shalt thou say, and I was not sick*; they have beaten me, *and I felt it not*: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

Solomon here gives fair warning against the sin of drunkenness, to confirm what he had said, v. 20.

I. He cautions all people to keep out of the way of temptations to this sin; (v. 31.) *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red*. Red wine was in Canaan looked upon as the best wine, it is therefore called *the blood of the grape*. Critics judge of wine, among other indications, by the colour of it; some wine, they say, looks charmingly, looks so well, that it even says, "Come and drink me;" *it moves itself aright*, goes down very smoothly, or perhaps the roughness of it is grateful. It is said of generous, strong-bodied, wine, that it even *causes the lips of those that are asleep to speak*, Cant. 7. 9. But *look not thou upon it*. 1. "Be not ruled by sense, but reason and religion; covet not that which pleases the eye, in hopes that it will please the taste, but let thy serious thoughts correct the errors of thy senses, and convince thee that that which seems delightful is really hurtful, and resolve against it accordingly. Let not the heart walk after the eye, for it is a deceitful guide." 2. "Be not too bold with the charms of this or any other sin; *look not*, lest thou lust, lest thou take the forbidden fruit." Note, Those that would be kept from any sin, must keep themselves from all the occasions and beginnings of it, and be afraid of coming within the reach of its allurements, lest they be overcome by them.

II. He shews the many pernicious consequences of the sin of drunkenness, for the enforcement of this caution. Take heed of the bait, for fear of the hook; *At the last, it bites*, v. 32. All sin will be bitterness in the end, and this sin particularly. *It bites like a serpent*; when the drunkard is made sick by his surfeit, thrown by it into a dropsy, or some fatal disease, beggared and ruined in his estate, especially when his conscience is awakened, and he cannot reflect upon it without horror and indignation at himself; but, worst of all, at last, when the cup of drunkenness shall be turned into a cup of trembling, the cup of the Lord's wrath, the dregs of which he must be for ever drinking, and shall not have a drop of water to cool his inflamed tongue. To take off the force of the temptation that there is in the pleasure of the sin, foresee the punishment of it, and what it will at last end in, if repentance prevent not. In *its latter end it bites*, so the word is; think, therefore, what will be *in the end thereof*.

But he chooses to specify those pernicious consequences of this sin, which are present and sensible.

1. It embroils men in quarrels, makes them quarrel with others, and say and do that which gives others occasion to quarrel with them, v. 29. He asks, *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow?* Who has not, in this world? Many have woe and sorrow, and cannot help it; but drunkards wilfully create woe and sorrow to themselves. They that have *contentions* have *woe and sorrow*; and drunkards are the fools whose *lips enter into contention*. When the wine is in, the wit is out, and the passions up; and thence come drunken scuffles, and drunken frays, and drunken disputes over the cups; many a vexatious, ruining, law-suit has begun thus. There is *babbling*, quarrels in word, and the exchanging of scurrilous language; yet it rests not there; you shall have *wounds without cause*, for causes are things which drunkards are in no capacity to judge of, and therefore they deal blows about with the least consideration why or wherefore, and must expect to be in like manner treated themselves. The wounds which men receive in defence of their country, and its just rights, are their honour; but *wounds without cause*, received in service of their lusts, are marks of their infamy. Nay, drunkards wound themselves in a tender part, for they have *redness of eyes*, symptoms of an inward inflammation; their sight is weakened by it, and their looks deformed. This comes, (1.) Of drinking long, *tarrying long at the wine*, and spending that time in drunken company which should be spent in useful business, or, in sleep, which should fit for business, v. 30. Oh the precious hours which thousands throw away thus; every one of which will be brought into the account at the great day! (2.) Of drinking that which is strong and intoxicating. *They go up and down to seek wine* that will please them; their great inquiry, "Where is the best liquor?" *They seek mixed wine*, which is most palatable, but most heady; so willingly do they sacrifice their reason to please their palate!

2. It makes men impure and insolent, v. 33. (1.) The eyes grow unruly, and *behold strange women* to lust after them, and so let in adultery into the heart. *Est Venus in vinis—Wine is oil to the fire of lust*. *Thine eyes shall behold strange things*; so some read it. When men are drunk, the house turns round with them, and every thing looks strangely to them, so that then they cannot trust their own eyes. (2.) The tongue also grows unruly, and talks extravagantly; by it the *heart utters perverse things*, things contrary to reason, religion, and common civility; which they would be ashamed to speak if they were sober. What ridiculous incoherent nonsense will men talk when they are drunk, who at another time will speak admirably well, and to the purpose!

3. It stupifies and besots men, v. 34. When men are drunk, they know not where they are, nor what they say and do. (1.) Their heads are giddy, and, when they lie down to sleep, they are as if they were tossed by the rolling waves of the sea, or upon the top of a mast; hence they complain that their heads swim; their sleeps are commonly unquiet and not refreshing, and their dreams tumultuous. (2.) Their judgments are clouded, and they have no more steadiness and consistency than he that sleeps upon the top of a mast; they *drink, and forget the law*, (ch. 31. 5.) *they err through wine*, (Isa. 28. 7.) and think as extravagantly as they talk. (3.) They are heedless and fearless of danger, and senseless of the rebukes they are under, either from God or man. They are in imminent danger of death, of damnation, lie as much exposed as if they slept upon the top of a mast, and yet are secure, and sleep on. They fear no peril when the terrors of the Lord are laid before them; nay, they feel no pain when the judgments of God are actually upon them; they cry not when he binds them. Set a drunkard in the stocks, and he is not sensible of the punishment; "*They have stricken me, and I was not sick; I felt it not, it made no impression at all upon me*." Drunkenness turns men into stocks and stones, they are scarcely to be reckoned animals, they are dead while they live.

4. Worst of all, the heart is hardened in the sin, and the sinner, notwithstanding all these present mischiefs that attend it, obstinately persists in it, and hates to be reformed; *When shall I awake?* Much ado he has to shake off the chains of his drunken sleep, he can hardly get clear of the fumes of the wine, though he strive with them, that (being thirsty in the morning) he may return to

again. So perfectly lost is he to all sense of virtue and honour, and so wretchedly is his conscience seared, that he is not ashamed to say, *I will seek it yet again. There is no hope; no, they have loved drunkards, and after them they will go*, Jer. 2. 25. This is *adding drunkenness to thirst, and following strong drink*; those that do so may read their doom, (Dent. 29. 19, 20.) their *woe*; (Isa. 5. 11.) and if this be the end of the sin, with good reason were we bid to stop at the beginning of it; *Look not upon the wine when it is red.*

CHAP. XXIV.

1. **B**E not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them: 2. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief.

Here, 1. The caution given is much the same with that which we had before; (*ch. 23. 17.*) not to envy sinners, not to think them happy, nor to wish ourselves in their condition, though they prosper ever so much in this world, and are ever so merry, and ever so secure; "Let not such a thought ever come into thy mind; Oh that I could shake off the restraints of religion and conscience, and take as great a liberty to indulge the sensual appetite, as I see such and such do! No; *desire not to be with them*, to do as they do, and fare as they fare, and to *cast in thy lot among them.*"

2. Here is another reason given for this caution; *Be not envious against them*; not only because their end will be bad, but because their way is so, *v. 2.* Do not think with them, *for their heart studies destruction* to others, but it will prove destruction to themselves. Do not speak like them, *for their lips talk of their mischief.* All they say has an ill tendency; to dishonour God, reproach religion, or wrong their neighbour; but it will be mischief to themselves at last. It is therefore thy wisdom to have nothing to do with them; nor hast thou any reason to look upon them with envy, but with pity rather, or a just indignation at their wicked practices."

3. Through wisdom is an house builded, and by understanding it is established: 4. And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. 5. A wise man *is* strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. 6. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors *there is* safety.

We are tempted to envy those that grow rich, and raise their estates and families, by such unjust courses as our consciences will by no means suffer us to use. But, to set aside that temptation, Solomon here shews that a man, with prudent management, may raise his estate and family by lawful and honest means, with a good conscience, and a good name, and the blessing of God upon it; and if the other be raised a little sooner, yet these will last a great deal longer.

1. That which is here recommended to us, as having the best influence upon our outward prosperity, is, *wisdom, and understanding, and knowledge*; that is, both piety toward God, (for that is true wisdom,) and prudence in the management of our outward affairs. We must govern ourselves in every thing by the rules of religion first, and then of discretion. Some, that are truly pious, do not thrive in the world, for want of prudence; and some, that are prudent enough, yet do not prosper, because they lean to their own understanding, and do not acknowledge God in their ways; therefore both must go together to complete a wise man.

2. That which is here set before us as the advantage of true wisdom, is, that it will make men's outward affairs prosperous and successful.

(1.) It will *build a house, and establish it*, *v. 3.* Men may, by unrighteous practices, build their houses, but they cannot establish them, for the foundation is rotten; (Hab. 2. 9, 10.) whereas, what is honestly got will wear like steel, and be an inheritance to children's children.

(2.) It will enrich a house, and furnish it, *v. 4.* Those that

manage their affairs with wisdom and equity, that are diligent in the use of lawful means for increasing what they have, that spare from luxury, and spend in charity, they are in a fair way to have their shops, their warehouses, their chambers, *filled with all precious and pleasant riches*; *precious*, because got by honest labour, and the substance of a diligent man is *precious*; *pleasant*, because enjoyed with holy cheerfulness; some think this is to be understood chiefly of spiritual riches; *By knowledge the chambers of the soul are filled with the graces and comforts of the Spirit*, those *precious and pleasant riches*; for the Spirit, by enlightening the understanding, performs all his other operations on the soul.

(3.) It will fortify a house, and turn it into a castle; *Wisdom is better than weapons of war*, offensive or defensive. A wise man *is in strength*, is in a strong-hold, *yea, a man of knowledge strengthens might, increases it*, *v. 5.* As we grow in knowledge, we grow in all grace, 2 Pet. 3. 18. Those that *increase in wisdom are strengthened with all might*, Col. 1. 9, 11. A wise man will compass that by his wisdom, which a strong man cannot effect by force of arms. The spirit is strengthened both for the spiritual work, and the spiritual warfare, by true wisdom.

(4.) It will govern a house and a kingdom too, and the affairs of both, *v. 6.* Wisdom will erect a college, or council of state. Wisdom will be of use, [1.] For the managing of the public quarrels, so as not to engage in them but for an honest cause, and with some probability of success; and engaged in, to manage them well, and so as to make either an advantageous peace, or an honourable retreat; *By wise counsel thou shalt make war*; which is a thing that may prove of ill consequence if not done by wise counsel. [2.] For the securing of the public peace; *In the multitude of counsellors there is safety*, for one may foresee the danger, and discern the advantages, which another cannot. In our spiritual conflicts, we need wisdom, for our enemy is subtle.

7. Wisdom *is* too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate. 8. He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person. 9. The thought of foolishness *is* sin: and the scorner *is* an abomination to men.

Here is the description,

1. Of a weak man; *Wisdom is too high* for him; he thinks it so, and therefore, despairing to attain it, he will take no pains in the pursuit of it, but sit down content without it. And really it is so, he has not capacity for it, and therefore the advantages he has for getting it are all in vain to him. It is no easy thing to get wisdom; those that have natural parts good enough, yet if they be foolish, if they be slothful and will not take pains, if they be playful and trifling, and given to their pleasures, if they be viciously inclined, and keep bad company, it *is too high* for them, they are not likely to reach it. And, for want of it, they are unfit for the service of their country, they *open not their mouth in the gate*, they are not admitted into the council or magistracy, or, if they are, they are dumb statues, and stand for cyphers, they say nothing, because they have nothing to say, and they know, that if they should offer any thing, it would not be heeded, nay, it would be hissed at. Let young men take pains to get wisdom, that they may be qualified for public business, and do it with reputation.

2. Of a wicked man, who is not only despised as a fool is, but detested. Two sorts of wicked men are so.

(1.) Such as are secretly malicious. Though they speak fair, and carry it plausibly, they *devise to do evil*, are contriving to do an ill turn to those they bear a grudge to, or have an envious eye at; He that does so, *shall be called a mischievous person*, or a *master of mischief*; which, perhaps, was then a common name of reproach; he shall be branded as an *inventor of evil things*, (Rom. 1. 30.) or, if any mischief be done, he shall be suspected as the author of it, or, at least, accessory to it. This *devising evil*, is the *thought of foolishness*, *v. 9.* It is made light of, and turned off with a jest, as only a foolish thing, but really it *is sin*, it is exceeding sinful; you cannot call it by a worse name than to call it *sin*. It is bad to do evil, but it is worse to devise it; for that *has in it*

the subtlety and poison of the old serpent. But it may be taken more generally; We contract guilt, not only by the act of foolishness, but by the thought of it, though it go no further; the first risings of sin in the heart are sin, offensive to God, and must be repented of, or we are undone. Not only malicious, unclean, proud, thoughts, but even foolish thoughts, are sinful thoughts. If *vain thoughts lodge in the heart*, they defile it, (Jer. 4. 14.) which is a reason why we should *keep our hearts with all diligence*, and harbour no thoughts there which cannot give a good account of themselves, Gen. 6. 5.

(2.) Such as are openly abusive; *The scorner*, who gives ill-language to every body, takes a pleasure in affronting people, and reflecting upon them, *he is an abomination to men*; none that have any sense of honour and virtue will care to keep company with him. *The seat of the scornful is the pestilential chair*, (as the Seventy call it, Ps. 1. 1.) which no wise man will come near, for fear of taking the infection. Those that strive to make others odious, do but make themselves so.

10. *If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.*

Note, 1. In *the day of adversity*, we are apt to *faint*, to droop and be discouraged, to desist from our work, and to despair of relief. Our spirits sink, and then our hands hang down, and our knees grow feeble, and we become unfit for any thing. And often those that are most cheerful, when they are well, droop most, and are most dejected, when any thing ails them.

2. This is an evidence that our *strength is small*, and is a means of weakening it more; "It is a sign that thou art not a man of any resolution, any firmness of thought, any consideration, any faith, (for that is the strength of a soul,) if thou canst not bear up under an afflictive change of thy condition." Some are so feeble, that they can bear nothing; if a trouble does but *touch* them, (Job, 4. 5.) nay, if it does but threaten them, they *faint* immediately, and are ready to give up all for gone; and by this means they render themselves unfit to grapple with their trouble, and unable to help themselves. *Be of good courage* therefore, *and God shall strengthen thy heart*.

11. If thou forbear to deliver *them that are drawn unto death*, and *those that are ready to be slain*; 12. If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider *it*? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth *not* he know *it*? and shall *not* he render to *every man* according to his works?

Here is, 1. A great duty required of us, and that is, to appear for the relief of oppressed innocency; if we see the lives or livelihoods of any in danger of being taken away unjustly, we ought to bestir ourselves all we can to save them, by disproving the false accusations on which they are condemned, and seeking out proofs of their innocency. Though the persons be not such as we are under any particular obligation to, we must help them, out of a general zeal for justice. If any be set upon by force and violence, and it be in our power to rescue them, we ought to do it. Nay, if we see any through ignorance exposing themselves to danger, or fallen in distress, as travellers upon the road, ships at sea, or any the like, it is our duty, though it be with peril to ourselves, to hasten with help to them, and not *forbear to deliver them*, not be slack, or remiss, or indifferent, in such a case.

2. An answer to the excuse that is commonly made for the omission of this duty. Thou wilt say, "*Behold, we knew it not*; we were not aware of the imminency of the danger the person was in; we could not be sure that he was innocent, nor did we know how to prove it, nor which way to do any thing in favour of him, else we would have helped him." Now, (1.) It is easy to make such an excuse as this, sufficient to avoid the censures of men, for perhaps they cannot disprove us, when we say, *We knew it not*; or, *We forgot*. The temptation to tell a lie, for the

excusing of a fault, is very strong, when we know that it is impossible to be disproved, the truth lying wholly in our own breast; as when we say, *We thought so and so, and really designed it*; which no one is conscious of but ourselves. (2.) It is not so easy with such excuses to evade the judgment of God; and to the discovery of that we lie open, and by the determination of that we must abide. Now, [1.] God *pondereth the heart, and keeps the soul*; he keeps an eye upon it, observes all the motions of it; its most secret thoughts and intents are all naked and open before him. It is his prerogative, and that in which he glories; (Jer. 17. 10.) *I the Lord search the heart. He keeps the soul*; holds it in life. This is a good reason why we should be tender of the lives of others, and do all we can to preserve them, because our lives have been precious in the sight of God, and he has graciously kept them. [2.] He knows and considers whether the excuse we make be true or no; whether it was because we did not know it, or whether the true reason was not because we did not love our neighbour as we ought, but were selfish, and regardless both of God and man. Let this serve to silence all our frivolous pleas, by which we think to stop the mouth of conscience when it charges us with the omission of plain duty. *Does not he that ponders the heart consider it*? [3.] He will judge us accordingly. As his knowledge cannot be imposed upon, so his justice cannot be biassed, but he will *render to every man according to his works*, not only the commission of evil works, but the omission of good works.

13. My son, eat thou honey, because *it is good*; and the honey-comb, *which is sweet to thy taste*: 14. So *shall* the knowledge of wisdom *be* unto thy soul: when thou hast found *it*, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.

We are here quickened to the study of wisdom by the consideration both of the pleasure and the profit of it.

1. It will be very pleasant; we *eat honey because it is sweet to the taste*, and upon that account we call it *good*, especially that which runs first from the *honey-comb*. Canaan was said to flow with milk and honey, and it was the common food of the country, (Luke, 24. 41, 42.) even for children, Isa. 7. 15. Thus should we feed upon wisdom, and relish the good instructions of it. They that have tasted honey, need no further proof that it is sweet, nor can they by any argument be convinced of the contrary; so those that have experienced the power of truth and godliness are abundantly satisfied with the pleasure of both; they have tasted the sweetness of them, and all the atheists in the world with their sophistry, and the profane with their banter, cannot alter their sentiments.

2. It will be very profitable. Honey may be *sweet to the taste*, and yet not wholesome, but wisdom has a future recompence attending it, as well as a present sweetness in it; "Thou art permitted to *eat honey*, and the agreeableness of it to thy taste invites thee to it; but thou hast much more reason to relish and digest the precepts of *wisdom*; for, *when thou hast found that there shall be a reward*, thou shalt be paid for thy pleasure, while the servants of sin pay dear for their pains. Wisdom does indeed set thee to work, but *there shall be a reward*; it does indeed raise great expectations in thee, but as thy labour, so thy hope, shall not be in vain, *thine expectation shall not be cut off*, (ch. 23. 18.) nay, it shall be infinitely outdone."

15. Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting-place: 16. For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.

This is spoken, not so much by way of counsel to wicked men, they will not receive instruction, (ch. 23. 9.) but rather in defiance of them, for the encouragement of good people that are threatened by them. See here,

1. The designs of the wicked against the righteous, and the success they promise themselves in those designs. The plot is laid deep; they *lay wait against the dwelling of the righteous*, thinking to charge some iniquity upon it, or compass some design against it; they lie in wait at the door, to catch him when he stirs out, as David's persecutors, Ps. 59. *title*. The hope is raised high; they doubt not but to *spoil his dwelling-place*, because he is weak, and cannot support it, because his condition is low and distressed, and he is almost down already. All this is a fruit of the old enmity in the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman. *The blood-thirsty hate the upright*.

2. The folly and frustration of those designs.

(1.) The righteous man, whose ruin was expected, recovers himself; he *falls seven times* into trouble, but, by the blessing of God upon his wisdom and integrity, he *rises up again*, sees through his troubles, and sees better times after them. The *just man falls*, sometimes *falls seven times*, perhaps into sin, sins of infirmity, through the surprise of temptation; but he *rises up again*, by repentance finds mercy with God, and regains his peace.

(2.) The wicked man, who expected to see his ruin, and to help it forward, is undone; he *falls into mischief*, his sins and his troubles are his utter destruction.

17. Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: 18. Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.

Here, 1. The pleasure we are apt to take in the troubles of an enemy is forbidden us; as when any have done us an ill turn, or we bear them ill will only because they stand in our light, or in our way; when any damage comes to them, suppose they *fall*; or any danger, suppose they *stumble*; and our corrupt hearts conceive a secret delight and satisfaction in it; *Aha, so would we have it; they are entangled, the wilderness has shut them in*. Or, as Tyrus said concerning Jerusalem, (Ezek. 26. 2.) *I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste*. "Men hope in the ruin of their enemies or rivals to wreak their revenge, or to find their account; but be not thou so inhuman; *rejoice not when the worst enemy thou hast, falls*." There may be a holy joy in the destruction of God's enemies, as it tends to the glory of God, and the welfare of the church; (Ps. 58. 10.) but in the ruin of our enemies, as such, we must by no means rejoice; on the contrary, we must weep, even with them when they weep, (as David, Ps. 35. 13, 14.) and that in sincerity; not so much as letting our hearts be secretly glad at their calamities.

2. The provocation which that pleasure gives to God is assigned as the reason of that prohibition; *The Lord will see it*, though it be hid in the heart only, and it will *displease him*; as it will displease a prudent father to see one child triumph in the correction of another, which he ought to tremble at and take warning by, not knowing how soon it may be his own case, he having so often deserved it. He adds an argument *ad hominem*—addressed to the individual, "Thou canst not do a greater kindness to *thine enemy*, when he is fallen, than to rejoice in it; for then, to cross thee and vex thee, God will *turn his wrath from him*; for, as the *wrath of man works not the righteousness of God*, so the righteousness of God was never intended to gratify the wrath of man, and humour his foolish passions; rather than seem to do that, he will adjourn the executions of his wrath: nay, it is implied, that when he *turns his wrath from him*, he will turn it against thee, and the cup of trembling shall be put into thy hand."

19. Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked: 20. For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.

Here, 1. He repeats the caution he had before given against envying the pleasures and successes of wicked men in their wicked ways. "His he quotes from his father David, Ps. 37. 1. We

must not in any case *fret* ourselves, or make ourselves uneasy, whatever God does in his providence; how disagreeable soever it to our sentiments, interests, and expectations, we must acquiesce in it. Even that which grieves us must not *fret* us; nor must our eye be evil against any, because God is good. Are we more wise or just than he? If wicked people prosper, we must not therefore incline to do as they do.

2. He gives a reason for this caution, taken from the end of that way which wicked men walk in; envy not their prosperity: for (1.) There is no true happiness in it; *There shall be no reward to the evil man*; his prosperity only serves for his present subsistence; these are all the good things he must even expect; there is none intended him in the world of retribution; *he has his reward*, Matth. 6. 2. He shall have none. Those are not to be envied that have their portion in this life, and must out-live it, Ps. 17. 14. (2.) There is no continuance in it; their *candle shines bright*, but it shall presently *be put out*, and a final period put to all their comforts, Job, 21. 17. Ps. 37. 1, 2.

21. My son, fear thou the LORD, and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change: 22. For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?

Note, 1. Religion and loyalty must go together. As men, it is our duty to honour our Creator, to worship and reverence him, and to be always in his fear; as members of a community, incorporated for mutual benefit, it is our duty to be faithful and dutiful to the government God has set over us, Rom. 13. 1, 2. Those that are truly religious will be loyal in conscience toward God; the godly in the land will be the *quiet in the land*; and those are not truly loyal, or will be so no longer than is for their interest, that are not religious. How should he be true to his prince, that is false to his God? And if they come in competition, it is an adjudged case; we must *obey God rather than men*.

2. Innovations in both are to be dreaded. Have nothing to do, he does not say, with them that *change*, for there may be cause to change for the better, but *that are given to change*, that affect it for change-sake, out of a peevish discontent with that which is, and a fondness for novelty, or a desire to fish in troubled waters; *Meddle not with them that are given to change*, either in religion, or in the civil government; *came not into their secret*, join not with them in their cabals, nor enter into the mystery of their iniquity.

3. Those that are of restless, factious, turbulent, spirits, commonly pull mischief upon their own heads ere they are aware; *Their calamity shall rise suddenly*. Though they carry on their designs with the utmost secrecy, they will be discovered, and brought to condign punishment, when they little think of it. *Who knows* the time and manner of the ruin which both God and the king will bring on their contemners, both on them and them that meddle with them?

23. These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment. 24. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him: 25. But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them. 26. Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer.

Here are lessons for wise men, judges, and princes. As subjects must do their duty, and be obedient to magistrates, so magistrates must do their duty in administering justice to their subjects, both in pleas of the crown, and causes between party and party. These are lessons for them.

1. They must always weigh the merits of a cause, and not be swayed by any regard, one way or other, to the parties concerned; *It is not good in itself, nor can it ever do well, to have respect of persons in judgment*; the consequences of it cannot but be the perverting of justice, and doing wrong, under colour of law and

equity. A good judge will know the truth, not know faces, so as to countenance a friend, and help him out in a bad cause, or so much as omit any thing that can be said or done in favour of a righteous cause, when it is the cause of an enemy.

2. They must never connive at, or encourage, wicked people in their wicked practices. Magistrates in their places, and ministers in theirs, are to deal faithfully with the wicked man, though he be a great man, or a particular friend; to convict him of his wickedness, to shew him what will be in the end thereof, to discover him to others, that they may avoid him. But if those whose office it is thus to shew people their transgressions, palliate them, and connive at them; if they excuse the wicked man, much more if they prefer him and associate with him, which is, in effect, to say, *Thou art righteous*, they shall justly be looked upon as enemies to the public peace and welfare, which they ought to advance, and *the people shall curse them*, and cry out shame on them; and even those of other nations shall abhor them, as base betrayers of their trust.

3. They must discountenance, and give check to, all fraud, violence, injustice, and immorality; and though thereby they may disoblige a particular person, yet they will recommend themselves to the favour of God and man. Let magistrates and ministers, and private persons too, that are capable of doing it, *rebuke* the wicked, that they may bring them to repentance, or put them to shame, and they shall have the comfort of it in their own bosoms: *to them shall be delight*, when their consciences witness for them that they have been witnesses for God; and *a good blessing shall come upon them*, the blessing of God and good men; they shall be deemed religious patrons, and their country's patriots. See *ch. 28. 23.*

4. They must always give judgment according to equity; (*v. 26.*) they must *give a right answer*, give their opinion, and pass sentence, according to law and the true merits of the cause; and *every one shall kiss his lips* that doeth so, shall love and honour him, and be subject to his orders, for there is a kiss of allegiance as well as of affection. He that in common conversation likewise speaks pertinently and with sincerity, recommends himself to his company, and is beloved and respected by all.

27. Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.

This is a rule of prudence in the management of household affairs; for all good men should be good husbands, and manage with discretion, which would prevent a great deal of sin, and trouble, and disgrace to their profession.

1. We must prefer necessities before conveniencies and not lay that out for shew, which should be expended for the support of the family. We must be content with a mean cottage for a habitation, rather than want, or go in debt for, food convenient.

2. We must not think of building till we can afford it; "First apply thyself to *thy work without in the field*, let thy ground be put into good order, look after thy husbandry, for that is it by which thou must get; and when thou hast got well by that, then, and not till then, thou mayest think of re-building and beautifying *thy house*, for that is it upon which, and in which, thou wilt have occasion to spend." Many have ruined their estates and families by laying out money on that which brings nothing in, beginning to *build*, when they were *not able to finish*. Some understand it as advice to young men not to marry (for by that the house is built) till they have set up in the world, and got wherewith to maintain a wife and children comfortably.

3. When we have any great design on foot, it is wisdom to take it before us, and make the necessary preparations, before we fall to work, that, when it is begun, it may not stand still for want of materials. Solomon observed this rule himself in building the house of God; all was made ready *before it was brought to the ground*, 1 Kings, 6. 7.

28. Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive *not* with thy lips.

29. Say not I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.

We are here forbidden to be in any thing injurious to our neighbour, particularly in and by the forms of law; either, 1. As a witness; "Never bear a testimony against any man *without cause*, unless what thou sayest thou knowest to be punctually true, and thou hast a clear call to testify it. Never bear a false testimony against any one;" for it follows, "*Deceive not with thy lips*; deceive not thy judge and jury, deceive not those whom thou conversest with into an ill opinion of thy neighbour. When thou speakest of thy neighbour, do not only speak that which is true, but take heed, lest in the manner of thy speaking thou insinuate any thing that is otherwise, and so should deceive by innuendos or hyperboles."

Or, 2. As a plaintiff or prosecutor. If there be occasion to bring an action or information against thy neighbour, let it not be from a spirit of-revenge; *Say not*, I am resolved I will meet with him, *I will do so to him as he has done to me*; even a righteous cause becomes unrighteous, when it is thus prosecuted with malice. *Say not*, *I will render to the man according to his work*, and make him pay dear for it; for it is God's prerogative to do so, and we must leave it to him, and not step into his throne or take his work out of his hands. If we will needs be our own carvers, and judges in our own cause, we forfeit the benefit of an appeal to God's tribunal; therefore we must not avenge ourselves, because he has said, *Vengeance is mine*.

30. I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; 31. And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof was broken down. 32. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. 33. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 34. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.

Here is, 1. The view which Solomon took of *the field and vineyard of the slothful man*. He did not go on purpose to see it, but, as he passed by, observing the fruitfulness of the ground, as it is very proper for travellers to do, and his subjects' management of their land, as it is very proper for magistrates to do, he cast his eye upon a *field*, and a *vineyard*, unlike all the rest; for though the soil was good, yet there was nothing growing in them but *thorns and nettles*; not here and there one, but they were all over-run with weeds; and if there had been any fruit, it would have been eaten up by the beasts, for there was no fence, *the stone-wall was broken down*. See the effects of that curse upon the ground, (Gen. 3. 18.) "*Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee*, and nothing else, unless thou take pains with it." See what a blessing to the world the husbandman's calling is, and what a wilderness this earth, even Canaan itself, would be without it. *The king himself is served of the field*, but he would be ill served, if God did not teach the husbandman discretion and diligence to rid the ground, plant it, sow it, and fence it. See what a great difference there is between some and others in the management even of their worldly affairs, and how little some consult their reputation, not caring though they proclaim their slothfulness, in the manifest effects of it, to all that pass by, shamed by their neighbour's diligence.

2. The reflections which he made upon it. He paused a little, and considered it, looked again upon it, and received instruction. He did not break out into any passionate censures of the owner, did not call him any ill names, but he endeavoured himself to get good by the observation, and to be quickened by it to diligence. Note, Those that are to give instruction to others, must receive instruction

tion themselves; and instruction may be received, not only from what we read and hear, but from what we see; not only from what we see of the works of God, but from what we see of the manners of men; not only from men's good manners, but from their evil manners. Plutarch relates a saying of Cato Major, That wise men profit more by fools than fools by wise men; for wise men will avoid the faults of fools, but fools will not imitate the virtues of wise men. Solomon reckoned that he *received instruction* by this sight, though it did not suggest to him any new notion or lesson, but only put him in mind of an observation he himself had formerly made, of the ridiculous folly of the sluggard, who, when he has needful work to do, lies dozing in bed, and cries, *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber*, and still it will be a little more, till he has slept his eyes out, and, instead of being fitted by sleep for business, as wise men are, he is dulled, and stupified, and made good for nothing. Hence, certain misery attends him; his *poverty comes as one that travels*, it is constantly coming nearer and nearer to him, and will be upon him speedily, and want seizes him as irresistibly as an armed man, a highway-man that will strip him of all he has.

Now this is applicable, not only to our worldly business, to shew what a scandalous thing slothfulness in that is, and how injurious to the family, but to the affairs of our souls. Note, (1.) Our souls are our fields and vineyards, which we are every one of us to take care of, to dress, and to keep. They are capable of being improved with good husbandry; that may be got out of them which will be fruit abounding to our account. We are charged with them, to occupy them till our Lord come; and a great deal of care and pains it is requisite that we should take about them. (2.) These fields and vineyards are often in a very bad state; not only no fruit brought forth, but all over-grown with thorns and nettles, scratching, stinging, inordinate, lusts and passions, pride, covetousness, sensuality, malice, those are the thorns and nettles, the wild grapes, which the unsanctified heart produces; no guard kept against the enemy, but the *stone-wall broken down*; all lies in common, all exposed. (3.) Where it is thus, it is owing to the sinner's own slothfulness and folly; he is a sluggard, loves sleep, hates labour, and he is void of understanding, understands neither his business nor his interest: he is perfectly besotted. (4.) The issue of it will certainly be the ruin of the soul, and all its welfare. It is everlasting want that thus comes upon it as an armed man. We know the place assigned to the wicked and slothful servant.

CHAP. XXV.

1. **THESE** are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.

This verse is the title of this latter collection of Solomon's proverbs, for he *sought out, and set in order, many proverbs*, that by them he might be still *teaching the people knowledge*, Eccl. 12. 9. Observe,

1. The proverbs were Solomon's, who was divinely inspired to deliver, for the use of the church, these wise and weighty sentences. We have had many, but still there are more; yet, herein also, Christ is greater than Solomon, for, if we had all upon record that Christ said and did, that was instructive, *the world could not contain the books that should be written*, John, 21. 25.

2. The publishers were Hezekiah's servants, who, it is likely, herein acted as his servants, being appointed by him to do this good service to the church, among other good offices that he did *in the law and in the commandments*, 2 Chron. 31. 21. Whether he employed the prophets in this work, as Isaiah, Hosea, or Micah, who lived in his time, or some that were trained up in the schools of the prophets, or some of the priests and Levites, to whom we find him giving a charge concerning divine things, (2 Chron. 29. 4.) or (as the Jews think) his princes and ministers of state, who were more properly called his *servants*, is not certain; if it was done by Eliakim, and Joah, and Shebna, it was no diminution to their character. They copied out these proverbs

from the records of Solomon's reign, and published them as an appendix to the former edition of this book. It may be a piece of very good service to the church to publish other men's works that have lain hid in obscurity, perhaps a great while. Some think they culled these out of the 3000 proverbs which Solomon spake, (1 Kings, 4. 32.) leaving out those that were physical, and that pertained to natural philosophy, and preserving such only as were divine and moral; and in this collection some observe that special regard was had to those observations which concern kings and their administration.

2. *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.*
3. *The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable.*

Here is, 1. An instance given of the honour of God; *It is his glory to conceal a matter*. He needs not search into any thing, for he perfectly knows every thing by a clear and certain view, and nothing can be hid from him; and yet his own way is in the sea, and his *path in the great waters*. There is an unfathomable depth in his counsels, Rom. 11. 33. It is but a little portion that is heard of him. Clouds and darkness are round about him. We see what he does, but we know not the reasons. Some refer it to the sins of men; it is his glory to pardon sin, which is covering it, nor remembering it, not mentioning it; his forbearance, which he exercises toward sinners, is likewise his honour, in which he seems to keep silence, and take no notice of the matter.

2. A double instance of the honour of kings.

(1.) It is God's glory that he needs not *search into a matter*, because he knows it without search; but it is the honour of kings, with a close application of mind, and by all the methods of inquiry, to search out the matters that are brought before them, to take pains in examining offenders, that they may discover their designs, and bring to light the hidden works of darkness; not to give judgment till they have weighed things; nor to leave it wholly to others to examine things, but to see with their own eyes.

(2.) It is God's glory that he cannot himself be found out by searching, and some of that honour is devolved upon kings, wise kings, that *search out matters*; their *hearts are unsearchable*, like the *height of heaven*, or the *depth of the earth*, which we may guess at, but cannot measure. Princes have their *arcana imperii*—*state secrets*, designs which are kept private, and reasons of state, which private persons are not competent judges of, and therefore ought not to pry into. Wise princes, when they *search into a matter*, have reaches which one would not think of, as Solomon, when he called for a sword to divide the living child with, designing thereby to discover the true mother.

4. *Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.* 5. *Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.*

This shews that the vigorous endeavours of a prince to suppress vice, and reform the manners of his people, is the most effectual way to support his government.

Observe, 1. What the duty of magistrates is; *To take away the wicked*, to use their power for the terror of evil works and evil workers, not only to banish those that are vicious and profane from their presence, and forbid them the court, but so to frighten them and restrain them, that they may not spread the infection of their wickedness among their subjects. This is called *taking away the dross from the silver*, which is done by the force of fire. Wicked people are the dross of a nation, the scum of the country, and, as such, to be taken away. If men will not do it, God will, Ps. 119. 119. *If the wicked be taken away from before the king*, if he abandon them, and shew his detestation of their wicked courses, it will go far toward the disabling of them to do mischief. The reformation of the court will promote the reformation of the kingdom, Ps. 101. 3, 8.

2. What the advantage will be of their doing this duty. (1.) It will be the bettering of the subjects; they shall be made like silver refined, fit to be made *vessels of honour*. (2.) It will be the settling of the prince; *his throne shall be established in this righteousness*; for God will bless his government, the people will be pliable to it, and so it will become durable.

6. Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: 7. For better *it is* that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.

Here we see, 1. That religion is so far from destroying good manners, that it teaches us to behave ourselves lowly and reverently towards our superiors, to keep our distance, and give place to those to whom it belongs; "*Put not forth thyself* rudely and carelessly *in the king's presence*, or in the presence of great men; do not *compare with them*;" (so some understand it); "do not vie with them in apparel, furniture, gardens, house-keeping, or retinue, for that is an affront to them, and will waste thine own estate."

2. That religion teaches us humility and self-denial, which is a better lesson than that of good manners; "Deny thyself the place thou art entitled to, covet not to make a fair shew, nor aim at preferment, nor thrust thyself into the company of those that are above thee; be content in a low sphere, if that is it which God has allotted to thee." The reason he gives, is, because this is really the way to advancement, as our Saviour shews in a parable that seems to be borrowed from this, Luke, 14.9. Not that we must *therefore* pretend modesty and humility, and make a stratagem of it, for the courting of honour, but *therefore* we must really be modest and humble, because God will put honour on such, and so will men too. It is better, more for a man's satisfaction and reputation, to be advanced above his pretensions and expectations, than to be thrust down below them, *in the presence of the prince*, whom it was a great piece of honour to be admitted to the sight of, and a great piece of presumption to look upon without leave.

8. Go not forth hastily to strive, lest *thou know not* what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. 9. Debate thy cause with thy neighbour *himself*; and discover not a secret to another: 10. Lest he that heareth *it* put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.

Here is good counsel given about going to law:

1. "Be not hasty in bringing an action, before thou hast thyself considered it, and consulted with thy friends about it; *Go not forth hastily to strive*, do not send for a writ in a passion, or upon the first appearance of right on thy side, but weigh the matter deliberately, because we are apt to be partial in our own cause; consider the certainty of the expences, and the uncertainty of the success, how much care and vexation it will be the occasion of, and, after all, the cause may go against thee; surely then thou shouldest not *go forth hastily to strive*."

2. "Bring not an action before thou hast tried to end the matter amicably; (v.9.) *Debate thy cause with thy neighbour* privately, and perhaps you will understand one another better, and see that there is no occasion to go to law." In public quarrels, the war that must at length end, might better have been prevented by a treaty of peace, and a great deal of blood and treasure spared. It is so in private quarrels; "Sue not thy neighbour as a *heathen man and a publican*, until thou hast told him his fault between thee and him alone, and he has refused to refer the matter, or to come to an accommodation. Perhaps the matter in variance is a secret, not fit to be divulged to any, much less to be brought upon the stage before the country; and therefore end it privately, that

it may not be discovered." *Reveal not the secret of another*, so some read it. "Do not in revenge, to disgrace thine adversary, disclose that which should be kept private, and which does not at all belong to the cause."

Two reasons he gives why we should be thus cautious in going to law; (1.) "Because otherwise the cause will be in danger to go against thee, and thou wilt *not know what to do*, when the defendant has justified himself in what thou didst charge upon him, and made it out that thy complaint was frivolous and vexatious, and that thou hadst no just cause of action, and so *put thee to shame*, nonsuit thee, and force thee to pay costs; all which might have been prevented by a little consideration." (2.) "Because it will turn very much to thy reproach, if thou fall under the character of being litigious. Not only the defendant himself, (v.8.) but he that hears the cause tried, will *put thee to shame*, will expose thee as a man of no principle, and *thine infamy will not turn away*, thou wilt never retrieve thy reputation."

11. A word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold in pictures of silver. 12. As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, *so is* a wise reprovcr upon an obedient ear.

Solomon here shews how much it becomes a man,

1. To speak pertinently; *A word* upon the wheels, that runs well, is well-circumstanced in proper time and place, instruction, advice, or comfort, given seasonably, and in apt expressions, adapted to the case of the person spoken to, and agreeing with, the character of the person speaking, is like golden balls resembling apples, or like true apples of a golden colour, (golden rannets,) or perhaps gilded, as sometimes we have gilded laurels, and those embossed *in pictures of silver*, or rather, brought to table in a silver network basket, or in a silver box of that which we call *Philligree-work*, through which the golden apples might be seen. Doubtless it was some ornament of the table then well known. As that was very pleasing to the eye, so is *a word fitly spoken* to the ear.

2. Especially to give a reproof with discretion, and so as to make it acceptable. If it be well given by *a wise reprovcr*, and well taken by an *obedient ear*, it is as an *ear-ring of gold*, and an *ornament of fine gold*, very graceful, and well-becoming both the reprovcr and the reprovcd; both will have their praise, the reprovcr for giving it so prudently, and the reprovcd for taking it so patiently, and making a good use of it. Others will commend them both, and they will have satisfaction in each other; he who gave the reproof is pleased that it had the desired effect, and he to whom it was given has reason to be thankful for it as a kindness. *That is well given*, we say, *that is well taken*; yet it does not always prove that that is well taken which is well given. It were to be wished that a *wise reprovcr* should always meet with an *obedient ear*, but often it is not so.

13. As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, *so is* a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters.

See here, 1. What ought to be the care of a servant, the meanest that is sent on an errand, and intrusted with any business, much more the greatest, the agent and ambassador of a prince; he ought to be *faithful to him that sends him*, and to see to it that he do not, by mistake or with design, falsify his trust, and that he be in nothing, that lies in his power, wanting to his master's interest. Those that act as factors, by commission, ought to act as carefully as for themselves.

2. How much this will be the satisfaction of the master; it will *refresh his soul*, as much as ever the *cold of snow* (which in hot countries they preserve by art all the year round) refreshed the labourers in the harvest, that *bore the burthen and heat of the day*. The more important the affair was, and the more fear of its miscarrying, the more acceptable is the messenger, if he have managed it successfully and well. A faithful minister, Christ's

messenger, should be thus acceptable to us; (Job, 33. 23.) however, he will be a *sweet savour to God*, 2 Cor. 2. 15.

14. Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift *is like clouds and wind without rain.*

He may be said to boast of a false gift,

1. Who pretends to have received or given that which he never had, which he never gave; makes a noise of his great accomplishments, and his good services, but it is all false; he is not what he pretends to be. Or,

2. Who promises what he will give, and what he will do, but performs nothing; who raises people's expectations of the mighty things he will do for his country, for his friends, what noble legacies he will leave, but either he has not wherewithal, or he never designs it. Such a one is like the morning-cloud, that passes away, and disappoints those who looked for rain from it to water the parched ground; (Jude, 12.) *Clouds without water.*

15. By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.

Two things are here recommended to us, in dealing with others, as likely means to gain our point;

1. Patience, to bear a present heat without being put into a heat by it, and to wait for a fit opportunity to offer our reasons, and to give persons time to consider them. By this means even a *prince* may be persuaded to do a thing which he seemed very averse to, much more a common person. That which is justice and reason now will be so another time, and therefore we need not urge them with violence now, but wait for a more convenient season.

2. Mildness, to speak without passion or provocation; *A soft tongue breaks the bone*; it mollifies the roughest spirits, and overcomes those that are most morose; like lightning, which, they say, sometimes has broken the bone, and yet not pierced the flesh. Gideon with a soft tongue pacified the Ephraimites, and Abigail turned away David's wrath. *Hard words*, we say, *break no bones*, and therefore we should bear them patiently; but, it seems, *soft words* do, and therefore we should, on all occasions, give them prudently.

16. Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.

Here, 1. We are allowed a sober and moderate use of the delights of sense; "*Hast thou found honey?*" It is not forbidden fruit to thee, as it was to Jonathan; thou mayest eat of it with thanksgiving to God, who, having created things grateful to our senses, has given us leave to make use of them. *Eat as much as is sufficient*, and no more; *enough is as good as a feast.*"

2. We are cautioned to take heed of excess. We must use all pleasures as we do honey, with a check upon our appetite, lest we take more than does us good, and make ourselves sick with it. We are most in danger of surfeiting upon that which is most sweet, and therefore those that fare sumptuously every day have need to watch over themselves, *lest their hearts be at any time overcharged*. The pleasures of sense lose their sweetness by the excessive use of them, and become nauseous; as honey, which turns sour in the stomach; it is therefore our interest, as well as our duty, to use them with sobriety.

17. Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.

Here he mentions another pleasure which we must not take too much of, that of visiting our friends; the former, for fear of surfeiting ourselves, this, for fear of surfeiting our neighbour.

1. It is a piece of civility to visit our neighbours sometimes, to shew our respect to them and concern for them, and to cultivate and improve mutual acquaintance and love, and that we may have both the satisfaction and advantage of their conversation.

2. It is wisdom, as well as good manners, not to be troublesome

to our friends in our visiting of them; not to visit too often, nor stay too long, nor contrive to come at meal-time, nor make ourselves busy in the affairs of their families hereby we make ourselves cheap, mean, and burthensome. Thy neighbour, who is thus plagued and haunted with thy visits, will be *weary of thee*, and *hate thee*, and that will be the destruction of friendship, which should have been the improvement of it. *Post tres sepe dies, piscis vilescit et hospes—After the third day, fish and company become distasteful.* Familiarity breeds contempt. *Nulli te facias nimis sodalem—Be not too intimate with any.* He that spunges upon his friend loses him. How much better a Friend than is God than any other friend; for we need not withdraw our foot from his house, the throne of his grace; (ch. 8. 34.) the oftener we come to him the better, and the more welcome.

18. A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.

Here, 1. The sin condemned, is, *bearing false witness against our neighbour*, either in judgment, or in common conversation, contrary to the law of the ninth commandment.

2. That which it is here condemned for, is, the mischievousness of it; it is in its power to ruin not only men's reputation, but their lives, estates, families, all that is dear to them; a false testimony is every thing that is dangerous, it is a *maul* or *club* to knock a man's brains out, a flail, which there is no fence against; it is a *sword* to wound near at hand, and a *sharp arrow* to wound at a distance; we have therefore need to pray, *Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips*, Ps. 120. 2.

19. Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.

1. The *confidence of an unfaithful man* (so some read it) *will be like a broken tooth*; his policy, his power, his interest, all that which he trusted in to support him in his wickedness, will fail him in time of trouble, Ps. 52. 7.

2. *Confidence in an unfaithful man*, so we read it; in a man whom we thought trusty, and therefore depended on, but who proves otherwise; it proves not only unserviceable, but painful and vexatious, like a *broken tooth*, or a *foot out of joint*, which, when we put any stress upon it, not only fails us, but makes us feel from it; especially in time of trouble, when we most expect help from it; it is like a broken reed, Isa. 36. 6. Confidence in a faithful God, in time of trouble, will not prove thus; on him we may rest, and in him dwell at ease.

20. As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.

1. The absurdity here censured, is, *singing songs to a heavy heart*. Those that are in great sorrow are to be comforted by sympathizing with them, condoling with them, and concurring in their lamentation: if we take that method, the *moving of our lips may assuage their grief*; (Job, 16. 5.) but we take a wrong course with them, if we think to relieve them by being merry with them, and endeavouring to make them merry; for it adds to their grief, to see their friends so little concerned for them, it puts them upon ripping up the causes of their grief, and aggravating them, and makes them harden themselves in sorrow against the assaults of mirth.

2. The absurdities this is compared to, are, *taking away a garment from a man in cold weather*, which makes him colder, or *pouring vinegar upon nitre*, which, like water upon lime, puts it into a ferment; so improper, so incongruous, is it to sing pleasant songs to one that is of a sorrowful spirit. Some read it in a contrary sense; *As he that puts on a garment in cold weather* warms the body, or as *vinegar upon nitre* dissolves it, so he that *sings songs* of comfort to a person in sorrow refreshes him, and dispels his grief.

21. If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: 22. For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.

By this it appears, that, however the scribes and Pharisees had corrupted the law, not only the commandment of loving our brethren, but even that of loving our enemies, was not only a new, but an old, commandment; an Old-Testament commandment, though our Saviour has given it us with the new enforcement of his own great example in loving us when we were enemies. Observe,

1. How we must express our love to our enemies; by the real offices of kindness, even those that are expensive to ourselves, and most acceptable to them; "If they be *hungry and thirsty*, instead of pleasing thyself with their distress, and contriving how to cut off supplies from them, relieve them, as Elisha did the Syrians that came to apprehend him," 2 Kings, 6. 22.

2. What encouragement we have to do so. (1.) It will be a likely means to win upon them, and bring them over to be reconciled to us; we shall mollify them as the refiner melts the metal in the crucible, not only by putting it over the fire, but by heaping coals of fire upon it. The way to turn an enemy into a friend, is, to act toward him in a friendly manner. If it do not gain him, it will aggravate his sin and punishment, and heap the burning coals of God's wrath upon his head, as rejoicing in his calamity, may be an occasion of God's turning his wrath from him, *ch. 24. 17.* (2.) However, we shall be no losers by our self-denial; "Whether he relent toward thee or no, *the Lord shall reward thee*; he shall forgive thee, who thus shewest thyself to be of a forgiving spirit; he shall provide for thee when thou art in distress, (though thou hast been evil and ungrateful,) as thou dost for thine enemy." However, it shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, when kindnesses done to our enemies shall be remembered, as well as those shewn to God's friends.

23. The north-wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.

Here see, 1. How we must discourage sin, and witness against it, and particularly the sin of slandering and backbiting; we must frown upon it, and, by giving it an angry countenance, endeavour to put it out of countenance. Slanders would not be so readily spoken as they are, if they were not readily heard; but good manners would silence the slanderer, if he saw that his tales displeased the company. We should shew ourselves uneasy, if we heard a dear friend, whom we value, evil-spoken of; the same dislike we should shew of evil speaking in general. If we cannot otherwise reprove, we may do it by our looks.

2. The good effect which this might, probably, have; who knows but it may silence and drive away a *backbiting tongue*? Sin, if it be countenanced, becomes daring, but if it receive any check, it is so conscious of its own shame, that it becomes cowardly, and this particularly; for many abuse those they speak of, only in hopes to curry favour with those they speak to.

24. *It is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.*

This is the same with what he had said, *ch. 21. 9.*

Observe, 1. How those are to be pitied that are unequally yoked, especially with such as are brawling and contentious, whether husband or wife; for it is equally true of both. It is better to be alone than to be joined to one, who, instead of being a meet-help, is a great hinderance to the comfort of life.

2. How those may sometimes be envied that live in solitude; as they want the comfort of society, so they are free from the vexation of it. And as there are cases which give occasion to say, "Blessed is the womb that has not borne," so there are which give occasion to say, "Blessed is the man who was never married, but who lies like a servant in a corner of the house-top."

25. *As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.*

See here, 1. How natural it is to us to desire to hear good news from our friends, and concerning our affairs at a distance. It is sometimes with impatience that we expect to hear from abroad, our souls thirst after it; but we should check the inordinateness of that desire; if it be bad news, it will come too soon, if good, it will be welcome at any time.

2. How acceptable such good news will be when it does come, as refreshing as cold water to one that is thirsty. Solomon himself had much trading abroad, as well as correspondence by his ambassadors with foreign courts; and how pleasant it was to hear of the good success of his negotiations abroad, he well knew by experience. Heaven is a country afar off; how refreshing is it to hear good news from thence, both in the everlasting gospel, which signifies glad tidings, and in the witness of the Spirit with our spirit that we are God's children.

26. A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring.

It is here represented as a very lamentable thing, and a public grievance, and of ill consequence to many, like the *troubling of a fountain*, and the *corrupting of a spring*, for the righteous to *fall down before the wicked*; that is,

1. For the righteous to fall into sin, in the sight of the wicked, for them to do any thing unbecoming their profession, which is *told in Gath*, and *published in the streets of Askelon*, and in which the *daughters of the Philistines rejoice*; for them that have been in reputation for wisdom and honour, to fall from their excellency, this troubles the fountains by grieving some, and corrupts the springs by infecting others, and emboldening them to do likewise.

2. For the righteous to be oppressed, and run down, and trampled upon, by the violence or subtlety of evil men, to be displaced, and thrust into obscurity, this is the troubling of the fountains of justice, and corrupting the very springs of government, *ch. 28. 12, 28.—29. 2.*

3. For the righteous to be cowardly, to truckle to the wicked, to be afraid of opposing his wickedness, and basely to yield to him, this is a reflection upon religion, a discouragement to good men, and strengthens the hands of sinners in their sins, and so is like a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring.

27. *It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory.*

Two things we must be graciously dead to.

1. To the pleasures of sense, for *it is not good to eat much honey*, though it pleases the taste, and, if eaten with moderation, is very wholesome, yet, if eaten to excess, it becomes nauseous, creates bile, and is the occasion of many diseases: it is true of all the delights of the children of men, that they will surfeit, but never satisfy, and they are dangerous to those that allow themselves the liberal use of them.

2. To the praise of men. We must not be greedy of that, any more than of pleasure, because, *for men to search their own glory*, to court applause, and covet to make themselves popular, is not their glory, but their shame, every one will laugh at them for it; and the glory which is so courted, when it is got, is *not glory*, it is really no true honour to a man.

Some give another sense of this verse; *To eat much honey is not good*, but to search into glorious and excellent things is a great commendation, it is true glory; we cannot therein offend by excess. Others thus; As honey, though pleasant to the taste, if used immoderately, oppresses the stomach, so an over-curious search into things sublime and glorious, though pleasant to us, if we pry too far, will overwhelm our capacities with a greater glory and lustre than they can bear. Or thus; "You may be surfeited with eating too much honey, but the last of glory, of their glory, the glory of the blessed, is glory, it will be ever fresh, and never pall the appetite."

28. He that *hath* no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

Here is, 1. The good character of a wise and virtuous man implied; he is one that has *rule over his own spirit*, he maintains the government of himself, and of his own appetites and passions, and does not suffer them to rebel against reason and conscience. He has the rule of his own thoughts, his desires, his inclinations, his resentments, and keeps them all in good order.

2. The bad case of a vicious man, who has not this rule over his own spirit, who, when temptations to excess in eating or drinking are before him, has no government of himself, when he is provoked, breaks out into exorbitant passions, such a one is like a city that is broken down, and without walls; all that is good goes out, and forsakes him, all that is evil breaks in upon him, he lies exposed to all the temptations of Satan, and becomes an easy prey to that enemy; he is also liable to many troubles and vexations; it is likewise as much a reproach to him as it is to a city to have its walls ruined, Neh. 1. 3.

CHAP. XXVI.

1. **A** snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool.

Note, 1. It is too common a thing for honour to be given to fools, who are utterly unworthy of it, and unfit for it; bad men, who have neither wit nor grace, are sometimes preferred by princes, and applauded and cried up by the people. *Folly is set in great dignity*, as Solomon observed, Eccl. 10. 6.

2. It is very absurd and unbecoming when it is so. It is as incongruous as snow in summer, and as great a disorder in the commonwealth as that is in the course of nature and in the seasons of the year; nay, it is as injurious as rain in harvest, which hinders the labourers, and spoils the fruits of the earth when they are ready to be gathered. When bad men are in power, they commonly abuse their power, in discouraging virtue, and giving countenance to wickedness, for want of wisdom to discern it, and grace to detest it.

2. As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.

Here is, 1. The folly of passion; it makes men scatter *causeless curses*; wishing ill to others, upon presumption that they are bad, and have done ill, when either they mistake the person, or misunderstand the fact, or call evil good, and good evil. Give honour to a fool, and he thunders out his anathemas against all that he is disgusted with, right or wrong. Great men, when wicked, think they have a privilege to keep those about them in awe, by cursing them, and swearing at them; which yet is an expression of the most impotent malice, and shews their weakness as much as their wickedness.

2. The safety of innocency. He that is cursed without cause, whether by furious imprecations or solemn anathemas, the curse shall do him no more harm than the bird that flies over his head, than Goliath's curses did to David, 1 Sam. 17. 43. It will fly away like the sparrow or the wild dove, which go nobody knows whither, till they return to their proper place, as the curse will at length return upon the head of him that uttered it.

3. A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.

Here, 1. Wicked men are compared to *the horse* and *the ass*; so brutish are they, so unreasonable, so unruly, and not to be governed but by force or fear; so low has sin sunk men, so much below themselves! Man indeed is *born like the wild ass's colt*, but as some, by the grace of God, are changed, and become rational, so others, by custom in sin are hardened, and become more and more sottish, as *the horse and the mule*, Ps. 32. 9.

2. Direction is given to use them accordingly; Princes, instead of giving honour to a fool, (v. 1.) must put disgrace upon him; instead of putting power into his hand, must exercise power over

him. A horse unbroken needs a whip for correction, and an ass a bridle for direction, and to check him when he would turn out of the way; so a vicious man, who will not be under the guidance and restraint of religion and reason, ought to be whipt and bridled, to be rebuked severely, and made to smart for what he has done amiss, and to be restrained from offending any more.

4. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. 5. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

See here the noble security of the scripture-style, which seems to contradict itself, but really does not. Wise men have need to be directed how to deal with fools; and they have never more need of wisdom than in dealing with such, to know when to keep silence, and when to speak, for there may be a time for both.

1. In some cases, a wise man will not set his wit to that of a fool, so far as to answer him according to his folly. "If he boast of himself, do not answer him by boasting of thyself. If he rail and talk passionately, do not thou rail and talk passionately too. If he tell one great lie, do not thou tell another to match it. If he calumniate thy friends, do not thou calumniate his. If he banter, do not answer him in his own language, lest thou be like him; even thou, who knowest better things, who hast more sense, and hast been better taught."

2. Yet, in other cases, a wise man will use his wisdom for the conviction of a fool; when, by taking notice of what he says, there may be hopes of doing good, or, at least, preventing further mischief, either to himself or others. "If thou have reason to think that thy silence will be deemed an evidence of the weakness of thy cause, or of thine own weakness, in such a case, answer him, and let it be an answer *ad hominem*—to the man, beat him at his own weapons, and that will be an answer *ad rem*—to the point, or as good as one. If he offer any thing that looks like an argument, answer that, and suit thine answer to his case. If he think, because thou dost not answer him, that what he says is unanswerable, then give him an answer, lest he be wise in his own conceit, and boast of a victory." For (Luke, 7. 35.) wisdom's children must justify her.

6. He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cullteth off the feet, and drinketh damage. 7. The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools. 8. As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool. 9. As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

To recommend wisdom to us, and to quicken us to the diligent use of all the means for the getting of wisdom, Solomon here shews that fools are fit for nothing; they are either sottish men, who will never think and design at all, or vicious men, who will never think and design well.

1. They are not fit to be intrusted with any business, not fit to go on an errand; (v. 6.) *He that does but send a message by the hand of a fool*, of a careless, heedless, person, one who is so full of his jests, and so given to his pleasures, that he cannot apply his mind to any thing that is serious, he will find his message misunderstood, the one half of it forgotten, the rest awkwardly delivered, and so many blunders made about it, that he had as good have cut off his legs, that is, never have sent him; nay, he will drink damage, it will be very much to his prejudice to have employed such a one, who, instead of bringing him a good account of his affairs, will abuse him, and put a trick upon him; for, in Solomon's language, a knave and a fool are of the same signification. It will turn much to a man's disgrace to make use of the service of a fool, for people will be apt to judge of the master by his messenger.

2. They are not fit to have any honour put upon them; he had said, (v. 1.) *Honour is not seemly for a fool*; here he shews that it is lost and thrown away upon him; as if a man should throw a

precious stone, or a stone fit to be used in weighing, into a heap of common stones, where it would be buried, and of no use; it is as absurd as if a man should *dress up a stone in purple*, so others; nay, it is dangerous, it is like a *stone bound in a sling*, with which a man will be likely to do hurt; to *give honour to a fool*, is to put a sword in a madman's hand, with which we know not what mischief he may do, even to those that put it into his hand.

3. They are not fit to deliver wise sayings, nor should they undertake to handle any matter of weight, though they should be instructed concerning it, and be able to say something to it. Wise sayings, as a foolish man delivers them, and applies them, (in such a manner, that one may know he does not rightly understand them,) lose their excellency and usefulness; *A parable in the mouth of fools* ceases to be a parable, and becomes a jest. If a man who lives a wicked life, yet speaks religiously, and takes God's covenant into his mouth,

(1.) He does but shame himself and his profession; *As the legs of the lame are not equal*, by reason of which their going is unseemly, so unseemly is it for a fool to pretend to speak apophthegms, and give advice, and for a man to talk devoutly, whose conversation is a constant contradiction to his talk, and gives him the lie. His good words raise him up, but then his bad life takes him down, and so his *legs are not equal*. "A wise saying (says Bishop Patrick) doth as ill become a fool as dancing doth a cripple; for as his lameness never so much appears as when he would seem nimble, so the other's folly is never so ridiculous as when he would seem wise." As therefore it is best for a lame man to keep his seat, so it is best for a silly man, and a bad man, to hold his tongue.

(2.) He does but do mischief with it to himself and others, as a drunkard does with a thorn, or any other sharp thing which he takes in his hand, with which he tears himself and those about him, because he knows not how to manage it. Those that talk well, and do not live well, their good words will aggravate their own condemnation, and others will be hardened by their inconsistency with themselves. Some give this sense of it; The sharpest saying, by which a sinner, one would think, should be pricked to the heart, makes no more impression upon a fool, no, though it come out of his own mouth, than the scratch of a thorn does upon the hand of a man when he is drunk, who then feels it not, nor complains of it, *ch. 23. 35.*

10. The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors.

Our translation gives this verse a different reading in the text, and in the margin; and accordingly it bespeaks, either,

1. The equity of a good God; The Master, or Lord, (so *Rab* signifies,) or, as we read it, *The great God that formed all things* at first, and still governs them in infinite wisdom, renders to every man according to his work. He *rewards the fool*, who sinned through ignorance, *who knew not his Lord's will, with few stripes*; and he *rewards the transgressor*, who sins presumptuously, and with a high hand, *who knew his Lord's will, and would not do it, with many stripes*. Some understand it of the goodness of God's common providence, even to *fools and transgressors*, on whom he *causes his sun to shine, and his rain to fall*. Or it bespeaks,

2. The iniquity of a bad prince; so the margin reads it; *A great man grieves all; and he hires the fool, he hires also the transgressors*. When a wicked man gets power in his hand, by himself, and by the fools and knaves whom he employs under him, whom he hires, and chooses to make use of, he grieves all who are under him, and is vexatious to them. We should therefore *pray for kings, and all in authority*, that, under them, our lives may be quiet and peaceable.

11. As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.

See here, 1. What an abominable thing sin is, and how hateful sometimes it is made to appear, even to the sinner himself. When his conscience is convinced, or he feels smart from his sin, he is

sick of it, and vomits it up; he seems then to detest it, and to be willing to part with it. It is in itself, and, first or last, will be to the sinner, more loathsome than the vomit of a dog, *Ps. 36. 2.*

2. How apt sinners are to relapse into it notwithstanding; as the dog, after he has gained ease by vomiting that which burthened his stomach, yet goes and licks it up again, so sinners, who have been convinced only, and not converted, return to sin again, forgetting how sick it made them. The Apostle applies this proverb to those that *have known the way of righteousness*, but are *turned from it*; (2 Pet. 2. 22.) but God will *spew them out of his mouth*, *Rev. 3. 16.*

12. Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him.

Here is, 1. A spiritual disease supposed, and that is self-conceit. *Seest thou a man?* Yes, we see many a one, *wise in his own conceit*; who has some little sense, but is proud of it, thinks it much more than it is, more than any of his neighbours have, and enough, so that he needs no more; has such a conceit of his own abilities as makes him opinionative, dogmatical, and censorious; and all the use he makes of his knowledge, is, that it puffs him up. Or, if by a wise man we understand a religious man, it describes the character of those who, making some show of religion, conclude their spiritual state to be good, when really it is very bad, like *Laodicea*, *Rev. 3. 17.*

2. The danger of this disease; it is in a manner desperate, *there is more hope of a fool*, that knows, and owns, himself to be such, than of such a one. Solomon was not only a wise man himself, but a teacher of wisdom; and this observation he made upon his pupils, that he found his work most difficult, and least successful, with those that had a good opinion of themselves, and were not sensible that they needed instruction. Therefore he that *seems to himself to be wise*, must *become a fool*, that he may be wise, *1 Cor. 3. 18.* There is more hope of a publican than of a proud Pharisee, *Matth. 21. 32.* Many are hindered from being truly wise, and religious, by a false and groundless conceit that they are so, *John. 9. 40, 41.*

13. The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.

When a man talks foolishly, we say, He talks idly; for none betray their folly more than those who are idle, and go about to excuse themselves in their idleness. As men's folly makes them slothful, so their slothfulness makes them foolish. Observe,

1. What the slothful man really dreads; he dreads *the way, the streets*, the place, where work is to be done, and a journey to be gone; he hates business, hates every thing that requires care and labour.

2. What he dreams of, and pretends to dread; *a lion in the way*. When he is pressed to be diligent, either in his worldly affairs, or in the business of religion, this is his excuse, (and a sorry excuse it is, as bad as none,) *There is a lion in the way*, some insuperable difficulty or danger which he cannot pretend to grapple with. Lions frequent woods and deserts; and, in the day-time, when man has business to do, they are in their dens, *Ps. 104. 22, 23.* But the sluggard fancies, or rather pretends to fancy, *a lion in the streets*, whereas the lion is only in his own fancy, nor is he so fierce as he is painted. Note, It is a foolish thing to frighten ourselves from real duties by fancied difficulties, *Ecc. 11. 4.*

14. As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed.

Having seen the slothful man in fear of his work, here we find him in love with his ease; he lies in his bed on one side till he is weary of that, and then turns to the other, but still in his bed, when it is far in the day, and work is to be done; as the door is moved, but not removed; and so his business is neglected, and his opportunities let slip. See the sluggard's character:

1. He is one that does not care to get out of his bed, but seems to be hung upon it, *as the door upon the hinges*. Bodily ease, too

much consulted, is the sad occasion of many a spiritual disease. They that love sleep will prove in the end to have loved death.

2. He does not care to get forward with his business, in that he stirs to and fro a little, but to no purpose, he is where he was. Slothful professors turn, in profession, like *the door upon the hinges*. The world and the flesh are the two hinges on which they are hung, and, though they move in a course of external services, are got into a road of duties, and tread around in them like the horse in the mill, yet they get no good, they get no ground, they are never the nearer heaven; sinners unchanged, saints unimproved.

15. The slothful hideth his hand in *his bosom*; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.

The sluggard is now, with much ado, got out of his bed, but he might as good have lain there still, for any thing he is likely to bring to pass in his work, so awkwardly does he go about it. Observe,

1. The pretence he makes for his slothfulness; He *hides his hand in his bosom*, for fear of cold; next to his warm bed is his warm bosom; or, pretending that he is lame, as some do, that make a trade of begging; something ails his hand, he would have it thought that it is blistered with yesterday's hard work; or, it speaks, in general, his aversion to business; he has tried, and his hands are not used to labour, and therefore he hugs himself in his own ease, and cares for nobody. Note, It is common for those that will not do their duty, to pretend they cannot; *I cannot dig*, Luke, 16. 3.

2. The prejudice he sustains by his slothfulness; He himself is the loser by it, for he starves himself; *it grieves him to bring his hand to his mouth*, he cannot find in his heart to feed himself, but dreads, as if it were a mighty toil, to lift his hand to his head. It is an elegant hyperbole, aggravating his sin, that he cannot endure to take the least pains, no, not for the greatest profit, and shewing how his sin is his punishment. Those that are slothful in the business of religion will not be at the pains to feed their own souls with the word of God, the bread of life, nor to fetch in promised blessings by prayer, though they might have them for the fetching.

16. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.

Observe, 1. The high opinion which the sluggard has of himself, notwithstanding the gross absurdity and folly of his slothfulness; He thinks himself *wiser than seven men*, than seven wise men, for they are such as *can render a reason*. It is the wisdom of a man to be able to *render a reason*; of a good man, to be able to give *a reason of the hope that is in him*, 1 Pet. 3. 15. What we do we should be able to *render a reason* for, though, perhaps, we may not have wit enough to shew the fallacy of every objection against it. He that takes pains in religion can render a good reason for it; he knows that he is working for a good Master, and that *his labour shall not be in vain*. But the sluggard thinks himself *wiser than seven* such; for, let seven such persuade him to be diligent, with all the reasons they can render for it, it is to no purpose, his own determination, he thinks, answer enough to them and all their reasons.

2. The reference that this has to his slothfulness. It is *the sluggard*, above all men, that is thus self-conceited; for, (1.) His good opinion of himself is the cause of his slothfulness; *therefore* he will not take pains to get wisdom, because he thinks he is wise enough already. A conceit of the sufficiency of our attainments is a great enemy to our improvement. (2.) His slothfulness is the cause of his good opinion of himself. If he would but take pains to examine himself, and compare himself with the laws of wisdom, he would have other thoughts of himself. Indulged slothfulness is at the bottom of prevailing self-conceitedness. Nay, (3.) So wretchedly besotted is he, that he takes his slothfulness to be his wisdom; he thinks it is his wisdom to make much of himself, and take all the ease he can get, and do no more in religion than he needs must, to avoid suffering; to sit still and see what other people do, that he may have the pleasure of finding fault with

them. Of such sluggards, who are proud of that which is their shame, there is little hope, v. 12.

17. He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.

1. That which is here condemned, is, *meddling with strife that belongs not to us*. If we must not be hasty to strive in our own cause, (ch. 25. 8.) much less in other people's, especially theirs that we are no way related to, or concerned in, but light on accidentally as we pass by. If we can be instrumental to make peace between those that are at variance, we must do it, though we should thereby get the ill-will of both sides, at least, while they are in their heat; but to make ourselves busy in other men's matters, and parties in other men's quarrels, is not only to court our own trouble, but to thrust ourselves into temptation. *Who made me a judge?* Let them end it, as they began it, between themselves.

2. *Therefore* we are cautioned against it, because of the danger it exposes us to; it is like taking a snarling cur *by the ears*, that will snap at you, and bite you; you had better have let him alone, for you cannot get clear of him when you would, and must thank yourselves if you come off with a wound and dishonour. He that has got *a dog by the ears*, if he let him go, he flies at him, if he keeps his hold, he has his hands full, and can do nothing else. Let every one *with quietness work, and mind his own business*, and not with unquietness quarrel, and meddle with other people's business.

18. As a mad man who casteth fire-brands, arrows, and death, 19. So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?

See here, 1. How mischievous those are that make no scruple of *deceiving their neighbours*, they are *as mad men that cast fire-brands, arrows, and death*; so much hurt may they do by their deceits. They value themselves upon it, as politic, cunning, men, but really they are *as mad men*. There is not a greater madness in the world than a wilful sin. It is not only the passionate, furious, man, but the malicious, deceitful, man, that is *a mad man*; he does in effect *cast fire-brands, arrows, and death*; he does more mischief than he can imagine. Fraud and falsehood burn like fire-brands, kill, even at a distance, like arrows.

2. See how frivolous the excuse is which men commonly make for the mischief they do, that they did it in jest; with this they think to turn it off when they are reproved for it, *Am not I in sport?* But it will prove dangerous playing with fire, and jesting with edge-tools. Not that those are to be commended who are captious, and can take no jest, they that themselves are *wise, must suffer fools*, (2 Cor. 11. 19, 20.) but those are certainly to be condemned who are any way abusive to their neighbours, impose upon their credulity, cheat them in their bargains with them, tell lies to them, or tell lies of them, give them ill language, or sully their reputation, and then think to excuse it by saying that they did but jest; *Am not I in sport?* He that sins in jest, must repent in earnest, or his sin will be his ruin. Truth is too valuable a thing to be sold for a jest, and so is the reputation of our neighbour. By lying and slandering in jest, men learn themselves, and teach others, to lie and slander in earnest; a false report, raised in mirth, may be spread in malice; and if a man may tell a lie to make himself merry, why not to make himself rich? and so *truth quite perishes*, and men *teach their tongues to tell lies*, Jer. 9. 5. If men would consider that a lie comes from the Devil, and brings to hell-fire, surely that would spoil the sport of it; it is *casting arrows and death* to themselves.

20. Where no wood is, *there* the fire goeth out: so where *there is* no tale-bearer, the strife ceaseth.

21. *As* coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife.

22. The words of a tale-bearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Contention is as a fire, it heats the spirit, burns up all that is good, and puts families and societies into a flame. Now here we are told how that fire is commonly kindled and kept burning, that we may avoid the occasions of strife, and so prevent the mischievous consequences of it. If then we would keep the peace,

1. We must not give ear to *tale-bearers*, for they feed the fire of contention with fuel; nay, they spread it with combustible matter; the tales they carry are fire-balls; they who, by insinuating base characters, revealing secrets, and misrepresenting words and actions, do what they can to make relations, friends, and neighbours, jealous one of another, to alienate them one from another, and sow discord among them, are to be banished out of families, and all societies, and then strife will as surely cease, as the fire will go out when it has no fuel; the contenders will better understand one another, and come to a better temper; old stories will soon be forgotten, when there are no new ones told to keep up the remembrance of them, and both sides will see how they have been imposed upon by a common enemy. Whisperers and backbiters are incendiaries not to be suffered.

To illustrate this, he repeats (v. 22.) what he had said before, (ch. 18. 8.) that *the words of a tale-bearer are as wounds*, deep and dangerous wounds, wounds in the vitals; they wound the reputation of him who is belied, and, perhaps, the wound proves incurable, and even the plaister of a recantation (which yet can seldom be obtained) may not prove wide enough for it; they wound the love and charity which he, to whom they are spoken, ought to have for his neighbour, and give a fatal stab to friendship and Christian fellowship. We must therefore not only not be tale-bearers ourselves at any time, nor ever do any ill offices, but we should not give the least countenance to those that are.

2. We must not associate with peevish, passionate, people, that are exceptions, and apt to put the worst constructions upon every thing, that pick quarrels upon the least occasion, and are quick, and high, and hot, in resenting affronts; these are *contentious men* that *kindle strife*, v. 21. The less we have to do with such, the better, for it will be very hard not to quarrel with those that are quarrelsome.

23. Burning lips and a wicked heart *are like a potsherd covered with silver dross*.

This may be meant, either,

1. Of a *wicked heart* shewing itself in *burning lips*, furious, passionate, outrageous words, burning in malice, and persecuting those to whom, or of whom, they are spoken; ill words and ill-will agree as well together as a *potsherd* and the *dross of silver*, which, now that the pot is broken and the dross separated from the silver, are fit to be thrown together to the dunghill.

2. Or of a *wicked heart* disguising itself with *burning lips*, burning with the professions of love and friendship, and even persecuting a man with flatteries; this is *like a potsherd covered with the scum or dross of silver*, with which one that is weak may be imposed upon, as if it were of some value, but a wise man is soon aware of the cheat. This sense agrees with the following verses.

24. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; 25. When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for *there are seven abominations in his heart*. 26. *Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation*.

There is cause to complain, not only of the want of sincerity in men's profession of friendship, and that they do not love so well as they pretend, nor will serve their friends so much as they promise, but, which is much worse, of wicked designs in the profession of friendship, and the making of it subservient to the most malicious intentions. This is here spoken of as a common thing; (v. 24.) *He that hates his neighbour*, and is contriving to do him a mischief, yet *dissembles with his lips*, professes to have a respect for him, and to be ready to serve him, talks kindly with him, as

Cain with Abel, asks, *Art thou in health, my brother?* as Joab to Amasa, that his malice may not be suspected, and guarded against, and so he may have the fairer opportunity to execute the purposes of it, this man *lays up deceit within him*, he keeps in his mind the mischief he intends to do his neighbour, till he catches him at an advantage. This is malice which has no less of the subtlety, than it has of the venom, of the old serpent in it.

Now, as to this matter, we are here cautioned,

1. Not to be so foolish as to suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by the pretensions of friendship. Remember to distrust *when a man speaks fair*, be not too forward to believe him, unless you know him well, for it is possible *there may be seven abominations in his heart*, a great many projects of mischief against you, which he is labouring so industriously to conceal with his fair speech. Satan is an enemy that hates us, and yet, in his temptations, speaks fair, as he did to Eve, but it is madness to give credit to him, for *there are seven abominations in his heart, seven other spirits* does one unclean spirit bring *more wicked than himself*.

2. Not to be so wicked as to impose upon any with a profession of friendship; for, though the fraud may be carried on plausibly a while, it will be brought to light, v. 26. *He whose hatred is covered by deceit*, one time or other will be discovered, and his *wickedness shewed*, to his shame and confusion, *before the whole congregation*; and nothing will do more to make a man odious to all companies. Love (says one) is the best armour, but the worst cloke, and will serve dissemblers as the disguise which Ahab put on and perished in.

27. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.

See here, 1. What pains men take to do mischief to others: As they put a force upon themselves by concealing it with a profession of friendship, so they put themselves to a great deal of labour to bring it about; it is *digging a pit*, it is *rolling a stone*, hard work; and yet men will not stick at it, to gratify their passion and revenge.

2. What preparation they hereby make of mischief to themselves; their violent dealing will return upon their own heads: they shall themselves *fall into the pit they digged*, and the stone they rolled *will return upon them*, Ps. 7. 15, 16.—9. 15, 16. The righteous God will take the wise, not only *in their own craftiness*, but in their own cruelty. It is the plotter's doom. Haman is hanged on a gallows of his own preparing:

—Nec lex est justior ulla
Quam neis artifices arte perire sua—

Nor is there any law more just than that the contrivers of destruction should perish by their own arts.

28. A lying tongue hateth *those that are afflicted* by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.

There are two sorts of lies equally detestable.

1. A slandering lie, which avowedly hates those it is spoken of; *A lying tongue hates those that are afflicted by it*; it afflicts them by calumnies and reproaches, because it hates them, and can thus smite them secretly where they are without defence; and it hates them, because it has afflicted them, and made them its enemies. The mischief of this is open and obvious: it afflicts, it hates, and owns it, and every body sees it.

2. A flattering lie, which secretly *works the ruin* of those it is spoken to. In the former, the mischief is plain, and men guard against it as well as they can, but in this it is little suspected, and men betray themselves by being credulous of their own praises, and the compliments that are passed upon them. A wise man therefore will be more afraid of a flatterer that kisses and kills, than of a slanderer that proclaims war.

CHAP. XXVII.

1. **B**OAST not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

Here is, 1. A good caution against presuming upon *time to*

come; *Boast not thyself*, no, not of *to-morrow*, much less of many days or years to come. This does not forbid *preparing for to-morrow*, but *presuming upon to-morrow*. We must not promise ourselves the continuance of our lives and comforts till *to-morrow*, but speak of it with submission to the will of God, and as those who, with good reason, are kept at uncertainty about it. We must not *take thought for the morrow*, (Matth. 6. 34.) but we must cast our care concerning it upon God. See James, 4. 13. 15. We must not put off the great work of conversion, that one thing needful, till *to-morrow*, as if we were sure of it, *but to-day, while it is called to-day*, hear God's voice.

2. A good consideration, upon which this caution is grounded; *We know not what a day may bring forth*; what event may be in the teeming womb of time; it is a secret till it is born, Eccl. 11. 5. A little time may produce considerable changes, and such as we little think of; we *know not what the present day may bring forth*, the evening must commend it. *Nescis quid serus vesper vehat—Thou knowest not what the close of evening may bring with it*. God has wisely kept us in the dark concerning future events, and reserved to himself the knowledge of them, as a flower of the crown, that he may train us up in a dependence upon himself, and a continued readiness for every event, Acts, 1. 7.

2. Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.

Note, 1. We must do that which is commendable, for which even strangers may praise us. Our *light must shine before men*, and we must do good works that may be seen, though we must not do them on purpose that they may be seen. Let our own works be such as will praise us, even *in the gates*, Phil. 4. 8.

2. When we have done it, we must not commend ourselves, for that is an evidence of pride, folly, and self-love, and a great lessening to a man's reputation. Every one will be forward to run him down that cries himself up. There may be a just occasion for us to vindicate ourselves, but it does not become us to applaud ourselves. *Proprio laus sordet in ore—Self-praise defiles the mouth*.

3. A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both. 4. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?

These two verses shew the intolerable mischief,

1. Of ungoverned passion; The wrath of a fool, who, when he is provoked, cares not what he says and does, is more grievous than a great stone, or a load of sand. It lies heavy upon himself. Those who have no command of their passions do themselves even sink under the load of them. The wrath of a fool lies heavy upon those he is enraged at, to whom, in his fury, he will be in danger of doing some mischief. It is therefore our wisdom not to give provocation to a fool, but, if he be in a passion, to get out of his way.

2. Of rooted malice; which is as much worse than the former, as coals of juniper are than a fire of thorns; *Wrath* (it is true) *is cruel*, and does many a barbarous thing, and *anger is outrageous*; but a secret enmity at the person of another, an envy at his prosperity, and a desire of revenge for some injury or affront, are much more mischievous: one may avoid a sudden heat, as David escaped Saul's javelin, but when it grows, as Saul's did, to a settled envy, there is no *standing before it*; it will pursue, it will overtake. He that grieves at the good of another, will be still contriving to do him hurt, and will keep his anger for ever.

5. Open rebuke is better than secret love. 6. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Note, 1. It is good for us to be reprov'd, and told of our faults, by our friends. If true love in the heart has but zeal and courage enough to shew itself in dealing plainly with our friends, and

reproving them for what they say and do amiss, this is really better, not only than secret hatred, (as Lev. 19. 17.) but than *secret love*, that love to our neighbours which does not shew itself in this good fruit, which compliments them in their sins, to the prejudice of their souls; *Faithful are the reproofs of a friend*, though, for the present, they are painful as wounds. It is a sign that our friends are faithful indeed, if, in love to our souls, they will not suffer sin upon us, nor let us alone in it. The physician's care is to cure the patient's disease, not to please his palate.

2. It is dangerous to be caressed and flattered by an enemy, whose kisses are deceitful; we can take no pleasure in them, because we can put no confidence in them. Joab's kiss and Judas's were deceitful, and therefore we have need to stand upon our guard, that we be not deluded by them; they are to be deprecated. Some read it, *The Lord deliver us from an enemy's kisses; from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue*.

7. The full soul loatheth an honey-comb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

Solomon here, as often in this book, shews that the poor have in some respects the advantage of the rich; for,

1. They have a better relish of their enjoyments than the rich have; hunger is the best sauce. Coarse fare, with a good appetite to it, has a sensible pleasantness in it, which they are strangers to whose hearts are *overcharged with surfeiting*. They that fare sumptuously every day nauseate even delicate food, as the Israelites did the quails; whereas they that have no more than their necessary food, though it be such as *the full soul* would call bitter, to them it is sweet; they eat it with pleasure, digest it, and are refreshed by it.

2. They are more thankful for their enjoyments; *The hungry* will bless God for bread and water, while those that are full think the greatest dainties and varieties scarcely worth giving thanks for. The virgin Mary seems to refer to this, when she says, (Luke, 1. 53.) *The hungry*, who know how to value God's blessings, are filled with good things, but the rich, who despise them, are justly sent empty away.

8. As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.

Note, 1. There are many that do not know when they are well off, but are uneasy with their present condition, and given to change. God, in his providence, has appointed them a place fit for them, and has made it comfortable to them; but they affect unsettledness, they love to wander, they are glad of a pretence to go abroad, and do not care for staying long at a place; they needlessly absent themselves from their own work and care, and meddle with that which belongs not to them.

2. Those that thus desert the post assigned to them, are like a bird that wanders from her nest. It is an instance of their folly, they are like a silly bird, they are always wavering, like the wandering bird that hops from bough to bough, and rests nowhere. It is unsafe; the bird that wanders is exposed; a man's place is his castle, he that quits it makes himself an easy prey to the fowler; when the bird wanders from her nest, the eggs and young ones there are neglected. They that love to be abroad leave their work at home undone. *Let every man therefore, in the calling wherein he is called, therein abide, therein abide with God*.

9. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel. 10. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not: neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near, than a brother far off.

Here is, 1. A charge given to be faithful and constant to our friends, our old friends, to keep up an intimacy with them, and to be ready to do them all the good offices that lie in our power. It is good to have a friend, a bosom-friend, whom we can be free

with, and with whom we may communicate counsels; it is not necessary that this friend should be a relation, or any way akin to us, though it is happiest, when, among those who are so, we find one fit to make a friend of. Peter and Andrew were brethren, so were James and John; yet Solomon frequently distinguishes between a friend and a brother. But it is advisable to choose a friend among our neighbours who live near us, that acquaintance may be kept up, and kindnesses the more frequently interchanged. It is good also to have a special respect to those who have been friends to our family; "*Thine own friend*, especially if he have been *thy father's friend, forsake not*; fail not both to serve him, and to use him, as there is occasion. He is a tried friend, he knows thine affairs, he has a particular concern for thee, therefore be advised by him." It is a duty we owe to our parents, when they are gone, to love their friends, and consult with them. Solomon's son undid himself by forsaking the counsel of his father's friends.

2. A good reason given why we should thus value true friendship, and be choice of it.

(1.) Because of the pleasure of it. There is a great deal of *sweetness* in conversing and consulting with a cordial friend; it is like *ointment and perfume*, which are very grateful to the smell, and exhilarate the spirits, it *rejoices the heart*, the burthen of care is made lighter by unbosoming ourselves to our friend, and it is a great satisfaction to us to have his sentiments concerning our affairs. *The sweetness of friendship lies not in hearty mirth, and hearty laughter, but in hearty counsel, faithful advice, sincerely given and without flattery; by counsel of the soul*, so the word is; counsel which reaches the case, and comes to the heart; counsel about soul-concerns, Ps. 66. 16. We should reckon that the most pleasant conversation, which is about spiritual things, and promotes the prosperity of the soul.

(2.) Because of the profit and advantage of it, especially in a *day of calamity*; when we are here advised not to go into a *brother's house*, not to expect relief from a kinsman, merely for kindred-sake, for the obligation of that commonly goes little further than calling cousin, and fails when it comes to the trial of a real kindness; but, rather, to apply ourselves to our neighbours, who are at hand, and will be ready to help us at an exigence. It is wisdom to oblige them by being neighbourly, and we shall have the benefit of it in distress, by finding them so to us, *ch. 18. 24.*

11. My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.

Children are here exhorted to be wise and good,

1. That they may be a comfort to their parents, and may *make their hearts glad*, even when *the evil days come*, and so recompense them for their care, *ch. 23. 15.*

2. That they may be a credit to them; "*That I may answer him that reproaches me* with having been over-strict and severe in bringing up my children, and having taken a wrong method with them, in restraining them from the liberties which other young people take. *My son, be wise*, and then it will appear, in the effect, that I went the wisest way to work with my children." Those that have been blest with a religious education, should carry it so in every thing as to be a credit to their education, and to silence those who say, *A young saint, an old Devil*; and to prove the contrary, *A young saint, an old Angel*.

12. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.

This we had before, *ch. 22. 3.*

Note, 1. Evil may be foreseen. Where there is temptation, it is easy to foresee, that, if we thrust ourselves into it, there will be sin, and as easy to foresee, that, if we venture upon the evil of sin, there will follow the evil of punishment; and, commonly, God warns before he wounds, having *set watchmen over us*, Jer. 6. 17.

2. It will be well or ill with us, according as we do, or do not, improve the foresight we have of evil before us; The prudent man, *foreseeing the evil*, forecasts accordingly, and *hides himself*,

but the simple is either so dull that he does not foresee it, or so wilful and slothful that he will take no care to avoid it, and so he *passes on securely, and is punished*. We do well for ourselves, when we provide for hereafter.

13. Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.

This also we had before, *ch. 20. 16.*

1. It shews who they are that are hastening to poverty; those that have so little consideration as to be bound for every body that will ask them, and those that are given to women. Such as these will take up money as far as ever their credit will go, but they will certainly cheat their creditors at last, nay, they are cheating them all along. An honest man may be made a beggar, but he is not honest that makes himself one.

2. It advises us to be so discreet, in ordering our affairs, as not to lend money to those who are manifestly wasting their estates, unless they give very good security for it. Foolish lending is injustice to our families. He does not say, "*Get another to be bound with him*," for he that makes himself a common voucher will have those to be his security who are as insolvent as himself; therefore *Take his garment*.

14. He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.

Note, 1. It is a great folly to be extravagant in praising even the best of our friends and benefactors; it is our duty to give every one his due praise, to applaud those that excel in knowledge, virtue, and usefulness, and to acknowledge the kindnesses we have received with thankfulness; but to do this *with a loud voice, rising early in the morning*, to be always harping on this string, in all companies, even to our friend's face, or so as that he may be sure to hear it, to do it studiously, as we do that which we rise early to, to magnify the merits of our friend above measure, and with hyperboles, is fulsome, and nauseous, and savours of hypocrisy and design; praising men for what they have done, is only to get more out of them; and every body concludes the parasite will be well paid for his panegyric or epistle dedicatory. We must not give that praise to our friend, which is due to God only, as some think is intimated in *rising early* to do it; for in the morning God is to be praised. We must not *make too much haste to praise men*, so some understand it; not cry up men too soon for their abilities and performances, but let them first be proved; lest they be lifted up with pride, and laid to sleep in idleness.

2. It is a greater folly to be fond of being ourselves extravagantly praised; a wise man rather counts it a *curse*, and a reflection upon him; not only designed to pick his pocket, but which may really turn to his prejudice. Modest praises (as a great man observes) invite such as are present to add to the commendation, but immodest, immoderate, praises tempt them to detract rather, and to censure one that they hear over-commended. And besides, over-praising a man makes him the object of envy; every man puts in for a share of reputation, and therefore reckons himself injured, if another monopolize it, or have more given him than his share. And the greatest danger of all, is, that it is a temptation to pride; men are apt to *think* of themselves above what is meet, when others *speak* of them above what is meet. See how careful blessed Paul was not to be over-valued, 2 Cor. 12. 6.

15. A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. 16. Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, *which bewrayeth itself*.

Here, as before, Solomon laments the case of him that has a peevish, passionate, wife, that is continually chiding, and making herself, and all about her, uneasy.

1. It is a grievance that there is no *avoiding*, for it is like a

final dropping in a very rainy day. The contentions of a neighbour may be, like a sharp shower, troublesome for the time, yet, while it lasts, one may take shelter; but *the contentions of a wife* are like a constant soaking rain, for which there is no remedy but patience. See *ch. 19. 13.*

2. It is a grievance that there is no *concealing*. A wise man would hide it if he could, for the sake both of his own and his wife's reputation, but he cannot, any more than he can conceal the noise of the wind when it blows, or the smell of a strong perfume. Those that are froward and brawling will proclaim their own shame, even when their friends, in kindness to them, would cover it.

17. Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

This bespeaks both the pleasure and the advantage of conversation. One man is nobody; nor will poring upon a book in a corner accomplish a man so as reading and studying of men will. Wise and profitable discourse sharpens men's wits; and those that have ever so much knowledge, may, by conference, have something added to them. It sharpens men's looks, and, by cheering the spirits, puts a briskness and liveliness into the countenance, and gives a man such an air as shews he is pleased himself, and makes him pleasing to those about him. Good men's graces are sharpened by converse with those that are good, and bad men's lusts and passions are sharpened by converse with those that are bad, as iron is sharpened by its like, especially by the file. Men are filed, made smooth, and bright, and fit for business, (who were rough, and dull, and inactive,) by conversation. This is designed,

1. To recommend to us this expedient for sharpening ourselves, but with a caution to take heed whom we choose to converse with, because the influence upon us is so great, either for the better or for the worse.

2. To direct us what we must have in our eye in conversation, to improve both others and ourselves, not to pass away time or banter one another, but to *provoke one another to love and to good works*, and so to make one another wiser and better.

18. Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.

This is designed to encourage diligence, faithfulness, and constancy, even in mean employments. Though the calling be laborious and despicable, yet those who keep to it will find there is something to be got by it.

1. Let not a poor gardener, who *keeps the fig-tree*, be discouraged; though it require constant care and attendance to nurse up fig-trees, and, when they are grown to maturity, to keep them in good order, and gather the figs in their season, he shall be paid for his pains, he *shall eat the fruit* of it, 1 Cor. 9. 7.

2. Nay, let not a poor servant think himself incapable of thriving and being preferred; for, if he be diligent in *waiting on his master*, observant of him, and obedient to him; if he *keep his master*, so the word is; if he do all he can for the securing of his person and reputation, and take care that his estate be not wasted or damaged, such a one *shall be honoured*; shall not only get a good word, but be preferred and rewarded. God is a Master who has engaged to put an honour on those that serve him faithfully, John, 12. 26.

19. As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.

This shews us that there is a way,

1. Of knowing ourselves; as the water is a looking-glass, in which we may see our faces by reflection, so there are mirrors by which the *heart of man* is discovered to a man, to himself. Let a man examine his own conscience, his thoughts, affections, and intentions. Let him behold his *natural face in the gloss* of the divine law, (Jam. 1. 23.) and he may discern what kind of man he is, and what is his true character, which it will be of great use to every man rightly to know.

2. Of knowing one another by ourselves; for, as there is a similitude between the face of a man and the reflection of it in the water, so there is between one man's heart and another's; for God has fashioned men's hearts alike; and, in many cases, we may judge of others by ourselves, which is one of the foundations on which that rule is built, of doing to others as we would be done by, Exod. 23. 9. *Nihil est unum uni tam simile, tam par, quam omnes inter nosmet ipsos sumus. Sui nemo ipse tam similis quam omnes sunt omnium*—No one thing is so like another as man is to man. No person himself is so like as each person is to all besides. Cic. de Legib. lib. 1. One corrupt heart is like another, and so is one sanctified heart, for the former bears the same image of the earthy, the latter the same image of the heavenly.

20. Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

Two things are here said to be insatiable, and they are two things near of kin, death and sin.

1. Death is insatiable; the first death, the second death, both are so. The grave is not clogged with the multitude of dead bodies that are daily thrown into it, but is still an *open sepulchre*, and cries, *Give, give*; hell also has enlarged itself, and still has room for the damned spirits that are committed to that prison. *Tophet is deep and large*, Isa. 30. 33.

2. Sin is insatiable; *The eyes of man are never satisfied*, nor the appetites of the carnal mind toward profit or pleasure; the eye is *not satisfied with seeing*, nor is he that *loves silver satisfied with silver*. Men labour for that which surfeits, but satisfies not; nay, it is dissatisfying; such a perpetual uneasiness have men justly been doomed to, ever since our first parents were not satisfied with all the trees of Eden, but they must meddle with the forbidden tree. Those whose eyes are ever toward the Lord, in him are satisfied, and shall for ever be so.

21. As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise.

This gives us a touchstone by which we may try ourselves: silver and gold are tried by putting them into the furnace and fining-pot; so is a man tried by praising him. Let him be extolled and preferred, and then he will shew himself what he is.

1. If a man be made, by the applause that is given him, proud, conceited, and scornful; if he take the glory to himself, which he should transmit to God, as Herod did; if, the more he is praised, the more careless he is of what he says and does, if he *lie in bed till noon*, because *his name is up*; thereby it will appear that he is a vain foolish man, and a man who, though he be praised, has nothing in him truly praise-worthy.

2. If, on the contrary, a man is made, by his praise, more thankful to God, more respectful to his friends, more watchful against every thing that may blemish his reputation, more diligent to improve himself, and do good to others, that he may answer the expectations of his friends from him, by this it will appear that he is a wise and good man. He has a good temper of mind who knows how to pass by evil report and good report, and is still the same, 2 Cor. 6. 8.

22. Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.

Solomon had said, (*ch. 22. 15.*) *The foolishness which is bound in the heart of a child may be driven out by the rod of correction*, for then the mind is to be moulded, the vicious habits not having taken root; but here he shews, that, if it be not done then, it will be next to impossible to do it afterward; if the disease be inveterate, there is a danger of its being incurable. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin?* Observe,

1. Some are so bad, that rough and severe methods must be used with them, after gentle means have been tried in vain; they must be *brayed in a mortar*. God will take this way with them: his judgments; the magistrates must take this way with them.

by the rigour of the law. Force must be used with those that will not be ruled by reason, and love, and their own interest.

2. Some are so incorrigibly bad, that even those rough and severe methods do not answer the end, their *foolishness will not depart from them*; so fully are their hearts set in them to do evil; they are often under the rod, and yet not humbled; in the furnace, and yet not refined; but, like Ahaz, trespass yet more; (2 Chron. 28. 22.) and what remains, then, but that they should be rejected as reprobate silver?

23. Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds. 24. For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation? 25. The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered. 26. The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field. 27. And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for maintenance for thy maidens.

Here is, 1. A command given us to be diligent in our callings; it is directed to husbandmen and shepherds, and those that deal in cattle, but it is to be extended to all other lawful callings; whatever our business is, within doors or without, we must apply our minds to it. This command intimates, (1.) That we ought to have some business to do in this world, and not to live in idleness. (2.) We ought rightly and fully to understand our business, and know what we have to do, and not meddle with that which we do not understand. (3.) We ought to have an eye to it ourselves, and not turn over all the care of it to others; we should, with our own eyes, inspect the *state of our flocks*; it is the master's eye that makes them fat. (4.) We must be discreet and considerate in the management of our business; *know the state of things*, and *look well* to them, that nothing may be lost, no opportunity let slip, but every thing done in proper time and order, and so as to turn to the best advantage. (5.) We must be *diligent*, and *take pains*; not only sit down and contrive, but be up and doing; "Set thy heart to thy herds, as one in care; lay thy hands, lay thy bones, to thy business."

2. The reasons to enforce this command. Consider, (1.) The uncertainty of worldly wealth; (v. 24.) *Riches are not for ever*. [1.] Other riches are not so durable as these are; "Look well to thy flocks and herds, thine estate in the country, and the stock upon that, for these are staple commodities, which, in a succession, will be for ever, whereas riches in trade and merchandise will not be so; the crown itself may, perhaps, not be so sure to thy family as thy flocks and herds. [2.] Even these riches will go to decay, if they be not well looked after. If a man had an *abbey*, (as we say,) and should be slothful and wasteful, he may make an end of it; even the crown, and the revenues of it, if care be not taken, will suffer damage, nor will it *continue to every generation*, without very good management. Though David had the crown entailed on his family, yet he *looked well to his flocks*, 1 Chron. 27. 29, 31.

(2.) The bounty and liberality of nature, or, rather, of the God of nature, and his providence; (v. 25.) *The hay appears*. In taking care of the *flocks and herds*, [1.] "There needs no great labour, no ploughing or sowing, the food for them is the spontaneous product of the ground, thou hast nothing to do but to turn them into it in the summer, *when the grass shews itself*, and to *gather the herbs of the mountains* for them against winter. God has done his part, thou art ungrateful to him, and unjustly refusest to serve his providence, if thou dost not do thine." [2.] "There is an opportunity to be observed and improved; a time when *the hay appears*; but, if thou let slip that time, thy flocks and herds will fare the worse for it. As for ourselves, so for our cattle, we ought, with the ant, to provide meat in summer.

(3.) The profit of good husbandry in a family; "Keep thy sheep, and thy sheep will help to keep thee; thou shalt have food

for thy children and servants; *goats' milk enough*; (v. 27.) and *enough is as good as a feast*. Thou shalt have raiment likewise, the *lambs' wool shall be for thy clothing*. Thou shalt have money to pay thy rent; the goats thou shalt have to sell shall be the *price of thy field*;" nay, as some understand it, "Thou shalt become a purchaser, and buy land to leave to thy children," v. 26. Note, [1.] If we have food and raiment, and wherewithal to give every body their own, we have enough, and ought to be not only content, but thankful. [2.] Masters of families must provide not only for themselves, but for their families, and see that their servants have a fitting maintenance. [3.] Plain food and plain clothing, if they be but competent, are all we should aim at. "Reckon thyself well done to, if thou be clothed with home-spun cloth, with the fleece of thy own lambs, and fed with goats' milk; let that serve for thy food which serves for the *food of thy household*, and the *maintenance of thy maidens*; be not desirous of dainties, *far-fetched and dear bought*." [4.] This should encourage us to be careful and industrious about our business, that that will bring in a sufficient maintenance for our families; we shall *eat the labour of our hands*.

CHAP. XXVIII.

1. THE wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.

See here, 1. What continual frights *they* are subject to that go on in wicked ways; guilt in the conscience makes men a terror to themselves, so that they are ready to *flee when none pursues*; like one that absconds for debt, who thinks every one he meets a bailiff. Though they pretend to be easy, there are secret fears which haunt them wherever they go, so that they fear where no present or imminent danger is, Ps. 53. 5. They that have made God their Enemy, and know it, cannot but see the whole creation at war with them, and therefore can have no true enjoyment of themselves, no confidence, no courage, but a *fearful looking for of judgment*. Sin makes men cowards.

Degeneres animos timor arguit—

Fear argues a degenerate soul. VIRG.

Quos diri conscia facti mens habet attonitos—

The consciousness of atrocious crimes astounds and confounds.

Juv.

If they flee when none pursues, what will they do when they shall see God himself pursuing them with his armies? Job, 20. 24. —15. 24. See Deut. 28. 25. Lev. 26. 36.

2. What a holy security and serenity of mind *they* enjoy who keep conscience void of offence, and so keep themselves in the love of God. *The righteous are bold as a lion*, as a young lion; in the greatest dangers they have a God of almighty power to trust to; *Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed*; whatever difficulties they meet with in the way of their duty, they are not daunted by them; *None of those things move me*.

Hic murus aeneus esto, nil conscire sibi—

Be this thy brazen bulwark of defence,

Still to preserve thy conscious innocence. HOR.

2. For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged.

Note, 1. National sins bring national disorders, and the disturbances of the public repose; *For the transgression of a land*, and a general defection from God and religion, to idolatry, profaneness, or immorality, *many are the princes thereof*, many at the same time pretending to the sovereignty, and contending for it, by which the people are crumbled into parties and factions, biting and devouring one another. Or many, successively, in a little time, one cutting off another, as 1 Kings, 16. 8, &c. or soon cut off by the hand of God, or of a foreign enemy, as 2 Kings, 24. 5, &c. As the people suffer for the sins of the prince,

Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi—

Kings play the madmen, and their people suffer for it;

so the government sometimes suffers for the sins of the people.

2. Wisdom will prevent or redress these grievances; *By a man, by a people, of understanding, that come again to themselves and their right mind, things are kept in a good order, or, if disturbed, brought back to the old channel again.* Or, *By a prince of understanding and knowledge, a privy-counsellor, or minister of state, that will restrain or suppress the transgression of the land, and take the right methods of healing the state thereof, the good estate of it will be prolonged.* We cannot imagine what a great deal of service one wise man may do to a nation in a critical juncture.

3. A poor man that oppresseth the poor *is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food.*

See here, 1. How hard-hearted poor people frequently are to one another; not only not doing such good offices as they might do one to another, but imposing upon, and over-reaching, one another. Those who know by experience the miseries of poverty, should be compassionate to those who suffer the like, but they are inexcusably barbarous if they be injurious to them.

2. How imperious and gripping those commonly are, who, being indigent and necessitous, get into power. If a prince prefer a poor man, he forgets that ever he was poor, and none shall be so oppressive to the poor as he, or squeeze them so cruelly. The hungry leech and the dry sponge suck most. *Set a beggar on horseback, and he will ride without merey; he is like a sweeping rain, which washes away the corn in the ground, and lays and beats out that which is grown, so that it leaves no food.* Princes, therefore, ought not to put those into places of trust, who are poor, and in debt, and behind-hand in the world, nor any who make it their main business to enrich themselves.

4. They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them.

Note, 1. Those that *praise the wicked* make it to appear that they do themselves *forsake the law*, and go contrary to it, for that curses and condemns the wicked. Wicked people will speak well of one another, and so strengthen one another's hand in their wicked ways, hoping thereby to silence the clamours of their own consciences, and to serve the interests of the Devil's kingdom, which is not done by any thing so effectually as by keeping vice in reputation.

2. Those that do indeed make conscience of the law of God themselves, will, in their places, vigorously oppose sin, and bear their testimony against it, and do what they can to shame and suppress it; they will reprove the works of darkness, and silence the excuses which are made for those works, and do what they can to bring gross offenders to punishment, that others may hear and fear.

5. Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things.

Note, 1. As the prevalency of men's lusts is owing to the darkness of their understandings, so the darkness of their understandings is very much owing to the dominion of their lusts; *Men understand not judgment*, discern not between truth and falsehood, right and wrong; they understand not the law of God as the rule either of their duty or of their doom; and, (1.) *Therefore it is that they are evil men*; their wickedness is the effect of their ignorance and error, Eph. 4. 18. (2.) *Therefore they understand not judgment*, because they are *evil men*, their corruptions blind their eyes, and fill them with prejudices, and, because they do evil, they *hate the light*. It is just with God also to *give them up to strong delusions*.

2. As men's seeking the LORD is a good sign that they do understand much, so it is a good means of their understanding more, even of their understanding all things needful for them. They that set God's glory before them as their end, his favour as their felicity, and his word as their rule, and apply themselves to him upon all occasions by prayer, *they seek the LORD*, and he will give

them the spirit of wisdom. If a man *do his will*, he shall *know his doctrine*, John, 7. 17. *A good understanding they have, and a better they shall have, that do his commandments*, Ps. 111. 10. 1 Cor. 2. 12, 15.

6. Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.

Here, 1. It is supposed that a man may *walk in his uprightness*, and yet be poor in this world; may be poor in the world, which is a temptation to dishonesty, and yet may resist the temptation, and continue to *walk in his uprightness*: also that a man may be *perverse in his ways*, injurious to God and man, and yet be rich, and prosper in the world, for a while; may be rich, and so lie under great obligations, and have great opportunities to do good, and yet be *perverse in his ways*, and do a great deal of hurt.

2. It is maintained as a paradox to a blind world, that an honest, godly, poor man, is better than a wicked, ungodly, rich man; has a better character, is in a better condition, has more comfort in himself, and is a greater blessing to the world, and is worthy of much more honour and respect. It is not only certain that his case will be better at death, but it is better in life. When Aristides was by a rich man upbraided with his poverty, he answered, *Thy riches do thee more hurt than my poverty does me.*

7. Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father.

Note, 1. Religion is true wisdom, and it makes men wise in every relation; He that conscientiously *keeps the law* is wise, and he will be particularly a *wise son*, will act discreetly toward his parents, for the law of God teaches him to do so.

2. Bad company is a great hinderance to religion: Those that are *companions of riotous men*, that choose such for their companions, and delight in their conversation, will certainly be drawn from *keeping the law of God*, and drawn to transgress it, Ps. 119. 115.

3. Wickedness is not only a reproach to the sinner himself, but to all that are akin to him; He that keeps rakish company, and spends his time and money with them, not only grieves his parents, but shames them, it turns to their disrepute, as if they had not done their duty to him. They are ashamed that a child of theirs should be scandalous and abusive to their neighbours.

8. He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.

Note, 1. That which is ill-got, though it may increase much, will not last long. A man may perhaps raise a great estate, in a little time, by usury and extortion, fraud and oppression of the poor, but it will not continue; he gathers it for himself, but it shall prove to have been gathered for somebody else that he has no kindness for. His estate shall go to decay, and another man's shall be raised out of the ruins of it.

2. Sometimes God, in his providence, so orders it, that that which one got unjustly, another uses charitably; it is strangely turned into the hands of one that *will pity the poor*, and do good with it, and so cut off the entail of the curse which he brought upon it, who got it by deceit and violence. Thus, the same Providence that punishes the cruel, and disables them to do any more hurt, rewards the merciful, and enables them to do so much the more good. *To him that has the ten pounds give the pound which the wicked servant hid in the napkin*; for *to him that has, and uses it well, more shall be given*, Luke, 19. 24. Thus the poor are repaid, the charitable are encouraged, and God is glorified.

9. He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination

Note, 1. It is by the word and prayer that our communion with God is kept up. God speaks to us by his law, and expects we should hear him, and heed him; we speak to him by prayer, to which we wait for an answer of peace. How reverent and serious should we be, whenever we are hearing from, and speaking to, the Lord of glory!

2. If God's word be not regarded by us, our prayers shall not only not be accepted of God, but they shall be an abomination to him; not only our sacrifices, which were ceremonial appointments, but even our prayers, which are moral duties, and which, when they are put up by the upright, are so much his delight: see Isa. 1. 11, 15. The sinner, whose prayers God is thus angry at, is one who wilfully and obstinately refuses to obey God's commandments, who will not so much as give them the hearing, but causes his ear to decline the law, and refuses, when God calls; God will, therefore, justly refuse him when he calls: see Prov. 1. 24, 28.

10. Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in possession.

Here is, 1. The doom of seducers, who attempt to draw good people, or those who profess to be such, into sin and mischief, who would take a pride in causing the righteous to go astray in an evil way, in drawing them into a snare, that they may insult over them; they shall not gain their point; it is impossible to deceive the elect, but they shall fall themselves into their own pit; and, having been not only sinners, but tempters, not only unrighteous, but enemies to the righteous, their condemnation will be so much the greater, Matth. 23. 14, 15.

2. The happiness of the sincere; they shall not only be preserved from the evil way which the wicked would decoy them into, but they shall have good things, the best things, in possession, the graces and comforts of God's Spirit, beside what they have in reversion.

11. The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.

Note, 1. Those that are rich are apt to think themselves wise, because, whatever else they are ignorant of, they know how to get and save; and they that are purse-proud expect that all they say should be regarded as an oracle and a law, and that none should dare to contradict them, but every sheaf bow to their's; this humour is fed by flatterers, who, because, like Jezebel's prophets, they are fed at their table, cry up their wisdom.

2. Those that are poor often prove themselves wiser than they; A poor man, who has taken pains to get wisdom, having no other way (as the rich man has) to get a reputation, he searches him out, and makes it to appear that he is not such a scholar, nor such a politician, as he is taken to be. See how variously God dispenses his gifts; to some he gives wealth, to others wisdom, and it is easy to say which of these is the best gift, which we should covet most earnestly.

12. When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.

Note, 1. The comfort of the people of God is the honour of the nation in which they live; There is a great glory dwelling in the land when the righteous do rejoice, when they have their liberty, the free exercise of their religion, and are not persecuted; when the government countenances them, and speaks comfortably to them, when they prosper and grow rich, and much more when they are preferred and employed, and have power put into their hands.

2. The advancement of the wicked is the eclipsing of the beauty

of a nation; When the wicked rise, and get head, they make head against all that is sacred, and then a man is hidden, a good man is thrust into obscurity, is necessitated to abscond for his own safety: corruptions prevail so generally, that, as in Elijah's time, there seem to be no good men left, the wicked walk so thick on every side.

13. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Here is, 1. The folly of indulging sin, of palliating and excusing it, denying or extenuating it, diminishing it, dissembling it, or throwing the blame of it upon others; He that thus covers his sins shall not prosper, let him never expect it; he shall not succeed in his endeavour to cover his sin, for it will be discovered, sooner or later; there is nothing hid which shall not be revealed, a bird of the air shall carry the voice, murder will out, and so will other sins. He shall not prosper, he shall not obtain the pardon of his sin, nor can he have any true peace of conscience. David owns himself to have been in a constant agitation while he covered his sins, Ps. 32. 3, 4. While the patient conceals his distemper he cannot expect a cure.

2. The benefit of parting with it, both by a penitent confession, and a universal reformation; He that confesses his guilt to God, and is careful not to return to sin again, shall find mercy with God, and shall have the comfort of it in his own bosom. His conscience shall be eased, and his ruin prevented: see 1 John, 1. 9. Jer. 3. 12, 13. When we set sin before our face, (as David, My sin is ever before me,) God casts it behind his back.

14. Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.

Here is, 1. The benefit of a holy caution. It sounds strange, but it is very true; Happy is the man that feareth alway. Most people think that they are happy who never fear; but there is a fear which is so far from having torment in it, that it has in it the greatest satisfaction. Happy is the man who always keeps up in his mind a holy awe and reverence of God, his glory, goodness, and government, who is always afraid of offending God, and incurring his displeasure, who keeps conscience tender, and has a dread of the appearance of evil, who is always jealous of himself, distrustful of his own sufficiency, and lives in expectation of troubles and changes, so that, whenever they come, they are no surprise to him. He who keeps up such a fear as this, will live a life of faith and watchfulness, and therefore happy is he, blessed and holy.

2. The danger of a sinful presumption; He that hardens his heart, that mocks at fear, and sets God and his judgments at defiance, and receives not the impressions of his word or rod, he shall fall into mischief, his presumption will be his ruin, and, whatever sin (which is the greatest mischief) he falls into, it is owing to the hardness of his heart.

15. As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people.

It is written indeed, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people; but, if he be a wicked ruler, that oppresses the people, especially the poor people, robbing them of the little they have, and making a prey of them, whatever we may call him, this scripture calls him a roaring lion, and a ranging bear.

1. In respect of his character; he is brutish, barbarous, and blood-thirsty, he is rather to be put among the beasts of prey, the wildest and most savage, than to be reckoned of that noble rank of beings whose glory is reason and humanity.

2. In respect of the mischief they do to their subjects; they are dreadful as the roaring lion, who makes the forest tremble; they

are devouring as a hungry bear, and the more necessitous they are, the more mischief they do, and the more greedy of gain they are.

16. The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.

Two things are here intimated to be the causes of the maladministration of princes;

1. The love of money, that *root of all evil*; for *hating covetousness* here stands opposed to *oppression*, according to Moses's character of good magistrates, *men fearing God and hating covetousness*, (Exod. 18. 21.) not only not being covetous, but *hating* it, and shaking the hands from taking of bribes. A ruler that is covetous will neither do justly nor love mercy, but the people under him shall be bought and sold.

2. Want of consideration; *He that hates covetousness shall prolong his government and peace*, shall be happy in the affections of his people, and the blessings of his God. It is as much the interest as the duty of princes to reign in righteousness; oppressors therefore and tyrants are the greatest fools in the world, they *want understanding*, they do not consult their own honour, ease, and safety, but sacrifice all to their ambition of an absolute and arbitrary power. They might be much happier in the hearts of their subjects, than in their necks or estates.

17. A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him.

This agrees with that ancient law, *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*, (Gen. 9. 6.) and speaks,

1. The doom of the shedder of blood; He that has committed murder, though he flies for his life, shall be continually haunted with terrors, shall himself *flee to the pit*, betray himself, and torment himself, like Cain, who, when he had killed his brother, became a fugitive and a vagabond, and trembled continually.

2. The duty of the avenger of blood; Whether the magistrate, or the next of kin, or whoever are concerned in making inquisition for blood, let them be close and vigorous in the prosecution, and let it not be bought off. They that acquit the murderer, or do any thing to help him off, come in sharers in the guilt of blood; nor can the land be purged from blood but by the blood of him that shed it, Numb. 35. 33.

18. Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once.

Note, 1. Those that are honest are always safe. He that acts with sincerity, that speaks as he thinks, has a single eye, in every thing, to the glory of God and the good of his brethren, that would not, for a world, do an unjust thing, if he knew it, that in all manner of conversation *walks uprightly*, he *shall be saved* hereafter. We find a glorious company of those *in whose mouth was found no guile*, Rev. 14. 5. They shall be safe now. Integrity and uprightness will preserve men, will give them a holy security in the worst of times; for it will preserve their comfort, their reputation, and all their interests; they may be injured, they cannot be hurt.

2. Those that are false and dishonest are never safe; *He that is perverse in his ways*, that thinks to secure himself by fraudulent practices, by dissimulation and treachery, or by an estate ill-got, he *shall fall*, nay, he *shall fall at once*, not gradually, and with warning given, but suddenly, without previous notice, for he is least safe when he is most secure. He *falls at once*, and so has neither time to guard against his ruin, nor to provide for it; and, being a surprise upon him, it will be so much the greater terror to him.

19. He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of

bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough.

Note, 1. Those that are diligent in their callings take the way to live comfortably; He that *tills his land*, and tends his shop, and minds his business, whatever it is, he *shall have plenty of bread*, of that which is necessary for himself and his family, and with which he may be charitable to the poor; he shall *eat the labour of his hands*.

2. Those that are idle, and careless, and company-keepers, though they indulge themselves in living (as they think) easily and pleasantly, they take the way to live miserably. He that has land, and values himself upon that, but does not till it, neglects his business, will not take pains, but *follows after vain persons*, drinks with them, joins with them in their frolics and vain sports, and idles away his time with them, he shall have *poverty enough*, shall be *satiated or replenished* with poverty, so the word is; he takes those courses which lead so directly to it, that he seems to court it, and he shall have his fill of it.

20. A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.

Here, 1. We are directed in the true way to be happy, and that is to be holy and honest; He that is *faithful* to God and man shall be blessed of the Lord, and he *shall abound with blessings* of the upper and nether springs. Men shall praise him, and pray for him, and be ready to do him any kindness. He shall abound in doing good, and shall himself be a blessing to the place where he lives. Usefulness shall be the reward of faithfulness, and it is a good reward.

2. We are cautioned against a false and deceitful way to happiness, and that is, right or wrong, raising an estate suddenly. Say not, This is the way to *abound with blessings*; for he that *makes haste to be rich*, more haste than good speed, he *shall not be innocent*; and if he be not, he shall not be blessed of God, but, rather, bring a curse upon what he has; nor, if he be not innocent, can he long be easy to himself; he shall not be accounted innocent by his neighbours, but shall have their ill will and ill word. He does not say that he *cannot be innocent*, but there is all the probability in the world that he will not prove so; *He that hasteth with his feet, sinneth, stumbleth, falleth. Sed quæ reverentia loquar, quis metus, aut pudor, est unquam præperantis arari?—What reverence for law, what fear, what shame, was ever indicated by an avaricious man hasting to be rich?*

21. To have respect of persons is not good: for for a piece of bread that man will transgress.

Note, 1. It is a fundamental error in the administration of justice, and that which cannot but lead men to abundance of transgression, to consider the parties concerned more than the merits of the cause, so as to favour one because he is a gentleman, a scholar, my countryman, my old acquaintance, has formerly done me a kindness, or may do me one, or is if my party and persuasion; and to bear hard on the other party, because he is a stranger, a poor man, has done me an ill turn, is, or has been, my rival, or if not of my mind, or has voted against me. Judgment is perverted when any consideration of this kind is admitted into the scale, any thing but pure right.

2. Those that are partial will be paltry, those that have once broken through the bonds of equity, though, at first, it must be some great bribe, some noble present, that would bias them, yet, when they have debauched their consciences, they will, at length, be so sordid, that *for a piece of bread* they will give judgment against their consciences; they will rather play at small game than sit out.

22. He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye,

and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.

Here again Solomon shews the sin and folly of those that will be rich; they are resolved that they will be so, *per fas, per nefas*—right or wrong; they will be so with all speed, they are getting hastily an estate.

1. They have no comfort in it; they have an evil eye, they are always grieving at those that have more than they, and always grudging their necessary expenses, because they think the former keep them from seeming rich, the latter from being so, and between both they must needs be perpetually uneasy.

2. They have no assurance of the continuance of it, and yet take no thought to provide against the loss of it; Poverty shall come upon them, and the riches which they made wings for, that they might fly to them, will make themselves wings to fly from them; but they are secure and improvident, and do not consider this, that while they are making haste to be rich, they are really making haste to be poor, else they would not trust to uncertain riches.

23. He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.

Note, 1. Flatterers may please those for a time, who, upon second thoughts, will detest and despise them. If ever they come to be convinced of the evil of those sinful courses they were flattered in, and to be ashamed of the pride and vanity which were humoured and gratified by those flatteries, they will hate the fawning flatterers, as having had an ill design upon them, and the fulsome flatteries, as having had an ill effect upon them, and being become nauseous.

2. Reprovers may displease those at first, who yet, afterward, when the passion is over, and the bitter physic begins to work well, will love and respect them. He that deals faithfully with his friend, in telling him of his faults, though he may put him into some heat for the present, and perhaps have hard words, instead of thanks, for his pains, yet, afterward, he will not only have the comfort in his own bosom of having done his duty, but he also, whom he reproveth, will acknowledge that it was a kindness, will conceive an opinion of his wisdom and faithfulness, and look upon him as fit to be a friend. He that cries out against his surgeon for hurting him when he is searching his wound, will yet pay him well, and thank him too, when he has cured it.

24. Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer.

As Christ shews the absurdity and wickedness of those children who think it is no duty, in some cases, to maintain their parents, (Matth. 15. 5.) so Solomon here shews the absurdity and wickedness of those who think it is no sin to rob their parents, either by force or secretly, by wheedling them or threatening them, or by wasting what they have, and (which is no better than robbing them) running into debt, and leaving them to pay it. Now,

1. This is commonly made light of by untoward children; they say, "It is no transgression, for it will be our own shortly, our parents can well enough spare it we have occasion for it, we cannot live as gentlemen upon the allowance our parents give us, it is too strait for us." With such excuses as these they endeavour to shift off the conviction. But,

2. How light soever an ungoverned youth makes of it, it is really a very great sin; he that does it is the companion of a destroyer; no better than a robber on the highway. What wickedness will he scruple to commit, who will rob his own parents?

25. He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife:

but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.

Note, 1. Those make themselves lean, and continually unquiet, that are haughty and quarrelsome, for they are opposed to those that shall be made fat; He that is of a proud heart, that is conceited of himself, and looks with a contempt upon all about him, that cannot bear either competition or contradiction, he stirs up strife, makes mischief, and creates disturbance to himself and every body else.

2. Those make themselves fat, and always easy, that live in a continual dependence upon God and his grace; He who puts his trust in the Lord, who, instead of struggling for himself, commits his cause to God, he shall be made fat; he saves the money which others spend upon their pride and contentiousness, he enjoys himself, and has abundant satisfaction in his God; and thus his soul dwells at ease, and he is most likely to have plenty of outward good things. None live so easily, so pleasantly, as those who live by faith.

26. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.

Here is, 1. The character of a fool; he trusts to his own heart, to his own wisdom and counsels, his own strength and sufficiency, his own merit and righteousness, and the good opinion he has of himself; he that does so is a fool, for he trusts to that, not only which is deceitful above all things, (Jer. 17. 9.) but which has often deceived him. This implies, that it is the character of a wise man (as before, v. 25.) to put his trust in the Lord, and in his power and promise, and to follow his guidance, Prov. 3. 5, 6.

2. The comfort of a wise man; He that walks wisely, that trusts not to his own heart, but is humble and self-diffident, and goes on in the strength of the Lord God, he shall be delivered; when the fool, that trusts in his own heart, shall be destroyed.

27. He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.

Here is, 1. A promise to the charitable; He that gives to the poor shall himself be never the poorer for so doing, he shall not lack; if he have but little, and so be in danger of lacking, let him give out of his little, and that will prevent it from coming to nothing; as the bounty of the widow of Sarepta to Elijah, for whom she made a little cake first, when what she had was reduced to a handful of meal. If he have much, let him give much out of it, and that will prevent its growing less; he and his shall not want what is given in pious charity. What we gave we have.

2. A threatening to the uncharitable; He that hides his eyes, that he may not see the miseries of the poor, nor read their petitions, lest his eye should affect his heart, and extort some relief from him, he shall have many a curse, both from God and man, and neither causeless, and therefore they shall come. Woeful is the condition of that man who has the word of God, and the prayers of the poor, against him.

28. When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.

This is to the same purport with what we had, v. 12.

1. When bad men are preferred, that which is good is clouded and run down; When power is put into the hands of the wicked, men hide themselves, wise men retire into privacy, and decline public business, not caring to be employed under them; rich men get out of the way, for fear of being squeezed for what they have; and, which is worst of all, good men abscond, despairing to do good, and fearing to be persecuted and ill-treated.

2. When bad men are displaced, degraded, and their power taken from them, then that which is good revives again, then the righteous increase; for, when they perish, good men will be

put in their room, who will, by their example and interest, countenance religion and righteousness. It is well with a land when the number of good people increases in it; and it is therefore the policy of all princes, states, and potentates, to encourage them, and to take special care of the good education of youth.

CHAP. XXIX.

1. **H**E, that being often reprov'd hardeneth *his* neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Here, 1. The obstinacy of many wicked people in a wicked way is to be greatly lamented. They are *often reprov'd* by parents and friends, by magistrates and ministers, by the providence of God, and by their own consciences, have had their sins set in order before them, and fair warning given them of the consequences of them, but all in vain, they *harden their necks*, perhaps they fling away, and will not so much as give the reproof a patient hearing; or, if they do, yet they go on in the sins for which they are reprov'd, they will not bow their necks to the yoke, but are children of Belial, they refuse reproof, (*ch. 10. 17.*) despise it, (*ch. 5. 12.*) hate it, *ch. 12. 1.*

2. The issue of this obstinacy is to be greatly dreaded; They that go on in sin, in despite of admonition, *shall be destroyed*; those that will not be reformed must expect to be ruined; if the rods answer not the end, expect the axes; they *shall be suddenly destroyed*, in the midst of their security, and without remedy; they have sinned against the preventing remedy, and therefore let them not expect any recovering remedy. Hell is remediless destruction; they *shall be destroyed, and no healing, so the word is.* If God wounds, who can heal?

2. When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

This is what was said before, *ch. 28. 12, 28.*

1. The people will have cause to rejoice, or mourn, according as their rulers are *righteous, or wicked*; for if the *righteous* be in authority, sin will be punished and restrained, religion and virtue will be supported and kept in reputation; but if the *wicked* get power in their hands, wickedness will abound, religion and religious people will be persecuted, and so the ends of government will be perverted.

2. The people will actually rejoice, or mourn, according as their rulers are *righteous, or wicked*. Such a conviction are even the common people under of the excellency of virtue and religion, that they will rejoice when they see it preferred and countenanced; and, on the contrary, let men have ever so much honour and power, if they be wicked and vicious, and use it ill, they *make themselves contemptible and base before all the people*, (as those priests, *Mal. 2. 9.*) and subjects will think themselves miserable under such a government.

3. Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth *his* substance.

Both the parts of this verse repeat what has been often said, but, on comparing them together, the sense of them will be enlarged from each other.

1. Be it observed, to the honour of a virtuous young man, that he loves wisdom, he is a philosopher, (for that signifies a lover of wisdom,) for religion is the best philosophy; he avoids bad company, and especially the company of lewd women; hereby he rejoices his parents, and has the satisfaction of being a comfort to them, and increases his estate, and is likely to live comfortably.

2. Be it observed, to the reproach of a vicious young man, that he hates wisdom, he keeps company with scandalous women, who will be his ruin, both in soul and body; he grieves his parents,

and, like the prodigal son, devours their living with harlots. Nothing will beggar men sooner than the lusts of uncleanness; and the best preservative from those ruinous lusts is wisdom.

4. The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it.

Here is, 1. The happiness of a people under a good government. The care and business of a prince should be to establish the land, to maintain its fundamental laws, to settle the minds of his subjects, and make them easy, to secure their liberties and properties from hostilities, and for posterity, and to set in order the things that are wanting; this he must do by judgment, by wise counsels, and by the steady administration of justice, without respect of persons, which will have these good effects.

2. The misery of a people under a bad government; A man of oblations, (so it is in the margin,) overthroweth the land; a man that is either sacrilegious or superstitious, or that invades the priest's office, as Saul and Uzziah; or a man that aims at nothing but getting money, and will, for a good bribe, connive at the most guilty, and, in hope of one, persecute the innocent; such governors as these will ruin a country.

5. A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.

Those may be said to flatter their neighbours, who commend and applaud that good in them, (the good they do, or the good they have,) which really either is not, or is not such as they represent it, and who profess that esteem and that affection for them, which really they have not; these spread a net for their feet.

1. For their neighbours' feet, whom they flatter; they have an ill design in it, they would not speak thus fair, but that they hope to make an advantage of them; and it is therefore wisdom to suspect those who flatter us, that they are secretly laying a snare for us, and to stand on our guard accordingly. Or it has an ill effect on those who are flattered; it puffs them up with pride, and makes them conceited and confident of themselves, and so proves a net that entangles them in sin.

2. For their own feet; so some understand it. He that flatters others, in expectation that they will return his compliments, and flatter him, does but make himself ridiculous and odious even to those he flatters.

6. In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice.

Here is, 1. The peril of a sinful way; there is not only a punishment at the end of it, but a snare in it; one sin is a temptation to another, and there are troubles which, as a snare, come suddenly upon evil men in the midst of their transgressions; nay, their transgression itself often involves them in vexations, their sin is their punishment, and they are holden in the cords of their own iniquity, *ch. 5. 22.*

2. The pleasantness of the way of holiness. The snare that is in the transgression of evil men spoils all their mirth, but righteous men are kept from those snares, or delivered out of them; they walk at liberty, walk in safety, and therefore they sing and rejoice; they that make God their chief Joy, have him for their exceeding Joy, and it is their own fault if they do not rejoice evermore. If there be any true joy on this side heaven, doubtless they have it whose conversation is in heaven.

7. The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.

It is pity but that every one who sues *sub forma pauperis*—as a pauper, should have an honest cause, (they are of all others inexcusable, if they have not,) because the scripture has so well provided that it should have a fair hearing, and that the judge himself should be of counsel, as for the prisoner, so for the pauper.

1. It is here made the character of a righteous judge, that he

considers the cause of the poor; it is every man's duty to consider the poor, (Ps. 41.1.) but the judgment of the poor is to be considered by those that sit in judgment; they must take as much pains to find out the right in a poor man's cause, as in a rich man's. Sense of justice must make both judge and advocate as solicitous and industrious in the poor man's cause, as if they hoped for the greatest advantage.

2. It is made the character of a *wicked man*, that because it is a poor man's cause, which there is nothing to be got by, he *regards not to know it*, in the true state of it, for he cares not which way it goes, right or wrong. See Job, 29.16.

8. Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath.

See here, 1. Who are the men that are dangerous to the public, *scornful men*; when such are employed in the business of the state, they do things with precipitation, because they scorn to deliberate, and will not take time for consideration and consultation; they do things illegal and unjustifiable, because they scorn to be hampered by laws and constitutions; break their faith, because they scorn to be bound by their word; provoke the people, because they scorn to please them; thus they *bring a city into a snare* by their ill conduct, or, as the margin reads it, they *set a city on fire*, they sow discord among the citizens, and run them into confusion. Those are *scornful men* that mock at religion, the obligations of conscience, the fears of another world, and every thing that is sacred and serious; such men are the plagues of their generation, they bring God's judgments upon a land, set men together by the ears, and so bring all to confusion.

2. Who are the men that are the blessings of a land; the *wise men*, who, by promoting religion, which is true wisdom, *turn away the wrath* of God, and who, by prudent counsels, reconcile contending parties, and prevent the mischievous consequences of divisions. Proud and foolish men kindle the fires which wise and good men must extinguish.

9. If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, *there is no rest*.

A wise man is here advised not to set his wit to a fool's, not to dispute with him, or, by contending with him, to think either of fastening reason upon him, or gaining right from him; *If a wise man contend with a wise man*, he may hope to be understood, and, as far as he has reason and equity on his side, to carry his point, at least, to bring the controversy to a head, and make it issue amicably; but if he *contend with a foolish man*, *there is no rest*; he will see no end of it, nor will he have any satisfaction in it, but must expect to be always uneasy.

1. Whether the foolish man he contends with, *rage or laugh*, whether he take angrily or scornfully, what is said to him, whether he rail at it or mock at it, one of the two he will do, and so there will be *no rest*. However it is given, it will be ill-taken, and the wisest man must expect to be either scolded or ridiculed, if he *contend with a fool*. He that fights with a dunghill, whether he be conqueror or conquered, is sure to be defiled.

2. Whether the wise man himself *rage or laugh*, whether he take the serious or the jocular way of dealing with the fool, whether he be severe or pleasant with him, whether he come with a rod or with the *spirit of meekness*, (1 Cor. 4.21.) it is all alike, no good is done. *We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced, mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented*.

10. The blood-thirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul.

Note, 1. Bad men hate their best friends; *The blood-thirsty*, all the seed of the old serpent, who *was a murderer from the beginning*, and inherit his enmity against the seed of the woman, they *hate the upright*, they seek the ruin of good men, because they condemn the wicked world, and witness against it. Christ told his disciples that they should be *hated of all men*. Bloody men do especially *hate upright* magistrates, who would restrain

them, and put the laws in execution against them, and so really do them a kindness.

2. Good men love their worst enemies: *The just*, whom the bloody men hate, *seek their soul*, pray for their conversion, and would gladly do any thing for their salvation. This Christ taught us, *Father forgive them*. *The just seek his soul*, the soul of the upright, whom the bloody hate, so it is commonly understood; seek to protect it from violence, and save it from, or avenge it at, the hands of the *blood-thirsty*.

11. A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.

Note, 1. It is a piece of weakness to be very open; *He is a fool who utters all his mind*, who tells every thing he knows, and has in his mouth instantly whatever he has in his thoughts, and can keep no counsel; *who, whatever is started in discourse, shoots his bolt*; who, when he is provoked, will say any thing that comes uppermost, whoever is reflected upon by it; who, when he is to speak of any business, will say all he thinks, and yet never thinks he says enough, whether choice or refuse, corn or chaff, pertinent or impertinent, you shall have it all.

2. It is a piece of wisdom to be upon the reserve; *A wise man will not utter all his mind* at once, but will take time for a second thought, or reserve the present thought for a fitter time, when it will be more pertinent, and likely to answer his intention; will not deliver himself in a continued speech, or starched discourse, but with pauses, that he may hear what is to be objected, and answer it. *Non minus interdum oratorium est tacere quam dicere—True oratory requires an occasional pause*. Plin. Ep. 7. 6.

12. If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.

Note, 1. It is a great sin in any, especially in rulers, to *hearken to lies*; for thereby they not only give a wrong judgment themselves of persons and things, according to the lies they give credit to, but they encourage others to give them wrong informations. Lies will be told to those that will hearken to them; but the receiver, in this case, is as bad as the thief.

2. Those that do so will have *all their servants wicked*; all their servants will appear wicked, for they will have lies told of them; and they will be wicked, for they will tell lies to them. All that have their ear will fill their ear with slanders, and false characters and representations; and so, if princes, as well as people, will be deceived, they shall be deceived, and, instead of devolving the guilt of their own false judgments upon their servants that misinformed them, they must share in their servants' guilt, and on them will much of the blame lie for encouraging such misinformations, and giving countenance and ear to them.

13. The poor and the deceitful man meet together: the LORD lighteneth both their eyes.

This shews how wisely the great God serves the designs of his providence, by persons of very different tempers, capacities, and conditions in the world; even,

1. By those that are contrary the one to the other. Some are *poor*, and forced to borrow, others are rich, have a great deal of the *mammon of unrighteousness*, (*deceitful riches* they are called,) and they are creditors, or *usurers*, as it is in the margin. Some are *poor*, and honest, and laborious, others rich, slothful, and *deceitful*; they *meet together* in the business of this world, and have dealings with one another, and *the Lord enlightens their eyes*, he causes his sun to shine upon both, and gives them both the comforts of this life; to some of both sorts he gives his grace; he enlightens the eyes of the *poor*, by giving them patience, and of the *deceitful*, by giving them repentance, as Zaccheus.

2. By those that we think could best be spared. *The poor and the deceitful* we are ready to look upon as blemishes of Providence, but God makes even them to display the beauty of Providence; he has wise ends only in leaving the *poor* always with us, but

permitting *the deceived and the deceiver*, for both are his, (Job, 12, 16.) and turn to his praise.

14. The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever.

Here is, 1. The duty of magistrates, and that is, to judge faithfully between man and man, and to determine all causes brought before them, according to truth and equity; particularly to take care of *the poor*; not to countenance them in an unjust cause, for the sake of their poverty, (Exod. 23. 3.) but to see that their poverty do not turn to their prejudice, if they have a just cause. The rich will look to themselves, but *the poor and needy the prince must defend*, (Ps. 82. 3.) and plead for, Prov. 31. 9.

2. The happiness of those magistrates that do their duty; their *throne of honour*, their tribunal of judgment, *shall be established for ever*. This will secure to them the favour of God, and strengthen their interest in the affections of their people, both which will be the establishment of their power, and help to transmit it to posterity, and perpetuate it in the family.

15. The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.

Parents, in educating their children, must consider,

1. The benefit of due correction. They must not only tell their children what is good and evil, but they must chide them, and correct them too, if need be, when they either neglect that which is good, or do that which is evil. If a *reproof* will serve without *the rod*, it is well, but *the rod* must never be used without a rational and grave *reproof*; and then, though it may be a present uneasiness both to the father and to the child, yet it will *give wisdom*. *Vexatio dat intellectum—Vexation sharpens the intellect*. The child will take warning, and so will get *wisdom*.

2. The mischief of undue indulgence; *A child* that is not restrained or reprov'd, but is *left to himself*, as Adonijah was, to follow his own inclinations, he may do well if he will, but if he take to ill courses, nobody will hinder him, it is a thousand to one but he proves a disgrace to his family, and *brings his mother*, who fondled him, and humoured him in his licentiousness, *to shame*, to poverty, to reproach, and perhaps will himself be abusive to her, and give her ill language.

16. When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall.

Note, 1. The more sinners there are, the more sin there is; *When the wicked*, being countenanced by authority, grow numerous, and walk on every side, no marvel if *transgression increases*, as a plague in the country is said to increase, when still more and more are infected with it. *Transgression* grows more impudent and bold, more imperious and threatening, when there are many to keep it in countenance. In the old world, when *men began to multiply*, they began to degenerate, and corrupt themselves and one another.

2. The more sin there is, the nearer is the ruin threatened. Let not *the righteous* have their faith and hope shocked by the increase of sin and sinners; let them not say that they have *cleansed their hands in vain*, or that *God has forsaken the earth*, but wait with patience; the transgressors shall fall, the measure of their iniquity will be full, and then they shall fall from their dignity and power, and fall into disgrace and destruction, and *the righteous shall have the satisfaction of seeing their fall*, (Ps. 37. 34.) perhaps in this world, at furthest, in the judgment of the great day, when the fall of God's implacable enemies will be the joy and triumph of glorified saints. See Isa. 66. 24. Gen. 19. 28.

17. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.

Note, 1. It is a very happy thing when children prove the comfort of their parents; good children are so; they *give them rest*, make them easy, and free from the many cares they have had concerning them; *yea, they give delight unto their souls*. It is a pleasure to parents, which none know but those that are blessed

with it, to see the happy fruit of the good education they have given their children, and to have a prospect of their well-doing for both worlds; it *gives delight* proportionable to the many thoughts of heart that have been concerning them.

2. In order to this, children must be trained up under a strict discipline, and not suffered to do what they will, and to go without rebuke when they do amiss. The foolishness bound up in their hearts must by correction be driven out, when they are young, or it will break out, to their own and their parents' shame, when they are grown up.

18. Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

See here, 1. The misery of the people that want a settled ministry; *Where there is no vision*, no prophet to expound the law, no priest or Levite to teach the good knowledge of the Lord, no means of grace, the word of the Lord is scarce, there is *no open vision*: (1 Sam. 3. 1.) where it is so, *the people perish*; the word has many significations, any of which will apply here; (1.) *The people are made naked*, stripped of their ornaments, and so exposed to shame; stripped of their armour, and so exposed to danger. How bare does a place look, without Bibles and ministers, and what an easy prey is it to the enemy of souls! (2.) *The people rebel*, not only against God, but against their prince; good preaching would make people good subjects, but, for want of it, they are turbulent and factious, and *despise dominions*, because they know no better. (3.) *The people are idle*, or *they play*, as the scholars are apt to do when the master is absent; they do nothing to any good purpose, but stand all the day idle, and sporting in the market-place, for want of instruction what to do, and how to do it. (4.) *They are scattered as sheep having no shepherd*, for want of the masters of assemblies to call them and keep them together, Mark, 6. 34. They are scattered from God and their duty by apostacies, from one another by divisions; God is provoked to scatter them by his judgments, 2 Chron. 15. 3, 5. (5.) *They perish*; they are *destroyed for lack of knowledge*, Hos. 4. 6. See what reason we have to be thankful to God for the plenty of *open vision* which we enjoy!

2. The felicity of a people that have not only a settled, but a successful, ministry among them; the people that hear and *keep the law*, among whom religion is uppermost; *happy* are such a people, and every particular person among them. It is not having the law, but obeying it, and living up to it, that will entitle us to blessedness.

19. A servant will not be corrected by words. for though he understand, he will not answer.

Here is the description of an unprofitable, slothful, wicked, servant; a slave that serves not from conscience, or love, but purely from fear. Let those that have such servants put on patience to bear the vexation, and not disturb themselves at it, See their character.

1. No rational *words* will work upon them; they *will not be corrected* and reformed, not brought to their business, nor cured of their idleness and laziness, by fair means, no, nor by foul *words*; even the most gentle master will be forced to use severity with them; no reason will serve their turn, for they are unreasonable.

2. No rational *words* will be got from them; they are dogged and sullen; and *though they understand* the questions you ask them, they *will not give you an answer*; though you make it ever so plain to them, what you expect from them, they will not promise you to mend what is amiss, or to mind their business. See the folly of those servants whose mouth by their silence calls for strokes; they might *be corrected by words*, and save blows, but they *will not*.

20. Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him.

Solomon here shews that there is little hope of bringing a man to wisdom that is hasty, either,

1. Through rashness and inconsideration; *Seest thou a man that is hasty in his matters*, that is of a light, desultory, wit, that seems to take a thing quick, but takes it by the halves, gallops over a book or science, but takes no time to digest it, no time to pause or muse upon a business? *There is more hope of making a scholar*, and a wise man, of one that is dull and heavy, and slow in his studies, *than of one that has such a mercurial genius*, and cannot fix.

2. Through pride and conceitedness; *Seest thou a man that is forward to speak to every matter that is started*, and affects to speak first to it, to open it, and speak last to it, to give judgment upon it, as if he were an oracle? *There is more hope of a modest fool*, who is sensible of his folly, *than of such a self-conceited one*.

21. He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become *his son* at the length.

Note, 1. It is an imprudent thing in a master to be too fond of a servant, to advance him too fast, and admit him to be too familiar with him; to suffer him to be over-nice and curious in his diet, and clothing, and lodging, and so to bring him up delicately, because he is a favourite, and an agreeable servant; it should be remembered that he is a servant, and, by being thus indulged, will be spoiled for any other place. Servants must endure hardness.

2. It is an ungrateful thing in a servant, but what is very common, to behave himself insolently, because he has been used tenderly. The humble prodigal thinks himself unworthy to be called a son, and is content to be a servant; the pampered slave thinks himself too good to be called a servant, and will be a son of the length, will take his ease and liberty, will be on a par with his master, and perhaps pretend to the inheritance. Let masters give their servants that which is equal and fit for them, and neither more nor less. This is very applicable to the body, which is a servant to the soul; those that delicately bring up the body, that humour it, and are over-tender of it, will find that at length it will forget its place, and become a son, a master, a perfect tyrant.

22. An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.

See here the mischief that flows from an angry, passionate, furious, disposition.

1. It makes men provoking to one another; *An angry man stirs up strife*, is troublesome and quarrelsome in the family and in the neighbourhood, blows the coals, and even forces those to fall out with him that would live peaceably and quietly by him.

2. It makes men provoking to God; *A furious man*, who is wedded to his humours and passions, cannot but abound in transgressions; that is a sin which is the cause of many sins; it not only hinders men from calling upon God's name, but it occasions their swearing and cursing, and profaning God's name.

23. A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.

This agrees with what Christ said more than once,

1. That those who exalt themselves shall be abased. They that think to gain respect by lifting up themselves above their rank, by looking high, talking big, appearing fine, and applauding themselves, will, on the contrary, expose themselves to contempt, lose their reputation, and provoke God by humbling providences to bring them down and lay them low.

2. That those who humble themselves shall be exalted, and shall be established in their dignity; *Honour shall uphold the humble in spirit*; their humility is their honour, and that shall make them truly and safely great, and recommend them to the esteem of all that are wise and good.

24. Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not.

See here what sin and ruin they involve themselves in, who are drawn away by the enticement of sinners.

1 They incur a great deal of guilt; *He* doesso, that goes partner

with such as rob and defraud, and casts in his lot among them, ch. 1. 11, &c. The receiver is as bad as the thief; and, being drawn in to join with him in the commission of the sin, he cannot escape joining with him in the concealment of it, though it be with the most horrid perjuries and execrations. They hear cursing, when they are sworn to tell the whole truth, but they will not confess.

2. They hasten to utter ruin; they even hate their own souls, for they willfully do that which will be the inevitable destruction of them. See the absurdities sinners are guilty of; they love death, than which nothing is more dreadful, and hate their own souls, than which nothing is more dear.

25. The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

Here, 1. We are cautioned not to dread the power of man; neither the power of a prince, nor the power of the multitude; both are formidable enough, but the slavish fear of either brings a snare, exposes men to many insults; (some take a pride in terrifying the timorous;) or, rather, exposes men to many temptations. Abraham, for fear of man, denied his wife, and Peter his Master, and many a one his God and religion. We must not shrink from duty, or commit sin, to avoid the wrath of man, nor, though we see it coming upon us, be disquieted with fear, Dan. 3. 16. Ps. 118. 6. He must himself die, (Isa. 51. 12.) and can but kill our body, Luke, 12. 5.

2. We are encouraged to depend upon the power of God, which would keep us from all that fear of man, which has either torment or temptation in it. Whoso puts his trust in the Lord, for protection and supply in the way of duty, he shall be set on high, above the power of man, and above the fear of that power. A holy confidence in God makes a man both great and easy, and enables him to look with a gracious contempt upon the most formidable designs of hell and earth against him. If God be my Salvation, I will trust, and not be afraid.

26. Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the LORD.

See here, 1. What is the common course men take to advance and enrich themselves, and make themselves great; they seek the ruler's favour, and, as if all their judgment proceeded from him, to him they make all their court. Solomon was himself a ruler, and knew with what sedulity men made their application to him, some on one errand, others on another, but all for his favour. It is the way of the world to make interest with great men, and expect much from the smiles of second causes, which yet are uncertain, and frequently disappoint them. Many take a great deal of pains in seeking the ruler's favour, and yet cannot have it; many have it for a little while, but they cannot keep themselves in it, by some little turn or other they are brought under his displeasure; many have it, and keep it, and yet it does not answer their expectation, they cannot make that hand of it, that they promised themselves they should. Haman had the ruler's favour, and yet it availed him nothing.

2. What is the wisest course men can take to be happy; let them look up to God, and seek the favour of the Ruler of rulers; for every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord. It is not with us as the ruler pleases; his favour cannot make us happy, his frowns cannot make us miserable; but it is as God pleases; every creature is that to us that God makes it to be, no more and no other; he is the first Cause on which all second causes depend; if he help not, they cannot, 2 Kings, 6. 27. Job, 34. 29.

27. An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.

This bespeaks not only the innate contrariety that there is between virtue and vice, as between light and darkness, fire and water, but the old enmity that has always been between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, Gen. 3. 15.

1. All that are sanctified have a rooted antipathy to wickedness and wicked people. They have a good will to the souls of all; (God has so, and would have none perish;) but they hate the ways and practices of those that are impious toward God, and injurious toward men; they cannot hear of them, or speak of them, without a holy indignation; they loathe the society of the ungodly and unjust, and dread the thought of giving them any countenance, but do all they can to bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end. Thus an unjust man makes himself odious to the just, and it is one part of his present shame and punishment, that good men cannot endure him.

2. All that are unsanctified have a like rooted antipathy to godliness and godly people; *He that is upright in the way, that makes conscience of what he says and does, is an abomination to the wicked*, whose wickedness is restrained perhaps, and suppressed, or, however, shamed and condemned, by the uprightness of the upright. Thus Cain did, who was of his father the Devil. And this is not only the wickedness of the wicked, that they hate those whom God loves, but their misery too, that they hate those whom they shall shortly see in everlasting bliss and honour, and who shall have dominion over them in the morning, Ps. 49. 14.

CHAP. XXX.

This end the following chapter are an appendix to Solomon's proverbs; but they are both expressly called prophecies, in the first verses of both; by which it appears, that the penmen of them, whoever they were, were divinely inspired. This chapter was penned by one that bears the name of Agur Ben Jakeh. What tribe he was of, or when he lived, we are not told; what he wrote, being indited by the Holy Ghost, is here kept upon record. We have here, I. His confession of faith, v. 1..6. II. His prayer, v. 7..9. III. A caution against wronging servants, v. 10. IV. Four wicked generations, v. 11..14. V. Four things insatiable, (v. 15. 16.) to which is added, fair warning to undutiful children, v. 17. VI. Four things unsearchable, v. 18..20. VII. Four things intolerable, v. 21..23. VIII. Four things little and wise, v. 24..28. IX. Four things stately, v. 29. to the end.

1. **T**HE words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal. 2. Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. 3. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. 4. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell? 5. Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. 6. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

Some make Agur to be not the name of this author, but his character; he was a collector, so it signifies; a gatherer; one that did not compose things himself, but collected the wise sayings and observations of others; made abstracts of the writings of others; which some think is the reason why he says, (v. 3.) "*I have not learned wisdom myself, but have been a scribe, or amanuensis, to other wise and learned men.*" Note, We must not bury our talent, though it be but one, but, as we have received the gift, so minister the same, if it be but to collect what others have written. But we rather suppose it to be his name, which, no doubt, was well known then, though not mentioned elsewhere in scripture.

Ithiel and Ucal are mentioned, either,

1. As the names of his pupils, whom he instructed, or who consulted him as an oracle, having a great opinion of his wisdom and goodness. Probably, they wrote from him what he dictated, as Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah, and by their means it was preserved, and they were ready to attest it to be his, for it was spoken to them; they were two witnesses of it. Or,

2. As the subject of his discourse. *Ithiel* signifies *God with me*, the application of *Immanuel, God with us*. The word calls him *God with us*; faith appropriates this, and calls him "*God with me*, who loved me, and gave himself for me, and into union and communion with whom I am admitted." *Ucal* signifies the *Mighty One*, for it is upon one that is mighty, that help is laid for us. Many good interpreters therefore apply this to the Messiah, for to him all the prophecies bear witness, and why not this then? It is what Agur spake concerning *Ithiel*, even concerning *Ithiel* (that is the name on which the stress is laid) and *Ucal*. *The mighty God, (Isa. 9. 6.) with us, Isa. 7. 14.*

Three things the prophet here aims at,

I. To abase himself. Before he makes confession of his faith, he makes confession of his folly, and the weakness and deficiency of reason, which make it so necessary that we be guided and governed by faith. Before he speaks concerning the Saviour, he speaks of himself as needing a Saviour, and as nothing without him; we must go out of ourselves before we go into Jesus Christ.

1. He speaks of himself as wanting a righteousness, and having done foolishly, very foolishly. When he reflects upon himself, he owns, *Surely I am more brutish than any man. Every man is become brutish*, Jer. 10. 14. But he that knows his own heart, knows so much more evil of himself than he does of any other, that he cries out, "*Surely I cannot but think that I am more brutish than any man*, surely no man has such a corrupt deceitful heart as I have. I have acted as one that has not the understanding of Adam, as one that is wretchedly degenerated from the knowledge and righteousness in which man was at first created; nay, I have not the common sense and reason of a man, else I had not done as I have done." Agur, when he was applied to by others, as wiser than most, acknowledges himself more foolish than any. Whatever high opinion others may have of us, 't becomes us to have low thoughts of ourselves.

2. He speaks of himself as wanting a revelation to guide him in the ways of truth and wisdom. He owns, (v. 3.) "*I neither learned wisdom by any power of my own, the depths of it cannot be fathomed by my line and plummet, nor know I the knowledge of the holy ones*, the angels, our first parents in innocency, nor of the holy things of God, I can get no insight into them, nor make any judgment of them, further than God is pleased to make them known to me." The natural man, the natural powers, perceive not, nay they receive not, the things of the Spirit of God. Some suppose Agur to be asked, as Apollo's oracle was of old, *Who was the wisest man?* The answer is, *He that is sensible of his own ignorance*, especially in divine things. *Hoc tantum scio, me nihil scire—All that I know is, that I know nothing.*

II. To advance Jesus Christ, and the Father in him; (v. 4.) *Who hath ascended up into heaven, &c.*

1. Some understand this of God, and of his works, which are both incomparable and unsearchable. He challenges all mankind to give an account of the heavens above, of the winds, the waters, the earth; "*Who can pretend to have ascended up to heaven*, to take a view of the orbs above, and then to have descended, to give us a description of them? Who can pretend to have had the command of the winds, to have grasped them in his hand, and managed them, as God does, or to have bound the waves of the sea with a swaddling band, as God has done? Who has established the ends of the earth, or can describe the strength of its foundations, or the extent of its limits? Tell me what is the man's name who can undertake to vie with God, or to be of his cabinet council, or, if he be dead, what is his name to whom he has bequeathed this great secret."

2. Others refer it to Christ, to Ithiel and Ucal, the Son of God, for it is the Son's name, as well as the Father's, that is here inquired after, and a challenge given to any to compare with him. We must now exalt Christ as one revealed, they then magnified him as one concealed; as one they had heard something of, but had very dark and defective ideas of. *We have heard the fame of him with our ears*, but cannot describe him; (Job, 28. 22.) certainly it is God that has gathered the wind in his fists, and bound the waters as in a garment: but what is his name? It is,

I am that I am, (Exod. 3. 14.) a name to be adored, not to be understood. What is *his Son's name*, by whom he doeth all these things? The Old-Testament saints expected the Messiah to be the *Son of the Blessed*, and he is here spoken of as a Person distinct from the Father, but his name as yet secret. Note, The great Redeemer, in the glories of his providence and grace, can neither be paralleled, nor found out to perfection. (1.) The glories of the kingdom of his grace are unsearchable and unparalleled; for who besides has *ascended into heaven, and descended*? Who besides is perfectly acquainted with both worlds, and has himself a free correspondence with both, and is therefore fit to settle a correspondence between them, as Mediator, as Jacob's ladder? He was *in heaven in the Father's bosom*, (John, 1. 1, 18.) thence he descended to take our nature upon him; and never was there such condescension! In that nature he again ascended, (Eph. 4. 9.) to receive the promised glories of his exalted state; and who besides has done this? Rom. 10. 6. (2.) The glories of the kingdom of his providence are likewise unsearchable and unparalleled. The same that reconciles heaven and earth was the Creator of both, and governs and disposes of all. He specifies in his government the three lower elements of *air, water, and earth*. [1.] The motions of the air are of his directing. Satan pretends to be the prince of the power of the air, but even there Christ has *all power*, he *rebuked the winds*, and they obeyed him. [2.] The bounds of the water are of his appointing; He *binds them as in a garment; hitherto they shall come, and no further*, Job, 38. 9.. 11. [3.] The foundations of the earth are of his establishing; he founded it at first, he upholds it still; if Christ had not interposed, the foundations of the earth had sunk under the load of the curse upon the ground, for man's sin. Who, and what, is the mighty He that doeth all this? We cannot *find out God*, nor the *Son of God, unto perfection*. Oh the depth of that knowledge!

III. To assure us of the truth of the word of God, and to recommend it to us, v. 5, 6. Agur's pupils expect to be instructed by him in the things of God; "Alas," says he, "I cannot undertake to instruct you; go to the word of God, see what he has there revealed of himself, and of his mind and will; you need know no more than what that will teach you, and that you may rely upon, as sure and sufficient. *Every word of God is pure; there is not the least mixture of falsehood and corruption in it.*" The words of men are to be heard and read with jealousy, and with allowance, but there is not the least ground to suspect any deficiency in the Word of God; it is *as silver purified seven times*, (Ps. 12. 6.) without the least dross or alloy; *Thy word is very pure*, Ps. 119. 140.

1. It is sure, and therefore we must trust to it, and venture our souls upon it. God in his word, God in his promise, is a *Shield*, a sure Protection, to all them that put themselves under his protection, and *put their trust in him*. The word of God, applied by faith, will make us easy in the midst of the greatest dangers, Ps. 46. 1, 2.

2. It is sufficient, and therefore we must not add to it; (v. 6.) *Add thou not unto his words*, because they are pure and perfect. This forbids the advancing of any thing, not only in contradiction to the word of God, but in competition with it; though it be under the plausible pretence of explaining it, yet if it pretend to be of equal authority with it, it is *adding to his words*, which is not only a reproach to them as insufficient, but opens a door to all manner of errors and corruptions; for, that one absurdity being granted, that the word of any man, or company of men, is to be received with the same faith and veneration as the word of God, a thousand follow. We must be content with what God has thought fit to make known to us of his mind, and not covet to be *wise above what is written*; for, (1.) God will resent it as a heinous affront; "He will *reprove thee*, will reckon with thee as a traitor against his crown and dignity, and lay thee under the heavy doom of those that add to his words, or diminish from them," Deut. 4. 2.—12. 32. (2.) We shall run ourselves into endless mistakes; "Thou wilt be found a liar, a corrupter of the word of truth, a breacher of heresies, and guilty of the worst of forgeries, counterfeiting the broad seal of heaven, and pretending a divine

mission, and inspiration, when it is all a cheat. Men may be thus deceived, but *God is not mocked.*"

7. *Two things* have I required of thee: deny me *them* not before I die: 8. Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: 9. Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God *in vain*.

After Agur's confession and creed, here follows his litany; where we may observe,

1. The preface to his prayer; *Two things have I required*, that is, *requested*, of thee, O God. Before we go to pray, it is good to consider what we need, and what the things are which we have to ask of God. What does our case require? What do our hearts desire? What would we that God should do for us? That we may not be to seek for our petition and request, when we should be presenting it. He begs, *Deny me not before I die*. In praying, we should think of dying, and pray accordingly. "Lord, give me pardon, and peace, and grace, before I die, *before I go hence, and be no more*; for if I be not renewed and sanctified before I die, it will not be done after; if I do not prevail in prayer before I die, prayers after will not prevail, no, not *Lord, Lord*. There is none of this wisdom or working in the grave. *Deny me not thy grace*, for if thou do, I die; I perish, if thou be silent to me, *I am like them that go down to the pit*, Ps. 28. 1. *Deny me not before I die*; as long as I continue in the land of the living, let me continue under the conduct of thy grace and good providence."

II. The prayer itself; the *two things* he requires, grace sufficient, and food convenient.

1. Grace sufficient for his soul; "Remove from me vanity and lies; deliver me from sin, from all corrupt principles, practices, and affections, from error and mistake, which are at the bottom of all sin; from the love of the world and the things of it, which are all *vanity and a lie*." Some understand it as a prayer for the pardon of sin, for when God forgives sin, he removes it, he takes it away. Or rather, it is a prayer of the same import with that, *Lead us not into temptation*. Nothing is more mischievous to us than sin, and therefore there is nothing which we should more earnestly pray against than that we may *do no evil*.

2. Food convenient for his body. Having prayed for the operations of divine grace, he here begs the favours of the Divine Providence, but such as may tend to the good, and not to the prejudice, of the soul.

(1.) He prays, that, of God's free gift, he might receive a competent portion of the good things of this life; "Feed me with the bread of my allowance; such bread as thou thinkest fit to allow me." As to all the gifts of the Divine Providence, we must refer ourselves to the Divine Wisdom. Or, "the bread that is fit for me, as a man, a master of a family; that which is agreeable to my rank and condition in the world." For *as is the man, so is his competency*. Our Saviour seems to refer to this, when he teaches us to pray, *Give us this day our daily bread*; as this seems to refer to Jacob's vow, in which he wished for no more than *bread to eat, and raiment to put on*. Food convenient for us is what we ought to be content with, though we have not dainties, varieties, and superfluities; what is for necessity, though we have not for delight and ornament; and it is what we may in faith pray for, and depend upon God for.

(2.) He prays that he may be kept from every condition of life that would be a temptation to him.

[1.] He prays against the extremes of abundance and want; *Give me neither poverty nor riches*. He does not hereby prescribe to God, nor pretend to teach him what condition he shall allot to him, nor does he pray against poverty or riches absolutely, as in themselves evil, for either of them, by the grace of God, may be sanctified, and be a means of good to us; but, *First*, He hereby intends to express the value which wise and good men have for a

middle state of life, and, with submission to the will of God, desires that that might be his state: neither great honour, nor great contempt. We must learn how to manage both, (as St. Paul, Phil. 4. 12.) but rather wish to be always between both. *Optimus pecunie modus qui nec in paupertate cedit, nec procul à paupertate discedit—The best condition is that which neither implies poverty, nor yet recedes far from it.* Seneca. Secondly, He hereby intimates a holy jealousy he had of himself, that he could not keep his ground against the temptations either of an afflicted, or a prosperous, condition. Others may preserve their integrity in either, but he is afraid of both, and therefore grace teaches him to pray against riches, as much as nature against poverty; but *the will of the Lord be done.*

[2.] He gives a pious reason for his prayer; (v. 9.) he does not say, “*Lest I be rich*, and cumbered with care, and envied by my neighbours, and eaten up with a multitude of servants,” or, “*Lest I be poor*, and trampled on, and forced to work hard, and fare hard;” but, “*Lest I be rich*, and sin, or *poor*, and sin.” Sin is that which a good man is afraid of in every condition, and under every event; witness Nehemiah, (ch. 6. 13.) *that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin.*

First, He dreads the temptations of a prosperous condition, and therefore even deprecates that; *Lest I be full, and deny thee*, (as Jeshurun, who *roared fat, and kicked*, and forsook God who made him, Deut. 32. 15.) and say, as Pharaoh in his pride, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?* Prosperity makes people proud, and forgetful of God, as if they had no need of him, and were therefore under no obligation to him. *What can the Almighty do for them?* (Job, 22. 17.) And therefore they will do nothing for him. Even good men are afraid of the worst sins, so deceitful do they think their own hearts to be; and they know that the greatest gains of the world will not balance the least guilt.

Secondly, He dreads the temptations of a poor condition, and for that reason, and no other, deprecates that; *Lest I be poor, and steal.* Poverty is a strong temptation to dishonesty, and such as many are overcome by, who are also ready to think it will be their excuse; but it will not bear them out at God's bar, any more than at men's, to say, “*I stole because I was poor;*” yet if a man *steal for the satisfying of his soul when he is hungry*, it is a case of compassion, (ch. 6. 30.) and what even those that have some principles of honesty in them may be drawn to. But observe why Agur dreads this; not because he should endanger himself by it, “*Lest I steal*, and be hanged for it, whipt, or put into the stocks, or sold for a bondman; as among the Jews poor thieves were, who had not wherewithal to make restitution; but lest he should dishonour God by it; “*Lest I should steal, and take the name of my God in vain*, discredit my profession of religion by practices disagreeable to it.” Or, “*Lest I steal*, and, when I am charged with it, forswear myself.” He therefore dreads one sin, because it would draw on another, for the way of sin is down-hill. Observe, He calls God *his God*, and therefore he is afraid of doing any thing to offend him, because of the relation he stands in to him.

10. Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.

11. *There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.* 12. *There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.* 13. *There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes!* and their eyelids are lifted up. 14. *There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.*

Here is, 1. A caution not to abuse other people's servants any more than our own, nor to make mischief between them and their masters, for it is an ill office, invidious, and what will make a man odious, v. 10. Consider, (1.) It is an injury to the servant, whose

poor condition makes him an object of pity, and therefore it is barbarous to add affliction to him that is afflicted; *Hurt not a servant with thy tongue*, so the margin reads it; for it argues a sordid disposition to smite any body secretly with the scourge of the tongue, especially a servant, who is not a match for us, and whom we should rather protect, if his master be severe with him, than exasperate him more. (2.) “*It will perhaps be an injury to thyself; if a servant be thus provoked, perhaps he will curse thee, will accuse thee, and bring thee into trouble; or give thee an ill word, and blemish thy reputation; or appeal to God against thee, and imprecate his wrath upon thee, who is the Patron and Protector of oppressed innocency.*”

2. An account, upon occasion of this caution, of some wicked generations of men, that are justly abominable to all that are virtuous and good.

(1.) Such as are abusive to their parents, give them bad language, and wish them ill, call them bad names, and actually injure them; there is a generation of such; young men of that black character commonly herd together, and irritate one another against their parents; a *generation of vipers* they are, who curse: either their natural parents, or their magistrates, or their ministers, because they cannot endure the yoke; and they are near of kin to them, who, though they are not yet arrived at such a pitch of wickedness as to curse their parents, yet do not bless them, cannot give them a good word, and will not pray for them.

(2.) Such as are conceited of themselves, and, under a shew and pretence of sanctify, hide from others, and perhaps from themselves too, abundance of reigning wickedness in secret; (v. 12.) they are *pure in their own eyes*, as if they were in all respects such as they should be; they have a very good opinion of themselves and their own character, that they are not only righteous, but *rich and increased with goods*, (Rev. 3. 17.) and yet are *not cleansed from their filthiness*, the filthiness of their hearts, which they pretend to be the best part of them; they are, it maybe, swept and garnished, but they are not washed, not sanctified; as the Pharisees that within were *full of all uncleanness*, Matth. 23. 25, 26.

(3.) Such as are haughty and scornful to those about them, v. 13. He speaks of them with amazement at their intolerable pride and insolence; *Oh how lofty are their eyes!* With what disdain do they look upon their neighbours, as not worthy to be set with the dogs of their flock! What a distance do they expect every body should keep; and when they look upon themselves, how do they strut and vaunt, like the peacock, thinking they make themselves illustrious, when really they make themselves ridiculous! There is a generation of such, on whom he that *resists the proud* will pour contempt.

(4.) Such as are cruel to the poor, and barbarous to all that lie at their mercy; (v. 14.) their teeth are iron and steel, *swords and knives*, instruments of cruelty, with which they devour the poor with the greatest pleasure imaginable, and as greedily as hungry men eat their meat, and eat it. God has so ordered it, that the *poor we shall have always with us*, that they shall never cease out of the land; but there are those who, because they hate to relieve them, would, if they could, abolish them *from the earth, from among men*; especially God's poor. Some understand it of those who wound and ruin others by slanders and false accusations, and severe censures of their everlasting state; their tongues, and their teeth too, (which are likewise organs of speech,) are *as swords and knives*, Ps. 57. 4.

15. The horseleech hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, *It is enough*:

16. The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, *It is enough.* 17. The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.

He had spoken before of those that devoured the poor, (v. 14.) and had spoken of them last, as the worst of all the four generations there mentioned; now here he speaks of their insatiableness in doing this. The temper that puts them upon it is made up of cruelty and covetousness; those are *two daughters* of the *horsesleece*, its genuine offspring, that still cry, "*Give, give, give more blood, give more money;*" for the bloody are still blood-thirsty; being drunk with blood, they add thirst to their drunkenness, and will seek it yet again. They also that *love silver* shall never be satisfied with silver. Thus, while from these two principles they are devouring the poor, they are continually uneasy to themselves, as David's enemies, Ps. 59. 14, 15.

Now, 1. For the further illustration of this, he specifies four other things which are insatiable, to which those devourers are compared, which say not, *It is enough*; or, *It is wealth*. Those are never rich that are always coveting. Now these four things that are always craving, are, (1.) The grave into which multitudes fall, and yet still more will fall, and it swallows them all up, and returns none. *Hell and destruction are never full*, ch. 27. 20. When it comes to our turn, we shall find the grave ready for us, Job, 17. 1. (2.) The barren womb, which is impatient of its affliction in being barren, and cries, as Rachel did, *Give me children*. (3.) The parched ground in time of drought, (especially in those hot countries,) which still soaks in the rain that comes in abundance upon it, and in a little time wants more. (4.) The fire, which, when it has consumed abundance of fuel, yet still devours all the combustible matter that is thrown into it. So insatiable are the corrupt desires of sinners, and so little satisfaction have they even in the gratification of them.

2. He adds a terrible threatening to disobedient children, (v. 17.) for warning to the first of those four wicked generations that curse their parents, (v. 11.) and shews here, (1.) Who they are that belong to that generation; not only they that curse their parents in heat and passion, but, [1.] They that *mock* at them, though it be but with a scornful eye, looking with disdain upon them, because of their bodily infirmities, or looking sour or dogged at them when they instruct or command, impatient at their checks, and angry at them. God takes notice with what eye children look upon their parents, and will reckon for the leering look and the casts of an evil eye, as well as for bad language given them. [2.] They that *despise to obey* them, that think it a thing below them to be dutiful to their parents, especially to the mother, they scorn to be controlled by her; and thus she that bare them in sorrow, in greater sorrow bears their manners. (2.) What their doom will be. They that dishonour their parents shall be set up as monuments of God's vengeance; they shall be hanged in chains, as it were, for the birds of prey to pick out their eyes, those eyes with which they looked so scornfully on their good parents. The dead bodies of malefactors were not to hang all night, but before night the ravens would have picked out their eyes. If men do not punish undutiful children, God will, and will load those with the greatest infamy that conduct themselves haughtily toward their parents. Many who have come to an ignominious end, have owned that the wicked courses that brought them to it began in a contempt of their parents' authority.

18. There be three *things* which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: 19. The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid. 20. Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness. 21. For three *things* the earth is disquieted, and for four *which* it cannot bear: 22. For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; 23. For an

odious woman when she is married; and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress.

Here is,

I. An account of four things that are unsearchable, too wonderful to be fully known. And here,

1. The three first are natural things, and are only designed as comparisons for the illustration of the last. We cannot trace, (1.) *An eagle in the air*; which way she is flown cannot be discovered, either by the footstep or by the scent, as the way of a beast may upon the ground; nor can we account for the wonderful swiftness of her flight, how soon she is gone beyond our ken. (2.) *A serpent upon a rock*. The way of a serpent in the sand we may find by the track, but not of a serpent upon the hard rock; nor can we describe how a serpent will, without feet, in a little time creep to the top of a rock. (3.) *A ship in the midst of the sea*. The leviathan, indeed, *makes a path to shine after him, one would think the deep to be hoary*, (Job, 41. 32.) but a ship leaves no mark behind it, and sometimes it is so tossed upon the waves, that one would wonder how it lives at sea, and gains its point. The kingdom of nature is full of wonders; marvellous things which the God of nature does, *past finding out*.

2. The fourth is a mystery of iniquity, more unaccountable than any of these; it belongs to the depths of Satan, that deceitfulness, and that desperate wickedness of the heart, which none can know, Jer. 17. 9. It is twofold,

(1.) The cursed arts which a vile adulterer has to debauch a maid, and to persuade her to yield to his wicked and abominable lust; this is what a wanton poet wrote a whole book of, long since, *De arte amandi—On the art of love*. By what pretensions and protestations of love, and all its powerful charms, promises of marriage, assurances of secrecy and reward, is many an unwary virgin brought to sell her virtue, and honour, and peace, and soul, and all to a base traitor; for so all sinful lust is in the kingdom of love. The more artfully the temptation is managed, the more watchful and resolute ought every pure heart to be against it.

(2.) The cursed arts which a vile adulteress has to conceal her wickedness, especially from her husband, from whom she treacherously departs; so close are her intrigues with her lewd companions, and so craftily disguised, that it is as impossible to discover her as to track an eagle in the air. She eats the forbidden fruit, after the similitude of Adam's transgression, and then *wipes her mouth*, that it may not betray itself, and, with a bold and impudent face, says, *I have done no wickedness*. [1.] To the world she denies the fact, and is ready to swear it, that she is as chaste and modest as any woman, and never did the wickedness she is suspected of. They are works of darkness, which are industriously kept from coming to the light. [2.] To her own conscience (if she have any left) she denies the fault, and will not own that that *great wickedness* is any wickedness at all, but an innocent entertainment. See Hos. 12. 7, 8. Thus multitudes ruin their souls by calling evil good, and out-facing their convictions with a self-justification.

II. An account of four things that are intolerable, that is, four sorts of persons that are very troublesome to the places where they live, and the relations and companies they are in; the earth is *disquieted for them*, and groans under them as a burthen it cannot bear, and they are all much alike. 1. *A servant* when he is advanced, and intrusted with power, who is, of all others, most insolent and imperious; witness Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, Neh. 2. 10. 2. *A fool*, a silly, rude, boisterous, vicious man, when he is grown rich, and is partaking of the pleasures of the table, will disturb all the company with his extravagant talk, and the affronts he will put upon those about him. 3. An ill-natured, cross-grained, woman, when she gets a husband; who, having made herself odious by her pride and sourness, so that one would not have thought any body should have loved her, yet, if at last she be married, that honourable estate makes her more intolerably scornful and spiteful than ever. It is pity that which should sweeten the disposition, should have a contrary effect. A gracious woman, when she is married, will be yet more obliging.

4. An old maid-servant that has prevailed with her mistress, by humouring her, and, as we say, getting the length of her foot, to leave her what she has, or is as dear to her as if she was to be her heir, such a one likewise will be intolerably proud and malicious, and think all too little that her mistress gives her, and herself wronged if any thing be left from her. Let those, therefore, whom Providence has advanced to honour from mean beginnings, carefully watch against that sin which will most easily beset them, pride and haughtiness, which will in them, of all others, be most insufferable and inexcusable; and let them humble themselves with the remembrance of the rock out of which they were hewn.

24. There be four *things which are little upon the earth*, but they *are exceeding wise*; 25. The ants *are* a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; 26. The conies *are* but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; 27. The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; 28. The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.

Agur, having specified four things, that seem great, and yet are really contemptible, here specifies four things that are little, and yet are very admirable, great in miniature; in which, as Bishop Patrick observes, he teaches us several good lessons; as, 1. Not to admire bodily bulk, or beauty, or strength, or to value persons, or think the better of them, for that, but to judge of men by their wisdom and conduct, their industry and application to business, which are characters that deserve respect. 2. To admire the wisdom and power of the Creator in the smallest and most despicable animals, in an ant as much as in an elephant. 3. To blame ourselves who do not act so much for our own interest as the meanest creatures do for their's. 4. Not to despise the weak things of the world; there are those that are *little upon the earth*, poor in the world, and of small account, and yet *are exceeding wise*, wise for their souls and another world, and those *are exceeding wise, wiser than their neighbours*. Margin. *They are wise, made wise by the special instinct of nature*; all that are wise to salvation, are made wise by the grace of God. Those he specifies are,

(1.) The *ants*; minute animals, and very weak, and yet they are very industrious in gathering proper food, and have a strange sagacity to do it in the summer, the proper time: this is so great a piece of wisdom, that we may learn of them to be wise for futurity, *ch. 6. 6*. When the ravening lions lack, and suffer hunger, the laborious ants have plenty, and know no want.

(2.) The *conies*, or, as some rather understand it, the Arabian mice, field-mice, weak creatures, and very timorous, yet they have so much wisdom as to *make their houses in the rocks*, where they are well-guarded, and their feebleness makes them take shelter in those natural fastnesses and fortifications. Sense of our own indigence and weakness should drive us to him that is a *Rock higher than we*, for shelter and support; there let us make our habitation.

(3.) The *locusts*; they are little also, and *have no king*, as the bees have, but *they go forth all of them by bands*, like an army in battle-array; and, observing such good order among themselves, it is not any inconvenience to them that they *have no king*. They are called God's *great army*; (Joel, 2. 25.) for, when he pleases, he musters, he marshals, them, and wages war by them, as he did upon Egypt. *They go forth all of them gathered together*; so the margin; sense of weakness should engage us to keep together, that we may strengthen the hands of one another.

(4.) The *spider*; an insect, but as great an instance of industry in our houses as the ants are in the field. Spiders are very ingenious in weaving their webs, with a fineness and exactness, such as no art can pretend to come near; *They take hold with their hands*, and spin a fine thread out of their own bowels, with a great deal of art; and they are not only in poor men's cottages, but in *kings' palaces*, notwithstanding all the care that is there

taken to destroy them. Providence wonderfully keeps up those kinds of creatures, not only which men provide not for, but which every man's hand is against, and seeks the destruction of. Those that will mind their business, and *take hold of it with their hands*, shall be in *king's palaces*; sooner or later, they will get preferment, and may go on with it, notwithstanding the difficulties and discouragements they meet with. If one well-spun web be swept away, it is but making another.

29. There be three *things* which go well, yea, four are comely in going: 30. A lion *which is* strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; 31. A greyhound; an he-goat also; and a king, against whom *there is* no rising up. 32. If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, *lay* thine hand upon thy mouth. 33. Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

Here is, 1. An enumeration of four things which are majestic and stately in their going, which look great.

(1.) A *lion*, the king of beasts, because *strongest among beasts*; among beasts it is strength that gives the pre-eminence, but it is pity that it should do so among men, whose *wisdom* is their honour, not their *strength* and *force*. The lion *turns not away*, nor alters his pace, for fear of any pursuers, since he knows he is too hard for them. Herein *the righteous are bold as a lion*, that they *turn not away* from their duty for fear of any difficulty they meet with in it.

(2.) A *grey-hound* that is girt in the loins, and fit for running; or, as the margin reads it, a *horse*, which ought not to be omitted among the creatures that *are comely in going*, for so he is, especially when he is dressed up in his harness, or trappings.

(3.) A *he-goat*, the comeliness of whose going is when he goes first, and leads the flock; it is the comeliness of a Christian's going, to go first in a good work, and to lead others in the right way.

(4.) A *king*, who, when he appears in his majesty, is looked upon with reverence and awe, and all agree that *there is no rising up against him*; none can compare with him, none can contend with him, whoever does it, it is at his peril. And if *there is no rising up against an earthly prince, woe to him then that strives with his Maker*. It is intended that we should learn courage and fortitude in all virtuous actions from the *lion*, and *not to turn away from any difficulty* we meet with; from the *grey-hound* we may learn quickness and dispatch; from the *he-goat*, the care of our family, and those under our charge; and from a *king*, to have our children in subjection with all gravity; and from them all, to *go well*, and to order the steps of our conversation, so as that we may not only be safe, but *comely, in going*.

2. A caution to us to keep our temper at all times, and under all provocations, and to take heed of carrying our resentments too far upon any occasion, especially when there is a *king* in the case, *against whom there is no rising up*; when it is a ruler, or one much our superior, that is offended; nay, the rule is always the same.

(1.) We must bridle and suppress our own passion, and take shame to ourselves, whenever we are justly charged with a fault, and not insist upon our own innocency; If we have *lifted up ourselves*, either in a proud conceit of ourselves, or a peevish opposition to those that are over us, if we have transgressed the laws of our place and station, we have therein *done foolishly*. Those that magnify themselves *over* others, or *against* others, that are haughty and insolent, they do but shame themselves, and betray their own weakness; nay, if we have but *thought evil*, if we are conscious to ourselves, that we have harboured an ill design in our minds, or it has been suggested to us, we must *lay our hand upon our mouth*, [1.] We must humble ourselves for what we

have done amiss, and even lie in the dust before God, in sorrow for it, as Job did, when he repented of what he had said foolishly; (*ch.* 40. 4.) *I will lay my hand upon my mouth;* and as the convicted leper, who *put a covering upon his upper lip.* If we have done foolishly, we must not stand to it before men, but by silence own our guilt, which will be the best way of appeasing those we have offended. [2.] We must keep the evil thought we have conceived in our minds from breaking out in any evil speeches; Do not give the evil thought an *imprimatur*—a licence; allow it not to be published, but *lay thy hand upon thy mouth;* use a holy violence with thyself, if need be, and enjoin thyself silence; as Christ *suffered not the evil spirits to speak.* It is bad to think ill, but it is much worse to speak it; for that implies a consent to the evil thought, and a willingness to infect others with it.

(2.) We must not irritate the passions of others. Some are so very provoking in their words and conduct, that they even *force wrath,* they make those about them angry, whether they will or no, and put *them* into a passion, who are not only not inclined to it, but resolved against it. Now, this *forcing of wrath brings forth strife,* and where that is, *there is confusion and every evil work.* As the violent agitation of the cream fetches all the good out of the milk, and the hard *wringing of the nose* will extort blood from it, so this *forcing of wrath* wastes both the body and spirits of a man, and robs him of all the good that is in him. Or, as it is in *the churning of milk, and the wringing of the nose,* that is done by force, which otherwise would not be done; so the spirit is heated by degrees with strong passions, one angry word begets another, and that a third, one passionate debate makes work for another, and so it goes on, till it ends at length in irreconcilable feuds; let nothing, therefore, be said or done with violence, but every thing with softness and calmness.

CHAP. XXXI.

This chapter is added to Solomon's proverbs, some think, because it is of the same author, supposing king Lemuel to be king Solomon; others, only because it is of the same nature, though left in writing by another author, called Lemuel; however it be, it is a prophecy, and therefore given by inspiration and direction of God, which Lemuel was under in the writing of it, and putting it into this form, as his mother was in dictating to him the matter of it. Here is, I. An exhortation to Lemuel, a young prince, to take heed of the sins he would be tempted to, and to do the duties of the place he was called to, *v.* 1..9. II. The description of a virtuous woman, especially in the relation of a wife, and the mistress of a family, which Lemuel's mother drew up, not as an encomium of herself, though, no doubt, it was her own true picture, but either as an instruction to her daughters, as the foregoing verses were to her son, or as a direction to her son in the choice of a wife; she must be chaste and modest, diligent and frugal, dutiful to her husband, careful of her family, discreet in her discourse, and in the education of her children, and, above all, conscientious in her duty to God; such a one as this, if he can find her, will make him happy, *v.* 10..31.

1. **T**HE words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him. 2. What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? 3. Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. 4. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine;* nor for princes strong drink: 5. Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. 6. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. 7. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. 8. Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. 9. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Most interpreters are of opinion that Lemuel is Solomon; the name signifies one that is *for God, or devoted to God;* and so it

agrees well enough with that honourable name which, by divine appointment, was given to Solomon, (*2 Sam.* 12. 25.) *Jedediah, beloved of the Lord.* Lemuel is supposed to be a pretty, fond, endearing, name, by which his mother used to call him; and so much did he value himself upon the interest he had in his mother's affections, that he was not ashamed to call himself by it. One would the rather incline to think it is Solomon that here tells us what *his mother taught him,* because he tells us, (*ch.* 4. 4.) what his father taught him. But some think, (and the conjecture is not improbable,) that Lemuel was a prince of some neighbouring country, whose mother was a daughter of Israel, perhaps of the house of David, and taught him these good lessons. Note, 1. It is the duty of mothers, as well as fathers, to teach their children what is good, that they may do it, and what is evil, that they may avoid it; when they are young and tender, they are most under the mother's eye, and she has then an opportunity of moulding and fashioning their minds well, which she ought not to let slip. 2. Even kings must be catechised; the greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of God. 3. Those that are grown up to maturity should often call to mind, and make mention of, the good instructions they received when they were children, for their own admonition, the edification of others, and the honour of those who were the guides of their youth.

Now, in this mother's (this queen mother's) catechism, observe, I. Her expostulation with the young prince, by which she lays hold of him, claims an interest in him, and awakens his attention to what she was about to say; (*v.* 2.) "*What, my son? What shall I say to thee?*" She speaks as one considering what advice to give him, and choosing out words to reason with him; so full of concern is she for his welfare! Or, *What is this that thou doest?* It seems to be a chiding question. She observed, when he was young, that he was too much inclined to women and wine, and therefore she found it necessary to take him to task, and deal roundly with him. "*What, my son? Is this the course of life thou intendest to lead? Have I taught thee no better than thus? I must reprove thee, and reprove thee sharply, and thou must take it well, for,*"

1. "Thou art descended from me, thou art *the son of my womb,* and therefore, what I say comes from the authority and affection of a parent, and cannot be suspected to come from any ill-will; thou art a piece of myself, I bare thee with sorrow, and I expect no other return for all the pains I have taken with thee, and undergone for thee, than this, Be wise and good, and then I am well-paid."

2. "Thou art devoted to my God; thou art *the son of my vows,* the son I prayed to God to give me, and promised to give back to God, and did so;" (thus Samuel was the son of Hannah's vows;) "thou art the son I have often prayed to God to give his grace to; (*Ps.* 72. 1.) and shall a child of so many prayers miscarry? And shall all my hopes concerning thee be disappointed?" Our children that by baptism are dedicated to God, for whom, and in whose name, we covenanted with God, may well be called *the children of our vows;* and as this may be made a good plea with God in our prayers for them, so it may be made a good plea with them in the instructions we give them; we may tell them they are baptized, are *the children of our vows,* and it is at their peril if they break those bonds in sunder, which, in their infancy, they were solemnly brought under.

II. The caution she gives him against those two destroying sins of *uncleanness* and *drunkenness,* which, if he allowed himself in them, would certainly be his ruin.

1. Against uncleanness; (*v.* 3.) *Give not thy strength unto women,* unto strange women. He must not be soft and effeminate, nor spend that time in a vain conversation with the ladies, which should be spent in getting knowledge and dispatching business; nor employ that wit which is the strength of the soul in courting and complimenting them, which he should employ about the affairs of his government. "Especially shun all adultery, fornication, and lasciviousness, which waste the strength of the body, and bring into it dangerous diseases. *Give not thy ways,* thy affections, thy conversation, *to that which destroys kings,* which has destroyed many, which gave such a shock to the kingdom, even of David

himself, in the matter of Uriah. Let the sufferings of others be thy warnings." It lessens the honour of kings, and makes them mean. Are *those* fit to govern others, that are themselves slaves to their own lusts? It makes them unfit for business, and fills their court with the basest and worst of animals. Kings lie exposed to temptations of this kind, having wherewith both to please the humours, and to bear the charges of the sin, and therefore they ought to double their guard; and if they would preserve their people from the unclean spirit, they must themselves be patterns of purity. Meaneer people may also apply it to themselves. Let none give their strength to *that which destroys souls*.

2. Against drunkenness, v.4,5. He must not *drink wine*, or *strong drink*, to excess; he must never sit to drink as they used to do *in the day of their king*, when the princes made him sick with bottles of wine, Hos. 7.5. Whatever temptation he might be in from the excellency of the wine, or the charms of the company, he must deny himself, and be strictly sober, considering.

(1.) The indecency of drunkenness in a king; However some may call it a fashionable accomplishment and entertainment, *it is not for kings*, O Lemuel, *it is not for kings*, to allow themselves that liberty; it is a disparagement to their dignity, and profanes their crown, by confusing the head that wears it; that which for the time unmans them, does for the time unking them. Shall we say, *They are gods*? No, they are *worse than the beasts that perish*. All Christians are *made to our God kings and priests*, and must apply this to themselves. *It is not for Christians, it is not for Christians, to drink to excess*, they debase themselves if they do; it ill becomes the heirs of the kingdom, and the spiritual priests, Lev.10.9.

(2.) The ill consequences of it; (v.5.) *Lest they drink away their understandings and memories, drink, and forget the law* by which they are to govern; and so, instead of doing good with their power, do hurt with it, and *pervert or alter the judgment of all the sons of affliction*, and, when they should right them, wrong them, and add to their affliction. It is a sad complaint which is made of the priests and prophets, (Isa.28.7.) *that they have erred through wine, and through strong drink they are out of the way*; and the effect is as bad in kings, who, when they are drunk, or intoxicated with the love of wine, cannot but stumble in judgment. Judges must have clear heads, which *those* cannot have, who so often make themselves giddy, and incapacitate themselves to judge of the most common things.

III. The counsel she gives him to do good.

1. He must do good with his wealth. Great men must not think that they have their abundance, only that out of it they may *make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of it*, and may the more freely indulge their own genius; no, but that with it they may relieve such as are in distress, v.6,7. "Thou hast wine and strong drink at command; instead of doing thyself hurt with it, do others good with it, let *them* have it that need it." Those that have wherewithal must not only give bread to the hungry, and water to the thirsty, but they must *give strong drink to him that is ready to perish* through sickness or pain, and *wine to those that are melancholy and of heavy heart*; for it was appointed to cheer and revive the spirits, and *make glad the heart*, (as it does where there is need of it,) not to burthen and oppress the spirits, as it does where there is no need of it. We must deny ourselves in the gratifications of sense, that we may have to spare for the relief of the miseries of others, and be glad to see our superfluities and dainties better bestowed upon those whom they will be a real kindness to, than upon ourselves whom they will be a real injury to. Let those that are *ready to perish* drink soberly, and it will be a means so to revive their drooping spirits, that they will *forget their poverty* for the time, and *remember their misery no more*, and so they will be the better able to bear it. The Jews say, that upon this was grounded the practice of giving a stupifying drink to condemned prisoners when they were going to execution, as they did to our Saviour. But the scope of the place is to shew that wine is a cordial, and therefore to be used for want, and not for wantonness, by those only that need cordials, as Timothy, who is

advised to *drink a little wine, only for his stomach's sake, and his often infirmities*, 1 Tim. 5.23.

2. He must do good with his power, his knowledge, and interest; must administer justice with care, courage, and compassion, v.8,9. (1.) He must himself take cognizance of the causes his subjects have depending in his courts, and inspect what his judges and officers do, that he may support those that do their duty, and lay those aside that neglect it, or are partial. (2.) He must, in all matters that come before him, *judge righteously*, and, without fear of the face of man, boldly pass sentence according to equity; *Open thy mouth*; which denotes the liberty of speech that princes and judges ought to use in passing sentence. Some observe, that wise men only *open* their mouths, for fools have their mouths always open, are full of words. (3.) He must especially look upon himself as obliged to be the patron of oppressed innocency; the inferior magistrates perhaps had not zeal and tenderness enough to *plead the cause of the poor and needy*, therefore the king himself must interpose and appear as an advocate, [1.] For those that were unjustly charged with capital crimes, as Naboth was; that were *appointed to destruction*, to gratify the malice either of a particular person, or of a party. It is a case which it well befits a king to appear in, for the preserving of innocent blood. [2.] For those that had actions unjustly brought against them, to defraud them of their right, because they were *poor and needy*, and unable to defend it, not having wherewithal to fee counsel; in such a case also kings must be advocates for the poor. Especially, [3.] For those that were *dumb*, and knew not how to speak for themselves, either through weakness or fear, or being over-talked by the prosecutor, or overawed by the court. It is generous to speak for those that cannot speak for themselves, that are absent, or have not words at command, or are timorous. Our law appoints the judge to be of counsel for the prisoner.

10. Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. 11. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. 12. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. 13. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. 14. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. 15. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. 16. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. 17. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. 18. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. 19. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. 20. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. 21. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. 22. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry: her clothing is silk and purple. 23. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. 24. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. 25. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. 26. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. 27. She locketh well to the ways of her household,

and eateth not the bread of idleness. 28. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. 29. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. 30. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. 31. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

This description of the *virtuous woman* is designed to shew what wives the women should make, and what wives the men should choose; it consists of twenty-two verses, each beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, as some of the *Psalms*; which makes some think it was no part of the lesson which Lemuel's mother taught him, but a poem by itself, written by some other hand, and perhaps had been commonly repeated among the pious Jews, for the ease of which it was made alphabetical. We have the abridgment of it in the New Testament, (1 Tim. 2. 9, 10. 1 Pet. 3. 1. .6.) where the duty prescribed to wives agrees with this description of a good wife; and with good reason is so much stress laid upon it, since it contributes as much as any one thing to the keeping up of religion in families, and the entail of it upon posterity, that the mothers be wise and good; and of what consequence it is to the wealth and outward prosperity of a house, every one is sensible. He that will thrive must ask his wife leave. Here is,

I. A general inquiry after such a one; (v. 10.) where observe, 1. The person inquired after, and that is, a *virtuous woman*; a woman of strength, so the word is; though the weaker vessel, yet made strong by wisdom and grace, and the fear of God; it is the same word that is used in the character of good judges, (Exod. 18. 21.) that they are *able men*, men qualified for the business to which they are called, *men of truth, fearing God*. So it follows, A *virtuous woman* is a woman of spirit, who has the command of her own spirit, and knows how to manage other people's; one that is pious and industrious, and a help meet for a man. In opposition to this strength, we read of the weakness of the heart of an *imperious, whorish, woman*, Ezek. 16. 30. A *virtuous woman* is a woman of resolution, who, having espoused good principles, is firm and steady to them, and will not be frightened with winds and clouds from any part of her duty. 2. The difficulty of meeting with such a one; *Who can find her?* Which intimates that good women are very scarce; many that seem to be so, do not prove so; he that thought he had found a *virtuous woman* was deceived; *Behold, it was Leah*, and not the Rachel he expected. But he that designs to marry ought to seek diligently for such a one, to have this principally in his eye, in all his inquiries, and to take heed that he be not biassed by beauty or gaiety, wealth or parentage, dressing well or dancing well, for all these may be, and yet the woman not be virtuous; and there is many a woman truly virtuous, who yet is not recommended by these advantages. 3. The unspeakable worth of such a one, and the value which he that has such a wife ought to put upon her, shewing it by his thankfulness to God, and his kindness and respect to her, whom he must never think he can do too much for; *her price is far above rubies*, and all the rich ornaments with which vain women adorn themselves. The more rare such good wives are, the more they are to be valued.

II. A particular description of her, and of her excellent qualifications.

1. She is very industrious to recommend herself to her husband's esteem and affection. Those that are good really, will be good relatively. A good woman, if she be brought into the married state, will be a good wife, and make it her business to please her husband, 1 Cor. 7. 34. Though she is a woman of spirit herself, yet her desire is to her husband, to know his mind, that she may accommodate herself to it, and she is willing that he rule over her.

(1.) She conducts herself so that he may repose an entire confi-

dence in her; in her chastity, which she never gave him the least occasion to suspect, or to entertain any jealousy of; she is not morose and reserved, but modest and grave, and has all the marks of virtue in her countenance and behaviour; her husband knows it, and therefore his heart doth safely trust in her; he is easy, and makes her so. He trusts in her conduct, that she will speak in all companies, and act in all affairs, with prudence and discretion, so as not to occasion him either damage or reproach. He trusts in her fidelity to his interests, and that she will never betray his counsels, or have any interest separate from that of his family. When he goes abroad, to attend the concerns of the public, he can confide in her to order all his affairs at home, as well as if he himself were there. She is a good wife, that is fit to be trusted, and he a good husband, that will leave it to such a wife to manage for him.

(2.) She contributes so much to his content and satisfaction that he shall have no need of spoil; he needs not be griping and scraping abroad, as those must be whose wives are proud and wasteful at home. She manages his affairs so that he is always before-hand, has such plenty of his own, that he is in no temptation to prey upon his neighbours. He thinks himself so happy in her, that he envies not those who have most of the wealth of this world; he needs it not, he has enough, having such a wife. Happy the couple that have such a satisfaction as this in each other!

(3.) She makes it her constant business to do him good, and is afraid of doing any thing, even through inadvertency, that may turn to his prejudice, v. 12. She shews her love to him, not by a foolish fondness, but by prudent endearments, accommodating herself to his temper, and not crossing him, giving him good words, and not bad ones, no, not when he is out of humour; studying to make him easy, to provide what is fit for him both in health and sickness, and attending him with diligence and tenderness when any thing ails him; nor would she, no, not for the world, wilfully do any thing that might be a damage to his person, family, estate, or reputation. And this is her care all the days of her life; not at first only, or now and then, when she is in a good humour, but perpetually; and she is not weary of the good offices she does him; *She does him good*, not only all the days of his life, but of her own too; if she survive him, still she is doing him good in her care of his children, his estate, and good name, and all the concerns he left behind him. We read of kindness shewed, not only to the living, but to the dead, Ruth, 2. 20.

(4.) She adds to his reputation in the world; (v. 23.) *Her husband is known in the gates*, known to have a good wife. By his wise counsels, and prudent management of affairs, it appears that he has a discreet companion in his bosom, by conversation with whom he improves himself. By his cheerful countenance and pleasant humour, it appears that he has an agreeable wife at home; for many that have not have their tempers strangely soured by it. Nay, by his appearing clean and neat in his dress, every thing about him decent and handsome, yet not gaudy, one may know he has a good wife at home that takes care of his clothes.

2. She is one that takes pains in the duty of her place, and takes pleasure in it. This part of her character is much enlarged upon here.

(1.) She hates to sit still and do nothing; *She eats not the bread of idleness*, v. 27. Though she needs not work for her bread, (she has an estate to live upon,) yet she will not eat it in idleness, because she knows that we were none of us sent into this world to be idle, and that when we have nothing to do, the Devil will soon find us something to do, and that it is not fit that those who will not labour should eat. Some eat and drink because they can find themselves nothing else to do; and needless visits must be received with fashionable entertainments; these are eating the bread of idleness, which she has no relish for, for she neither gives, nor receives, idle visits or idle talk.

(2.) She is careful to fill up time that none of that be lost. When day-light is done, she does not then think it time to lay by her work, as those are forced to do whose business lies abroad in the fields, (Ps. 104. 23.) but, her business lying within doors,

and her work worth candle-light, with that she lengthens out the day: and her candle goes not out by night, v. 18. It is a mercy to have candle-light to supply the want of day-light, and a duty, having that advantage, to improve it. We say of an elaborate piece, It smells of the lamp.

(3.) She rises early, while it is yet night, (v. 15.) to give her servants their breakfast, that they may be ready to go cheerfully about their work as soon as the day breaks. She is none of those who sit up playing at cards, or dancing, till midnight, till morning, and then lie in bed till noon; no, the virtuous woman loves her business better than her ease or her pleasure, is in care to be found in the way of her duty every hour of the day, and has more true satisfaction in having given meat to her household betimes in the morning, than those can have in the money they have won, much more, in what they have lost, who sat up all night at play. Those that have a family to take care of, should not love their bed too well in a morning.

(4.) She applies herself to the business that is proper for her. It is not in scholar's business, or statesman's business, or husbandman's business, that she employs herself, but in women's business; She seeks wool and flax, where she may have the best of each at the best hand, and cheapest; she has a stock of both by her, and every thing that is necessary to the carrying on both of the woollen and the linen manufacture; (v. 13.) and with this, she does not only set the poor on work, which is a very good office, but does herself work, and work willingly, with her hands; she works with the counsel or delight of her hands, so the word is; she goes about it cheerfully and dexterously; lays not only her hand, but her mind, to it, and goes on in it without weariness in well-doing. She lays her own hands to the spindle, or spinning-wheel, and her hands hold the distaff; (v. 19.) and she does not reckon it either an abridgment of her liberty, or a disparagement to her dignity, or at all inconsistent with her repose. The spindle and the distaff are here mentioned as her honour, while the ornaments of the daughters of Zion are reckoned up to their reproach, Isa. 3. 18, &c.

(5.) She does what she does with all her might, and does not trifle in it; (v. 17.) She girds her loins with strength, and strengthens her arms; she does not employ herself in sitting work only, or in that which is only the nice performance of the fingers; there are works that are scarcely one remove from doing nothing; but, if there be occasion, she will go through with work that requires all the strength she has, which she will use as one that knows it is the way to have more.

3. She is one that makes what she does to turn to a good account by her prudent management of it; she does not toil all night and catch nothing; no, she herself perceives that her merchandise is good; (v. 18.) she is sensible that in all her labour there is profit, and that encourages her to go on in it. She perceives that she can make things herself better and cheaper than she can buy them; she finds by observation what branch of her employment brings in the best returns, and to that she applies herself most closely.

(1.) She brings in provisions of all things necessary and convenient for her family, v. 14. No merchants' ships, no, not Solomon's navy, ever made a more advantageous return than her employments do. Do they bring in foreign commodities with the effects they export? So does she with the fruit of her labours. What her ground does not produce, she can furnish herself with, if she have occasion for it, by exchanging her own goods for it; and so she brings her food from afar. Not that she values things the more for their being far-fetched, but, if they be ever so far off, if she must have them, she knows how to come by them.

(2.) She purchases lands, and enlarges the demesne of the family; (v. 16.) She considers a field, and buys it. She considers what an advantage it will be to the family, and what a good account it will turn to, and therefore she buys it; or rather, though she have ever so much mind to it, she will not buy it, till she has first considered it, whether it be worth her money, whether she can afford to take so much money out of her stock, as must go to purchase it, whether the title be good, whether the ground

will answer the character given of it, and whether she has money at command to pay for it. Many have undone themselves by buying without considering; but those who would make advantageous purchases must consider, and then buy. She also plants a vineyard, but it is with the fruit of her hands; she does not take up money, or run into debt, to do it, but she does it with what she can spare out of the gains of her own housewifery. Men should not lay out any thing upon superfluities, till, by the blessing of God upon their industry, they are got before-hand, and can afford it; and then the fruit of the vineyard is likely to be doubly sweet, when it is the fruit of honest industry.

(3.) She furnishes her house well, and has good clothing for herself and her family; (v. 22.) She makes herself coverings of tapestry to hang her rooms, and she may be allowed to use them when they are of her own making; her own clothing is rich and fine, it is silk and purple, according to her place and rank. Though she is not so vain as to spend much time in dressing her, nor makes the putting on of apparel her adorning, nor values herself upon it, yet she has rich clothes, and puts them on well. The senator's robes which her husband wears are of her own spinning, and they look better, and wear better, than any that are bought. She also gets good warm clothing for her children, and her servants' liveries; she needs not fear the cold of the most pinching winter, for she and her family are well-provided with clothes, sufficient to keep out cold, which is the end chiefly to be aimed at in clothing; All her household are clothed in scarlet, strong cloth, and fit for winter, and yet rich, and making a good appearance. They are all double-clothed, so some read it; have change of raiment, a winter-suit, and a summer-suit.

(4.) She trades abroad; she makes more than she and her household have occasion for; and therefore, when she has sufficiently stocked her family, she sells fine linen and girdles to the merchants, (v. 24.) who carry them to Tyre, the mart of the nations, or some other trading city. Those families are likely to thrive that sell more than they buy; as it is well with the kingdom when abundance of its home-manufactures are exported. It is no disgrace to those of the best quality to sell what they can spare, nor to deal in trade, and send ventures by sea.

(5.) She lays up for hereafter; She shall rejoice in time to come, having laid in a good stock for her family, and having good portions for her children. Those that take pains when they are in their prime will have the pleasure and joy of it when they are old, both in reflecting upon it, and in reaping the benefit of it.

4. She takes care of her family, and all the affairs of it, gives meat to her household, (v. 15.) to every one their portion of meat in due season, so that none of her servants have reason to complain of being kept short, or faring hard. She gives also a portion, an allotment of work, as well as meat, to her maidens; they shall each of them know their business, and have their task. She looks well to the ways of her household, (v. 27.) she inspects the manners of all her servants, that she may check what is amiss among them, and oblige them all to behave properly, and do their duty to God and one another, as well as to her, as Job, who put away iniquity far from his tabernacle; and David, who would suffer no wicked thing in his house. She does not intermeddle in the concerns of other people's houses, she thinks it enough for her to look well to her own.

5. She is charitable to the poor, v. 20. She is as intent upon giving as she is upon getting, she often serves the poor with her own hand, and she does it freely, cheerfully, and very liberally, with an outstretched hand. Nor does she relieve her poor neighbours only, and those that are nigh at hand, but she reaches forth her hands to the needy that are at a distance, seeking opportunities to do good and to communicate; which is as good housewifery as any thing she does.

6. She is discreet and obliging in all her discourse; not talkative, censorious, or peevish, as some are, that know how to take pains; no, she opens her mouth with wisdom; when she does speak, it is with a great deal of prudence, and very much to the purpose; you may perceive by every word she says, how much she governs herself by the rules of wisdom. She not only takes prudent measures

herself, but gives prudent advice to others; and this, not as assuming the authority of a dictator, but with the affection of a friend, and an obliging air; *In her tongue is the law of kindness*; all she says is under the government of that law. The law of love and kindness is written in the heart, but it shews itself in the tongue; if we are *kindly affectioned one to another*, it will appear by affectionate expressions. It is called a *law of kindness*, because it gives law to others, to all she converses with; her wisdom and kindness together put a commanding power into all she says; they command respect, they command compliance. How forcible are right words! *In her tongue is the law of grace, or mercy*; so some read it, understanding it of the word and law of God, which she delights to talk of among her children and servants. She is full of pious religious discourse, and manages it prudently; which shews how full her heart is of another world, even when her hands are most busy about this world.

7. That which completes and crowns her character, is, that she *fears the Lord*, v. 30. With all those good qualities she lacks not that *one thing needful*; she is truly pious, and, in all she does, is guided and governed by principles of conscience, and a regard to God; this is that which is here preferred far before *beauty*, that is *vain and deceitful*; all that are wise and good, account it so, and value neither themselves nor others on it. Beauty recommends none to God, nor is it any certain indication of wisdom and goodness, but it has deceived many a man who has made his choice of a wife by it. There may be an impure deformed soul lodged in a comely and beautiful body; nay, many have been exposed by their beauty to such temptations as have been the ruin of their virtue, their honour, and their precious souls. It is a fading thing at the best, and therefore *vain and deceitful*; a fit of sickness will stain and sully it in a little time; a thousand accidents may blast this flower in its prime; old age will certainly wither it, and death and the grave consume it; but the fear of God reigning in the heart, is the beauty of the soul; it recommends those that have it, to the favour of God, and is, in his sight, of great price; it will last for ever, and bid defiance to death itself, which consumes the beauty of the body, but consummates the beauty of the soul.

III. The happiness of this virtuous woman.

1. She has the comfort and satisfaction of her virtue in her own mind; (v. 25.) *Strength and honour are her clothing*, in which she wraps herself, that is, enjoys herself, and in which she appears to the world, and so recommends herself. She enjoys a firmness and constancy of mind, has spirit to bear up under the many crosses and disappointments which even the wise and virtuous must expect to meet with in this world; and this is her clothing, for defence as well as decency. She deals honourably with all, and she has the pleasure of doing so, *and shall rejoice in time to come*; she shall reflect upon it with comfort when she comes to be old, that she was not idle or useless when she was young. In the day of death it will be a pleasure to her to think that she has lived to some good purpose. Nay, *she shall rejoice in an eternity to come*, she shall be recompensed for her goodness with *fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore*.

2. She is a great blessing to her relations, v. 28.

(1.) *Her children* grow up in her place, *and they call her blessed*; they give her their good word, they are themselves a commendation to her, and they are ready to give great commendations of

her; they pray for her, and bless God that they had such a good mother. It is a debt which they owe her, a part of that honour which the fifth commandment requires to be paid to father and mother; and it is a double honour that is due to a good father and a good mother.

(2.) *Her husband* thinks himself so happy in her, that he takes all occasions to speak well of her, as one of the best of women. It is no indecency at all, but a laudable instance of conjugal love, for husbands and wives to give one another their due praises.

3. She gets the good word of all her neighbours, as Ruth did, whom *all the city of her people knew* to be a *virtuous woman*, Ruth, 3. 11. Virtue will have its praise, Phil. 4. 8. A woman that fears the Lord shall have praise of God, (Rom. 2. 29.) and of men too. It is here shewed,

(1.) That she shall be highly praised; (v. 29.) *Many have done virtuously*; virtuous women, it seems, are precious jewels, but not such rare jewels as was represented, v. 10.; there have been many, but such a one as this cannot be paralleled; *Who can find her equal? She excels them all*. Note, Those that are good should aim and covet to excel in virtue. *Many daughters*, in their father's house, and in the single state, *have done virtuously*, but a good wife, if she be virtuous, *excels them all*, and does more good in her place than they can do in theirs. Or, as some explain it, A man cannot have his house so well kept by good daughters as by a good wife.

(2.) That she shall be incontestably praised, without contradiction, v. 31. Some are praised above what is their due, but those that praise her do but *give her of the fruit of her hands*; they give her that which she has dearly earned, and which is justly owing to her; she is wronged if she have it not.

Note, Those ought to be praised, the fruit of whose hands is praise-worthy. The tree is known by its fruits, and therefore, if the fruit be good, the tree must have our good word. If her children be dutiful and respectful to her, and conduct themselves as they ought, they then *give her of the fruit of her hands*; she reaps the benefit of all the care she has taken of them, and thinks herself well-paid. Children must thus study to *requite their parents*, and this is *showing piety at home*, 1 Tim. 5. 4. But if men be unjust, the thing will speak itself, *her own works will praise her in the gates*, openly before all the people. [1.] She leaves it to her own works to praise her, and does not court the applause of men. Those are none of the truly virtuous women that love to hear themselves commended. [2.] *Her own works will praise her*; if her relations and neighbours altogether hold their peace, her good works will proclaim her praise. The widows gave the best encomium of Doreas, when they *shewed the coats and garments she had made for the poor*, Acts, 9. 39. [3.] The least that can be expected from her neighbours, is, that they should *let her own works praise her*, and do nothing to hinder them. They that do that which is good, let them *have praise of the same*, (Rom. 13. 3.) and let not us enviously say, or do, any thing to the diminishing of it, but be provoked by it to a holy emulation. Let none have an ill report from us, that have a good report even of the truth itself. Thus is shut up this looking-glass for ladies, which they are desired to open, and dress themselves by; and if they do so, their adorning will be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Twenty Chapters of the Book of *Proverbs*, (beginning with *ch. 10.* and ending with *ch. 29.*) consisting mostly of entire sentences in each verse, could not well be reduced to proper heads, and the contents of them gathered; I have therefore here put the contents of all these chapters together, which, perhaps, may be of some use to those who desire to see at once all that is said of any one head in these chapters. I take the heads in no method but as they occurred in reading the chapters; some of the verses, perhaps, I have not put under the same heads that another would have put them under, but the most of them fall (I hope) naturally enough to the places I have assigned them.

(1.) OF the comfort, or grief, parents have in their children, according as they are wise or foolish, godly or ungodly, *ch. 10. 1.—15. 20.—17. 21, 25.—19. 13, 26.—23. 15, 16, 24, 25.—27. 11.—29. 3.*

(2.) Of the world's insufficiency, and religion's sufficiency, to make us happy, *ch. 10. 2, 3.—11. 4.* and the preference to be therefore given to the gains of virtue, above those of this world, *ch. 15. 16, 17.—16. 8, 16.—17. 1.—19. 1.—28. 6, 11.*

PROVERBS.—CONTENTS.

- (3.) Of slothfulness and diligence, *ch.* 10. 4, 26.—12. 11, 24, 27.—13. 4, 23.—15. 19.—16. 26.—18. 9.—19. 15, 24.—20. 4, 13.—21. 5, 25, 26.—22. 13, 29.—24. 30.—26. 13.—16.—27. 18, 23.—27.—28. 19. Particularly the improving or neglecting opportunities, *ch.* 6. 6.—10. 5.
- (4.) The happiness of the righteous, and the misery of the wicked, *ch.* 10. 6, 9, 16, 24, 25, 27.—11. 3, 5.—8, 18.—21, 31.—12. 2, 3, 7, 13, 14, 21, 26, 28.—13. 6, 9, 14, 15, 21, 22, 25.—14. 11, 14, 19, 32.—15. 6, 8, 9, 24, 26, 29.—20. 7.—21. 12, 15, 16, 18, 21.—22. 12.—28. 10, 18.—29. 6.
- (5.) Of honour and dishonour, *ch.* 10. 7.—12. 8, 9.—18. 3.—26. 1.—27. 21. And of vain-glory, *ch.* 25. 14, 27.—27. 2.
- (6.) The wisdom of obedience, and folly of disobedience, *ch.* 10. 8, 17.—12. 1, 15.—13. 1, 13, 18.—15. 5, 10, 12, 31, 32.—19. 16.—28. 4, 7, 9.
- (7.) Of mischievousness and usefulness, *ch.* 10. 10, 23.—11. 9.—11, 23, 27.—12. 5, 6, 12, 18, 20.—13. 2.—14. 22.—16. 29, 30.—17. 11.—21. 10.—24. 8.—26. 23, 27.
- (8.) The praise of wise and good discourse, and the hurt and shame of an ungoverned tongue, *ch.* 10. 11, 13, 14, 20, 21, 31, 32.—11. 30.—14. 3.—15. 2, 4, 7, 23, 28.—16. 20, 23, 24.—17. 7.—18. 4, 7, 20, 21.—20. 15.—21. 23.—23. 9.—24. 26.—25. 11.
- (9.) Of love and hatred, peaceableness and contention, *ch.* 10. 12.—15. 17.—17. 1, 9, 14, 19.—18. 6, 17.—19.—20. 3.—25. 8.—26. 17, 21.—29. 9.
- (10.) Of the rich and poor, *ch.* 10. 15, 22.—11. 28.—13. 7, 8.—14. 20, 24.—18. 11, 23.—19. 1, 4, 7, 22.—22. 2, 7.—28. 6, 11.—29. 13.
- (11.) Of lying, fraud, and dissimulation, and of truth and sincerity, *ch.* 10. 18.—12. 17, 19, 22.—13. 5.—17. 4.—20. 14, 17.—26. 18, 19, 24.—26, 28.
- (12.) Of slandering, *ch.* 10. 18.—16. 27.—25. 23.
- (13.) Of talkativeness and silence, *ch.* 10. 19.—11. 12.—12. 23.—13. 3.—17. 27, 28.—29. 11, 20.
- (14.) Of justice and injustice, *ch.* 11. 1.—13. 16.—16. 8, 11.—17. 15, 26.—18. 5.—20. 10, 23.—22. 28.—23. 10, 11.—29. 24.
- (15.) Of pride and humility, *ch.* 11. 2.—13. 10.—15. 25, 33.—16. 5, 18, 19.—18. 12.—21. 4.—25. 6, 7.—28. 25.—29. 23.
- (16.) Of despising and respecting others, *ch.* 11. 12.—14. 21.
- (17.) Of tale-bearing, *ch.* 11. 13.—16. 28.—18. 8.—20. 19.—26. 20, 22.
- (18.) Of rashness and deliberation, *ch.* 11. 14.—15. 22.—18. 13.—19. 2.—20. 5, 18.—21. 29.—22. 3.—25. 8.—10.
- (19.) Of suretiship, *ch.* 11. 15.—17. 18.—20. 16.—22. 26, 27.—27. 13.
- (20.) Of good and bad women, or wives, *ch.* 11. 16, 22.—12. 4.—14. 1.—18. 22.—19. 13, 14.—21. 9, 19.—25. 24.—27. 15, 16.
- (21.) Of mercifulness and unmercifulness, *ch.* 11. 17.—12. 10.—14. 21.—19. 17.—21. 13.
- (22.) Of charity to the poor, and uncharitableness, *ch.* 11. 24.—26.—14. 31.—17. 5.—22. 9, 16, 22, 23.—28. 27.—29. 7.
- (23.) Of covetousness and contentment, *ch.* 11. 29.—15. 16, 17, 27.—23. 4, 5.
- (24.) Of anger and meekness, *ch.* 12. 16.—14. 17, 29.—15. 1, 18.—16. 32.—17. 12, 26.—19. 11, 19.—22. 24, 25.—25. 15, 28.—26. 21.—29. 22.
- (25.) Of melancholy and cheerfulness, *ch.* 12. 25.—14. 10, 13.—15. 13, 15.—17. 22.—18. 14.—25. 20, 25.
- (26.) Of hope and expectation, *ch.* 13. 12, 19.
- (27.) Of prudence and foolishness, *ch.* 13. 16.—14. 8, 18, 33.—15. 14, 21.—16. 21, 22.—17. 24.—18. 2, 15.—24. 3.—7, 27.—26. 6.—11.—28. 5.
- (28.) Of treachery and fidelity, *ch.* 13. 17.—25. 13, 19.
- (29.) Of good and bad company, *ch.* 13. 20.—14. 7.—28. 7.—29. 3.
- (30.) Of the education of children, *ch.* 13. 24.—19. 18.—20. 11.—22. 6, 15.—23. 12.—14.—29. 15, 17.
- (31.) Of the fear of the Lord, *ch.* 14. 2, 26, 27.—15. 16, 33.—16. 6.—19. 23.—22. 4.—23. 17, 18.
- (32.) Of true and false witness-bearing, *ch.* 14. 5, 25.—19. 5, 9, 28.—21. 28.—24. 28.—25. 18.
- (33.) Of scorers, *ch.* 14. 6, 9.—21. 24.—22. 10.—24. 9.—29. 8.
- (34.) Of credulity and caution, *ch.* 14. 15, 16.—27. 12.
- (35.) Of kings and their subjects, *ch.* 14. 28, 34, 35.—16. 10, 12.—15.—19. 6, 12.—20. 2, 8, 26, 28.—22. 11.—24. 23.—25.—25. 2.—5.—28. 2, 3, 15, 16.—29. 4, 12, 14, 26.
- (36.) Of envy, especially envying sinners, *ch.* 14. 30.—23. 17, 18.—24. 1, 2, 19, 20.—27. 4.
- (37.) Of God's omniscience, and his universal providence, *ch.* 15. 3, 11.—16. 1, 4, 9, 33.—17. 3.—19. 21.—20. 12, 24.—21. 1, 30, 31.—29. 26.
- (38.) Of a good and ill name, *ch.* 15. 30.—22. 1.
- (39.) Of men's good opinion of themselves, *ch.* 14. 12.—16. 2, 25.—20. 6.—21. 2.—26. 12.—28. 26.
- (40.) Of devotion toward God, and dependence on him, *ch.* 16. 3.—18. 10.—23. 26.—27. 1.—28. 25.—29. 25.
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- (42.) Excitements to get wisdom, *ch.* 16. 16.—18. 1.—19. 8, 20.—22. 17.—21.—23. 15, 16, 22.—25.—24. 13, 14.—27. 11.
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- (44.) Of old age and youth, *ch.* 16. 31.—17. 6.—20. 29.
- (45.) Of servants, *ch.* 17. 2.—19. 10.—29. 19, 21.
- (46.) Of bribery, *ch.* 17. 8, 23.—18. 16.—21. 14.—28. 21.
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- (49.) Of friendship, *ch.* 17. 17.—18. 24.—27. 9, 10, 14, 17.
- (50.) Of sensual pleasures, *ch.* 21. 17.—23. 1.—3, 6.—8, 19.—21. 27. 7.
- (51.) Of drunkenness, *ch.* 20. 1.—23. 29.—35.
- (52.) Of the universal corruption of nature, *ch.* 20. 9.
- (53.) Of flattery, *ch.* 20. 19.—26. 28.—28. 23.—29. 5.
- (54.) Of undutiful children, *ch.* 20. 20.—28. 24.
- (55.) Of the short continuance of what is ill-gotten, *ch.* 20. 21.—21. 6, 7.—22. 8.—28. 8.
- (56.) Of revenge, *ch.* 20. 22.—24. 17, 18, 29.
- (57.) Of sacrilege, *ch.* 20. 25.
- (58.) Of conscience, *ch.* 20. 27.—27. 19.
- (59.) Of the preference of moral duties before ceremonial, *ch.* 15. 8.—21. 3, 27.
- (60.) Of prodigality and wastefulness, *ch.* 21. 20.
- (61.) The triumphs of wisdom and godliness, *ch.* 21. 22.—24. 15, 16.
- (62.) Of frowardness and tractableness, *ch.* 22. 5.
- (63.) Of uncleanness, *ch.* 22. 14.—23. 27, 28.
- (64.) Of fainting in affliction, *ch.* 24. 10.
- (65.) Of helping the distressed, *ch.* 24. 11, 12.
- (66.) Of loyalty to the government, *ch.* 24. 21, 22.
- (67.) Of forgiving enemies, 25. 21, 22.
- (68.) Of causeless curses, *ch.* 26. 2.
- (69.) Of answering fools, *ch.* 26. 4, 5.
- (70.) Of unsettledness and unsatisfiedness, *ch.* 27. 3, 20.
- (71.) Of cowardliness and courage, *ch.* 28. 1.
- (72.) The people's interest in the character of their rulers, *ch.* 28. 12, 28.—29. 2, 16.—11. 10, 11.
- (73.) The benefit of repentance and holy fear, *ch.* 28. 13, 14.
- (74.) The punishment of murder, *ch.* 28. 17.
- (75.) Of hastening to be rich, *ch.* 28. 20, 22.
- (76.) The enmity of the wicked against the godly, *ch.* 29. 10, 27.
- (77.) The necessity of the means of grace, *ch.* 29. 18.

AN

E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH

Practical Observations,

OF THE BOOK OF

E C C L E S I A S T E S.

We are still among Solomon's happy men, his happy servants, that *stood continually before him to hear his wisdom*; and they are the choicest of all the dictates of his wisdom, such as were more immediately given by divine inspiration, that are here transmitted to us, not to be heard, as by them, but once, and then liable to be mistaken or forgotten, and by repetition to lose their beauty, but to be read, reviewed, revolved, and had in everlasting remembrance. The account we have of Solomon's apostacy from God, in the latter end of his reign, (1 Kings, 11. 1.) is the tragical part of his story; we may suppose that he spake his *Praverbs* in the prime of his time, while he kept his integrity, but delivered his *Ecclesiastes* when he was grown old, (for of the burthens and decays of age he speaks feelingly, *ch* 12.) and was, by the grace of God, recovered from his backslidings: there he dictated his observations, here he wrote his own experiences; this is what days speak, and wisdom which the multitude of years teaches. The title of the book and the penman we shall meet with in the first verse, and therefore shall here only observe,

- I. That it is a *sermon*, a sermon in print; the text is, (*ch* 1. 2.) *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*; that is the doctrine too; it is proved at large, by many arguments, and an induction of particulars; and divers objections are answered; and, in the close, we have the use and application of all, by way of exhortation, to *remember our Creator*, to *fear him*, and to *keep his commandments*. There are indeed many things in this book which are dark, and hard to be understood, and some things which men of corrupt minds *wrest to their own destruction*, for want of distinguishing between Solomon's arguments and the objections of atheists and epicures; but there is enough easy and plain to convince us (if we will admit the conviction) of the vanity of the world, and its utter insufficiency to make us happy, the vileness of sin, and its certain tendency to make us miserable, and of the wisdom of being religious, and the solid comfort and satisfaction that are to be had in doing our duty both to God and man; this should be intended in every sermon, and that is a good sermon by which these points are in any measure gained.
- II. That it is a *penitential* sermon, as some of David's psalms are penitential psalms; it is a recantation-sermon, in which the preacher sadly laments his own folly and mistake, in promising himself satisfaction in the things of this world, and even in the forbidden pleasures of sense, which now he finds more bitter than death. His fall is a proof of the weakness of man's nature; *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*, nor say, "I shall never be such a fool as to do so and so," when Solomon himself, the wisest of men, played the fool so egregiously; nor *let the rich man glory in his riches*, since Solomon's wealth was so great a snare to him, and did him a great deal more hurt than Job's poverty did him. His recovery is a proof of the power of God's grace, in bringing one back to God that had gone so far from him; it is a proof too of the riches of God's mercy in accepting him, notwithstanding the many aggravations of his sin, pursuant to the promise made to David, that *if his children should commit iniquity*, they should be corrected, but not abandoned and disinherited, 2 Sam. 7. 14, 15. Let him therefore that *thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall*; and let him that is fallen, make haste to get up again, and not despair either of assistance or acceptance therein.
- III. That it is a *practical, profitable*, sermon. Solomon, being brought to repentance, resolves, like his father, to *teach transgressors God's way*, (Ps. 51. 13.) and to give warning to all to take heed of splitting upon those rocks which had been fatal to him; and these were *fruits meet for repentance*. The fundamental error of the children of men, and that which is at the bottom of all their departures from God, is the same with that of our first parents, hoping to be *as gods*, by entertaining themselves with that which seems *good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise*. Now the scope of this book is to shew that this is a great mistake, that our happiness consists not in being as gods to ourselves, to *have what we will, and do what we will*, but in having Him that made us to be a God to us. The moral philosophers disputed much about man's felicity, or chief good, various opinions they had about it, but Solomon, in this book, determines the question, and assures us, that *to fear God and to keep his commandments, is the whole of man*. He tried what satisfaction might be found in the wealth of the world, and the pleasures of sense, and at last pronounced *all vanity and vexation*; yet multitudes will not take his word, but will make the same dangerous experiment, and it proves fatal to them. He, 1. Shews the vanity of those things in which men commonly look for happiness, as human learning and policy, sensual delights, honour and power, riches and great possessions. And then, 2. He prescribes remedies against the vexation of spirit that attends them. Though we cannot cure them of their vanity, we may prevent the trouble they give us, by sitting loose to them, enjoying them comfortably, but laying our expectations low from them, and acquiescing in the will of God concerning us in every event, especially by remembering God in the days of our youth, and continuing in his fear and service all our days, with an eye to the judgment to come.

CHAP. I.

In this chapter, we have, I. The inscription, or title, of the book, v. 1. II. The general doctrine of the vanity of the creature laid down, (v. 2.) and explained, v. 3. III. The proof of this doctrine, taken, 1. From the shortness of human life, and the multitude of births and burials in this life, v. 4. 2. From the inconstant nature, and constant revolutions, of all the creatures, and the perpetual flux and reflux they are in; the sun, wind, and water, v. 5. 7. 3. From the abundant toil man has about them, and the little satisfaction he has in them, v. 8. 4. From the return of the same things again, which shews the end of all perfection, and that the stock is exhausted, v. 9, 10. 5. From the oblivion to which all things are condemned, v. 11. IV. The first instance of the vanity of men's knowledge, and all the parts of learning, especially natural philosophy and politics. Observe, 1. The trial Solomon made of these, v. 12, 13, 16, 17. 2. His judgment of them; that all is vanity, v. 14. For, (1.) There is labour in getting knowledge, v. 13. (2.) There is little good to be done with it, v. 15. (3.) There is no satisfaction in it, v. 18. And if this is vanity and vexation, all other things in this world, being much inferior to it in dignity and worth, must needs be so too. A great scholar cannot be happy, unless he be a true saint.

1. **THE** words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem. 2. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. 3. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

Here is,

1. An account of the penman of this book; it was Solomon, for no other son of David was king of Jerusalem; but he conceals his name *Solomon*, peaceable, because by his sin he had brought trouble upon himself and his kingdom, had broken his peace with God, and lost the peace of his conscience, and therefore was no more worthy of that name. Call me not *Solomon*, call me *Marah*, for behold, for peace I had great bitterness. But he calls himself,

1. *The preacher*; which bespeaks his present character. He is *Koheleth*, which comes from a word which signifies to gather; but it is of a feminine termination, by which, perhaps, Solomon intends to upbraid himself with his effeminacy, which contributed more than any thing to his apostacy; for it was to please his wives that he set up idols, Neh. 13. 26. Or the word *Soul* must be understood, and so *Koheleth* is,

(1.) A *penitent soul*, or one *gathered*; that had rambled and gone astray like a lost sheep, but was now reduced, gathered in from his wanderings, gathered home to his duty, and come at length to himself; the spirit, that was dissipated after a thousand vanities, is now collected, and made to centre in God. Divine grace can make great sinners great converts, and renew even those to repentance, who, after they had known the way of righteousness, turned aside from it, and heal their backslidings, though it is a difficult case. It is only the penitent soul that God will accept, the heart that is broken, not the head that is bowed down like a bulrush only for a day, David's repentance, not Ahab's. And it is only the gathered soul that is the penitent soul, that comes back from its by-paths, that no longer scatters its way to the strangers, (Jer. 3. 13.) but is united to fear God's name. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak, and therefore we have here the words of the penitent, and those published. If eminent professors of religion fall into gross sin, they are concerned, for the honour of God, and the repairing of the damage they have done to his kingdom, openly to testify their repentance, that the antidote may be administered as extensively as the poison.

(2.) A *preaching soul*, or one *gathering*. Being himself gathered to the congregation of saints, out of which he had by his sin thrown himself, and being reconciled to the church, he endeavours to gather others to it, that had gone astray like him, and perhaps were led astray by his example. He that has done any thing to seduce his brother, ought to do all he can to restore him. Perhaps Solomon called together a congregation of his people, as he had done at the dedication of the temple, (1 Kings, 8. 2.) so now at the re-dedicating of himself. In that assembly he presided as the people's mouth to God in prayer, (v. 12.) in this as God's mouth to them in preaching. God by his Spirit made him a preacher, in token of his being reconciled to him; a commission is an implicit pardon. Christ sufficiently signified his forgiving Peter, by

committing his lambs and sheep to his trust. Observe, Penitents should be preachers; they that have taken warning themselves to turn and live, should give warning to others not to go on and die. When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. Preachers must be preaching souls, for that only is likely to reach to the heart that comes from the heart. Paul served God with his spirit in the gospel of his Son, Rom. 1. 9.

2. *The son of David*. His taking this title intimates, (1.) That he looked upon it as a great honour to be the son of so good a man, and valued himself very much upon it. (2.) That he also looked upon it as a great aggravation of his sin, that he had such a father, who had given him a good education, and put up many a good prayer for him; it cuts him to the heart to think that he should be a blemish and disgrace to the name and family of such a one as David. It aggravated the sin of Jehoiakim, that he was the son of Josiah, Jer. 22. 15. 17. (3.) That his being the son of David encouraged him to repent, and hope for mercy, for David had fallen into sin, by which he should have been warned not to sin, but was not; but David repented, and therein he took example from him, and found mercy as he did. Yet this was not all, he was that son of David concerning whom God had said, that though he would chasten his transgression with the rod, yet he would not break his covenant with him, Ps. 89. 34. Christ, the great Preacher, was the Son of David.

3. *King of Jerusalem*. This he mentions, (1.) As that which was a very great aggravation of his sin; he was a king. God had done much for him, in raising him to the throne, and yet he had so ill requited him; his dignity made the bad example and influence of his sin the more dangerous, and many would follow his pernicious ways; especially as he was king of Jerusalem, the holy city, where God's temple was, and of his own building too, where the priests, the Lord's ministers, were, and his prophets who had taught him better things. (2.) As that which might give some advantage to what he wrote, for where the word of a king is, there is power. He thought it no disparagement to him, as a king, to be a preacher; but the people would regard him the more as a preacher, because he was a king. If men of honour would lay out themselves to do good, what a great deal of good might they do! Solomon looked as great in the pulpit, preaching the vanity of the world, as in his throne of ivory, judging.

The Chaldee-paraphrase (which, in this book, makes very large additions to the text, or comments upon it, all along) gives this account of Solomon's writing this book; That by the spirit of prophecy he foresaw the revolt of the ten tribes from his son; and, in process of time, the destruction of Jerusalem and the house of the sanctuary, and the captivity of the people; in the foresight of which, he said, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*; and to that he applies many passages in this book.

II. The general scope and design of the book. What is it that this royal preacher has to say? That which he aims at, is, for the making of us truly religious, to take down our esteem of, and expectation from, the things of this world. In order to this, he shews,

1. That they are *all vanity*, v. 2. This is the proposition he lays down, and undertakes to prove; *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*. It was no new text, his father David had more than once spoken to the same purport. The truth itself here asserted, is, that *all is vanity*; all beside God, and considered as abstract from him; the *all* of this world; all worldly employments and enjoyments; the *all* that is in the world; (1 John, 2. 16.) all that which is agreeable to our senses and to our fancies in this present state, which gains pleasure to ourselves, or reputation with others. It is *all vanity*, not only in the abuse of it, when it is perverted by the sin of man, but even in the use of it. Man, considered with reference to these things, is vanity, (Ps. 39. 5, 6.) and, if there were not another life after this, were made in vain; (Ps. 89. 47.) and those things, considered in reference to man, (whatever they are in themselves,) are *vanity*. They are impertinent to the soul, foreign, and add nothing to it; they do not answer the end, nor yield any true satisfaction; they are uncertain in their continuance, are fading, and perishing, and passing away, and will certainly

deceive and disappoint those that put a confidence in them. Let us not therefore *love vanity*, (Ps. 4. 2.) nor *lift up our souls* to it, (Ps. 24. 4.) for we shall but weary ourselves for it, Heb. 2. 13.

It is expressed here very emphatically; not only *All is vain*, but in the abstract, *All is vanity*; as if vanity were the *proprium quarto modo*—*property in the fourth mode*, of the things of this world, that which enters into the nature of them. They are not only *vanity*, but *vanity of vanities*, the vainest vanity, vanity in the highest degree, nothing but vanity, such a vanity as is the cause of a great deal of vanity. And this is redoubled, because the thing is certain and past dispute, it is *vanity of vanities*. This intimates that the wise man had his own heart fully convinced of, and much affected with, this truth, and that he was very desirous that others should be convinced of it, and affected with it, as he was, but that he found the generality of men very loath to believe it, and consider it; (Job, 33. 14.) it intimates likewise, that we cannot comprehend and express the vanity of this world. But who is it that speaks thus slightly of the world? Is it one that will stand to what he says? Yes, he puts his name to it, *saith the preacher*. Is it one that was a competent judge? Yes, as much as ever any man was. Many speak contemptuously of the world, because they are hermits, and know it not, or beggars, and have it not; but Solomon knew it, he had dived into nature's depths, (1 Kings, 4. 33.) and he had it, more of it perhaps than ever any man had, his head filled with its notions, and *his belly* with its *hid treasures*, (Ps. 17. 14.) and he passes this judgment on it. But did he speak as one having authority? Yes, not only that of a king, but that of a prophet, a preacher; he spake in God's name, and was divinely inspired to say it. But did he not say it in his haste, or in a passion, upon occasion of some particular disappointment? No, he said it deliberately, said it, and proved it, laid it down as a fundamental principle, on which he grounded the necessity of being religious. And, as some think, one main thing he designed, was, to shew that the everlasting throne and kingdom which God had by Nathan promised to David and his seed, must be of another world; for all things in this world are subject to vanity, and therefore have not in them sufficient to answer the extent of that promise. If Solomon find all to be vanity, then the kingdom of the Messiah must come, in which we shall inherit substance.

2. That they are insufficient to make us happy. And for this he appeals to men's consciences; *What profit has a man of all the pains he takes?* v. 3. Observe here,

(1.) The business of this world described; It is *labour*, the word signifies both care and toil; it is work that wearies men; there is a constant fatigue in worldly business; it is *labour under the sun*, that is a phrase peculiar to this book, where we meet with it twenty-eight times. There is a world above the sun, a world which needs not the sun, for the glory of God is its light, where there is work without labour, and with great profit, the work of angels; but he speaks of the work *under the sun*, the pains of which are great, and the gains little. It is *under the sun*, under the influence of the sun, by its light and in its heat; as we have the benefit of the light of the day, so we have sometimes the burthen and heat of the day; (Matth. 20. 12.) and therefore *in the sweat of our face we eat bread*; in the dark and cold grave the weary are at rest.

(2.) The benefit of that business inquired into; *What profit has a man of all that labour?* Solomon says, (Prov. 14. 23.) *In all labour there is profit*; and yet here he denies that there is any profit. As to our present condition in the world, it is true that by labour we get that which we call *profit*; we *eat the labour of our hands*; but as the wealth of the world is commonly called *substance*, and yet it is *that which is not*, (Prov. 23. 5.) so it is called *profit*, but the question is, Whether it be really so or no? And here he determines that it is not; that it is not a real benefit, that it is not a remaining benefit. In short, the wealth and pleasure of this world, if we had ever so much of them, are not sufficient to make us happy, nor will they be a portion for us. [1.] As to the body, and the life that now is, *What profit has a man of all his labour?* *A man's life consists not in an abundance*, Luke, 12. 15. As goods are increased, care about them is

increased, and *they are increased that eat of them*, and a little thing will imbitter all the comfort of them; and then, *what profit has a man of all his labour?* *Early up, and never the nearer*. [2.] As to the soul, and the life that is to come, we may much more truly say, *What profit has a man of all his labour?* All he gets by it will not supply the wants of the soul, nor satisfy its desires, will not atone for the sin of the soul, nor cure its diseases, nor countervail the loss of it; what profit will they be of to the soul in death, in judgment, or in the everlasting state? The fruit of our labour in heavenly things is *meat that endures to eternal life*, but the fruit of our labour for the world is *only meat that perishes*.

4. *One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh*: but the earth abideth for ever.

5. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. 6. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. 7. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. 8. All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

To prove the vanity of all things under the sun, and their insufficiency to make us happy, Solomon here shews,

1. That the time of our enjoyment of these things is very short, and only while we *accomplish as a hireling his day*. We continue in the world for but one generation, which is continually passing away, to make room for another, and we are passing with it. Our worldly possessions we very lately had from others, and must very shortly leave to others, and therefore to us they are vanity; they can be no more substantial than that life which is the *substratum* of them, and that is but a *vapour, which appears for a little while, and then vanishes away*. While the stream of mankind is continually flowing, how little enjoyment has one drop of that stream of the pleasant banks between which it glides! We may give God the glory of that constant succession of generations, in which the world has hitherto had its existence, and will have to the end of time; admiring his patience in continuing that *sinful* species, and his power in continuing that *dying* species. We may be also quickened to do the work of our generation diligently, and serve it faithfully, because it will be over shortly; and, in concern for mankind in general, we should consult the welfare of succeeding generations; but as to our own happiness, let us not expect it within such narrow limits, but in an eternal rest and consistency.

2. That when we leave this world, we leave the earth behind us; that *abides for ever* where it is, and therefore the things of the earth can stand us in no stead in the future state. It is well for mankind in general, that the earth endures to the end of time, when it and all the works in it shall be burnt up; but what is that to particular persons, when they remove to the world of spirits?

3. That the condition of man is, in this respect, worse than that even of the inferior creatures; *The earth abides for ever*, but man abides upon the earth but a little while. The sun sets indeed every night, yet it rises again in the morning, as bright and fresh as ever; the winds, though they shift their point, yet in some point or other still they are; the waters that go to the sea above ground, come from it again under ground; *but man lies down and rises not*, Job, 14. 7. 12.

4. That all things in this world are moveable and mutable, and subject to a continual toil and toss, constant in nothing but inconstancy, still going, never resting; it was but once that the sun stood still; when it is risen, it is hastening to set, and when it is set, hastening to rise again; (v. 5.) the winds are ever and anon shifting, (v. 6.) and the waters in a continual circulation;

v. 7.) it would be of as bad consequence for them to stagnate, as for the blood in the body to do so. And can we expect rest in a world where all things are thus full of labour, (v. 8.) on a sea that is always ebbing and flowing, and her waves continually working and rolling?

5. That though all things are still in motion, yet they are still where they were; The sun *parts*, as it is in the margin, but it is to the same place; the wind turns till it comes to the same place, and so the waters return to the same place whence they came. Thus man, after all the pains he takes to find satisfaction and happiness in the creature, is but where he was, still as far to seek as ever. Man's mind is as restless in its pursuits as the sun, and wind, and rivers, but never satisfied, never contented; the more it has of the world, the more it would have; and it would be no sooner filled with the streams of outward prosperity, the brooks of *honey and butter*, (Job, 20. 17.) than the sea is with *all the rivers that run into it*; it is still as it was, *a troubled sea that cannot rest*.

6. That *all things continue as they were, from the beginning of the creation*; (2 Pet. 3. 4.) the earth is where it was, the sun, and winds, and rivers, keep the same course that ever they did, and therefore if they have never yet been sufficient to make a happiness for man, they are never likely to be so, for they can but yield the same comfort that they have yielded: we must therefore look above the sun for satisfaction, and for a new world.

7. That this world is, at the best, a weary land; *All is vanity*, for all is *full of labour*; the whole creation is made subject to this vanity, ever since man was sentenced to *eat bread in the sweat of his brows*. If we survey the whole creation, we shall see all busy; all have enough to do, to mind their own business, none will be a portion or happiness for man; all labour to serve him, but none prove a *help-meet* for him. Man cannot express how full of labour all things are, can neither number the laborious, nor measure the labours.

8. That our senses are unsatisfied, and the objects of them unsatisfying. He specifies those senses that perform their office with least toil, and are most capable of being pleased; *The eye is not satisfied with seeing*, but is weary of seeing always the same sight, and covets novelty and variety. *The ear is fond*, at first, of a pleasant song or tune, but soon nauseates it, and must have another; both are surfeited, but neither satiated, and what was most grateful becomes ungrateful. Curiosity is still inquisitive, because still unsatisfied, and the more it is humoured, the more nice and peevish it grows, crying, *Give, give*.

9. The thing that hath been, it *is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is that* which shall be done: and *there is no new thing* under the sun. 10. Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is new*? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. 11. *There is no remembrance of former things*; neither shall there be *any* remembrance of *things* that are to come with *those* that shall come after.

Two things we are apt to take a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction in, and value ourselves upon, with reference to our business and enjoyments in the world, as if they helped to save them from vanity; Solomon here shews us our mistake in both.

1. The novelty of the invention, that it is such as was never known before. How grateful is it to think that none ever made such advances in knowledge, and such discoveries by it, as we! that none ever made such improvements of an estate or trade, and had the art of enjoying the gains of it, as we have! Their contrivances and compositions are all despised and run down, and we boast of new fashions, new hypotheses, new methods, new expressions, which juggle out the old, and put them down; but this is all a mistake; *The thing that is, and shall be, is the same with that which has been; and that which shall be done, will be but the same with that which is done, for there is no new thing*

under the sun, v. 9. It is repeated, (v. 10.) by way of question, *Is there any thing of which it may be said*, with wonder, *See this is new*; there never was the like? It is an appeal to observing men, and a challenge to those that cry up modern learning above that of the ancients. Let them name any thing which they take to be new, and though perhaps we cannot make it to appear, for want of the records of former times, yet we have reason to conclude that *it has been already of old time, which was before us*. What is there in the kingdom of nature, of which we may say, *This is new*? *The works were finished from the foundation of the world*; (Heb. 4. 3.) things which appear new to us, as they do to children, are not so in themselves. The heavens were *of old*; the earth abides for ever; the powers of nature and the links of natural causes are still the same that ever they were. In the kingdom of Providence, though the course and method of it have not such known and certain rules as that of nature, nor does it go always in the same track, yet, in the general, it is still the same thing over and over again; men's hearts, and the corruptions of them, are still the same; their desires, and pursuits, and complaints, still the same; and what God does in his dealings with men, is according to the scripture, according to the manner, so that it is all repetition. What is surprising to us needs not be so, for there has been the like; the like strange advancements and disappointments; the like strange revolutions and sudden turns, sudden turns of affairs; the miseries of human life have always been much the same, and mankind tread a perpetual round, and, as the sun and wind, are but where they were.

Now the design of this is,

(1.) To shew the folly of the children of men, in affecting things that are new, in imagining that they have discovered such things, and in pleasing and priding themselves in them. We are apt to nauseate old things, and to grow weary of what we have been long used to, as Israel of the manna, and covet, with the Athenians, still to tell and hear of some new thing, and admire this and the other as new, whereas it is all what has been. Tatianus the Assyrian, shewing the Grecians how all the arts, which they valued themselves upon, owed their original to those nations which they counted barbarous, thus reasons with them; "For shame, do not call those things *Εὐρήσεις*—*Inventions*, which are but *Μιμήσεις*—*Imitations*."

(2.) To take us off from expecting happiness and satisfaction in the creature. Why should we look for it there, where never any yet have found it? What reason have we to think that the world should be any kinder to us than it has been to those that have gone before us; since there is nothing in it that is *new*, and our predecessors have made as much of it as could be made? *Your fathers did eat manna, and yet they are dead*. See John, 3. 8. 9.—6. 49.

(3.) To quicken us to secure spiritual and eternal blessings. If we would be entertained with new things, we must acquaint ourselves with the things of God, get a new nature; then *old things pass away, and all things become new*, 2 Cor. 5. 17. The gospel puts a *new song into our mouths*. In heaven *all is new*, (Rev. 21. 5.) all new at first, wholly unlike the present state of things, a new world indeed, (Luke, 20. 35.) and all new to eternity, always fresh, always flourishing. This consideration should make us willing to die, That in this world there is nothing but the same over and over again, and we can expect nothing from it more or better than we have had.

2. The memorableness of the achievement, that it is such as will be known and talked of hereafter. Many think they have found satisfaction enough in this, that their names shall be perpetuated, that posterity will celebrate the actions they have performed, the honours they have won, and the estates they have raised; that *their houses shall continue for ever*; (Ps. 49. 11.) but herein they deceive themselves. How many *former things* and persons were there, which in their day looked very great, and made a mighty figure, and yet *there is no remembrance* of them, they are buried in oblivion! Here and there one person or action that was remarkable, met with a kind historian, and had the good hap to be recorded, when, at the same time, there were others, no less remarkable, that were dropt: and therefore we may

conclude, that *neither shall there be any remembrance of things to come*, but that that which we hope to be remembered by will be either lost or slighted.

12. I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. 14. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. 15. *That which is crooked cannot be made straight*: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. 16. I communed with mine own heart saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. 17. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. 18. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

Solomon, having asserted, in general, that *all is vanity*, and having given some general proofs of it, now takes the most effectual method to evince the truth of it, 1. By his own experience; he tried them all, and found them vanity. 2. By an induction of particulars; and here he begins with that which bids fairest of all other to be the happiness of a reasonable creature, and that is knowledge and learning; if this be vanity, every thing else must needs be so. Now as to this,

1. Solomon tells us here what trial he had made of it, and that with such advantages, that if true satisfaction could have been found in it, he had found it.

1. His high station gave him an opportunity of improving himself in all parts of learning, and particularly in politics and the conduct of human affairs, v. 12. He that is *the preacher* of this doctrine *was king over Israel*, whom all their neighbours admired as a *wise and understanding people*, Deut. 4. 6. He had his royal seat in *Jerusalem*, which then deserved, better than Athens ever did, to be called *the eye of the world*. The heart of a king is unsearchable, he has reaches of his own, and a *divine sentence is often in his lips*. It is his honour, it is his business, to search out every matter. Solomon's great wealth and honour put him into a rapacity of making his court the centre of learning, and the rendezvous of learned men, of furnishing himself with the best of books, and either conversing or corresponding with all the wise and knowing part of mankind then in being, who made application to him to learn of him, by which he could not but improve himself; for it is in knowledge as it is in trade, all the profit is by barter and exchange; if we have that to say which will instruct others, they will have that to say, which will instruct us. Some observe how slightly Solomon speaks of his dignity and honour. He does not say, *I the preacher am king*, but *I was king*, no matter what I am. He speaks of it as a thing past, because worldly honours are transitory.

2. He applied himself to the improvement of these advantages, and the opportunities he had of getting wisdom, which, though ever so great, will not make a man wise, unless he give his mind to it. Solomon *gave his heart to seek and search out* all things to be known *by wisdom*, v. 13. He made it his business to acquaint himself with *all the things that are done under the sun*, that are done by the providence of God, or by the art and prudence of man. He set himself to get all the insight he could, into philosophy and mathematics, into husbandry and trade, merchandise and mechanics, into the history of former ages, and the present

state of other kingdoms, their laws, customs, and policies, into men's different tempers, capacities, and projects, and the methods of managing them; he set himself not only to seek, but to search, to pry into, that which is most intricate, and which requires the closest application of mind, and the most vigorous and constant prosecution. Though he was a prince, he made himself a drudge to learning, was not discouraged by its knots, nor took up short of its depths. And this he did, not merely to gratify his own genius, but to qualify himself for the service of God and his generation, and to make an experiment how far the enlargement of the knowledge would go toward the settlement and repose of the mind.

3. He made a very great progress in his studies, wonderfully improved all the parts of learning, and carried his discoveries much further than any that had been before him. He did not condemn learning, as many do, because they cannot conquer it, and will not be at the pains to make themselves masters of it; no, what he aimed at he compassed; he *saw all the works that were done under the sun*, (v. 14.) works of nature in the upper and lower world, all within this vortex, (to use the modern gibberish,) which has the sun for its centre; works of art, the product of men's wit, in a personal or social capacity. He had as much satisfaction in the success of his searches as ever any man had; he *communed with his own heart* concerning his attainments in knowledge, with as much pleasure as ever any rich merchant had in taking account of his stock. He could say, "*Lo, I have magnified and increased wisdom*, have not only gotten more of it myself, but have done more to propagate it and bring it into reputation, than any, *than all, that have been before me in Jerusalem*." Note, It becomes great men to be studious, and delight themselves most in intellectual pleasures. Where God gives great advantages of getting knowledge, he expects improvements accordingly. It is happy with a people, when their princes and noblemen study to excel others as much in wisdom and useful knowledge, as they do in honour and estate; and they may do that service to the commonwealth of learning, by applying themselves to the studies that are proper for them, which meaner persons cannot do. Solomon must be acknowledged a competent judge of this matter, for he had not only got his head full of notions, but his *heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge*, of the power and benefit of it, as well as the amusement and entertainment of it; what he knew he had digested, and knew how to make use of. *Wisdom entered into his heart*, and so became *pleasant to his soul*, Prov. 2. 10, 11.—22. 18.

4. He applied his studies especially to that part of learning, which is most serviceable to the conduct of human life, and, consequently, is the most valuable; (v. 17.) "*I gave my heart to know the rules and dictates of wisdom*, and how I might obtain it; and *to know madness and folly*, how I might prevent and cure it; to know the snares and insinuations of it, that I might avoid them, and guard against them, and discover its fallacies." So industrious was Solomon to improve himself in knowledge, that he gained instruction both by the wisdom of prudent men, and by the madness of foolish men; by *the field of the slothful*, as well as of *the diligent*.

11. He tells us what was the result of this trial, to confirm what he had said, that *all is vanity*.

1. He found that his searches after knowledge were very toilsome, and a weariness not only to the flesh, but to the mind; (v. 13.) *This sore travail*, this difficulty that there is in searching after truth, and finding it, *God has given to the sons of men, to be afflicted therewith*, as a punishment for our first parents coveting forbidden knowledge. As bread for the body, so that for the soul, must be got and eaten *in the sweat of our face*, whereas both had been had without labour, if Adam had not sinned.

2. He found that the more he saw of *the works done under the sun*, the more he saw of their vanity; nay, and the sight often occasioned him *vexation of spirit*; (v. 14.) "*I have seen all the works of a world full of business*, have observed what the children of men are doing; and, *behold*, whatever men think of their own works, I see, *all is vanity and vexation of spirit*." He had be-

CHAP. II.

fore pronounced all *vanity*, (v.2.) needless and unprofitable, and that which does us no good; here he adds, It is all *vezation of spirit*, troublesome and prejudicial, and that which does us hurt. It is *feeding upon wind*; so some read it, Hos. 12. 1. (1.) The works themselves which we see done, are *vanity and vezation* to those that are employed in them. There is so much care in the contrivance of our worldly business, so much toil in the prosecution of it, and so much trouble in the disappointments we meet with in it, that we may well say, It is *vezation of spirit*. (2.) The sight of them is *vanity and vezation of spirit* to the wise observer of them. The more we see of the world, the more we see to make us uneasy, and, with Heraclitus, to look upon all with weeping eyes. Solomon especially *perceived* that the knowledge of wisdom and folly was *vezation of spirit*, v. 17. It vexed him to see many that had wisdom not use it, and many that had folly not strive against it. When he knew wisdom, it vexed him to see how far off it stood from the children of men; and when he saw folly, how fast he saw it bound in their hearts.

3. He found that when he had got some knowledge, he could neither gain that satisfaction to himself, nor do that good to others, with it, which he expected, v. 15. It would not avail,

(1.) To redress the many grievances of human life; "After all, I find that *that which is crooked* will be crooked still, and *cannot be made straight*." Our knowledge is itself intricate and perplexed, we must go far about, and fetch a great compass, to come at it. Solomon thought to have found out a nearer way to it, but he could not; the paths of learning are as much a labyrinth as ever they were. The minds and manners of men are crooked and perverse. Solomon thought, with his wisdom and power together, to have thoroughly reformed his kingdom, and made that straight which he found crooked; but he was disappointed. All the philosophy and politics in the world will not restore the corrupt nature of man to its primitive rectitude; we find the insufficiency of them, both in others and in ourselves. Learning will not alter men's natural tempers, nor cure them of their sinful distempers; nor will it change the constitution of things in this world; a vale of tears it is, and so it will be, when all is done.

(2.) To make up the many deficiencies in the comfort of human life: *That which is wanting* there *cannot be numbered*, or counted out to us, from the treasures of human learning, but what is *wanting* will still be so; all our enjoyments here, when we have done our utmost to bring them to perfection, are still lame and defective, and it cannot be helped; as they are, so they are like to be. *That which is wanting* in our knowledge, is so much, that it *cannot be numbered*. The more we know, the more we see of our own ignorance. *Who can understand his errors*, his defects?

4. Upon the whole, therefore, he concluded that great scholars do but make themselves great mourners; *for in much wisdom is much grief*, v. 18. There must be a great deal of pains taken to get it, and a great deal of care not to forget it; the more we know, the more, we see, there is to be known, and, consequently, we perceive with greater clearness that our work is without end, and the more we see of our former mistakes and blunders, which occasions *much grief*. The more we see of men's different sentiments and opinions, (and that is it which a great deal of our learning is conversant about,) the more at a loss we are, it may be, which is in the right. Those *that increase knowledge* have so much the more quick and sensible perception of the calamities of this world, and for one discovery they make that is pleasing, perhaps they make ten that are displeasing, and so they *increase sorrow*. Let us not therefore be driven off from the pursuit of any useful knowledge, but put on patience to break through the sorrow of it; but let us despair of finding true happiness in this knowledge, and expect it only in the knowledge of God, and the careful discharge of our duty to him. *He that increases in heavenly wisdom*, and in an experimental acquaintance with the principles, powers, and pleasures, of the spiritual and divine life, *increases joy*, such as will shortly be consummated in everlasting joy.

Solomon having pronounced all *vanity*, and particularly knowledge and learning, which he was so far from giving himself joy of, that he found the increase of it did but increase his sorrow, in this chapter, he goes on to shew what reason he had to be tired of this world and with what little reason most men are fond of it. I. He shews that there is no true happiness and satisfaction to be had in mirth and pleasure, and the delights of sense, v. 1. 11. II. He re-considers the pretensions of wisdom, and allows it to be excellent and useful, and yet sees it clogged with such diminutions of its worth, that it proves insufficient to make a man happy, v. 12. 16. III. He inquires how far the business and wealth of this world will go toward making men happy, and concludes, from his own experience, that, to those who set their hearts upon it, it is vanity and vexation of spirit, (v. 17. 23.) and that if there be any good in it, it is only to those that sit loose to it, v. 21. 26.

1. I SAID in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. 2. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? 3. I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. 4. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: 5. I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all *kind of* fruits: 6. I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: 7. I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: 8. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, *as* musical instruments, and that of all sorts. 9. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. 10. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. 11. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun.

Solomon here, in pursuit of the *summum bonum*—the felicity of man, adjourns out of his study, his library, his elaboratory, his council-chamber, where he had in vain sought for it, into the park and the play-house, his garden and his summer-house; exchanges the company of the philosophers and grave senators for that of the wits and gallants, and the beaux-esprits, of his court, to try if he could find true satisfaction and happiness among them. Here he takes a great step downward, from the noble pleasures of the intellect to the brutal ones of sense; yet, if he resolve to make a thorough trial, he must knock at this door, because here a great part of mankind imagine they have found that which he was in quest of.

I. He resolved to try what mirth would do, and the pleasures of wit, whether he should be happy if he constantly entertained himself and others with merry stories and jests, banter and drollery; if he should furnish himself with all the pretty ingenious turns and repartees he could invent or pick up, fit to be laughed over, and all the bulls, and blunders, and foolish things, he could hear of, fit to be ridiculed and laughed at, so that he might be always in a merry humour

7. This experiment made; (c. 1.) "Finding that in much wisdom is much grief, and that those who are serious are apt to be melancholy, *I said in my heart,*" (to my heart,) "*Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth,* I will try if that will give thee satisfaction." Neither the temper of his mind, nor his outward condition, had any thing in them to keep him from being merry, but both agreed, as did all other advantages, to further it, *therefore* he resolved to take a lease this way, and said, "*Enjoy pleasure, and take thy fill of it; cast away care, and resolve to be merry.*" So a man may be, and yet have none of these fine things which he here got to entertain himself with; many that are poor are very merry; beggars in a barn are so to a proverb. Mirth is the entertainment of the fancy, and though it comes short of the solid delights of the rational powers, yet it is to be preferred before those that are merely carnal and sensual. Some distinguish man from the brutes, not only as *animal rationale*—a rational animal, but as *animal risibile*—a risible animal; therefore he that said to his soul, *Take thine ease, eat and drink*, added, *And be merry*, for it was in order to that that he would eat and drink. "Try therefore," says Solomon, "to laugh and be happy."

2. The judgment he passed upon this experiment; *Behold, this also is vanity*, like all the rest, it yields no true satisfaction, v. 2. *I said of laughter, It is mad*, or, *Thou art mad*, and therefore I will have nothing to do with thee; *and of mirth*, (of all sports and recreations, and whatever pretends to be diverting,) *What doeth it?* or, *What doest thou?* Innocent mirth, soberly, seasonably, and moderately, used, is a good thing, fits for business, and helps to soften the toils and chagrins of human life; but, when it is excessive and immoderate, it is foolish and fruitless. (1.) It does no good; *What doeth it?* *Cui bono*—Of what use is it? It will not avail to quiet a guilty conscience; no, nor to ease a sorrowful spirit; nothing is more ungrateful than *singing songs to a heavy heart*. It will not satisfy the soul, nor ever yield it true content. It is but a palliative cure to the grievances of this present time. Great laughter commonly ends in a sigh. (2.) It does a great deal of hurt; *it is mad, it makes men mad*, it transports men into many indecencies, which are a reproach to their reason and religion. They are mad that indulge themselves in it, for it estranges the heart from God and divine things, and insensibly eats out the power of religion. Those that love to be merry forget to be serious, and while they take the timbrel and harp, they say to the Almighty, *Depart from us*, Job, 21. 12, 14. We may, as Solomon, *prove ourselves with mirth*, and judge of the state of our souls by this; How do we stand affected to it? Can we be merry and wise? Can we use it as sauce, and not as food? But we need not try, as Solomon did, whether it will make a happiness for us, for, we may take his word for it, *It is mad*; and *What doeth it?* Laughter and pleasure (says Sir William Temple) come from very different affections of the mind; for as men have no disposition to laugh at things they are most pleased with, so they are very little pleased with many things they laugh at.

II. Finding himself not happy in that which pleased his fancy, he resolved next to try that which would please the palate, v. 3. Since the knowledge of the creature would not satisfy, he would see what the liberal use of it would do; *I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine*, to good meat and good drink; many give themselves to these without consulting their hearts at all, not looking any further than merely the gratification of the sensual appetite; but Solomon applied himself to it rationally, and as a man; critically, and only to make an experiment. Observe,

1. He did not allow himself any liberty in the use of the delights of sense till he had tired himself with his severe studies; till his increase of wisdom proved an increase of sorrow, he never thought of giving himself to wine. When we have spent ourselves in doing good, we may then most comfortably refresh ourselves with the gifts of God's bounty. Then the delights of sense are rightly used, when they are used as we use cordials, only when we need them; as Timothy drank wine for his health's sake, 1 Tim. 5. 23. *I thought to draw my flesh with wine*; so the margin reads it, or to wine. Those that have addicted themselves to drinking did at first put a force upon themselves, they drew their flesh to it, and

with it; but they should remember to what miseries they hereby draw themselves.

2. He then looked upon it as folly, and it was with reluctance that he gave himself to it; as St. Paul, when he commended himself, called it a *weakness*, and desired to be borne with in his *foolishness*, 2 Cor. 11. 1. He sought to lay hold on folly, to see the utmost that that folly would do toward making men happy; but he had like to have carried the jest (as we say) too far. He resolved that the folly should not take hold of him, not get the mastery of him, but he would lay hold on it, and keep it at a distance; yet he found it too hard for him.

3. He took care at the same time to acquaint himself with wisdom, to manage himself wisely in the use of his pleasures, so that they should not do him any prejudice, nor disfit him to be a competent judge of them. When he drew his flesh with wine, he led his heart with wisdom, so the word is; kept up his pursuits after knowledge, did not make a sot of himself, nor become a slave to his pleasures, but his studies and his feasts were foils to each other, and he tried whether both mixed together would give him that satisfaction which he could not find in either separately. This Solomon proposed to himself, but he found it vanity; for they that think to give themselves to wine, and yet to acquaint their hearts with wisdom, will perhaps deceive themselves as much as they do that think to serve both God and mammon. *Wine is a mocker*, it is a great cheat, and it will be impossible for any man to say that thus far he will give himself to it, and no further.

4. That which he aimed at, was, not to gratify his appetite, but to find out man's happiness, and this, because it pretended to be so, must be tried among the rest. Observe the description he gives of man's happiness; it is *that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all their days*. (1.) That which we are to inquire after is not so much the good we must have, we may leave that to God, but the good we must do, that ought to be our care. *Good Master, what good things shall I do?* Our happiness consists not in being idle, but in doing aright, in being well employed. If we do that which is good, no doubt we shall have comfort and praise of the same. (2.) It is good to be done under the heaven, while we are here in this world, while it is day, while our doing time lasts; this is our state of work and service, it is in the other world that we must expect the retribution, thither our works will follow us. (3.) It is to be done all the days of our life; the good we are to do we must persevere in the doing of to the end, while our doing time lasts; the number of the days of our life, so it is in the margin; the days of our life are numbered to us by him in whose hand our times are, and they are all to be spent as he directs. But that any man should give himself to wine, in hopes to find out in that the best way of living in this world, was an absurdity which Solomon here, in the reflection, condemns himself for. Is it possible that this should be the good that men should do? No; it is plainly very bad.

III. Perceiving quickly that it was folly to give himself to wine, he next tried the most costly entertainments and amusements of princes and great men. He had a vast income, the revenue of his crown was very great, and he laid it out so as might most please his own humour, and make him look great.

1. He gave himself much to building, both in the city and in the country; and, having been at such vast expense, in the beginning of his reign, to build a house for God, he was the more excusable if afterward he pleased his own fancy in building for himself; he began his work at the right end, (Matth. 6. 33.) not as the people (Hag. 1. 4.) that *ceiled their own houses* while God's lay waste, and it prospered accordingly. In building, he had the pleasure of employing the poor, and doing good to posterity. We read of Solomon's buildings, (1 Kings, 9. 15. . 19.) and they were all great works, such as became his purse, and spirit, and great dignity. See his mistake; he inquired after the good works he should do, (c. 3.) and, in pursuit of the inquiry, applied himself to great works. Good works indeed are truly great, but many are reputed great works, which are far from being good; wondrous works, which are not gracious, Matth. 7. 22.

2. He took to love a garden, which is to some as bewitching a

building; he *planted him vineyards*, which the soil and climate of the land of Canaan favoured; he *made him fine gardens and orchards*, (v. 5.) and perhaps the art of gardening was no way inferior then to what it is now; he had not only forests of timber-trees, but *trees of all kind of fruit*, which he himself had planted; and, if any worldly business would yield a man happiness, surely it must be that which Adam was employed in while he was in innocence.

3. He laid out a great deal of money in water-works, ponds, and canals; not for sport and diversion, but for use, *to water the wood that brings forth trees*; (v. 6.) he not only planted, but watered, and then left it to God to give the increase. *Springs of water are great blessings*; (Josh. 15. 19.) but where nature has provided them, art must direct them, to make them serviceable, Prov. 21. 1.

4. He increased his family. When he proposed to himself to do great works, he must employ many hands, and therefore procured *servants and maidens*, which were bought with his money, and of those he *had servants born in his house*, v. 7. Thus his retinue was enlarged, and his court appeared more magnificent. See Ezra, 2. 58.

5. He did not neglect country-business, but both entertained and enriched himself with that, and was not diverted from it, either by his studies or by his pleasures. He *had large possessions of great and small cattle*, herds and flocks, as his father had before him; (1 Chron. 27. 29, 31.) not forgetting that his father, in the beginning, was a keeper of sheep. Let those that deal in cattle neither despise their employment, nor be weary of it, remembering that Solomon puts his having *possessions of cattle* among his *great works* and his pleasures.

6. He grew very rich, and was not at all impoverished by his building and gardening, as many are, who, for that reason only, repent it, and call it *vanity and vexation*. Solomon scattered, and yet increased. He filled his exchequer with *silver and gold*, which yet did not stagnate there, but were made to circulate through his kingdom, so that he made *silver to be in Jerusalem as stones*; (1 Kings, 10. 27.) nay, he had the *Segullah*, the peculiar treasure of *hugs, and of the provinces*, which was, for richness and rarity, more accounted of than *silver and gold*. The neighbouring kings, and the distant provinces of his own empire, sent him the richest presents they had, to obtain his favour, and the instructions of his wisdom.

7. He had every thing that was charming and diverting; all sorts of melody and music, vocal and instrumental, *men-singers and women-singers*, the best voices he could pick up, and all the wind and hand-instruments that were then in use. His father had a genius for music, but it should seem he employed it more to serve his devotion than the son, who made it more his diversion. These are called *the delights of the sons of men*; for the gratifications of sense are the things that the generality of people set their affections upon, and take the greatest complacency in. The delights of the children of God are of quite another nature, pure, spiritual, and heavenly, and the delights of angels.

8. He enjoyed, more than ever any man did, a composition of rational and sensitive pleasures at the same time. He was, in this respect, *great, and increased more than all that were before him*, that he was wise amidst a thousand earthly enjoyments. It was strange, and the like was never met with,

(1.) That his pleasures did not debauch his judgment and conscience. In the midst of all these entertainments, *his wisdom remained with him*, v. 9. In the midst of all these childish delights, he preserved his spirit manly, kept the possession of his own soul, and maintained the dominion of reason over the appetites of sense; such a vast stock of wisdom had he, that it was not wasted and impaired, as any other man's would have been, by this course of life! But let none be emboldened hereby to lay the reins on the neck of their appetites, presuming that they may do that, and yet retain their wisdom, for they have not such a strength of wisdom as Solomon had; nay, and Solomon was deceived; for how did *his wisdom remain with him*, when he lost his religion so far as to build altars to strange gods, for the humouring of his strange wives?

But thus far *his wisdom remained with him*, that he was master of his pleasures, and not a slave to them, and kept himself capable of making a judgment of them. He went over into the enemies' country, not as a deserter, but as a *spy, to discover the nakedness of their land*.

(2.) Yet his judgment and conscience gave no check to his pleasures, nor hindered him from extracting the very quintessence of the delights of sense, v. 10. It might be objected against his judgment in this matter, that, if *his wisdom remained with him*, he could not take the liberty that was necessary to a full experimental acquaintance with it; "Yea," said he, "I took as great a liberty as any man could take, for *whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them*, if it could be compassed by lawful means, though ever so difficult or costly; and as *I withheld not any joy from my heart*, that I had a mind to, so *I withheld not my heart from any joy*, but, with a *non-obstante*—with the full exercise of my wisdom, I had a high gust of my pleasures, relished and enjoyed them as much as ever any Epicure did;" nor was there any thing, either in the circumstances of his condition, or in the temper of his spirit, to sour or imbitter them, or give them any alloy. In short, [1.] He had as much pleasure in his business as ever any man had; *My heart rejoiced in all my labour*; so that the toil and fatigue of that were no damp to his pleasures. [2.] He had no less profit by his business, he met with no disappointment in it to give him any disturbance; *This was my portion of all my labour*; he had this added to all the rest of his pleasures, that in them he did not only see, but eat, the labour of his hands; and this was all he had, for indeed it was all he could expect, from his labour. It sweetened his business, that he enjoyed the success of it, and it sweetened his enjoyments, that they were the product of his business; so that, upon the whole, he was certainly as happy as the world could make him.

Lastly, We have, at length, the judgment he deliberately gave of all this, v. 11. When the Creator had made his great works, he reviewed them, and *behold, all was very good*, every thing pleased him; but when Solomon reviewed *all the works that his hands had wrought*, with the utmost cost and care, and *the labour that he had laboured to do*, in order to make himself easy and happy, nothing answered his expectation; *behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit*, he had no satisfaction in it, no advantage by it; *there was no profit under the sun*, neither by the employments, nor by the enjoyments, of this world.

12. And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what *can* the man *do* that cometh after the king? *even* that which hath been already done. 13. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. 14. The wise man's eyes *are* in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. 15. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also *is* vanity. 16. For *there is* no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now *is*, in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise *man*? as the fool.

Solomon having tried what satisfaction was to be had in learning first, and then in the pleasures of sense, and having also put both together, he here compares them one with another, and passes a judgment upon them.

1. He sets himself to consider both wisdom and folly. He had considered these before; (ch. 1. 17.) but, lest it should be thought he was then too quick in passing a judgment upon them, he here turns himself again to behold them, to see if, upon a second view, and second thoughts, he could gain more satisfaction in the search

than he had done upon the first. He was sick of his pleasures, and, as nauseating them, he turned from them, that he might again apply himself to speculation; and if, upon this rehearing of the cause, the verdict be still the same, the judgment will surely be decisive; *for what can the man do that comes after the king; especially such a king, who had so much of this world to make the experiment upon, and so much wisdom to make it with.* The baffled trial needs not be repeated; no man can expect to find more satisfaction in the world than Solomon did, nor to gain a greater insight into the principles of morality; when a man has done what he can, still it is *that which has been already done.* Let us learn, (1.) Not to indulge ourselves in a fond conceit that we can mend that which has been well done before us; let us esteem *others better than ourselves*, and think how unfit we are to attempt the improvement of the performances of better heads and hands than our's, and rather own how much we are beholden to them, John, 4. 37, 38. (2.) To acquiesce in Solomon's judgment of the things of this world, and not to think of repeating the trial; for we can never think of having such advantages as he had to make the experiment, nor of being able to make it with equal application of mind, and so little danger to ourselves.

2. He gives the preference to wisdom far before folly; let none mistake him, as if, when he speaks of the vanity of human literature, he designed only to amuse men with a paradox, or were about to write (as a great wit once did) *Eucomium moriæ—A panegyric in praise of folly*; no, he is maintaining sacred truths, and therefore is careful to guard against being misunderstood. I soon saw (says he) *that there is an excellency in wisdom more than in folly*, as much as there is in light above darkness. The pleasures of wisdom, though they suffice not to make men happy, yet they vastly transcend the pleasures of wine. Wisdom enlightens the soul with surprising discoveries, and necessary directions for the right government of itself; but sensuality (for that seems to be especially the folly here meant) clouds and eclipses the mind, and is as darkness to it, it puts out men's eyes, makes them to stumble in the way, and wander out of it. Or, though wisdom and knowledge will not make a man happy, (St. Paul shews a *more excellent way* than gifts, and that is grace,) yet it is much better to have them than to be without them, in respect of our present safety, comfort, and usefulness; for *the wise man's eyes are in his head*, (v. 14.) where they should be, ready to discover both the dangers that are to be avoided, and the advantages that are to be improved; a wise man has not his reason to seek when he should use it, but looks about him, and is quick-sighted, knows both where to step and where to stop; whereas *the fool walks in darkness*, and is ever and anon either at a loss, or at a plunge, either bewildered, that he knows not which way to go, or embarrassed, that he cannot go forward. A man that is discreet and considerate has the command of his business, and acts decently and safely, as those that walk in the day; but he that is rash, and ignorant, and sottish, is continually making blunders, running upon one precipice or other, his projects, his bargains, are all foolish, and ruin his affairs. Therefore *get wisdom, get understanding.*

3. Yet he maintains that, in respect of lasting happiness and satisfaction, the wisdom of this world gives a man very little advantage: for,

(1.) Wise men and fools fare alike. "It is true, the wise man has very much the advantage of the fool, in respect of foresight and insight, and yet the greatest probabilities do so often come short of success, that *I myself perceived*, by my own experience, *that one event happens to them all*; (v. 14.) those that are most cautious of their health are as soon sick as those that are most careless of it, and the most suspicious are imposed upon." David had observed that *wise men die*, and are involved in the same common calamity with the fool and the brutish person, Ps. 49. 12. See ch. 9. 11. Nay, it has of old been observed, that *Fortune favours fools*, and that half-witted men often thrive most, while the greatest projectors forecast worst for themselves. The same sickness, the same sword, devours wise men and fools.

Solomon applies this mortifying observation to himself, (v. 15.) *that, though he was a wise man, he might not glory in his wisdom;*

I said to my heart, when it began to be proud or secure, As it happens to the fool, so it happens to me, even to me; for thus emphatically it is expressed in the original; "So, as for me, it happens to me. Am I rich? So is many a Nabal that fares as sumptuously as I do. Is a foolish man sick, does he get a fall? So do I, even I; and neither my wealth nor my wisdom will be my security. And why was I then more wise? Why should I take so much pains to get wisdom, when, as to this life, it will stand me in so little stead? Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity." Some make this a correction of what was said before, like that, (Ps. 77. 10.) "*I said, This is my infirmity; it is my folly to think that wise men and fools are upon a level;*" but really they seem to be so, in respect of the event, and therefore it is rather a confirmation of what he had before said, That a man may be a profound philosopher and politician, and yet not be a happy man.

(2.) Wise men and fools are forgotten alike; (v. 16.) *There is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool.* It is promised to the righteous, that they shall be had in everlasting remembrance, and *their memory shall be blessed*, and they shall shortly shine as the stars; but there is no such promise made concerning the wisdom of this world, that that shall perpetuate men's names, for those names only are perpetuated that are *written in heaven*, and otherwise the names of this world's wise men are written with those of its fools in the dust. *That which now is, in the days to come, shall all be forgotten.* What was much talked of in one generation, is, in the next, as if it had never been. New persons and new things jostle out the very remembrance of the old, which in a little time are looked upon with contempt, and at length quite buried in oblivion. *Where is the wise? Where is the disputer of this world?* 1 Cor. 1. 20. And it is upon this account that he asks, *How dies the wise man? As the fool.* Between the death of a godly and wicked man there is a great difference, but not between the death of a wise man and a fool; the fool is buried and forgotten; (ch. 8. 10.) *and no one remembered the poor man that by his wisdom delivered the city;* (ch. 9. 15.) so that to both the grave is a *land of forgetfulness*; and wise and learned men, when they have been a while there out of sight, grow out of mind, a new generation arises, that *knew them not.*

17. Therefore I hated life: because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. 18. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. 19. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. 20. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. 21. For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22. For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? 23. For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. 24. *There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour.* This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. 25. For who can eat, or who else can hasten *hereunto*, more than I?

26. For *God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

Business is a thing that wise men have pleasure in; they are in their element when they are in their business, and complain if they be out of business; they may sometimes be tired with their business, but they are not weary of it, nor willing to leave it off: here therefore one would expect to have found the good that men should do, but Solomon tried this too; after a contemplative life, and a voluptuous life, he betook himself to an active life, and found no more satisfaction in it than in the other, still it is all *vanity and vexation of spirit*; of which he gives an account in these verses. Where observe,

I. What the business was which he made trial of; it was business *under the sun*, (v. 17. . 20.) about the things of this world, sublunary things, the riches, honours, and pleasures, of this present time; it was the business of a king. There is business *above the sun*, perpetual business, which is perpetual blessedness: what we do, in conformity to that business, (doing *God's will as it is done in heaven*, and in pursuance of that blessedness,) will turn to a good account, we shall have no reason to hate that labour, nor to despair of it; but it is *labour under the sun*, labour for the *meat that perishes*, (John, 6. 27. Isa. 55. 2.) that Solomon here speaks of with so little satisfaction. It was the better sort of business, not that of the *hewers of wood and drawers of water*, (it is not so strange if men hate all that labour,) but it was *in wisdom, and knowledge, and equity*, v. 21. It was rational business, which related to the government of his kingdom and the advancement of its interests. It was labour managed by the dictates of wisdom, of natural and acquired knowledge, and the directions of justice; it was labour at the council-board and in the courts of justice; it was labour wherein he *shewed himself wise*, (v. 19.) which as much exceeds the labour wherein men only shew themselves strong, as the endowments of the mind, by which we are allied to angels, do those of the body, which we have in common with the brutes. That which many people have in their eye more than any thing else, in the prosecution of their worldly business, is, to *shew themselves wise*, to get the reputation of ingenious men, and men of sense and application.

II. His falling out with this business; he soon grew weary of it. 1. He *hated all his labour*, because he did not meet with that satisfaction in it which he expected: after he had had his fine houses, and gardens, and water-works, a while, he began to nauseate them, and look upon them with contempt, as children, who are eager for a toy, and fond of it at first, but, when they have played with it a while, are weary of it, and throw it away, and must have another. This speaks not a gracious hatred of these things, which is our duty, to love them less than God and religion, (Luke, 14. 26.) nor a sinful hatred of them, which is our folly, to be weary of the place God has assigned us and the work of it, but a natural hatred of them, arising from a surfeit upon them, and a sense of disappointment in them. 2. He *caused his heart to despair of all his labour*; (v. 20.) he took pains to possess himself with a deep sense of the vanity of worldly business, that it would not bring in the advantage and satisfaction he had formerly flattered himself with the hopes of. Our hearts are very loath to quit their expectations of great things from the creature, we must go about, must fetch a compass, in arguing with them, to convince them that there is not that in the things of this world which we are apt to promise ourselves from them. Have we so often bored and sunk into this earth for some rich mine of satisfaction, and found not the least sign or token of it, but been always frustrated in the search, and shall we not at length set our hearts at rest, and despair of ever finding it? 3. He came to that, at length, that he *hated life itself*, (v. 17.) because it is subject to so many toils and troubles, and a constant series of disappointments. God had given Solomon such largeness of heart, and such vast capacities of mind,

that he experienced more than other men of the unsatisfying nature of all the things of this life, and their insufficiency to make him happy. Life itself, that is so precious to a man, and such a blessing to a good man, may become a burthen to a man of business.

III. The reasons of this quarrel with his life and labours. Two things made him weary of them.

1. That his business was so great a toil to himself; the work that he had wrought *under the sun* was grievous unto him, v. 17. His thoughts and cares about it, and that close and constant application of mind, which was requisite to it, were a burthen and fatigue to him, especially when he grew old. It is the effect of a curse on that we are to work upon. Our business is said to be *the work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord had cursed*, (Gen. 3. 29.) and of the weakening of the faculties we are to work with, and of the sentence pronounced on us, that *in the sweat of our face we must eat bread*. Our labour is called *the vexation of our heart*; (v. 22.) it is to most a force upon themselves, so natural is it to us to love our ease. A man of business is described to be uneasy both in his *going out* and his *coming in*, v. 23. (1.) He is deprived of his pleasure by day, for *all his days are sorrow*, not only sorrowful, but sorrow itself, nay, many sorrows and various; his travail, or labour, all day, is grief. Men of business ever and anon meet with that which vexes them, and is an occasion of anger or sorrow to them. They are apt to fret; the more dealings they have in the world, the oftener they are made to fret. The world is a *vale of tears*, even to those that have much of it. They that labour are said to be *heavy-laden*, and are therefore called to come to Christ for rest, Matth. 11. 28. (2.) He is disturbed in his repose *by night*. When he is overcome with the hurries of the day, and hopes to find relief when he lays his head on his pillow, he is disappointed there; *cares hold his eyes waking*, or, if he sleep, yet his heart wakes, and that *takes no rest in the night*. See what fools they are, that make themselves drudges to the world, and do not make God their Rest; night and day they cannot but be uneasy. So that, upon the whole matter, it is *all vanity*, v. 17. This is vanity in particular, (v. 19, 23.) nay, it is *vanity and a great evil*, v. 21. It is a great affront to God, and a great injury to themselves, therefore a *great evil*; it is a vain thing *to rise up early and sit up late*, in pursuit of this world's goods, which were never designed to be our chief good.

2. That the gains of his business must be all left to others. Prospect of advantage is the spring of action, and the spur of industry; therefore men labour, because they hope to get by it; if the hope fail, the labour flags; and therefore Solomon quarrelled with all the works, the great works, he had made, because they would not be of any lasting advantage to himself.

(1.) He must leave them. He could not, at death, take them away with him, nor any share of them, nor should he return any more to them, (Job, 7. 10.) nor would the remembrance of them do him any good, Luke, 16. 25. But I must leave all to the man that shall be after me, to the generation that comes up in the room of that which is passing away. As there were many before us, who built the houses that we live in, and into whose purchases and labours we have entered, so there shall be many after us, who shall live in the houses that we build, and enjoy the fruit of our purchases and labours. Never was land lost for want of an heir. To a gracious soul this is no uneasiness at all; why should we grudge others their turn in the enjoyments of this world, and not rather be pleased, that, when we are gone, those that come after us shall fare the better for our wisdom and industry? But to a worldly mind, that seeks for its own happiness in the creature, it is a great vexation to think of leaving the beloved self behind, at this uncertainty.

(2.) He must leave them to those that would never have taken so much pains for them, and will thereby excuse himself from taking any pains. He that raised the estate did it by *labouring in wisdom, and knowledge, and equity*; but he that enjoys it, and spends it, (it may be,) *has not laboured therein*, (v. 21.) and, more than that, never will; the bee toils to maintain the droue. Nay, it proves a snare to him, it is left him for his portion, which he

rests in, and takes up with; and miserable he is in being put off with it for a portion. Whereas if an estate had not come to him thus easily, who knows but he might have been both industrious and religious? Yet we ought not to perplex ourselves about this, since it may prove otherwise, that what is well-got may come to one that will use it well, and do good with it.

(3.) He knows not whom he must leave it to, (for God makes heirs,) or, at least, what he will prove to whom he leaves it, whether a *wise man or a fool*, a wise man that will make it more, or a fool that will bring it to nothing; yet he shall have rule over all my labour, and foolishly undo that which his father wisely did. It is probable that Solomon wrote this very feelingly, being afraid what Rehoboam would prove. St. Jerom, in his commentary on this passage, applies this to the good books which Solomon wrote, in which he had shewn himself wise, but he knew not into whose hands they would fall, perhaps into the hands of a fool, who, according to the perverseness of his heart, makes a bad use of what was well-written. So that, upon the whole matter, he asks, (v. 22.) *What has man of all his labour?* What has he to himself, and to his own use? What has he that will go with him into another world?

IV. The best use which is therefore to be made of the wealth of this world; and that is, to use it cheerfully, to take the comfort of it, and do good with it. With this he concludes the chapter, v. 24..26. There is no true happiness to be found in these things; they are *vanity*, and if happiness be expected from them, the disappointment will be *vexation of spirit*; but he will put us in a way to make the best of them, and to avoid the inconveniencies he had observed. 1. We must not over-toil ourselves, so as, in pursuit of more, to rob ourselves of the comfort of what we have. 2. We must not over-board for hereafter, nor lose our own enjoyment of what we have, to lay it up for those that shall come after us, but serve ourselves out of it first. Observe,

(1.) What that good is which is here recommended to us; and which is the utmost pleasure and profit we can expect or extract from the business and profit of this world, and the furthest we can go to rescue it from its *vanity*, and the *vexation* that is in it.

[1.] We must do our duty with them, and be more in care how to use an estate well, for the ends for which we were intrusted with it, than how to raise or increase an estate. This is intimated v. 26. where *those* only are said to have the comfort of this life, who are good in *God's sight*; and again, *good before God*, truly good, as Noah, whom *God saw righteous before him*. We must set God always before us, and give diligence in every thing to approve ourselves to him. The Chaldee-paraphrase says, *A man should make his soul to enjoy good by keeping the commandments of God, and walking in the ways that are right before him*; and (v. 25.) *by studying the words of the law, and being in care about the day of the great judgment that is to come*.

[2.] We must take the comfort of them. Those things will not make a happiness for the soul; all the good we can have out of them is for the body, and if we make use of them for the comfortable support of that, so that it may be fit to serve the soul, and able to keep pace with it in the service of God, then they turn to a good account. *There is therefore nothing better for a man, as to these things, than to allow himself a sober cheerful use of them*, according as his rank and condition are, to have meat and drink of them for himself, his family, his friends, and so delight his senses, and make his *soul enjoy good*, all the good that is to had out of them; do not lose that, in pursuit of that good, which is not to be had out of them. But observe, He would not have us to give up business, and take our ease, that we may *eat and drink*; no, we must *enjoy good in our labour*; we must use these things, not to excuse us from, but to make us diligent and cheerful in, our worldly business.

[3.] We must herein *acknowledge God*, we must see that *it is from the hand of God*; First, The good things themselves that we enjoy, are so, not only the products of his creating power, but the gifts of his providential bounty to us. And then they are truly pleasant to us, when we take them from the hand of God as a Father, when we eye his wisdom giving us that which is fittest for

us, and acquiesce in it, and taste his love and goodness, relish them, and are thankful for them. Secondly, A heart to enjoy them is so; this is the gift of God's grace. Unless he gives us wisdom to make a right use of what he has, in his providence, bestowed upon us, and, withal, peace of conscience, that we may discern God's favour in the world's smiles, we cannot make our souls enjoy any good in them.

(2.) Why we should have this in our eye, in the management of ourselves as to this world, and look up to God for it.

[1.] Because Solomon himself, with all his possessions, could aim at no more, and desire no better; (v. 25.) "*Who can hasten to this more than I?*" This is that which I was ambitious of, I wished for no more, and those that have but little, in comparison with what I have, may attain to this, to be content with what they have, and enjoy the good of it." Yet Solomon could not obtain it by his own wisdom, without the special grace of God, and therefore directs us to expect it from the hand of God, and pray to him for it.

[2.] Because riches are a blessing, or a curse, to a man, according as he has, or has not, a heart to make good use of them.

First, God makes them a reward to a good man, if with them he give him *wisdom, and knowledge, and joy*, to enjoy them cheerfully himself, and to communicate them charitably to others. To those who are *good in God's sight*, who are of a good spirit, honest and sincere, pay a deference to their God, and have a tender concern for all mankind, *God will give wisdom and knowledge in this world, and joy with the righteous in the world to come*; so the Chaldee. Or, he will give that wisdom and knowledge in things natural, moral, political, and divine, which will be a constant joy and pleasure to them.

Secondly, He makes them a punishment to a bad man, if he denies him a heart to take the comfort of them, for they do but tantalize him, and tyrannize over him; *To the sinner God gives travail*, by leaving him to himself and his own foolish counsels, to *gather and to heap up* that which, as to himself, will not only burthen him like *thick clay*, (Hab. 2. 6.) but be a *witness against him, and eat his flesh as it were fire*; (Jam. 5. 3.) while God designs, by an overruling providence, to give it to him that is *good before him*; for the *wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just, and gathered for him that will pity the poor*. Note, 1. *Godliness, with contentment, is great gain*; and those only have true joy that are *good in God's sight*, and that have it from him, and in him. 2. Ungodliness is commonly punished with discontent and an insatiable covetousness, which are sins that are their own punishment. 3. When God gives abundance to wicked men, it is with design to force them to a resignation in favour of his own children, when they are of age, and ready for it; as the Canaanites kept possession of the good land till the time appointed for Israel's entering upon it. Lastly, The burthen of the song is still the same; *This is also vanity and vexation of spirit*. It is vanity, at the best, even to the good man; when he has all that the sinner has scraped together, it will not make him happy without something else; but it is *vexation of spirit* to the sinner to see what he had laid up, enjoyed by him that is *good in God's sight*, and therefore evil in his. So that, take it which way you will, the conclusion is firm, *All is vanity, and vexation of spirit*.

CHAP. III.

Solomon having shewed the vanity of studies, pleasures, and business, and made it to appear that happiness is not to be found in the schools of the learned, in the gardens of Epicurus, or upon the exchange, he proceeds, in this chapter, further to prove his doctrine, and the inference he had drawn from it; That therefore we should cheerfully content ourselves with, and make use of, what God has given us, by shewing, I. The mutability of all human affairs, r. 1..10. II. The immutability of the divine counsels concerning them, and the unsearchableness of those counsels, v. 11..15. III. The vanity of worldly honour and power, which are abused for the support of oppression and persecution, if men be not governed by the fear of God in the use of it, v. 16. For a check to proud oppressors, and to shew them their vanity, he reminds them, 1. That they will be called to account for it in the other world, v. 17. 2. That their condition, in reference to this world, (for of that he speaks,) is no better than that of the brutes, v. 18..21. And therefore he concludes, that it is our wisdom to make use of what power we have, for our own comfort, and not to oppress others with it.

1. **T**O every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
 2. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted; 3. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6. A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7. A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8. A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. 9. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? 10. I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men, to be exercised in it.

The scope of these verses, is, to shew,

1. That we live in a world of changes. That the several events of time, and conditions of human life, are vastly different from one another, and yet occur promiscuously, and we are continually passing and re-passing between them; as in the revolutions of every day and every year. In the *wheel of nature*, (Jam. 3. 6.) sometimes one spoke is uppermost, and by and by the contrary; there is a constant ebbing and flowing, waxing and waning; from one extreme to the other does the *fashion of this world change*, ever did, and ever will.

2. That every change concerning us, and the time and season of it, is unalterably fixed and determined by a Supreme Power; and we must take things as they come, for it is not in our power to change what is appointed for us. And this comes in here as a reason why, when we are in prosperity, we should be easy, and yet not secure; not secure, because we live in a world of changes, and therefore have no reason to say, *To-morrow shall be as this day*; the lowest vallies join to the highest mountains; and yet to be easy, and as he had advised, (ch. 2. 24.) *to enjoy the good of our labour*, in a humble dependence upon God and his providence, neither lifted up with hopes, nor cast down with fears, but with evenness of mind expecting every event. Here we have,

I. A general proposition laid down, *To every thing there is a season, &c.* 1. Those things which seem most contrary the one to the other, will, in the revolution of affairs, each take their turn, and come into play. The day will give place to the night, and the night again to the day. Is it summer? It will be winter. Is it winter? Stay a while, and it will be summer. Every purpose has its time. The clearest sky will be clouded, *Post gaudia luctus—Joy succeeds sorrow*; and the most cloudy sky will clear up; *Post nubila Phœbus—The sun will burst from behind the cloud*. 2. Those things which to us seem most casual and contingent, are, in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, punctually determined, and the very hour of them fixed, which can neither be anticipated nor adjourned a moment.

II. The proof and illustration of it by the induction of particulars, twenty-eight in number, according to the days of the moon's revolution, which is always increasing or decreasing between its full and change; some of these changes are purely the act of God, others depend more upon the will of man, but all are determined by the divine counsel. Every thing *under heaven* is thus changeable, but in heaven there is an unchangeable state, and an unchangeable counsel, concerning these things.

1. There is a *time to be born, and a time to die*; these are determined by the divine counsel, and, as we were born, so we must die, at the time appointed, Acts, 17. 26. Some observe that

here is a *time to be born, and a time to die*, but no time to live; that is so short, that it is not worth mentioning; as soon as we are born, we begin to die. But as there is a *time to be born, and a time to die*, so there will be a time to rise again, a set time when they that lie in the grave shall be remembered, Job, 14. 13.

2. A *time for God to plant a nation*, as that of Israel in Canaan, and, in order to that, *to pluck up* the seven nations that were planted there, to make room for them; and at length there was a time when God spake concerning Israel too, *to pluck up and to destroy*, when the measure of their iniquity was full, Jer. 18. 7, 9. There is a *time for men to plant*, a time of the year, a time of their lives, but when *that which was planted* is grown fruitless and useless, it is *time to pluck it up*.

3. A *time to kill*, when the judgments of God are abroad in a land, and lay all waste; but when he returns in ways of mercy, then is a *time to heal what he has torn*, (Hos. 6. 1, 2.) to comfort a people after the time that he has afflicted them, Ps. 90. 15. There is a time when it is the wisdom of rulers to use severe methods, but there is a time when it is as much their wisdom to take a more gentle course, and to apply themselves to lenitives, not corrosives.

4. A *time to break down a family, an estate, a kingdom*, when it has ripened itself for destruction; but God will find a *time*, if they return and repent, to rebuild what he has broken down; there is a *time*, a set time, for the Lord *to build up Zion*, Ps. 102. 13, 16. There is a *time for men to break up house*, and break off trade, and so *to break down*, which they that are busy *building up* both must expect and prepare for.

5. A *time* when God's providence calls *to weep and mourn*, and when man's wisdom and grace will comply with the call, and *will weep and mourn*, as in times of common calamity and danger, and then it is very absurd *to laugh, and dance*, and make merry; (Isa. 22. 12, 13. Ezek. 21. 10.) but then, on the other hand, there is a time when God calls to cheerfulness, *a time to laugh and dance*, and then he expects we should *serve him with joyfulness and gladness of heart*. Observe, The time of mourning and weeping is put first, before that of laughter and dancing, for we must first *sow in tears*, and then *reap in joy*.

6. A *time to cast away stones*, by breaking down and demolishing fortifications, when God gives peace in the borders, and there is no more occasion for them; but there is a *time to gather stones together*, for the making of strong holds, v. 5. A time for old towers to fall, as that in Siloam, (Luke, 13. 4.) and for the temple itself to be so ruined, as that *not one stone should be left upon another*; but also a time for towers and trophies too to be erected, when national affairs prosper.

7. A *time to embrace a friend*, when we find him faithful, but a *time to refrain from embracing*, when we find he is unfair or unfaithful, and that we have cause to suspect him; it is then our prudence to be shy, and keep at a distance. It is commonly applied to conjugal embraces, and explained by 1 Cor. 7. 3. . 5. Joel, 2. 16.

8. A *time to get*, get money, get preferment, get good bargains and a good interest, when opportunity smiles; a time when a wise man will *seek*, (so the word is,) when he is setting out in the world, and has a growing family, when he is in his prime, when he prospers, and has a run of business, then it is time for him to be busy, and make hay when the sun shines. There is a *time to get wisdom, and knowledge, and grace*, when a man has a price put into his hand; but then let him expect there will come a time to spend, when all he has will be little enough to serve his turn. Nay, there will come a *time to lose*, when what has been got fast will be scattered as fast, and cannot be held fast.

9. A *time to keep*, when we have use for what we have got, and can keep it without running the hazard of a good conscience; but there may come a *time to cast away*, when love to God may oblige us to cast away what we have, because we must deny Christ, and wrong our consciences, if we keep it, (Matth. 10. 37, 38.) and rather to make shipwreck of all than of the faith; nay, when love to ourselves may oblige us to cast it away, when it is for the saving of our lives, as it was when Jonah's mariners heaved their cargo into the sea.

10. *A time to rend the garments*, as upon occasion of some great grief, and *a time to sew them again*, in token that the grief is over. A time to undo what we have done, and a time to do again what we have undone. Jerom applies it to the rending of the Jewish church, and the sewing and making up of the gospel church thereupon.

11. *A time when it becomes us*, and is our wisdom and duty, *to keep silence*, when it is an *evil time*, (Amos, 5. 13.) when our speaking would be the *casting of pearl before swine*, or when we are in danger of speaking amiss; (Ps. 39. 2.) but there is also *a time to speak* for the glory of God and the edification of others, when silence would be the betraying of a righteous cause, and when with the mouth confession is to be made to salvation; and it is a great part of Christian prudence to know when to speak and when to hold our peace.

12. *A time to love*, and to show ourselves friendly, to be free and cheerful, and it is a pleasant time; but there may come *a time to hate*, when we shall see cause to break off all familiarity with some that we have been fond of, and to be upon the reserve, as having found reason for a suspicion, which love is loath to admit.

Lastly, A time of war, when God draws the sword for judgment, and gives it commission to devour; when men draw the sword for justice and the maintaining of their rights; when there is in the nations a disposition to war; but we may hope for *a time of peace*, when the sword of the Lord shall be sheathed, and he shall *make wars to cease*, (Ps. 46. 9.) when the end of the war is obtained, and when there is on all sides a disposition to peace. War shall not last always, nor is there any peace to be called lasting, on this side the everlasting peace. Thus in all these changes God has set the one over-against the other, that we may *rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and weep as though we wept not*.

III. The inferences drawn from this observation. If our present state be subject to such vicissitude,

1. Then we must not expect our portion in it, for the good things of it are of no certainty, no continuance; (v. 9.) *What profit has he that works?* What can a man promise himself from planting and building, when that which he thinks is brought to perfection may so soon, and will so surely, be plucked up and broken down? All our pains and care will not alter either the mutable nature of the things themselves, or the immutable counsel of God concerning them.

2. Then we must look upon ourselves as upon our probation in it. There is indeed no profit in *that wherein we labour*; the thing itself, when we have it, will do us little good; but if we make a right use of the disposals of Providence about it, there will be profit in that; (v. 10.) *I have seen the travail which God has given to the sons of men*, not to make up a happiness by it, but *to be exercised in it*, to have various graces exercised by the variety of events, to have their dependence upon God tried by every change, and to be trained up to it, and taught both *how to want and how to abound*, Phil. 4. 12. Note, (1.) There is a great deal of toil and trouble to be seen among the children of men; labour and sorrow fill the world. (2.) This toil and this trouble are what God has allotted us; he never intended this world for our rest, and therefore never appointed us to take our ease in it. (3.) To many it proves a gift; God gives it men, as the physician gives a medicine to his patient, to do him good. This travail is given us, to make us weary of the world, and desirous of the remaining rest. (4.) It is given us, that we may be kept in action, and may always have something to do; for we were none of us sent into the world to be idle. Every change cuts us out some new work, which we should be more solicitous about than about the event.

11. He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. 12. I know that *there is no good in them*, but for *a man* to rejoice, and to do good in his life. 13. And also that

every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it *is* the gift of God. 14. I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him. 15. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

We have seen what changes there are in the world, and must not expect to find the world more sure to us than it has been to others. Now here he shews the hand of God in all those changes; it is he that has made every creature to be that to us that it is, and therefore we must have our eye always up unto him.

1. We must make the best of *that which is*, and must believe it best for the present, and accomodate ourselves to it; *He has made every thing very beautiful in his time*, (v. 11.) and, therefore, while its time lasts, we must be reconciled to it; nay, we must please ourselves with the beauty of it. Note, (1.) Every thing is as God has made it; it is really as he appointed it to be, not as it appears to us. (2.) That which to us seems most unpleasant, in its proper time, is altogether becoming. Cold is as becoming in winter as heat in summer; and the night, in its turn, is a black beauty, as the day, in its turn, is a bright one. (3.) There is a wonderful harmony in the Divine Providence, and all its disposals; so that the events of it, when they come to be considered in their relations and tendencies, together with the seasons of them, will appear very beautiful to the glory of God, and the comfort of those that trust in him. Though we see not the complete beauty of Providence, yet we shall see it, and a glorious sight it will be, when the mystery of God shall be finished; then every thing shall appear to have been done in the most proper time, and it will be the wonder of eternity, Deut. 32. 4.

2. We must wait with patience for the full discovery of that which to us seems intricate and perplexed, acknowledging that we *cannot find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end*, and therefore must judge nothing before the time. We are to believe that God has made all beautiful, every thing is done well, as in creation, so in providence, and we shall see it when the end comes, but till then we are incompetent judges of it. While the picture is in drawing, and the house in building, we see not the beauty of either, but when the artist has put his last hand to them, and given them their finishing strokes, then all appears very good. We see but the middle of God's works, not from the beginning of them, then we should see how admirably the plan was laid in the divine counsels, nor to the end of them, which crowns the action, then we should see the product to be glorious; but we must wait till the veil be rent, and not arraign God's proceedings, nor pretend to pass a judgment on them. *Secret things belong not to us*.

Those words, *He has set the world in their hearts*, are differently understood. (1.) Some make them to be a reason why we may know more of God's work than we do; so Mr. Pemble, "God has not left himself without witness of his righteous, equal, and beautiful ordering of things, but has set it forth to be observed in the book of *the world*, and this he has set in *men's hearts*, given man a large desire, and a power, in good measure, to comprehend and understand the history of nature, with the course of human affairs, so that if men did but give themselves to the exact observation of things, they might, in most of them, perceive an admirable order and contrivance." (2.) Others make them to be a reason why we do not know so much of God's works as we might; so Bishop Reynolds; "We have the world so much in our hearts, are so taken up with thoughts and cares of worldly things, and are so exercised in our travail concerning them, that we have neither time nor spirit to eye God's hand in them." The world has not only gained possession of the heart, but has formed prejudices there against the beauty of God's works.

3. We must be pleased with our lot in this world, and cheer-

fully acquiesce in the will of God concerning us, and accommodate ourselves to it. *There is no certain, lasting, good in these things; what good there is in them, we are here told, v. 12, 13. We must make a good use of them,*

(1.) For the benefit of others. All the *good* there is *in them, is to do good*, with them, to our families, to our neighbours, to the poor, to the public, to its civil and religious interests. What have we our beings, capacities, and estates, for, but to be some way serviceable to our *generation*? We mistake, if we think we were born for ourselves; no, it is our business *to do good*, it is in that that there is the truest pleasure, and what is so laid out, is best laid up, and will turn to the best account. Observe, It is *to do good in this life*, which is short and uncertain; we have but a little time to be doing good in, and therefore had need to redeem time. It is *in this life*, where we are in a state of trial and probation for another life. Every man's life is his opportunity of doing that which will make for him in eternity.

(2.) For our own comfort. Let us make ourselves easy, *rejoice, and enjoy the good of our labour, as it is the gift of God*, and so enjoy God in it, and taste his love, return him thanks, and make him the Centre of our joy; *eat and drink* to his glory, and *serve him with joyfulness of heart in the abundance of all things*. If all things in this world be so uncertain, it is a foolish thing for men sordidly to spare for the present, that they may hoard up all for hereafter; it is better to live cheerfully and usefully upon what we have, and let to-morrow *take thought for the things of itself*. Grace and wisdom to do this *is the gift of God*, and it is a good gift, which crowns the gifts of his providential bounty.

4. We must be entirely satisfied in all the disposals of the Divine Providence, both as to personal and public concerns, and bring our minds to them, because God, in all, performs the thing that is appointed for us, acts according to the counsel of his will; and we are here told,

(1.) That that counsel cannot be altered, and therefore it is our wisdom to make a virtue of necessity, by submitting to it. It must be as God wills; *I know* (and every one knows it, that knows any thing of God) *that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever, v. 14.* He is in one mind, and who can turn him? His measures are never broken, nor is he ever put upon new counsels, but what he has purposed shall be effected, and all the world cannot defeat or disannul it. It behoves us therefore to say, "Let it be as God wills," for how cross soever it may be to our designs and interests, God's will is his wisdom.

(2.) That that counsel needs not to be altered, for there is nothing amiss in it, nothing that can be amended. If we could see it altogether at one view, we should see it so perfect, that *nothing can be put to it*, for there is no deficiency in it, *nor any thing taken from it*, for there is nothing in it unnecessary, or that can be spared. Like the word of God, the works of God are each perfect in their kind, and it is presumption for us either to add to them, or to diminish from them, Deut. 4. 2. It is therefore as much our interest as our duty, to bring our wills to the will of God.

5. We must study to answer God's end in all his providences, which is, in general, to make us religious. *God doeth all, that men should fear before him*, to convince them that there is a God above them, that has a sovereign dominion over them, at whose disposal they are, and all their ways, and in whose hands their times are, and all events concerning them; and that therefore they ought to have their eyes ever toward him, to worship and adore him, to acknowledge him in all their ways, to be careful in every thing to please him, and afraid of offending him in any thing. God thus changes his disposals, and yet is unchangeable in his counsels, not to perplex us, much less to drive us to despair, but to teach us our duty to him, and engage us to do it. That which God designs in the government of the world, is, the support and advancement of religion among men.

6. Whatever changes we see or feel in this world, we must acknowledge the inviolable steadiness of God's government. The sun rises and sets, the moon increases and decreases, and yet both are where they were, and their revolutions are in the same

method from the beginning, according to *the ordinances of heaven*; so it is with the events of Providence; (v. 15.) *That which has been, is now.* God has not of late begun to use this method; no, things were always as mutable and uncertain as they are now, and so they will be; *that which is to be has already been*; and therefore we speak inconsiderately, when we say, "Surely the world was never so bad as it is now," or, "None ever met with such disappointments as we meet with," or, "The times will never mend;" they may mend with us, and, after a time to mourn, there may come a time to rejoice, but that will still be liable to the common character, to the common fate. The world, as it has been, is, and will be, constant in inconstancy; for *God requires that which is past*, repeats what he has formerly done, and deals with us no otherwise than as he has used to deal with good men; and *shall the earth be forsaken for us, or the rock removed out of his place?* There has no change befallen us, nor any temptation by it taken us, *but such as is common to men.* Let us not be proud and secure in prosperity, for God may recall a past trouble, and order that to seize us, and spoil our mirth; (Ps. 30. 7.) nor let us despond in adversity, for God may call back the comforts that are past, as he did to Job. We may apply this to our past actions, and our behaviour under the changes that have affected us, God will call us to account for *that which is past*; and therefore when we enter into a new condition we should judge ourselves for our sins in our former condition, prosperous or afflicted.

16. And moreover, I saw under the sun the place of judgment, *that wickedness was there*; and the place of righteousness, *that iniquity was there.* 17. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for *there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.* 18. I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. 19. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath: so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all *is vanity.* 20. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. 21. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? 22. Wherefore I perceive that *there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works*; for that *is his portion*: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

Solomon is still shewing that every thing in this world, without piety and the fear of God, is vanity. Take away religion, and there is nothing valuable among men, nothing for the sake of which a wise man would think it worth while to live in this world. In these verses, he shews that power, than which there is nothing men are more ambitious of, and life itself, than which there is nothing men are more fond, more jealous, of, are nothing without the fear of God.

I. Here is the vanity of man as mighty; man in his best estate, man upon the throne, where his authority is submitted to, man upon the judgment-seat, where his wisdom and justice are appealed to, and where, if he be governed by the laws of religion, he is God's vicegerent; nay, he is of those to whom it is said, *Ye are gods*; but without the fear of God it *is vanity*, for, set that aside, and,

1. The judge will not judge aright, will not use his power well,

but will abuse it; instead of doing good with it, will do hurt with it, and then it is not only vanity, but a lie, a cheat to himself, and to all about him, v. 16. Solomon perceived, by what he had read of former times, what he heard of other countries, and what he had seen in some corrupt judges, even in the land of Israel, notwithstanding all his care to prefer good men, that there was *wickedness in the place of judgment*. It is not so above the sun; far be it from God that he should do iniquity, or pervert justice; but *under the sun* it is often found that that which should be the refuge proves the prison of oppressed innocency. *Man, being in honour, and not understanding what he ought to do, becomes like the beasts that perish*, like the beasts of prey, even the most ravenous, Ps. 49. 20. Not only from the persons that sat in judgment, but even *in the places* where judgment was, in pretence, administered, and righteousness was expected, *there was iniquity*; men met with the greatest wrongs in those courts to which they fled for right; this is *vanity and vexation*; for, (1.) It had been better for the people to have had no judges than to have had such. (2.) It had been better for the judges to have had no power than to have had it and used it to such ill purposes; and so they will say another day.

2. The judge will himself be judged for not judging right. When Solomon saw how judgment was perverted among men, he looked up to God the Judge, and looked forward to the day of his judgment; (v. 17.) *I said in my heart*, that this unrighteous judgment is not so conclusive as both sides take it to be, for there will be a review of the judgment; *God shall judge between the righteous and the wicked*, shall judge for the righteous, and plead their cause, though now it is run down, and judge *against* the wicked, and reckon with them for all their *unrighteous decrees*, and the *grievousness which they have prescribed*, Isa. 10. 1. With an eye of faith we may see, not only the period, but the punishment, of the pride and cruelty of oppressors, (Ps. 92. 7.) and it is an unspeakable comfort to the oppressed, that their cause will be heard over again. Let them therefore wait with patience, for there is another *Judge that stands before the door*. And though the day of affliction may last long, yet *there is a time*, a set time, for the examination of *every purpose and every work* done under the sun. Men have their day now, but God's day is coming, Ps. 37. 13. With God *there is a time* for the rehearing of causes, redressing of grievances, and reversing of unjust decrees, though as yet we see it not here, Job, 24. 1.

II. Here is the vanity of man as mortal. He now comes to speak more generally concerning *the estate of the sons of men* in this world, their life and being on earth, and shews that their reason, without religion and the fear of God, advances them but little above the beasts. Now observe,

1. What he aims at in this account of man's estate.

(1.) That God may be honoured, may be justified, may be glorified; *that they might clear God*, so the margin reads it; that, if men have an uneasy life in this world, full of vanity and vexation, they may thank themselves, and lay no blame on God; let them clear him, and not say, that he made this world to be man's prison, and life to be his penance; no, God made man, in respect both of honour and comfort, *little lower than the angels*; if he be mean and miserable, it is his own fault. Or, *that God*, the word of God, *might manifest them*, and discover them to themselves, and so appear to be *quick and powerful*, and a Judge of men's characters; and we may be made sensible how open we lie to God's knowledge and judgment.

(2.) That men may be humbled, may be vilified, may be mortified; *that they might see that they themselves are beasts*. It is much to convince proud men that *they are but men*, (Ps. 9. 20.) much more to convince bad men *that they are beasts*, that, being destitute of religion, they are as *the beasts that perish*, as *the horse and the mule that have no understanding*. Proud oppressors are as beasts, as roaring lions, and ranging bears. Nay, every man that minds his body only, and not his soul, makes himself no better than a brute, and must wish, at least, to die like one.

2. The manner in which he verifies this account; that which he undertakes to prove, is, that a wordly, carnal, earthly-minded man,

has no preeminence above the beast, for all that which he sets his heart upon, places his confidence, and expects a happiness, in, is vanity, v. 19. Some make this to be the language of an atheist, who justifies himself in his iniquity, (v. 16.) and evades the argument taken from the judgment to come, (v. 17.) by pleading that there is not another life after this, but that when man dies, there is an end of him, and therefore, while he lives, he may live as he lists; but others rather think Solomon here speaks as he himself thinks, and that it is to be understood in the same sense with that of his father, (Ps. 49. 14.) *Like sheep they are laid in the grave*, and that he intends to shew the vanity of this world's wealth and honours, "by the equal condition in mere outward respects" (as Bishop Reynolds expounds it) "between men and beasts."

(1.) The events concerning both seem much alike; (v. 19.) *That which befalls the sons of men*, is no other than that which *befalls beasts*; a great deal of knowledge of human bodies is gained by the anatomy of the bodies of brutes. When the deluge swept away the old world, the beasts perished with mankind. Horses and men are killed in battle with the same weapons of war.

(2.) The end of both, to an eye of sense, seems alike too; *They have all one breath*, and breathe in the same air, and it is the general description of both, that *in their nostrils is the breath of life*, (Gen. 7. 22.) and, therefore, *as the one dies, so dies the other*; in their expiring there is no visible difference, but death makes much the same change with a beast that it does with a man.

[1.] As to their bodies, the change is altogether the same, except the different respects that are paid to them by the survivors. Let a man be *buried with the burial of an ass*, (Jer. 22. 19.) and what pre-eminence then has he *above a beast*? The touch of the dead body of a man, by the law of Moses, contracted a greater ceremonial pollution than the touch of the carcase even of an unclean beast or fowl. And Solomon here observes, that *all go unto one place*, the dead bodies of men and beasts putrefy alike, *all are of the dust*, in their original, for we see *all turn to dust again*, in their corruption. What little reason then have we to be proud of our bodies, or any bodily accomplishments, when they must not only be reduced to the earth very shortly, but must be so in common with the beasts, and we must mingle our dust with theirs!

[2.] As to their spirits, there is indeed a vast difference, but not a visible one, v. 21. It is certain that *the spirit of the sons of men* at death is ascending, it *goes upward* to the Father of spirits, who made it, to the world of spirits, to which it is allied; it dies not with the body, but *is redeemed from the power of the grave*, Ps. 49. 15. It *goes upward*, to be judged, and determined to an unchangeable state. It is as certain that *the spirit of the beast goes downward to the earth*, it dies with the body, it perishes, and is gone at death. The soul of a beast is, at death, like a candle blown out, there is an end of it; whereas the soul of a man is then like a candle taken out of a dark lantern, which leaves the lantern useless indeed, but does itself shine brighter. This great difference there is between the spirits of men and beasts; and a good reason it is why men should *set their affections on things above*, and lift up their souls to those things, not suffering them, as if they were the souls of brutes, to cleave to this earth. But *who knows* this difference? We cannot see the ascent of the one, and the descent of the other, with our bodily eyes; and therefore those that live by sense, as all carnal sensualists do, that *walk in the sight of their eyes*, and will not admit any other discoveries, by their own rule of judgment, have *no pre-eminence above the beasts*, *Who knows?* Who considers this? Isa. 53. 1. Very few; were it better considered, the world would be every way better; but most men live as if they were to be here always, or as if, when they die, there were an end of them; and it is not strange that those live like beasts, who think they shall die like beasts; but on such the noble faculties of reason are perfectly lost and thrown away.

3. An inference drawn from it; (v. 22.) *There is nothing better, as to this world, nothing better to be had out of our wealth and honour, than that a man should rejoice in his own works*.

(1.) *Keep a clear conscience*, and never admit iniquity into the place

of righteousness. *Let every man prove his own work, and approve himself to God in it, so shall he have rejoicing in himself alone,* Gal. 6.4. Let him not get or keep any thing but what he can rejoice in. See 2 Cor. 1.12. (2.) Live a cheerful life. If God have prospered the work of our hands unto us, let us rejoice in it, and take the comfort of it, and not make it a burthen to ourselves, and leave others the joy of it; *for that is our portion*, not the portion of our souls, miserable are they that have their portion in this life, (Ps. 17.14.) and fools are they that choose it and take up with it, (Luke, 12.19.) but it is the portion of the body; that only which we enjoy is our's out of this world; it is taking what is to be had, and making the best of it; and the reason is, because none can give us a sight of *what shall be after us*; either who shall have our estates, or what use they will make of them. When we are gone, it is likely we shall not see what is after us; there is no correspondence that we know of between the other world and this, Job, 14.21. They in the other world will be wholly taken up with that world, so that they will not care for seeing what is done in this; and while we are here, we cannot foresee *what shall be after us*, either as to our families or the public; *it is not for us to know the times and seasons that shall be after us*; which, as it should be a restraint to our cares about this world, so it should be a reason for our concern about another. Since death is a final farewell to this life, let us look before us to another life.

CHAP. IV.

Solomon, having shewed the vanity of this world, in the temptation which those in power feel to oppress and trample upon their subjects, here further shews. I. The temptation which the oppressed feel to discontent and impatience, v. 1..3. II. The temptation which those that love their ease feel to take their ease and neglect business, for fear of being envied, v. 4..6. III. The folly of hoarding up abundance of worldly wealth, v. 7, 8. IV. A remedy against that folly, in being made sensible of the benefit of society and mutual assistance, v. 9..12. V. The mutability even of royal dignity, not only through the folly of the prince himself, (v. 13, 14.) but through the fickleness of the people, let the prince be ever so discreet, v. 15, 16. It is not the prerogative even of kings themselves to be exempted from the vanity and vexation that attend these things; let none else then expect it.

1. **SO** I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of *such as were* oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors *there was* power; but they had no comforter. 2. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. 3. Yea, better *is he* than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Solomon had a large soul, (1 Kings, 4.29.) and it appeared by this, among other things, that he had a very tender concern for the miserable part of mankind, and took cognizance of the afflictions of the afflicted. He had taken the *oppressors* to task, (ch. 3.16, 17.) and put them in mind of the judgment to come, to be a curb to their insolence; now here he observes the *oppressed*; this he did, no doubt, as a prince, to do them justice, and *avenge them of their adversaries*, for he both *feared God and regarded men*: but here he does it as a preacher, and shews,

1. The troubles of their condition; (v.1.) of these he speaks very feelingly, and with compassion. It grieved him,

(1.) To see might prevailing against right, to see so much *oppression done under the sun*; to see servants, and labourers, and poor workmen, oppressed by their masters, who take advantage of their necessity to impose what terms they please upon them; debtors oppressed by cruel creditors, and creditors too by fraudulent debtors; tenants oppressed by hard landlords, and orphans by treacherous guardians; and, worst of all, subjects oppressed by arbitrary princes and unjust judges. *Such oppressions are done under the sun*, above the sun righteousness reigns for ever. Wise men will consider these *oppressions*, and contrive to do something

for the relief of those that are oppressed. *Blessed is he that considers the poor.*

(2.) To see how those that were wronged laid to heart the wrongs that were done them. He *beheld the tears of such as were oppressed*, and perhaps could not forbear weeping with them. The world is a place of weepers; look which way we will, we have a melancholy scene presented to us, *the tears of those that are oppressed* with one trouble or other. They find it is to no purpose to complain, and therefore mourn in secret, (as Job, ch. 16. 20.—30. 28.) but *Blessed are they that mourn*.

(3.) To see how unable they were to help themselves; *On the side of their oppressors there was power*, when they had done wrong, to stand to it, and make good what they had done, so that the poor were borne down with a strong hand, and had no way to do themselves right. It is sad to see power misplaced, and that which was given men to enable them to do good, perverted to support them in doing wrong.

(4.) To see how they and their calamities were slighted by all about them. They wept, and needed comfort, but there was none to do that friendly office, *they had no comforter*, their oppressors were powerful and threatening, and therefore *they had no comforter*; they that should comfort them durst not, for fear of displeasing the oppressors, and being made their companions for offering to be their comforters. It is sad to see so little humanity among men.

2. The temptations of their condition. Being thus hardly used, they are tempted to hate and despise life, and to envy those that are dead and in their graves, and to wish they had never been born; (v. 2, 3.) and Solomon is ready to agree with them, for it serves to prove that *all is vanity and vexation*, since life itself is often so; and if we disregard it, in comparison with the favour and fruition of God, (as St. Paul, Acts, 20. 24. Phil. 1. 23.) it is car praise; but if (as here) only for the sake of the miseries that attend it, it is our infirmity, and we judge therein after the flesh, as Job and Elijah did.

(1.) He here thinks them happy who have ended this miserable life, have done their part, and quitted the stage; *I praised the dead that are already dead*, slain outright, or that had a speedy passage through the world, made a short cut over the ocean of life, dead already, before they had well begun to live; I was pleased with their lot, and, had it been in their own choice, should have praised their wisdom, for but looking into the world, and then retiring, as not liking it. I concluded that it is better with them than with the *living that are yet alive*, and that is all, dragging the long and heavy chain of life, and wearing out its tedious minutes. This may be compared, not with Job, 3. 20, 21. but with Rev. 14. 13. where, in times of persecution, (and such Solomon is here describing,) it is not the passion of man, but the Spirit of God, that says, *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth*. Note, The condition of the saints that are dead, and gone to rest with God, is, upon many accounts, better and more desirable than the condition of living saints that are yet continued in their work and warfare.

(2.) He thinks them happy, who never began this miserable life; nay, they are happiest of all; *He that has not been is happier than both they*. Better never to have been born than be born to see the *evil work that is done under the sun*; to see so much wickedness committed, so much wrong done, and not only to be in no capacity to mend the matter, but to suffer ill for doing well. A good man, how calamitous a condition soever he is in in this world, cannot have cause to wish he had never been born, since he is glorifying the Lord even in the fires, and will be happy at last, for ever happy; nor ought any to wish so while they are alive, for while there is life, there is hope; a man is never undone till he is in hell.

4. Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit. 5. The fool foldeth his hands together, and

eateth his own flesh. 6. Better is an handful *with* quietness, than both the hands full *with* travail and vexation of spirit.

Here Solomon returns to the observation and consideration of the vanity and vexation of spirit that attend the business of this world, which he had spoken of before, *ch.* 2. 11.

1. If a man be acute, and dexterous, and successful in his business, he gets the ill-will of his neighbours, *v.* 4. Though he takes a great deal of pains, and goes through *all* travail, does not get his estate easily, but it costs him a great deal of hard labour, nor does he get it dishonestly, he wrongs no man, defrauds no man, but by every right work, by applying himself to his own proper business, and managing it by all the rules of equity and fair-dealing, yet *for this he is envied of his neighbour*, and the more for the reputation he has got by his honesty. This shews, (1.) What little conscience most men have, that they will bear a grudge to a neighbour, give him an ill word, and do him an ill turn, only because he is more ingenious and industrious than themselves, and has more of the blessing of heaven. Cain envied Abel, Esau Jacob, and Saul David, and all for their *right works*. This is downright diabolism. (2.) What little comfort wise and useful men must expect to have in this world. Let them behave themselves ever so cautiously, they cannot escape being *envied*; and *who can stand before envy?* *Prov.* 27. 4. They that excel in virtue will always be an eye-sore to those that exceed in vice; which should not discourage us from any *right work*, but drive us to expect the praise of it, not from men, but from God, and not to count upon satisfaction and happiness in the creature; for if *right works* prove *vanity and vexation of spirit*, no works *under the sun* can prove otherwise. But for every *right work* a man shall be accepted of his God, and then he needs not mind though he be *envied of his neighbour*, only it may make him love the world the less.

2. If a man be stupid and dull, and blundering in his business, he does ill for himself; (*v.* 5.) *The fool* that goes about his work as if his hands were muffled and *folded together*, that does every thing awkwardly; *the sluggard*, (for he is a fool,) that loves his ease, and *folds his hands together* to keep them warm, because they refuse to labour, he *eats his own flesh*, is a cannibal to himself, brings himself into such a poor condition that he has nothing to eat but his own flesh, into such a desperate condition, that he is ready to eat his own flesh for vexation; he has a dog's life, hunger and ease. Because he sees active men, that thrive in the world, envied, he runs into the other extreme; and, lest he should be *envied* for his *right works*, he does every thing wrong, and does not deserve to be pitied. Note, Idleness is a sin that is its own punishment.

The following words, (*v.* 6.) *Better is a handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit*, may be taken either, (1.) As the sluggard's argument for the excuse of himself in his idleness; he *folds his hands together*, and abuses and misapplies a good truth for his justification; as if, because a little *with quietness* is better than abundance with strife, therefore a little with idleness is better than abundance with honest labour: thus *wise in his own conceit* is he, *Prov.* 26. 16. But, (2.) I rather take it as Solomon's advice to keep the mean between that *travail* which will make a man *envied*, and that slothfulness which will make a man *eat his own flesh*. Let us by honest industry lay hold on the *handful*, that we may not want necessities, but not grasp at *both the hands full*, which will but create us *vexation of spirit*. Moderate pains and moderate gains will do best. A man may have but a *handful* of the world, and yet may enjoy it and himself with a great deal of *quietness*, with content of mind, peace of conscience, and the love and good will of his neighbours, while many that have *both their hands full*, have more than heart could wish, have a great deal of *travail and vexation* with it. Those that cannot live on a little, it is to be feared, would not live as they should, if they had ever so much.

7. Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the

sun. 8. There is one *alone*, and *there is not a second*; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet *is there* no end of all his labour: neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither *saith he*, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This *is* also vanity, yea, it *is* a sore travail. 9. Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 10. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him *that is alone* when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up. 11. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm *alone*? 12. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Here Solomon fastens upon another instance of the vanity of this world, that frequently the more men have of it, the more they would have; and on this they are so intent, that they have no enjoyment of what they have. Now Solomon here shews,

1. That selfishness is the cause of this evil; (*v.* 7, 8.) *There is one alone* that minds none but himself, cares for nobody, but would, if he could, be placed alone in the midst of the earth; *there is not a second*, nor does he desire there should be, one mouth he thinks enough in a house, and grudges every thing that goes beside him. See how this covetous muckworm is here described.

(1.) He makes himself a mere slave to his business. Though *he has* no charge, *neither child nor brother*, none to take care of but himself, none to hang upon him, or draw from him, no poor relations, nor dares he marry, for fear of the expence of a family, yet *is there no end of his labour*, he is at it night and day, early and late, and will scarcely allow necessary rest to himself and those he employs. He does not confine himself within the bounds of his own calling, but is for having a hand in any thing that he can get by. See *Ps.* 127. 2.

(2.) He never thinks he has enough; *His eye is not satisfied with riches*. Covetousness is called *the lust of the eye*, (1 John, 2. 16.) because the *beholding of it with his eyes* is all that the worldling seems to covet, *Ecc.* 5. 11. He has enough for his back, (as Bishop Reynolds observes,) for his belly, for his calling, for his family, for his living decently in the world, but he has not enough for his eyes; though he can but see it, can but count his money, and not find in his heart to use it, yet he is not easy because he has not more to regale his eyes with.

(3.) He denies himself the comfort of what he has. *He bereaves his soul of good*. If our souls be *bereaved of good*, it is we ourselves that do bereave them; others may bereave us of outward good, but cannot rob us of our graces and comforts, our spiritual good things; it is our own fault if we do not enjoy ourselves; yet many are so set upon the world, that, in pursuit of it, they *bereave their souls of good* here and for ever, make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, bereave themselves not only of the favour of God and eternal life, but of the pleasures of this world too, and this present life. Worldly people, pretending to be wise for themselves, are really enemies to themselves.

(4.) He has no excuse for doing this; *He has neither child nor brother*; none that he is bound to, on whom he may lay out what he has to his satisfaction while he lives; none that he has a kindness for, for whom he may lay it up to his satisfaction, and to whom he may leave it when he dies; none that are poor or dear to him.

(5.) He has not consideration enough to shew himself the folly of this: he never puts this question to himself, "*For whom do I labour* thus? Do I labour, as I should, for the glory of God, and that I may have to give to those that need? Do I consider that it is but for the body that I am labouring, a dying body; it is for

others, and I know not for whom; perhaps for a fool that will scatter it as fast as I have gathered it; perhaps for a foe, that will be ungrateful to my memory?" Note, It is wisdom for those that take pains about this world, to consider whom they take all this pains for; and whether it be really worth while to *bereave themselves of good*, that they may bestow it on a stranger. If men do not consider this, it is *vanity, and a sore travail*; they shame and vex themselves to no purpose.

2. That sociableness is the cure of this evil. Men are thus sordid, because they are all for themselves. Now Solomon shews here, by divers instances, that *it is not good for man to be alone*; (Gen. 2. 18.) he designs hereby to recommend to us both marriage and friendship, two things which covetous misers decline, because of the charge of them; but such are the comfort and advantage of them both, if prudently contracted, that they will very well quit cost. Man, in paradise itself, could not be happy without a mate, and therefore is no sooner made than matched.

(1.) Solomon lays this down for a truth, That *two are better than one*, and more happy jointly than either of them could be separately; more pleased in one another than they could be in themselves only; mutually serviceable to each other's welfare, and by a united strength more likely to do good to others; *They have a good reward of their labour*; whatever service they do, it is returned to them another way. He that serves himself only, has himself only for his pay-master, and commonly proves more unjust and ungrateful to himself than his friend, if he should serve him, would be to him; witness him that *labours endlessly*, and yet *bereaves his soul of good*; he has no reward of his labour; but he that is kind to another has a *good reward*; the pleasure and advantage of holy love will be an abundant recompence for all the *work and labour of love*.

(2.) Hence he infers the mischief of solitude; *Woe to him that is alone*: he lies exposed to many temptations which good company and friendship would prevent and help him to guard against; he wants that advantage which a man has by the countenance of his friend, as iron has of being sharpened by iron. A monastic life then was surely never intended for a state of perfection, nor should those be reckoned the greatest lovers of God who cannot find in their hearts to love any one else.

3. He proves it by divers instances of the benefit of friendship and good conversation.

(1.) Occasional succour in an exigence. *It is good for two to travel together, for if one happen to fall, and perhaps so as not to be able to get up himself, the other will be ready to help him up*; a friend in need is a friend indeed; whereas if one travel alone, and get a fall, he may be lost for want of a little help. If a man fall into sin, his friend will help to *restore him with the spirit of meekness*; if he fall into trouble, his friend will help to comfort him and assuage his grief.

(2.) Mutual warmth. As a fellow-traveller is of use, (*amicus pro vehiculo—a friend is a good substitute for a carriage*), so is a bed-fellow; *If two lie together, they have heat*. So virtuous and gracious affections are excited by good society, and Christians warm one another by *provoking one another to love and to good works*.

(3.) United strength. If an enemy find a man alone, he is likely to *prevail against him*; with his own single strength he cannot make his part good, but, if he have a second, he may do well enough, *two shall withstand him*; "You shall help me against my enemy, and I will help you against your's; according to the agreement between Joab and Abishai, (2 Sam. 10. 11.) and so both are conquerors, whereas, acting separately, both had been conquered; as was said of the ancient Britons, when the Romans invaded them, *Dum singuli pugnabant, universi vincuntur—While they fight in detached parties, they sacrifice the general cause*. In our spiritual warfare we may be helpful to one another as well as in our spiritual work; next to the comfort of communion with God, is that of the communion of saints. He concludes with this proverb, *A threefold cord is not easily broken*, any more than a bundle of arrows, though each single thread and each single arrow is. Two together he compares to a *threefold cord*; for

where two are closely joined in holy love and fellowship, Christ will by his Spirit come to them, and make the third, as he joined himself to the two disciples going to Emmaus, and then there is a *threefold cord* that can never be broken. *They that dwell in love dwell in God, and God in them*.

13. Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.

14. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.

15. I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. 16. There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Solomon was himself a king, and therefore may be allowed to speak more freely than another, concerning the vanity of kingly state and dignity, which he shews here to be an uncertain thing, he had said so, Prov. 27. 24. *The crown doth not endure to every generation*; and his son found it so. Nothing is more slippery than the highest post of honour without wisdom and the people's love.

1. A king is not happy, unless he have wisdom, v. 13, 14. He that is truly wise, prudent, and pious, though he be poor in the world, and very young, and, upon both accounts, despised and little taken notice of, is better, more truly valuable and worthy of respect, is likely to do better for himself, and to be a greater blessing to his generation, than a king, than an old king, a man therefore venerable, both for his gravity and for his dignity, if he be foolish, and knows not how to manage public affairs himself, nor will be admonished and advised by others; who knows not to be admonished, will not suffer any counsel or admonition to be given him; no one about him dares contradict him; he will not hearken to the counsel and admonition that are given him. It is so far from being any part of the honour of kings, that it is the greatest dishonour to them that can be, not to be admonished. Folly and wilfulness commonly go together, and those that most need admonition, can worst bear it; but neither age nor titles will secure men respect, if they have not true wisdom and virtue to recommend them; while wisdom and virtue will gain men honour, even under the disadvantages of youth and poverty.

To prove the *wise child better than the foolish king*, he shews what each of them come to, v. 14. (1.) A poor man by his wisdom comes to be preferred, as Joseph, who, when he was but young, was brought out of prison to be the second man in the kingdom; to which story Solomon seems here to refer. Providence sometimes raises the poor out of the dust to set them among princes, Ps. 113. 7, 8. Wisdom has wrought not only the liberty of men, but their dignity, raised them from the dunghill, from the dungeon, to the throne. (2.) A king by his folly and wilfulness comes to be impoverished; though he was born in his kingdom, came to it by inheritance, though he has lived to be old in it, and has had time to fill his treasures, yet, if he take ill courses, and will no more be admonished as he has been, thinking, because he is old, he is past it, he becomes poor, his treasure is exhausted, and perhaps he is forced to resign his crown, and retire into privacy.

2. A king is not likely to continue, if he have not a confirmed interest in the affections of the people; that is intimated, but somewhat obscurely, in the two last verses. (1.) He that is king must have a successor, a second, a child that shall stand up in his stead; his own, suppose, or perhaps that poor and wise child spoken of, v. 13. Kings, when they grow old, must have the mortification of seeing those that are to jostle them out, and stand up in their stead. (2.) It is common with the people to adore the rising sun; all the living which walk under the sun are with the second child, are in his interests, are conversant with him, and make their court to him more than to the father, whom they look upon as going

off, and despise because his best days are past. Solomon considered this, he saw this to be the disposition of his own people, which appeared immediately after his death, in their complaints of his government, and their affectation of a change. (3.) People are never long easy and satisfied; *There is no end, no rest, of all the people*; they are continually fond of changes, and know not what they would have. (4.) This is no new thing, but it has been the way of all that have been before them; there have been instances of this in every age, even Samuel and David could not always please. (5.) As it has been, so it is like to be still; *They that came after* will be of the same spirit, and *shall not long rejoice in him* whom at first they seemed extremely fond of. To-day, *Hosanna*, to-morrow, *Crucify*. (6.) It cannot but be a great grief to princes, to see themselves thus slighted by those they have studied to oblige, and have depended upon; there is no faith in man, no steadfastness; *This is vanity and vexation of spirit*.

CHAP. V.

Solomon, in this chapter, discourses, I. Concerning the worship of God, prescribing that as a remedy against all those vanities which he had already observed to be in wisdom, learning, pleasure, honour, power, and business. That we may not be deceived by those things, nor have our spirits vexed with the disappointments we meet in them, let us make conscience of our duty to God, and keep up our communion with him; but withal, he gives a necessary caution against the vanities which are too often found in religious exercises, which deprive them of their excellency, and render them unable to help against other vanities. If our religion be a vain religion, how great is that vanity! Let us therefore take heed of vanity, 1. In hearing the word, and offering sacrifice, v. 1. 2. In prayer, v. 2, 3. 3. In making vows, v. 4. 6. 4. In pretending to divine dreams, v. 7. Now, (1.) For a remedy against those vanities, he prescribes the fear of God, v. 7. (2.) To prevent the offence that might arise from the present sufferings of good people, he directs us to look up to God, v. 8. II. Concerning the wealth of this world, and the vanity and vexation that attend it. The fruits of the earth indeed are necessary to the support of life, (v. 9.) but as for silver, and gold, and riches, 1. They are unsatisfying, v. 10. 2. They are unprofitable, v. 11. 3. They are disquieting, v. 12. 4. They often prove hurtful and destroying, v. 13. 5. They are perishing, v. 14. 6. They must be left behind when we die, v. 15, 16. 7. If we have not a heart to make use of them, they occasion a great deal of uneasiness, v. 17. And therefore he recommends to us the comfortable use of that which God has given us, with an eye to him that is the Giver, as the best way both to answer the end of our having it, and to obviate the mischiefs that commonly attend great estates, v. 18. 20. So that, if we can but learn out of this chapter how to manage the business of religion, and the business of this world, (which two take up most of our time,) so that both may turn to a good account, and neither our sabbath-days nor our week-days may be lost, we shall have reason to say, *We have learned two good lessons*.

1. **K**EEP thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. 3. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

Solomon's design in driving us off from the world, by shewing us its vanity, is to drive us to God and to our duty; that we may not walk in the way of the world, but by religious rules, nor depend upon the wealth of the world, but on religious advantages; and therefore,

1. He here sends us to the house of God, to the place of public worship, to the temple, which he himself had built at a vast expence; when he reflected with regret on all his other works, (ch. 2. 4.) he did not repent that, but reflected on it with pleasure; yet mentions it not, lest he should seem to reflect on it with pride; but he here sends those to it that would know more of the vanity of the world, and would find that happiness which is in vain sought for in the creature. David, when he was perplexed, *went into the sanctuary of God*, Ps. 73. 17. Let our disappointments in the creature turn our eyes to the Creator, let us have recourse to the word of God's grace, and consult that, to the throne of his grace,

and solicit that. In the word and prayer there is a balm for every wound.

II. He charges us to behave ourselves well there, that we may not miss of our end in coming thither. Religious exercises are not vain things, but, if we mismanage them, they become vain to us. And therefore,

1. We must address ourselves to them with all possible seriousness and care; "*Keep thy foot*, not keep it back from the house of God, (as Prov. 25. 17.) nor go slowly thither, as one unwilling to draw nigh to God, but *look well to thy goings, ponder the path of thy feet*, lest thou take a false step. Address thyself to the worship of God with a solemn pause, and take time to compose thyself for it, not going about it with precipitation, which is called *hasting with the feet*, Prov. 19. 2. Keep thy thoughts from roving and wandering from the work; keep thy affections from running out toward wrong objects, for in the business of God's house there is work enough for the whole man, and all too little to be employed." Some think it alludes to the charge given to Moses and Joshua, to *put off their shoes*, (Exod. 3. 5. Josh. 5. 15.) in token of subjection and reverence, *Keep thy feet clean*, Exod. 30. 19.

2. We must take heed that the sacrifice we bring be not the sacrifice of fools, of wicked men, for they are fools, and their sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord; (Prov. 15. 8.) that we bring not the torn, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice; for we are plainly told that it will not be accepted, and therefore it is folly to bring it; that we rest not in the sign and ceremony, and the outside of the performance, without regarding the sense and meaning of it, for that is the sacrifice of fools; bodily exercise, if that be all, is a jest; none but fools will think thus to please him who is a Spirit, and requires the heart; and they will see their folly when they find what a great deal of pains they have taken to no purpose for want of sincerity. They are fools, for they consider not that they do evil; they think they are doing God and themselves good service, when really they are putting a great affront upon God, and a great cheat upon their own souls, by their hypocritical devotions. Men may be doing evil, even then when they profess to be doing good, and even then when they do not know it, when they do not consider it. *They know not but to do evil*, so some read it. Wicked minds cannot choose but sin, even in the acts of devotion. Or, *They consider not that they do evil*; they act at a venture, right or wrong, pleasing to God or not, it is all one to them.

3. That we may not bring the sacrifice of fools, we must come to God's house with hearts disposed to know and do our duty. We must be ready to hear. (1.) We must diligently attend to the word of God read and preached; "*Be swift to hear* the exposition which the priests give of the sacrifices, declaring the intent and meaning of them, and do not think it enough to gaze upon what they do, for it must be a reasonable service, otherwise it is the sacrifice of fools." (2.) We must resolve to comply with the will of God as it is made known to us; *hearing is often put for obeying*, and that is it that is better than sacrifice, 1 Sam. 15. 22. Isa. 1. 15, 16. We then come in a right frame to holy duties, when we come with this upon our heart, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears*. Let the word of the Lord come, (said a good man,) and if I had 600 necks I would bow them all to the authority of it.

4. We must be very cautious and considerate in all our approaches and addresses to God; (v. 2.) *Be not rash with thy mouth*, in making either prayers, or protestations, or promises; *let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God*. Note, (1.) When we are in the house of God, in solemn assemblies for religious worship, we are in a special manner before God, and in his presence; there where he has promised to meet his people, where his eye is upon us, and ours' ought to be unto him. (2.) We have something to say, something to utter before God, when we draw nigh to him in holy duties; he is one with whom we have to do, with whom we have business of vast importance. If we come without an errand, we shall go away without any advantage. (3.) What we utter before God must come from the heart, and therefore we must not be rash with our mouth, never let our tongue out-run our thoughts in our devotions; the words of our mouth

must always be the product of the *meditation of our hearts*. Thoughts are words to God, and words are but wind, if they be not copied from the thoughts. Lip-labour, though ever so well laboured, if that be all, is but lost labour in religion, Matth. 15. 8, 9. (4.) It is not enough that what we say comes from the heart, but it must come from a composed heart, and not from a sudden heat or passion. As the mouth must not be rash, so the heart must not be hasty; we must not only think, but think twice, before we speak, when we are to speak either *from God* in preaching, or *to God* in prayer, and not utter any thing indecent and undigested, 1 Cor. 14. 15.

5. We must be sparing of our words in the presence of God, we must be reverent and deliberate; not talk to God as boldly and carelessly as we do to one another, not speak what comes uppermost, not repeat things over and over, as we do to one another, that what we say may be understood and remembered, and may make impression; no, when we speak to God, we must consider,

(1.) That between him and us there is an infinite distance: *God is in heaven*, where he reigns in glory over us and all the children of men, where he is attended with an innumerable company of holy angels, and is *far exalted above all our blessing and praise*. *We are on earth*, the footstool of his throne; we are mean and vile, unlike God, and utterly unworthy to receive any favour from him, or to have any communion with him; therefore we must be very grave, humble, and serious, and be reverent in speaking to him, as we are when we speak to a great man that is much our superior; and, in token of this, *let our words be few*, that they may be *well-chosen*, Job, 9. 14. This does not condemn all long prayers; were they not good, the Pharisees had not used them for a pretence; Christ prayed all night; and we are bid to *continue in prayer*; but it condemns careless, heartless, praying, *vain repetitions*, (Matth. 6. 7.) repeating *Pater-nosters* by tale. Let us speak to God, and of him, in his own words, words which the scripture teaches; and let our words, words of our own invention, be few, lest, not speaking by rule, we speak amiss.

(2.) That the multiplying of words in our devotions will make them *the sacrifices of fools*, v. 3. As confused dreams, frightful and perplexed, and such as disturb the sleep, are an evidence of a hurry of business which fills our head; so, many words, and hasty ones, used in prayer, are an evidence of folly reigning in the heart, ignorance of, and unacquaintedness with, both God and ourselves, low thoughts of God, and careless thoughts of our own souls. Even in common conversation, a *fool is known by the multitude of words*; they that know least talk most, (ek. 10. 11.) particularly in devotion; there, no doubt, *a prating fool shall fall*, (Prov. 10. 8, 10.) shall fall short of acceptance. Those are *fools* indeed who think they *shall be heard*, in prayer, for their much speaking.

4. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than thou shouldest vow and not pay. 6. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it *was* an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? 7. For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there are* also *divers* vanities: but fear thou God. 8. If then seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for *he that is* higher than the highest regardeth; and *there be* higher than they.

Four things we are exhorted to in these verses:

1. To be conscientious in paying our vows. A vow is a bond upon the soul, (Numb. 30. 2.) by which we solemnly oblige ourselves, not only, in general, to do that which we are already bound

to do, but, in some particular instances, to do that to do which we were not under any antecedent obligation, whether it respects honouring God, or serving the interests of his kingdom among men. When, under the sense of some affliction, (Ps. 66. 14.) or in the pursuit of some mercy, (1 Sam. 1. 11.) thou hast vowed such a vow as this *unto God*, know that *thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, and thou canst not go back*; therefore,

1. *Pay it*; perform what thou hast promised, bring to God what thou hast dedicated and devoted to him, *pay that which thou hast vowed*, pay it in full, and *keep not back any part of the price*, pay it in kind, do not *alter it, or change it*, so the law was, Lev. 27. 10. Have we vowed to *give our own selves unto the Lord*? let us, then, be as good as our word, act in his service, to his glory, and not sacrilegiously alienate ourselves.

2. *Defer not to pay it*; if it be in the power of thine hands to pay it to-day, leave it not till to-morrow; do not *beg a day*, nor put it off to a more convenient season. By delay the sense of the obligation slackens and cools, and is in danger of wearing off; we thereby discover a loathness and backwardness to perform our vow; and, *Qui non est hodie, cras minus aptus erit—He who is not inclined to-day, will be averse to-morrow*; the longer it is put off, the more difficult it will be to bring ourselves to it; death may not only prevent the payment, but fetch thee to judgment, under the guilt of a broken vow.

Two reasons are here given why we should speedily and cheerfully pay our vows. (1.) Because otherwise we affront God; we play the fool with him, as if we designed to put a trick upon him; and *God has no pleasure in fools*; (more is implied than is expressed;) the meaning is, He greatly abhors such fools, and such foolish dealings. *Has he need of fools*? No; *Be not deceived, God is not mocked, but will surely and severely reckon with those that thus play fast and loose with him*. (2.) Because otherwise we wrong ourselves, we lose the benefit of the making of the vow, nay, we incur the penalty for the breach of it; so that it had been better a great deal *not to have vowed*, more safe, and more to our advantage, than to *vow and not to pay*. Not to have *vowed* had been but an omission, but to *vow and not pay*, incurs the guilt of treachery and perjury; it is *lying to God*, Acts, 5. 4.

II. To be cautious in making our vows; this is necessary in order to our being conscientious in performing them, v. 6. 1. We must take heed that we never vow any thing that is sinful, or may be an occasion of sin, for such a vow is ill-made, and must be broken. *Suffer not thy mouth, by such a vow, to cause thy flesh to sin*, as Herod's rash promise caused him to cut off the head of John the Baptist. 2. We must not vow that which, through the frailty of the flesh, we have reason to fear we shall not be able to perform; as those that vow a single life, and yet know not how to keep their vow. Hereby, (1.) *They shame themselves*; for they are forced to *say before the angel, It was an error*; that either they did not mean, or did not consider, what they said; and, take it which way you will, it is bad enough. "When thou hast made a *vow*, do not seek to evade it, nor find out excuses to get clear of the obligation of it; *say not before the priest, who is called the angel, or messenger, of the Lord of hosts*, that, upon second thoughts, thou hast changed thy mind, and desirest to be absolved from the obligation of thy *vow*; but stick to it, and do not seek a hole to creep out at." Some by the *angel* understand the *guardian angel*, which they suppose to attend every man, and to inspect what he does. Others understand it of Christ, *the Angel of the covenant*, who is present with his people in their assemblies, who searches the heart, and cannot be imposed upon; *provoke him not, for God's name is in him*, and he is represented as strict and jealous, Excd. 23. 20, 21. (2.) They expose themselves to the wrath of God, for he is *angry at the voice of those that thus lie unto him with their mouth, and flatter him with their tongue*, and is displeased at their dissimulation, and *destroys the works of their hands*, blasts their enterprises, and defeats those purposes which, when they made these vows, they were seeking to God for the success of. If we treacherously cancel the words of our mouths, and revoke our vows, God will justly overthrow our projects, and walk contrary, and at all adventures, with those that

thus walk contrary, and at all adventures, with him. It is a *snares to a man, after vows, to make inquiry.*

III. To keep up the fear of God, v. 7. Many, of old, pretended to have known the mind of God by *dreams*, and were so full of them, that they almost made God's people forget his name by their *dreams*; (Jer. 23. 25, 26.) and many, now, perplex themselves with their frightful or odd dreams, or with other people's dreams, as if they foreboded this or the other disaster; those that heed dreams shall have a multitude of them to fill their heads with; but in them all *there are divers vanities*, as there are in many words, and the more, if we regard them. "They are but like the idle impertinent chat of children and fools, and therefore never heed them, forget them, instead of repeating them, lay no stress upon them, draw no disquieting conclusions from them, but *fear thou God*, have an eye to his sovereign dominion, set him before thee, keep thyself in his love, and be afraid of offending him, and then thou wilt not disturb thyself with foolish dreams." The way not to be dismayed at the signs of heaven, nor afraid of the *idols of the heathen*, is, to *fear God as King of nations*, Jer. 10. 2, 5, 7.

IV. With that to keep down the fear of man, v. 8. "Set God before thee, and then, if *thou seest the oppression of the poor*, thou wilt not *marvel at the matter*, nor find fault with Divine Providence, nor think the worse of the institution of magistracy, when thou seest the ends of it thus perverted, nor of religion, when thou seest it will not secure men from suffering wrong. Observe here,

1. A melancholy sight on earth, and such as cannot but trouble every good man that has a sense of justice and a concern for mankind, to see the *oppression of the poor*, because they are poor, and cannot right themselves, and the *violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province*, oppression under colour of law, and backed with power. The kingdom in general may have a good government, and yet it may so happen that a particular *province* may be committed to a bad man, by whose mal-administration justice may be perverted; so hard it is for the wisest of kings, in giving preferments, to be sure of their men; they can but redress the grievance when it appears.

2. A comfortable sight in heaven. When things look thus dismal, we may satisfy ourselves with this,

(1.) That, though oppressors be *high*, God is *above them*, and in that very thing wherein *they deal proudly*, Exod. 18. 11. God is *higher than the highest* of creatures, than the highest of princes, than the king that is *higher than Agag*, (Numb. 24. 7.) than the highest angels, the *thrones and dominions* of the upper world; God is the *Most High over all the earth*, and his *glory is above the heavens*; before him, princes are worms, the brightest but glow-worms.

(2.) That, though oppressors be secure, God has his eye upon them, takes notice of, and will reckon for, all their violent perverting of judgment; *he regards*, not only sees it, but observes it, and keeps it on record, to be called over again; his *eyes are upon their ways*. See Job, 24. 23.

(3.) That there is a world of angels, for there are *higher than they*, who are employed by the divine justice for protecting the injured, and punishing the injurious. Sennacherib bore himself high upon his potent army, but one angel proved too hard for him and all his forces. Some, by those *that are higher than they*, understand the great council of the nation, the presidents to whom the *princes of the provinces are accountable*, (Dan. 6. 2.) the senate that receive complaints against the proconsuls, the courts above, to which appeals are made from the inferior courts, which are necessary to the good government of a kingdom. Let it be a check to oppressors, that perhaps their superiors on earth may call them to an account; however, God, the Supreme in heaven, will.

9. Moreover the profit of the earth is for all; the king *himself* is served by the field. 10. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor be that loveth abundance with increase: this

is also vanity. 11. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good *is there* to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of *them* with their eyes? 12. The sleep of a labouring man *is sweet*, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. 13. There is a sore evil *which* I have seen under the sun, *namely*, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. 14. But those riches perish by evil travail; and he begetteth a son, and *there is nothing* in his hand. 15. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. 16. And this also *is* a sore evil, *that* in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? 17. All his days also he eateth in darkness, and *he hath* much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

Solomon had shewed the vanity of pleasure, gaiety, and fine works, of honour, power, and royal dignity; and there is many a covetous worldling that will agree with him, and speak as slightly as he does of these things; but money, he thinks, is a substantial thing, and, if he can but have enough of that, he is happy; that is the mistake which Solomon attacks, and attempts to rectify, in these verses; he shews that there is as much vanity in great riches, and the *lust of the eye* about them, as there is in the *lusts of the flesh*, and the *pride of life*; and a man can make himself no more happy by hoarding an estate than by spending it.

I. He grants that the products of the earth, for the support and comfort of human life, are valuable things; (v. 9.) *The profit of the earth is for all*; man's body, being made of the earth, thence has its maintenance; (Job, 28. 5.) and that it has so, and that a *barren land* is not *made his dwelling*, (as he has deserved for being rebellious, Ps. 68. 6.) is an instance of God's great bounty to him. There is *profit to be got out of the earth*, and it is *for all*, all need it, it is appointed for all, there is enough for all; it is not only for all men, but for all the inferior creatures; the same ground brings *grass for the cattle* that brings *herbs for the service of men*. Israel had *bread from heaven*, *angels' food*, but (which is a humbling consideration) the earth is our storehouse, and the beasts fellow-commoners with us. *The king himself is served of the field*, and would be ill-served, would be quite starved, without its products. This puts a great honour upon the husbandman's calling, that it is the most necessary of all other to the support of man's life; the *many* have the benefit of it, the *mighty* cannot live without it; it is *for all*, it is for the *king himself*. Those that have an abundance of the fruits of the earth, must remember *they are for all*, and therefore must look upon themselves but as stewards of their abundance, out of which they must give to those that need; dainty meats and soft clothing are only *for some*, but the *fruit of the earth is for all*. And even those that *suck the abundance of the seas*, (Deut. 33. 19.) cannot be without the fruit of the earth, while those that have a competency of the *fruit of the earth* may despise the *abundance of the seas*.

II. He maintains that the riches that are more than these, that are for hoarding, not for use, are *vain things*, and will not make a man easy or happy. That which our Saviour has said, (Luke, 12. 15.) *that a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses*, is what Solomon here undertakes to prove by divers arguments.

1. The more men have, the more they would have, v. 10. A man may have but a little silver, and be satisfied with it, may know when he has enough, and covet no more. *Godliness, with contentment, is great gain*. *I have enough*, says Jacob; *I have all*, and

abound, says St. Paul: but, (1.) He that *loves silver*, and sets his heart upon it, will never think he has enough, but *enlarges his desire as hell*, (Hab. 2. 5.) *lays house to house and field to field*, (Isa. 5. 8.) and, like the daughters of the horse-leech, still cries, *Give, give*. Natural desires are at rest when that which is desired is obtained, but corrupt desires are insatiable; nature is content with little, grace with less, but lust with nothing. (2.) He that has silver in *abundance*, and has it increasing ever so fast upon him, yet does not find that it yields any solid satisfaction to his soul; there are bodily desires which silver itself will not satisfy; if a man be hungry, ingots of silver will do no more to satisfy his hunger than clods of clay; much less will worldly abundance satisfy spiritual desires; he that has ever so much silver, covets more, not only of that, but of something else, something of another nature. They that make themselves drudges to the world are spending their labour for that which satisfies not, (Isa. 55. 2.) which fills the belly, but will never fill the soul, Ezek. 7. 19.

2. The more men have, the more occasion they have for it, and the more they have to do with it, so that it is as broad as long; *when goods increase, they are increased that eat them*, v. 11. *The more meat, the more mouths*. Does the estate thrive? And does not the family, at the same time, grow more numerous, and the children grow up to need more? The more men have, the better house they must keep, the more servants they must employ, the more guests they must entertain, the more they must give to the poor, and the more they will have hanging on them, for where *the carcase is, the eagles will be*. What we have, more than food and raiment, we have for others; and then *what good is there to the owners themselves*, but the pleasure of beholding them with their eyes? And a poor pleasure it is: an empty speculation is all the difference between the owners and the sharers; the owner sees that as his own, which those about him enjoy as much of the real benefit of as he; only he has the satisfaction of doing good to others, which indeed is a satisfaction to one who believes what Christ said, that it is *more blessed to give than to receive*; but to a covetous man, who thinks all lost that goes beside himself, it is a constant vexation to see others eat of his increase.

3. The more men have, the more care they have about it, which perplexes them, and disturbs their repose; (v. 12.) refreshing sleep is as much the support and comfort of this life as food is. Now, (1.) Those commonly sleep best that work hard, and have but what they work for; *The sleep of the labouring man is sweet*, not only because he has tired himself with his labour, which makes this sleep the more welcome to him, and makes him sleep soundly, but because he has little to fill his head with care about, and so break his sleep. His sleep is sweet, though he eat but little, and have but little to eat, for his weariness rocks him asleep; and, though he eat much, yet he can sleep well, for his labour gets him a good digestion. The sleep of the diligent Christian, and his long sleep, is sweet, for, having spent himself and his time in the service of God, he can cheerfully return to God, and repose in him as his Rest. (2.) Those that have every thing else often fail to secure a good night's sleep; either their eyes are held waking, or their sleeps are unquiet, and do not refresh them; and it is their abundance that breaks their sleep, and disturbs it; both the abundance of their care, (as that rich man's, who, when his ground brought forth plentifully, thought within himself, *What shall I do?* Luke, 12. 17.) and the abundance of what they eat and drink, which overcharges the heart, makes them sick, and so hinders their repose. Ahasuerus, after a banquet of wine, could not sleep; and perhaps consciousness of guilt, both in getting and using what they have, breaks their sleep as much as any thing; but God gives his beloved sleep.

4. The more men have, the more danger they are in, both of doing mischief, and of having mischief done them; (v. 13.) *There is an evil, a sore evil*, which Solomon himself had seen under the sun, in this lower world, this theatre of sin and woe—*riches kept for the owners thereof*, (who have been industrious to hoard them and keep them safe,) to their hurt, they had better have been without them. (1.) Their riches do them hurt, make them proud, secure, and in love with the world, draw away their hearts from

God and duty, and make it very difficult for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven, nay, help to shut them out of it. (2.) They do hurt with their riches, which not only put them into a capacity of gratifying their own lusts, and living luxuriously, but give them an opportunity of oppressing others, and dealing hardly with them. (3.) Often they sustain hurt by their riches; they would not be envied, would not be robbed, if they were not rich. It is the fat beast that is led first to the slaughter. A very rich man (as one observes) has sometimes been excepted out of a general pardon, both as to life and estate, merely on account of his vast and overgrown estate; so riches often take away the life of the owners thereof, Prov. 1. 19.

5. The more men have, the more they have to lose, and perhaps they may lose it all, v. 14. Those riches that have been laid up with a great deal of pains, and kept with a great deal of care, perish by evil travail, by the very pains and care which they take to secure and increase them; many a one has ruined his estate by being over-solicitous to advance it, and make it more, and has lost all by catching at all. Riches are perishing things, and all our care about them cannot make them otherwise; they make themselves wings, and fly away. He that thought he should have made his son a gentleman leaves him a beggar; he begets a son, and brings him up in the prospect of an estate, but, when he dies, leaves it under a charge of debt as much as it is worth, so that there is nothing in his hand. This is a common case; estates that made a great shew do not prove what they seemed, but cheat the heir.

6. How much soever men have when they die, they must leave it all behind them; (v. 15, 16.) *As he came forth of his mother's womb naked, so shall he return*; only as his friends, when he came naked into the world, in pity to him, helped him with swaddling-clothes, so, when he goes out, they help him with grave-clothes, and that is all: see Job, 1. 21. Ps. 49. 17. This is urged as a reason why we should be content with such things as we have, 1 Tim. 6. 7. In respect of the body, we must go as we came, the dust shall return to the earth as it was; but sad is our case if the soul return as it came, for we were born in sin, and, if we die in sin unsanctified, we had better never been born; and that seems to be the case of the worldling here spoken of, for he is said to return in all points as he came, as sinful, as miserable, and much more so. This is a sore evil; he thinks it so, whose heart is glued to the world, that he shall take nothing of his labour which he may carry away in his hand; his riches will not go with him into another world, nor stand him in any stead there. If we labour in religion, the grace and comfort we get by that labour we may carry away in our hearts, and shall be the better for it to eternity; that is meat that endures: but, if we labour only for the world, to fill our hands with that, we cannot take that away with us; we are born with our hands griping, but die with them extended, letting go what we held fast. So that, upon the whole matter, he may well ask, *What profit has he that has laboured for the wind?*

Note, Those that labour for the world labour for the wind; for that which has more sound than substance, which is uncertain, and always shifting its point, unsatisfying, and often hurtful, which we cannot hold fast, and which, if we take up with it as our portion, will no more feed us than the wind, Hos. 12. 1. Men will see that they have laboured for the wind, when, at death, they find the profit of their labour is all gone, gone, like the wind, they know not whither.

7. Those that have much, if they set their hearts upon it, have not only uncomfortable deaths, but uncomfortable lives too, v. 17. This covetous worldling, that is so bent upon raising an estate, all his days he eats in darkness and much sorrow, and it is his sickness and wrath; he has not only no pleasure of his estate, nor any enjoyment of it himself, for he eats the bread of sorrow, (Ps. 127. 2.) but a great deal of vexation to see others eat of it. His necessary expenses make him sick, make him fret, and he seems as if he were angry that himself and those about him cannot live without meat. As we read the last clause, it intimates how ill this covetous worldling can bear the common and unavoidable calamities of

human life; when he is in health, he *eats in darkness*, always dull with care and fear about what he has; but, if he be sick, he *has much sorrow and wrath with his sickness*; he is vexed that his sickness takes him off from his business, and hinders him in his pursuits of the world; vexed that all his wealth will not give him any ease or relief; but especially terrified with the apprehensions of death, (which his diseases are the harbingers of,) of leaving this world, and the things of it, behind him, which he has set his affections upon, and removing to a world he has made no preparation for. He has not any *sorrow after a godly sort*, does not *sorrow to repentance*, but he has *sorrow and wrath*, is angry at the providence of God, angry at his sickness, angry at all about him, fretful and peevish, which doubles his affliction, which a good man lessens and lightens by patience and joy in his sickness.

18. Behold *that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.* 19. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this *is the gift of God.* 20. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth *him* in the joy of his heart.

Solomon, from the vanity of riches hoarded up, here infers, that the best course we can take, is, to use well what we have, to serve God with it, to do good with it, and take the comfort of it to ourselves and our families; this he had pressed before, *ch. 2. 24.—3. 22.* Observe,

1. What it is that is here recommended to us; not to indulge the appetites of the flesh, or to take up with present pleasures or profits for our portion, but soberly and moderately to make use of what Providence has allotted for our comfortable passage through this world. We must not starve ourselves, either through covetousness, because we cannot afford ourselves food convenient, or through eagerness in our worldly pursuits, or through excessive care and grief, but *eat and drink* what is fit for us, to keep our bodies in good plight for the serving of our souls in God's service. We must not kill ourselves with *labour*, and then leave others to *enjoy the good* of it, but take the comfort of that which our hands have laboured for, and that not now and then, but *all the days of our life which God gives us.* Life is God's gift, and he has appointed us the number of the days of our life: (Job, 14. 5.) let us therefore spend those days in *serving the Lord our God with joyfulness and gladness of heart.* We must not do the business of our calling as a drudgery, and make ourselves slaves to it, but we must *rejoice in our labour*, not grasp at more business than we can go through without perplexity and disquiet, but take a pleasure in the calling wherein God has put us, and go on in the business of it with cheerfulness; this is to *rejoice in our labour*, whatever it is, as *Zebulun in his going out, and Issachar in his tents.*

2. What is urged to recommend it to us.

(1.) That it is *good and comely* to do this; it is well, and it looks well; they that cheerfully use what God has given them, thereby honour the Giver, answer the intention of the gift, act rationally and generously, do good in the world, and make what they have turn to the best account, and this is both their credit and their comfort; *it is good and comely*; there is duty and decency in it.

(2.) That it is all the good we can have out of the things of this world; *it is our portion*, and in doing thus we *take our portion*, and make the best of bad. This is our part of our worldly possessions; God must have his part, the poor their's, and our families their's, but this is our's, it is all that falls to our lot out of them.

(3.) That a heart to do thus is such a gift of God's grace as crowns all the gifts of his providence. If God has given a man *riches and wealth*, he completes the favour, and makes that a

blessing indeed, if, withal, he *gives him power to eat thereof*, wisdom and grace to take the good of it, and to do good with it. If this is *God's gift*, we must *covet it earnestly as the best gift* relating to our enjoyments in this world.

(4.) That this is the way to make our own lives easy, and to relieve ourselves against the many toils and troubles which our lives on earth are incident to; (v. 20.) *He shall not much remember the days of his life*, the days of his sorrow and sore travail, his working days, his weeping days; he shall either forget them, or remember them as waters that pass away; he shall not much lay to heart his crosses, nor long retain the bitter relish of them, *because God answers him in the joy of his heart*, balances all the grievances of his labour with the joy of it, and recompenses him for it, by giving him to *eat the labour of his hands.* If he does not answer all his desires and expectations, in the letter of them, yet he answers them with that which is more than equivalent, *in the joy of his heart.* A cheerful spirit is a great blessing; it makes the yoke of our employments easy, and the burthen of our afflictions light.

CHAP. VI.

In this chapter, I. The royal preacher goes on further to shew the vanity of worldly wealth, when men place their happiness in it, and are eager and inordinate in laying it up. Riches, in the hands of a man that is wise and generous, are good for something; but, in the hands of a sordid, sneaking, covetous, miser, they are good for nothing. 1. He takes an account of the possessions and enjoyments which such a man may have. He has wealth, (v. 2.) he has children to inherit it, (v. 3.) and lives long, v. 3, 6. 2. He describes his folly in not taking the comfort of it; he has no power to eat of it, lets strangers devour it, is never filled with good, and, at last, has no burial, v. 2, 3. 3. He condemns it as an evil, a common evil, vanity, and a disease, v. 1, 2. 4. He prefers the condition of a still-born child before the condition of such a one, v. 3. The still-born child's infelicity is only negative, (v. 4, 5.) but that of the covetous worldling is positive; he lives a great while, to see himself miserable, v. 6. 5. He shews the vanity of riches, as pertaining only to the body, and giving no satisfaction to the mind, (v. 7, 8.) and of those boundless desires with which covetous people vex themselves, (v. 9.) which, if they be gratified ever so fully, leave a man but a man still, v. 10. II. He concludes this discourse, of the vanity of the creature, with this plain inference from the whole, That it is folly to think of making up a happiness for ourselves in the things of this world, v. 11, 12. Our satisfaction must be in another life, not in this.

1. **T**HERE is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: 2. A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this *is vanity*, and it *is an evil disease.* 3. If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also *that he have no burial*; I say, *that an untimely birth is better than he.* 4. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. 5. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known *any thing*: this hath more rest than the other. 6. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice *told*, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place!

Solomon had shewed, in the close of the foregoing chapter, how good it is to make a comfortable use of the gifts of God's providence; now here he shews the evil of the contrary, having, and not using, gathering to lay up for I know not what contingent emergencies to come, not to lay out on the most urgent occasions present; this is *an evil which Solomon himself saw under the sun*, v. 1. A great deal of evil there is *under the sun*; there is a world above the sun, where there is no evil, yet God *causes his sun to shine upon the evil* as well as upon the good, which is an aggrava-

tion of the evil. God has lighted up a candle for his servants to work by, but they bury their talent as slothful and unprofitable, and so waste the light, and are unworthy of it. Solomon, as a king, inspected the manners of his subjects, and took notice of this evil as a prejudice to the public, who are damaged, not only by men's prodigality on the one hand, but by their penuriousness on the other; as it is with the blood in the natural body, so it is with the wealth of the body politic; if, instead of circulating, it stagnates, it will be of ill consequence. Solomon, as a preacher, observed the evils that were done, that he might reprove them and warn people against them. This evil was, in his days, common, and yet then there was great plenty of silver and gold, which, one would think, should have made people less fond of riches; the times also were peaceable, nor was there any prospect of trouble, which to some is a temptation to hoard; but no providence will of itself, unless the grace of God work with it, cure the corrupt affection that is in the carnal mind to the world and the things of it; nay, when *riches increase*, we are most apt to set our hearts upon them. Now concerning this miser, observe,

I. The abundant reason he has to serve God with joyfulness and gladness of heart; how well God has done for him;

1. He has given him riches, wealth, and honour, v. 2. Note, (1.) *Riches and wealth* commonly gain people honour among men. Though it be but an image, if it be a golden image, all people, nations, and languages, will fall down, and worship it. (2.) *Riches, wealth, and honour*, are God's gifts, the gifts of his providence, and not given, as his rain and sunshine, alike to all, but to some, and not to others, as God sees fit. (3.) Yet they are given to many that do not make a good use of them, to many to whom God does not give wisdom and grace to take the comfort of them, and serve God with them. The gifts of common providence are bestowed on many to whom are denied the gifts of special grace without which the gifts of providence often do more hurt than good.

2. He wants nothing for his soul, of all that he desires. Providence has been so liberal to him, that he has as much as heart could wish, and more, Ps. 73. 7. He does not desire grace for his soul, the better part; all he desires, is, enough to gratify the sensual appetite, and that he has, his belly is filled with these hid treasures, Ps. 17. 14.

3. He is supposed to have a numerous family, to beget a hundred children, which are the stay and strength of his house, and as a quiver full of arrows to him, which are the honour and credit of his house, and in whom he has the prospect of having his name built up, and having all the immortality this world can give him. They are full of children, (Ps. 17. 14.) while many of God's people are written childless, and stript of all.

4. To complete his happiness, he is supposed to live many years, or rather many days, for our life is to be reckoned rather by days than years; the days of his years are many, and so healthful is his constitution, and so slowly does age creep upon him, that they are likely to be many more. Nay, he is supposed to live a thousand years twice told, a small part of which time, one would think, were enough to convince men, by their own experience, of the folly both of those that expect to find all good in worldly wealth, and of those that expect to find any good in it but in using it.

II. The little heart he has to use this which God gives him, for the ends and purposes for which it was given him. This is his fault and folly, that he renders not again according to the benefit done unto him, and serves not the Lord God, his Benefactor, with joyfulness and gladness of heart, in the abundance of all things: in the day of prosperity he is not joyful. *Tristis es, et felix?—Art thou happy, yet sad? See his folly:*

1. He cannot find in his heart to take the comfort of what he has himself. He has meat before him, he has wherewith to maintain himself and his family comfortably, but he has not power to eat thereof; his sordid niggardly temper will not suffer him to lay it out, no not upon himself, no not upon that which is most necessary for himself. He has not power to reason himself out of this absurdity, to conquer his covetous humour. He is weak

indeed, who has not power to use what God gives him, for God gives him not that power, but withholds it from him, to punish him for his other abuses of his wealth; because he has not the will to serve God with it, God denies him the power to serve himself with it.

2. He suffers those to prey upon him, that he is under no obligations to; *A stranger eateth it*. This is the common fate of misers, they will not trust their own children, perhaps; but retainers and hangers on, that have the art of wheedling, insinuate themselves into them, and find ways of devouring what they have, or getting it to be left to them by their wills. God orders it so that *a stranger eats it; strangers devour his strength*, Hos. 7. 9. Prov. 5. 10. This may be well called *vanity, and an evil disease*. What we have we have in vain, if we do not use it; and that temper of mind is certainly a most wretched distemper, which keeps us from using it. Our worst diseases are those from the corruption of our own hearts.

3. He deprives himself of the good that he might have had of his worldly possessions; not only forfeits it, but robs himself of it, and throws it from him; *His soul is not filled with good*, v. 3. He is still unsatisfied and uneasy. His hands are filled with riches, his barns filled, and his bags filled, but *his soul is not filled with good*, no, not with that good, for it is still craving more. Nay, (v. 6.) *he has not seen good*, he cannot so much as please his eye, for that is still looking further, and looking with envy on those that have more. He has not even the sensible good of an estate. Though he looks not beyond the things that are seen, yet he looks not with any true pleasure even on them.

4. He has no burial, none agreeable to his rank, no decent burial, but *the burial of an ass*; either through the sordidness of his temper he will not allow himself a fashionable burial, but forbids it, or the strangers that have eaten him up leave him so poor, at last, that he has not wherewithal, or those to whom he leaves what he has have so little esteem for his memory, and are so greedy of what they are to have from him, that they will not be at the charges of burying him handsomely, which his own children, if he had left it to them, would not have grudged him.

III. The preference which the preacher gives to an untimely birth before him; *An untimely birth*, a child that is carried from the womb to the grave is better than he. Better is the fruit that drops from the tree before it is ripe, than that which is left to hang on till it is rotten. Job, in his passion, thinks the condition of an untimely birth better than his, when he was in adversity; (Job, 3. 16.) but Solomon here pronounces it better than the condition of a worldling in his greatest prosperity, when the world smiles upon him.

1. He grants the condition of an untimely birth, upon many accounts, to be very sad; (v. 4. 5.) *He comes in with vanity*, for, as to this world, he that is born, and dies immediately, was born in vain, and he *departs in darkness*, little or no notice is taken of him; being an abortive, he has no name, or, if he had, it would soon be forgotten and buried in oblivion, it would be covered with darkness, as the body is with the earth. Nay, (v. 5.) *he has not seen the sun*, but from the darkness of the womb he is hurried immediately to that of the grave, and, which is worse than not being known to any, he has not known any thing, and therefore has come short of that which is the greatest pleasure and honour of man. Those that live in wilful ignorance, and know nothing to purpose, are no better than an untimely birth that has not seen the sun, nor known any thing.

2. Yet he prefers it before that of a covetous miser; *this untimely birth has more rest than the other*, for *this* has some rest, but *the other* has none; *this* has no trouble and disquiet, but *the other* is in perpetual agitation, and has nothing but trouble, trouble of his own making. The shorter the life is, the longer the rest; and the fewer the days, and the less we have to do with this troublesome world, the less trouble we know.

'Tis better die a child at four,
Than live, and die so at fourscore.

The reason he gives why *this* has more rest, is, because all go

to one place to rest in, and this is sooner at his rest, v. 6. He that lives a thousand years goes to the same place with the child that does not live an hour, ch. 3. 20. The grave is the place we shall all meet in. Whatever differences there may be in men's condition in this world, they must all die, are all under the same sentence, and, to outward appearance, their deaths are alike. The grave is, to one as well as another, a land of silence, of darkness, of separation from the living, and a sleeping-place. It is the common rendezvous of rich and poor, honourable and mean, learned and unlearned; the short-lived and long-lived meet in the grave, only one rides post thither, the other goes by a slower conveyance; the dust of both mingle, and lie undistinguished.

7. All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. 8. For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living? 9. Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit. 10. That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.

The preacher here further shews the vanity and folly of heaping up worldly wealth, and expecting happiness in it.

1. How much soever we toil about the world, and get out of it, we can have for ourselves no more than a maintenance; (v. 7.) *All the labour of man is for his mouth, which craves it of him;* (Prov. 16. 26.) it is but *food and raiment*, what is more, others have, not we; it is all for the mouth; meats are but for the belly, and the belly for meats, there is nothing for the head and heart, nothing to nourish or enrich the soul. A little will serve to sustain us comfortably, and a great deal can do no more.

2. Those that have ever so much, are still craving; let a man labour ever so much for his mouth, yet the appetite is not filled. (1.) Natural desires are still returning, still pressing; a man may have feasted to-day, and yet hungry to-morrow. (2.) Worldly sinful desires are insatiable, ch. 5. 10. Wealth to a worldly man is like drink to one in a dropsy, which does but increase the thirst. Some read the whole verse thus; *Though all a man's labour fall out to his own mind, (ori ejus obveniat—so as to correspond with his views, Juv.)* just as himself would have it, yet his desire is not satisfied, still he has a mind to something more. (3.) The desires of the soul find nothing in the wealth of the world to give them any satisfaction. *The soul is not filled*, so the word is. When God gave Israel their request, he sent leanness into their souls, Ps. 106. 15. He was a fool, who, when his barns were full, said, *Soul, take thine ease*.

3. A fool may have as much worldly wealth, and may enjoy as much of the pleasure of it, as a wise man; nay, and perhaps not be so sensible of the vexation of it; *What has the wise more than the fool?* v. 8. Perhaps he has not so good an estate, so good a trade, nor such good preferment, as the fool has. Nay, suppose them to be equal in their possessions, what can a wise man, a scholar, a wit, a politician, squeeze out of his estate more than needful supplies? But a half-witted man may do this. A fool can fare as well and relish it, can dress as well, and make as good a figure in any public appearance, as a wise man; so that if there were not pleasures and honour peculiar to the mind, which the wise man has more than the fool, as to this world they would be upon a level.

4. Even a poor man, who has business, and is discreet, diligent and dexterous, in the management of it, may get as comfortably through this world as he that is loaded with an overgrown estate. Consider what the poor has less than the rich, if he but knows to walk before the living, knows how to conduct himself decently, and do his duty to all, how to get an honest livelihood by his labour, how to spend his time well, and improve his opportunities. What has he? Why, he is better beloved, and more respected, among his neighbours, and has a better interest, than many a rich man that is griping and haughty. What has he? Why he has as

much of the comfort of this life, has food and raiment, and is therewith content, and so is as truly rich as he that has abundance.

5. The enjoyment of what we have cannot but be acknowledged more rational than a greedy grasping at more; (v. 9.) *Better is the sight of the eyes*, making the best of that which is present, than the wandering of the desire, the uneasy walking of the soul after things at a distance, and the affecting of a variety of imaginary satisfactions. He is much happier that is always content, though he has ever so little, than he that is always coveting, though he has ever so much. We cannot say, *Better is the sight of the eyes than the fixing of the desire upon God*, and the resting of the soul in him; it is better to live by faith in things to come than to live by sense, which dwells only upon present things; but *better is the sight of the eyes than the roving of the desire after the world*, and the things of it, than which nothing more uncertain nor more unsatisfying at the best. *This wandering of the desire is vanity and vexation of spirit*; it is vanity at the best; if what is desired be obtained, it proves not what we promised ourselves from it, but commonly the wandering desire is crossed and disappointed, and then it turns to vexation of spirit.

6. Our lot, whatever it is, is that which is appointed us by the counsel of God, which cannot be altered, and it is therefore our wisdom to reconcile ourselves to it, and cheerfully to acquiesce in it; (v. 10.) *That which has been*, or, as some read it, *that which is*, and so likewise that which shall be, is named already, it is already determined in the divine foreknowledge, and all our care and pains cannot make it otherwise than as it is fixed; *Jaeta est alea—The die is cast*; it is therefore folly to quarrel with that which will be as it is, and wisdom to make a virtue of necessity. We shall have what pleases God, and let that please us.

7. Whatever we attain to in this world, still we are but men, and the greatest possessions and preferments cannot set us above the common accidents of human life; *That which has been*, and is, that busy animal that makes such a stir and such a noise in the world, is named already; he that made him gave him his name, and it is known that it is man, that is his name by which he must know himself, and it is a humbling name, Gen. 5. 2. He called their name Adam; and all theirs have the same character, *red earth*. Though a man could make himself master of all the treasures of kings and provinces, yet he is a man still, mean, mutable, and mortal, and may at any time be involved in the calamities that are common to men. It is good for rich and great men to know and consider that they are but men, Ps. 9. 20. *It is known that they are but men*; let them put what face they will upon it, and, like the king of Tyre, set their heart as the heart of God, yet the Egyptians are men, and not gods, and it is known that they are so.

8. How far soever our desires wander, and how closely soever our endeavours keep pace with them, we cannot strive with the Divine Providence, but must submit to the disposals of it, whether we will or no. If it is man, he may not contend with him that is mightier than he; it is presumption to arraign God's proceedings, and to charge him with folly or iniquity; nor is it to any purpose to complain of him, for he is in one mind, and who can turn him? Elihu pacifies Job with this incontestable principle, *That God is greater than man*, (Job, 33. 12.) and therefore man may not contend with him, nor resist his judgments, when they come with commission. A man cannot with the greatest riches make his part good against the arrests of sickness or death, but must yield to his fate.

11. Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? 12. For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

Here, 1. Solomon lays down his conclusion, which he had undertaken to prove, as that which was fully confirmed by the foregoing discourse; *There be many things that increase vanity; the*

Life of man is vain, at the best, and there are abundance of accidents that concur to make it more so; even that which pretends to increase the wealth and pleasure, does but increase the vanity, and make it more vexatious.

2. He draws some inferences from it, which serve further to evince the truth of it.

(1.) That a man is never the nearer to true happiness for the abundance that he has in this world; *What is man the better for his wealth and pleasure, his honour and preferment? What remains to man? What residuum has he, what overplus, what real advantage, when he comes to balance his accounts? Nothing that will do him any good, or turn to account.*

(2.) That we do not know what to wish for, because that which we promise ourselves most satisfaction in, often proves most vexatious to us; *Who knows what is good for a man in this life, where every thing is vanity, and any thing, even that which we most covet, may prove a calamity to us? Thoughtful people are in care to do every thing for the best, if they knew it; but as it is an instance of the corruption of our hearts, that we are apt to desire that as good for us which is really hurtful, as children that cry for knives to cut their fingers with; so is it an instance of the vanity of this world, that what, according to all probable conjectures, seems to be for the best, often proves otherwise; such is our short-sightedness concerning the issues and events of things, and such broken reeds are all our creature-confidences. We know not how to advise others for the best, nor how to act ourselves, because that which we apprehend likely to be for our welfare may become a trap.*

(3.) That therefore our life upon earth is what we have no reason to take any great complacency in, or to be confident of the continuance of; it is to be reckoned by *days*, it is but a *vain life*, and we spend it as a *shadow*, so little is there in it substantial, so fleeting, so uncertain, so transitory, is it, and so little in it to be fond of, or to be depended on. If all the comforts of life be vanity, life itself can have no great reality in it, to constitute a happiness for us.

(4.) That our expectations from this world are as uncertain and deceitful as our enjoyments are. Since every thing is vanity, *Who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun? He can no more please himself with the hopes of what shall be after him, to his children and family, than with the relish of what is with him, since he can neither foresee himself, nor can any one else foretell to him, what shall be after him; nor shall he have any intelligence sent him of it when he is gone; his sons come to honour, and he knows it not; so that, look which way we will, Vanity of vanity, all is vanity.*

CHAP. VII.

Solomon had given many proofs and instances of the vanity of this world and the things of it; now, in this chapter, I. He recommends to us some good means proper to be used for the redress of these grievances, and the arming of ourselves against the mischief we are in danger of from them, that we may make the best of the bad. As, 1. Care of our reputation, v. 1. 2. Seriousness, v. 2..6. 3. Calmness of spirit, v. 7..10. 4. Prudence in the management of all our affairs, v. 11,12. 5. Submission to the will of God in all events, accommodating ourselves to every condition, v. 13..15. 6. A conscientious avoiding of all dangerous extremes, v. 16..18. 7. Mildness and tenderness toward those that have been injurious to us, v. 19..22. In short, the best way to sure ourselves from the vexation which the vanity of the world creates us, is, to keep our temper, and to maintain a strict government of our passions. II. He laments his own iniquity, as that which was more vexatious than any of these vanities, that mystery of iniquity, the having of many wives, by which he was drawn away from God and his duty, v. 23..29.

1. **A** GOOD name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. 2. *It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men: and the living will lay it to his heart.* 3. *Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.* 4. The heart of

the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. 5. *It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.* 6. *For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.*

In these verses, Solomon lays down some great truths, which seem paradoxes to the unthinking part, that is, the far greatest part, of mankind.

I. That the honour of virtue is really more valuable and desirable than all the wealth and pleasure in this world; (v. 1.) *A good name is before good ointment*, so it may be read; it is preferable to it, and will be rather chosen by all that are wise. *Good ointment* is here put for all the profits of the earth, among the products of which oil was reckoned one of the most valuable, for all the delights of sense, for *ointment and perfume*, which *rejoice the heart*, and it is called *the oil of gladness*, nay, and for the highest titles of honour with which men are dignified, for kings are anointed. *A good name is better than all riches*; (Prov. 22. 1.) a name for wisdom and goodness with those that are wise and good—*the memory of the just*; this is a good that will bring a more grateful pleasure to the mind, will give a man a larger opportunity of usefulness, and will go further, and last longer, than the most *precious box of ointment*; for Christ paid Mary for her ointment with a *good name*, a name in the gospels, (Matth. 26. 13.) and we are sure he always pays with advantage.

II. That, all things considered, our going out of the world is a greater kindness to us than our coming into the world was; *The day of death is preferable to the birth-day*; though, as to others, there was joy *when a child was born into the world*, and where there is death, there is lamentation, yet, as to ourselves, if we have lived so as to merit a *good name, the day of our death*, which will put a period to our cares, and toils, and sorrows, and remove us to rest, and joy, and eternal satisfaction, *is better than the day of our birth*, which ushered us into a world of so much sin and trouble, vanity and vexation. We were born to uncertainty, but a good man does not die at uncertainty. *The day of our birth* clogged our souls with the burthen of the flesh, but *the day of our death* will set them at liberty from that burthen.

III. That it will do us more good to go to a funeral than to go to a festival; (v. 2.) *It is better to go to the house of mourning, and there weep with them that weep, than to go to the house of feasting, to a wedding, or a wake, there to rejoice with them that do rejoice.* It will do us more good, and make better impressions upon us. We may lawfully go to both, as there is occasion; our Saviour both feasted at the wedding of his friend in Cana, and wept at the grave of his friend in Bethany; and we may possibly both glorify God, and do good, and get good, in the house of feasting; but, considering how we are apt to be vain and frothy, proud and secure, and indulgent of the flesh, *it is better for us to go to the house of mourning*, not to see the pomp of the funeral, but to share in the sorrow of it, and to learn good lessons, both from the dead, who is going thence to his long home, and from the mourners, who go about the streets.

The uses to be gathered from *the house of mourning*, are, 1. By way of information; *That is the end of all men; it is the end of man as to this world*, a final period to his state here, he shall return no more to his house; *it is the end of all men*; all have sinned, and therefore *death passes upon all*; we must thus be left by our friends as the mourners are, and thus leave, as the dead do. What is the lot of others will be our's; the cup is going round, it will come to our turn to pledge it shortly. 2. By way of admonition: *The living will lay it to his heart.* Will they? It were well if they would; they that are spiritually alive *will lay it to heart*, and, as for all the survivors, one would think they should; it is their own fault if they do not; for nothing is more easy and natural than by the death of others to be put in mind of our own. Some perhaps *will lay that to heart*, and *consider their latter end*, who would not lay a good sermon to heart.

For the further proof of this, (v. 4.) he makes it the character, (1.) Of a wise man, that his heart is *in the house of mourning*; he is much conversant with mournful subjects; and it is both an evidence and a furtherance of his wisdom; *the house of mourning* is the wise man's school, where he has learned many a good lesson, and there, where he is serious, he is in his element. When he is *in the house of mourning*, his heart is there, to improve the spectacles of mortality that are presented to him; nay, when he is *in the house of feasting*, his heart is *in the house of mourning*, by way of sympathy with those that are in sorrow.

(2.) It is the character of a fool, that his heart is *in the house of mirth*; his heart is all upon it, to be merry and jovial, his whole delight is in sport and gaiety, in merry stories, merry songs, and merry company, merry days, and merry nights. If he be at any time *in the house of mourning*, he is under a restraint, his heart at the same time is *in the house of mirth*; this is his folly, and helps to make him more and more foolish.

IV. That gravity and seriousness better become us, and are better for us, than mirth and jollity, v. 3. The common proverb says, "An ounce of mirth is worth a pound of sorrow;" but the preacher teaches us a contrary lesson; *Sorrow is better than laughter*, more agreeable to our present state, where we are daily sinning, and suffering ourselves, more or less, and daily seeing the sins and sufferings of others. While we are in a vale of tears, we should conform to the temper of the climate: it is also more for our advantage, *for by the sadness that appears in the countenance, the heart is often made better*. Note, 1. That is best for us which is best for our souls, by which *the heart is made better*, though it be displeasing to sense. 2. Sadness is often a happy means of seriousness, and that affliction which is impairing to the health, estate, and family, may be improving to the mind, and make such impressions upon that, as may alter its temper very much for the better; may make it humble and meek, loose from the world, penitent for sin, and careful of duty. *Vexatio dat intellectum—Vexation sharpens the intellect. Perissem nisi perissem—I had perished, if I had not been made wretched*. It will follow, on the contrary, that *by the mirth and frolicsomeness of the countenance the heart is made worse*, more vain, carnal, sensual, and secure, more in love with the world, and more estranged from God and spiritual things, (Job, 21. 12, 14.) till it become utterly unconcerned in the afflictions of Joseph, as those, Amos, 6. 5, 6, and the king and Haman, Esth. 3. 15.

V. That it is much better for us to have our corruptions mortified by *the rebuke of the wise* than to have them gratified by *the song of fools*, v. 5. Many that would be very well pleased to hear the information of the wise, and much more to have their commendations and consolations, yet do not care for *hearing their rebukes*, that is, care not for being told of their faults, though ever so wisely; but therein they are no friends to themselves, for *reproofs of instruction are the way of life*, (Prov. 6. 23.) and though they be not so pleasant as *the song of fools*, they are more wholesome. To hear, not only with patience, but with pleasure, *the rebuke of the wise*, is a sign and means of wisdom; but to be fond of *the song of fools*, is a sign that the mind is vain, and is the way to make it more so. And what an absurd thing it is for a man to dote so much upon such a transient pleasure as *the laughter of a fool* is, which may fitly be compared to the burning of thorns under a pot, which makes a great noise, and a great blaze, for a little while, but is gone presently, scatters its ashes, and contributes scarcely any thing to the production of a boiling heat, for that requires a constant fire! *The laughter of a fool* is noisy and flashy, and is not an instance of true joy. *This is also vanity*, it deceives men to their destruction, for *the end of that mirth is heaviness*. Our blessed Saviour has read us our doom; *Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh; woe to you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep*, Luke, 6. 21, 25.

7. Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad: and a gift destroyeth the heart. 3. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

9. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools. 10. Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.

Solomon had often complained before of the oppressions which he saw under the sun, which gave occasion for many melancholy speculations, and were a great discouragement to virtue and piety.

Now here,

I. He grants the temptation to be strong; (v. 7.) *Surely*, it is often too true, that *oppression makes a wise man mad*. If a wise man be much and long oppressed, he is very apt to speak and act unlike himself, to lay the reins on the neck of his passions, and break out into indecent complaints against God and man, or to make use of unlawful dishonourable means of relieving himself. *The righteous*, when the rod of the wicked rests long on their lot, are in danger of putting forth their hands to iniquity, Ps. 125. 3. When even wise men have unreasonable hardships put upon them, they have much ado to keep their temper, and to keep their place. *It destroys the heart of a gift*, so the latter clause may be read; even the generous heart that is ready to give gifts, and a gracious heart that is endowed with many excellent gifts, is destroyed by being oppressed. We should therefore make great allowances to those that are abused, and ill-dealt with, and not be severe in our censures of them, though they do not act so discreetly as they should; we know not what we should do if it were our own case.

II. He argues against it; let us not fret at the power and success of oppressors, nor be envious at them, for,

1. The character of oppressors is very bad, so some understand v. 7. If he that had the reputation of a wise man, becomes an oppressor, he becomes a mad man, his reason is departed from him, he is no better than a roaring lion and a ranging bear, and the gifts, the bribes, he takes, the gains he seems to reap by his oppressions, do but destroy his heart, and quite extinguish the poor remains of sense and virtue in him, and therefore he is rather to be pitied than envied; let him alone, and he will act so foolishly, and drive so furiously, that in a little time he will ruin himself.

2. The issue, at length, will be good; *Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof*; by faith see what the end will be, and with patience expect it. When proud men begin to oppress their poor honest neighbours, they think their power will bear them out in it, they doubt not but to carry the day, and gain the point; but it will prove better in the end than it seemed in the beginning, their power will be broken, their wealth gotten by oppression will be wasted and gone, they will be humbled and brought down, and reckoned with for their injustice, and oppressed innocency will be both relieved and recompensed. *Better was the end of Moses's treaty with Pharaoh*, that proud oppressor, when Israel was brought forth with triumph, than the beginning of it, when the tale of bricks was doubled, and every thing looked discouraging.

He arms us against it with some necessary directions. If we would not be driven mad by oppression, but preserve the possession of our own souls,

1. We must be clothed with humility; *for the proud in spirit* are they that cannot bear to be trampled upon, but grow outrageous, and fret themselves, when they are hardly bested; that will break a proud man's heart which will not break a humble man's sleep. Mortify pride, therefore, and a lowly spirit will easily be reconciled to a low condition.

2. We must put on patience; *bearing patience*, to submit to the will of God in the affliction, and *waiting patience*, to expect the issue in God's due time. *The patient in spirit* are here opposed to the proud in spirit, for where there is humility, there will be patience; those will be thankful for any thing, who own they deserve nothing at God's hand; and the patient are said to be better than the proud, they are more easy to themselves, more acceptable to others, and more likely to see a good issue of their troubles.

3. We must govern our passion with wisdom and grace; (v. 9.) *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry*; those that are hasty in their

expectations, and cannot brook delays, are apt to be angry if they be not immediately gratified; "Be not angry at proud oppressors, or any that are the instruments of your trouble." (1.) "Be not soon angry, not quick in apprehending an affront, and resenting it, nor forward to express your resentments of it." (2.) "Be not long angry;" for though anger may come into the bosom of a wise man, and pass through it as a way-faring man, it rests only in the bosom of fools, there it resides, there it remains, there it has the innermost and uppermost place, there it is hugged as that which is dear, and laid in the bosom, and not easily parted with. He therefore that would approve himself so wise as not to give place to the Devil, must not let the sun go down upon his wrath, Eph. 4. 26, 27.

4. We must make the best of that which is; (v. 10.) "Take it not for granted that the former days were better than these, nor inquire what is the cause that they were so, for therein thou dost not inquire wisely, since thou inquirest into the reason of the thing before thou art sure that the thing itself is true; and besides, thou art so much a stranger to the times past, and such an incompetent judge even of the present times, that thou canst not expect a satisfactory answer to the inquiry, and therefore thou dost not inquire wisely; nay, the supposition is a foolish reflection upon the providence of God in the government of the world." Note, (1.) It is folly to cry out of the badness of our own times, when we have more reason to cry out of the badness of our own hearts, (if men's hearts were better, the times would mend,) and when we have more reason to be thankful that they are not worse, but that even in the worst of times we enjoy many mercies, which help to make them not only tolerable, but comfortable. (2.) It is folly to cry up the goodness of former times, so as to derogate from the mercy of God to us in our own times; as if former ages had not the same things to complain of that we have, or if, perhaps, in some respects, they had not, yet as if God had been unjust and unkind to us in casting our lot in an iron age, compared with the golden ages that went before us; this arises from nothing but fretfulness and discontent, and an aptness to pick quarrels with God himself. We are not to think there is any universal decay in nature, or degeneracy in morals; God has been always good, and men always bad; and if, in some respects, the times are now worse than they have been, perhaps, in other respects, they are better.

11. Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. 12. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it. 13. Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which he hath made crooked? 14. In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over-against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. 15. All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness. 16. Be not righteous over-much, neither make thyself over-wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself? 17. Be not over-much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time? 18. It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. 19. Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city. 20. For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and

sinneth not. 21. Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: 22. For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

Solomon, in these verses, recommends wisdom to us as the best antidote against those distempers of mind, which we are liable to, by reason of the vanity and vexation of spirit that there are in the things of this world.

Here are some of the praises and the precepts of wisdom.

1. The praises of wisdom. Many things are here said, in its commendation, to engage us to get and retain wisdom.

1. Wisdom is necessary to the right managing and improving of our worldly possessions; *Wisdom is good with an inheritance*: an inheritance is good for little without wisdom. Though a man have a great estate, though it come easily to him, by descent from his ancestors, if he have not wisdom to use it for the end for which he has it, he had better have been without it. Wisdom is not only good for the poor, to make them content and easy, but it is good for the rich too, good with riches to keep a man from getting hurt by them, and to enable a man to do good with them. *Wisdom is good of itself*, and makes a man useful; but if he have a good estate with it, that will put him into a greater capacity of being useful, and with his wealth he may be more serviceable to his generation, than he could have been without it; he will also *make friends to himself*, Luke, 16. 9. *Wisdom is as good as an inheritance, yea, better too*, so the margin reads it; it is more our own, more our honour, will make us greater blessings, will remain longer with us, and turn to a better account.

2. It is of great advantage to us throughout the whole course of our passage through this world; *by it there is real profit to them that see the sun*, both to those that have it, and to their contemporaries. It is pleasant to see the sun, (ch. 11. 7.) but that pleasure is not comparable to the pleasure of wisdom. The light of this world is an advantage to us in doing the business of this world; (John, 11. 9.) but to them that have that advantage, unless withal they have wisdom wherewith to manage their business, that advantage is worth little to them. The clearness of the eye of the understanding is of greater use to us than bodily eye-sight.

3. It contributes much to our safety, and is a shelter to us from the storms of trouble, and its scorching heat; it is a shadow, so the word is, *as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land*. *Wisdom is a defence, and money, that is, as money is a defence*. As a rich man makes his wealth, so a wise man makes his wisdom, a strong city. In the shadow of wisdom, (so the words run,) and in the shadow of money, there is safety. He puts wisdom and money together, to confirm what he had said before, that *wisdom is good with an inheritance*. Wisdom is as a wall, and money may serve as a thorn-hedge, which protects the field.

4. It is joy and true happiness to a man. This is the excellency of knowledge, divine knowledge, not only above money, but above wisdom too, human wisdom, the wisdom of this world, that it gives life to them that have it. The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and that is life, it prolongs life. Men's wealth exposes their lives, but their wisdom protects them. Nay, whereas wealth will not lengthen out the natural life, true wisdom will give spiritual life, the earnest of eternal life; so much better is it to get wisdom than gold!

5. It will put strength into a man, and be his stay and support; (v. 19.) *Wisdom strengthens the wise*, strengthens their spirits, and makes them bold and resolute, by keeping them always on sure grounds; it strengthens their interest, and gains them friends and reputation; it strengthens them for their services under their sufferings, and against the attacks that are made upon them, more than ten mighty men, great commanders, strengthen the city. They that are truly wise and good are taken under God's protection, and are safer there than if ten of the mightiest men in the city, men of the greatest power and interest, should undertake to secure them, and become their patrons.

II. Some of the precepts of wisdom, that wisdom which will be of so much advantage to us.

1. We must have an eye to God and to his hand in every thing that befalls us; (*v. 13.*) *Consider the work of God.* To silence our complaints concerning cross events, let us consider the hand of God in them, and not open our mouths against that which is his doing; let us look upon the disposal of our condition and all the circumstances of it as *the work of God*, and consider it as the product of his eternal counsel, which is fulfilled in every thing that befalls us. Consider that every work of God is wise, just, and good, and there is an admirable beauty and harmony in his works, and all will appear, at last, to have been for the best. Let us therefore give him the glory of all his works concerning us, and study to answer his designs in them. *Consider the work of God*, as that which we cannot make any alteration of. *Who can make that straight which he has made crooked?* Who can change the nature of things from what is settled by the God of nature? If he speak trouble, who can make peace? And if he hedge up the way with thorns, who can get forward? If desolating judgments go forth with commission, who can put a stop to them? Since therefore we cannot mend God's work, we ought to make the best of it.

We must accommodate ourselves to the various dispensations of Providence, that respect us, and do the work and duty of the day in its day, *v. 14.* Observe,

(1.) How the appointments and events of Providence are counterchanged. In this world, at the same time, some are in prosperity, others are in adversity; the same persons, at one time, are in great prosperity, at another time, in great adversity; nay, one event prosperous, and another grievous, may occur to the same person at the same time; both come from the hand of God, *out of his mouth both evil and good proceed*, (*Isa. 14. 7.*) and *he has set the one over against the other*, so that there is a very short and easy passage between them, and they are a foil to each other; day and night, summer and winter, are set *the one over against the other*, that in prosperity we may rejoice as *though we rejoiced not*, and in adversity may weep as *though we wept not*, for we may plainly see the one from the other, and quickly exchange the one for the other; and it is *to the end that man may find nothing after him*, that he may not be at any certainty concerning future events, or the continuance of the present scene, but may live in a dependence upon Providence, and be ready for whatever happens. Or, that man may find nothing in the word of God which he can pretend to amend.

(2.) How we must comply with the will of God, in events of both kinds. Our religion, in general, must be the same in all conditions, but the particular instances and exercises of it must vary, as our outward condition does, that we may *walk after the Lord*. [1.] In a day of prosperity, (and it is but a day,) we must be joyful, be in good, be doing good, and getting good, maintain a holy cheerfulness, and *serve the Lord with gladness of heart in the abundance of all things*. "When the world smiles, rejoice in God, and praise him, and let *the joy of the Lord be thy strength*." [2.] In a day of adversity, (and that is but a day too,) *consider*. Times of affliction are proper times for consideration, then God calls to *consider*, (*IIag. 1. 5.*) then, if ever, we are disposed to it, and no good will be gotten by the affliction without it. We cannot answer God's end in afflicting us, unless we consider why and wherefore he contends with us. And consideration is necessary also to our comfort and support under our afflictions.

3. We must not be offended at the greatest prosperity of wicked people, nor at the saddest calamities that may befall the godly in this life, *v. 15.* Wisdom will teach us how to construe those dark chapters of Providence, so as to reconcile them with the wisdom, holiness, goodness, and faithfulness, of God. We must not think it strange; Solomon tells us there were instances of this kind in his time; "*All things have I seen in the days of my vanity*; I have taken notice of all that passed, and this has been as surprising and perplexing to me as any thing." Observe, Though Solomon was so wise and great a man, yet he calls the days of his life the *days of his vanity*, for the best days on earth are so, in comparison

with the days of eternity. Or perhaps he refers to the days of his apostacy from God, (those were indeed the days of his vanity,) and reflects upon this as one thing that tempted him to infidelity, or, at least, to indifferency in religion, that he saw *just men perishing in their righteousness*, that the greatest piety would not secure men from the greatest afflictions by the hand of God, nay, and sometimes did expose men to the greatest injuries from the hands of wicked and unreasonable men. Naboth perished in his righteousness, and Abel long before. He had also seen wicked men prolonging their lives in their wickedness; they *live, become old, yea, and are mighty in power*; (*Job, 21. 7.*) by their fraud and violence they screen themselves from the sword of justice. "Now, in this, consider the work of God, and let it not be a stumbling-block to thee." The calamities of the righteous are preparing them for their future blessedness, and the wicked, while their days are prolonged, are but ripening for ruin. There is a judgment to come, which will rectify this seeming irregularity, to the glory of God and the full satisfaction of all his people, and we must wait with patience till then.

4. Wisdom will be of use both for caution to saints in their way, and for a check to sinners in their way.

(1.) As to saints, it will engage them to proceed and persevere in their righteousness, and yet will be an admonition to them to take heed of running into extremes; *A just man may perish in his righteousness*, but let him not, by his own imprudence and rash zeal, pull trouble upon his own head, and then reflect upon Providence as dealing hardly with him; (*v. 16.*) "*Be not righteous over-much*. In the acts of righteousness, govern thyself by the rules of prudence, and be not transported, no not by a zeal for God, into any intemperate heats or passions, or any practices unbecoming thy character, or dangerous to thine interests." Note, There may be over-doing in well-doing. Self-denial and mortification of the flesh are good; but if we prejudice our health by it, and unfit ourselves for the service of God, we are *righteous over-much*. To reprove those that offend, is good, but to cast that pearl before swine, who will turn again and read us, is to be *righteous over-much*. "*Make not thyself over-wise*; be not opinionative, and conceited of thine own abilities; set not up for a dictator, nor pretend to give law to, and give judgment upon, all about thee; set not up for a critic, to find fault with every thing that is said and done, nor busy thyself in other men's matters; as if thou knewest every thing, and couldst do any thing. *Why shouldst thou destroy thyself*, as fools often do by meddling with strife that belongs not to them. *Why shouldst thou provoke authority*, and run thyself into the briers, by needless contradictions, and by going out of thy sphere to correct what is amiss. *Be wise as serpents*, beware of men."

(2.) As to sinners, if it cannot prevail with them to forsake their sins, yet it may restrain them from growing very exorbitant. It is true, *there is a wicked man that prolongs his life in his wickedness*; (*v. 15.*) but let none say, therefore they may safely be as wicked as they will; no, *be not over-much wicked*, (*v. 17.*) do not run to an excess of riot. Many that will not be wrought upon by the fear of God, and a dread of the torments of hell, to avoid all sin, will yet, if they have ever so little consideration, avoid those sins that ruin their health and estate, and expose them to public justice. And Solomon here makes use of these considerations. "*The magistrate bears not the sword in vain*, has a quick eye and a heavy hand, and is a *terror to evil-doers*; therefore be afraid of coming within his reach, be not so foolish as to lay thyself open to the law, *why shouldst thou die before thy time?*" Solomon, in these two cautions, had probably a special regard to some of his own subjects that were disaffected to his government, and were meditating the revolt which they made immediately after his death. Some, it may be, quarreled with the sins of their governor, and made that their pretence; to them he says, *Be not righteous over-much*. Others were weary of the strictness of the government, and the temple-service, and that made them desirous to set up another king; but he frightens both from their seditious practices with the sword of justice, and others likewise from meddling with *them that were given to change*.

5. Wisdom will direct us in the mean between two extremes, and keep us always in the way of our duty, which we shall find a plain and safe way; (v. 18.) "*It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this, this wisdom, this care, not to run thyself into snares; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand, never slacken thy diligence, nor abate thy resolution to maintain a due decorum, and a good government of thyself; take hold of the bridle by which thy head-strong passions must be held in from hurrying thee into one mischief or other, as the horse and mule that have no understanding; and, having taken hold of it, keep thine hold, and withdraw not thine hand from it, for if thou do, the liberty that they will take will be as the letting forth of water, and thou wilt not easily recover thy hold again. Be conscientious, and yet be cautious, and to this exercise thyself. Govern thyself steadily by the principles of religion, and thou shalt find, that he that fears God shall come forth out of all those straits and difficulties which they run themselves into that cast off that fear.*" The fear of the Lord is that wisdom which will serve as a clue to extricate us out of the most intricate labyrinths. *Honesty is the best policy.* They that truly fear God have but one end to serve, and therefore act steadily. God has likewise promised to direct those that fear him, and to order their steps not only in the right way, but out of every dangerous way, Ps. 37. 23, 24.

6. Wisdom will teach us how to conduct ourselves in reference to the sins and offences of others, which commonly contribute more than any thing else to the disturbance of our repose, which contract both guilt and grief.

(1.) Wisdom teaches us not to expect that those we deal with should be faultless; we ourselves are not so, none are so, no not the best. This wisdom strengthens the wise as much as any thing, and arms them against the danger that arises from provocation, (v. 19.) so that they are not put into disorder by it; they consider that those they have dealings and conversation with are not incarnate angels, but sinful sons and daughters of Adam, even the best are so, insomuch that *there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not*, v. 20. Solomon had this in his prayer, (1 Kings, 8. 46.) in his proverbs, (Prov. 20. 9.) and here in his preaching. Note, [1.] It is the character of just men, that they *do good*; for the tree is known by its fruits. [2.] The best men, and they that do most good, yet cannot say that they are perfectly free from sin: even those that are sanctified are not sinless. None that live on this side heaven live without sin; *if we say, We have not sinned, we deceive ourselves.* [3.] We sin even in our doing good; there is something defective, nay something offensive, in our best performances. That which, for the substance of it, is good, and pleasing to God, is not so well done as it should be, and omissions in duty are sins, as well as omissions of duty. [4.] It is only just men upon earth that are subject thus to sin and infirmity; *the spirits of just men*, when they are got clear of the body, are made perfect in holiness, (Heb. 12. 23.) and in heaven they *do good, and sin not*.

(2.) Wisdom teaches us not to be quicksighted, or quickscented, in apprehending and resenting affronts; but to wink at many of the injuries that are done us, and act as if we did not see them; (v. 21.) "*Take no heed to all words that are spoken, set not thy heart to them; vex not thyself at men's peevish reflections upon thee, or suspicions of thee, but be as a deaf man that hears not*; (Ps. 38. 13, 14.) be not solicitous or inquisitive to know what people say of thee; if they speak well of thee, it will feed thy pride, if ill, it will stir up thy passion; see therefore that thou approve thyself to God and thine own conscience, and then heed not what men say of thee. *Hearkeners*, we say, *seldom hear good of themselves*; if thou heed every word that is spoken, perhaps thou wilt hear thine own servant curse thee, when he thinks thou dost not hear him; thou wilt be told that he does, and perhaps told falsely, if thou have thine ear open to tale-bearers, Prov. 29. 12. Nay, perhaps it is true, and thou mayest stand behind the curtain, and hear it thyself, mayest hear thyself not only blamed and despised, but cursed, the worst said of thee, and wished to thee, and that by a servant, one of the meanest rank, of the abjects, nay, by thy own servant, who should be an advocate for thee, and

protect thy good name, as well as thy other interests; perhaps it is a servant thou hast been kind to, and yet he requites thee thus ill: and this will vex thee, thou hadst better not have heard it. Perhaps it is a servant thou hast wronged, and dealt unjustly with, and though he dares not tell thee so, he tells others so, and tells God so, and then thine own conscience will join with him in the reproach, which will make it much more uneasy." The good names of the greatest lie much at the mercy even of the meanest. And perhaps there is a great deal more evil said of us than we think there is, and by those from whom we little expected it. But we do not consult our own repose, no, nor our credit, though we pretend to be jealous of it, if we take notice of every word that is spoken diminishingly of us; it is easier to pass by twenty such affronts than to avenge one.

(3.) Wisdom puts us in mind of our own faults; (v. 22.) "*Be not enraged at those that speak ill of thee, or wish ill to thee; for oftentimes, in that case, if thou retire into thyself, thy own conscience will tell thee that thou thyself hast cursed others*, spoken ill of them, and wished ill to them, and thou art paid in thine own coin." Note, When any affront or injury is done us, it is reasonable to examine our consciences, whether we have not done the same, or as bad, to others; and if, upon reflection, we find we have, we must take that occasion to renew our repentance for it, must justify God, and make use of it to qualify our own resentments. If we be truly angry with ourselves, as we ought to be, for backbiting and censuring others, we shall be the less angry with others for backbiting and censuring us. We must shew all meekness towards all men, for we ourselves *were sometimes foolish*, Tit. 3. 2, 3. Matth. 7. 1, 2. James, 3. 1, 2.

23. All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it *was* far from me. 24. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? 25. I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness: 26. And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart *is* snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. 27. Behold, this have I found (saith the preacher) *counting* one by one, to find out the account: 28. Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. 29. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Solomon had hitherto been proving the vanity of the world, and its utter insufficiency to make men happy; now here he comes to shew the vileness of sin, and its certain tendency to make men miserable; and this, as the former, he proves from his own experience, and it was a dear-bought experience. He is here, more than any where in all this book, putting on the habit of a penitent. He reviews what he had been discoursing of already, and tells us that what he had said was what he knew, and was well assured of, and what he resolved to stand by; *All this have I proved by wisdom*, v. 23. Now here,

I. He owns and laments the deficiencies of his wisdom. He had wisdom enough to see the vanity of the world, and to experience that that would not make a portion for a soul; but, when he came to inquire further, he found himself at a loss, his eye was too dim, his line was too short, and though he discovered this, there were many other things which he could not prove by wisdom.

1. His searches were industrious. God had given him a capa

city for knowledge above any; he set up with a great stock of wisdom; he had the largest opportunities of improving himself that ever any man had. And, (1.) He resolved, if it were possible, to gain his point; *I said, I will be wise*; he earnestly desired it as highly valuable, he fully designed it as that which he looked upon to be attainable, he determined not to sit down short of it, Prov. 18. 1. Many are not wise, because they never said they would be so, being indifferent to it; but Solomon set it up for the mark he aimed at. When he made trial of sensual pleasures, he still thought to *acquaint his heart with wisdom*, (ch. 2. 3.) and not to be diverted from the pursuits of that; but perhaps he did not find it so easy a thing as he imagined, to keep up his correspondence with wisdom, while he addicted himself so much to his pleasures. However, his will was good; he said, *I will be wise*. And that was not all, (2.) He resolved to spare no pains; (c. 25.) *"I applied my heart; I and my heart turned every way, I left no stone unturned, no means untried, to compass what I had in view. I set myself to know, and to search, and to seek out, wisdom, to accomplish myself in all useful learning, philosophy, and divinity."* If he had not thus closely applied himself to study, it had been but a jest for him to say, *I will be wise*; for those that will attain the end must take the right way. Solomon was a man of great quickness, and yet, instead of using that (with many) as an excuse for slothfulness, he pressed it upon himself as an inducement to diligence, and the easier he found it to master a good notion, the more intent he would be that he might be master of the more good notions. Those that have the best parts should take the greatest pains, as those that have the largest stock should trade most. He applied himself not only to know what lay on the surface, but to search what lay hid out of the common view and road; nor did he search a little way, and then give it over, because he did not presently find what he searched for, but he *sought it out*, went to the bottom of it; nor did he aim to know things only, but the reasons of things, that he might give an account of them.

2. Yet his success was not answerable or satisfying; *"I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me, I could not compass it. After all, This only I know, that I know nothing, and the more I know, the more I see there is to be known, and the more sensible I am of my own ignorance. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?"* He means God himself, his counsels and his works; when he searched into these, he presently found himself puzzled and run aground; he *could not order his speech by reason of darkness. It is higher than heaven, what can he do?* Job, 11. 8. Blessed be God, there is nothing which we have to do which is not plain and easy; *the word is nigh us*; (Prov. 8. 9.) but there is a great deal which we would wish to know, which is *far off, and exceeding deep*, among the secret things which belong not to us. And, probably, it is a culpable ignorance and error that Solomon here laments, that his pleasures, and the many amusements of his court, had blinded his eyes, and cast a mist before them, so that he could not attain to true wisdom, as he designed.

II. He owns and laments the instances of his folly, in which he had exceeded, as, in wisdom, he came short. Here is,

1. His inquiry concerning the evil of sin. He *applied his heart to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness*. Observe, (1.) The knowledge of sin is a difficult knowledge, and hard to be attained; Solomon took pains for it. Sin has many disguises with which it palliates itself, as being loath to appear sin, and it is very hard to strip it of these, and to see it in its true nature and colours. (2.) It is necessary to our repentance for sin, that we be acquainted with the evil of it, as it is necessary to the cure of a disease, to know its nature, causes, and malignity. St. Paul therefore valued the divine law, because it discovered sin to him, Rom. 7. 7. Solomon, who, in the days of his folly, had set his wits on work to invent pleasures, and sharpen them, and was ingenious in making provision for the flesh, now that God had opened his eyes, is as industrious to find out the aggravations of sin, and so to put an edge upon his repentance. Ingenious sinners should be ingenious penitents, and wit and learning, among

the other spoils of the *strong man armed*, should be divided by the Lord Jesus. (3.) It well becomes penitents to say the worst they can of sin, for the truth is, we can never speak ill enough of it. Solomon here, for his further humiliation, desired to see more, [1.] Of the *sinfulness of sin*; that is it which he lays the greatest stress upon in this inquiry, to *know the wickedness of folly*; by which perhaps he means his own iniquity, the sin of uncleanness, for that was commonly called *folly in Israel*, Gen. 34. 7. Dent. 22. 21. Judg. 20. 6. 2 Sam. 13. 12. When he indulged himself in it, he made a light matter of it; but now he desires to see the *wickedness* of it, its *great wickedness*, so Joseph speaks of it, Gen. 39. 9. Or it may be taken there generally for all sin. Many extenuate their sins with this, *They were folly*; but Solomon sees *wickedness* in those follies; an offence to God, and a wrong to conscience; *This is wickedness*, Jer. 4. 18. Zech. 5. 8. [2.] Of the folly of sin; as there is a *wickedness in folly*, so there is a *folly in wickedness*, even foolishness and madness. Wilful sinners are fools and madmen; they act contrary both to right reason and to their true interest.

2. The result of this inquiry.

(1.) He now discovered more than ever of the evil of that great sin which he himself had been guilty of, the *loving of many strange women*; (1 Kings, 11. 1.) this is that which he here most feelingly laments, and in very pathetic expressions.

[1.] He found the remembrance of the sin very grievous. Oh how heavy did it lie upon his conscience, what an agony was he in upon the thought of it; the wickedness, the foolishness, the madness, that he had been guilty of! *I find it more bitter than death*. As great a terror seized him, in reflection upon it, as if he had been under the arrest of death. Thus do they that have their sins set in order before them by a sound conviction, cry out against them; they are bitter as gall, nay, bitter as death, to all true penitents. Uncleanness is a sin that is, in its own nature, more pernicious than death itself. Death may be made honourable and comfortable, but this sin can be no other than shame and pain, Prov. 5. 9, 11.

[2.] He had found the temptation to the sin very dangerous, and that it was extremely difficult, and next to impossible, for those that ventured into the temptation to escape the sin, and for those that had fallen into the sin to recover themselves by repentance. The heart of the adulterous woman is *snares and nets*; she plays her game to ruin souls with as much art and subtlety as ever any fowler used to take a silly bird. The methods such sinners use are both deceiving and destroying as snares and nets are. The unwary souls are enticed into them by the bait of pleasure, which they greedily catch at, and promise themselves satisfaction in; but they are taken before they are aware, and taken irrecoverably. Her hands are as hands, with which, under colour of fond embraces, she hold those fast, that she has seized; they are *held in the cords of their own sin*, Prov. 5. 22. Lust gets strength by being gratified, and its charms are more prevalent.

[3.] He reckoned it a great instance of God's favour to any man, if by his grace he has kept him from this sin; *He that pleases God shall escape from her*, shall be preserved either from being tempted to this sin, or from being overcome by the temptation. Those that are kept from this sin, must acknowledge it is God that keeps them, and not any strength or resolution of their own, must acknowledge it a great mercy; and they that would have grace, sufficient for them, to arm them against this sin, must be careful to please God in every thing, by keeping his ordinances, Lev. 18. 30.

[4.] He reckoned it a sin, that is as sore a punishment of other sins as a man can fall under in this life; *The sinner shall be taken by her*. First, Those that allow themselves in other sins, by which their minds are blinded, and their consciences debauched, are the more easily drawn to this. Secondly, It is just with God to leave them to themselves to fall into it. See Rom. 1. 26, 28. Eph. 4. 18, 19. Thus does Solomon, as it were, with horror, bless himself from the sin in which he had plunged himself.

(2.) He now discovered more than ever of the general corruption of man's nature. He runs up that stream to the fountain, &

his father had done before him, on a like occasion; (Ps. 51. 5.) *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity.*

[1.] He endeavoured to find out the number of his actual transgressions; (v. 27.) "*Behold, this have I found*, this I hoped to have found, I thought I could have understood my errors, and have brought in a complete list, at least, of the heads of them; I thought I could have counted them one by one, and have found out the account." He desired to find them out as a penitent, that he might the more particularly acknowledge them; and, generally, the more particular we are in the confession of sin, the more comfort we have in the sense of the pardon; he desired it also, as a preacher, that he might the more particularly give warning to others. Note, A sound conviction of one sin will put us upon inquiring into the whole confederacy; and the more we see avails in ourselves, the more diligently we should inquire further into our own faults, that what we see not may be discovered to us, Job, 34. 32.

[2.] He soon found himself at a loss, and perceived that they were innumerable; (v. 28.) "*which yet my soul seeks*, I am still counting, and still desirous to find out the account, but I find not, I cannot count them all, nor find out the account of them to perfection. I still make new and amazing discoveries of the desperate wickedness that there is in my own heart," Jer. 17. 9, 10. *Who can know it? Who can understand his errors? Who can tell how often he offends?* Ps. 19. 12. He finds that if God enters into judgment with him, or he with himself, for all his thoughts, words, and actions, he is *not able to answer for one of a thousand*, Job, 9. 3. This he illustrates, by comparing the corruption of his own heart and life with the corruption of the world, where he scarcely found one good man among a thousand, nay, among all the thousand wives and concubines which he had, he did not find *one good woman*; "Even so," says he, "when I come to recollect and review my own thoughts, words, and actions, and all the passages of my life past, perhaps among those that were manly I might find one good among a thousand, and that was all, the rest even of those had some corruption or other in them." He found (v. 20.) that he had sinned even in doing good; but for those that were effeminate, that passed in the indulgence of his pleasures, they were all naught; in that part of his life there did not appear so much as one of a thousand good. In our hearts and lives there appears little good, at the best, but sometimes none at all. Doubtless, this is not intended as a censure of the female sex in general; it is probable that there have been, and are, more good women than good men; (Acts, 17. 4, 12.) he merely alludes to his own sad experience; and perhaps there may be this further in it, he does, in his proverbs, warn us against the snares both of the *evil man* and of the *strange woman*, Prov. 2. 12, 16.—4. 14.—5. 3. Now he had observed the ways of the *evil women* to be more deceitful and dangerous than those of the *evil men*, that it was more difficult to discover their frauds and elude their snares; and therefore he compares sin to an adulteress, (Prov. 9. 13.) and perceives he can no more find out the deceitfulness of his own heart than he can that of a strange woman, whose ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them.

[3.] He therefore runs up all the streams of actual transgression to the fountain of original corruption. The source of all the folly and madness that are in the world, is in man's apostasy from God, and his degeneracy from his primitive rectitude; (v. 29.) "*Lo, this only have I found*; when I could not find out the particulars, yet the gross account was manifest enough; it is as clear as the sun, that man is corrupted and revolted, and is not as he was made." Observe,

First, How man was made by the wisdom and goodness of God; *God made man upright; Adam the first man*, so the Chaldee. God made him, and he made him *upright*, such a one as he should be; being made a rational creature, he was, in all respects, such a one as a rational creature should be, *upright*, without any irregularity, one could find no fault in him; he was *upright*, determined to God only, in opposition to the *many inventions* which he afterward turned aside to. Man, as he came out of God's hands, was (as we may say) a little picture of his Maker, who is *good and upright*.

Secondly, How he was marred, and, in effect, unmade, by his own folly and badness; *They have sought out many inventions*; they, our first parents, or the whole race, all in general, and every one in particular. *They have sought out great inventions*, so some; inventions to become great as gods, Gen. 3. 5. Or, *the inventions of the great ones*, so some; of the angels that fell, the *Magnates*. Or, *many inventions*. Man, instead of resting in what God had found for him, was for seeking to mend himself, like the prodigal that left his father's house, to seek his fortune. Instead of being for one, he was for many; instead of being for God's institutions, he was for his own inventions. The law of his creation would not hold him, but he would be at his own disposal, and follow his own sentiments and inclinations. *Vain man would be wise*, wiser than his Maker; is giddy and unsettled in his pursuits, and therefore has *many inventions*. They that forsake God, wander endlessly. Men's actual transgressions are multiplied. Solomon could not find out how many they are; (v. 28.) but he found they were *very many*. Many kinds of sins, and those often repeated; *they are more than the hairs on our heads*, Ps. 40. 12.

CHAP. VIII.

Solomon, in this chapter, comes to recommend wisdom to us, as the most powerful antidote against both the temptations and vexations that arise from the vanity of the world. Here is, I. The benefit and praise of wisdom, v. 1. II. Some particular instances of wisdom prescribed to us. 1. We must keep in due subjection to the government God has set over us, v. 2. 5. 2. We must get ready for sudden evils, and especially for sudden death, v. 6. 8. 3. We must arm ourselves against the temptation of an oppressive government, and not think it strange, v. 9. 10. The impunity of oppressors makes them more daring, (v. 11.) but in the issue it will be well with the righteous and ill with the wicked; (v. 12, 13.) and therefore the present prosperity of the wicked and afflictions of the righteous ought not to be a stumbling-block to us, v. 14. 4. We must cheerfully use the gifts of God's providence, v. 15. 5. We must with an entire satisfaction acquiesce in the will of God, and, not pretending to find the bottom, we must humbly and silently adore the depth of his unsearchable counsels, being assured they are all wise, just, and good, v. 16, 17.

1. **WHO** is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed. 2. I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. 3. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. 4. Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? 5. Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

Here is,

I. An encomium of wisdom, (v. 1.) that is, of true piety, guided in all its exercises by prudence and discretion. The wise man is the good man, that knows God, and glorifies him, knows himself, and does well for himself; his wisdom is a great happiness to him; for,

1. It advances him above his neighbours, and makes him more excellent than they; *Who is as the wise man?* Note, Heavenly wisdom will make a man an incomparable man. No man without grace, though he be learned, or noble, or rich, is to be compared with a man that has true grace, and is therefore accepted of God.

2. It makes him useful among his neighbours, and very serviceable to them; *Who but the wise man knows the interpretation of a thing*, understands the times and the events of them, and their critical junctures, so as to direct what Israel ought to do? 1 Chron. 12. 32.

3. It beautifies a man in the eyes of his friends; *it makes his*

face to shine, as Moses's did when he came down from the mount; it puts honour upon a man, and a lustre on his whole conversation, makes him to be regarded and taken notice of, and gains him respect; (as Job, 29. 7, &c.) it makes him lovely and amiable, and the darling and blessing of his country; *The strength of his face*, the sourness and severity of his countenance, (so some understand the last clause,) *shall be changed* by it into that which is sweet and obliging. Even those whose natural temper is rough and morose, by *wisdom* are strangely altered, they become mild and gentle, and learn to look pleasant.

4. It imboldens a man against his adversaries, their attempts, and their scorn; *The boldness of his face shall be doubled* by wisdom; it will add very much to his courage in maintaining his integrity, when he not only has an honest cause to plead, but by his wisdom knows how to manage it, and where to find the interpretation of a thing. *He shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with his enemy in the gate.*

II. A particular instance of wisdom pressed upon us, and that is, subjection to authority, and a dutiful and peaceable perseverance in our allegiance to the government which Providence has set over us. Observe,

1. How the duty of subjects is here described:

(1.) We must be observant of the laws. In all those things wherein the civil power is to interpose, whether legislative or judicial, we ought to submit to its order and constitutions; *I counsel thee*; it may as well be supplied, *I charge thee*, not only as a prince but as a preacher; he might do both; "I recommend it to thee as a piece of wisdom; I say, whatever those say that are given to change, *keep the king's commandment*; wherever the sovereign power is lodged, be subject to it. *Observe the mouth of a king*," (so the phrase is,) "say as he says, do as he bids thee; let his word be a law, or rather let the law be his word." Some understand the following clause as a limitation of this obedience; "*Keep the king's commandment*, yet so as to have a regard to the *cath of God*, so as to keep a good conscience, and not to violate thy obligations to God, which are prior and superior to thine obligations to the king. *Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's*, but so as to reserve pure and entire to *God the things that are his*."

(2.) We must not be forward to find fault with the public administration, or quarrel with every thing that is not just according to our mind, nor quit our post of service under the government, and throw it up, upon every discontent; (v. 3.) "*Be not hasty to go out of his sight*, when he is displeased at thee, (ch. 10. 4.) or when thou art displeased at him; fly not off in a passion, nor entertain such jealousies of him as will tempt thee to renounce the court, or forsake the kingdom." Solomon's subjects, as soon as his head was laid low, went directly contrary to this rule, when, upon the rough answer which Rehoboam gave them, they were *hasty to go out of his sight*, would not take time for second thoughts, nor admit proposals of accommodation, but cried, *To your tents, O Israel*. "There may perhaps be a just cause for *to go out of his sight*; but *be not hasty* to do it, act with great deliberation."

(3.) We must not persist in a fault when it is shewed us; "*Stand not in an evil thing*; in any offence thou hast given to thy prince, humble thyself, and do not justify thyself, for that will make the offence much more offensive. In any ill design thou hast, upon some discontent, conceived against thy prince, do not proceed in it; but *if thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or hast thought evil, lay thy hand upon thy mouth*," Prov. 30. 32. Note, Though we may by surprise be drawn into an evil thing, yet we must not stand in it, but recede from it as soon as it appears to us to be evil.

(4.) We must prudently accommodate ourselves to our opportunities, both for our own relief, if we think ourselves wronged, and for the redress of public grievances; *A wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment*; (v. 5.) it is the wisdom of subjects, in applying themselves to their prince, to inquire and consider both at what season, and in what manner, they may do it best and most effectually, to pacify his anger, obtain his favour, or obtain the revocation of any grievous measure prescribed. Esther, in dealing with Ahasuerus, took a deal pains to *discern both time*

and judgment, and it sped accordingly. This may be taken as a general rule of wisdom, that every thing should be well-timed; and our enterprises are then likely to succeed, when we embrace the exact opportunity for them.

2. What arguments are here used to engage us to be subject to the higher powers; they are much the same with those which St. Paul uses, Rom. 13. 1, &c.

(1.) We must needs be subject, for conscience-sake, and that is the most powerful principle of subjection; we must be subject because of the *oath of God*, the oath of allegiance, which we have taken to be faithful to the government; *the covenant between the king and the people*, 2 Chron. 23. 16. *David made a covenant*, or contract, *with the elders of Israel*, though he was king by divine designation, 1 Chron. 11. 3. "*Keep the king's commandments*, for he has sworn to rule thee in the fear of God, and thou hast sworn, in that fear, to be faithful to him." It is called the *oath of God*, because he is a Witness to it, and will avenge the violation of it.

(2.) *For wrath's sake*; because of the sword which the prince bears, and the power he is intrusted with, which make him very formidable; *He does whatsoever pleases him*; he has a great authority, and a great ability to support that authority; (v. 4.) *Where the word of a king is*, giving orders to seize a man, *there is power*; there are many that will execute his orders, which makes *the wrath of a king*, or supreme government, like the roaring of a lion, and like messengers of death. *Who may say unto him, What doest thou?* He that contradicts him, does it at his peril. Kings will not bear to have their orders disputed, but expect they should be obeyed. In short, it is dangerous contending with sovereignty, and what many have repented. A subject is an unequal match for a prince. *He may command me*, who has legions at command.

(3.) For the sake of our own comfort; *Whoso keeps the commandment*, and lives a quiet and peaceable life, *shall feel no evil thing*; to which that of the apostle answers, (Rom. 13. 3.) *Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power of the king?* *Do that which is good*, as becomes a dutiful and loyal subject, and thou shalt, ordinarily, *have praise of the same*. He that does no ill, shall feel no ill, and needs fear none.

6. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. 7. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? 8. *There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit*; neither *hath he power in the day of death*; and *there is no discharge in that war*; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

Solomon had said, (v. 5.) that *a wise man's heart discerns time and judgment*; a man's wisdom will go a great way, by the blessing of God, in moral prognostications; but here he shews that few have that wisdom, and that even the wisest may yet be surprised by a calamity which they had not any foresight of, and therefore it is our wisdom to expect, and prepare for, sudden changes. Observe,

1. All the events concerning us, with the exact time of them, are determined and appointed in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, and all in wisdom; *To every purpose there is a time* prefixed, and it is the best time, for it is *time and judgment*, time appointed both in wisdom and righteousness; the appointment is not chargeable with folly or iniquity.

2. We are very much in the dark concerning future events, and the time and season of them; *Man knows not that which shall be himself*; and *who can tell him when or how it shall be?* v. 7. It cannot either be foreseen by him, or foretold to him; the stars cannot foretell a man what shall be, nor any of the arts of divination; God has, in wisdom, concealed from us the knowledge of future events, that we may be always ready for changes.

3. It is our great unhappiness and misery, that, because we can-

not foresee an evil, we know not how to avoid it, or guard against it, and, because we are not aware of the proper successful season of actions, therefore we lose our opportunities, and miss our way; *Because to every purpose there is but one way, one method, one proper opportunity, therefore the misery of man is great upon him; because it is so hard to hit that, and it is a thousand to one but he misses it.* Most of the miseries men labour under had been prevented, if they could have been foreseen, and the happy time discovered to avoid them. Men are miserable, because they are not sufficiently sagacious and attentive.

4. Whatever other evils may be avoided, we are all under a fatal necessity of dying, *v. 8.*

(1.) When the soul is required, it must be resigned, and it is to no purpose to dispute it, either by arms or arguments, ourselves, or by any friend; *There is no man that has power over his own spirit to retain it*, when it is summoned to return to God who gave it. It cannot fly any where out of the jurisdiction of death, nor find any place where its writs do not run. It cannot abscond so as to escape death's eye, though it is hid from the eyes of all living. A man has no power to adjourn the day of his death, nor can he by prayers or bribes obtain a reprieve; no bail will be taken, no *essoine*,* protection, or imparlance,† allowed. We have not *power over the spirit* of a friend, to retain that; the prince, with all his authority, cannot prolong the life of the most valuable of his subjects, nor the physician, with his medicines and methods, nor the soldier, with his force, nor the orator, with his eloquence, nor the best saint, with his intercessions. The stroke of death can by no means be put by, when our days are determined, and the hour appointed us is come.

(2.) Death is an enemy that we must all enter the lists with, sooner or later; *There is no discharge in that war*, no dismission from it, either of the men of business, or of the faint-hearted, as there was among the Jews, *Dent. 20. 5, 8.* While we live, we are struggling with death, and we shall never put off the harness till we put off the body, never obtain the discharge till death has obtained the mastery; the youngest is not released as a fresh-water soldier, nor the oldest as *miles emeritus*—*a soldier whose merits have entitled him to a discharge.* Death is a battle that must be fought; *There is no sending to that war*, so some read it; no substituting another to muster for us, no champion admitted to fight for us; we must ourselves engage, and are concerned to provide accordingly, as for a battle.

(3.) Men's wickedness, by which they often evade or outface the justice of the prince, cannot secure them from the arrest of death, nor can the most obstinate sinner harden his heart against those terrors. Though he *strengthen himself* ever so much in his wickedness, (*Ps. 52. 7.*) death will be too strong for him; the most subtle wickedness cannot outwit death, nor the most impudent wickedness outbrave death. Nay, the wickedness which men give themselves to, will be so far from delivering them from death, that it will deliver them up to death.

9. All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: *there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.* 10. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: *this is also vanity.* 11. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. 12. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his *days* be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him; 13. But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he pro-

long *his days, which are* as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

Solomon, in the beginning of the chapter, had warned us against having any thing to do with seditious subjects; here, in these verses, he encourages us, in reference to the mischief of tyrannical and oppressive rulers, such as he had complained of before, *ch. 3. 16.*—4. 1.

1. He had observed many such rulers, *v. 9.* In the serious views and reviews he had taken of the children of men and their state, he had observed that many a time *one man rules over another to his hurt*; that is, (1.) To the hurt of the ruled, many understand it so; whereas they ought to be God's ministers unto their subjects *for their good*, (*Rom. 13. 4.*) to administer justice, and to preserve the public peace and order, they use their power for their hurt, to invade their property, encroach upon their liberty, and patronise the acts of injustice. It is sad with a people, when those that should protect their religion and rights aim at the destruction of both. (2.) To the hurt of the rulers, so we render it; *to their own hurt*, to the feeding of their pride and covetousness, the gratifying of their passion and revenge, and so, to the filling up of the measure of their sins, and the hastening and aggravating of their ruin. *Agens agendo repatitur—What hurt men do to others, will return, in the end, to their own hurt.*

2. He had observed them to prosper and flourish in the abuse of their power; (*v. 10.*) *I saw those wicked rulers come and go from the place of the holy; go in state to, and return in pomp from, the place of judicature, (which is called the place of the Holy One, because the judgment is the Lord's, (Deut. 1. 17.) and he judges among the gods, (Ps. 82. 1.) and is with them in the judgment, (2 Chron. 19. 6.) and they continued all their days in office, were never reckoned with for their male-administration, but died in honour, and were buried magnificently; their commissions were durante vita—during life, and not quamdiu se bene gesserint—during good behaviour; and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done; their wicked practices were not remembered against them to their reproach and infamy when they were gone. Or rather, it denotes the vanity of their dignity and power, for that is his remark upon it in the close of the verse; This is also vanity. They are proud of their wealth, and power, and honour, because they sit in the place of the holy; but all this cannot secure, (1.) Their bodies from being buried in the dust; I saw them laid in the grave; and their pomp, though it attended them thither, could not descend after them, Ps. 49. 17. (2.) Nor their names from being buried in oblivion; for they were forgotten, as if they had never been.*

3. He had observed that their prosperity hardened them in their wickedness, *v. 11.* It is true of all sinners in general, and particularly of wicked rulers, that, *because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily*, they think it will never be executed, and therefore they set the law at defiance, and *their hearts are full in them to do evil*; they venture to do so much the more mischief, fetch a greater compass in their wicked designs, and are secure and fearless in it, and commit iniquity with a high hand. Observe, (1.) Sentence is past against evil works, and evil workers, by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, even against the evil works of princes and great men, as well as of inferior persons. (2.) The execution of this sentence is often delayed a great while, and the sinner goes on, not only unpunished, but prosperous and successful. (3.) Impunity hardens sinners in impiety, and the patience of God is shamefully abused by many, who, instead of being led by it to repentance, are confirmed by it in their impenitency. (4.) Sinners herein deceive themselves, for though the sentence be not executed speedily, it will be executed the more severely, at last. Vengeance comes slowly, but it comes surely; and wrath is in the mean time treasured up against the day of wrath.

4. He foresaw such an end of all these things as would be sufficient to keep us from quarrelling with the Divine Providence upon account of them. He supposes a wicked ruler to do an

* Excuse.—Ed.

† Respite.—Ed.

unjust thing a hundred times, and that yet his punishment is deferred, and God's patience toward him is prolonged, much beyond what was expected, and the days of his power are lengthened out, so that he continues to oppress; yet he intimates that he should not be discouraged.

(1.) God's people are certainly a happy people, though they be oppressed; *It shall be well with them that fear God*, I say, with all them, and them only, *which fear before him*. Note, [1.] It is the character of God's people that they *fear God*, have an awe of him upon their hearts, and make conscience of their duty to him; and this, because they see his eye always upon them, and they know it is their concern to approve themselves to him. When they lie at the mercy of proud oppressors, they fear God more than they fear them. They do not quarrel with the providence of God, but submit to it. [2.] It is the happiness of *all that fear God*, that in the worst of times *it shall be well with them*; their happiness in God's favour cannot be prejudiced, nor their communion with God interrupted, by their troubles; they are in a good case, for they are kept in a good frame under their troubles, and in the end they shall have a blessed deliverance from, and an abundant recompence for, their troubles. And therefore *surely I know*, I know it by the promise of God, and the experience of all the saints, *that*, however it goes with others, *it shall go well with them*. All is well that ends well.

(2.) Wicked people are certainly a miserable people; though they prosper, and prevail, for a time, the curse is as sure to them as the blessing is to the righteous; *It shall not be well with the wicked*, as others think it is, who judge by outward appearance, and as they themselves expect it will be; nay, *woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with them*; (Isa. 3. 10, 11.) they shall be reckoned for all the ill they have done; nothing that befalls them shall be really well for them. *Nihil potest ad malos pervenire quod prosit, ima nihil quod non noceat*—No event can occur to the wicked which will do them good, rather, no event which will not do them harm. Seneca. Note, [1.] The wicked man's days are as a shadow, not only uncertain and declining, as all men's days are, but altogether unprofitable. A good man's days have some substance in them; he lives to a good purpose; a wicked man's days are all as a shadow, empty and worthless. [2.] These days shall not be prolonged to what he promised himself; he shall not live out half his days, Ps. 55. 23. Though they may be prolonged, (v. 12.) beyond what others expected, yet his day shall come to fall. He shall fall short of everlasting life, and then his long life on earth will be worth little. [3.] God's great quarrel with wicked people is for their *not fearing before him*; that is at the bottom of their wickedness, and cuts them off from all happiness.

14. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity. 15. Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun. 16. When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) 17. Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

Wise and good men have, of old, been perplexed with this difficulty, how the prosperity of the wicked and the troubles of the righteous can be reconciled with the holiness and goodness of the God that governs the world; concerning this, Solomon here gives us his advice.

1. He would not have us to be surprised at it, as though some strange thing happened, for he himself saw it in his days, v. 14. (1.) He saw *just men*, to whom it happened according to the work of the wicked, who, notwithstanding their righteousness, suffered very hard things, and continued long to do so, as if they were to be punished for some great wickedness. (2.) He saw *wicked men*, to whom it happened according to the work of the righteous, who prospered as remarkably as if they had been rewarded for some good deed, and that from themselves, from God, from men. We see the just troubled and perplexed in their own minds, the wicked easy, fearless, and secure; the just crossed and afflicted by the Divine Providence, the wicked prosperous, successful, and smiled upon; the just censured, reproached, and run down, by the higher powers, the wicked applauded and preferred.

2. He would have us to take occasion hence, not to charge God with iniquity, but to charge the world with vanity. No fault is to be found with God; but as to the world, *This is vanity upon the earth*, and again, *This is also vanity*, it is a certain evidence that the things of this world are not the best things, nor were ever designed to make a portion and happiness for us, for, if they had, God would not have allotted so much of this world's wealth to his worst enemies, and so much of its troubles to his best friends; there must therefore be another life after this, the joys and griefs of which must be real and substantial, and able to make men truly happy or truly miserable, for this world does neither.

3. He would have us not to fret and perplex ourselves about it, or make ourselves uneasy, but cheerfully to enjoy what God has given us in the world, to be content with it, and make the best of it, though it be much better with others, and such as we think very unworthy; (v. 15.) *Then I commended joy*, a holy security and serenity of mind, arising from a confidence in God, and his power, providence, and promise, *because a man has no better thing under the sun* (though a good man has much better things above the sun) *than to eat and drink*, that is, soberly and thankfully to make use of the things of this life according as his rank is, *and to be cheerful*, whatever happens, *for that shall abide with him of his labour*, that is all the fruit he has for himself of the pains that he takes in the business of the world; let him therefore take it, and much good may it do him; and let him not deny himself that, out of a peevish discontent, because the world does not go as he would have it; *That shall abide with him during the days of his life which God gives him under the sun*. Our present life is a life under the sun, but we look for the life of the world to come, which will commence and continue when the sun shall be turned into darkness, and shine no more. This present life must be reckoned by days; this life is given us, and the days of it allotted to us, by the counsel of God, and therefore, while it does last, we must accommodate ourselves to the will of God, and study to answer the ends of life.

4. He would not have us undertake to give a reason for that which God does, for *his way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters*, past finding out, and therefore we must be contentedly and piously ignorant of the meaning of God's proceedings in the government of the world, v. 16, 17. Here he shews,

(1.) That both he himself and many others had very closely studied the point, and searched far into the reasons of the prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous; he, for his part, had applied his heart to know this wisdom, and to see the business that is done, by the Divine Providence, upon the earth, to find out if there were any certain scheme, any constant rule or method, by which the affairs of this lower world were administered, any course of government as sure and steady as the course of nature, so that by what is done now we might as certainly foretell what will be done next, as by the moon's changing now we can foretell when it will be at the full; this he would fain have found out. Others had likewise set themselves to make this inquiry with so close an

application, that they could not find time for *sleep, either day or night*, nor find in their hearts to sleep, so full of anxiety were they about these things. Some think Solomon speaks of himself, that he was so eager in prosecuting this great inquiry, that he could not sleep for thinking of it.

(2.) That it was all labour in vain, v. 17. When we look upon *all the works of God*, and his providence, and compare one part with another, we *cannot find* that there is any such certain method by which *the work that is done under the sun* is directed; we cannot discover any key by which to decypher the character, nor, by consulting precedents, can we know the practice of this court, nor what the judgment will be. [1.] *Though a man be ever so industrious, though he labour to seek it out*; [2.] *Though he be ever so ingenious, though he be a wise man in other things, and can fathom the counsels of kings themselves, and trace them by their footsteps; nay, [3.] Though he be very confident of success, though he think to know it, yet he shall not*, he cannot, *find it out*. God's ways are above our's, nor is he tied to his own former ways, but *his judgments are a great deep*.

CHAP. IX.

Solomon, in this chapter, for a further proof of the vanity of this world, gives us four observations which he had made upon a survey of the state of the children of men in it. I. He observed, that, commonly, as to outward things, good and bad men fare much alike, v. 1..3. II. That death puts a final period to all our employments and enjoyments in this world, (v. 4..6.) whence he infers that it is our wisdom to enjoy the comforts of life, and mind the business of life, while it lasts, v. 7..10. III. That God's providence often crosses the fairest and most hopeful probabilities of men's endeavour, and great calamities often surprise men ere they are aware, v. 11, 12. IV. That wisdom often makes men very useful, and yet gains them little respect, for that persons of great merit are slighted, v. 13..18. And what is there then in this world, that should make us fond of it?

I FOR all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are in the hand of God*: no man knoweth either love or hatred *by all that is before them*. 2. *All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath*. 3. *This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead*.

It has been observed concerning those who have pretended to search for the philosophers' stone, that though they could never find what they sought for, yet in the search they have hit upon many other useful discoveries and experiments. Thus Solomon, when, in the close of the foregoing chapter, he *applied his heart to know the work of God*, and took a great deal of pains to search into it, though he despaired of finding it out, yet he found out that which abundantly recompensed him for the search, and gave him some satisfaction, which he here gives us; *for therefore he considered all this in his heart*, and weighed it deliberately, that he might declare it for the good of others. Note, What we are to declare we should first consider, think twice before we speak once; and what we have considered we should then declare; *I believed, therefore have I spoken*.

The great difficulty which Solomon met with in studying the book of providence, was, the little difference that is made between good men and bad, in the distribution of comforts and crosses, and the disposal of events; this has perplexed the minds of many wise and contemplative men; Solomon discourses of it in these verses, and though he does not undertake to find out this *work of*

God, yet he says that which may prevent its being a stumbling-block to us.

1. Before he describes the temptation in its strength, he lays down a great and unquestionable truth, which he resolves to adhere to, and which, if firmly believed, will be sufficient to break the force of the temptation. This has been the way of God's people in grappling with this difficulty. Job, before he discourses of this matter, lays down the doctrine of God's omniscience, (Job, 24. 1.) Jeremiah the doctrine of his righteousness, (Jer. 12. 1.) another prophet that of his holiness, (Hab. 1. 13.) the psalmist that of his goodness and peculiar favour to his own people; (Ps. 73. 1.) and that is it which Solomon here fastens upon, and resolves to abide by, that though good and evil seem to be dispensed promiscuously, yet God has a particular care of, and concern for, his own people; *The righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God*, under his special protection and guidance; all their affairs are managed by him for their good; all their wise and righteous actions are *in his hand*, to be recompensed in the other world, though not in this. They seem as if they were given up *into the hand of their enemies*, but it is not so; men have *no power against them, but what is given them from above*; the events that affect them do not come to pass by chance, but all according to the will and council of God, which will turn that to be for them which seemed to be most against them. Let this make us easy, whatever happens, that all God's saints are in his hand, Deut. 33. 3 John, 10. 29. Ps. 31. 15.

2. He lays this down for a rule, That the love and hatred of God are not to be measured and judged of by men's outward condition. If prosperity were a certain sign of God's love, and affliction of his hatred, then it might justly be an offence to us to see the wicked and godly fare alike. But the matter is not so; *No man knows either love, or hatred, by all that is before them* in this world, by those things that are the objects of sense. These we may know by that which is within us; if we love God with all our heart, thereby we may know that he loves us; as we may know likewise that we are under his wrath, if we be governed by that carnal mind which is enmity to him; these will be known by that which shall be hereafter, by men's everlasting state; it is certain that men are happy or miserable, according as they are under the love or hatred of God, but not according as they are under the smiles or frowns of the world; and therefore if God loves a righteous man, (as certainly he does,) he is happy, though the world frown upon him; and if he hate a wicked man, (as certainly he does,) he is miserable, though the world smile upon him; then is the offence of this promiscuous distribution of events ceased.

3. Having laid down these principles, he acknowledges that *all things come alike to all*; so it has been formerly, and therefore we are not to think it strange, if it be so now, if it be so with us and our families. Some make this, and all that follows to v. 13. to be the perverse reasonings of the atheists against the doctrine of God's providence; but I rather take it to be Solomon's concession, which he might the more freely make, when he had fixed those truths which are sufficient to guard against any ill use that may be made of what he grants. Observe here, v. 2.

(1.) The great difference that there is between the characters of the righteous and the wicked, which, in several instances, are set the one over against the other, to shew that though *all things come alike to all*, yet that does not in the least confound the eternal distinction between moral good and evil, but that remains immutable. [1.] The righteous are *clean, have clean hands and pure hearts*; the wicked are *unclean*, under the dominion of unclean lusts, *pure perhaps in their own eyes*, but not *cleansed from their filthiness*. God will certainly put a difference *between the clean and the unclean, the precious and the vile*, in the other world, though he does not seem to do so in this. [2.] The righteous *sacrifice*, they make conscience of worshipping God according to his will, both with inward and outward worship; the wicked *sacrifice not*, they live in the neglect of God's worship, and grudge to part with any thing for his honour. *What is the Almighty, that they should serve him?* [3.] The righteous are *good*, good in God's sight, they do good in the world; the wicked are *sinners*, violating

the laws of God and man, and provoking to both. [4.] The wicked man *swears*, has no veneration for the name of God, but profanes it by swearing rashly and falsely; but the righteous man *fears an oath*, swears not, but is sworn, and then with great reverence; he fears to take an oath, because it is a solemn appeal to God as a Witness and Judge; he fears, when he has taken an oath, to break it, because God is righteous, who takes vengeance.

(2.) The little difference there is between the conditions of the righteous and the wicked in this world; *There is one event to both*. Is David rich? So is Nabal. Is Joseph favoured by his prince? So is Haman. Is Ahab killed in a battle? So is Josiah. Are the bad figs carried to Babylon? So are the good, Jer. 24. 1. There is a vast difference between the original, the design, and the nature, of the same event to the one and to the other; the effects and issues of them are likewise vastly different; the same providence to the one is a *savour of life unto life*, to the other of *death unto death*, though, to outward appearance, it is the same.

4. He owns this to be a very great grievance to those that are wise and good; *This is an evil*, the greatest perplexity, *among all things that are done under the sun*; (v. 3.) nothing has given me more disturbance than this, *that there is one event unto all*. It hardens atheists, and strengthens the hands of evil doers; for therefore it is that *the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil*, and *fully set in them to do evil*, ch. 8. 11. When they see that *there is one event to the righteous and the wicked*, they wickedly infer thence, that it is all one to God whether they are righteous or wicked, and therefore they stick at nothing to gratify their lusts.

5. For the further clearing of this great difficulty, as he began this discourse with the doctrine of the happiness of the righteous, (whatever they may suffer, *they and their works are in the hands of God*, and therefore in good hands, they could not be in better,) so he concludes with the doctrine of the misery of the wicked; however they may prosper, *madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead*. Envy not the prosperity of evil doers, for, (1.) They are now madmen, and all the delights they seem to be blessed with are but like the pleasant dreams and fancies of a distracted man. They are *mad upon their idols*, (Jer. 50. 38.) are mad against God's people, Acts, 26. 11. When the prodigal repented, it is said, *He came to himself*, (Luke, 15. 17.) which intimates that he had been beside himself before. (2.) They will shortly be dead men. They make a mighty noise and bustle *while they live*, but, after a while, *they go to the dead*, and there is an end of all their pomp and power; they will then be reckoned with for all their madness and outrage in sin. Though, on this side death, the righteous and the wicked seem alike, on the other side death there will be a vast difference between them.

4. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. 6. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any *thing* that is done under the sun. 7. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. 8. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. 9. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in *this* life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. 10. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for *there is no work, nor device, nor*

knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Solomon, in a fret, had *praised the dead more than the living*; (ch. 4. 2.) but here, considering the advantages of life to prepare for death, and make sure the hope of a better life, he seems to be of another mind.

I. He shews the advantages which the living have above those that are dead, v. 4. . 6.

1. While there is life *there is hope*. *Dum spiro, spero*—*While I breathe, I hope*. It is the privilege of the living, that they are *joined to the living*, in relation, commerce, and conversation, and, while they are so, *there is hope*. If a man's condition be, upon any account, bad, *there is hope* it will be amended; if *the heart be full of evil, and madness be in it*, yet, while there is life, *there is hope*, that, by the grace of God, there may be a blessed change wrought; but after men *go to the dead*, (v. 3.) it is too late then; he that is then filthy will be filthy still, for ever filthy. If men be thrown aside as useless, yet, while they are *joined to the living*, *there is hope* that they may yet again take root, and bear fruit; he that is alive, is, or may be, good for something, but he that is dead, as to this world, is not capable of being any further serviceable; therefore *a living dog is better than a dead lion*, the meanest beggar alive has that comfort of this world, and does that service to it, which the greatest prince, when he is dead, is utterly incapable of.

2. While there is life, there is an opportunity of preparing for death; *The living know* that which the dead have no knowledge of, particularly they *know that they shall die*, and are, or may be, thereby influenced to prepare for that great change, which will come certainly, and may come suddenly. Note, *The living cannot but know that they shall die*, that they must needs die; they know they are under a sentence of death; they are already taken into custody by its messengers, and feel themselves declining. This is a needful, useful, knowledge; for what is our business, while we live, but to get ready to die? *The living know they shall die*, it is a thing yet to come, and therefore provision may be made for it; *the dead know* they are dead, and it is too late, they are on the other side the great gulf fixed.

3. When life is gone, all this world is gone with it, as to us. (1.) There is an end of all our acquaintance with this world, and the things of it; *The dead know not any thing* of that which, while they lived, they were intimately conversant with. It does not appear that they know any thing of what is done by those they leave behind. Abraham is ignorant of us; they are removed *into darkness*, Job, 10. 22. (2.) There is an end of all their enjoyments in this world; *They have no more a reward* for their toils about the world, but all they got must be left to others; they have a reward for their holy actions, but not for their worldly ones; the meats and the belly will be destroyed together, John, 6. 27. 1 Cor. 6. 13. It is explained, v. 6. *Neither have they any more a portion for ever*; none of that which they imagined would be a *portion for ever*, of that which is *done*, and *got under the sun*. The things of this world will not be a portion for the soul, because they will not be a portion for ever; they that choose *this*, and have them for their *good things*, have only a *portion in this life*, Ps. 17. 14. The world can only be an annuity for life, not a *portion for ever*. (3.) There is an end of their name; there are but few whose names survive them long, the grave is a land of forgetfulness, *for the memory of them* that are laid there, *is soon forgotten*; their *place knows them no more*, nor the lands they called by their own names. (4.) There is an end of their affections, their friendships, and enmities; *Their love, and their hatred, and their envy, are now perished*; the good things they loved, the evil things they hated, the prosperity of others, which they envied, are now all at an end with them. Death parts those that loved one another, and puts an end to their friendship, and those that hated one another too, and puts an end to their quarrels. *Actio moritur cum persona*—*The person and his actions die together*. There we shall be never the better for our friends, their love can do us no kindness; nor ever the worse for our enemies, their hatred and envy can do us no damage. *There the wicked cease from troubling*. Those

things which now so affect us, and fill us, which we are so concerned about, and so jealous of, will there be at an end.

H. Hence he infers that it is our wisdom to make the best use of life that we can, while it does last, and manage wisely what remains of it.

1. Let us relish the comforts of life while we live, and cheerfully take our share of the enjoyments of it. Solomon, having been himself ensnared by the abuse of sensitive delights, warns others of the danger, not by a total prohibition of them, but by directing to the sober and moderate use of them; we may use the world, but must not abuse it; take what is to be had out of it, and expect no more.

Here we have, (1.) The particular instances of this cheerfulness prescribed; "Thou that art drooping and melancholy, *go thy way*, like a fool as thou art, and get into a better temper of mind."

[1.] "Let thy spirit be easy and pleasant, then let there be *joy* and a *merry heart* within;" a *good heart*, so the word is; which distinguishes this from carnal mirth and sensual pleasure, which are the evil of the heart, both a symptom, and a cause, of much evil there. We must enjoy ourselves, enjoy our friends, enjoy our God, and be careful to keep a good conscience, that nothing may disturb us in these enjoyments. We must serve God with gladness, in the use of what he gives us, and be liberal in communicating it to others, and not suffer ourselves to be oppressed with inordinate care and grief about the world. We must eat our bread as Israelites, *not in our mourning*; (Deut. 26. 14.) as Christians, *with gladness and liberality of heart*, Acts, 2. 46. See Deut. 28. 47.

[2.] "Make use of the comforts and enjoyments which God has given thee; *eat thy bread, drink thy wine*, thine, not another's; not *the bread of deceit*, or *the wine of violence*, but that which is honestly got, else thou canst not eat it with any comfort, nor expect a blessing upon it; *thy bread*, and *thy wine*, such as are agreeable to thy place and station, not extravagantly above it, nor sordidly below it; lay out what God has given thee, for the ends for which thou art intrusted with it, as being but a steward."

[3.] "Evidence thy cheerfulness; (c. 8.) *Let thy garments be always white*; observe a proportion in thine expences; reduce not thy food, in order to gratify thy pride, nor thy clothing, in order to gratify thy voluptuousness. Be neat, wear clean linen, and be not slovenly." Or, "*Let thy garments be white*, in token of joy and cheerfulness," which were expressed by *white raiment*; (Rev. 3. 4.) "and, as a further token of joy, *let thy head lack no ointment* that is fit for it;" our Saviour admitted this piece of pleasure at a feast, (Matth. 26. 7.) and David observes it among the gifts of God's bounty to him, (Ps. 23. 5.) *Thou anointest my head with oil*. Not that we must place our happiness in any of the delights of sense, or set our hearts upon them, but what God has given us we must make as comfortable a use of as we can afford, under the limitations of sobriety and wisdom, and not forgetting the poor.

[4.] "Make thyself agreeable to thy relations; *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest*; do not engross thy delights, making much of thyself only, and not caring what becomes of those about thee, but let them share with thee, and make them easy too. Have a wife; for even in paradise *it was not good for man to be alone*. Keep to thy wife, to one, and do not multiply wives;" (Solomon had found the mischief of that;) "keep to her only, and have nothing to do with any other." How can a man live joyfully with one with whom he does not live honestly? "Love thy wife; and *the wife whom thou lovest* thou wilt be likely to *live joyfully with*." When we do the duty of relations, we may expect the comfort of them. See Prov. 5. 19. "Live with thy wife, and delight in her society; *live joyfully with her*, and be most cheerful when thou art with her. Take pleasure in thy family, thy vine and thine olive plants."

(2.) The qualifications necessary to this cheerfulness; "Rejoice, and have a *merry heart*, if God now accepts thy works. If thou art reconciled to God, and recommended to him, then thou hast reason to be cheerful, otherwise not." *Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people, for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God*, Hos. 9. 1. Our first care must be to make our peace with God, and obtain his favour, to do that which he will accept of, and

then, *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy*. Note, Those whose works God has accepted have reason to be cheerful, and ought to be so. "Now that thou eatest the bread of thy sacrifices *with joy*, and partakest of the wine of thy drink-offerings *with a merry heart*, now *God accepts thy works*: thy religious services, when performed with holy joy, are pleasing to God; he loves to have his servants sing at their work, it proclaims him a good Master.

(3.) The reasons for it; "Live joyfully, for,"

[1.] "It is all little enough to make thy passage through this world easy and comfortable; *The days of thy life* are the days of *thy vanity*; there is nothing here but trouble and disappointment; thou wilt have time enough for sorrow and grief when thou canst not help it, and therefore *live joyfully* while thou canst, and perplex not thyself with thoughts and cares about to-morrow; *suffieient to the day is the evil thereof*. Let a gracious serenity of mind be a powerful antidote against the vanity of the world."

[2.] "It is all thou canst get from this world; *That is thy portion in the things of this life*; in God, and another life, thou shalt have a better portion, and a better recompence for thy labours in religion; but for thy pains *which thou takest* about the things *under the sun*, this is all thou canst expect, and therefore do not deny this to thyself."

2. Let us apply ourselves to the business of life, while life lasts, and so use the enjoyments of it, as by them to be fitted for the employments; "Therefore *eat with joy* and a *merry heart*, not that thy soul may take its ease, (as Luke, 12. 19.) but that thy soul may take the more pains, and the joy of the Lord may be its strength, and oil to its wheels," v. 10. *Whatsoever thy hand finds to do, do it with thy might*. Observe here, (1.) There is not only something to be had, but something to be done, in this life, and the chief good we are to inquire after, is, *the good we should do*, Eccl. 2. 3. This is the world of service, that to come is the world of recompence; this is the world of probation and preparation for eternity; we are here upon business, and upon our behaviour. (2.) Opportunity is to direct and quicken duty; that is to be done, which *our hand finds to do*, which occasion calls for; and an active hand will always find something to do that will turn to a good account. What must be done, of necessity, our hand will here find a price in it for the doing of, Prov. 17. 16. (3.) What good we have an opportunity of doing, we must do, while we have the opportunity, and *do it with our might*, with care, vigour, and resolution, whatever difficulties and discouragements we may meet with in it. Harvest-days are busy days; and we must make hay while the sun shines. Serving God and working out our salvation must be done with *all that is within us*; and all little enough. (4.) There is good reason why we should *work the works of him that sent us, while it is day, because the night comes, wherein no man can work*, John, 9. 4. We must up and be doing now with all possible diligence, because our doing-time will be done shortly, and we know not how soon. But this we know, that if the work of life be not done when our time is done, we are undone for ever; *There is no work to be done, nor device to do it, no knowledge for speculation, nor wisdom for practice, in the grave, whither thou goest*. We are all going toward the grave, every day brings us a step nearer it; when we are *in the grave*, it will be too late to mend the errors of life, too late to repent, and make our peace with God, too late to lay up any thing in store for eternal life; it must be done now or never. The grave is a land of darkness and silence, and therefore there is no doing any thing for our souls there, it must be done now or never, John, 12. 35.

11. I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

12. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of

men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

The preacher here, for a farther proof of the vanity of the world, and to convince us that *all our works are in the hand of God*, and not in our own hand, shews the uncertainty and contingency of future events, and how often they contradict the prospects we have of them. He had exhorted us (v.10.) to do what we have to do *with all our might*; but here he reminds us, that, when we have done all, we must leave the issue with God, and not be confident of the success.

1. We are often disappointed of the good we had great hopes of. v.11. Solomon had himself made the observation, and so has many a one since, that events, both in public and private affairs, do not always agree even with the most rational prospects and probabilities. *Nullo fortuna tam dedita est, ut multa tentanti ubique respondeat—Fortune surrenders herself to no one, so as to ensure him success, however numerous his undertakings.* Seneca. The issue of affairs is often unaccountably cross to every one's expectation; that the highest may not presume, nor the lowest despair, but all may live in a humble dependence upon God, from whom every man's judgment proceeds.

(1.) He gives instances of disappointment, even there where means and instruments were most encouraging, and promised fair.

[1.] One would think that the lightest of foot should, in running, win the prize; and yet *the race is not always to the swift*, some accident happens to retard them, or they are too secure, and therefore remiss, and let those that are slower get the start of them.

[2.] One would think that, in fighting, the most numerous and powerful army should be always victorious, and, in single combat, that the bold and mighty champion should win the laurel; but *the battle is not always to the strong*; a host of Philistines was once put to flight by Jonathan and his man; *one of you shall chase a thousand*; the goodness of the cause has often carried the day against the most formidable power.

[3.] One would think that men of sense should always be men of substance, and that those who know how to live in the world should not only have a plentiful maintenance, but get great estates; and yet it does not always prove so; even *bread is not always to the wise*, much less *riches always to men of understanding*. Many ingenious men, and men of business, who were likely to thrive in the world, have strangely gone backward, and come to nothing.

[4.] One would think that those who understand men, and have the art of management, should always get preferment, and obtain the smiles of great men; but many ingenious men have been disappointed, and have spent their days in obscurity, nay, have fallen into disgrace, and perhaps have ruined themselves, by those very methods by which they hoped to have raised themselves; for *favour is not always to men of skill*, but fools are favoured, and wise men frowned upon.

(2.) He resolves all these disappointments into an over-ruling power and providence, the disposals of which to us seem casual, and we call them *chance*, but really they are according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, here called *time*, in the language of this book, ch. 3. 1. Ps. 31. 15. *Time and chance happen to them all*. A sovereign Providence breaks men's measures, and blasts their hopes, and teaches them that the way of man is not in himself, but subject to the divine will. We must use means, but not trust to them; if we succeed, we must give God the praise; (Ps. 44. 3.) if we be crossed, we must acquiesce in his will, and take our lot.

2. We are often surprised with the evils we were in little fear of; (v. 12.) *Man knows not his time*, the time of his calamity, his fall, his death, which, in scripture, is called *our day*, and *our hour*.

(1.) We know not what troubles are before us, which will take us off our business, and take us out of the world, what *time and chance will happen to us*, nor what *one day*, or a night, may bring forth. It is not for us to know the times, no, not our own time, when, or how, we shall die. God has, in wisdom, kept us in the dark, that we may be always ready. (2.) Perhaps we may meet

with trouble in that very thing wherein we promise ourselves the greatest satisfaction and advantage; as the fishes and the birds are drawn into the snare and net by the bait laid to allure them, which they greedily catch at, so are the sons of men often snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them, before they are aware. And these things too *come alike to all*. Men often find their bane where they sought their bliss, and catch their death where they thought to have found a prize. Let us therefore never be secure, but always ready for changes, that, though they may be sudden, they may be no surprise or terror to us.

13. This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: 14. *There was a little city*, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: 15. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. 16. Then said I, *Wisdom is better than strength*: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. 17. The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. 18. *Wisdom is better than weapons of war*: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

Solomon still recommends wisdom to us as necessary to the preserving of our peace and the perfecting of our business, notwithstanding the vanities and crosses which human affairs are subject to. He had said, (v. 11.) *Bread is not always to the wise*; yet he would not therefore be thought either to disparage, or to discourage, wisdom, no, he still retains his principle, that *wisdom excels folly as much as light excels darkness*, (ch. 2. 13.) and we ought to love and embrace it, and be governed by it, for the sake of its own intrinsic worth, and the capacity it gives us of being serviceable to others, though we ourselves should not get wealth and preferment by it. This wisdom, this which he here describes, wisdom, which enables a man to serve his country, out of pure affection to its interests, when he himself gains no advantage by it, no not so much as thanks for his pains, or the reputation of it, this is the wisdom which, Solomon says, *seemed great unto him*, v. 13. A public spirit, in a private sphere, is wisdom, which those who understand things that differ, cannot but look upon as very magnificent.

1. Solomon here gives an instance, which, probably, was a case in fact, in some neighbouring country, of a poor man who with his wisdom did great service in a time of public distress and danger; (v. 14.) *There was a little city*, (no great prize, whoever was master of it,) there were but few men within it to defend it, and men, if men of fortitude, are the best fortifications of a city; here were few men, and, because few, feeble, fearful, and ready to give up their city as not tenable. Against this little city a great king came with a numerous army, and besieged it, either in pride, or covetousness to possess it, or in revenge for some affront given him, to chastise and destroy it; thinking it stronger than it was, he built great bulwarks against it, from which to batter it, and doubted not in a little time to make himself master of it. What a great deal of unjust vexation do ambitious princes give to their harmless neighbours! This great king needed not fear this little city; why then should he frighten it? It would be little profit to him: why then should he put himself to such a great expence to gain it? But, as unreasonably and insatiably greedy as little people sometimes are to lay house to house, and field to field, great kings often are, to lay city to city, and province to province, that they may be placed alone in the earth, Isa. 5. 8. Did victory and success attend the strong? No, there was found in this little city, among the few men that were in it, one poor wise man; a wise man, and yet poor, and not preferred to any place of profit or power in the city; places of trust were not given to men according

*to their merit, and meetness for them, else such a wise man as this had not been a poor man. Now,

1. Being wise, he served the city, though he was poor; in their distress they found him out, (Judg. 11. 7.) and begged his advice and assistance; and *he by his wisdom delivered the city*, either by prudent instructions given to the besieged, directing them to some unthought of stratagem for their own security, or by a prudent treaty with the besiegers, as the woman at Abel, 2 Sam. 20. 16. He did not upbraid them with the contempt they had put upon him, in leaving him out of their council, nor tell them he was poor, and had nothing to lose, and therefore cared not what became of the city; but did his best for it, and was blessed with success. Note, Private interests and personal resentments must always be sacrificed to the public good, and forgotten when the common welfare is concerned.

2. Being poor, he was slighted by the city, though he was wise, and had been an instrument to save them all from ruin; *No man remembered that same poor man*, his good services were not taken notice of, no recompence was made him, no marks of honour put upon him, but he lived in as much poverty and obscurity as he had done before; *riches were not to this man of understanding, nor favour to this man of skill*. Many who have well-merited of their prince and country have been ill-paid; such an ungrateful world do we live in. It is well that useful men have a God to trust to, who will be their bountiful Rewarder; for, among men, great services are often envied, and rewarded with evil for good.

II. From this instance he draws some useful inferences; looks upon it, and receives instruction.

1. Hence he observes the great usefulness and excellency of wisdom, and what a blessing it makes men to their country; *Wisdom is better than strength, v. 16*. A prudent mind, which is the honour of a man, is to be preferred before a robust body, in which many of the brute creatures excel man. A man may by his wisdom effect that which he could never compass by his strength; and may overcome those, by out-witting them, who are able to overpower him. Nay, *wisdom is better than weapons of war*, offensive or defensive, v. 18. *Wisdom*, that is, religion and piety, (for the wise man is here opposed to a sinner,) this is better than all military endowments or accoutrements, for it will engage God for us, and then we are safe in the greatest perils, and successful in the greatest enterprises. *If God be for us, who can be against us*, or stand before us?

2. Hence he observes the commanding force and power of wisdom, though it labour under external disadvantages; (v. 17.) *The words of wise men are heard in quiet*; what they speak, being rational and to the purpose, being spoken calmly and with deliberation, (though, not being rich and in authority, they dare not speak loud, nor with any great assurance,) will be hearkened to and regarded, will gain respect, nay, will gain the point, and sway with men, more than the imperious clamour of him that *rules among fools*, who, like fools, chose him to be their ruler, for his noise and blustering, and, like fools, think he must by those methods carry the day with every body else. A few close arguments are worth a great many big words; and those will strike sail to fair reasoning, who will answer them that hector and insult according to their folly. *How forcible are right words!* What is spoken wisely should be spoken calmly, and then it will be heard in quiet, and calmly considered. But passion will lessen the force even of reason, instead of adding any force to it.

3. Hence he observes that wise and good men, notwithstanding this, must often content themselves with the satisfaction of having done good, or, at least, endeavoured it, and offered at it, when they cannot do the good they would do, nor have the praise they should have. Wisdom capacitates a man to serve his neighbours, and he offers his service; but, alas, if he be poor, his wisdom is despised, and *his words are not heard, v. 16*. Many a man is buried alive in poverty and obscurity, who, if he had but fit encouragement given him, might be a great blessing to the world; many a pearl is lost in its shell. But there is a day coming, when wisdom and goodness shall be in honour, and the *righteous shall shine forth*.

4. From what he had observed of the great good which one wise and virtuous man may do, he infers what a great deal of mischief one wicked man may do, and what a great deal of good he may be the hinderance of; *One sinner destroyeth much good. (1.)* As to himself, a sinful condition is a wasteful condition. How many of the good gifts both of nature and Providence does one sinner destroy, and make waste of—good sense, good parts, good learning, a good disposition, a good estate, good meat, good drink, and abundance of God's good creatures, all made use of in the service of sin, and so destroyed and lost, and the end of giving them frustrated and perverted! He who destroys his own soul destroys much good. (2.) As to others, what a great deal of mischief may one wicked man do in a town or country! One sinner, who makes it his business to debauch others, may defeat and frustrate the intentions of a great many good laws, and a great deal of good preaching, and draw many into his pernicious ways; one sinner may be the ruin of a town, as one Achan troubled the whole camp of Israel. The wise man, who delivered the city, had had his due respect and recompence for it, but that some one sinner hindered it, and invidiously diminished the service. And many a good project, well-laid for the public welfare, has been destroyed by some one subtle adversary to it. The wisdom of some would have healed the nation, but through the wickedness of a few, it would not be healed. See who are a kingdom's friends and enemies, if one saint does much good, and one sinner destroys much good.

CHAP. X.

This chapter seems to be like Solomon's proverbs, a collection of wise sayings and observations, rather than a part of his sermon; but the preacher studied to be sententious, and set in order many proverbs, to be brought in in his preaching.

Yet the general scope of all the observations in this chapter, is, to recommend wisdom to us, and its precepts and rules, as of great use for the right ordering of our conversation, and to caution us against folly. I. He recommends wisdom to private persons, who are in an inferior station. 1. It is our wisdom to preserve our reputation, in managing our affairs dexterously, v. 1. 3. 2. To be submissive to our superiors, if at any time we have offended them, v. 4. 3. To live quiet and peaceable lives, and not to meddle with those that are factious and seditious, and are endeavouring to disturb the government, and the public repose; the folly and danger of which disloyal and turbulent practices he shews, v. 8. 11. 4. To govern our tongues well, v. 12. 15. 5. To be diligent in our business and provide well for our families, v. 18, 19. 6. Not to speak ill of our rulers, no not in secret, v. 20. II. He recommends wisdom to rulers; let them not think that, because their subjects must be quiet under them, therefore they may do what they please; no, but, 1. Let them be careful whom they prefer to places of trust and power, v. 5. 7. 2. Let them manage themselves discreetly, be generous, and not childish; temperate, and not luxurious, v. 16, 17. Happy the nation, when princes and people make conscience of their duty, according to these rules.

1. **D**EAD flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour. 2. A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left. 3. Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.

In these verses, Solomon shews,

1. What great need wise men have to take heed of being guilty of any instance of folly; for a little folly is a great blemish to him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour, and is as hurtful to his good name as dead flies are to a sweet perfume, not only spoiling the sweetness of it, but making it to send forth a stinking savour. Note, (1.) True wisdom is true honour, and will gain a man a reputation, which is like a box of precious ointment, pleasing and very valuable. (2.) The reputation that is got hardly, and by a great deal of wisdom, may be easily lost, and by a little folly; because envy fastens upon eminency, and makes the worst of the mistakes and miscarriages of those who are cried up for wisdom, and improves them to their disadvantage; so that the folly which in another would not be taken notice of, in them is severely censured. Those who make a great profession of religion have need to walk very circumspectly, to abstain from all appearances of evil

and approaches towards it, because many eyes are upon them, that watch for their halting; their character is soon sullied, and they have a great deal of reputation to lose.

2. What a deal of advantage a wise man has above a fool in the management of business; (v. 2.) *A wise man's heart is at his right hand*, so that he goes about his business with dexterity, turns his hand readily to it, and goes through it with dispatch; his counsel and courage are ready to him, whenever he has occasion for them; but a *fool's heart is at his left hand*, it is always to seek when he has any thing to do that is of importance, and therefore he goes awkwardly about it, like a man that is left-handed; he is soon at a loss, and at his wit's end.

3. How apt fools are, at every turn, to proclaim their own folly, and expose themselves; he that is either witless or graceless, either silly or wicked, if he be ever so little from under the check, and left to himself, if he but *talk by the way*, soon shows what he is; his *wisdom fails him*, and, by some impropriety or other, *he says to every one he meets, that he is a fool*, (v. 3.) he discovers it as plainly as if he had told them so. He cannot conceal it, and he is not ashamed of it. Sin is the reproach of sinners, wherever they go.

4. If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacieth great offences. 5. There is an evil *which* I have seen under the sun, as an error *which* proceedeth from the ruler: 6. Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. 7. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth. 8. He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. 9. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. 10. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct. 11. Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment, and a babler is no better.

The scope of these verses is to keep subjects loyal and dutiful to the government; in Solomon's reign, the people were very rich, and lived in prosperity, which perhaps made them proud and petulant, and when the taxes were high, though they had enough to pay them with, it is probable that many carried it insolently toward the government, and threatened to rebel. To such Solomon here gives some necessary cautions.

I. Let not subjects carry on a quarrel with their prince upon any private personal disgust; (v. 4.) "*If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee*, if, upon some misinformation given him, or some mismanagement of thine, he is displeased at thee, and threaten thee, yet *leave not thy place*, forget not the duty of a subject, revolt not from thy allegiance, do not, in a passion, quit thy post in his service, and throw up thy commission, as despairing ever to regain his favour; no, wait a while, and thou wilt find he is not implacable, but that *yielding pacifies great offences*." Solomon speaks for himself, and for every wise and good man that is a master, or a magistrate, that he could easily forgive those, upon their submission, whom yet, upon their provocation, he had been very angry with. It is fairer and better to yield to an angry prince than to contend with him.

II. Let not subjects commence a quarrel with their prince, though the public administration be not in every thing as they would have it. He grants *there is an evil often seen under the sun*, and it is a king's evil, an evil which the king only can cure, for *it is an error which proceeds from the ruler*; (v. 5.) it is a mistake which rulers, consulting their personal affections more than the public interests, are too often guilty of, that men are not pre-

ferred according to their merit, but *folly is set in great dignity*, men of shattered brains, and broken fortunes, are put in places of power and trust, while the rich men of good sense and good estates, whose interest would oblige them to be true to the public, and whose abundance would be likely to set them above temptations to bribery and extortion, yet sit in low places, and can get no preferment; (v. 6.) either the ruler knows not how to value them, or the terms of preferment are such as they cannot in conscience comply with. It is ill with a people, when vicious men are advanced, and men of worth are kept under hatches. This is illustrated; (v. 7.) *I have seen servants upon horses*; men not so much of mean extraction and education, (if that were all, it were the more excusable, nay, there is many a wise servant, who with good reason *has rule over a son that causes shame*;) but of sordid, servile, mercenary, dispositions, I have seen these riding in pomp and state as princes, while princes, men of noble birth and qualities, fit to rule a kingdom, have been forced to *walk as servants upon the earth*, poor, and despised. Thus God, in his providence, punishes a wicked people; but as far as it is the ruler's act and deed, it is certainly his *error*, and a *great evil*, a grievance to the subject, and very provoking; but it is an *error under the sun*, which will certainly be rectified *above the sun*, and when it shall shine no more, for in heaven it is only wisdom and holiness that are set in *great dignity*. But if the prince be guilty of this error, yet let not the subjects *leave their places*, nor rise up against the government, nor form any project for the alteration of it; nor let the prince carry on the humour too far, nor set such servants, such beggars, on horseback, as will ride furiously over the ancient landmarks of the constitution, and threaten the subversion of it.

1. Let neither prince nor people violently attempt any changes, nor make a forcible entry upon a national settlement, for they will both find it of dangerous consequence, which he shews here by four similitudes, the scope of which is to give us a caution not to meddle to our own hurt. Let not princes invade the rights and liberties of their subjects; let not subjects mutiny and rebel against their princes: for, (1.) *He that digs a pit for another*, it is ten to one but *he falls into it* himself, and his violent dealing returns upon his own head. If princes become tyrants, or subjects become rebels, all histories will tell both what is likely to be their fate, and that it is at their utmost peril, and it were better for both to be content within their own bounds. (2.) *Whoso breaks a hedge*, an old hedge, that has long been a land-mark, let him expect that a *serpent or adder*, such as harbour in rotten hedges, will *bite him*; some viper or other will fasten upon his hand, Acts, 28. 3. God, by his ordinance, as by a hedge, has enclosed the prerogatives and powers of princes, their persons are under his special protection; those therefore that form any treasonable designs against their peace, their crown and dignity, are but twisting halters for themselves. (3.) *Whoso removes stones*, to pull down a wall or building, does but pluck them upon himself, he shall be *hurt therewith*, and will wish that he had let them alone. Those that go about to alter a well-modelled, well-settled, government, under colour of redressing some grievances, and correcting some faults in it, will quickly perceive, not only that it is easier to find fault than to mend, to demolish that which is good than to build up that which is better, but that they thrust their own fingers into the fire, and overwhelm themselves in the ruin they occasion. (4.) *He that cleaves the wood*, especially if, as it follows, he has sorry tools, (v. 10.) *he shall be endangered thereby*, the chips, or his own axe-head, will fly in his face. If we meet with knotty pieces of timber, men of perverse and ungovernable spirits, and we think to master them by force and violence, and hew them to pieces, they may not only prove too hard for us, but the attempt may turn to our damage.

2. Rather let both prince and people act towards each other with prudence, mildness, and good temper; *Wisdom is profitable to direct* the ruler how to manage a people that are inclined to be turbulent, so as neither, on the one hand, by a supine negligence, to embolden and encourage them, nor, on the other hand, by rigour and severity, to exasperate and provoke them to any seditious practices. It is likewise profitable to direct the subjects how to

act towards a prince that is inclined to bear hard upon them, so as not to alienate his affections from them, but to win upon him, by humble remonstrances, (not insolent demands, such as the people made upon Rehoboam,) by patient submissions, and peaceable expedients. The same rule is to be observed in all relations, for the preserving of the comfort of them; let wisdom direct to gentle methods, and forbear violent ones.

(1.) Wisdom will teach us to whet the tool we are to make use of, rather than, by leaving it blunt, oblige ourselves to put to so much the *more strength*, v. 10. We might save ourselves a great deal of labour, and prevent a great deal of danger, if we did whet before we cut, consider and premeditate what is fit to be said and done in every difficult case, that we may accommodate ourselves to it, and may do our work smoothly and easily both to others and to ourselves. Wisdom will direct how to sharpen and put an edge upon both ourselves and those we employ, not to *work deceitfully*, (Ps. 53. 2.) but to work cleanly and cleverly. The mower loses no time, when he is whetting his scythe.

(2.) Wisdom will teach us to enchant the serpent we are to contend with, rather than think to out-hiss it; (v. 11.) *The serpent will bite*, if he be not by singing and music charmed and enchanted, against which therefore he *stops his ears*; (Ps. 58. 4, 5.) and a *babbler is no better* to all those who enter the lists with him, who therefore must not think by dint of words to out-talk him, but by prudent management to enchant him. *He that is lord of the tongue*, so the phrase is, a ruler that has liberty of speech, and may say what he will, it is as dangerous dealing with him, as with a serpent uncharmed; but, if you use the enchantment of a mild and humble submission, you may be safe, and out of danger; herein *wisdom*, the meekness of wisdom, is *profitable to direct*. *By long forbearing is a prince persuaded*, Prov. 25. 15. Jacob enchanted Esau with a present, and Abigail David. To those that may say any thing, it is wisdom to say nothing that is provoking.

12. The words of a wise man's mouth *are* gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. 13. The beginning of the words of his mouth *is* foolishness: and the end of his talk *is* mischievous madness. 14. A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? 15. The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

Solomon having shewed the benefit of wisdom, and of what great advantage it is to us in the management of our affairs, here shews the mischief of folly, and how it exposes men; which perhaps comes in as a reflection upon those rulers who *set folly in great dignity*.

1. Fools *talk* a great deal to no purpose, and they shew their folly as much by the multitude, impertinence, and mischievousness, of their words, as by any thing; whereas *the words of a wise man's mouth are gracious*, are grace, manifest grace in his heart, and minister grace to the hearers, are good, and such as become him, and do good to all about him, *the lips of a fool* not only expose him to reproach, and make him ridiculous, but *will swallow up himself*, and bring him to ruin, by provoking the government to take cognizance of his seditious talk, and call him to an account for it. Adonijah foolishly *spoke against his own life*, 1 Kings, 2. 23. Many a man has been sunk by having *his own tongue fall upon him*, Ps. 64. 8. See what a fool's talk is.

(1.) It takes rise from his own weakness and wickedness; *The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness*; the foolishness bound up in his heart, that is the corrupt spring out of which all these polluted streams flow, the evil treasure out of which evil things are brought. As soon as he begins to speak, you may perceive his folly; at the very first he talks idly, and passionately, and like himself.

(2.) It *riseth up to fury*, and tends to the hurt and injury of

others; *The end of his talk*, the end it comes to, is madness; he will presently talk himself into an indecent heat, and break out into the wild extravagancies of a distracted man; the end he aims at, is, mischief; as, at first, he appeared to have little government of himself, so, at last, it appears he has a great deal of malice to his neighbours; that root of bitterness bears gall and wormwood. Note, It is not strange if those that begin foolishly, and madly; for an ungoverned tongue, the more liberty is allowed, grows the more violent.

(3.) It is all the same over and over; (v. 14.) *A fool also is full of words*, a passionate fool especially, that runs on endlessly, and never knows when to take up; he will have the last word, though it be but the same with that which was the first; what is wanting in the weight and strength of his words, he endeavours in vain to make up in the number of them; and they must be repeated, because otherwise there is nothing in them to make them regarded. Note, Many, who are empty of sense, are *full of words*, and the least solid are the most noisy. The following words may be taken either, [1.] As checking him for his vain-glorious boasting in the multitude of his words, what he will *do*, and what he will *have*, not considering that which every body knows, that *a man cannot tell what shall be* in his own time, while he lives, (Prov. 27. 1.) much less can one tell *what shall be after him*, when he is dead and gone. Would we duly consider our own ignorance of, and uncertainty about, future events, it would cut off a great many of the idle words we foolishly multiply. Or, [2.] As mocking him for his tautologies; he is *full of words*, for, if he do but speak the most trite and common thing, *a man cannot tell what shall be*, because he loves to hear himself talk, he will say it again, *what shall be after him, who can tell him?* like Battus in Ovid:

—Sub illis

Montibus (inquit) erant, et erant sub montibus illis—

Under those mountains were they,

They were under those mountains, I say.

whence vain repetitions are called *Battologies*, Matth. 6. 7.

2. Fools *toil* a great deal to no purpose; (v. 15.) *The labour of the foolish*, to accomplish their designs, *wearies every one of them*.

(1.) They weary themselves in that labour which is very foolish and absurd. All their labour is for the world and the body, and the meat that perishes, and in this labour they spend their strength and exhaust their spirits, and *weary themselves for very vanity*, Hab. 2. 13. Isa. 55. 2. They choose that service which is perfect drudgery, rather than that which is perfect liberty. (2.) That labour which is necessary, and would be profitable, and might be gone through with ease, wearies them, because they go about it awkwardly, and foolishly, and so make their business a toil to them, which, if they applied themselves to it prudently, would be a pleasure to them. Many complain of the labours of religion as grievous, which they would have no reason to complain of, if the exercises of Christian piety were always under the direction of Christian prudence. The foolish tire themselves in endless pursuits, and never bring any thing to pass, *because they know not how to go to the city*, because they have not capacity to apprehend the plainest thing, such as the entrance into a great city is, where one would think it were impossible for a man to miss his road. Men's imprudent management of their business robs them both of the comfort and of the benefit of it. But it is the excellency of the way to the heavenly city, that it is a high-way, in which the *way-faring men, though fools, shall not err*; (Isa. 35. 8.) yet sinful folly makes men miss that way.

16. Woe to thee, O land, when thy king *is* a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! 17. Blessed *art* thou, O land, when thy king *is* the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! 18. By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through. 19. A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry:

but money answereth all *things*. 20. Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

Solomon here observes,

1. How much the happiness of a land depends upon the character of its rulers; it is well or ill, with the people, according as the princes are good, or bad.

(1.) The people cannot be happy, when their princes are childish and voluptuous; (v. 16.) *Woe unto thee, O land*, even the land of Canaan itself, though otherwise the glory of all lands, when *thy king is a child*, not so much in age (Solomon himself was young when his kingdom was happy in him) as in understanding; when the prince is weak and foolish as a child, fickle and fond of changes, fretful and humoursome, easily imposed upon, and hardly brought to business, it is ill with the people. The body staggers, if the head be giddy. Perhaps Solomon wrote this, with a foresight of his son Rehoboam's ill conduct; (2 Chron. 13. 7.) he was a child all the days of his life, and his family and kingdom fared the worse for it. Nor is it much better with a people, when their princes *eat in the morning*, make a god of their belly, and make themselves slaves to their appetites. If the king himself were a child, yet if the princes and privy-counsellors are wise and faithful, and apply themselves to business, the land may do the better; but if they addict themselves to their pleasures, and prefer the gratifications of the flesh before the dispatch of the public business, which they disfit themselves for by eating and drinking *in a morning*, when judges are epicures, and do not eat to live, but live to eat, what good can a nation expect?

(2.) The people cannot but be happy, when their rulers are generous and active, sober and temperate, and men of business, v. 17. *The land is then blessed*, [1.] When the sovereign is governed by principles of honour, *when the king is the son of nobles*, acted and animated by a noble spirit, which scorns to do any thing base, and unbecoming so high a character, which is solicitous for the public welfare, and prefers that before any private interests. Wisdom, virtue, and the fear of God, beneficence, and a readiness to do good to all mankind, these ennoble the royal blood. [2.] When the subordinate magistrates are more in care to discharge their trusts than to gratify their appetites, when they *eat in due season*, that is, when they have dispatched their business, and got them an appetite. God gives the creatures *their meat in due season*, (Ps. 145. 15.) let us not take our's unseasonably, lest we lose the comfort of seeing God give it us. Magistrates should *eat for strength*, that their bodies may be fitted to serve their souls in the service of God and their country, *and not for drunkenness*, to make themselves unfit to do any thing either for God or man, and particularly to *sit in judgment*, for they will *err through wine*, (Isa. 28. 7.) *will drink and forget the law*, (Prov. 31. 5.) It is well with a people, when their princes are examples of temperance, when those that have most to spend upon themselves know how to deny themselves.

2. Of what ill consequence slothfulness is both to private and public affairs; (v. 18.) *By much slothfulness and idleness of the hands*, the neglect of business, and the love of ease and pleasure, *the building decays, drops through* first, and by degrees drops down; if it be not kept well covered, and care be not taken to repair the breaches, as any happen, it will rain in, and the timber will rot, and the house will become unfit to dwell in: it is so with the family and the affairs of it; if men cannot find in their hearts to take pains in their cullings, to tend their shops, and look after their own business, they will soon run in debt, and go behind-hand, and, instead of making what they have, more, for their children, will make it less; it is so with the public; if the king be *a child*, and will take no care, if the *princes eat in the morning*, and will take no pains, the affairs of the nation suffer loss, and its interests are prejudiced, its honours sullied, its power weakened, its borders encroached upon, the course of justice obstructed, the

treasure exhausted, and all its foundations out of course; and all this, through the slothfulness and self-seeking of those that should be the *repairers of its breaches, and the restorers of paths to dwell in*, Isa. 58. 12.

3. How industrious, generally, all are, both princes and people, to get money, because that serves for all purposes, v. 19. He seems to prefer money before mirth; *A feast is made for laughter*, not merely for eating, but chiefly for pleasant conversation, and the society of friends; not the laughter of the fool, which is madness, but that of wise men, by which they fit themselves for business, and severe studies. Spiritual feasts are made for spiritual laughter, holy joy in God. *Wine makes merry, makes glad the life, but money is the measure of all things, and answers all things*. *Pecunia obediunt omnia—Money commands all things*. Though *wine make merry*, it will not be a house for us, nor a bed, nor clothing, nor provisions and portions for children; *but money*, if men have enough of it, will be all these. The feast cannot be made without money, and though men have wine, they are not so much disposed to be merry, unless they have money for the necessary supports of life. Money, of itself, answers nothing; it will neither feed nor clothe, but, as it is the instrument of commerce, it answers all the occasions of this present life; what is to be had, may be had for money, but it answers nothing to the soul; it will not procure the pardon of sin, the favour of God, the peace of conscience; the soul, as it is not redeemed, so it is not maintained, with *corruptible things, as silver and gold*. Some refer this to rulers; it is ill with the people, when they give up themselves to luxury and riot, feasting and making merry, not only because their business is neglected, but because *money* must be had, to *answer all these things*, and, in order to that, the people squeezed by heavy taxes.

4. How cautious subjects have need to be, that they harbour not any disloyal purposes in their minds, nor keep up any factious cabals or consultations against the government, because it is ten to one that they are discovered and brought to light, v. 20. "Though rulers should be guilty of some errors, yet be not, upon all occasions, arraigning their administration and running them down, but make the best of them. "Here, (1.) The command teaches us our duty; *Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought*, do not wish ill to the government in thy mind." All sin begins there, and therefore the first risings of it must be curbed and suppressed, and particularly that of treason and sedition. *Curse not the rich*, the princes and governors, *in thy bed-chamber*, in a conclave, or club, of persons disaffected to the government; associate not with such; *come not into their secret*; join not with them in speaking ill of the government, or plotting against it." (2.) The reason consults our safety; "Though the design be carried on ever so closely, *a bird of the air shall carry the voice* to the king, who has more spies about than thou art aware of, *and that which has wings shall tell the matter*, to thy confusion and ruin." God sees what men do, and hears what they say, in secret; and, when he pleases, he can bring to light by strange and unsuspected ways. *Wouldest thou then not be hurt by the powers that be, nor be afraid of them? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same; but if thou do that which is evil, be afraid*, Rom. 13, 3, 4.

CHAP. XI.

In this chapter, we have, I. A pressing exhortation to works of charity and bounty to the poor, as the best cure of the vanity which our worldly riches are subject to, and the only way of making them turn to a substantial good account, v. 1. .6. II. A serious admonition to prepare for death and judgment, and to begin betimes, even in the days of our youth, to do so, v. 7. .10.

1. **C**AST thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. 2. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. 3. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where

the tree falleth, there it shall be. 4. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. 5. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones *do grow* in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. 6. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both *shall be* alike good.

Solomon had often, in this book, pressed it upon rich people to take the comfort of their riches themselves; here he presses it upon them to do good to others with them, and to abound in liberality to the poor, which will, another day, abound to their account. Observe,

I. How the duty itself is recommended to us, v. 1.

1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters, thy bread-corn upon the low places*, so some understand it, alluding to the husbandman, who goes forth, bearing precious seed, sowing bread-corn from his family for his seedness, knowing that, without that, he can have no harvest another year; thus the charitable man takes from his bread-corn for seed-corn, abridges himself to supply the poor, that he may sow beside all waters, (Isa. 32. 20.) because, as he sows, he must reap, Gal. 6. 7. We read of the *harvest of the river*, Isa. 23. 3. Waters, in scripture, are put for multitudes, (Rev. 16. 5.) and there are multitudes of poor, we do not want objects of charity; waters are put also for mourners, the poor are men of sorrows. Thou must give bread, the necessary supports of life, not only give good words, but good things, Isa. 58. 7. It must be *thy* bread, that which is honestly got; it is no charity, but injury, to give that which is none of our own to give; first, *do justly*, and then *love mercy*. “*Thy bread*, which thou didst design for thyself, let the poor have a share with thee, as they had with Job, ch. 31. 17. Give freely to the poor, though it may seem thrown away and lost, as that which is cast upon the waters. Send it a voyage, send it at a venture, as merchants that trade by sea; trust it upon the waters, it shall not sink.”

2. “*Give a portion to seven, and also to eight*; be free and liberal in works of charity.” (1.) “*Give much*, if thou hast much to give, not a pittance, but a *portion*, not a bit or two, but a mess, a meal; give a large dole, not a paltry one; give *good measure*, (Luke, 6. 38.) be generous in giving, as they were, when, on festival days, they sent portions to them for whom nothing was prepared, (Neh. 8. 10.) worthy portions.” (2.) “*Give to many, to seven, and also to eight*; if thou meet with seven objects of charity, give to them all, and then, if thou meet with an eighth, give to that, and if with eight more, give to them all too. Excuse not thyself with the good thou hast done, from the good thou hast further to do, but hold on, and mend. In hard times, when the number of the poor increases, let thy charity be proportionably enlarged.” God is rich in mercy to all, to us, though unworthy, he gives liberally, and upbraids not with former gifts, and we must be merciful, as our heavenly Father is.

II. The reasons with which it is pressed upon us. Consider,

1. Our reward for well-doing is very certain. “*Though thou cast it upon the waters, and it seem lost, thou thinkest thou hast given thy good word with it, and art likely never to hear of it again, yet thou shalt find it after many days*, as the husbandman finds his seed again in a plentiful harvest, and the merchant his venture in a rich return. It is not lost, but well laid out, and well laid up; it brings in full interest, in the present gifts of God’s providence, and graces and comforts of his Spirit; and the principal is sure, laid up in heaven, for it is lent to the Lord.” Seneca, a heathen, could say, *Nihil magis possidere me credam quam bene donata—I possess nothing so completely as that which I have given away. Hoc habeo quodcumque dedi; hæc sunt divitiæ certæ in quacumque*

sortis humanæ ieritate—Whatever I have imparted I still possess, these riches remain with me through all the vicissitudes of life. “Thou shalt find it, perhaps not quickly, but after many days; the return may be slow, but it is sure, and will be so much the more plentiful.” Wheat, the most valuable grain, lies longest in the ground. Long voyages make the best returns.

2. Our opportunity for well-doing is very uncertain; “*Thou knowest not what evil may be upon the earth*, which may deprive thee of thine estate, and put thee out of a capacity to do good, and therefore, while thou hast wherewithal, be liberal with it; improve the present season, as the husbandman in sowing his ground, before the frost comes.” We have reason to expect evil upon the earth, for we are born to trouble; what the evil may be we know not, but, that we may be ready for it, whatever it is, it is our wisdom, in the day of prosperity, to be in good, to be doing good. Many make use of this as an argument against giving to the poor, because they know not what hard times may come, when they may want themselves; whereas we should therefore the rather be charitable, that, when evil days come, we may have the comfort of having done good while we were able; we would then hope to find mercy both with God and man, and therefore should now shew mercy. If by charity we trust God with what we have, we put it into good hands, against bad times.

III. How he obviates the objections which might be made against this duty, and the excuses of the uncharitable.

1. Some will say, that what they have is their own, and they have it for their own use, and will ask, Why should we cast it thus upon the waters? Why should I take my bread, and my flesh, and give it to I know not whom? So Nabal pleaded, 1 Sam. 25. 11. Look up, man, and consider how soon thou wouldest be starved in a barren ground, if the clouds over thy head should plead thus, that they have their waters for themselves; but thou seest, when they are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth, to make it fruitful, till they are wearied and spent with watering it, Job, 37. 11. Are the heavens thus bountiful to the poor earth, that is so far below them, and wilt thou grudge thy bounty to thy poor brother, who is bone of thy bone?—Or thus; some will say, Though we give but little to the poor, yet, thank God, we have as charitable a heart as any. Nay, says Solomon, if the clouds be full of rain, they will empty themselves; if there be charity in the heart, it will shew itself, Jam. 2. 15, 16. He that draws out his soul to the hungry will reach forth his hand to them as he has ability.

2. Some will say that their sphere of usefulness is low and narrow, they cannot do the good that they see others can, who are in more public stations, and therefore they will sit still, and do nothing. Nay, says he, in the place where the tree falls, or happens to be, there it shall be, for the benefit of those to whom it belongs; every man must labour to be a blessing to that place, whatever it is, where the providence of God casts him; wherever we are, we may find good work to do, if we have but hearts to do it. Or thus; some will say, “*Many present themselves as objects of charity who are unworthy, and I do not know whom it is fit to give it to.*” “*Trouble not thyself about that;*” (says Solomon;) “*give as discreetly as thou canst, and then be satisfied, that, though the person should prove undeserving of thy charity, yet, if thou give it with an honest heart, thou shalt not lose thy reward; which way soever the charity is directed, north or south, thine shall be the benefit of it.*” This is commonly applied to death; therefore let us do good, and, as good trees, bring forth the fruits of righteousness, because death will shortly come, and cut us down, and we shall then be determined to an unchangeable state of happiness or misery, according to what was done in the body. As the tree falls at death, so it is likely to lie to all eternity.

3. Some will object the many discouragements they have met with in their charity; they have been reproached for it as proud and pharisaical; they have but little to give, and they shall be despised, if they do not give as others do; they know not but their children may come to want it, and they had better lay it up for them; they have taxes to pay, and purchases to make; they know not what use will be made of their charity, nor what construction

will be put upon it; these, and a hundred such objections, he answers in one word; (v. 4.) *He that observes the wind shall not sow*, which signifies doing good; and *he that regards the clouds shall not reap*, which signifies getting good; if we stand thus magnifying every little difficulty, and making the worst of it, starting objections, and fancying hardship and danger where there is none, we shall never go on, much less go through, with our work, nor make any thing of it. If the husbandman should decline or leave off sowing for the sake of every flying cloud, and reaping for the sake of every blast of wind, he would make but an ill account of his husbandry at the year's end. The duties of religion are as necessary as sowing and reaping, and will turn as much to our own advantage; the discouragements we meet with in these duties are but as *winds* and *clouds*, which will do us no harm; and which those that put on a little courage and resolution will despise and easily break through. Note, Those that will be deterred and driven off by small and seeming difficulties from great and real duties, will never bring any thing to pass in religion, for there will always arise some *wind*, some *cloud* or other, at least in our imagination, to discourage us. *Winds* and *clouds* are in God's hands, are designed to try us, and our Christianity obliges us to endure hardness.

4. Some will say, "We do not see in which way what we expend in charity should ever be made up to us, we do not find ourselves ever the richer; why should we depend upon the general promise of a blessing on the charitable, unless we saw which way to expect the operation of it?" To this he answers, "*Thou knowest not the work of God*, nor is it fit thou shouldst; thou mayest be sure he will make good his word of promise, though he does not tell thee how or which way, and though he works in a way by himself, according to the councils of his unsearchable wisdom; he will work, and none shall hinder; but then he will work, and none shall direct or prescribe to him; the blessing shall work insensibly, but irresistibly; God's work shall certainly agree with his word, whether we see it or no." Our ignorance of the work of God he shews in two instances. (1.) *We know not what is the way of the Spirit*; of the wind, so some; we know not whence it comes, or whither it goes, or when it will turn; yet the seamen lie ready waiting for it, till it turns about in favour of them; so we must do our duty, in expectation of the time appointed for the blessing. Or it may be understood of the human soul; we know that God made us, and gave us these souls, but how they entered into these bodies, are united to them, animate them, and operate upon them, we know not; the soul is a mystery to itself, no marvel then that *the work of God* is so to us. (2.) *We know not how the bones are fashioned in the womb of her that is with child*; we cannot describe the manner either of the formation of the body, or of its information with a soul; both, we know, are *the work of God*, and we acquiesce in his work, but cannot, in either, trace the process of the operation; we doubt not of the birth of the child that is conceived, though we know not how it is formed, nor need we doubt of the performance of the promise, though we perceive not how things work towards it. And we may well trust God to provide for us that which is convenient, without our anxious disquieting cares, and therein to recompense us for our charity, since it was without any knowledge or forecast of our's, that our bodies were curiously wrought in secret, and our souls found the way into them; and so the argument is the same, and urged to the same intent, with that of our Saviour, (Matth. 6. 25.) *The life*, the living soul that God has given us, *is more than meat*; the body, that God has made us, *is more than raiment*; let him therefore that has done the greater for us be cheerfully depended upon to do the lesser.

5. Some say, "We have been charitable, have given a great deal to the poor, and never yet saw any return for it; many days are past, and we have not found it again." To which he answers, (v. 6.) "Yet go on, proceed and persevere in well-doing, let slip no opportunity. *In the morning*, sow thy seed upon the objects of charity that offer themselves early, and, *in the evening*, do not withhold thy hand, under pretence that thou art weary; as thou hast opportunity, be doing good, some way or other, all the day

long, as the husbandman follows his seedness from morning till night. *In the morning* of youth, lay out thyself to do good; give out of the little thou hast to begin the world with; and, *in the evening* of old age, yield not to the common temptation old people are in to be penurious; even then *withhold not thy hand*, and think not to excuse thyself from charitable works by purposing to make a charitable will, but do good to the last, *for thou knowest not which work of charity and piety shall prosper*, both as to others and as to thyself, *this or that*, but hast reason to hope that *both shall be alike good*. *Be not weary of well-doing*, for *in due season*, in God's time, and that is the best time, *you shall reap*." Gal. 6. 9. This is applicable to spiritual charity, our pious endeavours for the good of the souls of others; let us continue them, for, though we have long laboured in vain, we may at length see the success of them. Let ministers, in the days of their seedness, sow both morning and evening; *for who can tell which shall prosper?*

7. Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: 8. But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. 9. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. 10. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

Here is an admonition both to old people and to young people, to think of dying, and get ready for it. Having, by many excellent precepts, taught us how to live well, the preacher comes now, toward the close of his discourse, to teach us how to die well, and to put us in mind of our latter end.

1. He applies himself to the aged, writes to them as fathers, to awaken them to think of death, v. 7, 8. Here is,

1. A rational concession of the sweetness of life, which old people find by experience; *Truly the light is sweet*; the light of the sun is so; it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold it; light was the first thing made in the formation of the great world, as the eye is one of the first in the formation of the body, the little world; it is pleasant to see the light, the heathen were so charmed with the pleasure of it, that they worshipped the sun; it is pleasant by it to see other things, the many agreeable prospects this world gives us; the light of life is so. Light is put for life, Job. 3. 20, 23. It cannot be denied that life is sweet; it is sweet to bad men, because they have *their portion in this life*; it is sweet to good men, because they have this life as the time of their preparation for a better life; it is sweet to all men; nature says it is so, and there is no disputing against it; nor can death be desired for its own sake, but dreaded, unless as a period to present evils, or a passage to future good. Life is sweet, and therefore we have need to double a guard upon ourselves, lest we love it too well.

2. A caution to think of death, even in the midst of life, and of life when it is most sweet, and we are most apt to forget death; *If a man live many years, yet let him remember the days of darkness are coming*. Here is, (1.) A summer's day supposed to be enjoyed—that life may continue long, even many years, and that, by the goodness of God, it may be made comfortable, and a man may rejoice in them all. There are those that live many years in this world, escape many dangers, receive many mercies, and therefore are secure that they shall want no good, and that no evil shall befall them, that the pitcher which has come so often from the well, safe and sound, shall never come home broken. But who are they that live many years, and rejoice in them all? Alas! none; we have but hours of joy for months of sorrow. How-

ever, some rejoice in their years, their many years, more than others; if these two things meet, a prosperous state, and a cheerful spirit, these two indeed may do much towards enabling a man to *rejoice in them all*, and yet the most prosperous state has its allays, and the most cheerful spirit has its damps; jovial sinners have their melancholy qualms, and cheerful saints have their gracious sorrows; so that it is but a supposition, not a case in fact, that a man should *live many years, and rejoice in them all*. But, (2.) Here is a winter's night proposed to be expected, after this summer's day; *yet let this hearty old man remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many*. Note, [1.] There are *days of darkness* coming, the days of our lying in the grave; there the body will lie in the dark, there the eyes see not, the sun shines not. The darkness of death is opposed to the light of life, the grave is a *land of darkness*, Job, 10. 21. [2.] Those *days of darkness* will be many; the days of our lying under ground will be more than the days of our living above ground. They are many, but they are not infinite; many as they are, they will be numbered and finished when *the heavens are no more*, Job, 14. 12. As the longest day will have its night, so the longest night will have its morning. [3.] It is good for us often to remember those *days of darkness*, that we may not be lifted up with pride, nor lulled asleep in carnal security, nor even transported into indecencies by vain mirth. [4.] Notwithstanding the long continuance of life, and the many comforts of it, yet we must *remember the days of darkness*, because those will certainly come, and they will come with much the less terror, if we have thought of them before.

II. He applies himself to the young, and writes to them as children, to awaken them to think of death; (v. 9, 10.) here we have,

1. An ironical concession to the vanities and pleasures of youth; *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth*. Some make this to be the counsel which the atheist and the epicure give to the young man, the poisonous suggestions against which Solomon, in the close of the verse, prescribes a powerful antidote. But it is more emphatical, if we take it, as it is commonly understood, by way of irony, like that of Elijah to the priests of Baal, *Cry aloud, for he is a god*; or of Micaiah to Ahab, *Go to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper*; or of Christ to his disciples, *Sleep on now*. "*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth* live a merry life, follow thy sports, and take thy pleasures: *let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth*, cheer thee with its fancies and foolish hopes; entertain thyself with thy pleasing dreams, *walk in the ways of thy heart*, do whatever thou hast a mind to do, and stick at nothing that may gratify the sensual appetite; *Quicquid libet licet—Make thy will thy law; walk in the ways of thy heart*, and let thine heart walk after thine eyes, a rambling heart after a roving eye; what is pleasing to thine own eyes do it, whether it be pleasing in the eyes of God or no." Solomon speaks thus ironically to the young man, to intimate, (1.) That this is that which he would do, and which he would fain have leave to do, in which he places his happiness, and on which he sets his heart. (2.) That he wishes all about him would give him this counsel, would prophesy to him such smooth things as these, and cannot brook any advice to the contrary, but reckons those his enemies that bid him be sober and serious. (3.) To expose his folly, and the great absurdity of a voluptuous vicious course of life; the very description of it, if men would see things entirely, and judge of them impartially, is enough to shew how contrary to reason those act that live such a life. The very opening of the cause is enough to determine it without any argument. (4.) To shew, that, if men give themselves to such a course of life as this, it is just with God to give them up to it, to abandon them to their own hearts' lusts, that they may *walk in their own counsels*, Hos. 4. 17.

2. A powerful check given to these vanities and pleasures; "*Know thou, that for all these things God shall bring thee into judgment*, and duly consider that, and then live such a luxurious life, if thou canst, if thou darest." This is a *κολασθηριον*—a corrective to the foregoing concession, and plucks in the reins he had laid on the neck of the young man's lust. "*Know then*, for a certainty, that, if thou dost take such a liberty as this, it will be

thy everlasting ruin, thou hast to do with a God who will not let it go unpunished." Note, (1.) There is a judgment to come. (2.) We must every one of us be brought into judgment, however we may now put far from us that evil day. (3.) We shall be reckoned with for all our carnal mirth and sensual pleasures in that day. (4.) It is good for all, but especially for young people, to know and consider this, that they may not, by the indulgence of their youthful lusts, *treasure up unto themselves wrath against that day of wrath*, the wrath of the Lamb.

3. A word of caution and exhortation inferred from all this, v. 10. Let young people look to themselves, and manage well both their souls and their bodies, their heart and their flesh. (1.) Let them take care that their minds be not lifted up with pride, or disturbed with anger, or any sinful passion; *Remove sorrow*, or anger, *from thy heart*; the word signifies any disorder or perturbation of the mind. Young people are apt to be impatient of check and controul, to vex and fret at any thing that is humbling and mortifying to them, and their proud hearts rise against every thing that crosses and contradicts them. They are so set upon that which is pleasing to sense, that they cannot bear any thing that is displeasing, but it goes with sorrow to their heart; their pride often disquiets them, and makes them uneasy. "Put that away, and the love of the world, and lay thine expectations low from the creature, and then disappointments will not be occasions of sorrow and anger to thee." Some by sorrow here understand that carnal mirth described v. 9. the end of which will be bitterness and sorrow. Let them keep at a distance from every thing which will be sorrow in the reflection. (2.) Let them take care that their bodies be not defiled by intemperance, uncleanness, or any fleshly lusts; "*Put away evil from the flesh*, and let not the members of thy body be instruments of unrighteousness. The evil of sin will be the evil of punishment, and that which thou art fond of, as good for the flesh, because it gratifies the appetites of it, will prove evil, and hurtful to it, and therefore put it far from thee, the further the better."

The preacher, to enforce his admonition both to old and young, urges, as an effectual argument, that which is the great argument of his discourse, the vanity of all present things, their uncertainty and insufficiency.

1. He reminds old people of this; (v. 8.) *All that comes is vanity*; yea, though a man *live many years, and rejoice in them all*. All that is come already, and all that is yet to come, how much soever men promise themselves from the concluding scenes, it is all *vanity*. What will be will do no more to make men happy than what has been. *All that come into the world are vanity*; they are altogether so, at their best estate.

2. He reminds young people of this; *Childhood and youth are vanity*. The dispositions and actions of childhood and youth have in them a great deal of impertinence and iniquity, sinful vanity, which young people have need to watch against, and get cured. The pleasures and advantages of childhood and youth have in them no certainty, satisfaction, or continuance; they are passing away; these flowers will soon wither, and these blossoms fall; let them therefore knit them into good fruit, which will continue and abound to a good account.

CHAP. XII.

The wise and penitent preacher is here closing his sermon; and he closes it, not only like a good orator, but like a good preacher, with that which was likely to make the best impressions, and which he wished might be powerful and lasting upon his hearers. Here is, I. An exhortation to young people to begin betimes to be religious, and not to put it off to old age, (v. 1.) enforced with arguments taken from the calamities of old age, (v. 1..5.) and the great change that death will make upon us, v. 6, 7. II. A repetition of the great truth he had undertaken to prove in this discourse, the vanity of the world, v. 8. III. A confirmation and recommendation of what he had written in this and his other books, as worthy to be duly weighed and considered, v. 9..12. IV. The whole matter summed up and concluded with a charge to all to be truly religious, in consideration of the judgment to come, v. 13, 14.

1. REMEMBER now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I

have no pleasure in them; 2. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: 3. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, 4. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; 5. Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burthen, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: 6. Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. 7. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Here is,

I. A call to young people to think of God, and mind their duty to him, when they are young; *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.* This is, 1. The royal preacher's application of his sermon concerning the vanity of the world, and every thing in it. "You that are young flatter yourselves with expectations of great things from it, but believe those that have tried, it yields no solid satisfaction to a soul; therefore, that you may not be deceived by this vanity, nor too much disturbed by it, *remember your Creator*, and so guard yourselves against the mischiefs that arise from the vanity of the creature." 2. It is the royal physician's antidote against the particular diseases of youth, the love of mirth, and the indulgence of sensual pleasures, the vanity which childhood and youth are subject to; to prevent and cure this, *remember thy Creator.* Here is, (1.) A great duty pressed upon us, to *remember* God as our *Creator*; not only to remember that God is our Creator, that he *made us*, and *not we ourselves*, and is therefore our rightful Lord and Owner, but we must engage ourselves to him with the considerations which his being our Creator lays us under, and pay him the honour and duty which we owe him as our Creator. *Remember thy Creators*; the word is plural, as it is, Job, 35. 10. *Where is God my Makers?* For God said, *Let us make man*, us, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. (2.) The proper season for this duty; *in the days of thy youth*; the *days of thy choice*, so some; thy choice days, thy choosing days. "Begin, in the beginning of thy days, to remember him from whom thou badst thy being, and go on according to that good beginning. Call him to mind when thou art young, and keep him in mind throughout all the days of thy youth, and never forget him. Guard thus against the temptations of youth, and thus improve the advantages of it."

II. A reason to enforce this command; *While the evil days come not, and the years, of which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.* Do it quickly,

1. "Before sickness and death come; do it while thou livest, for it will be too late to do it when death has removed thee from this state of trial and probation to that of recompence and retribution." The days of sickness and death are *the days of evil*, terrible to nature, *evil days* indeed to those that have forgotten their Creator; these *evil days* will come, sooner or later; as yet they *come not*; for God is *long-suffering to us-ward*, and gives us *space to repent*; the continuing of life is but the deferring of death, and, while life is continued and death deferred, it concerns

us to prepare, and get the property of death altered, that we may die comfortably.

2. Before old age comes, which, if death prevent not, will come, and they will be *years, of which we shall say, We have no pleasure in them*; when we shall not relish the delights of sense, as Barzillai, (2 Sam. 19. 35.) when we shall be loaded with bodily infirmities, old and blind, or old and lame; when we shall be taken off from our usefulness, and our *strength shall be labour and sorrow*; when we shall either have parted with our relations, and all our old friends, or be afflicted in them, and see them weary of us; when we shall feel ourselves die by inches; these *years draw nigh*, when *all that comes* will be *vanity*, the remaining months all months of vanity, and there will be *no pleasure* but in the reflection of a good life on earth, and the expectation of a better life in heaven.

These two arguments he enlarges upon in the following verses, only inverting the order, and shews,

(1.) How many are the calamities of old age, and that, if we should live to be old, our days will be such as we shall *have no pleasure in*: which is a good reason why we should return to God, and make our peace with him, *in the days of our youth*, and not put it off till we come to be old; for it will be no thanks to us to leave the pleasures of sin, when they have left us, nor to return to God, when need forces us; it is the greatest absurdity and ingratitude imaginable, to give the cream and flower of our days to the Devil, and reserve the bran and refuse and dregs of them for God; this is offering *the torn, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice*; and besides, old age being thus clogged with infirmities, it is the greatest folly imaginable to put off that needful work till then, which requires the best of our strength, when our faculties are in their prime, and especially to make the work more difficult by a longer continuance in sin, and, laying up treasures of guilt in the conscience, to add to the burthens of age, and make them much heavier. If the calamities of age will be such as are here represented, we shall have need of something to support and comfort us then, and nothing will be more effectual to do that than the testimony of our consciences for us, that we began betimes to remember our Creator, and have not since laid aside the remembrance of him. How can we expect God should help us when we are old, if we will not serve him when we are young? See Ps. 71. 17, 18.

The decays and infirmities of old age are here elegantly described in figurative expressions, which have some difficulty in them to us now, who are not acquainted with the common phrases and metaphors used in Solomon's age and language; but the general scope is plain—to shew how uncomfortable, generally, the days of old age are.

[1.] Then *the sun* and *the light* of it, *the moon* and *the stars*, and the light which they borrow from it, will be *darkened*; they look dim to old people, in consequence of the decay of their sight; their countenance is clouded, and the beauty and lustre of it are eclipsed; their intellectual powers and faculties, which are as lights in the soul, are weakened; their understanding and memory fail them, and their apprehension is not so quick, nor their fancy so lively, as it has been; (light is often put for joy and prosperity;) the days of their mirth are over, and they have not pleasure either of the converse of the day, or the repose of the night, for both *the sun* and *the moon* are *darkened* to them.

[2.] Then *the clouds return after the rain*; as, when the weather is disposed to wet, no sooner is one cloud blown over than another succeeds it, so it is with old people, when they are got free from one pain or ailment, they are seized with another, so that their distempers are *like a continual dropping in a very rainy day*. The end of one trouble is, in this world, but the beginning of another, and deep calls unto deep. Old people are often afflicted with defluxions of rheum, like soaking rain, after which still more clouds return, feeding the humour, so that it is continually grievous, and therein the body, as it were, melts away.

[3.] Then *the keepers of the house tremble*; the head, which is as the watch-tower, shakes, and the arms and hands, which are ready for the preservation of the body, shake too, and grow feeble, upon every sudden approach and attack of danger; that vigour of

the animal spirits, which used to be exerted for self-defence, fails, and cannot do its office; old people are easily dispirited and discouraged.

[4.] Then *the strong men shall bow themselves*; the legs and thighs, which used to support the body, and bear its weight, bend, and cannot serve for labour, as they have done, but are soon tired. Old men, that have been in their time *strong men*, are become weak, and stoop for age, Zech. 8. 4. *God takes no pleasure in the legs of a man*, (Ps. 147. 10.) for their strength will soon fade; but in *the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength*, he has everlasting arms.

[5.] Then *the grinders cease, because they are few*; the teeth, with which we grind our meat, and prepare it for concoction, cease to do their part, *because they are few*; they are rotted and broken, and perhaps have been drawn, because they ached; some old people have lost all their teeth, and others have but few left; and this infirmity is the more considerable, because the meat, not being well chewed, for want of teeth, is not well digested, which has as much an influence as any thing upon the other decays of age.

[6.] *Those that look out of the windows are darkened*; the eyes wax dim, as Isaac's, (Gen. 27. 1.) and Ahijah's, 1 Kings, 14. 4. Moses was a rare instance of one, who, when 120 years old, had good eye-sight, but ordinarily, the sight decays in old people as soon as any thing, and it is a mercy to them that art helps nature with spectacles. We have need to improve our sight well while we have it, because the light of the eyes may be gone before the light of life.

[7.] *The doors are shut in the streets*; old people keep within doors, and care not for going abroad to entertainments; the lips, the doors of the mouth, are shut in eating, because the teeth are gone, and *the sound of the grinding with them is low*, so that they have not command of their meat in their mouths, which they used to have; they cannot digest their meat, and therefore little grist is brought to the mill.

[8.] Old people *rise up at the voice of the bird*; they have no sound sleep as young people have, but a little thing disturbs them, even the chirping of a bird; they cannot rest, for coughing, and therefore rise up at cock-crowing, as soon as any body is stirring; or they are apt to be jealous, and timorous, and full of care, which breaks their sleep, and makes them rise early; or they are apt to be superstitious, and *rise up*, as in a fright, *at those voices of birds*, of ravens, or screech-owls, which soothsayers call ominous.

[9.] With them, *all the daughters of music are brought low*; they have neither voice nor ear, can neither sing themselves, nor take any pleasure, as Solomon had done in the days of his youth, in *singing men and singing women, and musical instruments*, ch. 2. 8. Old people grow hard of hearing, and unapt to distinguish sounds and voices.

[10.] They are *afraid of that which is high*, afraid to go to the top of any high place, either because, for want of breath, they cannot reach it, or, their heads being giddy, or, their legs failing them, they dare not venture to it; or they frighten themselves with fancies, that *that which is high* will fall upon them. Fear is in the way; they can neither ride nor walk with their usual boldness, but are afraid of every thing that lies in their way, lest it throw them down.

[11.] *The almond-tree flourishes*; the old man's hair is grown white, so that his head looks like an almond-tree in the blossom. The almond-tree blossoms before any other tree, and therefore fitly shews what haste old age makes in seizing upon men; it prevents their expectations, and comes faster upon them than they thought of. Gray hairs are here and there upon them, and they perceive it not.

[12.] *The grasshopper is a burthen, and desire fails*. Old men can bear nothing, the lightest thing sits heavy upon them, both on their bodies and on their minds, a little thing sinks and breaks them; perhaps *the grasshopper* was some food that was looked upon to be very light of digestion; John Baptist's meat was *locusts*; but even that lies heavy upon an old man's stomach, and therefore *desire fails*, he has no appetite to his meat, neither shall he *regard*

the desire of woman, as that king, Dan. 11. 37. Old men become mindless and listless, and the pleasures of sense are to them tasteless and sapless.

It is probable that Solomon wrote this when he was himself old, and could speak feelingly of the infirmities of age, which perhaps grew the faster upon him, for the indulgence he had given himself in sensual pleasures. Some old people bear up better than others under the decays of age, but, more or less, the days of old age are and will be *evil days*, and of little pleasure. Great care therefore should be taken to pay respect and honour to old people, that they may have something to balance their grievances, and nothing may be done to add to them. And all this put together makes up a good reason why we should remember our Creator in the days of our youth, that he may remember us with favour, when these *evil days* come, and his comforts may delight our souls when the delights of sense are in a manner worn off.

(2.) He shews how great a change death will make with us, which will be either the prevention or the period of the miseries of old age. Nothing else will keep them off, nor any thing else cure them. "Therefore remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, because death is certainly before thee, perhaps it is very near thee, and it is a serious thing to die, and thou shouldst feel concerned with the utmost care and diligence to prepare for it."

[1.] Death will fix us in an unchangeable state; *Man* shall then go to his long home, and all these infirmities and decays of age are harbingers of, and advances toward, that awful remove. At death, *man* goes from this world, and all the employments and enjoyments of it; he is gone for good and all, as to his present state; he is gone home; for here he was a stranger and pilgrim; both soul and body go to the place whence they came, v. 7. He is gone to his rest, to the place where he is to fix. He is gone to his home; to the house of his world, so some; for this world is not his. He is gone to his long home; for the days of his lying in the grave will be many. He is gone to his house of eternity; not only to his house whence he shall never return to this world, but to the house where he must be for ever. This should make us willing to die, that at death we must go home; and why should we not long to go to our Father's house? And this should quicken us to get ready to die, that we must then go to our long home, to an everlasting habitation.

[2.] Death will be an occasion of sorrow to our friends that lo us; when *man* goes to his long home, the mourners go about the streets, the real mourners, and those, as now with us, distinguished by their habits as they go along the streets; the mourners for ceremony, that were hired to weep for the dead, both to express and to excite the real mourning. When we die, we not only remove to a melancholy house before us, but we leave a melancholy house behind us. Tears are a tribute due to the dead, and this, among other circumstances, makes it a serious thing to die. But in vain do we go to the house of mourning, and see the mourners go about the streets, if it do not help to make us serious and pious mourners in the closet.

[3.] Death will dissolve the frame of nature, and take down the earthly house of this tabernacle, which is elegantly described, v. 6. Then shall the silver cord, by which soul and body were wonderfully fastened together, be loosed, that sacred knot untied, and those old friends be forced to part; then shall the golden bowl, which held the waters of life for us, be broken; then shall the pitcher, with which we used to fetch up water, for the constant support of life, and the repair of its decays, be broken, even at the fountain, so that it can fetch up no more, and the wheel, all those organs that serve for the collecting and distributing of nourishment, shall be broken, and disabled to do their office any more; the body shall become like a watch when the spring is broken, the motion of all the wheels is stopped, and they all stand still; the machine is taken to pieces; the heart beats no more, nor does the blood circulate. Some apply this to the ornaments and utensils of life; rich people must, at death, leave behind them their clothing and furniture of silver and gold, and poor people their earthen pitchers, and the drawers of water will have their wheel broken.

[4.] Death will resolve us into our first principles, v. 7. *Man*

is a strange sort of creature, a ray of heaven united to a clod of earth; at death, these are separated, and each goes to the place whence it came.

First, The body, that clod of clay, returns to its own earth, it is made of *the earth*; Adam's body was so, and we are of the same mould; it is a house of clay, at death it is laid in *the earth*, and in a little time will be resolved into earth, not to be distinguished from common earth, according to the sentence, (Gen. 3. 19.) *Dust thou art, and therefore to dust thou shalt return*. Let us not therefore indulge the appetites of the body, nor pamper it, (it will be worms' meat shortly,) nor let *sin reign in our mortal bodies*, for they are mortal, Rom. 6. 12.

Secondly, The soul, that beam of light, returns to that God, who, when he made man of the dust of the ground, breathed into him the breath of life, to make him a living soul, (Gen. 2. 7.) and forms the spirit of every man within him. When the fire consumes the wood, the flame ascends, when the ashes return to the earth out of which the wood grew. The soul does not die with the body; it is redeemed from the power of the grave; (Ps. 49. 15.) it can subsist without it, and will in a state of separation from it, as the candle burns, and burns brighter, when it is taken out of the dark lanthorn. It removes to the world of spirits, to which it is allied. It goes to God as a Judge, to give account of itself, and to be lodged either with the spirits in prison, (1 Pet. 3. 19.) or with the spirits in paradise, (Luke, 23. 43.) according to what was done in the body. This makes death terrible to the wicked, whose souls go to God as an Avenger; and comfortable to the godly, whose souls go to God as a Father, into whose hands they cheerfully commit them, through a Mediator, out of whom sinners may justly dread to think of going to God.

8. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. 9. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. 10. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. 11. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. 12. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Solomon is here drawing towards a close, and is loath to part, till he has gained his point, and prevailed with his hearers, with his readers, to seek for that satisfaction in God only, and in their duty to him, which they can never find in the creature.

I. He repeats his text, v. 8. 1. As that which he had fully demonstrated the truth of, and so made good his undertaking in this sermon, wherein he had kept close to his text, and both his reasons and his application were to the purpose. 2. As that which he desired to inculcate both upon others and upon himself; to have it ready, and to make use of it, upon all occasions; we see it daily proved, let it therefore be daily improved; *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*.

II. He recommends what he had written upon this subject, by divine direction and inspiration, to our serious consideration. The words of this book are faithful, and well-worthy our acceptance, for,

1. They are the words of one that was a convert, a penitent, that could speak by dear-bought experience of the vanity of the world, and the folly of expecting great things from it. He was *Cohleleth*, one gathered in from his wanderings, and gathered home to that God from whom he had revolted. *Vanity of vanities, saith the penitent*. All true penitents are convinced of the vanity of the world, for they find it can do nothing to ease them of the burthen of sin, which they complain of.

2. They are the words of one that was wise, wiser than any;

endued with extraordinary measures of wisdom; famous for it among his neighbours, who all sought unto him, *to hear his wisdom*, and therefore a competent judge of this matter; not only wise as a prince, but wise as a preacher—and preachers have need of wisdom to win souls.

3. He was one that made it his business to do good, and to use wisdom aright; *Because he was himself wise*, but knew he had not his wisdom for himself, any more than he had it from himself, *he still taught the people that knowledge* which he had found useful to himself, and hoped might be so to them too. It is the interest of princes to have their people well taught in religion, and no disparagement to them to teach them themselves *the good knowledge of the Lord*, but their duty to encourage those whose office it is to teach them, and to speak comfortably to them, 2 Chron. 30. 22. Let not the people, the common people, be despised, no not by the wisest and greatest as either unworthy or incapable of good knowledge; even those that are well-taught, have need to be *still taught*, that they may grow in knowledge.

4. He took a great deal of pains and care to do good, designing to teach the people knowledge; he did not put them off with any thing that came next to hand, because they were inferior people, and he a very wise man, but, considering the worth of the souls he preached to, and the weight of the subject he preached on, he gave good heed to what he read and heard from others, that, having stocked himself well, he might bring out of his treasury things new and old. He gave good heed to what he spake and wrote himself, and was choice and exact in it; all he did was elaborate. (1.) He chose the most profitable way of preaching, by proverbs, or short sentences, which would be more easily apprehended and remembered than long and laboured periods. (2.) He did not content himself with a few parables, or wise sayings, and repeat them again and again, but he furnished himself with many proverbs, a great variety of grave discourses, that he might have something to say on every occasion. (3.) He did not only give them such observations as were obvious and trite, but he sought out such as were surprising and uncommon; he digged into the mines of knowledge, and did not only pick up what lay on the surface. (4.) He did not deliver his heads and observations at random, as they came to mind, but methodised them, and set them in order, that they might appear in more strength and lustre.

5. He put what he had to say in such a dress as he thought would be most pleasing; *He sought to find out acceptable words*, words of delight; (v. 10.) he took care that good matter might not be spoiled by bad strife, and by the ungratefulness and incongruity of the expression. Ministers should study, not for big words, or for fine words, but acceptable words, such as are likely to please men for their good, to edification, 1 Cor. 10. 33. They that would win souls must contrive how to win upon them with words fitly spoken.

6. That which he wrote for our instruction is of unquestionable certainty, and what we may rely upon; *That which was written was upright and sincere*, according to the real sentiments of the penman, even words of truth, the exact representation of the thing as it is. Those are sure not to miss their way who are guided by these words. What good will acceptable words do us, if they be not upright, and words of truth? Most are for smooth things, that flatter them, rather than right things, that direct them; (Isa. 30. 10.) but to those that understand themselves, and their own interest, words of truth will always be acceptable words.

7. That which he and other holy men wrote, will be of great use and advantage to us, especially being inculcated upon us by the exposition of it, v. 11. Here observe, (1.) A double benefit accruing to us from divine truths, if duly applied and improved; they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness. They are of use, [1.] To excite us to our duty; they are as goads to the ox that draws the plough, putting him forward when he is dull, and quickening him, to mend his pace. The truths of God prick men to the heart, (Acts, 2. 37.) and put them upon bethinking themselves, when they trifle and grow remiss, and exerting themselves with more vigour in their work. While our good affections are so apt as they are, to

grow flat and cool, we have need of these *goads*. [2.] To engage us to persevere in our duty; they are *as nails* to those that are wavering and inconstant, to fix them to that which is good; they are *as goads* to such as are dull, and draw back, and *nails* to such as are desultory, and draw aside; means to establish the heart, and confirm good resolutions, that we may not sit loose to our duty, nor ever be taken off from it, but that what good there is in us may be *as a nail fastened in a sure place*, Ezra, 9. 8. (2.) A double way of communicating divine truths, in order to these benefits. [1.] By the scriptures, as the standing rule, the *words of the wise*, of the prophets, who are called *wise men*, Matth. 23. 34. These we have in black and white, and may have recourse to them at any time, and make use of them as *goads* and *as nails*; by them we may teach ourselves, let them but come with pungency and power to the soul, let the impressions of them be deep and durable, and they will *make us wise to salvation*. [2.] By the ministry; to make the *words of the wise* more profitable to us, it is appointed that they should be impressed and fastened by the *masters of assemblies*. Solemn assemblies for religious worship are an ancient divine institution, intended for the honour of God and the edification of his church, and are not only serviceable, but necessary, to those ends. There must be masters of these assemblies, who are Christ's ministers, and, as such, are to preside in them, to be God's mouth to the people, and their's to God. Their business is to fasten the *words of the wise*, and drive them *as nails* to the head, in order to which, the word of God is likewise *as a hammer*, Jer. 23. 29.

8. That which is written, and thus recommended to us, is of divine origin. Though it comes to us through various hands, (many *wise men*, and many *masters of assemblies*,) yet it is given by one and the same shepherd, the great *shepherd of Israel*, that leads *Joseph like a flock*, Ps. 80. 1. God is that one Shepherd, whose good Spirit indited the scriptures, and assists the *masters of the assemblies* in opening and applying the scriptures. These *words of the wise* are the true sayings of God, on which we may rest our souls; from that one Shepherd all ministers must receive what they deliver, and speak according to the light of the written word.

9. The sacred inspired writings, if we will but make use of them, are sufficient to guide us in the way to true happiness, and we need not, in the pursuit of that, to toil ourselves with the search of other writings; (v. 12.) *And further*, nothing now remains but to tell thee that of *making many books there is no end*; (1.) Of *writing* many books. If what I have written, serve not to convince thee of the vanity of the world, and the necessity of being religious, neither wouldest thou be convinced, if I should write ever so much. "If the end be not attained in the use of those books of scripture which God has blessed us with, neither should we obtain the end, if we had twice as many more; nay, if we had so many, that the whole world could not contain them, (John, 21. 25.) and much study of them would but confound us, and would rather be *a weariness to the flesh* than any advantage to the soul; we have as much as God saw fit to give us, saw fit for us, and saw us fit for. Much less can it be expected that those who will not by these be admonished, should be wrought upon by other writings. Let men write ever so many books for the conduct of human life, write till they have tired themselves with much study, they cannot give better instructions than those we have from the word of God. Or, (2.) Of *buying* many books, making ourselves masters of them, and masters of what is in them, by much study; still the desire of learning would be unsatisfied; it will give a man indeed the best entertainment, and the best accomplishment, this world can afford him, but if we be not by these *admonished* of the vanity of the world, and human learning, among other things, and its insufficiency to make us happy without true piety, alas, there is no end of it, nor real benefit by it; it will weary the body, but never give the soul any *true satisfaction*. The great Mr. Selden subscribed to this, when he owned that in all the books he had read, he never found that on which he could rest his soul, but in the holy scripture, especially Tit. 2. 11, 12. By these therefore let us be admonished.

13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole *duty* of man. 14. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be good*, or whether *it be evil*.

The great inquiry which Solomon prosecutes in this book, is, *What is that good which the sons of men should do?* ch. 2. 3. What is the true way to true happiness, the certain means to attain our great end? He had in vain sought it among those things which most men are eager in pursuit of, but here, at length, he has found it, by the help of that discovery which God anciently made to man, (Job, 28. 28.) That serious godliness is the only way to true happiness; *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter*, the return entered upon the writ of inquiry, the result of this diligent search; you shall have all I have been driving at in two words. He does not say, *Do you hear it*, but, *Let us hear it*; for preachers must themselves be hearers of that word which they preach to others; must hear it as from God; those are teachers by the halves, who teach others, and not themselves, Rom. 2. 21. Every word of God is pure and precious, but some words are worthy of more special remark, as this here; the Masorites begin it with a capital letter, as that Deut. 6. 4. Solomon himself puts a *nota bene* before it, demanding attention in these words, *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter*. Observe here,

1. The summary of religion. Setting aside all matters of doubtful disputation, to be religious, is, to *fear God, and keep his commandments*. (1.) The root of religion is the fear of God reigning in the heart; a reverence of his majesty, a deference to his authority, and a dread of his wrath. *Fear God*, worship God, give him the honour due to his name, in all the instances of true devotion, inward and outward. See Rev. 14. 7. (2.) The rule of religion is the law of God revealed in the scriptures. Our fear toward God must be taught by his commandments, (Isa. 29. 13.) and those we must keep, and carefully observe. Wherever the fear of God is uppermost in the heart, there will be *a respect to all his commandments*, and care to keep them. In vain do we pretend to fear God, if we do not make conscience of our duty to him.

2. The vast importance of it; *This is the whole of man*; it is all his business, and all his blessedness; our whole duty is summed up in this, and our whole comfort is bound up in this. It is the concern of every man, and ought to be his chief and continual care; it is the common concern of all *men*, of their whole time. It is nothing to a man whether he be rich or poor, high or low, but it is the main matter, it is all to a man, to fear God, and do as he bids him.

3. A powerful inducement to this, v. 14. We shall see of what vast consequence it is to us, that we be religious, if we consider the account we must every one of us shortly give of ourselves to God; thence he argued against a voluptuous and vicious life, (ch. 11. 9.) and here for a religious life. *God shall bring every work into judgment*. Note, (1.) There is a judgment to come, in which every man's eternal state will be finally determined. (2.) God himself will be the Judge, God-man will, not only because he has a right to judge, but because he is perfectly fit for it; infinitely wise and just. (3.) *Every work* will then be brought into judgment, will be inquired into, and called over again. It will be a day to bring to remembrance every thing done in the body. (4.) The great thing to be then judged of concerning every work, is, whether it be good or evil, conformable to the will of God, or a violation of it. (5.) Even *secret things*, both good and evil, will be brought to light, and brought to account, in the judgment of the great day; (Rom. 2. 16.) there is no good work, no bad work, hid, but shall then be made manifest. (6.) In consideration of the judgment to come, and the strictness of that judgment, it highly concerns us now to be very strict in our walkings with God, that we may *give up our account with joy*.

AN
E X P O S I T I O N,
 WITH
Practical Observations,
 OF THE
S O N G O F S O L O M O N.

All scripture, we are sure, is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for the support and advancement of the interests of his kingdom among men, and it is never the less so for there being found in it some things dark and hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest to their own destruction. In our belief both of the divine extraction, and of the spiritual exposition, of this book, we are confirmed by the ancient, constant, and concurring, testimony, both of the church of the Jews, to whom were committed the oracles of God, and who never made any doubt of the authority of this book, and of the Christian church, which happily succeeds them in that trust and honour.

- I. It must be confessed, on the one hand, that if he who rarely reads this book, be asked, as the eunuch was, *Understandest thou what thou readest?* he will have more reason than he had to say, *How can I, except some man shall guide me?* The books of scripture-history and prophecy are very like one another, but this *Song of Solomon's* is very unlike the songs of his father David; there is not the name of God in it, it is never quoted in the New Testament, we find not in it any expressions of natural religion, or pious devotion, no, nor is it introduced by vision, or any of the marks of immediate revelation; it seems as hard as any part of scripture to be made a *savour of life unto life*, nay, and to those who come to the reading of it with carnal minds, and corrupt affections, it is in danger of being made a *savour of death unto death*; it is a flower out of which they extract poison; and therefore the Jewish doctors advised their young people not to read it till they were thirty years old, lest by the abuse of that which is most pure and sacred, (*horrendum dictu—horrible to say!*) the flames of lust should be kindled with fire from heaven, which is intended for the altar only. But,
- II. It must be confessed, on the other hand, that, with the help of the many faithful guides we have for the understanding of this book, it appears to be a very bright and powerful ray of heavenly light, admirably fitted to excite pious and devout affections in holy souls, to draw out their desires toward God, to increase their delight in him, and improve their acquaintance and communion with him. It is an allegory, the letter of which kills those who rest in that, and look no further, but the spirit of which gives life, 2 Cor. 3. 6. John. 6. 63. It is a parable, which makes divine things more difficult to those who do not love them, but more plain and pleasant to those who do, Matth. 13. 14, 16. Experienced Christians here find a counterpart of their experiences, and to them it is intelligible, while they neither understand it, nor relish it, who have no part or lot in the matter. It is a song, an *Epitholamium*, or nuptial song, wherein, by the expressions of love between a bridegroom and his bride, are set forth, and illustrated, the mutual affections that pass between God and a distinguished remnant of mankind. It is a pastoral; the bride and bridegroom, for the more lively representation of humility and innocence, are brought in as a shepherd and his shepherdess. Now, 1. This song might easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Jewish church, for whose use it was first composed, and was so taken. as appears by the Chaldee-Paraphrase and the most ancient Jewish expositors. God betrothed the people of Israel to himself, he entered into covenant with them, and it was a marriage-covenant. He had given abundant proofs of his love to them, and required of them that they should love him with all their heart and soul. Idolatry was often spoken of as spiritual adultery, and doting upon idols, to prevent which, this song was penned, representing the complacency which God took in Israel, and which Israel ought to take in God, and encouraging them to continue faithful to him, though he might seem sometimes to withdraw and hide himself from them, and to wait for the further manifestation of himself in the promised Messiah. 2. It may more easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Christian church, because the condescensions and communications of divine love appear more rich and free under the gospel than they did under the law, and the communion between heaven and earth more familiar. God sometimes spake of himself as the Husband of the Jewish church, (Isa. 64. 5. Hos. 2. 16, 19.) and rejoiced in it as his bride, Isa. 62. 4, 5. But more frequently is Christ represented as the Bridegroom of his church, (Matth. 25. 1. Rom. 7. 4. 2 Cor. 11. 2. Eph. 5. 32.) and the church as the bride, the Lamb's wife, Rev. 19. 7.—21. 2, 9. Pursuant to this metaphor, Christ and the church in general, Christ and particular believers, are here discoursing with abundance of mutual esteem and endearment. The best key to this book is the 45th Psalm, which we find applied to Christ in the New Testament, and therefore this ought to be so too. It requires some pains to find out what may, probably, be the meaning of the Holy Spirit in the several parts of this book: as David's songs are many of them level to the capacity of the meanest, and there are shallows in them, in which a lamb may wade, so this of Solomon's will exercise the capacities of the most learned, and there are depths in it, in which an elephant may swim. But, when the meaning is found out, it will be of admirable use to excite pious and devout affections in us; and the same truths which are plainly laid down in other scriptures, when they are extracted out of this, come to the soul with a more pleasing power. When we apply ourselves to the study of this book, we must not only, with Moses and Joshua, *put off our shoe from off our foot*, and even forget that we have bodies, because *the place where we stand is holy ground*, but we must, with John, *come up hither*, must spread our wings, take a noble flight, and soar upward, till by faith and holy love we enter into the holiest, for this is no other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

CHAP. I.

In this chapter, after the title of the book, (v. 1.) we have Christ and his church, Christ and a believer, expressing their esteem for each other. I. The bride, the church, speaks to the Bridegroom, (v. 2..4.) to the daughters of Jerusalem, (v. 5, 6.) and then to the Bridegroom, v. 7. II. Christ, the Bridegroom, speaks in answer to the complaints and request of his spouse, v. 8..11. III. The church expresses the great value she has for Christ, and the delights she takes in communion with him, v. 12..14. IV. Christ commends the church's beauty, v. 15. V. The church returns the commendation, v. 16, 17. Where there is a fire of true love to Christ in the heart, this will be of use to blow it up into a flame.

1. THE song of songs, which is Solomon's.

We have here the title of this book, shewing,

1. The nature of it; it is a *song*, that it might the better answer the intention, which is to stir up the affections, and to heat them, which poetry will be very instrumental to do. The subject is pleasing, and therefore fit to be treated of in a song, in singing of which we may *make melody with our hearts unto the Lord*. It is evangelical; and gospel-times should be times of joy, for gospel-grace puts a new song into our mouths, Ps. 98. 1.

2. The dignity of it; it is the *song of songs*, a most excellent song; not only above any human composition, or above all the other songs which Solomon penned, but even above any other of the scripture-songs, as having more of Christ in it.

3. The penman of it; it is Solomon's; it is not the song of fools, as many of the songs of love are, but the song of the wisest of men; nor can any man give a better proof of his wisdom than to celebrate the love of God to mankind, and to excite his own love to God, and that of others with it. Solomon's songs were a thousand and five; (1 Kings, 4. 32.) those that were of other subjects are lost, but this of seraphic love remains, and will, to the end of time. Solomon, like his father, was addicted to poetry, and, which way soever a man's genius lies, he should endeavour to honour God, and edify the church, with it. One of Solomon's names was *Jedidiah, beloved of the Lord*; (2 Sam. 12. 25.) and none so fit to write of the Lord's love, as he that had himself so great an interest in it; none of all the apostles wrote so much of love, as he that was himself the beloved disciple, and lay in Christ's bosom. Solomon, as a king, had great affairs to mind and manage, which took up much of his thoughts and time, yet he found heart and leisure for this and other religious exercises. Men of business ought to be devout men, and not to think that their business will excuse them from that which is every man's great business—to keep up communion with God. It is not certain when Solomon penned this sacred song; some think that he penned it after he recovered himself by the grace of God from his backslidings, as a further proof of his repentance, and as if, by doing good to many with this song, he would atone for the hurt he had perhaps done with loose, vain, amorous, songs, when he *loved many strange wives*; now he turned his wit the right way. It is more probable that he penned it in the beginning of his time, while he kept close to God, and kept up his communion with him; and perhaps he put this song, with his father's psalms, into the hands of the chief musician, for the service of the temple, not without a key to it, for the right understanding of it. Some think that it was penned upon occasion of his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, but that is uncertain; the tower of Lebanon, which is mentioned in this book, (ch. 7. 4.) was not built, as it is supposed, till long after that marriage. We may reasonably think that when in the height of his prosperity he *loved the Lord*, (1 Kings, 3. 3.) he thus *served him with joyfulness and gladness of heart in the abundance of all things*. It may be rendered, *The song of songs, which is concerning Solomon*, who, as the son and successor of David, on whom the covenant of royalty was entailed, as the founder of the temple, and as one that excelled in wisdom and wealth, was a type of Christ, in whom are *hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and yet is a greater than Solomon; this is therefore a song concerning him. It is here fitly placed after *Ecclesiastes*; for when by that book we are thoroughly convinced of the vanity of the creature, and its insufficiency to satisfy us, and make a happiness for us we

shall be quickened to seek for happiness in the love of Christ, and that true transcendent pleasure which is to be found only in communion with God through him. The voice in the wilderness, that was to prepare Christ's way, cried, *All flesh is grass*.

2. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. 3. Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee. 4. Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee. 5. I *am* black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. 6. Look not upon me, because I *am* black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, *but* mine own vineyard have I not kept.

The spouse, in this dramatic poem, is here first introduced addressing herself to the Bridegroom, and then to the daughters of Jerusalem.

I. To the Bridegroom; not giving him any name or title, but beginning abruptly, *Let him kiss me*; like Mary Magdalen to the supposed Gardener, (John, 20. 15.) *If thou have borne him hence*, meaning Christ, but not naming him; the heart had been before taken up with the thoughts of him, and to this relative those thoughts were the antecedent, that good matter which the heart was inditing, Ps. 45. 1. They that are full of Christ themselves are ready to think that others should be so too.

Two things the spouse desires, and pleases herself with the thoughts of.

1. The Bridegroom's friendship; (v. 2.) "*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*"; be reconciled to me, and let me know that he is so, let me have the tokens of his favour." Thus the Old-Testament church desired Christ's manifesting himself in the flesh, to be no longer under the law as a school-master, under a dispensation of bondage and terror, but to receive the communications of divine grace in the gospel, in which God is reconciling the world unto himself, binding up and healing what by the law was torn and smitten; as the mother kisses the child that she has chidden. "Let him no longer send to me, but come himself; no longer speak by angels and prophets, but let me have the words of his own mouth, those *gracious words*, (Luke, 4. 22.) which will be to me as the *kisses of his mouth*, sure tokens of reconciliation, as Esau's kissing Jacob was." All gospel-duty is summed up in our kissing the Son; (Ps. 2. 12.) so all gospel-grace is summed up in his kissing us, as the father of the prodigal kissed him when he returned a penitent. It is a kiss of peace. Kisses are opposed to wounds; (Prov. 27. 6.) so are the kisses of grace to the wounds of the law. Thus all true believers earnestly desire the manifestations of Christ's love to their souls; they desire no more to make them happy than the assurances of his favour, the lifting up of the light of his countenance upon them, (Ps. 4. 6, 7.) and the knowledge of that love of his which passes knowledge; this is the one thing they desire, Ps. 27. 4. They are ready to welcome the manifestation of Christ's love to their souls by his Spirit, and to return them in the humble professions of love to him, and complacency in him, above all. "*The fruit of his lips is peace*," Isa. 57. 19. Let him give me ten thousand kisses, whose very "*fruition makes me desire him the more*, and whereas all other "*pleasures sour and wither by using*, those of the Spirit become "*more delightful*." So Bishop Reynolds.

She gives several reasons for this desire.

(1.) Because of the great esteem she had for his love: *Thy love*

is better than wine. Wine makes glad the heart, revives the drooping spirits, and exhilarates them, but gracious soulstake more pleasure in loving Christ, and being loved of him, in the fruits and gifts of his love, and in the pledges and assurances of it, than any man ever took in the most exquisite delights of sense, and it is more reviving to them than ever the richest cordial was to one ready to faint. Note, [1.] Christ's love is in itself, and in the account of all the saints, more valuable and desirable than the best entertainments this world can give. [2.] Those only may expect the kisses of Christ's mouth, and the comfortable tokens of his favour, who prefer his love before all the delights of the children of men, who would rather forego those delights than forfeit his favour, and take more pleasure in spiritual joys than in any bodily refreshments whatsoever. Observe here the change of the person; *Let him kiss me*; there she speaks of him as absent, or as if she was afraid to speak to him; but, in the next words, she sees him near at hand, and therefore directs her speech to him, "*Thy love, thy loves*," (so the word is,) "I so earnestly desire, because I highly esteem it."

(2.) Because of the diffusive fragrantcy of his love, and the fruits of it; (v. 3.) "*Because of the savour of thy good ointment*, the agreeableness and acceptableness of thy graces and comforts to all that rightly understand both them and themselves, *thy name is an ointment poured forth*, thou art so, and all that whereby thou hast made thyself known; thy very name is precious to all the saints, it is an ointment and perfume which rejoices the heart." The unfolding of Christ's name is as the opening of a box of precious ointment, which the room is filled with the odour of; the preaching of his gospel was the *manifesting of the savour of his knowledge in every place*, 2 Cor. 2. 14. The Spirit was the *oil of gladness* wherewith Christ was anointed, (Heb. 1. 9.) and all true believers have that *unction*. (1 John, 2. 27.) so that he is precious to them, and they to him, and to one another. A good name is a precious ointment, but Christ's name is more fragrant than any other. Wisdom, like oil, *makes the face to shine*; but the Redeemer outshines, in beauty, all others. The name of Christ is not now like ointment sealed up, as it had been long, (*Ask not after my name, for it is secret*;) but like ointment poured forth; which denotes both the freeness and the fulness of the communications of his grace by the gospel.

(3.) Because of the general affection that all holy souls have to him; *Therefore do the virgins love thee*. It is Christ's love shed abroad in our hearts, that draws them out in love to him; all that are pure from the corruptions of sin, that preserve the elasticity of their own spirits, and are true to the vows by which they have devoted themselves to God, that not only suffer not their affections to be violated, but cannot bear so much as to be solicited by the world and the flesh, those are the virgins that love Jesus Christ, and follow him whithersoever he goes, Rev. 14. 4. And because Christ is the Darling of all the pure in heart, let him be our's, and let our desire be toward him and toward the kisses of his mouth.

2. The Bridegroom's fellowship, v. 4. Observe here,

(1.) Her petition for divine grace; *Draw me*. This implies sense of distance from him, desire of union with him; "Draw me to thyself, draw me nearer, draw me home to thee." She had prayed that he would draw nigh to her; (v. 2.) in order to that, she prays that he would draw her nigh to him. "*Draw me*, not only with the moral suasion which there is in the fragrantcy of the good ointments, not only with the attractives of that name which is as ointment poured forth, but with supernatural grace, with the cords of a man and the hands of love," Hos. 11. 4. Christ has told us that none come to him but such as the Father draws, John, 6. 44. We are not only weak, and cannot come of ourselves any further than we are helped, but we are naturally backward and averse to come, and therefore must pray for those influences and operations of the Spirit, by the power of which we are of unwilling made willing, Ps. 110. 3. "*Draw me*, else I move not; overpower the world and the flesh that would draw me from thee." We are not driven to Christ, but drawn in such a way as is agreeable to rational creature.

(2.) Her promise to improve that grace; *Draw me, and then we will run after thee*. See how the doctrine of special and effectual grace consists with our duty, and is a powerful engagement and encouragement to it, and yet reserves all the glory of all the good that is in us to God only. Observe, [1.] The flowing forth of the soul after Christ, and its ready compliance with him, are the effect of his grace; we could not run after him, if he did not draw us, 2 Cor. 3. 5. Phil. 4. 13. [2.] The grace which God gives us we must diligently improve; when Christ by his Spirit draws us, we must with our spirits run after him. As God says, *I will, and you shall*, (Ezek. 36. 27.) so we must say, "*Thou shalt, and we will*; thou shalt work in us both to will and to do, and therefore we will work out our own salvation;" (Phil. 2. 12, 13.) not only we will walk, but we will run, after thee; this denotes eagerness of desire, readiness of affection, vigour of pursuit, and swiftness of motion. *When thou shalt enlarge my heart, then I will run the way of thy commandments*; (Ps. 119. 32.) *when thy right hand upholds me, then my soul follows hard after thee*; (Ps. 63. 8.) when with loving-kindness to us he draws us, (Jer. 31. 3.) we with loving-kindness to him must run after him, Isa. 40. 31. Observe the difference between the petition and the promise; "*Draw me, and then we will run*." When Christ pours out his Spirit upon the church in general, which is his bride, all the members of it do thence receive enlivening quickening influences, and are made to run to him with the more cheerfulness, Isa. 55. 5. Or, "*Draw me*," (says the believing soul,) "*and then I will not only follow thee myself as fast as I can, but will bring all mine along with me*; *We will run after thee*, I and the virgins that love thee," (v. 3.) I and all that I have any interest in, or influence upon, *I and my house*, (Josh. 24. 15.) *I and the transgressors, whom I will teach thy ways*," Ps. 51. 13. Those that put themselves forth, in compliance with divine grace, shall find that their zeal will provoke many, 2 Cor. 9. 2. Those that are lively will be active; when Philip was drawn to Christ, he drew Nathanael; and they will be exemplary, and so will win those that would not be won by the word.

(3.) The immediate answer that was given to this prayer; *The King has drawn me, has brought me into his chambers*. It is not so much an answer fetched by faith from the word of Christ's grace, as an answer fetched by experience from the workings of his grace. If we observe, as we ought, the returns of prayer, we may find that sometimes, *while we are yet speaking*, Christ hears, Isa. 65. 24. The Bridegroom is a King; so much the more wonderful is his condescension in the invitations and entertainments that he gives us, and so much the greater reason have we to accept of them, and to run after him. God is the King that has made the marriage-supper for his Son, (Matth. 22. 2.) and brings in even the poor and the maimed, and even the most shy and bashful are compelled to come in. They that are drawn to Christ are brought not only into his courts, into his palaces, (Ps. 45. 15.) but into his presence-chamber, where his secret is with them, (Ps. 25. 14.) where he is free with them, (John, 14. 21.) and where they are safe in his pavilion, Ps. 27. 5. Isa. 26. 20. Those that wait at wisdom's gates, shall be made to come (so the word is) into her chambers, they shall be led into truth and comfort.

(4.) The wonderful complacency which the spouse takes in the honour which the king put upon her. Being brought into the chamber, [1.] "We have what we would have; our desires are crowned with unspeakable delights; all our griefs vanish, and we will be glad and rejoice. If a day in the courts, much more an hour in the chambers, is better than a thousand, than ten thousand, elsewhere." They that are, through grace, brought into covenant and communion with God, have reason to go on their way rejoicing, as the eunuch; (Acts, 8. 39.) and that joy will enlarge our heart, and be our strength, Neh. 8. 10. [2.] "All our joy shall centre in God; *We will rejoice*, not in the ointments, or the chambers, but in thee. It is God only that is our exceeding Joy, Ps. 43. 4. We have no joy but in Christ, and which we are indebted to him for." *Gaudium in Domino—Joy in the Lord*, was the ancient salutation, and *Salus in Domino sempiterna—Eternal salvation in the Lord*. [3.] "We will retain the relish and savour of this kindness of thine, and never forget it; we will remember thy loves

more than wine; not only thy love itself, (v.2.) but the very remembrance of it, shall be more grateful to us than the strongest cordial to the spirits, or the most palatable liquor to the taste. We will remember to give thanks for thy love, and it shall make more durable impressions upon us than any thing in this world."

(5.) The communion which a gracious soul has with all the saints in this communion with Christ. In the chambers to which we are brought, we not only meet with him, but meet with one another; (1 John, 1. 7.) for *the upright love thee*; the congregation, the generation, of *the upright love thee*. Whatever others do, all that are Israelites indeed, and faithful to God, will love Jesus Christ. Whatever differences of apprehension and affection there may be among Christians in other things, this they are all agreed in, Jesus Christ is precious to them. *The upright* here are the same with the *virgins*, v. 3. All that *remember his love more than wine*, will love him with a superlative love. Nor is any love acceptable to Christ but the love of *the upright*, love in sincerity, Eph. 6. 24.

II. The spouse applies herself to the daughters of Jerusalem, v. 5, 6. The church in general, being in distress, speaks to particular churches to guard them against the danger they were in, of being offended at the church's sufferings, 1 Thess. 3. 3. Or, the believer speaks to those that were professors at large in the church, but not of it; or to weak Christians, babes in Christ, that labour under much ignorance, infirmity, and mistake, not perfectly instructed, and yet willing to be taught, in the things of God. She observed these by-standers look disdainfully upon her, because of her blackness, in respect both of sins and sufferings, upon the account of which they thought she had little reason to expect the kisses she wished for, (v. 2.) or to expect that they should join with her in her joys, v. 4. She therefore endeavours to remove this offence; she owns she is *black*: guilt blackens; the heresies, scandals, and offences, that happen in the church, make her *black*; and the best saints have their failings; sorrow blackens, that seems to be especially meant; the church is often in a low condition, mean, and poor, and in appearance despicable; her beauty sullied, and her face foul with weeping; she is in mourning weeds, clothed with sackcloth, as the Nazarites that were become *black*er than a coal, Lam. 4. 8.

Now, to take off this offence,

1. She asserts her own comeliness notwithstanding; (v. 5.) *I am black, but comely*; black as the tents of Kedar, in which the shepherds lived, which were very coarse, and never whitened, weather-beaten and discoloured by long use; but comely as the curtains of Solomon, the furniture of whose rooms, no doubt, was sumptuous and rich, in proportion to the stateliness of his houses. The church is sometimes *black* with persecution, but *comely* in patience, constancy, and consolation, and never the less amiable in the eyes of Christ; *black* in the account of men, but *comely* in God's esteem; *black* in some that are a scandal to her, but *comely* in others that are sincere, and are an honour to her. True believers are *black* in themselves, but *comely* in Christ, with the comeliness that he puts upon them; *black* outwardly, for the world knows them not, but all glorious within, Ps. 45. 13. St. Paul was weak, and yet strong; (2 Cor. 12. 10.) and so the church is *black*, and yet *comely*; a believer is a sinner, and yet a saint; his own righteousness are as filthy rags, but he is clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness. The Chaldee Paraphrase applies it to the people of Israel's blackness when they made the golden calf, and their comeliness when they repented of it.

2. She gives an account how she came to be so black. The blackness was not natural, but contracted, and was owing to the hard usage that had been given her; *Look not upon me*, so scornfully, because *I am black*. We must take heed with what eye we look upon the church, especially when she is in black. *Thou shouldst not have looked upon the day of thy brother*, the day of his affliction, Obad. 12. Be not offended; for,

(1.) *I am black*, by reason of my sufferings; *The sun has looked upon me*. She was fair and comely, whiteness was her proper colour, but she got this blackness by the burthen and heat of the day, which she was forced to bear. She was sun-burnt, scorched with tribulation and persecution; (Matth. 13. 6, 21.) and the greatest

beauties, if exposed to the weather, are soonest tanned. Observe how she mitigates her troubles; she does not say, as Jacob, (Gen. 31. 40.) *In the day the drought consumed me*, but, *The sun has looked upon me*; for it becomes not God's suffering people to make the worst of their sufferings. But what was the matter? [1.] She fell under the displeasure of those of her own house; *My mother's children were angry with me*. She was in perils by false brethren: her foes were those of her own house, (Matth. 10. 36.) brethren by nature, as men; by profession, members of the same sacred corporation; the children of the church her mother, but not of God her Father; they were angry with her. The Samaritans, who claimed kindred to the Jews, were vexed at any thing that tended to the prosperity of Jerusalem, Neh. 2. 10. Note, It is no new thing for the people of God to fall under the anger of their own mother's children. *It was thou, a man, mine equal*, Ps. 55. 12, 13. This makes the trouble the more irksome and grievous; from such it is taken unkindly; and the anger of such is implacable; *a brother offended is hard to be won*. [2.] They dealt very hardly with her; *They made me the keeper of the vineyards*; First, "They seduced me to sin, drew me into false worship, to serve their gods, which was like dressing their vineyards, keeping the vine of Sodom; and they would not let me keep my own vineyard, serve my own God, and observe those pure worship which he gave me in charge, and which I do, and ever will, own for mine." These are the grievances which good people complain most of in a time of persecution, that their consciences are forced, and that those, who rule them with rigour, say to their souls, *Bow down, that we may go over*, Isa. 51. 23. Or, Secondly, "They brought me into trouble, imposed that upon me which was toilsome, and burthensome, and very disgraceful." Keeping the vineyards was base, servile, work, and very laborious, Isa. 61. 5. Her mother's children made her the drudge of the family. *Cursed be their anger for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel*. The spouse of Christ has met with a great deal of hard usage.

(2.) "My sufferings are such as I have deserved; for my own vineyard have I not kept. How unrighteous soever my brethren are in persecuting me, God is righteous in permitting them to do so. I am justly made a slavish keeper of men's vineyards, because I have been a careless keeper of the vineyard God has intrusted me with." Slothful servants of God are justly made to serve their enemies, that they may know his service, and the service of the kings of the countries, 2 Chron. 12. 8. Deut. 28. 47, 48. Ezek. 20. 23, 24. "Think not the worse of the ways of God for my sufferings, for I smart for my own folly." Note, When God's people are oppressed and persecuted, it becomes them to acknowledge their own sin to be the procuring cause of their troubles, especially that carelessness in keeping their vineyards, so that it has been like the field of the slothful.

7. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? 8. If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents. 9. I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. 10. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. 11. We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.

Here is,

I. The humble petition which the spouse presents to her Beloved, the shepherdess to the Shepherd, the church and every believer to Christ, for a more free and intimate communion with him. She turns from the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom she had complained both of her sins and of her troubles, and looks up

to heaven for relief and succour against both, v. 7. Where observe, 1. The title she gives to Christ, *O thou whom my soul loveth*. Note. It is the undoubted character of all true believers, that their souls love Jesus Christ, which intimates both the sincerity and the strength of their love; they *love him with all their hearts*; and they that do so may come to him boldly, and may humbly plead it with him. 2. The opinion she has of him as the good Shepherd of the sheep; she doubts not but he *feeds his flock*, and *makes them rest at noon*. Jesus Christ graciously provides both repast and repose for his sheep; they are not starved, but well-fed; not scattered upon the mountains, but fed together; fed *in green pastures*; and, in the hot time of the day, *led by the still waters*, and made to lie down under a cool refreshing shade. Is it with God's people a noon-time of outward troubles, inward conflicts? Christ has rest for them, he *carries them in his arms*, Isa. 40. 11. 3. Her request to him that she might be admitted into his society; *Tell me where thou feedest*. Those that would be told, that would be taught, what they are concerned to know and do, must apply themselves to Jesus Christ, and beg of him to teach them, to tell them. "Tell me where to find thee, where I may have conversation with thee, *where thou feedest* and tendest thy flock, that there I may have some of thy company." Observe, by the way, We should not, in love to our friends and their company, tempt them, or urge them, to neglect their business, but desire such an enjoyment of them as will consist with it, and, rather, if we can, to join with them in their business, and help to forward it. "*Tell me where thou feedest*, and there I will sit with thee, walk with thee, feed my flocks with thine, and not hinder thee or myself, but bring my work with me." Note, They, whose souls love Jesus Christ, earnestly desire to have communion with him, by his word in which he speaks to us, and by prayer in which we speak to him, and to share in the privileges of his flock; and we may learn from the care he takes of his church to provide convenient food and rest for it, how to take care of our own souls, which are our charge. 4. The plea she uses for the enforcing of this request; "*For why should I be as one that turns aside by, or after, the flocks of thy companions*, that pretend to be so, but are really thy competitors and rivals with thee." Note, Turning aside from Christ, after other lovers, is that which gracious souls dread, and deprecate, more than any thing else. "Thou wouldest not have me to *turn aside*, no, nor to be as one that *turns aside*; tell me then, O tell me, where I may be near thee, and I will never leave thee." (1.) "*Why should I lie under suspicion*, and look as if I belonged to some other, and not to thee? *Why should I be thought by the flocks of our companions* to be a deserter from thee, and a retainer to some other shepherd?" Good Christians will be afraid of giving any occasion to those about them to question their faith in Christ, and their love to him; they would not do anything that looks like unconcernedness about their souls, or uncharitableness toward their brethren, or that savours of indifference and disaffection to holy ordinances; and we should pray to God to direct us into, and keep us in, the way of our duty, that we may not so much as *seem to come short*, Heb. 4. 1. (2.) "*Why should I lie in temptation to turn aside*, as I do while I am absent from thee?" We should be earnest with God for a settled peace in communion with God through Christ, that we may not be as strays, ready to be picked up by him that next passes by.

II. The gracious answer which the Bridegroom gives to this request, v. 8. See how ready God is to answer prayer, especially prayers for instruction; even while she is yet speaking, he hears. Observe, 1. How affectionately he speaks to her; *O thou fairest among women*. Note, Believing souls are fair, in the eyes of the Lord Jesus, above any other. Christ sees a beauty in holiness, whether we do or no. The spouse had called herself *black*, but Christ calls her *fair*. Those that are low in their own eyes, are so much the more amiable in the eyes of Jesus Christ. Blushing at their own deformity (says Mr. Durham) is a chief part of their beauty. 2. How mildly he checks her for her ignorance, in these words, *If thou know not*, intimating that she might have known it, if it had not been her own fault. What! dost thou not know where to find me and my flock? Compare Christ's answer to a

like address of Philip's, (John, 14. 9.) *Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?* But, 3. With what tenderness he acquaints her where she might find him. If men say, *Lo, here is Christ, or, lo, he is there, believe them not, go not after them*, Matth. 24. 23, 26. But, (1.) *Walk in the way of good men*; (Prov. 2. 20.) follow the track, ask for the good old way, observe *the footsteps of the flock*, and *go forth by them*. It will not serve to sit still, and cry, "Lord, shew me the way," but we must bestir ourselves to inquire out the way; and we may find it by looking which way *the footsteps of the flock* lead, what has been the practice of godly people all along; let that practice be our's, Heb. 6. 12. 1 Cor. 11. 1. (2.) Sit under the direction of good ministers; "*Feed thyself, and thy kids, beside the tents of the under-shepherds*: Bring thy charge with thee," (it is probable that the custom was to commit the lambs and kids to the custody of the women, the shepherdesses,) "they shall all be welcome; *the shepherds* will be no hinderance to thee, as they were to Rachel's daughters, (Exod. 2. 17.) but helpers rather, and therefore abide by their tents." Note, Those that would have acquaintance and communion with Christ, must closely and conscientiously adhere to holy ordinances, must join themselves to his people, and attend to his ministers. Those that have the charge of families, must bring them with them to religious assemblies; let their *kids*, their children, their servants, have the benefit of *the shepherds' tents*.

III. The high encomiums which the Bridegroom gives of his spouse. To be *given in marriage*, in the Hebrew dialect, is to be *praised*; (Ps. 78. 63. margin;) so this spouse is here; her husband *praises this virtuous woman*, (Prov. 31. 28.) he praises her, as is usual in poems, by similitudes. 1. He calls her his *love*; (v. 9.) it is an endearing compellation often used in this book; "My friend, my companion, my familiar." 2. He compares her to a set of strong and stately *horses in Pharaoh's chariots*. Egypt was famous for the best horses, Solomon had his from thence, and Pharaoh, no doubt, had the choicest the country afforded for his own chariots. The church had complained of her own weakness, and the danger she was in of being made a prey of by her enemies; "Fear not," says Christ; "*I have made thee like a company of horses*, I have put strength into thee as I have done into the horse, (Job, 39. 19.) so that thou shalt with a gracious boldness mock at fear, (and not be affrighted,) like the lion, Prov. 28. 1. *The Lord has made thee as his goodly horse in the day of battle*, Zech. 10. 3. *I have compared thee to my company of horses* which triumphed over *Pharaoh's chariots*, the holy angels, *horses of fire*." Hab. 3. 15. *Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses*; and see Isa. 68. 13. We are weak in ourselves, but if Christ make us as horses, strong and bold, we need not fear what all the powers of darkness can do against us. 3. He admires the beauty and ornaments of her countenance; (v. 10.) *Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels*, the attire of the head, curls of hair, or favourites, so some; or knots of ribands; *thy neck also with chains*, such as persons of the first rank wear, *chains of gold*. The ordinances of Christ are the ornaments of the church; the graces, gifts, and comforts of the Spirit, are the adorning of every believing soul, and beautify it; these render it, *in the sight of God, of great price*. The ornaments of the saints are many, but all orderly disposed in *rows and chains*, in which there is a mutual connexion with, and dependence upon, each other. The beauty is not from any thing in themselves, from the *neck*, or from the *cheeks*, but from the ornaments with which they are set off. It was *comeliness which I put upon thee, saith the Lord God*; for we were born not only naked, but polluted, Ezek. 16. 14.

IV. His gracious purpose to add to her ornaments; for where God has given true grace, he will give more grace; *to him that has shall be given*. Is the church courageous in her resistance of sin, as the *horses in Pharaoh's chariots*? Is she *comely* in the exercise of grace, as *with rows of jewels, and chains of gold*? She shall be yet further beautified; (v. 11.) *We will make thee borders of gold, inlaid, or enamelled, with studs of silver*. Whatever is wanting, shall be made up, till the church and every true believer come to be *perfect in beauty*; see Ezek. 16. 14. This is her un-

undertaken to be done by the concurring power of the three persons in the Godhead; *We will* do it; like that, (Gen. 1. 26.) "*Let us make man*"; so let us new-make him, and perfect his beauty." The same that is the Author, will be the Finisher, of the good work; and it cannot miscarry.

12. While the king *sitteth* at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. 13. A bundle of myrrh *is* my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts. 14. My beloved *is* unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi. 15. Behold, thou *art* fair, my love; behold, thou *art* fair, thou *hast* doves' eyes. 16. Behold, thou *art* fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed *is* green. 17. The beams of our house *are* cedar, and our rafters of fir.

Here the conference is carried on between Christ and his spouse, and endearments are mutually exchanged.

I. Believers take a great complacency in Christ, and in communion with him. *To you that believe, he is precious*, above any thing in this world, 1 Pet. 2. 7. Observe,

1. The humble reverence believers have for Christ as their Sovereign, r. 12. He is a *King*, in respect both of dignity and dominion; he wears the crown of honour, he bears the sceptre of power, both which are the unspeakable satisfaction of all his people. This King has his royal table spread in the gospel, in which is made for all nations a feast of fat things, Isa. 25. 6. Wisdom has furnished her table, Prov. 9. 1. He sits at this table to see his guests, (Matth. 22. 11.) to see that nothing be wanting that is fit for them: he *sups with them*, and they with him; (Rev. 3. 20.) he has fellowship with them, and rejoices in them; he sits at his table to bid them welcome, and to carve for them, as Christ brake the five loaves, and gave to his disciples, that they might distribute to the multitude; he sits there to receive petitions, as Ahasuerus admitted Esther's petition at the banquet of wine. He has promised to be present with his people in his ordinances always. Then believers do him all the honour they can, and study how to express their esteem of him, and gratitude to him, as Mary did when she anointed his head with the ointment of spikenard that was very costly, one pound of it worth three hundred pence, and so fragrant, that the house was filled with the pleasing odour of it; (John, 12. 3.) which story seems as if it were designed to refer to this passage, for Christ was then sitting at table. When good Christians, in any religious duty, especially in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, where the King is pleased, as it were, to sit with us at his own table, have their graces exercised, their hearts broken by repentance, healed by faith, and inflamed with holy love and desire towards Christ, and with joyful expectations of the glory to be revealed, then the spikenard sends forth the smell thereof; Christ is pleased to reckon himself honoured by it, and to accept of it as an instance of respect to him, as it was in the wise men of the East, who paid their homage to the new-born King of the Jews, by presenting to him frankincense and myrrh. The graces of God's Spirit in the hearts of believers are exceeding precious in themselves, and pleasing to Christ; and his presence in ordinances draws them out into act and exercise. If he withdraw, graces wither and languish, as plants in the absence of the sun; if he approach, the face of the soul is renewed, as of the earth in the spring; and then it is time to bestir ourselves, that we may not lose the gleam, nor lose the gale; for nothing is done acceptably, but what grace does, Heb. 12. 28.

2. The strong affection they have for Christ as their Beloved, their well-beloved, v. 13. Christ is not only beloved by all believing souls, but is their well-beloved, their best-beloved, their only beloved; he has that place in their hearts, which no rival can be admitted to, the innermost and uppermost place. Observe,

(1.) How Christ is accounted of by all believers; He is a bundle of myrrh, and a cluster of camphire, something, we may be

sure, nay every thing, that is pleasant and delightful. The doctrine of his gospel, and the comforts of his Spirit, are very refreshing to them, and they rest in his love; none of all the delights of sense are comparable to the spiritual pleasure they have in meditating on Christ, and enjoying him. There is a complicated sweetness in Christ, and an abundance of it; there is a bundle of myrrh, and a cluster of camphire; we are not straitened in him in whom there is all fulness. The word translated camphire, is *copher*, the same word that signifies atonement or propitiation; Christ is a Cluster of merit and righteousness to all believers; therefore he is dear to them, because he is the propitiation for their sins. Observe what a stress the spouse lays upon the application; he is unto me, and again, unto me all that is sweet; whatever he is to others, he is so to me; he loved me, and gave himself for me; he is my Lord, and my God.

(2.) How he is accepted; He shall lie all night between my breasts, near my heart. Christ lays the beloved disciples in his bosom; why then should not they lay their beloved Saviour in their bosoms? why should not they embrace him with both arms, and hold him fast, with a resolution never to let him go? Christ must dwell in the heart, (Eph. 3. 17.) and, in order to that, the adulteries must be put from between the breasts; (Hos. 2. 2.) no pretender must have his place in the soul. He shall be as a bundle of myrrh or perfume bag, between my breasts, always sweet to me; or his effigies in miniature, his love-tokens, shall be hung between my breasts, according to the custom of those that are dear to each other. He shall not only be laid there for a while, but shall lie there, shall abide there.

II. Jesus Christ has a great complacency in his church, and in every true believer; they are amiable in his eyes; (v. 15.) Behold, thou art fair, my love; and again, Behold, thou art fair. He says this, not to make her proud, (humility is one principal ingredient in spiritual beauty,) but, 1. To shew that there is a real beauty in holiness; that all who are sanctified are thereby beautified; they are truly fair. 2. That he takes great delight in that good work which his grace has wrought on the souls of believers; so that, though they have their infirmities, whatever they think of themselves, and the world thinks of them, he thinks them fair. He calls them friends; the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, is in the sight of God of great price, 1 Pet. 3. 4. 3. To comfort weak believers, who are discouraged by their own blackness, let them be told again and again that they are fair. 4. To engage all who are sanctified to be very thankful for that grace which has made them fair, who by nature were deformed, and changed the Ethiopian's skin. One instance of the beauty of the spouse is here mentioned, that she has doves' eyes, as ch. 4. 1. Those are fair, in Christ's account, who have not the piercing eye of the eagle, but the pure and chaste eye of the dove; not like the hawk, who, when he soars upward, still has his eye upon the prey on earth; but a humble modest eye, such an eye as discovers a simplicity and godly sincerity, and a dove-like innocence. Eyes enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit, that blessed Dove; weeping eyes; I did mourn as a dove, Ezek. 7. 16.

III. The church expresses her value for Christ, and returns esteem for esteem; (v. 16.) Behold, thou art fair. See how Christ and believers praise one another. Israel saith of God, Who is like thee? (Exod. 15. 11.) And God saith of Israel Who is like thee? (Deut. 33. 29.) Lord, saith the church, "Dost thou call me fair? No; if we speak of strength, thou art strong; (Job, 9. 19.) so, if of beauty, thou art fair; I am fair no otherwise than as I have thine image stamped upon me; thou art the great Original. I am but a faint and imperfect copy, I am but thine umbra—the shadow of thee; (John, 1. 16.—3. 34.) Thou art fair in thyself, and (which is more) pleasant to all that are thine. Many are fair enough to look at, and yet the sourness of their temper renders them unpleasant; but thou art fair, yea, pleasant." Christ is pleasant, as he is our's, in covenant with us, in relation to us. Thou art pleasant now, when the King sits at his table. Christ is always precious to believers, but in a special manner pleasant, when they are admitted into communion with him, when they hear his voice, and see his face, and taste his love. It is good to be here

Having expressed her esteem of her husband's person, she next, like a loving spouse, that is transported with joy for having disposed of herself so well, applauds the accommodations he had for her entertainment; his *bed*, his *house*, his *rafters*, or *galleries*, (v. 16.) which may fitly be applied to those holy ordinances in which believers have fellowship with Jesus Christ, receive the tokens of his love, and return their pious and devout affections to him, increase their acquaintance with him, and improve their advantages by him. Now, 1. These she calls *our's*, Christ and believers having a joint-interest in them. As husband and wife are *heirs together*, (1 Pet. 3. 7.) so believers are *joint-heirs with Christ*, Rom. 8. 17. They are his institutions, and their privileges; in them Christ and believers meet. She does not call them *mine*, for a believer will own nothing as his, but what Christ shall have an interest in; nor *thine*, for Christ has said, *All that I have is thine*, Luke, 15. 31. All is *our's*, if we are Christ's. They that can by faith lay claim to Christ may lay claim to all that is his. 2. These are the best of the kind. Does the colour of the bed, and the furniture belonging to it, help to set it off? *Our bed is green*, a colour which, in a pastoral, is preferred before any other, because it is the colour of the fields and groves, where the shepherd's business and delight are. It is a refreshing colour, good for the eyes, and it denotes fruitfulness. *I am like a green olive tree*, Ps. 52. 8. We are *married to Christ*, that we should bring forth unto God, Rom. 7. 4. *The beams of our house are cedar*; (v. 17.) which, probably, refers to the temple Solomon had lately built for communion between God and Israel, which was of cedar, a strong sort of wood, sweet, durable, and which will never rot, typifying the firmness and continuance of the church, the gospel-temple; the galleries for walking are of *fir*, or *cypress*, some sort of wood that was pleasing both to the sight and to the smell, intimating the delight which the saints take in walking with Christ, and conversing with him. Every thing in the covenant of grace, (on which foot all their treaties are carried on,) is very firm, very fine, and very fragrant.

CHAP. II.

In this chapter, I. Christ speaks both concerning himself, and concerning his church, v. 1, 2. II. The church speaks, 1. Remembering the pleasure and satisfaction she had in communion with Christ, v. 3, 4. 2. Entertaining herself with the present tokens of his favour, and taking care that nothing happen to intercept them, v. 5, 7. 3. Triumphant in his approaches toward her, v. 8, 9. 4. Repeating the gracious calls he had given her to go along with him a walking, invited by the pleasures of the returning spring, (v. 10. .13.) out of her obscurity, (v. 14.) and the charge he had given to the servants to destroy that which should be hurtful to his vineyard, v. 15. 5. Rejoicing in her interest in him, v. 16. 6. Longing for his arrival, v. 17. They whose hearts are filled with love to Christ, and hope of heaven, know best what these things mean.

1. **I AM** the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the vallies. 2. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

See here, 1. What Christ is pleased to compare himself to; and he condescends very much in the comparison; he that is the Son of the Highest, the bright and morning Star, calls and owns himself *the Rose of Sharon*, and *the Lily of the vallies*, to express his presence with his people in this world, the easiness of their access to him, and the beauty and sweetness which they find in him; and to teach them to adorn themselves with him, as shepherds and shepherdesses, when they appeared gay, were decked with roses and lilies, garlands and chaplets of flowers. *The rose*, for beauty and fragrant, is the chief of flowers, and our Saviour prefers the clothing of *the lily* before that of *Solomon in all his glory*. Christ is *the Rose of Sharon*, where, probably, the best roses grew, and in most plenty; *the Rose of the field*, so some; denoting that the gospel salvation is a common salvation; it lies open to all; whoever will may come, and gather the rose-buds of privileges and comforts that grow in the covenant of grace; he is not a Rose locked up in a garden, but all may come and receive benefit by him, and comfort in him. He is a *Lily* for whiteness, a *Lily of the*

vallies for sweetness, for those which we call so are a strong perfume. He is a *Lily of the vallies*, or *low places*, in his humiliation, exposed to injury; humble souls see most beauty in him; whatever he is to others, to them that are in *the vallies* he is a *Lily*. He is *the Rose, the Lily*; there is none besides; whatever excellency is in Christ, it is in him singularly, and in the highest degree.

2. What he is pleased to compare his church to; (v. 2.) (1.) She is *as a lily*; he himself is the *Lily*, (v. 1.) she is *as the lily*; the beauty of believers consists in their conformity and resemblance to Jesus Christ; they are his love, and so they are as lilies, for those are made like Christ in whose hearts his *love is shed abroad*. (2.) *As a lily among thorns*; *as a lily* compared with *thorns*; the church of Christ as far excels all other societies, as a bed of roses excels a bush of thorns; *as a lily* compassed with *thorns*. The wicked, the daughters of this world, such as have no love to Christ, are as *thorns*, worthless and useless, good for nothing but to stop a gap; nay, they are noxious and hurtful, they came in with sin, and are a fruit of the curse; they choke good seed, and hinder good fruit, and their end is to be burned. God's people are *as lilies among them*, scratched and torn, shaded and obscured, by them; they are dear to Christ, and yet exposed to hardships and troubles in the world; they must expect it, for they are planted *among thorns*, (Ezek. 2. 6.) but they are nevertheless dear to him, he does not overlook or undervalue any of his lilies for their being *among thorns*. When they are *among thorns*, they must still be *as lilies*, must maintain their innocency and purity, and, though they are *among thorns*, must not be turned into *thorns*, must not render railing for railing, and if they thus preserve their character, they shall be still owned as conformable to Christ. Grace in the soul is a *lily among thorns*, corruptions are *thorns in the flesh*, (2 Cor. 12. 7.) are as Canaanites to God's Israel; (Josh. 23. 13.) but the *lily* that is now *among thorns*, shall shortly be transplanted out of this wilderness into that paradise where there is no pricking brier or grieving thorn, Ezek. 28. 24.

3. As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. 4. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love. 5. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love. 6. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. 7. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

Here,

I. The spouse commends her beloved, and prefers him before all others; *As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood*, which perhaps does not grow so high, nor spread so wide, as some other trees, yet is useful and serviceable to man, yielding pleasant and profitable fruit, while the other trees are of little use, no, not the cedars themselves, till they are cut down, so is my Beloved among the sons, so far does he excel them all, all the sons of God, the angels; that honour was put upon him, which was never designed for them; (Heb. 1. 4.) all the sons of men; he is *juiver*, how much more does he excel than all, than the choicest of them, Ps. 45. 2. Name what creature you will, and you will find Christ has the pre-eminence above them all. The world is a barren tree to a soul, Christ is a fruitful one.

II. She remembers the abundant comfort she has had in communion with him; she sat down by him with great delight, as shepherds sometimes repose themselves, sometimes converse with one another, under a tree.

A double advantage she found in sitting down so near the Lord Jesus. 1. A refreshing shade; *I sat down under his shadow*, to be sheltered by him from the scorching heat of the sun, to be cooled, and so to take some rest. Christ is to believers *as the sha-*

flow of a great tree, nay, of a great rock in a weary land, Isa. 32. 2.—25. 4. When a poor soul is parched with convictions of sin, and the terrors of the law, as David (Ps. 32. 4.) when fatigued with the troubles of this world, as Elijah when he *sat down under the juniper tree*, (1 Kings, 19. 4.) they find that in Christ, in his name, his graces, his comforts, and his undertaking for poor sinners, which revives them, and keeps them from fainting; they that are *weary and heavy laden* in Christ may find *rest*. It is not enough to pass by this *shadow*, but we must *sit down under it*; *here will I dwell*, for I have desired it; and we shall find it not like Jonah's gourd, that soon withered, and left him in a heat, both inward and outward, but like the tree of life, the leaves whereof were not only for shelter, but for the healing of the nations. We must *sit down under this shadow with delight*, must put an entire confidence in the protection of it, (as Judges, 9. 15.) and take an entire complacency in the refreshment of it. But that is not all. 2. Here is pleasing, nourishing, food; this tree drops its fruits to those that *sit down under its shadow*, and they are welcome to them, and will find them *sweet unto their taste*, whatever they are to others; believers have tasted that the Lord Jesus is *gracious*, (1 Pet. 2. 3.) his *fruits* are all the precious privileges of the new covenant, purchased by his blood, and communicated by his Spirit; promises are sweet to a believer, yea, and precepts too; *I delight in the law of God after the inward man*. Pardons are sweet, and peace of conscience sweet, assurances of God's love, joys of the Holy Ghost, the hopes of eternal life, and the present earnestness and fore-tastes of it, are sweet, all sweet to those that have their spiritual senses exercised. If our mouths be put out of taste for the pleasures of sin, divine consolations will be *sweet to our taste, sweeter than honey and the honey-comb*.

III. She owns herself obliged to Jesus Christ for all the benefit and comfort she had in communion with him; (v. 4.) *"I sat down under the apple-tree, glad to be there, but he admitted me, nay, he pressed me, to a more intimate communion with him; Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, why standest thou without? He brought me to the house of wine, the place where he entertains his special friends; from lower to higher measures and degrees of comfort; from the fruit of the apple-tree to the more generous fruit of the vine. To him that values the divine joys he has, more shall be given. One of the rabbins, by the banqueting-house, understands the tabernacle of the congregation where the interpretation of the law was given; surely then we may apply it to Christian assemblies, where the gospel is preached, and gospel-ordinances are administered, particularly the Lord's supper, that banquet of wine especially to the inside of those ordinances, communion with God in them. Observe, 1. How she was introduced; "He brought me, wrought in me an inclination to draw nigh to God, helped me over my discouragements, took me by the hand, guided and led me, and gave me an access with boldness to God as a Father, Eph. 2. 18. We had never come into the banqueting-house, and never been acquainted with spiritual pleasures, if Christ had not brought us, by opening for us a new and living way, and opening in us a new and living fountain. 2. How she was entertained; His banner over me was love; he brought me in with a banner displayed over my head, not as one he triumphed over, but as one he triumphed in, and whom he always caused to triumph with him, and in him, 2 Cor. 2. 14. The gospel is compared to a banner, or ensign, (Isa. 11. 12.) and that which is represented in this banner, written in it in letters of gold, letters of blood, is love, love; and this is the entertainment in the banqueting-house. Christ is the Captain of our salvation, and he enlists all his soldiers under the banner of love; in that they centre, to that they must continually have an eye, and be animated by it; the love of Christ must constrain them to fight manfully. When a city was taken, the conqueror set up his standard in it; "He has conquered me with his love, overcome me with kindness, and that is the banner over me." This she speaks of as what she had formerly had experience of, and she remembers it with delight. Eaten bread must not be forgotten, but remembered with thankfulness to that God who has fed us with manna in this wilderness.*

IV. She professes her strong affection and most passionate love to Jesus Christ; (v. 5.) *I am sick of love*, overcome, overpowered, by it. David explains this, when he says, (Ps. 119. 20.) *My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto thy judgments*, and, (v. 18.) *My soul faints for thy salvation*; languishing with care to make it sure, and fear of coming short of it. The spouse was now absent perhaps from her Beloved, waiting for his return, and cannot bear the grief and distance of delay. Oh how much better is it with the soul when it is *sick of love to Christ*, than when it is surfeited with the love of this world! She cries out for cordials; *"Oh stay me with flagons, or ointments, or flowers, any thing that is reviving; comfort me with apples, with the fruits of that Apple-tree, Christ, (v. 3.) with the merit and mediation of Christ, and the sense of his love to my soul."* Note, They that are *sick of love to Christ*, shall not want spiritual supports, while they are yet waiting for spiritual comforts.

V. She experiences the power and tenderness of divine grace, relieving her in her present faintings, v. 6. Though he seemed to have withdrawn, yet he was even then a very present Help, 1. To sustain the love-sick soul, and to keep it from fainting away; *"His left hand is under my head, to bear it up, nay, as a pillow to lay it easy."* David experienced God's hand upholding him then when *his soul was following hard after God*, (Ps. 63. 8.) and Job, in a state of desertion, yet found that God *put strength into him*, Job, 23. 6. *All his saints are in his hand*, which tenderly holds their aching heads. 2. To encourage the love-sick soul to continue waiting till he returns; *"For, in the mean time, his right hand embraces me, and thereby gives me an unquestionable assurance of his love."* Believers owe all their strength and comfort to the supporting left hand, and embracing right hand, of the Lord Jesus.

VI. Finding her Beloved thus nigh unto her she is in great care that her communion with him be not interrupted; (v. 7.) *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the mother of us all, charges all her daughters, the church charges all her members, the believing soul charges all its powers and faculties, the spouse charges herself, and all about her, not to stir up, or awake, her love until he please, now that he is asleep in her arms, as she was borne up in his, v. 6. She gives them this charge by the roes and the hinds of the field, by every thing that is amiable in their eyes, and dear to them, as the loving kind, and the pleasant roe; "My love is to me dearer than those can be to you, and will be disturbed, like them, with a very little noise."* Note, 1. Those that experience the sweetness of communion with Christ, and the sensible manifestations of his love, cannot but desire the continuance of these blessed views, these blessed visits. Peter would make tabernacles upon the holy mount, Matth. 17. 4. 2. Yet Christ will, when he pleases, withdraw those extraordinary communications of himself, for he is a free Agent, and the Spirit, as the wind blows where and when it listeth, and in his pleasure it becomes us to acquiesce. But 3. Our case must be, that we do nothing to provoke him to withdraw, and to hide his face; that we carefully watch over our own hearts, and suppress every thought that may grieve his good Spirit. Let those that have comfort, be afraid of sinning it away.

8. The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. 9. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice. 10. My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. 11. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. 12. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. 13. The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs

and the vines *with the tender grape* give a *good* mell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

The church is here *pleasing herself* exceedingly with the thoughts of her further communion with Christ, after she is recovered from her fainting fit.

1. She rejoices in his approach, v. 8. (1.) She hears him speak; "*It is the voice of my Beloved*, calling to me to tell me he is coming." Like one of his own sheep, she *knows his voice* before she sees him, and can easily distinguish it from *the voice of a stranger*, (John, 10. 4, 5.) and, like a faithful friend of the Bridegroom, she *rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice*, John, 3. 29. With what an air of triumph and exultation does she cry out, "*It is the voice of my Beloved*, it can be the voice of no other, for none besides can speak to the heart, and make that burn." (2.) She sees him come, sees the goings of *our God, our King*, Ps. 68. 24. *Behold he comes*. This may very well be applied to the prospect which the Old-Testament saints had of Christ's coming in the flesh. *Abraham saw his day* at a distance, and was glad. The nearer the time came, the clearer discoveries were made of it; and they that waited for the consolation of Israel with an eye of faith, saw him come, and triumphed in the sight. *Behold, he comes*; for they had heard him say, (Ps. 40. 7.) *Lo, I come*; to which their faith here affixes its seal. *Behold, he comes*, as he has promised. [1.] He comes cheerfully and with great alacrity; he comes leaping and skipping *like a roe*, and like a *young hart*, (v. 9.) as one pleased with his own undertaking, and that had his heart upon it, and his delights with the sons of men. When he came to be baptized with the baptism of blood, how was he *straitened till it was accomplished*! Luke, 12. 50. [2.] He comes, slighting and surmounting all the difficulties that lay in his way; he comes *leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills*, so some read it, making nothing of the discouragements he was to break through; the curse of the law, the death of the cross, must be undergone, all the powers of darkness must be grappled with; but, before the resolutions of his love, these great mountains become plains. Whatever opposition is given at any time to the deliverance of God's church, Christ will break through it, will get over it. [3.] He comes speedily, *like a roe*, or a *young hart*; they thought the time long, (every day a year,) but really he hastened; as now, so then, *surely he comes quickly; he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry*. When he comes for the deliverance of his people, he *flies upon a cloud*, and never stays beyond his time, which is the best time. We may apply it to particular believers, who find, that, even when Christ has withdrawn sensible comforts, and seems to forsake, yet it is but for a small moment, and he will soon return, with everlasting loving-kindness.

2. She pleases herself with the glimpses she has of him, and the glances she has of his favour; He *stands behind our wall*, I know he is there, for sometimes he *looks forth at the window*, or *looks in* at it, and displays *himself through the lattice*. Such was the state of the Old-Testament church while it was in expectation of the coming of the Messiah; the ceremonial law is called a *wall of partition*, (Eph. 2. 14.) a *rail*; (2 Cor. 3. 13.) but Christ stood behind that wall, they had him near them, they had him with them, though they could not see him clearly; he that was the substance was not far off from the shadows, Col. 2. 17. They saw him looking through the windows of the ceremonial institutions, and smiling through those lattices; in their sacrifices and purifications Christ discovered himself to them, and gave them intimations and earnestness of his grace both to engage and to encourage their longings for his coming. Such is our present state in comparison with what it will be at Christ's second coming; we now *see him through a glass darkly*, the body is a wall between us and him, through the windows of which we now and then get a sight of him, but not *face to face*, as we hope to see him shortly. In the sacraments Christ is near us, but it is *behind the wall* of external signs, through *those lattices* he manifests himself to us; but we shall shortly *see him as he is*. Some understand this of the

state of a believer when he is under a cloud; Christ is out of sight and yet not far off. See Job, 34. 14. and compare Job, 23. 8. . 10. She calls the wall that interposed between her and her Beloved, *our wall*, because it is sin, and nothing else, that separates between us and God, and that is a wall of our own erecting; (Isa. 59. 1.) behind that he stands, as *waiting to be gracious*, and ready to be reconciled, upon our repentance. Then he *looks in at the window*, observes the frame of our hearts and the working of our souls; he looks forth at the window, and shews himself in giving them some comfort, that they may continue hoping for his return.

3. She repeats the gracious invitation he had given her to come a walking with him, v. 10. . 13. She remembers what her Beloved said to her, for it had made a very pleasing and powerful impression upon her, and the *word that quickens us* we shall *never forget*. She relates it for the encouragement of others, telling them what he had said to her soul, and *done for her soul*, Ps. 66. 16.

(1.) He called her his love and his fair one; whatever she is to others, to him she is acceptable, and in his eyes she is amiable. Those that take Christ for their Beloved, he will own them as his; never was any love lost that was bestowed upon Christ. Christ, by expressing his love to believers, invites and encourages them to follow him.

(2.) He called her to *rise and come away*, (v. 10.) and again, (v. 13.) the repetition denotes backwardness in her; (we have need to be often called to come away with Jesus Christ, *precept must be upon precept, and line upon line*;) but it denotes earnestness in him; so much is his heart set upon the welfare of precious souls, that he importunes them most pressingly to that which is for their own good.

(3.) He gave for a reason the return of the spring, and the pleasantness of the weather; which is elegantly described in a great variety of expressions.

[1.] *The winter is past*, the dark, cold, and barren, winter: long winters and hard ones pass away at last, they do not endure always. And the spring would not be so pleasant as it is, if it did not succeed the winter, which is a foil to its beauty, Eccl. 7. 14. The face neither of the heavens, nor the earth, is always the same, but subject to continual vicissitudes, diurnal and annual. *The winter is past*, but not past away for ever, it will come again, and we must provide for it in summer, Prov. 6. 6, 8. We must weep in winter, and rejoice in summer, as though we wept and rejoiced not, for both are passing.

[2.] *The rain is over and gone*, the winter-rain, the cold stormy rain, it is over now, and *the dew is as the dew of herbs*. Even the rain that drowned the world was over and gone at last, (Gen. 8. 1. . 3.) and God promised to drown the world no more, which was a type and figure of the covenant of grace, Isa. 54. 9.

[3.] *The flowers appear on the earth*; all winter they are dead and buried in their roots, and there is no sign of them, but in the spring they revive, and shew themselves in a wonderful variety and verdure, and, like the dew that produces them, *tarry not for man*, Mic. 5. 7. They appear, but they will soon disappear again, and man is herein like *the flower of the field*, Job, 14. 2.

[4.] *The time of the singing of birds is come*. The little birds, which all the winter lie hid in their retirements, and scarcely live, when the spring returns, forget all the calamities of the winter, and to the best of their capacity chant forth the praises of their Creator. Doubtless, he who understands the birds that cry for want, (Ps. 147. 9.) takes notice of those that *sing for joy*, Ps. 104. 12. The singing of the birds may shame our silence in God's praises, who are better fed, (Matth. 6. 26.) and better taught, (Job, 35. 11.) and are of *more value than many sparrows*. They live without inordinate care, (Matth. 6. 26.) and therefore they sing, while we murmur.

[5.] *The voice of the turtle is heard in our land*, which is one of the season-birds, mentioned Jer. 8. 7. that observe the time of their coming, and the time of their singing, and so shame us who *know not the judgment of the Lord*, understand not the times, nor do that which is *beautiful in its season*, do not sing in singing time.

[6.] *The fig-tree puts forth her green figs*, by which we know *that summer is nigh*, (Matth. 24. 32.) when the green figs will be ripe figs, and fit for use, and the *vines with the tender grape give a good smell*: the earth produces not only *flowers*, (v. 12.) but *fruits*; and the smell of the fruits which are profitable, is to be preferred far before that of the flowers, which are only for shew and pleasure. Serpents, they say, are driven away by the smell of vines; and who is the old serpent, and who the true vine, we know very well.

Now this description of the returning spring, as a reason for coming away with Christ, is applicable,

First, To the introducing of the gospel in the room of the Old-Testament dispensation, during which it had been winter-time with the church. Christ's gospel warms that which was cold, makes that fruitful which was before dead and barren; when it comes to any place, it puts a beauty and glory upon that place, (2 Cor. 3. 7, 8.) and gives ministers occasion for joy. Spring-time is pleasant time, and so is gospel-time. *Aspice venturo letentur ut omnia seculo—Behold what joy the dawning age inspires!* said Virgil, from the Sibyls, perhaps with more reference to the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom at that time than he himself thought of. See Ps. 96. 11. *Arise then*, and improve this spring-time; *come away* from the world and the flesh, *come into fellowship with Christ*, 1 Cor. 1. 9.

Secondly, To the delivering of the church from the power of persecuting enemies, and the restoring of liberty and peace to it, after a severe winter of suffering and restraint. When the storms of trouble are over and gone, when the *voice of the turtle*, the joyful sound of the gospel of Christ, is again heard, and ordinances are enjoyed with freedom, then *arise*, and *come away* to improve the happy juncture. Walk in the light of the Lord, sing in the ways of the Lord: when the churches had rest, then were they edified, Acts. 9. 31.

Thirdly, To the conversion of sinners from a state of nature to a state of grace; that blessed change is like the return of the spring, a universal change, and a very comfortable one; it is a new creation, it is being born again. The soul that was hard, and cold, and frozen, and unprofitable, like the earth in winter, becomes fruitful, like the earth in spring; and, by degrees, like it, brings its fruits to perfection. This blessed change is owing purely to the approaches and influences of the Sun of Righteousness, who calls to us from heaven to *arise*, and *come away*; come, gather in summer.

Fourthly, To the consolations of the saints after a state of inward dejection and despondency. A child of God, under doubts and fears, is like the earth in winter, its nights long, its days dark, good affections chilled, nothing done, nothing got, the hand sealed up. But comfort will return, the birds shall sing again, and the flowers appear; arise, therefore, poor drooping soul, and *come away* with thy beloved. *Arise*, and *shake thyself from the dust*, Isa. 52. 2. *Arise*, *shine*, for *thy light is come*, (Isa. 60. 1.) *walk in that light*, Isa. 2. 5.

Fifthly, To the resurrection of the body at the last day, and the glory to be revealed. The bones that lay in the grave, as the roots of plants in the ground during the winter, shall then *flourish as an herb*, Isa. 66. 14.—26. 19. That will be an eternal farewell to winter, and a joyful entrance upon an everlasting spring.

14. O my dove, *that art* in the clefts of the rock, in the secret *places* of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. 15. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines *have* tender grapes. 16. My beloved is mine, and I am his: He feedeth among the lilies. 17. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away: turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of Bethel.

Here is, 1. The encouraging invitation which Christ gives to the church, and every believing soul, to come into communion with him, v. 14. (1.) His love is now his *dove*; David had called the church God's *turtle-dove*, (Ps. 74. 19.) and so she is here called; a dove for beauty, her *wings covered with silver*, (Ps. 68. 13.) for innocence and inoffensiveness; a gracious spirit is a dove-like spirit, harmless, loving quietness and cleanliness, and faithful to Christ, as the turtle to her mate. The Spirit descended *like a dove* on Christ, and so he does on all Christians, making them of a *meek and quiet spirit*. She is Christ's *dove*, for he owns her, and delights in her; she can find no rest but in him and his ark, and therefore to him, as her Noah, she returns. (2.) This dove is *in the clefts of the rock*, and *in the secret places of the stairs*. This speaks, either, [1.] Her praise; Christ is the Rock, to whom she flies for shelter, and in whom alone she can think herself safe, and find herself easy, as a dove in the hole of a rock, when struck at by the birds of prey, Jer. 48. 28. Moses was hid in a cleft of the rock, that he might behold something of God's glory, which otherwise he could not have borne the brightness of. She retires *into the secret places of the stairs*, where she may be alone, undisturbed, and may the better commune with her own heart. Good Christians will find time to be private. Christ often withdrew to a mountain *himself alone*, to pray. [2.] Her blame; she crept into the *clefts of the rock*, and the *secret places*, for fear and shame; any where to hide her head, being heartless and discouraged, and shunning even the sight of her Beloved, being conscious to herself of her own unfitness and unworthiness to come into his presence, and speak to him, she drew back, and was *like a silly dove without heart*, Hos. 7. 11. (3.) Christ graciously calls her out of her retirements; Come, *let me see thy countenance*, *let me hear thy voice*; she was *mourning like a dove*, (Isa. 38. 14.) bemoaning herself like the *doves of the valleys*, where they are near the clefts of the impending rocks, *mourning for her iniquities*, (Ezek. 7. 16.) and refusing to be comforted. But Christ calls her to *lift up her face without spot*, being purged from an evil conscience, (Job, 11. 15.—22. 26.) to *come boldly to the throne of grace*, having a great *High Priest* there, (Heb. 4. 16.) to tell what her petition is, and what her request; Let me *hear thy voice*, hear what thou hast to say; *what would ye that I should do unto you?* Speak freely, speak up, and fear not a slight or repulse. (4.) For her encouragement, he tells her the good thoughts he had of her, whatever she thought of herself; *Sweet is thy voice*; thy praying voice, though thou canst but *chatter like a crane or a swallow*, (Isa. 38. 14.) it is music in God's ears; he has assured us, that *the prayer of the upright is his delight*; he smelled a sweet savour from Noah's sacrifice, and the *spiritual sacrifices* are no less acceptable, 1 Pet. 2. 5. This does not so much commend our services, as God's gracious condescension in making the best of them, and the efficacy of the *much incense* which is *offered with the prayers of saints*, Rev. 8. 3. "That countenance of thine, which thou art ashamed of, is comely, though now mournful, much more will it be so when it becomes cheerful." *Then* the voice of prayer is sweet and acceptable to God, when the countenance, the conversation in which we shew ourselves before men, is holy, and so comely and agreeable to our profession; those that are sanctified have the best comeliness.

2. The charge which Christ gives to his servants, to oppose and suppress that which is a terror to his church, and drives her, like a poor frightened dove into the clefts of the rock, and which is an obstruction and prejudice to the interests of his kingdom in this world, and in the heart; (v. 15.) *Take us the foxes*, (take them for us, for it is good service both to Christ and the church,) *the little foxes*, that creep in insensibly; for, though they are little, they do great mischief, they spoil the vines, which they must by no means be suffered to do at any time, especially now when our vines have *tender grapes* that must be preserved, or the vintage will fail. Believers are as vines, weak, but useful, plants; their fruits are as *tender grapes* at first, which must have time to come to maturity. This charge, to *take the foxes*, is, (1.) A charge to particular believers to mortify their own corruptions, their sinful appetites and passions, which are as *foxes*, *little foxes*, that destroy their graces

and comforts, quash good motions, crush good beginnings, and prevent their coming to perfection. Seize the *little foxes*, the first risings of sin, the little ones of Babylon, (Ps. 137. 9.) these sins that seem little, for they often prove very dangerous. Whatever we find a hinderance to us in that which is good, we must put away. (2.) A charge to all in their places to oppose and prevent the spreading of all such opinions and practices as tend to corrupt men's judgments, debauch their consciences, perplex their minds, and discourage their inclinations to virtue and piety; persecutors are foxes, (Luke, 13. 32.) false prophets are foxes, Ezek. 13. 4. Those that sow the tares of heresy or schism, and, like Diotrephes, trouble the peace of the church, and obstruct the progress of the gospel, they are the *foxes*, the *little foxes*, which must not be knocked on the head, (*Christ came not to destroy men's lives*,) but taken, that they may be tamed, or else restrained from doing mischief.

3. The believing profession which the church makes of her relation to Christ, and the satisfaction she takes in her interest in him, and communion with him, v. 16. He had called her to *rise*, and *come away* with him, to let him see her face, and hear her voice; now this is her answer to that call, in which, though at present in the dark, and at a distance, (1.) She comforts herself with the thoughts of the mutual interest and relation that were between her and her beloved; *My beloved to me*, and *I to him*, so the original reads it very emphatically; the conciseness of the language speaks the largeness of her affection; "What he is to me, and I to him, may better be conceived than expressed." Note, 1. It is the unspeakable privilege of all true believers, that Christ is their's; *My beloved is mine*; this denotes not only propriety, ("I have a title to him,") but possession and tenure, "I receive from his fulness;" believers are partakers of Christ, they have not only an interest in him, but the enjoyment of him, are taken not only into covenant, but into communion, with him. All the benefits of his glorious undertaking, as Mediator, are made over to them. He is *that* to them, which the world neither is, nor can be, all that which they need and desire, and which will make a complete happiness for them. All he is, is their's, and all he has, all he has done, and all he is doing; all he has promised in the gospel, all he has prepared in heaven, all is your's. 2. It is the undoubted character of all true believers, that they are Christ's, and then, and then only, he is their's: they have given their own selves to him, (2 Cor. 8. 5.) they receive his doctrine and obey his law, they bear his image, and espouse his interest; they belong to Christ. If we be his, his wholly, his only, his for ever, we may take the comfort of his being our's. (2.) She comforts herself with the thoughts of the communications of his grace to his people; *He feeds among the lilies*. When she wants the tokens of his favour to her in particular, she rejoices in the assurance of his presence with all believers in general, who are as lilies in his eye; he *feeds* among them, he takes as much pleasure in them, and their assemblies, as a man does in his table or in his garden, for he *walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks*, he delights to converse with them, and to do them good.

4. The church's hope and expectation of Christ's coming, and her prayer grounded thereupon.

(1.) She doubts not but that the *day will break*, and the *shadows will flee away*. The gospel-day will dawn, and the shadows of the ceremonial law will flee away; this was the comfort of the Old-Testament church, that after the long night of that dark dispensation, the *day-spring from on high would at length visit them*, to *give light to them that sit in darkness*; when the sun rises, the shades of the night vanish, so do the shadows of the day when the substance comes. The day of comfort will come after a night of desertion. Or it may refer to the second coming of Christ, and the eternal happiness of the saints; the shadows of our present state will flee away, our darkness and doubts, our griefs and all our grievances, and a glorious day shall dawn, a morning when the *upright shall have dominion*, a day that shall have no night after it.

(2.) She begs the presence of her beloved, in the mean time, to support and comfort her; "Turn, my beloved, turn to me, come and visit me, come and relieve me, *be with me always to the end of the age*. In the day of my extremity, make haste to help me,

make no long tarrying. Come over even the mountains of division, interposing time and days, with some gracious anticipations of that light and love."

(3.) She begs that he would not only turn to her for the present, but hasten his coming to fetch her to himself; "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Though there be mountains in the way, thou canst, like a roe, or a young hart, step over them with ease, *Oh shew thyself to me, or take me up to thee*."

CHAP. III.

In this chapter, 1. The church gives an account of a sore trial wherewith she was exercised through the withdrawing of her beloved from her, the pains she was at before she recovered the comfortable sense of his favour again, and the resolution she took, when she did recover it, not to lose it again, as she had done through her own carelessness, v. 1. 5. 11. The daughters of Jerusalem admire the excellencies of the church, v. 6. 11. The church admires Jesus Christ under the person of Solomon, his bed, and the life-guards about it, (v. 7, 8.) his chariot, v. 9, 10. She calls upon the daughters of Zion, who were admiring her, to admire him rather, especially as he appeared on his coronation day, and the day of his nuptials, v. 11.

1. **BY** night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. 2. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. 3. The watchmen that go about the city found me: *to whom I said*, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? 4. *It was* but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. 5. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

God was not wont to say to the seed of Jacob, *Seek ye me, in vain*; and yet here we have the spouse for a great while seeking her beloved in vain, but finding him at last, to her unspeakable satisfaction. It was hard to the Old-Testament church to find Christ in the ceremonial law, and the types and figures which then were of good things to come; long was the consolation of Israel looked for before it came; the watchman of that church gave little assistance to those who inquired after him; but at length Simeon had him in his arms, *whom his soul loved*. It is applicable to the case of particular believers, who often walk in darkness a great while, but *at even time it shall be light*, and they that seek Christ to the end shall find him at length. Observe,

1. How the spouse sought him in vain upon her bed, (v. 1.) when she was up and looking about her, grace in act and exercise, though her beloved was withdrawn, yet she could not see him at a distance, (ch. 2. 8.) but now it was otherwise. She still continued her affection to him, still it was *he whom her soul loved*, that bond of the covenant still continued firm; "Though he slay me, I will trust in him; though he leave me, I will love him. When I have him not in my arms, I have him in my heart." But she wanted the communion she used to have with him; as David, when he *thirsted for God, for the living God*. She sought him, but, (1.) it was *by night on her bed*, it was late and lazy seeking. Her understanding was clouded, it was by night, in the dark; her affections were chilled, it was on her bed half asleep. The wise virgins slumbered in the absence of the Bridegroom. It was a dark time with the believer; she saw not her signs, and yet she sought them. They whose souls love Jesus Christ will continue to seek him, even in silence and solitude: their *reins* instruct them to do so, even *in the night season*. (2.) She failed in her endeavour. Sometimes he is *found of them that seek him not*, (Isa. 65. 1.) but here he is not found of one that sought him; either for the punish-

ment of her corruptions, her slothfulness and security, (we miss of comfort, because we do not seek it aright,) or for the exercise of graces, her faith and patience, to try whether she will continue seeking; the woman of Canaan sought Christ, and found him not at first, that she might find him, at length, so much the more to her honour and comfort.

2. How she sought him in vain abroad, v. 2. She had made trial of secret worship, and had gone through the duties of the closet, had remembered him on her bed, and meditated on him in the *night-watches*, (Ps. 63. 6.) but she did not meet with comfort; *My sore ran in the night*, and then *I remembered God, and was troubled*; (Ps. 77. 2, 3.) and yet she is not driven off by the disappointment from the use of further means; she resolves, "*I will rise now*, I will not lie here if I cannot find my Beloved here, nor be content if he be withdrawn. *I will rise now* without delay, and seek him immediately, lest he withdraw further from me." Those that would seek Christ so as to find him, must lose no time. *I will rise* out of a warm bed, and go out, in a cold dark night, in quest of my Beloved. Those that seek Christ must not startle at difficulties. *I will rise, and go about the city*, the holy city, in the streets, and the broad-ways; for she knew he was not to be found in any blind by-ways; we must seek in the city, in Jerusalem, which was a type of the gospel-church. The likeliest place to find Christ is in the temple, (Luke, 2. 46.) in the streets of the gospel-church, in holy ordinances, where the children of Zion pass and repass at all hours. She had a good purpose, when she said, *I will arise now*, but the good performance was all in all; she arose, and sought him. Those that are in pursuit of Christ, the knowledge of him, and communion with him, must turn every stone, seek every where; and yet *she found him not*; she was still unsatisfied, uneasy, as Job, when he looked on all sides, but could not perceive any tokens of the divine favour, (Job, 24. 8, 9.) and the Psalmist often, when he complained that God hid his face from him, Ps. 88. 14. We may be in the way of our duty, and yet may miss of comfort, for *the wind bloweth where it listeth*. How heavy is the accent on this repeated complaint, *I sought him, but I found him not!* Like that of Mary Magdalen, *They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him*, John, 20. 13.

3. How she inquired of the watchmen concerning him, v. 3. In the night the watchmen *go about the city*, for the preservation of its peace and safety, to guide and assist the honest and quiet, as well as to be a check upon those that are disorderly; these met her in her walks, and she asked them if they could give her any tidings of her Beloved. In the streets and broad ways of Jerusalem, she might meet with enough to divert her from her pursuit, and to entertain her, though she could not meet her Beloved; but she regards none in comparison with him. Gracious souls press through crowds of other delights and contentments, in pursuit of Christ, whom they prefer before their chief joy. Mary Magdalen sees angels in the sepulchre, but that will not do, unless she see Jesus. *Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?* Note, We must evidence the sincerity of our love to Christ by our solicitous inquiries after him. *The children of the bride-chamber will mourn, when the bridegroom is taken away*, (Matth. 9. 15.) especially for the sin which provoked him to withdraw; and if we do so, we shall be in care to recover the sense of his favour, and diligent and constant in the use of proper means; in order thereunto, we must search the scriptures, be much in prayer, keep close to ordinances, and all with this upon our heart, *Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?* Those only who have seen Christ themselves are likely to direct others to a sight of him. When the Greeks came to worship at the feast, they applied themselves to Philip, with such an address as this of the spouse to the watchmen, *Sir, we would see Jesus*, John, 12. 21.

4. How she found him at last, v. 4. She *passed from* the watchmen as soon as she perceived they could give her no tidings of her Beloved; she would not stay with them, because he was not among them, but went on seeking; for (as Ainsworth observes) the society neither of brethren, nor of the church, nor of ministers, can comfort the afflicted conscience, unless Christ himself be apprehended by faith. But soon after she parted from the watchmen she found him whom she sought, and then called him, *him whom*

my soul loveth, with as much delight as before with desire. Note, Those that continue seeking Christ shall find him at last, and when perhaps they are almost ready to despair of finding him. See Ps. 42. 7, 8.—77. 9, 10. Isa. 54. 7, 8. Disappointments must not drive us away from gracious pursuits; hold out, faith and patience, *the vision is for an appointed time*, and though the watchman can give us no account of it, *at the end it shall itself speak, and not lie*; and the comfort that comes in after long waiting, in the use of means, will be so much the sweeter at last.

5. How close she kept to him, when she had found him; she is, now, as much in fear of losing him, as, before, she was in care to find him; *I held him*, held him fast, as the women, when they met with Christ after his resurrection, *held him by the feet, and worshipped him*, Matth. 28. 9. "*I would not let him go*. Not only, I would never do any thing to provoke him to depart, but I would by faith and prayer prevail with him to stay, and by the exercise of grace preserve inward peace." Those that know how hard comfort is come by, and how dear it is bought, will be afraid of forfeiting it, and playing it away, and will think nothing too much to do to keep it safe. *Non minor est virtus quam querere parta tueri*—As much is implied in securing our acquisitions as in making them. They that have laid hold on wisdom must retain her, Prov. 3. 18. Those that hold Christ fast, in the arms of faith and love, shall *not let him go*, he will abide with them.

6. How desirous she was to make others acquainted with him; "*I brought him to my mother's house*, that all my relations, all who are dear to me, might have the benefit of communion with him." When Zaccheus found Christ, or rather was found of him, *salvation came to his house*, Luke, 19. 9. Wherever we find Christ, we must take him home with us to our houses, especially to our hearts. The church is our mother, and we should be concerned for her interests, that she may have Christ present with her, and be earnest in prayer for his presence with his people and ministers always. They that enjoy the tokens of Christ's favour to their own souls, should desire that the church, and all religious assemblies in their public capacity, might likewise enjoy the tokens of his favour.

7. What care she was in that no disturbance might be given him; (v. 5.) she repeats the charge she had before given (ch. 2. 7.) to the *daughters of Jerusalem*, not to *stir up, or awake, her Love*. When she *had brought him into her mother's house*, among her sisters, she gives them a strict charge to keep all quiet, and in good order, to be very observant of him, careful to please him, and afraid of offending him. The charge given to the church in the wilderness concerning the angel of the covenant, who was among them, explains this; (Exod. 23. 21.) *Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not*. See that none of you stir out of your places, lest you disturb him, but with *quietness work, and mind your own business*; make no noise, let all *clamour and bitterness be put far from you*, for that *grieves the Holy Spirit of God*, Eph. 4. 30, 31. Some make this to be Christ's charge to the *daughters of Jerusalem*, not to disturb or disquiet his church, nor trouble the minds of the disciples; for Christ is very tender of the peace of his church, and all the members of it, even the little ones; and those that trouble them *shall bear their judgment*, Gal. 5. 10.

6. Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

These are the words of the *daughters of Jerusalem*, to whom the charge was given, v. 5. They had looked shily upon the bride, because she was black; (ch. 1. 6.) but now they admire her, and speak of her with great respect; *Who is this?* How beautiful she looks! Who would have expected such a comely and magnificent person to *come out of the wilderness*? As when Christ rode in triumph into Jerusalem, they said, *Who is this?* And of the accession of strangers to the church, she herself says, with wonder, (Isa. 49. 21.) *Who has begotten me these?*

1. This is applicable to the Jewish church, when, after forty years' wandering in the wilderness, they came out of it, to take a glorious possession of the land of promise; and this may very well

be illustrated by what Balaam said of them at that time, when they ascended *out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke*, and he stood admiring them, *From the top of the rocks I see him. How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!* Numb. 23. 9.—24. 5.

2. It is applicable to any public deliverance of the church of God, as particularly out of Babylon, the Old-Testament and the New-Testament Babylon; then the church is *like pillars of smoke*, ascending upward in devout affections, the incense of praise, from which, as from Noah's sacrifice, God *smells a sweet savour*; then she is amiable in the eyes of her friends, and her enemies too cannot but have a veneration for her, and *worship at her feet, knowing that God has loved her*, Rev. 3. 9. Sometimes the fear of the Jews was upon their neighbours, when they saw that God was with them of a truth, Esth. 3. 17.

3. It is applicable to the recovery of a gracious soul out of a state of desertion and despondency. (1.) She ascends *out of the wilderness*, the dry and barren land, where there is *no way*, where there is *no water*, where travellers are still in want, and ever at a loss; here a poor soul may long be left to wander, but shall come up, at last, under the conduct of the Comforter. (2.) She comes up *like pillars of smoke*, like a cloud of incense ascending from the altar, or the smoke of the burnt-offerings. This intimates a fire of pious and devout affections in the soul, whence this smoke arises, and the mounting of the soul heaven-ward in this smoke, (as Judges, 13. 20.) the heart lifted up to God in the heavens, *as the sparks fly upward*. Christ's return to the soul gives life to its devotion, and its communion with God is most reviving, when it ascends *out of a wilderness*. (3.) She is *perfumed with myrrh and frankincense*; she is replenished with the graces of God's Spirit, which are as sweet spices, or as the holy incense, which, being now kindled by his gracious returns, sends forth a very fragrant smell; her devotions be now peculiarly lively, she is not only acceptable to God, but amiable in the eyes of others also, who are ready to cry out with admiration, *Who is this?* What a monument of mercy is this! The graces and comforts with which she is *perfumed*, are called the *powers of the merchant*, for they are far-fetched, and dear-bought, by our Lord Jesus, that blessed Merchant, who took a long voyage, and was at vast expence, no less than that of his own blood, to purchase them for us. They are not the products of our own soil, nor the growth of our own country; no, they are imported from the heavenly Canaan, the better country.

7. Behold his bed, which is Solomon's three-score valiant men *are* about it, of the valiant of Israel. 8. They all hold swords, *being* expert in war: every man *hath* his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night. 9. King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. 10. He made the pillars thereof *of* silver, the bottom thereof *of* gold, the covering of it *of* purple; the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem. 11. Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.

The daughters of Jerusalem stood admiring the spouse, and commending her, but she overlooks their praises, is not puffed up with them, but transfers all the glory to Christ, and directs them to look off her to him, recommends him to their esteem, and sets herself to applaud him. Here he is three times called *Solomon*, and we have that name but three times besides in all this song, ch. 1. 5.—8. 11, 12. It is Christ that is here meant, who is greater than Solomon, and of whom Solomon was an illustrious type for his wisdom and wealth, and especially his building of the temple.

Three things she admires him for;

1. The safety of his bed; (v. 7.) *Behold his bed*, even *Solomon's*,

very rich and fine; for such *the curtains of Solomon* were. *His bed*, which is *above Solomon's*, so some read it. Christ's bed, though he had *not where to lay his head*, is better than Solomon's best bed; the church is his bed, for he has said of it, *This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell*. The hearts of believers are his bed, for he lies all night between their breasts, Eph. 3. 17. Heaven is his bed, the rest into which he entered, when he had done his work. Or, it may be meant of the sweet repose and satisfaction which gracious souls enjoy in communion with him; it is called *his bed*, because, though we are admitted to it, and therefore it is called *our bed*, (ch. 1. 16.) yet it is his peace that is our rest, John, 14. 27. *I will give you rest*, Matth. 11. 28. It is *Solomon's bed*, whose name signifies *peace*, because in his days Judah and Israel *dwelt safely under their vines and fig-trees*.

That which she admires his bed for, is, the guard that surrounded it; they that rest in Christ not only dwell at ease, (many do so who yet are in the greatest danger,) but they dwell in safety; their holy serenity is under the protection of a holy security; this bed had *threescore valiant men about it*, as yeomen of the guard, or the band of gentlemen-pensioners, they are of the *valiant of Israel*, and a great many bold and brave men David's reign had produced; the life guard-men are well-armed, *they all hold swords*, and know how to hold them, they are *expert in war*, well-skilled in all the arts of it; they are posted about the bed at a convenient distance; they are in a posture of defence, *every man with his sword upon his thigh*, and his hand upon his sword, ready to draw upon the first alarm, and this, *because of fear in the night*, because of the danger feared; for the lives of princes, even the wisest and best, as they are more precious, so they are more exposed, and require to be more guarded, than the lives of common persons. Or, *because of the fear of it*, and the apprehension which the spouse may have of danger, these guards are set for her satisfaction, that she may be *quiet from the fear of evil*, which believers themselves are subject to, especially *in the night*, when they are under a cloud as to their spiritual state, or in any outward trouble more than ordinary. Christ himself was under the special protection of his Father in his whole undertaking; *In the shadow of his hand has he hid me*; (Isa. 49. 2.) he had legions of angels at his command. The church is well-guarded, more are with her than are against her; lest any hurt this vineyard, God himself *keeps it night and day*; (Isa. 27. 2, 3.) particular believers, when they repose themselves in Christ, and with him, though it may be night-time with them, and they may have their *fears in the night*, are yet safe, as safe as Solomon himself in the midst of his guards; the angels have a charge concerning them, ministers are appointed *to watch for their souls*, and they ought to be *valiant men, expert in the spiritual warfare*, holding *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*, and having that girt upon their thigh, always ready to them for the silencing of the fears of God's people *in the night*. All the attributes of God are engaged for the safety of believers; they are kept as in a strong hold by his power, (1 Pet. 1. 5.) are safe in *his name*, (Prov. 18. 10.) his peace protects those in whom it rules, (Phil. 4. 7.) and the effect of righteousness in them is *quietness and assurance*, Isa. 32. 17. Our danger is from *the rulers of the darkness of this world*, but we are safe in the *armour of light*.

II. The splendour of his chariot, v. 9, 10. As Christ and believers rest in safety under a sufficient guard, so when they appear publicly, as kings in their coaches of state, they appear in great magnificence. This chariot was of Solomon's own contriving and making, the materials very rich, *silver, and gold, and cedar, and purple*: he made it for himself, and yet made it *for the daughters of Jerusalem*, to oblige them. Some by this *chariot*, or *coach*, or *chaise*, (the word is no where else used in scripture,) understand the human nature of Christ, in which the divine nature rode as in a chariot; it was a divine workmanship; *A body hast thou prepared me*; the structure was very fine, but that which was at the bottom of it, was *love*, pure love to the children of men. Others make it to represent the everlasting gospel, in which, as in an open chariot, Christ shews himself, and, as in a chariot of war, ride forth triumphantly, *conquering, and to conquer*. The pillars, the seven pillars, (Prov. 9. 1.) are of *silver*, for the words of the Lord

are as *silver tried*, (Ps. 12. 6.) nay, they are better *than thousands of gold and silver*; it is hung with *purple*, a princely colour, all the adornings of it are dyed in the precious blood of Christ, and that gives them this colour; but that which completes the glory of it, is *love*, it is *pared with love*, it is lined with *love*, not *love* of strangers, as Solomon's was in the days of his defection, but *love of the daughters of Jerusalem*, a *holy love*. Silver is better than cedar, gold than silver, but love is better than gold, better than all, and it is put last, for nothing can be better than that. The gospel is all *love*.

Mr. Durham applies it to the covenant of redemption, the way of our salvation, as it is contrived in the eternal counsel of God, and manifested to us in the scripture. This is that work of Christ himself, wherein the glory of his grace and love to sinners most eminently appears, and which makes him amiable and admirable in the eyes of believers; in this covenant, love is conveyed to them, and they are carried in it to the perfection of love, and, as it were, ride in triumph. It is admirably framed and contrived, both for the glory of Christ, and for the comfort of believers; it is *well-ordered in all things, and sure*; (2 Sam. 23. 5.) it has *pillars* that cannot be shaken: it is *made of the wood of Lebanon*, which can never rot; the basis of it is *gold*, the most lasting metal; the blood of the covenant, that rich *purple*, is the cover of this chariot, by which believers are sheltered from the wind and storms of divine wrath, and the troubles of this world; but the midst of it, and that which is all in all in it, is *love*, that *love of Christ which passes knowledge*, and the dimensions of which are immeasurable.

III. The lustre of his royal person, when he appears in his greatest pomp, v. 11. Here observe,

1. The call that is given to the *daughters of Zion*, to acquaint themselves with the glories of *king Solomon*; *Go forth, and behold him*. The multitude of the spectators adds to the beauty of a splendid cavalcade; Christ, in his gospel, manifests himself; let each of us add to the number of those that give honour to him, by giving themselves the satisfaction of looking upon him. Who should pay respects to Zion's King, but Zion's daughters? They have reason to rejoice greatly when he comes, Zech. 9. 9. (1.) *Behold him* then; look with pleasure upon Christ in his glory; look upon him with an eye of faith, with a fixed eye: here is a sight worth seeing; *behold*, and admire him, *behold*, and love him; look upon him, and know him again. (2.) *Go forth, and behold him*, go off from the world, as those that see no beauty and excellency in it, in comparison with what is to be seen in the Lord Jesus. Go out of yourselves, and let the sight of his transcendent beauty put you out of conceit with yourselves. *Go forth* to the place where he is to be seen, to the street through which he passes, as Zaccheus.

2. The direction that is given them to take special notice of that which they would not see every day, and that was, his *crown*, either the crown of gold adorned with jewels, which he wore on his coronation-day; (Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, though she did not procure that for him, yet, by her seasonable interposal, she helped to secure it to him when Adonijah was catching at it;) or the garland, or crown of flowers and green tied with ribands, which his mother made for him, to adorn the solemnity of his nuptials. Perhaps Solomon's coronation-day was his marriage-day, *the day of his espousals*, when the garland his mother crowned him with was added to the crown his people crowned him with. Applying this to Christ, it speaks, (1.) The many honours put upon him, and the power and dominion he is intrusted with; *Go forth, and see king Jesus, with the crown wherewith his Father crowned him*, when he declared him his *beloved Son*, in whom he was *well-pleased*; when he *set him as king upon his holy hill of Zion*; when he advanced him to his own right hand, and invested him with a sovereign authority, both *in heaven and in earth*, and *put all things under his feet*. (2.) The dishonour put upon him by his persecutors. Some apply it to the *crown of thorns*, with which his mother, the Jewish church, *crowned him* on the day of his death, which was *the day of his espousals* to his church, when he *loved it, and gave himself for it*; (Eph. 5. 25.) and it is observable, that when he was *brought forth wearing the crown of thorns, Pilate*

said, and said it to the daughters of Zion, *Behold the man*. (3.) It seems especially to mean the honour done him by his church, as his mother, and by all true believers, in whose hearts he is formed, and of whom he has said, *These are my mother, and sister, and brother*, Matth. 12. 50. They give him the glory of his undertaking; to him is *glory in the church*, Eph. 3. 21. When believers accept of him as their's, and join themselves to him in an everlasting covenant, [1.] It is his coronation-day in their souls; before conversion they were crowning themselves, but then they begin to crown Christ, and continue to do so from that day forward; they appoint him their Head, they bring *every thought into obedience* to him; they set up his throne in their hearts, and cast all their crowns at his feet. [2.] It is *the day of his espousals*, in which he betrothes them to him for ever in loving-kindness and in mercies, joins them to himself in faith and love, and gives himself to them in the promises and all he has, to be their's. *Thou shalt not be for another, so will I also be for thee*; (Hos. 3. 3.) and to him they are presented as *chaste virgins*. [3.] It is *the day of the gladness of his heart*; he is pleased with the honour that his people do him, pleased with the progress of his interest among them. Does Satan fall before them? *In that hour Jesus rejoices in spirit*, Luke, 10. 18, 21. There is joy in heaven over repenting sinners; the family is glad when the prodigal son returns. *Go forth, and behold Christ's grace towards sinners*, as his *crown*, his brightest glory.

CHAP. IV.

In this chapter, I. Jesus Christ, having espoused his church to himself, (ch. 3. 11.) highly commends her beauty in the several expressions of it, concluding her fair, all fair, (v. 1. .5.) and again, v. 7. II. He retires himself, and invites her with him, from the mountains of terror to those of delight, v. 6. 8. III. He professes his love to her, and his delight in her affection to him, v. 9. .14. IV. She ascribes all she had, that was valuable in her, to him, and depends upon the continued influence of his grace, to make her more and more acceptable to him, v. 15, 16.

1. **B**EHOLD, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead. 2. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. 3. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks. 4. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. 5. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. 6. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. 7. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.

Here is,

I. A large and particular account of the beauties of the church, and of gracious souls on whom the image of God is renewed, consisting in the beauty of holiness. In general, he that is a competent judge of beauty, whose judgment, we are sure, is according to truth, and what all must subscribe to, he has said, *Behold, thou art fair*. She had commended him, and called all about her to take notice of his glories; hereby she recommends herself to him, gains his favour, and, in return for her respects, he calls to all about him to take notice of her graces. Those that honour Christ, he will honour, 1 Sam. 2. 30. He does not flatter her, nor design hereby either to make her proud of herself, or to court her praises of him; but, 1. It is to encourage her under her present dejections; whatever others thought of her, she was amiable in

his eyes. 2. It is to teach her what to value herself upon, not any external advantages, (which would add nothing to her, and the want of which would deprive her of nothing that was really excellent,) but upon the comeliness of grace which he had put upon her. 3. It is to invite others to think well of her too, and to join themselves to her; Thou art my love, thou lovest me, and art loved of me, and therefore thou art fair; all the beauty of the saints is derived from him, and they shine by reflecting his light; it is the beauty of the Lord our God that is upon us, Ps. 90. 17. She was espoused to him, and that made her beautiful. *Uxor fulget radiis mariti—The spouse shines in her husband's rays.* It is repeated; Thou art fair, and again, Thou art fair; noting not only the certainty of it, but the pleasure he took in speaking of it.

As to the representation here made of the beauty of the church, the images are certainly very bright, the shades strong, and the comparisons bold; not proper indeed to represent any external beauty, for they were not designed to do so, but the beauty of holiness, the new man, the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible. Seven particulars are specified, a number of perfection, for the church is enriched with manifold graces by the seven spirits that are before the throne, Rev. 1. 4. 1 Cor. 1. 5, 7.

(1.) Her eyes; a good eye contributes much to a beauty; Thou hast doves' eyes, clear and chaste, and often cast up toward heaven. It is not the eagle's eye, that can face the sun, but the dove's eye, a humble, modest, mournful, eye, that is the praise of those whom Christ loves. Ministers are the church's eyes; (Isa. 52. 8.) Thy watchmen shall see eye to eye; they must be like doves' eyes; harmless and inoffensive, (Matth. 10. 16.) having their conversation in the world, in simplicity and godly sincerity. Wisdom and knowledge are the eyes of the new man; they must be clear, but not haughty, not exercised in things too high for us. When our aims and intentions are sincere and honest, then we have doves' eyes; when we look not unto idols, (Ezek. 18. 6.) but have our eyes ever toward the Lord, Ps. 25. 15. The doves' eyes are within the locks, which are as a shade upon them, so that, [1.] They cannot fully see; as long as we are here in this world, we know but in part; a hair hangs in our eyes, we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness; death will shortly cut those locks, and then we shall see all things clearly. [2.] They cannot be fully seen, but as the stars through the thin clouds. Some make it to intimate the bashfulness of her looks; she suffers not her eyes to wander, but limits them with her locks.

(2.) Her hair; it is compared to a flock of goats, which looked white, and were, on the top of the mountains, like a fine head of hair: and the sight was the more pleasant to the spectator, because the goats have not only gravity from their beards, but they are comely in going; (Prov. 30. 29.) but it was most pleasant of all to the owner, much of whose riches consisted in his flocks. Christ puts a value upon that in the church, and in believers, which others make no more account of than of their hair; he told his disciples that the very hairs of their head were all numbered, as carefully as men number their flocks, (Matth. 10. 30.) and that not a hair of their head should perish, Luke, 21. 18. Some by the hair here understand the outward conversation of a believer, which ought to be comely, and decent, and agreeable to the holiness of the heart. The apostle opposes good works, such as become the professors of godliness, to the plaiting of the hair, 1 Tim. 2. 9, 10. Mary Magdalen's hair was beautiful when she wiped the feet of Christ with it.

(3.) Her teeth, r. 2. Ministers are the church's teeth; like nurses, they chew the meat for the babes of Christ. The Chaldee paraphrase applies it to the priests and Levites, who fed upon the sacrifices as the representatives of the people. Faith, by which we feed upon Christ, meditation, by which we ruminate on the word, and chew the cud upon what we have heard, in order to the digesting of it, are the teeth of the new man. These are here compared to a flock of sheep; Christ called his disciples and ministers a little flock. It is the praise of teeth to be even, to be white, and kept clean, like sheep from the washing, and to be firm and well-fixed in the gums, and not like sheep that cast their young; for so the word signifies, which we translate barren. It is the

praise of ministers to be even in mutual love and concord, to be pure and clean from all moral pollutions, and to be fruitful, bringing forth souls to Christ, and nursing his lambs.

(4.) Her lips; these are compared to a thread of scarlet; (v. 3.) red lips are comely, and a sign of health, as the paleness of the lips is a sign of faintness and weakness; her lips were of the colour of scarlet, but thin lips, like a thread of scarlet; the next words explain it; Thy speech is comely, always with grace, good, and to the use of edifying, which adds much to the beauty of a Christian. When we praise God with our lips, and with the mouth make confession of him to salvation, then they are as a thread of scarlet. All our good works and good words must be washed in the blood of Christ, dyed like the scarlet thread, and then, and not till then, they are acceptable to God. The Chaldee applies it to the chief priest, and his prayers for Israel on the day of atonement.

(5.) Her temples, or cheeks, which are here compared to a piece of a pomegranate, fruits which, when cut in two, have red veins, or specks, in them, like a blush in the face. Humility and modesty, blushing to lift up our faces before God, blushing at the remembrance of sin, and in a sense of our unworthiness of the honour put upon us, will beautify us very much in the eyes of Christ. The blushes of Christ's bride are within her locks, which intimates (says Mr. Durham) that she blushes when no other sees, and for that which none sees but God and conscience; also that she seeks not to proclaim her humility, but modestly covers that too; yet the evidences of all these, in a tender walk, appear, and are, comely.

(6.) Her neck; this is here compared to the tower of David; (v. 4.) this is generally applied to the grace of faith, by which we are united to Christ, as the body is united to the head by the neck; this is like the tower of David, furnishing us with weapons of war, especially bucklers and shields, as the soldiers were supplied with them out of that tower; for faith is our shield, (Eph. 6. 16.) they that have it never want a buckler, for God will compass them with his favour as with a shield. When this neck is like a tower, straight, and stately, and strong, a Christian goes on in his way, and works with courage and magnanimity, and does not hang a drooping head, as he does when faith fails. Some make the shields of the mighty men, that are here said to hang up in the tower of David, to be the monuments of the valour of David's worthies; their shields were preserved, to keep in remembrance them and their heroic acts, intimating, that it is a great encouragement to the saints to hold up their heads, to see what great things the saints in all ages have accomplished and won by faith. In Heb. 11. we have the shields of the mighty men hung up, the exploits of believers, and the trophies of their victories.

(7.) Her breasts; these are like two young roes that are twins, v. 5. The church's breasts are both for ornament, (Ezek. 16. 7.) and for use, they are the breasts of her consolation, (Isa. 66. 11.) as she is said to suck the breasts of kings, Isa. 60. 16. Some apply these to the two Testaments; others to the two sacraments, the seals of the covenant of grace; others to the ministers, who are to be spiritual nurses to the children of God, and to give out to them the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby; and, in order to that, are themselves to feed among the lilies where Christ feeds, (ch. 2. 16.) that they may be to the babes of the church as full breasts. Or, the breasts of a believer are his love to Christ, which he is pleased with, as a tender husband is with the affections of his wife, who is therefore said to be to him as the loving hind, and the pleasant roe, because her breasts satisfy him at all times, Prov. 5. 19. This includes also his edifying others, and communicating grace to them, which adds much to a Christian's beauty.

II. The Bridegroom's resolution hereupon to retire to the mountain of myrrh, (v. 6.) and there to make his residence. This mountain of myrrh is supposed to signify the mount Moriah, on which the temple was built, where incense was daily burnt to the honour of God; Christ was so pleased with the beauty of his church, that he chose this to be his rest for ever, here he will dwell till the day break and the shadows flee away. Christ's parting promise to his disciples, as the representatives of the church, answers to this; Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of

the world. Where the ordinances of God are duly administered, there Christ will be, and there we must meet him at the door of the tabernacle of the meeting. Some make these to be the words of the spouse, either modestly ashamed of the praises given her, and willing to get out of the hearing of them, or desirous to be constant to the holy hill, not doubting but there to find suitable and sufficient succour and relief in all her straits, and there to cast anchor, and wish for the day which, at the time appointed, would *break, and the shadows flee away.* The holy hill (as some observe) is here called both a *mountain of myrrh*, which is bitter, and a *hill of frankincense*, which is sweet, for there we have occasion both to mourn and rejoice; repentance is a bitter sweet, but in heaven it will be all frankincense, and no myrrh. Prayer is compared to incense, and Christ will meet his praying people, and will bless them.

III. His repeated commendation of the beauty of his spouse; (v. 7.) *Thou art all fair, my love.* He had said, (v. 1.) *Thou art fair*; but here he goes further, and, in review of the particulars, as of those of the creation, he pronounces *all very good*: "*Thou art all fair, my love*, thou art all over beautiful, and there is nothing amiss in thee, and thou hast all beauties in thee; thou art sanctified wholly in every part, *all things are become new*, (2 Cor. 5. 17.) there is not only a new face and a new name, but a new man, a new nature; *there is no spot in thee*, as far as thou art renewed." The spiritual sacrifices must be without blemish; *there is no spot* but such as is often the spot of God's children, none of the leopard's spots. The church, when Christ shall present it to himself a glorious church will be altogether *without spot or wrinkle*, Eph. 5. 27.

8. Come with me from Lebanon, *my spouse*, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. 9. Thou hast ravished my heart, *my sister, my spouse*; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. 10. How fair is thy love, *my sister, my spouse*! How much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! 11. Thy lips, O *my spouse*, drop as the honey-comb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. 12. A garden inclosed is my sister, *my spouse*; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. 13. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits, camphire, with spikenard. 14. Spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.

These are still the words of Christ to his church, expressing his great esteem of her and affection to her, the opinion he had of her beauty and excellency, the desire he had of, and the delight he had in, her converse and society. And so ought men to love their wives as Christ loves the church, and takes pleasure in it as if it were spotless and had no fault, when yet it is compassed with infirmity.

Now, observe here,

I. The endearing names and titles by which he calls her, to express his love to her, to assure her of it, and to engage and excite her love to him. Twice here he calls her *My spouse*, (v. 8, 11.) and three times *My sister, my spouse*, v. 9, 10, 12. Mention was made (ch. 3. 11.) of the day of his espousals, and, after that, she is called his spouse, not before. Note, There is a marriage-covenant between Christ and his church, between Christ and every true believer. Christ calls his church his *spouse*, and his

calling her so makes her so. "I have betrothed thee unto me for ever; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." He is not ashamed to own the relation, but, as becomes a kind and tender husband, he speaks affectionately to her, and calls her his *spouse*, which cannot but strongly engage her to be faithful to him. Nay, because no one relation among men is sufficient to set forth Christ's love to his church, and, to shew that all this must be understood spiritually, he owns her in two relations, which, among men, are incompatible, *My sister, my spouse*. Abraham's saying of Sarah, *She is my sister*, was interpreted as a denying of her to be his wife; but Christ's church is to him both a *sister* and a *spouse*, as Matth. 12. 50. a *sister and mother*. His calling her *sister*, is grounded upon his taking our nature upon him in his incarnation, and his making us partakers of his nature in our sanctification. He clothed himself with a *body*, (Heb. 2. 14.) and he clothes believers with his *Spirit*, (1 Cor. 6. 17.) and so they become his *sisters*. They are children of God his Father, (2 Cor. 6. 18.) and so they become his *sisters*; he that sanctifies, and they that are sanctified, are all of one, (Heb. 2. 11.) and he owns them, and loves them, as his *sisters*.

II. The gracious call he gives her to come along with him as a faithful bride, that must forget her own people and her father's house, and leave all to cleave to him. *Ubi tu Caius, ibi ego Caia*—Where thou Caius art, I Caia will be. *Come with me from Lebanon*, v. 8.

It is, 1. A precept; so we take it, like that, (ch. 2. 10, 13.) *Rise up, and come away.* All that are by faith come to Christ, must come with Christ, in holy obedience to him, and compliance with him. Being joined to him, we must walk with him. This is his command to us daily, "*Come with me, my spouse*; come with me to God as a Father, come with me onward, heavenward, come forward with me, come up with me; *come with me from Lebanon, from the top of Amana, from the lions' dens.*" These mountains are to be considered, (1.) As seemingly delightful places; Lebanon is called *that goodly mountain*, Dent. 3. 25. We read of the *glory of Lebanon*, (Isa. 35. 2.) and its goodly smell, Hos. 14. 6. We read of the pleasant dew of *Hermon*, (Ps. 133. 3.) and the *joy of Hermon*; (Ps. 89. 12.) and we may suppose the other mountains here mentioned to be pleasant ones; and so this is Christ's call to his spouse to come off from the world, all its products, all its pleasures, to sit loose to all the delights of sense; all those must do so that would come with Christ; they must take their affections off from all present things; yea, though they be placed at the upper end of the world, on the top of Amana, and the top of Shenir, though they enjoy the highest satisfactions the creature can propose to give, yet they must *come away* from them all, and live above the tops of the highest hills on earth, that they may have *their conversation in heaven*. *Come from those mountains, to go along with Christ to the holy mountain, the mountain of myrrh*, v. 6. Even while we have our residence on these mountains, yet we must look from them, look above them. Shall we lift up our eyes to the hills? No; *our help comes from the Lord*, Ps. 121. 1, 2. We must look beyond them, to the things that are not seen, (as these high hills are,) that are eternal. *From the tops of Shenir and Hermon*, which were on the other side Jordan, as from Pisgah, they could see the land of Canaan; from this world we must look forward to the better country. (2.) They are to be considered as really dangerous; these hills indeed are pleasant enough, but there are in them *lions' dens*; they are *mountains of the leopards*, mountains of prey, though they seem *glorious and excellent*, Ps. 76. 4. Satan, that *roaring lion*, is the prince of this world, in the things of it he lies in wait to devour; on the tops of these mountains there are many dangerous temptations to those who take up their residence in them; and therefore *come with me from them*; let us not set our hearts upon the things of this world, and then they can do us no hurt. *Come with me from the temples of idolaters, and the societies of wicked people*; so some understand it; *Come out from among them, and be ye separate. Come from under the dominion of your own lusts*, which are as *lions and leopards*, fierce upon us, and making us fierce.

2. It may be taken as a promise; Thou shalt *come with me*

from Lebanon, from the lions' dens; that is, (1.) "Many shall be brought home to me, as living members of the church, from every point, from Lebanon in the north, Amara in the west, Hermon in the east, Shenir in the south, from all parts, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Matth. 8. 11. See Isa. 49. 11, 12. Some from the tops of these mountains, some of the great men of this world, shall give themselves to Christ. (2.) The church shall be delivered from her persecutors, in due time: though now she dwells among lions, (Ps. 57. 4.) Christ will take her with himself from among their dens.

III. The great delight Christ takes in his church, and in all believers. He delights in them,

1. As in an agreeable bride, adorned for her husband, (Rev. 21. 2.) who greatly desires her beauty, Ps. 45. 11. No expressions of love can be more passionate than these here, in which Christ manifests his affection to his church; and yet that great proof of his love, his dying for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, goes far beyond them all. A spouse, so dearly bought and paid for, could not but be dearly loved; such a price being given for her, a high value must needs be put upon her accordingly; and both together may well set us a wondering at the height and depth, and length and breadth, of the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that love in which he gave himself for us, and gives himself to us. Observe,

(1.) How he is affected towards his spouse; *Thou hast ravished my heart*; the word is used only here, *Thou hast hearted me*, or, *Thou hast unhearted me*. New words are coined to express the inexpressibleness of Christ's surprising love to his church; and the strength of that love is set forth by that which is a weakness in men, who are so much in love with one object, as to be heartless to every thing else. This may refer to that love which Christ had to the chosen remnant, before the worlds were, when his delights were with the sons of men, (Prov. 8. 31.) that first love, which brought him from heaven to earth, to seek and save them at such vast expence, yet including the complacency he takes in them when he brought them to himself. Note, Christ's heart is upon his church; so it has appeared all along; his treasure is in it, it is his peculiar treasure, (Exod. 19. 5.) and therefore there his heart is also. "Never was love like unto the love of Christ, which made him even mindless of himself, when he emptied himself of his glory, and despised all shame and pain, for our sakes. The wound of love towards us, which he had from eternity in himself, made him neglect all the wounds and reproaches of the cross;" so Bishop Reynolds here. Thus let us love him.

(2.) What it is that thus affects him with delight.

[1.] The regard she has to him; *Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes*, those dove's eyes, clear and chaste, (which were commended, v. 1.) with one glance of those eyes. Christ is wonderfully pleased with those that look unto him as their Saviour, and through the eye of faith dart their affections to him above any rival whatsoever, and whose eyes are ever towards him; he is soon aware of the first look of a soul towards him, and meets it with his favours.

[2.] The ornaments she has from him, that is, the obedience she yields to him, for that is the chain of her neck, the graces that enrich her soul, which are connected as links in a chain; the exercise of these graces in a conversation which adorns both herself and the doctrine of Jesus Christ, which she professes to believe, as a gold chain is an ornament to persons of quality, and an entire submission to the commanding power of his law, and the constraining power of his love; having shaken off the bands of our neck, by which we were tied to this world, (Isa. 52. 2.) and the yoke of our transgressions, we are bound with the cords of love, as chains of gold, to Jesus Christ, and our necks are brought under his sweet and easy yoke, to draw in it; this recommends us to Jesus Christ, for this is that true wisdom which, in his account, is an ornament of grace unto the head, and chains about the neck, Prov. 1. 9.

[3.] The affection she has for him; *How fair is thy love!* how beautiful is it! Not only thy love itself, but all the fruits and products of it, its working in the heart, its works in the life. How

well does it become a believer thus to love Christ, and what a pleasure does Christ take in it! Nothing recommends us to Christ so as this does. *How much better is thy love than wine!* Than all the wine that was poured out to the Lord in the drink-offerings; hence the fruit of the vine is said to cheer God and man, Judges, 9. 13. She had said of Christ's love, *It is better than wine*; (ch. 1. 2.) and now Christ says so of her's; there is nothing lost by praising Christ, nor will he be behindhand with his friends in kindness.

[4.] The ointments, the odours, wherewith she is perfumed, the gifts and graces of the Spirit, her good works, which are an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God, Phil. 4. 18. The smell of thine ointment is better than all spices, such as the queen of Sheba presented to Solomon, camel-loads of them, (1 Kings, 10. 2.) or, rather, than all the spices that were used in compounding the holy incense which was burned daily on the golden altar; love and obedience to God are more pleasing to Christ than sacrifice or incense. The smell of her garments too, the visible professions she makes of religion, and relation to Christ, before men, and wherein she appears to the world, this is very grateful to Christ, as the smell of Lebanon. Christ having put upon his spouse the white raiment of his own righteousness, (Rev. 3. 18.) and the righteousness of saints, (Rev. 19. 8.) and this perfumed with holy joy and comfort, he is well-pleased with it.

[5.] Her words, both in her devotions to God, and her discourses with men; (v. 11.) *Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb*, drop that which is very sweet, and drop it freely and plentifully. If what God speaks to us be sweeter to us than the honey and the honeycomb, (Ps. 19. 10.) what we say to him in prayer and praise shall also be pleasing to him; *Sweet is thy voice*. And if, out of a good treasure in the heart, we bring forth good things, if our speech be always with grace, if our lips use knowledge aright, if they disperse knowledge, they then, in Christ's account, even drop the honeycomb, out-drop it. Honey and milk (the two staple commodities of Canaan) are under thy tongue; that is, in thy heart; not only reserved there for thy own use as a sweet morsel for thyself, but ready there for the use of others. In the word of God there is sweet and wholesome nourishment, milk for babes, honey for those that are grown up, Christ is well-pleased with those that are full of his word.

2. As in a pleasant garden. And well may a very great delight be compared to the delight taken in a garden, when the happiness of Adam in innocency was represented by the putting of him in a garden, a garden of pleasure. This comparison is pursued, v. 12. 14. The church is fitly compared to a garden, to a garden which, as usual, had a fountain in it; where Solomon made him gardens and orchards, he made him pools of water, (Ecc. 2. 5, 6.) not only for curiosity and diversion, in water-works, but for use, to water the gardens; Eden was well-watered, Gen. 2. 10.—13. 10. Observe,

(1.) The peculiarity of this garden; it is a garden enclosed, a paradise separated from the common earth; it is appropriated to God, he has set it apart for himself. Israel is God's portion, the lot of his inheritance. It is inclosed for secrecy; the saints are God's hidden ones, therefore the world knows them not; Christ walks in his garden unseen. It is inclosed for safety; a hedge of protection is made about it, which all the powers of darkness cannot either find or make a gap in. God's vineyard is fenced; (Isa. 5. 2.) there is a wall about it, a wall of fire. It has a spring in it, and a fountain, but it is a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed, which sends its streams abroad, (Prov. 5. 16.) but it is itself carefully locked up, that it may not by any injurious hand be muddled or polluted. The souls of believers are as gardens inclosed; grace in them is as a spring shut up there in the hidden man of the heart, where the water that Christ gives is a well of living water, John, 4. 14.—7. 38. The Old-Testament church was a garden inclosed by the partition wall of the ceremonial law; the Bible was then a spring shut up and a fountain sealed, it was confined to one nation; but now the wall of separation is removed, the gospel preached to every nation, and in Jesus Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew.

(2.) The products of this garden; it is as the garden of Eden, where the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food, Gen. 2.9. Thy plants, or plantations, are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, v. 13. It is not like the vineyard of the man void of understanding, that was all grown over with thorns and nettles; but here are fruits, pleasant fruits, all trees of frankincense, and all the chief spices, v. 14. Here is great plenty of fruits, and great variety, nothing wanting which might either beautify, or enrich, this garden, might make it either delightful or serviceable to its great Lord; every thing here is the best of the kind; their chief spices were much more valuable, because much more durable, than the choicest of our flowers. Solomon was a great master in botany as well as other parts of natural philosophy; he treated largely of trees, (1 Kings, 4. 33.) and perhaps had reference to some specific qualities of the fruits here specified, which made them very fit for the purpose for which he alludes to them; but we must be content to observe, in general, that saints in the church, and graces in the saints, are very fitly compared to these fruits and spices; for, [1.] They are planted, and do not grow of themselves; the trees of righteousness are the planting of the Lord, (Isa. 61. 3.) grace springs from an incorruptible seed. [2.] They are precious and of high value; hence we read of the precious sons of Zion and their precious faith, they are plants of renown. [3.] They are pleasant, and of a sweet savour to God and man, and, as strong aromatics, diffuse their fragrant. [4.] They are profitable and of great use; saints are the blessings of this earth, and their graces are their riches with which they trade as the merchants of the east with their spices. [5.] They are permanent, and will be preserved to good purpose, when flowers are withered and good for nothing. Grace, reduced into glory, will last for ever.

15. A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. 16. Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

These seem to be the words of the spouse, the church, in answer to the commendations which Christ, the Bridegroom, had given of her as a pleasant fruitful garden. Is she a garden?

1. She owns her dependence upon Christ himself to make this garden fruitful; to him she has an eye, (v. 15.) as the Fountain of gardens, not only the Founder of them, by whom they are planted, and to whom they owe their being, but the Fountain of them, by whom they are watered, and to whom they owe their continuance and well-being, and without whose constant supplies they would soon become like the dry and barren wilderness; to him she gives all the glory of her fruitfulness, as being nothing without him: O Fountain of gardens, Fountain of all good, of all grace, do not thou fail me. Does a believer say to the church, All my springs are in thee, in thee, O Zion? (Ps. 87. 7.) The church transmits the praise to Christ, and says to him, All my springs are in thee; thou art the Well of living waters, (Jer. 2. 13.) out of which flow the streams from Lebanon, the river Jordan, which had its rise at the foot of mount Lebanon, and the waters of the sanctuary, which issued out from under the threshold of the house, Ezek. 47. 1. They that are gardens to Christ, must acknowledge him a Fountain to them, from whose fulness they receive, and to whom it is owing that their souls are as a watered garden, Jer. 31. 12. The city of God on earth is made glad with the river that flows from this Fountain, (Ps. 46. 4.) and the new Jerusalem has its pure river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, Rev. 22. 1.

2. She implores the influences of the blessed Spirit to make this garden fragrant; (v. 16.) Awake, O north-wind, and come, thou south. This is a prayer, (1.) For the church in general, that there may be a plentiful effusion of the Spirit upon it, in order to its flourishing estate. Ministers' gifts are the spices; when the Spirit is poured out, these flow forth, and then the wilderness becomes a

fruitful field, Isa. 32. 15. This prayer was answered in the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, (Acts, 2. 1.) ushered in by a mighty wind; then the apostles, who were bound up before, flowed forth, and were a sweet savour to God, 2 Cor. 2. 15. (2.) For particular believers. Note, [1.] Sanctified souls are as gardens, gardens of the Lord, inclosed for him. [2.] Graces in the soul are as spices in these gardens, that in them which is valuable and useful. [3.] It is very desirable that the spices of grace should flow forth both in pious and devout affections, and in holy, gracious actions, that with them we may honour God, adorn our profession, and do that which will be grateful to good men. [4.] The blessed Spirit, in his operations upon the soul, is as the north and the south wind, which blows where it listeth, and from several points, John, 3. 8. There is the north-wind of convictions, and the south-wind of comforts; but all, like the wind, brought out of God's treasures, and fulfilling his word. [5.] The flowing forth of the spices of grace depends upon the gales of the Spirit; he stirs up good affections, and works in us both to will and to do that which is good; it is he that makes manifest the savour of his knowledge by us. [6.] We ought therefore to wait upon the Spirit of grace for his quickening influences, to pray for them, and to lay our souls under them. God has promised to give us his Spirit, but he will for this be inquired of.

3. She invites Christ to the best entertainment the garden affords; Let my beloved then come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits; let him have the honour of all the products of the garden, it is fit he should, and let me have the comfort of his acceptance of them, for that is the best account they can be made to turn to. Observe, (1.) She calls it his garden; for those that are espoused to Christ call nothing their own, but what they have devoted to him, and desire to be used for him. When the spices flow forth, then it is fit to be called his garden, and not till then. The fruits of the garden are his pleasant fruits, for he planted them, watered them, and gave the increase. What can we pretend to merit at Christ's hands, when we can invite him to nothing but what is his own already? (2.) She begs he would visit it, and accept of what it produced. The believer can take little pleasure in his garden, unless Christ, the Beloved of his soul, come to him, nor have any joy of the fruits of it, unless they redound some way or other to the glory of Christ, and he will think all he has, well-bestowed upon him.

CHAP. V.

In this chapter, we have, I. Christ's gracious acceptance of the invitation which his church had given him, and the kind visit which he made to her, v. 1. II. The account which the spouse gives of her own folly, in putting a slight upon her Beloved, and the distress she was in, by reason of his withdrawals, v. 2. 8. III. The inquiry of the daughters of Jerusalem concerning the amiable perfections of her Beloved, (v. 9.) and her particular answer to that inquiry, v. 10. 16. Unto you that believe he is thus precious.

1. I AM come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honey comb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved.

These words are Christ's answer to the church's prayer in the close of the foregoing chapter, Let my beloved come into his garden; here he is come, and lets her know it. See how ready God is to hear prayer; how ready Christ is to accept the invitations that his people give him, though we are backward to hear his calls, and accept his invitations. He is free in condescending to us, while we are shy of ascending to him. Observe how the return answered the request, and outdid it.

1. She called him her Beloved, (and really he was so,) and therefore invited him, because she loved him; in return to this, he called her his sister and spouse, as several times before, ch. 4. Those that make Christ their best Beloved, shall be owned by him in the nearest and dearest relations.

2. She called the garden his, and the pleasant fruits of it his,

and he acknowledges them to be so; It is *my garden*, it is *my spice*. When God was displeased with Israel, he turned them off to Moses; They are *thy people*; (Exod. 32. 7.) and he called the appointed feasts of the Lord *their appointed feasts*; (Isa. 1. 14.) but, now that they are in his favour, he owns them for his garden; though of small account, yet it is mine. They that in sincerity give up themselves and all they have, and can do, to Jesus Christ, he will give them the honour to stamp them, and what they have, and do, for him, with his own mark, and say, *It is mine*.

3. She invited him to *come into his garden*, and he says, *I am come*, Isa. 58. 9. *Thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am*. When Solomon prayed that God would come, and take possession of the house he had built for him, he did come, *his glory filled the house*, (2 Chron. 7. 2.) and (v. 16.) he let him know that he had chosen and sanctified this house, that his *name might be there for ever*. They that throw open the door of their souls to Jesus Christ, shall find him ready to come into them; and in every place where he records his name, he will meet his people, and bless them, Exod. 20. 24.

4. She desired him to *eat his pleasant fruits*, to accept of the sacrifices offered in his temple, which were as the fruits of his garden, and he does so, but finds they were not ready for eating, therefore he does himself gather them; as the fruits are his, so is the preparation of them; he finds the heart unready for his entertainment, but does himself draw out into exercise those gracious habits which he had planted there. What little good there is in us, would be shed and lost if he did not gather it, and preserve it to himself.

5. She only desired him to *eat the fruits* of the garden, but he brought along with him something more, *honey*, and *wine*, and *milk*, which yield substantial nourishment, and which were the products of Canaan, Immanuel's land. Christ delights himself greatly in that which he has both conferred upon his people, and wrought in them. Or we may suppose this to have been prepared by the spouse herself, as Esther prepared for the king her husband *a banquet of wine*; it is but plain fare, and what is natural, honey and milk, but, being kindly designed, it is kindly accepted; imperfections are overlooked, the honey-comb is eaten with the honey, and the weakness of the flesh passed by, and pardoned, because the *spirit is willing*. When Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, he did eat with them a piece of a honey-comb, (Luke, 24. 42, 43.) in which this scripture was fulfilled. He did not drink the wine only, which is liquor for men, for great men, but the milk too, which is liquor for children, little children, for he was to be the *holy child Jesus*, that had need of milk.

6. She only invited him to come himself, but he, bringing his own entertainment along with him, brings his friends too, and invites them to share in the provisions. *The more the merrier*, we say, and here, where there was so much plenty, there was not the worse fare. When our Lord Jesus fed five thousand at once, *they did all eat, and were filled*. Christ invites all his friends to the *wine and milk* which he himself drinks of, (Isa. 55. 1.) to the *feast of fat things*, and *wines on the lees*, Isa. 25. 6. The great work of man's redemption, and the riches of the covenant of grace, are a feast to the Lord Jesus, and they ought to be so to us. The invitation is very free, and hearty, and loving; *Eat, O friends*. If Christ comes to sup with us, it is we that sup with him, Rev. 3. 20. *Eat, O friends*. Those only that are Christ's friends are welcome to his table; his enemies, *that will not have him to reign over them*, have no part or lot in the matter. *Drink, yea drink abundantly*. Christ, in his gospel, has made plentiful provision for poor souls; *he fills the hungry with good things*; there is enough for all, there is enough for each, *we are not straitened in him* or in his grace; let us not therefore be straitened in our own bosoms. *Open thy mouth wide, and Christ will fill it*. *Be not drunk with wine, be filled with the Spirit*, Eph. 5. 18. Those that entertain Christ must bid his friends welcome with him; Jesus and his disciples were called together to the marriage, (John, 2. 2.) and Christ will have all his friends to rejoice with him in the day of his espousals to his church, and, in token of that, to feast with

him. In spiritual and heavenly joys there is no danger of exceeding; there we may *drink abundantly, drink of the river of God's pleasures*, (Ps. 36. 8.) and be *abundantly satisfied*, Ps. 65. 4.

2. I sleep, but my heart waketh: *it is* the voice of my beloved that knocketh, *saying*, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, *and* my locks with the drops of the night. 3. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? 4. My beloved put in his hand by the hole of *the door*, and my bowels were moved for him. 5. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped *with myrrh*, and my fingers *with* sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. 6. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself, *and* was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. 7. The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my vail from me. 8. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that *I am sick of love*.

In this song of loves and joys, we have here a very melancholy scene; the spouse here speaks, not *to* her Beloved, (as before, for he is withdrawn,) but *of* him, and it is a sad story she tells of her own folly and ill conduct toward him, notwithstanding his kindness, and of the just rebukes she fell under for it; perhaps it may refer to Solomon's own apostasy from God, and the sad effects of that apostasy, after God had come into his garden, had taken possession of the temple he had built, and he had feasted with God upon the sacrifices; (v. 1.) however, it is applicable to the too common case both of churches and particular believers, who by their carelessness and security provoke Christ to withdraw from them. Observe,

1. The indisposition that the spouse was under, and the listlessness that had seized her; (v. 2.) *I sleep, but my heart wakes*. Here is, 1. Corruption appearing in the actings of it; *I sleep*; the wise virgins slumbered. She was *on her bed*, (ch. 3. 1.) but now she sleeps. Spiritual distempers, if not striven against at first, are apt to grow upon us, and to get ground. *She slept*; pious affections cooled, she neglected her duty, and grew remiss in it, she indulged herself in her ease, was secure and off her watch. This is sometimes the bad effect of more than ordinary enlargements, a good cause. St. Paul himself was in danger of being puffed up with abundant revelations, and of saying, *Soul, take thine ease*, which made a *thorn in the flesh* necessary for him, to keep him from sleeping. Christ's disciples, when he was come into his garden, the garden of his agony, were heavy with sleep, and could not watch with him. True Christians are not always alike lively and vigorous in religion. 2. Grace remaining, notwithstanding, in the habit of it; "*My heart wakes*, my own conscience reproaches me for it, and ceases not to rouse me out of my sluggishness. *The spirit is willing*, and, *after the inner man, I delight in the law of God*, and *with my mind I serve that*. I am, for the present, overpowered by temptation, but all does not go one way in me. I sleep, but it is not a dead sleep, I strive against it, it is not a sound sleep, I cannot be easy under this indisposition." Note, (1.) We ought to take notice of our own spiritual slumbers and distempers, and to reflect upon it with sorrow and shame that we have fallen asleep, when Christ has been nigh us in his garden. (2.) When we are lamenting what is amiss in us, we must not overlook the good that is wrought in us, and preserved alive. "*My heart*

wakes in Christ, who is dear to me as my own heart, and is my Life; when I sleep, *he neither slumbers nor sleeps.*"

II. The call that Christ gave to her, when she was under this indisposition; *It is the voice of my Beloved*; she knew it to be so, and was soon aware of it, which was a sign that her heart was awake. Like the child Samuel, she heard at the first call, but did not, like him, mistake the person; she knew it to be the voice of Christ. He knocks, to awaken us to come and let him in; knocks by his word and Spirit, knocks by afflictions and by our own consciences; though this is not expressly quoted, yet, probably, it is referred to, (Rev. 3. 20.) *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.* He calls sinners into covenant with him, and saints into communion with him. Those whom he loves he will not let alone in their carelessness, but will find some way or other to awaken them, to rebuke and chasten them. When we are unmindful of Christ, he thinks of us, and provides that our faith fail not. Peter denied Christ, but the Lord turned, and looked upon him, and so brought him to himself again.

Observe how moving the call is, *Open to me, my sister, my love.* 1. He sues for entrance, who may demand it; and knocks, who could easily knock the door down. 2. He gives her all the kind and most endearing titles imaginable, *My sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled*; he not only gives her no hard names, nor upbraids her with unkindness in not sitting up for him, but, on the contrary, studies how to express his tender affection to her still; *his loving-kindness he will not utterly take away.* Those that by faith are espoused to Christ, he looks upon as his sisters, his loves, his doves, and all that is dear; and, being clothed with his righteousness, they are undefiled. This consideration should induce her to open to him. Christ's love to us should engage our's to him, even in the most self-denying instances. *Open to me.* Can we deny entrance to such a friend, to such a guest? Shall we not converse more with one that is infinitely worthy of our acquaintance, and so affectionately desirous of it, though we only can be gainers by it? 3. He pleads distress, and begs to be admitted *sub forma pauperis*—under the character of a poor traveller, that wants a lodging; *"My head is wet with the dew,* with the cold drops of the night; consider what hardships I have undergone to merit thee, which surely may merit from thee so small a kindness as this." When Christ was crowned with thorns, which, no doubt, fetched blood from his blessed head, then was his head *wet with the dew*; "Consider what a grief it is to me to be thus unkindly used, as much as it would be to a tender husband to be kept out of doors by his wife in a rainy stormy night." Do we thus requite him for his love? The slights which careless souls put upon Jesus Christ are to him as a *continual dropping in a very rainy day.*

III. The excuse she made to put off her compliance with this call; (v. 3.) *I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on again?* She is half asleep, she knows the voice of her Beloved, she knows his knock, but cannot find in her heart to open to him; she was undressed, and would not be at the pains to dress her again; she had *washed her feet*, and would not have occasion to wash them again. She could not send another to open the door, (it must be our own act and deed to let Christ into our hearts,) and yet she was loath to go herself; she did not say, *I will not open*, but, *How shall I?* Note, Frivolous excuses are the language of prevailing slothfulness in religion; Christ calls to us to open to him, but we pretend we have no mind, or we have no strength, or we have no time, and therefore think we may be excused, as the *sluggard that will not plough by reason of cold.* And those who ought to *watch for the Lord's coming*, with their *lains girt*, if they ungird themselves, and put off their coat, they will find it difficult to recover their former resolution, and to put it on again; it is best therefore to keep tight. Making excuses, (Luke, 14. 18.) is interpreted making light of Christ; (Matth. 22. 5.) and so it is. Those put a great contempt upon Christ that cannot find in their hearts to bear a cold blast for him, or get out of a warm bed.

IV. The powerful influences of divine grace, by which she was made willing to rise, and open to her Beloved. When he could not prevail with her by persuasion, he *put in his hand by the hole of the door*, to unbolt it, as one weary of waiting, v. 4. This inti-

mates a work of the Spirit upon her soul, by which she was of unwilling made willing, Ps. 110. 3. The conversion of Lydia is represented by the *opening of her heart*, (Acts, 16. 14.) and Christ is said to open his disciples' understandings, Luke, 24. 45. He that *formed the spirit of man within him* knows all the avenues to it, and which way to enter into it; he can find the *hole of the door*, at which to put in his hand for the conquering of prejudices, and the introducing of his own doctrine and law. He has the *key of David*, (Rev. 3. 7.) with which he opens the door of the heart in such a way as is suited to it, as the key is fitted to the wards of the lock; in such a way as not to put a force upon its nature, but only upon its ill nature.

V. Her compliance with these methods of divine grace at last; *My bowels were moved for him.* The will was gained by a good work wrought upon the affections; *My bowels were moved for him*, as those of the two disciples were, when Christ made their *heart to burn within them.* She was moved with compassion to her Beloved, because his *head was wet with the dew.* Note, Tenderness of spirit, and a heart of flesh, prepare the soul for the reception of Christ into it; and therefore his love to us is represented in such a way as is most affecting. Did Christ redeem us in his pity? Let us in pity receive him, and, for his sake, those that are his, when at any time they are in distress.

This good work, wrought upon her affections, raised her up, and made her ashamed of her dulness and slothfulness; (v. 5.) *I rose up to open to my Beloved*; his grace inclining her to do it, and conquering the opposition of unbelief. It was her own act, and yet he wrought it in her. And now her *hands dropped with myrrh upon the handles of the lock.* Either, 1. She found it there when she applied her hand to the lock, to shoot it back; he that *put in his hand by the hole of the door*, left it there as an evidence that he had been there. When Christ has wrought powerfully upon a soul, he leaves a blessed sweetness in it, which is very delightful to it; with this he oiled the lock, to make it go easy. Note, When we apply ourselves to our duty, in the lively exercises of faith, under the influence of divine grace, we shall find it will go on much more readily and sweetly than we expected. If we will but rise up, to open to Christ, we shall find the difficulty we apprehended in it, strangely overcome, and shall say with Daniel, *Now let my Lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me*, Dan. 10. 19. Or, 2. She brought it thither. Her *bowels being moved for her Beloved*, who had stood so long in the cold and wet, when she came to open to him, she prepared to anoint his head, and so to refresh and comfort him, and perhaps to prevent his catching cold; she was in such haste to meet him, that she would not stay to make the usual preparation, but dipped her hand in her box of ointment, that she might readily anoint his head, at his first coming in. Those that open the doors of their hearts to Christ, those *everlasting doors*, must meet him with the lively exercises of faith, and other graces, and with these must anoint him.

VI. Her sad disappointment, when she did open to her Beloved. And here is the most melancholy part of the story; *I opened to my Beloved*, as I intended, but, alas! *my Beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone*; my Beloved *was gone, was gone*, so the word is. She did not open to him at his first knock, and now she came too late, when afterward she *would have inherited this blessing.* Christ will be sought while he may be found; if we slip our time, we lose our passage. Note, 1. Christ justly rebukes our delays with his denials, and suspends the communications of comfort from those that are remiss and drowsy in their duty. 2. Christ's departures are matter of great grief and lamentation to believers. The royal psalmist never complains of any thing with such sorrowful accents as God's *hiding his face* from him, and *casting him off*, and *forsaking him.* The spouse here is ready to tear her hair, and rend her clothes, and wring her hands, crying, *He is gone, he is gone*; and that which cuts her to the heart, is, that she may thank herself, she provoked him to withdraw. If Christ departs, it is because he takes something unkindly.

Now observe what she does, in this case, and what befell her.

(1.) She still calls him her *Beloved*, being resolved, how cloudy and dark soever the day be, she will not quit her relation to him,

and interest in him. It is a weakness, upon every apprehension either of our own failings, or of God's withdrawals, to conclude hardly as to our spiritual state. Every desertion is not despair. I will say, *Lord, I believe*, though I must say, *Lord, help my unbelief*. Though he leave me, I love him, he is mine.

(2.) She now remembers the words he said to her, when he called her, and what impressions they made upon her, reproaching herself for her folly in not complying sooner with her convictions. "*My soul failed when he spake*; his words melted me when he said, *My head is wet with the dew*; and yet, wretch that I was! I lay still, and made excuses, and did not open to him." The smothering and stifling of our convictions is a thing that will be very bitter in the reflection, when God opens our eyes. Sometimes the word has not its effect immediately upon the heart, but it melts it afterward, upon second thoughts; *My soul now melted because of his words* which he had spoken before.

(3.) She did not go to bed again, but went in pursuit of him; *I sought him, I called him*. She might have saved herself this labour, if she would but have bestirred herself, when he first called; but we cut ourselves out a great deal of work, and create ourselves a great deal of trouble, by our own slothfulness and carelessness in improving our opportunities. Yet it is her praise, that, when her Beloved is withdrawn, she continues seeking him; her desires toward him are made more strong, and her inquiries after him more solicitous, by his withdrawals. She calls him by prayer, calls after him, and begs of him to return; and she not only prays, but uses means, she seeks him in the ways wherein she used to find him.

(4.) Yet still she missed of him; *I could not find him, he gave me no answer*. She had no evidence of his favour, no sensible comforts, but was altogether in the dark, and in doubt, concerning his love toward her. Note, There are those who have a true love for Christ, and yet have not immediate answers to their prayers for his smiles; but he gives them an equivalent, if he strengthens them with strength in their souls, to continue seeking him, Ps. 138. 3. St. Paul could not prevail for the removing of the thorn in the flesh, but was answered with grace sufficient for him.

(5.) She was ill-treated by the watchmen; *They found me, they smote me, they wounded me*, v. 7. They took her for a lewd woman, (because she went about the streets at that time of night, when they were walking their rounds,) and beat her accordingly. Disconsolate saints are taken for sinners, and are censured and reproached as such. Thus Hannah, when she was praying in the bitterness of her soul, was wounded and smitten by Eli, one of the prime watchmen, when he said to her, *How long wilt thou be drunken?* So counting her a daughter of Belial, 1 Sam. 1. 14, 15. It is no new thing for those that are of the loyal loving subjects of Zion's King, to be misrepresented by the watchmen of Zion, as enemies, or scandals, to his kingdom; they could not abuse and persecute them but by putting them into an ill-name. Some apply it to those ministers who, though watchmen by office, yet misapply the word to awakened consciences, and, through unskillfulness, or contempt of their griefs, add affliction to the afflicted, and make the hearts of the righteous sad, whom God would not have made sad, (Ezek. 13. 22.) discouraging those who ought to be encouraged, and talking to the grief of those whom God has wounded, Ps. 59. 26. Those watchmen were bad enough, that could not, or would not, assist the spouse in her inquiries after her Beloved; (ch. 3. 3.) but these were much worse that hindered her with their severe and uncharitable censures, *smote her and wounded her* with their reproaches, and, though they were the keepers of the wall of Jerusalem, as if they had been the breakers of it, *took away her vail* from her, rudely and barbarously, as if it had been only a pretence of modesty, but a cover of the contrary. They whose outward appearances are all good, and yet are invidiously condemned, and run down, for hypocrites, have reason to complain, as the spouse here, of the *taking away of their vail* from them.

(6.) When she was disabled by the abuses the watchman gave her, to prosecute her inquiry herself, she gave charge to those about her, to assist her in the inquiry; (v. 8.) *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem*, all my friends and acquaintance, *if you find*

my Beloved, it may be you may meet with him before I shall, *what shall ye tell him?* So some read it; "Speak a good word for me, tell him that *I am sick of love*." Observe here, [1.] What her condition was, she loved Jesus Christ to that degree, that his absence made her sick, extremely sick, she could not bear it, and she was in pain for his return, as a woman in travail, as Ahab for Naboth's vineyard, which he so passionately coveted. This is a sickness which is a sign of a healthful constitution of soul, and will certainly end well, a sickness that will be not death, but life. It is better to be sick of love to Christ than at ease in love to the world. [2.] What course she took in this condition; she did not sink into despair, and conclude she should die of her disease, but she sent after her Beloved; she asked the advice of her neighbours, and begged their prayers for her, that they would intercede with him on her behalf; "Tell him, though I was careless, and foolish, and slothful, and rose not up so soon as I should have done, to open to him, yet I love him; he *knows all things*, he *knows that I do*; represent me to him as sincere, though in many instances coming short of my duty; nay, represent me to him as an object of his pity, that he may have compassion on me, and help me." She does not bid them tell him how the watchmen had abused her; how unrighteous soever they were in it, she acknowledges that *the Lord is righteous*, and therefore bears it patiently; but "Tell him that I am wounded with love to him." Gracious souls are more sensible of Christ's withdrawals than of any other trouble whatsoever.

Languet amans, non languet amor—

The lover languishes, but not his love.

9. What is thy beloved more than *another* beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than *another* beloved, that thou dost so charge us? 10. My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. 11. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. 12. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. 13. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh. 14. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. 15. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. 16. His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Here is,

1. The question which the daughters of Jerusalem put to the spouse concerning her Beloved, in answer to the charge she had given them, v. 9. Observe,

1. The respectful title they give to the spouse, *O thou fairest among women*. Our Lord Jesus makes his spouse truly amiable, not only in his eyes, but in the eyes of all the daughters of Jerusalem. The church is the most excellent society in the world; the communion of saints the best communion, and the beauty of the sanctuary a transcendent beauty; the saints are the most excellent people; holiness is the symmetry of the soul; it is its agreement with itself, it recommends itself to all that are competent judges of it; even those that have little acquaintance with Christ, as those daughters of Jerusalem here, cannot but see an amiable beauty in those that bear his image, which we should love, wherever we see it, though in different dresses.

2. Their inquiry concerning her Beloved. "*What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?* If thou wilt have us to find him for thee, give us his marks, that we may know him, when we see him."

(1.) Some take it for a flighty question, blaming her for making such ado about him; "Why shouldst thou be so passionate in inquiring after thy Beloved, more than others are after their's? Why shouldst thou be so set upon him more than others that yet have a kindness for him?" Those that are zealous in religion are men wondered at by such as are indifferent to it. The many careless ones laugh at the few that are solicitous and serious, "What is there in him, that is so very charming, more than in another person? If he be gone, thou, who art the *fairest among women*, wilt soon have another with an equal flame." Note, Carnal hearts see nothing excellent or extraordinary in the Lord Jesus, in his person or offices, in his doctrine or in his favours; as if there were no more in the knowledge of Christ, and in communion with him, than in the knowledge of the world, and in its conversation.

(2.) Others rather take it for a serious question, and suppose that they who put it, intended, [1.] To comfort the spouse, who, they knew, would recover new spirits, if she did but talk awhile of her Beloved; nothing would please her better, or give a more powerful diversion to her grief, than to be put upon the pleasing task of describing the beauties of her Beloved. [2.] To inform themselves; they had heard, in general, that he was excellent and glorious, but they desired to know more particularly. They wondered what moved the spouse to charge them concerning her Beloved, with so much vehemence and concern, and therefore concluded there must be something more in him than in another beloved, which they are willing to be convinced of. Then there begin to be some hopes of people, when they begin to inquire concerning Christ and his transcendent perfections. And sometimes the extraordinary zeal of one, in inquiring after Christ, may be a means to provoke many; (2 Cor. 9. 2.) as the apostle, by the faith of the Gentiles, would stir up the Jews to a holy emulation, Rom. 11. 14. See John, 4. 10.

II. The account which the spouse gives of her Beloved, in answer to this question. We should always be ready to instruct and assist those that are inquiring after Christ. Experienced Christians, who are well acquainted with Christ themselves, should do all they can to make others acquainted with him.

1. She assures them, in general, that he is one of incomparable perfections, and unparalleled worth; (v. 10.) "Do not you know my Beloved? Can the daughters of Jerusalem be ignorant of him that is Jerusalem's Crown, and crowned Head? Let me tell you them."

(1.) That he has every thing in him that is lovely and amiable; *My beloved is white and ruddy*, the colours that make up a complete beauty. This points not at any extraordinary beauty of his body, when he should be incarnate. It was never said of the child Jesus, as of the child Moses when he was born, that he was *exceeding fair*; (Acts. 7. 20.) nay, *he had no form nor comeliness*, (Isa. 53. 2.) but his divine glory, and the concurrence of every thing in him as Mediator, to make him truly lovely in the eyes of those that are enlightened to discern spiritual things. In him we may behold the *beauty of the Lord*, he was the *holy child Jesus*, that was his fairness. If we look upon him as made to us *Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption*, he appears, in all, very amiable. His love to us renders him lovely; he is *white* in the spotless innocence of his life, *ruddy* in the bloody sufferings he went through at his death; *white* in his glory, as God; (when he was transfigured, *his raiment was white as the light*;) *ruddy* in his assuming the nature of man, *Adam—red earth*; *white* in his tenderness toward his people, *ruddy* in his terrible appearances against his and their enemies. His complexion is a very happy composition.

(2.) That he has that loveliness in him which is not to be found in any other; He is *the chiefest among ten thousand*; a nonsuch for beauty, *fairer than the children of men*, than any of them, than all of them; there is none like him, nor any to be compared with him; every thing else is to be accounted *loss and dung*, in comparison of him, Phil. 3. 8. *He is higher than the kings of the earth*, (Ps. 89. 27.) and has obtained a more excellent name than any of the principalities and powers of the upper or lower world, Phil. 2. 9. Heb. 1. 4. He is a *Standard-Bearer among ten thousand*; so the

word is, the tallest and comeliest of the company. He is himself *lifted up as an Ensign*, (Isa. 11. 10.) to whom we must be gathered, and must always have an eye. And there is all the reason in the world that he should have the innermost and uppermost place in our souls, who is the *fairest of ten thousands* in himself, and the finest of twenty thousands for us.

2. She gives a particular detail of his accomplishments, conceals not his power or comely proportion; every thing in Christ is amiable. Ten instances she here gives of his beauty, which we need not be nice in the application of, lest the wringing of them bring forth blood, and prove the wresting of them. The design, in general, is, to shew that he is every way qualified for his undertaking, and has all that in him which may recommend him to our esteem, love, and confidence. Christ's appearance to John, (Rev. 1. 13, &c.) may be compared with the description which the spouse gives of him here, the scope of both being to represent him transcendently glorious, that is, both great and gracious, made lovely in the eyes of believers, and making them happy in himself.

(1.) *His head is as the most fine gold*; *The head of Christ is God*, (1 Cor. 11. 3.) and it is promised to the saints, that *the Almighty shall be their Gold*, (Job, 22. 25.) their Defence, their Treasure; much more was he so to Christ, *in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*, Col. 2. 9. Christ's head bespeaks his sovereign dominion over all, and his vital influence upon his church and all its members; this is as *gold, gold*; the former word signifies shining gold, the latter strong solid gold; Christ's sovereignty is both beautiful and powerful. Nebuchadnezzar's monarchy is compared to a *head of gold*, (Dan. 2. 38.) because it excelled all the other monarchies, and so does Christ's government.

(2.) *His locks are bushy and black*; not black as the tents of Kedar, whose blackness was their deformity, to which therefore the church compares herself, (ch. 1. 5.) but *black as a raven*, whose blackness is his beauty. Sometimes Christ's hair is represented as *white*, (Rev. 1. 14.) denoting his eternity, that he is *the Ancient of days*; but here as *black and bushy*, bespeaking him ever young, and that there is in him no decay, nothing that waxes old. Every thing that belongs to Christ is amiable in the eyes of a believer, even his hair is so; it was pity that it should be wet, as it was, *with the dew*, and these *locks with the drops of the night*, while he waited to be gracious, v. 2.

(3.) *His eyes are as the eyes of doves*, fair and clear, and chaste and kind, *by the rivers of waters*, which doves delight in, and in which, as in a glass, they see themselves; they are washed, to make them clean, *washed with milk*, to make them white, and *fifty set*, neither starting out nor sunk in. Christ is of *purser eyes than to behold iniquity*, for they are doves' eyes, Hab. 1. 13. All believers speak with pleasure of the omniscience of Christ, as the spouse here of *his eyes*; for though it be terrible to his enemies as a *flame of fire*, (Rev. 1. 14.) yet it is amiable and comfortable to his friends, as *doves' eyes*, for it is a witness to their integrity; *Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*. Blessed and holy are they that walk always as under the eye of Christ.

(4.) *His cheeks (the risings of the face) are as a bed of spices*, raised in the gardens, which are the beauty and wealth of them, and as *sweet flowers*, or towers of sweetness. There is that in Christ's countenance which is amiable in the eyes of all the saints, in the least glimpse of him, for the cheek is but a part of the face. The half discoveries Christ makes of himself to the soul are reviving and refreshing, fragrant above the richest flowers and perfumes.

(5.) *His lips are like lilies*, not white like lilies, but sweet and pleasant: such are *the words of his lips* to all that are sanctified, *sweeter than honey*, and *the honey-comb*; such *the kisses of his lips*, all the communications of his grace; *grace is poured into his lips*, and they that heard him wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. *His lips are as lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh*. Never any lilies in nature dropped myrrh, but nothing in nature can fully set forth the beauty and excellency of Christ, and therefore, to do it by comparison, there must be a composition of images.

(6.) *His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl*, a noted

precious stone, v. 14. Great men had their hands adorned with gold rings on their fingers, set with diamonds or others precious stones; but, in her eye, *his hands* themselves were as gold rings; all the instances of his power, the works of his hands, all the performances of his providence and grace, are all rich, and pure, and precious gold, as the precious onyx and the sapphire; all fitted to the purpose for which they were designed, as gold rings to the finger; and all beautiful and very becoming, as rings set with beryl. His hands, which are stretched forth, both to receive his people, and to give to them, are thus rich and comely.

(7.) *His bowels are as bright ivory*, for so it should be rendered, rather than *his belly*, for it is the same word that was used for *bowels*, (v. 4.) and is often ascribed to God, (as Isa. 63. 15. Jer. 31. 20.) and so it denotes his tender compassion and affection for his spouse, and the love he has to her even in her desolate and deserted state. This love of his is like *bright ivory* finely polished, and richly overlaid with sapphires. The love itself is strong and firm, and the instances and circumstances of it are bright and sparkling, and add much to the inestimable value of it.

(8.) *His legs are as pillars of marble*, so strong, so stately, and no disgrace, no, not to the *sockets of fine gold*, upon which they are set, v. 15. This bespeaks his stability and steadfastness; where he sets his foot, he will fix it; he is able to bear all the weight of the government that is upon his shoulders, and his legs will never fail under him; this sets forth the stateliness and magnificence of the goings of our God, our King, in his sanctuary, (Ps. 68. 24.) and the steadiness and evenness of all his dispensations toward his people. *The ways of the Lord are equal*, they are all *mercy and truth*; these are the *pillars of marble*, more lasting than the pillars of heaven.

(9.) *His countenance* (his port and mien) *is as Lebanon*, that stately hill; his aspect beautiful and charming, like the prospect of that pleasant forest or park, *excellent as the cedars*, which, in height and strength, excel other trees, and are of excellent use. Christ is a goodly Person; the more we look upon him the more beauty we shall see in him.

(10.) *His mouth is most sweet*, it is sweetness itself, it is *sweetnesses*; so the word is; it is pure essence, nay, it is the quintessence of all delights, v. 16. The words of his mouth are all sweet to a believer, sweet as milk to babes, to whom it is agreeable, as honey to those that are grown up, (Ps. 119. 103.) to whom it is delicious. The kisses of his mouth, all the tokens of his love, have a transcendent sweetness in them, and are most delightful to them who have their *spiritual senses exercised*. *To you that believe he is precious*.

3. She concludes with a full assurance both of faith and hope, and so gets the mastery of her trouble.

(1.) Here is a full assurance of faith concerning the complete beauty of the Lord Jesus; "*He is altogether lovely*." Why should I stand to mention particulars, when throughout there is nothing amiss? She is sensible she does him wrong in the particular descriptions of him, and comes far short of the dignity and merit of the subject, and therefore she breaks off with this general encomium; *He is truly lovely*, he is wholly so; there is nothing in him but what is amiable, and nothing amiable but what is in him; he is all desires, he has all in him that one can desire, and therefore all her desire is towards him, and she seeks him thus carefully, and cannot rest contented in the want of him. Who cannot but love him who is so lovely?

(2.) Here is a full assurance of hope concerning her own interest in him; "*This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend*"; and therefore wonder not that I thus long after him." See with what a holy boldness she claims relation to him, and then with what a holy triumph she proclaims it. It is propriety that sweetens excellency. To see Christ, and not to see him as our's, would be rather a torture than a happiness; but to see one that is thus lovely, and to see him as our's, is a complete satisfaction. Here is a true believer,

[1.] Giving an entire consent to Christ; "*He is mine; my Lord, and my God*"; (John, 20. 28.) mine, according to the tenor

of the gospel-covenant; mine in all relations; bestowed upon me, to be all that to me that my poor soul stands in need of."

[2.] Taking an entire complacency in Christ. It is spoken of here with an air of triumph; "*This is he whom I have chosen, and to whom I have given up myself; none but Christ, none but Christ; this is he on whom my heart is, for he is my Best-Beloved; this is he in whom I trust, and from whom I expect all good, for this is my Friend*." Note, Those that make Christ their Beloved, shall have him their Friend; he has been, is, and will be, a special Friend to all believers. He loves those that love him; and those that have him their Friend have reason to glory in him, and speak of him with delight. "Let others be governed by the love of the world, and seek their happiness in its friendship and favours, *This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend*. Others may do as they please, but this is my soul's Choice, my soul's Rest, my Life, my Joy, my All; this is he whom I desire to live and die with."

CHAP. VI.

In this chapter, I. The daughters of Jerusalem, moved with the description which the church had given of Christ, inquire after him, v. 1. II. The church directs them where they may meet with him, v. 2, 3. III. Christ is now found of those that sought him, and very highly applauds the beauty of his spouse, as one extremely smitten with it, (v. 4. 7.) preferring her before all others, (v. 8, 9.) recommending her to the love and esteem of all her neighbours, (v. 10.) and, lastly, acknowledging the impressions which her beauty had made upon him, and the great delight he took in it, v. 11. 13.

1. **W**HITHER is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee. 2. My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. 3. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.

Here is,

I. The inquiry which the daughters of Jerusalem made concerning Christ, v. 1. They still continue their high thoughts of the church, and call her, as before, the *fairest among women*; for true sanctity is true beauty. And now they raise their thoughts higher concerning Christ, *Whither is thy Beloved gone? that we may seek him with thee*. This would be but an indecent, unacceptable, compliment, if the song were not to be understood spiritually; for love is jealous of a rival, would monopolize the Beloved, and cares not that others should join in seeking him; but they that truly love Christ are desirous that others should love him too, and be joined to him; nay, the greatest instance of duty and respect that the church's children can shew to their mother, is, to join with her in seeking Christ.

The daughters of Jerusalem, who had asked, (ch. 5. 9.) *What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?* wondering that the spouse should be so passionately in love with him, are now of another mind, and are themselves in love with him; for, 1. The spouse had described him, and shewed them his excellencies and perfections; and therefore, though they have not seen him, yet, believing, they love him. They that undervalue Christ, do so because they do not know him; when God, by his word and Spirit, discovers him to the soul, with that ray of light the fire of love to him will be kindled. 2. She had expressed her own love to him; her rest in that love, and had triumphed in it; *This is my Beloved*; and that flame in her breast scattered sparks into their's. As sinful lusts, when they break out, defile many, so the pious zeal of some may provoke many, 2 Cor. 9. 2.

The spouse had bespoken their help in seeking her Beloved; (ch. 5. 8.) but now they beg her's, for they perceive that now the cloud she had been under began to scatter, and the sky to clear up, and, while she was describing her Beloved to them, she herself retrieved her comfort in him. Drooping Christians would find benefit themselves by talking of Christ, as well as do good to others.

Now here, (1.) They inquire concerning him, "*Whither is thy Beloved gone?*" Which way must we steer our course, in pursuit of him? Note, Those that are made acquainted with the excellencies of Christ, and the comfort of an interest in him, cannot but be inquisitive after him, and desirous to know where they may meet with him. (2.) They offer their service to the spouse to accompany her in quest of him; *We will seek him with thee.* Those that would find Christ must seek him, seek him early, seek him diligently; and it is best seeking Christ in concert, to join with those that are seeking him. We must seek for communion with Christ, in communion with saints. We know *whither our Beloved is gone*; he is gone to heaven, *to his Father, and our Father*, he took care to send us notice of it, that we might know how to direct to him, John. 20. 17. We must by faith see him there, and by prayer seek him there; with boldness *enter into the holiest*, and herein must join with *the generation of them that seek him*, (Ps. 24. 6.) even with *all that in every place call upon him*, 1 Cor. 1. 2. We must pray with, and for, others.

II. The answer which the spouse gave to this inquiry, v. 2, 3. Now she complains not any more as she had done, (ch. 5. 6.) "*He is gone, he is gone,*" that she knew not where to find him, or doubted she had lost him for ever; no,

1. Now she knows very well where he is; (v. 2.) "*My Beloved is not to be found in the streets of the city, and the crowd and noise that are there, there I have in vain looked for him;*" (as his parents *sought him among their kindred and acquaintance, and found him not*;) "*but he is gone down to his garden, a place of privacy and retirement.*" The more we withdraw from the hurry of the world, the more likely we are to have acquaintance with Christ, who took his disciples into a garden, there to be witnesses of the agonies of his love. Christ's church is a garden inclosed, and separated from the open common of the world; it is *his garden*, which he has planted, as he did the garden of Eden, which he takes care of, and delights in: though he is gone up to paradise above, yet he comes down to his garden on earth; it lies low, but he condescends to visit it, and wonderful condescension it is. Will God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth? Those that would find Christ, may expect to meet with him in *his garden*, the church, for *there he records his name*; (Exod. 20. 24.) they must attend upon him in the ordinances which he has instituted, the word, sacraments, and prayer, wherein he will be with us *always, even to the end of the world*. The spouse here refers to what Christ had said, (ch. 5. 1.) *I am come into my garden*; it is as if she had said, "What a fool was I to fret and toil myself in seeking him where he was not, when he himself had told me where he was." Words of direction and comfort are often out of the way, when we have occasion to use them, till the blessed Spirit brings them to our remembrance, and then we wonder how we overlooked them. Christ has told us that he would *come into his garden*, thither therefore we must go to seek him.

The beds, and lesser gardens, in this greater, are the particular churches, the *synagogues of God in the land*; (Ps. 74. 8.) the *spices and lilies* are particular believers, the planting of the Lord, and pleasant in his eyes. When Christ comes down to his church, it is, (1.) *To feed among the gardens*, to feed his flock, which he feeds not, as other shepherds, in the open fields, but in his garden; so well are they provided for! Ps. 23. 2. He comes to feed his friends, and entertain them; there you may not only find him, but find his table richly furnished, and a hearty welcome to it. He comes to feed himself, to please himself with the products of his own grace in his people; *for the Lord takes pleasure in those that fear him*. He has many gardens, many particular churches of different sizes and shapes; but, while they are his, he feeds in them all, manifests himself among them, and is well-pleased with them. (2.) *To gather lilies*, wherewith he is pleased to entertain and adorn himself; he picks the lilies one by one, and gathers them to himself; and there will be a general harvest of them at the great day, when he will send forth his angels, to gather all his lilies, that he may be for ever glorified and admired in them.

2. She is very confident of her own interests in him; (v. 3.) "*I*

am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine; the relation is mutual, and the knot is tied, which cannot be loosed, for *he feeds among the lilies*, and my communion with him is a certain token of my interest in him." She had said this before; (ch. 2. 16.) but, (1.) Here she repeats it, as that which she resolved to abide by, and which she took an unspeakable pleasure and satisfaction in; she liked her choice too well to change. Our communion with God is very much maintained and kept up by the frequent renewing of our covenant with him, and rejoicing in it. (2.) She had occasion to repeat it, for she had acted unkindly to her Beloved, and, for her so doing, he had justly withdrawn himself from her, and therefore there was occasion to take fresh hold of the covenant, which continues firm between Christ and believers, notwithstanding their failings and his frowns, Ps. 89. 30. . 35. "*I have been careless and wanting in my duty, and yet I am my Beloved's*;" for every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of covenant. "*He has justly hid his face from me and denied me his comforts, and yet my Beloved is mine*;" for rebukes and chastenings are not only consistent with, but they flow from, covenant-love. (3.) When we want a full assurance of Christ's love, we must live by a faithful adherence to him; "*Though I have not the sensible consolation I used to have, yet I will cleave to this, Christ is mine, and I am his.*" (4.) Though she had said the same before, yet now she inverts the order, and asserts his interest in her first; *I am my Beloved's*, entirely devoted and dedicated to him; and then her interest in him and in his grace; "*My Beloved is mine, and I am happy, truly happy, in him.*" If our own hearts can but witness for us that we are his, there is no room left to question his being our's; for the covenant never breaks on his side. (5.) It is now her comfort, as it was then, that *he feeds among the lilies*, that he takes delight in his people, and converses freely with them, as we do with those with whom we feed; and therefore, though, at present, he be withdrawn, I shall meet with him again; *I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

4. Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. 5. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. 6. Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. 7. As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks. 8. There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. 9. My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. 10. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?

Now we must suppose Christ graciously returned to his spouse, from whom he had withdrawn himself, returned to converse with her, for he speaks to her, and *makes her to hear joy and gladness*; returned to favour her, having forgiven and forgotten all her unkindnesses, for he speaks very tenderly and respectfully to her.

I. He pronounces her truly amiable; (v. 4.) *Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah*, a city in the tribe of Manasseh, whose name signifies *pleasant, or acceptable*; the situation, no doubt, being very happy, and the buildings fine and uniform. *Thou art comely as Jerusalem*, a city compact together, (Ps. 122. 3.) and which Solomon had built and beautified, *the joy of the whole earth*; it was an honour to the world, (whether they thought so or no,) that

there was such a city in it. It was the holy city, and that was the greatest beauty of it; and fitly is the church compared to it, for it was figured and typified by it. The gospel-church is *the Jerusalem that is above*, (Gal. 4. 26.) *the heavenly Jerusalem*; (Heb. 12. 22.) in it God has *his sanctuary*, and is, in a special manner, present; thence he has the tribute of praise issuing; it is his rest for ever, and therefore it is *comely as Jerusalem*, and, being so, is *terrible as an army with banners*. Church-censures, duly administered, strike an awe upon men's consciences; the word (the weapons of her warfare) *cast down imaginations*, (2 Cor. 10. 5.) and even an unbeliever is convinced and judged by the solemnity of holy ordinances, 1 Cor. 14. 24, 25. The saints by faith *overcome the world*; (1 John, 5. 4.) nay, like Jacob, they have *power with God, and prevail*, Gen. 32. 23.

II. He owns himself in love with her, v. 5. Though, for a small moment, and in a little wrath, he had hid his face from her, yet now he gathers her with very surprising instances of *everlasting loving-kindness*, Isa. 54. 8. *Turn thine eyes toward me*; so some read it; "Turn the eyes of faith and love toward me, for they have lifted me up; look unto me, and be comforted." When we are calling to God to turn the eye of his favour towards us, he is calling to us to turn the eye of our obedience toward him. We read it as a strange expression of love, "*Turn away thine eyes from me, for I cannot bear the brightness of them, they have quite overcome me, and I am prevailed with to overlook all that is past*;" as God said to Moses, when he interceded for Israel, "*Let me alone, or I must yield*," Exod. 32. 10. Christ is pleased to borrow these expressions of a passionate lover, only to express the tenderness of a compassionate Redeemer, and the delight he takes in his redeemed, and in the workings of his own grace in them.

III. He repeats, almost word for word, part of the description he had given of her beauty, (ch. 4. 1. . 3.) her *hair*, her *teeth*, her *temples*; (v. 5. . 7.) not because he could not have described it in other words, and by other similitudes, but to shew that he had still the same esteem for her, since her unkindness to him, and his withdrawals from her, that he had before; lest she should think, that, though he would not quite cast her off, yet he would think the worse of her while he knew her, he says the same of her now, that he had done, for those *to whom much is forgiven, will love the more*, and, consequently, will be the more beloved, for Christ has said, *I love those that love me*. He is pleased with his people, notwithstanding their weaknesses, when they sincerely repent of them, and return to their duty, and commends them as if they were already arrived at perfection.

IV. He prefers her before all her competitors, and sees all the beauties and perfections of others meeting and centering in her; (v. 8, 9.) "*There are, it may be, threescore queens, who, like Esther, have by their beauty attained to the royal state and dignity, and fourscore concubines, whom kings have preferred before their own queens, as more charming, and these attended by their maids of honour, virgins without number, who, when there is a ball at court, appear in great splendour, with beauty that dazzles the eyes of the spectators; but my dove, my undefiled, is but one, a holy one.*"

1. She excels them all. Go through all the world, and view the societies of men that reckon themselves wise and happy, kingdoms, courts, senates, councils, or whatever incorporations you may think valuable, they are none of them to be compared with the church of Christ; their honours and beauties are nothing to her's. *Who is like unto thee, O Israel?* Deut. 33. 29.—4. 6, 7.

There are particular persons, as *virgins without number*, who are famed for their accomplishments, the beauties of their address, language, and performances, but the beauty of holiness is beyond all other beauty; "*My dove, my undefiled, is one, has that one beauty, that she is a dove, an undefiled dove, and nine, and that makes her excel the queens and virgins, though they were ever so many.*"

2. She includes them all; "Other kings have many queens, and concubines, and virgins, with whose conversation they entertain themselves, but *my dove, my undefiled*, is to me instead of all; in that one I have more than they have in all their's." Or,

"Though there are many particular churches, some of great dignity, others of less, some of longer, others of shorter, standing, and many particular believers, of different gifts and attainments, some more eminent, others less so, yet they all constitute but one catholic church, are all but parts of that whole, and that is *my dove, my undefiled*." Christ is the Centre of the church's unity; all the children of God, that are scattered abroad, are gathered by him, (John, 11. 52.) and meet in him, (Eph. 1. 10.) and are all his doves.

V. He shews how much she was esteemed, not by him only, but by all that had acquaintance with her, and stood in relation to her. It would add to her praise to say, 1. That she was her mother's darling; she had that in her, from a child, which recommended her to the particular affection of her parents; as Solomon himself is said to have been *tender, and an only one in the sight of his mother*, (Prov. 4. 3.) so was she *the only one of her mother*, as dear as if she had been an only one; and if there were many more, yet she was *the choice one of her that bare her*; more excellent than all the societies of men this world ever produced. All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, are nothing, in Christ's account, compared with the church, which is made up of *the excellent ones of the earth, the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, and more excellent than their neighbours*. 2. That she was admired by all her acquaintance, not only *the daughters*, who were her juniors, but even *the queen and the concubines*, who might have reason to be jealous of her as a rival; they all *blessed her*, and wished well to her, *praised her*, and spake well of her; the *daughters of Jerusalem* called her *the fairest among women*; all agreed to give her the pre-eminence for beauty, and every sheaf bowed to her's. Note, (1.) Those that have any sense of things, cannot but be convinced in their consciences, (whatever they say,) that godly people are excellent people: many will give them their good word, and more, their good will. (2.) Jesus Christ takes notice what people think and speak of his church, and is well-pleased with them that honour such as fear the Lord, and takes it ill of those that despise them, particularly when they are under a cloud, that *offend any of his little ones*.

VI. He produces the encomium that was given of her, and makes it his own; (v. 10.) *Who is she that looks forth as the morning?* This is applicable both to the church in the world, and to grace in the heart.

1. They are amiable as the light, the most beautiful of all visible things; Christians are, or should be, the lights of the world. The patriarchal church *looked forth as the morning*, when the promise of the Messiah was first made known, and *the day-spring from on high visited* this dark world. The Jewish church was *fair as the moon*; the ceremonial law was an imperfect light, it shone by reflection, it was changing as the moon, did not make day, nor was *the Sun of righteousness* yet risen; but the Christian church is *clear as the sun*, exhibits a great *light to them that sit in darkness*. Or, we may apply it to the kingdom of grace, the gospel-kingdom. (1.) In its rise, it *looks forth as the morning* after a dark night; it is *discovering*, (Job, 38. 12, 13.) and very acceptable, *looks forth pleasantly as a clear morning*; but it is small in its beginnings, and scarcely perceptible at first. (2.) It is, at the best, in this world, but *fair as the moon*, which shines with a borrowed light, which has her changes and eclipses, and her spots too, and, when at the full, does but rule by night. But, (3.) When it is perfected in the kingdom of glory, then it will be *clear as the sun*, the church *clothed with the sun*, with Christ *the Sun of righteousness*, Rev. 12. 1. They that love God will then be *as the sun when he goes forth in his strength*; (Judg. 5. 31. Matth. 13. 43.) they shall shine in inexpressible glory, and that which is perfect will then come; there shall be no darkness, no spots, Isa. 30. 26.

2. The beauty of the church and of believers, is not only amiable, but awful *as an army with banners*. The church, in this world, is *as an army*, as the camp of Israel in the wilderness; its state is militant; it is in the midst of enemies, and is engaged in a constant conflict with them. Believers are soldiers in this army. It has its *banners*; the gospel of Christ is an ensign, (Isa.

11. 12.) the love of Christ, *ch. 2. 4.* It is marshalled, and kept in order and under discipline; it is *terrible* to its enemies, as Israel in the wilderness was, *Exod. 15. 14.* When Balaam saw Israel encamped according to their tribes, by their standards, with colours displayed, he said, *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!* *Numb. 24. 5.* When the church preserves her purity, she secures her honour and victory; when she is *fair as the moon*, and *clear as the sun*, she is truly great and formidable.

11. I went down into the garden of nuts, to see the fruits of the valley, *and* to see whether the vine flourished, *and* the pomegranates budded. 12. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me *like* the chariots of Ammi-nadib. 11. Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies.

Christ being now returned to his spouse, and the breach being entirely made up, and the falling out of these lovers being the renewing of love, Christ here gives an account both of the distance and of the reconciliation.

1. That when he was withdrawn from his church as his spouse, and did not comfort her, yet even then he had his eye upon it as his garden, which he took care of; (*v. 11.*) "*I went down into the garden of nuts*, or nutmegs, *to see the fruits of the valley*, with complacency and concern, to see them as my own." When he was out of sight, he was no farther off than the garden, hid among the trees of the garden, in a low and dark valley; but then he was observing *how the vine flourished*, that he might do all that to it which was necessary to promote its flourishing, and might delight himself in it as a man does in a fruitful garden. He went to see whether *the pomegranates budded*. Christ observes the first beginnings of the good work of grace in the soul, and the early buddings of devout affections and inclinations there; and is well-pleased with them, as we are with the blossoms of the spring.

2. That yet he could not long content himself with this, but suddenly felt a powerful, irresistible, inclination in his own bosom to return to his church, as his spouse, being moved with her lamentations after him, and her languishing desire toward him; (*v. 12.*) "*Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib*; I could not any longer keep at a distance, my repentings were kindled together, and I presently resolved to fly back to the arms of my love, my dove." Thus Joseph made himself strange to his brethren, for a while, to chastise them for their former unkindnesses, and make trial of their present temper, till he could no longer refrain himself, but, *or ever he was aware*, burst out into tears, and said, *I am Joseph*, *Gen. 45. 1, 3.* And now the spouse perceives, as David did, (*Ps. 31. 22.*) that though she said *in her haste I am cut off from before thine eyes*, yet, at the same time, he heard the voice of her supplications, and became *like the chariots of Ammi-nadib*, which were noted for their beauty and swiftness. *My soul put me in the chariots of my willing people*; so some read it; "the chariots of their faith and hope, and love, their desires, and prayers, and expectations, which they sent after me, to fetch me back, as chariots of fire, with horses of fire." Note, (1.) Christ's people are, and ought to be, a willing people. (2.) If they continue seeking Christ, and longing after him, even when he seems to withdraw from them, he will graciously return to them in due time, perhaps sooner than they think, and with a pleasing surprise. No chariots sent for Christ shall return empty. (5.) All Christ's gracious returns to his people take rise from himself. It is not they, it is his own soul, that puts him into the chariots of his people; for he is gracious because he will be gracious, and loves his Israel because he would love them; not for their sakes, be it known to them.

3. That he, being returned to her, kindly courted her return to him, notwithstanding the discouragements she laboured under. Let her not despair of obtaining as much comfort as ever she had,

before this distance happened, but take the comfort of the return of her Beloved, *v. 13.* Here,

(1.) The church is called the *Shulamite*, referring either to *Solomon*, the bridegroom in type, by whose name she is called, in token of her relation to him, and union with him; thus believers are called *Christians* from *Christ*; or referring to *Salem*, the place of her birth and residence, as the woman of *Shunem* is called the *Shunamite*. Heaven is the Salem whence the saints have their birth, and where they have their citizenship; those that belong to Christ, and are bound for heaven, shall be called *Shulamites*.

(2.) She is invited to return, and the invitation most earnestly pressed; *Return, return*; and again, "*Return, return*; recover the peace thou hast lost and forfeited; come back to thy former composedness and cheerfulness of spirit." Note, Good Christians, after they have had their comfort disturbed, are sometimes hard to be pacified, and need to be earnestly persuaded to return again to their rest. As revolting sinners have need to be called to again and again, (*Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?*) so disquieted saints have need to be called to again and again, *Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye droop? why art thou cast down, O my soul?*

(3.) Being returned, she is desired to shew her face, *That we may look upon thee*. Go no longer with thy face covered like a mourner. Let those that have made their peace with God, *lift up their faces without spot*; (*Job. 22. 26.*) let them come boldly to his throne of grace. Christ is pleased with the cheerfulness and humble confidence of his people, and would have them look pleasant. Let us *look upon thee*, not I only, but the holy angels, who rejoice in the consolation of saints, as well as in the conversion of sinners: not I only, but all the daughters." Christ and believers are pleased with the beauty of the church.

(4.) A short account is given of what is to be seen in her. The question is asked, *What will ye see in the Shulamite?* And it is answered, *As it were the company of two armies*.

[1.] Some think she gives this account of herself; she is shy of appearing, unwilling to be looked upon, having, in her own account, no form or comeliness. Alas! says she, *What will you see in the Shulamite?* Nothing that is worth your looking upon; nothing but as *it were the company of two armies* actually engaged, where nothing is to be seen but blood and slaughter. The watchmen had smitten her, and wounded her, and she carried in her face the marks of those wounds, looked as if she had been fighting. She had said, (*ch. 1. 6.*) *Look not upon me, because I am black*; here she says, "*Look not upon me, because I am bloody.*" Or, it may denote the constant struggle that is between grace and corruption in the souls of believers; they are in them as *two armies* continually skirmishing, which makes her ashamed to shew her face.

[2.] Others think her Beloved gives this account of her. "I will tell you what you shall see in the *Shulamite*; you shall see as noble a sight as that of two armies, or two parts of the same army, drawn out in rank and file; not only as an *army with banners*, but as *two armies*, with a majesty double to what was before spoken: she is as *Mahanaim*, as the two hosts which Jacob saw, (*Gen. 32. 1, 2.*) a host of saints, and a host of angels ministering to them; the church militant, the church triumphant." Behold *two armies*; in both the church appears beautiful.

CHAP. VII.

In this chapter, I. Christ, the royal Bridegroom, goes on to describe the beauties of his spouse, the church, in many instances, and to express his love to her, and the delight he has in her conversation, *v. 1. 9.* II. The spouse, the church, expresses her great delight in him, and the desire that she had of communion and fellowship with him, *v. 10. 13.* Such mutual esteem and endearment are there between Christ and believers! And what is heaven but an everlasting interchanging of loves between the holy God and holy souls!

1. **H**OW beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman. 2. Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor: thy belly is like an heap

of wheat set about with lilies. 3. Thy two breasts *are* like two young roes *that are* twins. 4. Thy neck *is* as a tower of ivory; thine eyes *like* the fish-pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim: thy nose *is* as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus. 5. Thine head upon thee *is* like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple; the king *is* held in the galleries. 6. How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights! 7. This thy stature *is* like to a palm-tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. 8. I said, I will go up to the palm-tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples; 9. And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine, for my beloved, that goeth *down* sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.

The title which Jesus Christ here gives to the church is new, *O prince's daughter*, agreeing with Ps. 45. 13. where she is called *the king's daughter*. She is so, in respect of her new birth, born from above, begotten of God, and his workmanship, bearing the image of the King of kings, and guided by his Spirit. She is so by marriage; Christ, by betrothing her to himself, though he found her mean and despicable, has made her a *prince's daughter*; she has a princely disposition, something in her truly noble and generous; she is daughter and heir to the prince of the kings of the earth; *if children, then heirs*.

Now here we have,

I. A large description of the beauty of the spouse, which, some think, is given by the virgins her companions, and that those were they who called upon her to return; it seems rather to be given by Christ himself, and that it is designed to express his love to her, and delight in her, as before, *ch. 4. 1, &c.* and *ch. 6. 5, 6.* The similitudes are here different from what they were before, to shew that the beauty of holiness is such as nothing in nature can reach; you may still say more of it, and yet still come short of it. That commendation of the spouse, *ch. 4.* was immediately upon the espousals; (*ch. 3. 11.*) this, upon her return from a by-path; (*ch. 6. 13.*) yet this exceeds that, to shew the constancy of Christ's love to his people; *he loves them to the end*, since he made them *precious in his sight, and honourable*. The spouse had described the beauty of her Beloved in ten particulars; (*ch. 5. 11, &c.*) and now he describes her in as many, for he will not be behind-hand with her in respects and endearments. Those that honour Christ he will certainly honour, and make honourable. As the prophet, in describing the corruptions of degenerate Israel, reckons from the *sale of the foot even unto the head*, (*Isa. 1. 6.*) so here the beauties of the church are reckoned from foot to head, that, as the apostle speaks, when he is comparing the church, as here, to the natural body, (*1 Cor. 12. 23.*) *more abundant honour* might be bestowed on those parts of the body, which we think to be less honourable, and which therefore *lacked honour, v. 24.*

1. Her feet are here praised; the feet of Christ's ministers are beautiful in the eyes of the church, (*Isa. 52. 7.*) and her feet are here said to be beautiful in the eyes of Christ; *How beautiful are thy feet with shoes!* When believers, being made free from the captivity of sin, (*Acts, 12. 8.*) *stand fast in the liberty with which they are made free*, preserve the tokens of their enfranchisement, have *their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*, and walk steadily according to the rule of the gospel, then their feet are beautiful with shoes, they tread firm, being well-armed against the troubles they meet with in their way. When we rest not in good affections, but they are accompanied with sincere endeavours and resolutions, then our feet are beautified with shoes. See *Ezek. 16. 10.*

2. The joints of the thighs are here said to be like jewels, and

those curiously wrought by a cunning workman. This is explained by *Eph. 4. 16.* and *Col. 2. 19.* where the mystical body of Christ is said to be held together by joints and bands, as the hips and knees (both which are the joints of the thighs) serve the natural body in its strength and motion. The church is then comely in Christ's eyes, when those joints are kept firm by holy love and unity, and the communion of saints. When believers act in religion from good principles, and are steady and regular in their whole conversation, and turn themselves easily to every duty in its time and place, then the joints are like jewels.

3. The navel is here compared to a round cup or goblet, that wants not any of the agreeable liquor that one would wish to find in it, such as David's cup that ran over, (*Ps. 23. 5.*) well-shaped, and not as that miserable infant whose navel was not cut, *Ezek. 16. 4.* The fear of the Lord is said to be health to the navel. See *Prov. 3. 8.* When the soul wants not that fear, then the navel wants not liquor.

4. The belly is like a heap of wheat in the store-chamber, which perhaps was sometimes, to make shew, adorned with flowers. The wheat is useful, the lilies beautiful; there is every thing in the church, which may be to the members of that body either for use or for ornament. All the body is nourished from the belly; it denotes the spiritual prosperity of a believer, and the healthful constitution of the soul, all in good plight.

5. The breasts are like two young roes that are twins, *v. 3.* By the breasts of the church's consolations those are nourished who are born from its belly, (*Isa. 46. 3.*) and by the navel received nourishment in the womb. This comparison we had before, *ch. 4. 5.*

6. The neck, which before was compared to the tower of David, (*ch. 4. 4.*) is here compared to a tower of ivory, so white, so precious; such is the faith of the saints, by which they are joined to Christ their Head. The name of the Lord, improved by faith, is to the saints as a strong and impregnable tower.

7. The eyes are likened to the fish-pools in Heshbon, or the artificial fish-ponds, by a gate, either of Jerusalem, or of Heshbon, which is called Bath-rabbim, the daughter of a multitude, because a great thoroughfare. The understanding, the intentions of a believer, are clean and clear as these ponds. The eyes, weeping for sin, are as fountains, (*Jer. 9. 1.*) and comely with Christ.

8. The nose like the tower of Lebanon, the forehead or face set like a flint, (*Isa. 50. 7.*) undaunted as that tower was impregnable. So it denotes the magnanimity and holy bravery of the church, or, as others, a spiritual sagacity to discern things that differ, as animals strangely distinguish by the smell. This tower looks toward Damascus, the head city of Syria, denoting the boldness of the church, in facing its enemies, and not fearing them.

9. The head like Carmel, a very high hill near the sea, *v. 5.* The head of a believer is lifted up above his enemies, (*Ps. 27. 6.*) above the storms of the lower region, as the top of Carmel was, pointing heaven-ward. The more we get above this world, and the nearer to heaven, and the more secure and serene we become by that means, the more amiable we are in the eyes of the Lord Jesus.

10. The hair of the head is said to be like purple. This denotes the universal amiableness of a believer in the eyes of Christ, even to the hair, or, as some understand it, the pins with which the hair is dressed. Some by the head and the hair understand the governors of the church, who, if they be careful to do their duty, add much to her comeliness. The head like crimson, (so some read it,) and the hair like purple, the two colours worn by great men.

II. The complacency which Christ takes in his church thus beautified and adorned; she is lovely indeed, if she be so in his eyes; as he puts the comeliness upon her, so it is his love that makes this comeliness truly valuable; for he is an unexceptionable Judge.

1. He delighted to look upon his church, and to converse with it, rejoicing in that habitable part of his earth; the King is held in the galleries, and cannot leave them. This is explained by *Ps. 132. 13, 14.* The Lord has chosen Zion, saying, *This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell;* and *Ps. 147. 11.* The Lord takes plea-

me in those that fear him. And if Christ has such delight in the galleries of communion with his people, much more reason have they to delight in them, and to reckon a day there better than a thousand.

2. He was even struck with admiration at the beauty of his church; (v. 6.) *How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love! How art thou made fair!* So the word is; "not born so, but made so with the comeliness which I have put upon thee. Holiness is a beauty beyond expression; the Lord Jesus is wonderfully pleased with it: the outward aspect of it is fair, the inward disposition of it is pleasant and highly agreeable, and the complacency he has in it is inexpressible; *O my dearest for delights*; so some read it.

3. He determined to keep up communion with his church.

(1.) To take hold of her as of the boughs of a palm-tree. He compares her stature to a palm tree; (v. 7.) so straight, so strong, does she appear, when she is looked upon in her full proportion. The palm-tree is observed to flourish most when it is loaded; so the church, the more it has been afflicted, the more it has multiplied, and the branches of it are emblems of victory. Christ says, "*I will go up to the palm-tree*, to entertain myself with the shadow of it, (v. 8.) and *I will take hold of its boughs*, and observe the beauty of them." What Christ has said, he will do, in favour to his people; we may be sure he will do it, for his kind purposes are never suffered to fall to the ground; and if he take hold of the boughs of his church, take early hold of her branches, when they are young and tender, he will keep his hold, and not let them go.

(2.) To refresh himself with her fruits. He compares her breasts (her pious affections toward him) to clusters of grapes, a most pleasant fruit; (v. 7.) and he repeats it; (v. 8.) *They shall be, they shall be to me, as clusters of the vine, which make glad the heart.* "Now that I come up to the palm-tree, now thy graces shall be exerted and excited." Christ's presence with his people kindles the holy heavenly fire in their souls, and then their breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, a cordial to themselves, and acceptable to him. And since God, at first, *breathed into men's nostrils the breath of life*, and breathes the breath of the new life still, the smell of their nostrils is like the smell of apples, or oranges, which is pleasing and reviving. The Lord smelled a sweet savour from Noah's sacrifice, Gen. 8. 21. And, lastly, the roof of her mouth is like the best wine; (v. 9.) her spiritual taste and relish, or the words she speaks to God and man, which come not from the teeth outward, but from the roof of the mouth, these are pleasing to God; the prayer of the upright is his delight. And when those that fear the Lord speak one to another as becomes them, the Lord hearkens and hears with pleasure, Mal. 3. 16. It is like that wine which is, [1.] Very palatable and grateful to the taste; it goes down sweetly, it goes straightly; so the margin reads it; it moves itself aright, Prov. 23. 31. The pleasures of sense seem right to the carnal appetite, and go down smoothly, but they are often wrong, and, compared with the pleasure of communion with God, they are harsh and rough; nothing goes down so sweetly with a gracious soul, as the wine of God's consolations. [2.] It is a great cordial; the presence of Christ by his Spirit with his people shall be reviving and refreshing to them, as that strong wine which makes the lips even of those that are asleep, (that are ready to faint away in a deliquium,) to speak. Unconverted sinners are asleep, saints are often drowsy, and listless, and half asleep; but the word and Spirit of Christ will put life and vigour into the soul, and out of the abundance of the heart that is thus filled, the mouth will speak. When the apostles were filled with the Spirit, they spake with tongues the wonderful works of God; (Acts, 2. 10. 12.) and they who, in opposition to being drunk with wine, wherein is excess, are filled with the Spirit, speak to themselves in psalms and hymns, Eph. 5. 18, 19. When Christ is thus commending the sweetness of his spouse's love, excited by the manifestation of his, she seems to put in that word, *for my Beloved*, as in a parenthesis. "Is there anything in me that is pleasant or valuable? As it is from, so it is for my Beloved." Then he delights in our good affections and services, when they are all for him, and devoted to his glory.

10. I am my beloved's, and his desire is towards me. 11. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. 12. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. 13. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.

These are the words of the spouse, the church, the believing soul, in answer to the kind expressions of Christ's love in the foregoing verses.

1. She here triumphs in her relation to Christ, and her interest in him, and in his name will she boast all the day long. With what a transport of joy and holy exultation does she say, (v. 10.) "*I am my Beloved's*, not my own, but entirely devoted to him, and owned by him." If we can truly say that Christ is our best Beloved, we may be confident that we are his, and he will save us, Ps. 119. 94. The gracious discoveries of Christ's love to us should engage us greatly to rejoice in the hold he has of us, his sovereignty over us, and propriety in us; which is no less a spring of comfort than a bond of duty. Intimacy of communion with Christ should help to clear up our interest in him.

Glorying in this, that she is his, to serve him, and reckoning that her honour, she comforts herself with this, that his desire is toward her, that is, he is her Husband; it is a periphrasis of the conjugal relation, Gen. 3. 16. Christ's desire was strongly toward his chosen remnant, when he came from heaven to earth to seek and save them; and when, in pursuance of his undertaking, he was even straitened till the baptism of blood he was to pass through for them was accomplished, Luke, 12. 50. He desired Zion for a habitation; this is a comfort to believers, that, whosoever slights them, Christ has a desire toward them, such a desire as will again bring him from heaven to earth, to receive them to himself; for he longs to have them all with him, John, 17. 24.—14. 3.

II. She humbly and earnestly desires communion with him; (v. 11, 12.) "*Come, my Beloved*, let us take a walk together, that I may receive counsel, instruction, and comfort, from thee, and may make known my wants and grievances to thee, with freedom, and without interruption." Thus Christ walked with the two disciples that were going to the village called Emmaus, and talked with them, till he made their hearts burn within them. Observe here

1. Having received fresh tokens of his love, and full assurances of her interest in him, she presses forward toward further acquaintance with him; as blessed Paul, who desired yet more and more of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, Phil. 3. 8. Christ has made it appear how much his desire is towards us, and we are very ungrateful, if our's be not toward him. Note, Communion with Christ is that which all that are sanctified earnestly breathe after; and the clearer discoveries he makes them of his love, the more earnestly do they desire it. Sensual pleasures pall the carnal appetite, and soon give it a surfeit, but spiritual delights whet the desires, whose language is, *Nothing more than God*, but still *more and more of him*. Christ had said, *I will go up to the palm-tree*; Come, saith she, *Let us go*. The promises Christ has made us of communion with him are not to supersede, but quicken and encourage, our prayers for that communion.

2. She desires to go forth into the fields and villages, to have this communion with him. Those that would converse with Christ must go forth from the world, and the amusements of it, must avoid every thing that would divert the mind and be a hindrance to it, when it should be wholly taken up with Christ; we must contrive how to attend upon the Lord without distraction, (1 Cor. 7. 35.) for therefore the spouse here covets to get out of the noise of the town. Let us go forth to him without the camp, Heb. 14. 13. Solitude and retirement befriended communion with God: therefore Isaac went out into the field to meditate and pray.

SOLOMON'S SONG, VII, VIII. The Love of the Church to Christ.

Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door. A believer is never less alone than when alone with Christ, where no eye sees.

(3.) Having business to go abroad, to look after the grounds, she desires the company of her Beloved. Note, Wherever we are, we may keep up our communion with God, if it be not our own fault, for he is always at our right-hand, his eye always upon us, and both his word and his ear always nigh us. By going about our worldly affairs with heavenly holy hearts, mixing pious thoughts with common actions, and having our eyes ever toward the Lord, we may take Christ along with us whithersoever we go. Nor should we go any whither, where we cannot in faith ask him to go along with us.

(4.) She is willing to rise betimes, to go along with her Beloved; *Let us get up early to the vineyards*; it intimates her care to improve opportunities of conversing with her Beloved; when the time appointed is come, we must lose no time, but, as the woman, (Mark, 16. 2.) *go very early*, though it be to a *sepulchre*, if we be in hopes to meet him there. Those that will go abroad with Christ, must begin betimes with him, early in the morning of their days; must begin every day with him, seek him early, seek him diligently.

(5.) She will be content to take up her lodging in the villages, the huts or cottages which the country people built for their shelter, when they attended their business in the fields; there, in these mean and cold dwellings, she will gladly reside, if she may but have her Beloved with her; his presence will make them fine and pleasant, and convert them into palaces. A gracious soul can reconcile itself to the poorest accommodations, if it may have communion with God in them.

(6.) The most pleasant delightful fields, even in the spring-time, when the country is most pleasant, will not satisfy her, unless she have her Beloved with her. No delights on earth can make a believer easy, unless he enjoy God in all.

3. She desires to be better acquainted with the state of her own soul, and the present posture of its affairs; (v. 12.) *Let us see if the vine flourish*. Our own souls are our vineyards; they are, or should be, planted with vines and pomegranates, choice and useful trees; we are made keepers of these vineyards, and therefore are concerned often to look into them, to examine the state of our own souls; to see whether the *vine flourishes*, whether our graces be in act and exercise, whether we be fruitful in the fruits of righteousness, and whether our fruit abound. And especially let us inquire whether the *tender grapes appear*, and whether the *pomegranates bud forth*, what good motions and dispositions there are in us, that are yet but young and tender, that they may be protected and cherished with a particular care, and may not be nipped, or blasted, or rubbed off, but cultivated, that they may bring forth fruit unto perfection. In this inquiry into our own spiritual state, it will be good to take Christ along with us; because his presence will make the *vine flourish*, and the *tender grape appear*, as the returning sun revives the gardens; and because to him we are concerned to approve ourselves; if he sees the *vine flourish*, and the *tender grape appear*; if we can appeal to him, *Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*; if his Spirit witness with our spirit, that our souls prosper, it is enough. And if we would be acquainted with ourselves, we must beg of him to search and try us, to help us in the search, and discover us to ourselves.

4. She promises to her Beloved the best entertainment she can give him at her country-seat; for he will come in to us, and sup with us, Rev. 3. 20.

(1.) She promises him her best affections; and, whatever else she had for him, it would utterly be contemned, if her heart were not entire for him; "There therefore will I give thee my loves; I will repeat the professions of it, honour thee with the tokens of it; and the outgoings of my soul toward thee, in adorations and desires, shall be quickened and enlarged, and my heart offered up to thee in a holy fire."

(2.) She promises him her best provision, v. 13. There we shall find pleasant odours, for the *mandrakes give a smell*; the *love-flowers* or *lovely ones*, so the word signifies, or the *love fruits*; it was something that was in all respects very grateful, so valuable, that

Rachel and Leah had like to have fallen out about it, Gen. 30. 14. We shall also find that which is good for food, as well as pleasant to the eye, all the rarities that the country affords; *At our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits*. Note, (1.) The fruits and exercises of grace are pleasant to the Lord Jesus. Note, [2.] These must be carefully laid up for him, devoted to his service and honour, must be always ready to us when we have occasion for them, as that is which is laid up at our gates; that, by our bringing forth much fruit, he may be glorified, John, 15. 18. Note, [3.] There is a great variety of these pleasant fruits, with which our souls should be well stocked; we must have all sorts of them, grace for all occasions, *new and old*, as the good householder has in his treasury; not only the products of this year, but remainders of the last, Matth. 13. 52. We must not only have that ready to us, for the service of Christ, which we have heard, and learned, and experienced, lately, but must retain that which we have formerly gathered; nor must we content ourselves only with what we have laid up in store, in the days of old, but, as long as we live, must be still adding something new to it, that our stock may increase, and we may be *thoroughly furnished for every good work*. Note, [4.] Those that truly love Christ will think all they have, even their most *pleasant fruits*, and what they have treasured up most carefully, too little to be bestowed upon him, and he is welcome to it all; if it were more and better, it should be at his service. It is all from him, and therefore it is fit it should be all for him.

CHAP. VIII.

The affections between Christ and his spouse are as strong and lively here, in this closing chapter of the song, as ever, and rather more so. I. The spouse continues her importunity for a more intimate communion and fellowship with him, v. 1. 3. II. She charges the daughters of Jerusalem not to interrupt her communion with her Beloved; (v. 4.) and they, thereupon, admire her dependence on him, v. 5. III. She begs of her Beloved, whom she raises up by her prayers, (v. 5.) that he would by his grace confirm that blessed union with him, to which she was admitted, v. 6, 7. IV. She makes intercession for others also, that care might be taken of them, (v. 8, 9.) and pleases herself with the thoughts of her own interest in Christ, and his affection to her, v. 10. V. She owns herself his tenant for a vineyard she held of him at Bael-hamon, v. 11, 12. VI. The song concludes with an interchanging of parting requests. Christ charges his spouse that she should often let him hear from her; (v. 13.) and she begs of him that he would hasten his return to her, v. 14.

1. **O** THAT thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, I should not be despised. 2. I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate. 3. His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. 4. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.

Here, 1. The spouse wishes for a constant intimacy and freedom with the Lord Jesus. She was already betrothed to him, but, the nuptials being not yet solemnized and published, (the bride, the Lamb's wife, will not be completely ready till his second coming,) she was obliged to be shy, and to keep at some distance; she therefore wishes she may be taken for his sister, he having called her so, (ch. 5. 1.) and that she might have the same chaste and innocent familiarity with him that a sister has with a brother, an own brother, that *sucked the breasts* of the same mother with her, who would therefore be exceeding tender of her, as Joseph was of his brother Benjamin. Some make this to be the prayer of the Old-Testament saints for the hastening of Christ's incarnation, that the church might be the better acquainted with him, when, *forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood*, he should also himself likewise take part of the same, and not be ashamed to call them brethren. It is rather the wish of all believers for a more intimate communion with him, that they might *receive the Spirit of*

sanctification, and so Christ might be as their Brother, that they might be as his brethren, which *then* they are, when by grace they are made partakers of a divine nature, and *he that sanctifies, and they that are sanctified, are both of one*, Heb. 2. 11, &c. It becomes brethren and sisters, the children of the same parents, that have been nursed at the same breast, to be very loving to, and tender of, one another; such a love the spouse desires might be between her and her Beloved, that she might call him brother.

2. She promises herself then the satisfaction of making a more open profession of her relation to him, than at present she could make; "*When I should find thee without, any where, even before company, I would kiss thee*, as a sister does her own brother, especially her little brother that is now *sucking the breasts of her mother*;" for so some understand it; "*I would use all the decent freedom with thee that could be, and should not be despised for it*, as doing any thing unbecoming the modesty of my sex." The church, since Christ's incarnation, can better own him than she could before, when she would have been laughed at for being so much in love with one that was not yet born. Christ is become as our Brother; wherever we find him, therefore let us be ready to own our relation to him, and affection for him, and not fear being despised for it, nor regard that any more than David did, when he danced before the ark; *If this be to be vile, I will be yet more vile*. Nay, let us hope that we shall not be despised so much as some imagine; *Of the maid-servants of whom thou hast spoken I shall be had in honour*. Wherever we find the image of Christ, though it be without, among those that do not follow him with us, we must love it, and testify that love, and we *shall not be despised* for it, but catholic charity will gain us respect.

3. She promises to improve the opportunity she should then have for cultivating an acquaintance with him; (v. 2.) "*I would lead thee*, as my brother, by the arm, and hang upon thee; I would shew thee all the house of my precious things, would bring thee *into my mother's house*, into the church, into the solemn assemblies, (ch. 3. 4.) into my closet;" (for there the saints have most familiar communion with Christ;) "*and there thou wouldest instruct me*;" (so some read it;) as brethren inform their sister of what they desire to be instructed in. Those that know Christ, shall be taught of him; and *therefore* we should desire communion with Christ, that we may receive instruction from him. He is come, that he might give us an understanding; or, "My mother would instruct me, when I have thee with me." It is the presence of Christ, in and with his church, that makes the word and ordinances instructive to her children, which shall all be taught of God.

4. She promises him to bid him welcome to the best she had; she would *cause him to drink of her spiced wine, and the juice of her pomegranate*, and bid him welcome to it, wishing it better, for his sake. The exercise of grace and the performance of duty are spiced wine to the Lord Jesus, very acceptable to him, as expressive of a grateful sense of his favours. Those that are pleased with Christ must study to be pleasing to him; and they will not find him hard to be pleased. He reckons hearty welcome his best entertainment; and if we have that, he will bring his entertainment along with him.

5. She doubts not but to experience his tender care of her, and affection to her; (v. 3.) that she should be supported by his power, and kept from fainting in the hardest services and sufferings; *His left hand shall be under my head*; and that she should be comforted with his love; *His right hand should embrace me*. Thus Christ laid his right hand upon John, when he was ready to die away, Rev. 1. 17. See also Dan. 10. 10, 18. It may be read as it is, ch. 2. 6. *His left hand is under my head*; for the words are the same in the original, and so it bespeaks an immediate answer to her prayer; she was answered with *strength in her soul*, Ps. 138. 3. While we are following hard after Christ, his *right hand sustains us*; (Ps. 63. 8.) *underneath are the everlasting arms*.

6. She charges those about her to take heed of doing any thing to interrupt the pleasing communion she now had with her Beloved, (v. 4.) as she had done before, when he thus strengthened and comforted her with his presence: (ch. 2. 7.) Let me *charge you*,

O ye daughters of Jerusalem, and reason with you, *Why should you stir up, and why should you awake, my Love, until he will?* The church, our common mother, charges all her children, that they never do any thing to provoke Christ to withdraw, which we are very prone to do. Why should you put such an affront upon him? Why should you be such enemies to yourselves? We should thus reason with ourselves when we are tempted to do that which will grieve the Spirit. "What! am I weary of Christ's presence, that I affront him, and provoke him to depart from me? Why should I do that which he will take so unkindly, and which I shall certainly repent of?"

5. Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple-tree: there thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth *that bare thee*. 6. Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, *which hath* a most vehement flame. 7. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

Here,

I. The spouse is very much admired by those about her. It comes in a parenthesis, but in it gospel-grace lies as plain, and as much above ground, as any where in this mystical song; *Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?* Some make these the words of the Bridegroom, expressing himself well-pleased with her reliance on him, and resignation of herself to his guidance. They are rather the words of the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom she spake; (v. 4.) they see her, and bless her; the angels in heaven, and all her friends on earth, are the joyful spectators of her bliss. The Jewish church came up from the wilderness, supported by the divine power and favour, Deut. 32. 10, 11. The Christian church was raised up from a low and desolate condition by the grace of Christ relied on, Gal. 4. 27. Particular believers are *then* amiable, nay, admirable, and divine grace is to be admired in them, when by the power of divine grace they are brought *up from the wilderness, leaning* with a holy confidence and complacency *upon Jesus Christ, their Beloved*. This bespeaks the beauty of a soul, and the wonders of divine grace; 1. In the conversion of sinners. A sinful state is a *wilderness*, remote from communion with God, barren and dry, and in which there is no true comfort, it is a wandering wanting state; out of this wilderness we are concerned to *come up*, by true repentance, in the strength of the grace of Christ, supported by our Beloved, and carried in his arms. 2. In the consolation of saints. A soul convinced of sin, and truly humbled for it, is in a *wilderness*, quite at a loss; and there is no coming out of this *wilderness*, but *leaning* on Christ as our Beloved, by faith, and not *leaning to our own understanding*, nor trusting to any righteousness or strength of our own as sufficient for us, but going forth, and going on, in the strength of the Lord God, and making mention of his righteousness, even his only, who is *the Lord our Righteousness*. 3. In the salvation of those that belong to Christ. We must go up from the wilderness of this world, having our conversation in heaven; and, at death, we must remove thither, *leaning* upon Christ; must live and die by faith in him; *To me to live is Christ*, and it is he that is Gain in death.

II. She addresses herself to her Beloved.

1. She puts him in mind of the former experience which she and others had had of comfort and success in applying to him. (1.) For her own part; "*I raised thee up under the apple-tree*, I have many a time wrestled with thee by prayer, and have prevailed. When I was alone in the acts of devotion, retired in the orchard, *under the apple-tree*," (which Christ himself was compared to,

(*ek. 2. 3.*) as *Nathanael under the fig-tree*, (John, 1. 48.) meditating and praying, then *I raised thee up*, to help me and comfort me, as the disciples raised him up in the storm, saying, *Master, carest thou not that we perish?* (Mark, 4. 38.) and the church, (Ps. 44. 23.) *Awake, why sleepest thou?* Note, The experience we have had of Christ's readiness to yield to the importunities of our faith and prayer, should encourage us to continue instant in our addresses to him, to strive more earnestly, and not to faint; *I sought the Lord, and he heard me*, Ps. 34. 4. (2.) Others also had had like experience of comfort in Christ, as it follows there, (Ps. 34. 5.) *They looked unto him*, as well as I, and *were lightened*. There *thy mother brought thee forth*, the universal church, or believing souls, in whom Christ was formed, Gal. 4. 15. They were in pain for the comfort of an interest in thee, and *travailed in pain with great sorrow*; so the word here signifies; but they *brought thee forth*, the pangs did not continue always, they that had *travailed* in convictions, at last *brought forth* in consolations, and the *pain was forgotten*, for joy of the Saviour's birth; by this very similitude our Saviour illustrates the joy which his disciples would have in his return to them, after a mournful separation for a time, John, 16. 21, 22. After the bitter pangs of repentance, many a one has had the blessed birth of comfort; why then may not I?

2. She begs of him that her union with him might be confirmed, and her communion with him continued, and made more intimate; (*v. 6.*) *Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.* (1.) "Let me have a place in thy heart, an interest in thy love;" this is that which all those desire above any thing, that know how much their happiness is bound up in the love of Christ. (2.) "Let me never lose the room I have in thy heart; let thy love to me be ensured, as that deed which is sealed not to be revoked, that cabinet which is sealed up, not to be robbed. Let nothing ever prevail either to separate me from thy love, or, by suspending the communications of it, to deprive me of the comfortable sense of it." (3.) "Let me be always near and dear to thee, as the *signet on thy right hand*, not to be parted with, (Jer. 22. 24.) *engraven upon the palms of thy hand*, (Isa. 49. 14.) loved with a peculiar love." (4.) "Be thou my High-Priest; let my name be written on thy breast-plate, nearer thy heart, as the names of all the tribes were engraven like the engravings of a signet, in twelve precious stones on the breast-plate of Aaron, and also on two precious stones on the *two shoulders* or arms of the Ephod," Exod. 28. 11, 12, 21. (5.) "Let thy power be engaged for me, as an evidence of thy love to me; let me be not only a *seal upon thine heart*, but a *seal upon thine arm*; let me be ever borne up in thine arms, and know it to my comfort." Some make these to be the words of Christ to his spouse, commanding her to be ever mindful of him, and of his love to her; however, if we desire and expect that Christ should set us as a *seal on his heart*, surely we cannot do less than set him as a *seal on our's*.

3. To enforce this petition, she pleads the power of love, or her love to him, which constrained her to be thus pressing for the tokens of his love to her.

(1.) Love is a violent vigorous passion. [1.] It is *strong as death*; the pains of a disappointed lover are like the pains of death; nay, the pains of death are slighted, and made nothing of, in pursuit of the beloved Object. Christ's love to us was *strong as death*; for it brake through death itself; *he loved us, and gave himself for us*. The love of true believers to Christ is *strong as death*, for it makes them dead to every thing else; it even parts between soul and body, while the soul, upon the wings of devout affections, soars up to heaven, and even forgets that it is yet clothed and clogged with flesh. Paul, in a rapture of this love, knew not whether he was in *the body*, or *out of the body*. By it a believer is crucified to the world. [2.] *Jealousy is cruel as the grave*, which swallows up and devours all; those that truly love Christ are jealous of every thing that would draw them from him, and especially jealous of themselves, lest they should do any thing to provoke him to withdraw from them, and, rather than do so, would *pluck out a right eye* and *cut off a right hand*, than which what can be more cruel? Weak and trembling saints,

who conceive a jealousy of Christ, doubting of his love to them, find that jealousy to prey upon them like the grave, nothing wastes the spirits more; but it is an evidence of the strength of their love to him. [3.] *The coals thereof*, its lamps, and flames, and beams, are very strong, and burn with incredible fury and irresistible force, as the *coals of fire that have a most vehement flame*, a *flame of the Lord*, (so some read it,) a powerful piercing flame, as the lightning, Ps. 29. 7. Holy love is a fire that begets a vehement heat in the soul, and consumes the dross and chaff that are in it, melts it down like wax into a new form, and carries it upward as the sparks toward God and heaven.

(2.) Love is a valiant and victorious passion. Holy love is so; the reigning love of God in the soul is constant and firm, and will not be drawn off from him, either by fair means or foul, by *life or death*, Rom. 8. 33.

[1.] Death, and all its terrors, will not frighten a believer from loving Christ; *Many waters*, though they will quench fire, *cannot quench this love*, no, nor the *floods drown it*; (*v. 7.*) the noise of these waters will strike no terror upon it, let them do their worst, Christ shall still be the Best-Beloved. The overflowing of these waters will strike no damp upon it, but it will enable a man to rejoice in tribulation; *Though he slay me, I will love him, and trust in him*. No waters could quench Christ's love to us, nor any floods drown it; he waded through the greatest difficulties, even seas of blood. Love sat king upon the floods; let nothing then abate our love to him.

[2.] Life, and all its comforts, will not entice a believer from loving Christ; *If a man could hire him with all the substance of his house*, to take his love off from Christ, and set it upon the world and the flesh again, he would reject the proposal with the utmost disdain; as Christ, when the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, were offered him, to buy him off from his undertaking, said, *Get thee hence, Satan*; it would utterly be contemned; offer those things to those that know no better. Love will enable us to repel, and triumph over, temptations from the smiles of the world, as much as from its frowns. Some give this sense of it; *If a man would give all the substance of his house to Christ*, as an equivalent instead of love, to excuse it, *it would be contemned*. He seeks not *our's*, but *us*; the heart, not the wealth. *If I give all my goods to feed the poor, and have not love, it is nothing*, 1 Cor. 13. 1. Thus believers stand affected to Christ; the gifts of his providence cannot content them without the assurances of his love.

8. We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for? 9. If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar. 10. I am a wall, and my breasts like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favour. 11. Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand *pieces* of silver. 12. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.

Christ and his spouse having sufficiently confirmed their love to each other, and agreed it to be on both sides *strong as death* and inviolable, they are here, in these verses, like a loving husband and his wife, consulting together about their affairs, and considering what they should do. Yoke-fellows, having laid their hearts together, lay their heads together, to contrive about their relations, and about their estates; and, accordingly, this happy pair are here advising with one another about a sister, and a vineyard.

1. They are here consulting about their sister, their little sister, and the disposing of her.

1. The spouse proposes her case with a compassionate concern; (v.8.) *We have a little sister, and she has no breasts*, she is not grown up to maturity; *what shall we do for this little sister of our's in the day that she shall be spoken for*, so as that we may do well for her?

(1.) This may be understood as spoken by the Jewish church concerning the Gentile world. God had espoused the church of the Jews to himself, and she was richly endowed, but what shall become of the poor Gentiles, *the barren that has not borne*, and *the desolate*? Isa. 54. 1. Their condition (say the pious Jews) is very deplorable and forlorn; they are *sisters*, children of the same fathers, God and Adam, but they are *little*, because not dignified with the knowledge of God; they *have no breasts*, no divine revelation, no scriptures, no ministers, no breasts of consolation drawn out to them, whence they might suck, being *strangers to the covenants of promise*; no breasts of instruction themselves to draw out to their children to nourish them, (1 Pet. 2. 2.) *What shall we do for them?* We can but pity them, and pray for them. Lord, what wilt thou do for them? The saints, in Solomon's time, might know, from David's psalms, that God had mercy in store for them, and they begged it might be hastened to them. Now the tables are turned, the Gentiles are betrothed to Christ, and ought to return the kindness by an equal concern for the bringing in of the Jews again, our eldest sister, that once had breasts, but now has none. If we take it in this sense, the unbelieving posterity of these pious Jews contradicted this prayer of their fathers; for when the day came that the Gentiles should be *spoken for*, and courted to Christ, instead of considering what to do for them, they plotted to do all they could against them, which filled up the measure of their iniquity, 1 Thess. 2. 16. Or,

(2.) It may be applied to any other that belong to the election of grace, but are yet uncalled; they are remotely related to Christ and his church, and sisters to them both; *other sheep that are not of this fold*, John, 10. 16. Acts, 18. 10. They *have no breasts*, none yet fashioned, (Ezek. 16. 7.) no affection to Christ, no principle of grace. *The day will come when they shall be spoken for*; when the chosen shall be called, shall be courted for Christ, by the ministers, the friends of the Bridegroom. A blessed day it will be, a day of visitation! What shall we do, in that day, to promote the match, to conquer their coyness, and persuade them to consent to Christ, and present themselves chaste virgins to him? Note, Those that through grace are brought to Christ themselves, should contrive what they may do to help others to him, to carry on the great design of his gospel, which is to espouse souls to Christ, and convert sinners to him from whom they have diverted.

2. Christ soon determines what to do in this case, and his spouse agrees with him in it; (v.9.) *If she be a wall*, if the good work be once begun with the Gentiles, with the souls that are to be called in, if the *little sister*, *when she shall be spoken for* by the gospel, will but receive the word, and build herself upon Christ the Foundation, and frame her doings to turn to the Lord, as the wall is in order to the house, *we will build upon her a palace of silver*, or build her up into such a palace; we will carry on the good work that is begun, till the wall becomes a palace, the wall of stone a palace of silver; which goes beyond the boast of Augustus Cæsar, that what he found brick he left marble. This *little sister*, when once she is joined to the Lord, shall be made to *grow into a holy temple, a habitation of God through the Spirit*, Eph. 2. 21, 22. *If she be a door*, when this palace comes to be finished, and the doors of this wall set up, which was the last thing done, (Neh. 7. 1.) then *we will enclose her with boards of cedar*, we will carefully and effectually protect her, that she shall receive no damage. *We will do it*; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, all concur in contriving, carrying on, and crowning the blessed work when the time comes. Whatever is wanting shall be set in order, and the work of faith shall be fulfilled with power. Though the beginnings of grace be small, the latter end shall greatly increase. The church is in care concerning those that are yet uncalled. "Let me alone," says Christ, "I will do all that which is necessary to be done for them. Trust me with it."

3. The spouse takes this occasion to acknowledge with thankfulness his kindness to her, v. 10. She is very willing to trust him with her *little sister*, for she herself had had great experience of his grace, and, for her part, she owed her all to it; *I am a wall, and my breasts like towers*. This she speaks, not as upbraiding her little sister that had no breasts, but comforting herself concerning her, that he who had made her what she is, who had built her up upon himself, and made her to grow up to maturity, could and would do the same kindness for those whose case she bore upon her heart; *Then was I in his eyes as one that found favour*. See,

(1.) What she values herself upon, her having found favour in the eyes of Jesus Christ; those are happy, truly happy, and for ever so, that have the favour of God, and are accepted of him.

(2.) How she ascribes the good work of God in her to the good will of God toward her; "He has made me a wall, and my breasts as towers, and then, in that instance more than in any thing, I experienced his love to me." *Hail, thou that art highly favoured*, for in thee Christ is formed.

(3.) What pleasure God takes in the work of his own hands. When we are made as a wall, as a *brazen wall*, (Jer. 1. 18.—15. 20.) that stands firm against *the blast of the terrible ones*, (Isa. 25. 4.) then God takes delight in us to do good.

(4.) With what joy and triumph we ought to speak of God's grace towards us, and with what satisfaction we should look back upon the special times and seasons when *we were in his eyes as those that find favour*; these were days never to be forgotten.

II. They are here consulting about a *vineyard* they had in the country, the church of Christ on earth, considered under the notion of a *vineyard*; (v. 11, 12.) *Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon*, had a kingdom in the possession of a multitude, a numerous people. As he was a type of Christ, so his vineyard was a type of the church of Christ. Our Saviour has given us a key to these verses in the parable of the vineyard let out to unthankful husbandmen, Matth. 21. 33. The bargain was, that every one of the tenants having so much of the vineyard assigned him as would contain a thousand vines, he was to pay the annual rent of a *thousand pieces of silver*; for we read, (Isa. 7. 23.) that in a fruitful soil there were *a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings*. Observe,

1. Christ's church is his vineyard, a pleasant and peculiar place, privileged with many honours; he delights to walk in it, as a man in his vineyard, and is pleased with its fruits.

2. He has intrusted each of us with this vineyard, as *keepers* of it; the privileges of the church are that good thing which he has committed to us, to be kept as a sacred trust; the service of the church is to be our business, according as our capacity is; *Son, go work to-day in my vineyard*. Adam, in innocency, was *to dress the garden, and to keep it*.

3. He expects rent from those that are employed in his vineyard, and intrusted with it. *He comes, seeking fruit*, and requires gospel-duty of all those that enjoy gospel-privileges. Every one, of what rank or degree soever, must bring glory and honour to Christ, and do some service to the interest of his kingdom in the world, in consideration of what benefit and advantage they enjoy by their share of the privileges of the vineyard.

4. Though Christ has *let out his vineyard to keepers*, yet still it is his, and he has his eye always upon it for good; for if he did not watch over it *night and day*, (Isa. 27. 1, 2.) *the watchmen*, to whom he has let it out, would keep it *but in vain*, Ps. 127. 1. Some take these for Christ's words; (v. 12.) *My vineyard, which is mine, is before me*; and they observe how he dwells upon his propriety in it; It is *my vineyard, which is mine*; so dear is his church to him, it is *his own in the world*, (John, 13. 1.) and therefore he will always have it under his protection; it is his own, and he will look after it.

5. The church, that enjoys the privileges of the vineyard, must have them always before her; the keeping of the vineyard requires constant care and diligence. They are rather the words of the spouse; *My vineyard, which is mine, is before me*. She had lamented her fault and folly in not keeping her *own vineyard*,

(ch. 6.) but now she resolves to reform. Our hearts are our vineyards, which we must *keep with all diligence*; and therefore we must have a watchful jealous eye upon them at all times.

6. Our great care must be to pay our rent for what we hold of Christ's vineyard, and to see that we do not go behind-hand, nor disappoint the messengers he sends to *receive the fruits*; (Matth. 21. 34.) *Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand*, and shalt have. The main of the profits belong to Christ; to him and his praise all our fruits must be dedicated.

7. If we be careful to give Christ the praise of our church-privileges, we may then take to ourselves the comfort and benefit of them. If the Owner of the vineyard has had his due, the keepers of it shall be well-paid for their care and pains; they shall have *two hundred*, which sum, no doubt, was looked upon as good profit. They that work for Christ are working for themselves, and shall be unspeakable gainers by it.

13. Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it.
14. Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

Christ and his spouse are here parting for a while; she must stay below *in the gardens* on earth, where she has work to do for him, he must remove to *the mountains of spices* in heaven, where he has business to attend for her, as an *Advocate with the Father*. Now observe with what mutual endearments they part:

1. He desires to hear often from her; she is ready at her pen, she must be sure to write to him, she knows how to direct it; (v. 13.) "*Thou that, for the present, dwellest in the gardens, dressing and keeping them till thou remove from the garden below to the paradise above; thou, O believer, whoever thou art, that dwellest in the gardens of solemn ordinances, in the gardens of church-fellowship and communion, the companions are so happy as to hear thy voice, cause me to hear it too.*"

Observe, (1.) Christ's friends should keep a good correspondence one with another, and, as dear companions, speak often to one another, (Mal. 3. 16.) and hearken to one another's voice; they should edify, encourage, and respect, one another. They are companions in the kingdom and patience of Christ, and therefore, as fellow-travellers, should keep up mutual freedom, and not be shy of, or strange to, one another. *The communion of saints* is an article of our covenant, as well as an article of our creed; *to exhort one another daily*, and be glad to be exhorted one by another. *Hearken to the voice of the church*, as far as it agrees with the voice of Christ; his companions will do so.

(2.) In the midst of our communion with one another, we must not neglect our communion with Christ, but let him see our countenance, and hear our voice; he here bespeaks it; "*The companions hearken to thy voice*, it is a pleasure to them; *cause me to hear it*. Thou makest thy complaints to them when any thing grieves thee; why dost thou not bring them to me, and let me hear them? Thou art free with them; be as free with me, pour out thy heart to me." Thus Christ, when he left his disciples, ordered them to send to him upon every occasion; *Ask, and ye shall receive*. Note, Christ not only accepts and answers, but even courts, his people's prayers, not reckoning them a trouble to him, but an honour and a *delight*, Prov. 15. 8. *We cause him to hear our prayers*, when we not only pray, but wrestle and strive in prayer. He loves to be pressingly importuned, which is not

the manner of men. Some read it, "*Cause me to be heard*; thou hast often an opportunity of speaking to thy companions, and they hearken to what thou sayest; speak of me to them, let my name be heard among them, let me be the subject of thy discourse." "One word of Christ," (as Archbishop Usher used to say.) "*before you part*." No subject is more becoming, or should be more pleasing.

2. She desires his speedy return to her; (v. 14.) *Make haste, my Beloved, to come again, and receive me to thyself; be thou like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of spices*; let no time be lost; it is pleasant dwelling here *in the gardens*, but to depart and be with thee *is far better*; that therefore is it I wish, and wait, and long for. *Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly*. Observe,

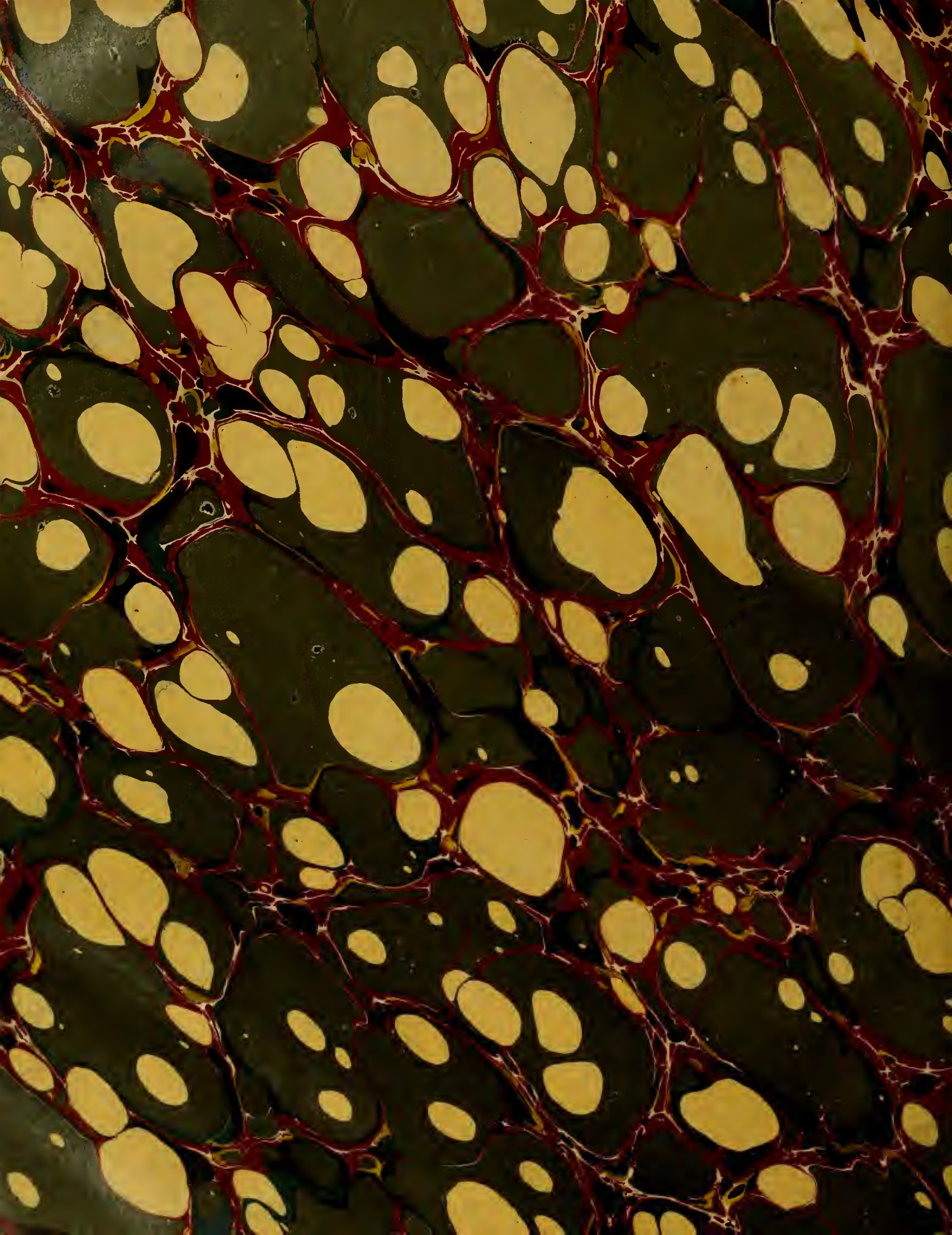
(1.) Though Jesus Christ be now retired, he will return. The heavens, those high *mountains of sweet spices*, must contain him, *till the times of refreshing shall come*; and those times will come, *when every eye shall see him*, in all the pomp and power of the upper and better world; the mystery of God being finished, and the mystical body completed.

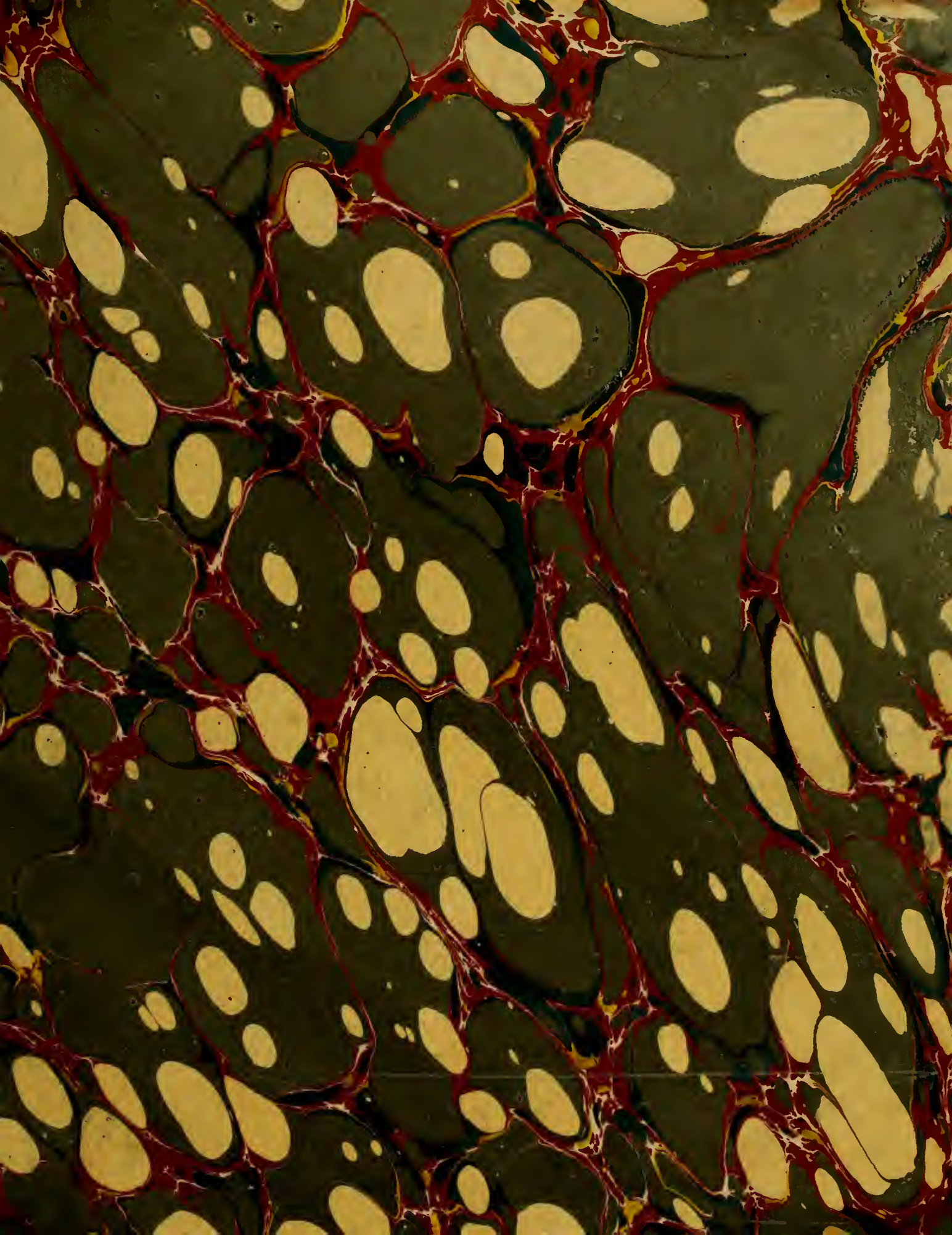
(2.) True believers, as they are looking for, so they are hastening to, the coming of that *day of the Lord*; not that they would have him make more haste than good speed, but that the intermediate counsels may all be fulfilled, and then that the end may come—the sooner, the better. Not that they think him *slack concerning his promise*, as some men count slackness, but thus they express the strength of their affections to him, and the vastness of their expectations from him when he comes again.

(3.) Those only that can in sincerity call Christ their *Beloved*, their *Best-Beloved*, can, upon good grounds, desire him to hasten his second coming. As for those whose hearts go a whoring after the world, and who set their affections on the things of the earth, they cannot love his appearing, but dread it rather, because then the earth, and all the things of it, which they have chosen for their portion, will be burnt up: but they that truly love Christ, long for his second coming, because it will be the crown both of his glory and their bliss.

(4.) The comfort and satisfaction which we sometimes have in communion with God in grace here, should make us breathe the more earnestly after the immediate vision, and complete fruition, of him in the kingdom of glory. The spouse, after an endearing conference with her Beloved, finding it must break off, concludes with this affectionate request for the perfecting and perpetuating of this happiness in the future state. The clusters of grapes, that meet us in this wilderness, should make us long for the full vintage in Canaan. If a day in his courts be so sweet, what then will an eternity within the veil be! If this be heaven, Oh that I were there!

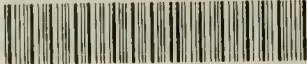
(5.) It is good to conclude our devotions with a joyful expectation of the glory to be revealed, and holy humble breathings towards it. We should not part but with the prospect of meeting again. It is good to conclude every sabbath with thoughts of the everlasting sabbath, which shall have no night at the end of it, nor any week-day to come after. It is good to conclude every sacrament with thoughts of the everlasting feast, when we shall sit down with Christ at his table in his kingdom, to rise no more, and drink of the wine new there; and to break up every religious assembly, in hopes of *the general assembly of the church of the first-born*, when time and days shall be no more. Let the blessed Jesus hasten that blessed day. *Why are his chariot-wheels so long a coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?*





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